



## June and July Sermon Series: Messy Church

### Sermon #7: Messy Love

#### Getting the Nod:

**Love never fails.** In 1 Corinthians 13, we find one of the most beautiful and familiar chapters in the Bible. This chapter is typically read at weddings and anniversary celebrations. It has even been set to music.

**Yet, this was never the original intent.** Instead, Paul was writing a rebuke to a dysfunctional church for their abuse of the spiritual gifts. Typically, though, this understanding is often ignored.

Consequently, I wonder if most Christians have truly pondered the deeper meaning of this passage. I would suggest that if we ignore the context of this chapter we are in danger of missing its major impact.

**Paul brings this negative church train to a screeching halt...** and offers the solution to bringing this family of God back into balance. So, I say it again... **Love never fails.**

**Opening illustration:** Newspaper columnist and minister George Crane tells of a wife who came into his office full of hatred toward her husband. "I do not only want to get rid of him, I want to get even. Before I divorce him, I want to hurt him as much as he has me."

**Dr. Crane suggested an ingenious plan...** "Go home and act as if you really love your husband. Tell him how much he means to you. Praise him for every decent trait. Go out of your way to be as kind, considerate, and generous as possible. Spare no efforts to please him, to enjoy him. Make him believe you love him. After you've convinced him of your undying love and that you cannot live without him, and then drop the bomb. Tell him that you're getting a divorce. That will really hurt him." With revenge in her eyes, she smiled and exclaimed, "Beautiful, beautiful. Will he ever be surprised!" And she did it with enthusiasm. Acting "as if." For two months she showed love, kindness, listening, giving, reinforcing, and sharing. When she didn't return, Crane called. "Are you ready now to go through with the divorce?"

**"Divorce?" she exclaimed. "Never! I discovered I really do love him."** Her actions had changed her feelings. Motion resulted in emotion.

**Transition:** Paul uses 1 Corinthians 13 to establish the answer to fixing a messy church... agape love. There is nothing more transforming than the love of Christ!! It transforms relationships... transforms failure and flaws... transforms communities and churches... and can offer comebacks and do-overs in life!! Let's read the first three verses to pick up on God's answer to messy love...

#### Connecting Us:

NLT | 1 Co 13:1-3 **If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn't love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God's secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn't love others, I would be nothing. 3 If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn't love others, I would have gained nothing.**

## The Six Love-less Gifts:

1. **Some may have the gift of tongues.** A characteristic of up roaring Gentile worship, especially the worship of the Greek god of wine, **Dionysus**, and of the **goddess Cybele**, was the clanging of cymbals and the blaring of trumpets. Even the coveted gift of tongues is no better than the uproar of Gentile worship if love was absent.
2. **Some may have the gift of prophecy.** We have already seen that prophecy corresponds most closely to preaching. There are two kinds of preachers. There are preachers whose one aim is to save souls and who woo people with the accents of love. Of no one was that truer than of Paul himself. On the other hand, and there are preachers who dangle their hearers over the flames of hell and give the impression that they would rejoice in their damnation as much as in their salvation. The preaching, which is all threat and no love may terrify, but it will not save.
3. **Some may have the gift of intellectual knowledge.** The permanent danger of intellectual distinction is **intellectual snobbery**. People who have great knowledge run the grave danger of developing the **spirit of contempt**. Only a knowledge whose cold detachment has been set alight by the fire of love can really save men and women.
4. **Some may have a passionate faith.** There are times when faith can be cruel. There was a man who visited his doctor and was informed that his heart was tired and he must rest. He telephoned his employer, a notable Christian figure, with the news, only to receive the answer: 'I have an inward strength which enables me to carry on.' These were the words of faith, but a faith which knew no love and therefore gave pain and hurt.
5. **Some may practice charity; they may distribute their goods to the poor.** There is nothing more humiliating than this so-called **charity without love**. To give as a grim duty, to give with a certain contempt, to take the moral high ground and throw scraps of charity as to a dog, to give and to accompany the giving with a smug moral lecture or a crushing rebuke, is not charity at all—it is pride; and pride is always cruel, for it knows no love.
6. **Some may give their bodies to be burned.** It is perhaps more likely that he is thinking of a famous monument in Athens called 'the Indian's Tomb'. There, an Indian had burned himself in public on a funeral pyre and had arranged to have engraved on the monument the boastful inscription: '**Zarmano-chegas, an Indian from Bargaosa**, according to the traditional customs of the Indians, made himself immortal and lies here.' Just possibly, Paul may have been thinking of the kind of Christian who actually courted persecution. If the motive which makes people give their lives for Christ is pride and exhibitionism, then even martyrdom becomes valueless.

**Transition:** Now, let's turn to the next 4 verses to see an accurate view of this love that never fails...

## God's Take on 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 12:

NKJV | 1 Co 13:4-7 Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; 5 does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; 6 does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

## What Love is Paul Talking About?

## 1. What love is: **Holy Activity**

- a. **Long suffering** - Endures slights and wrongs patiently and long, and returns a kindly spirit. It is "slow to anger" (Psalms 103:8). Christ, "when he was reviled, reviled not again" (1Peter 2:23). "The fruit of the Spirit is long-suffering" (Galatians 5:22).
- b. **Kind** - the positive side. Extending good to others.
- c. **Opposes jealousy** - Jealousy implies being displeased with the success of others. Yet, true love desires the success of others. The best way to cure envy is to pray sincerely for the one of whom you are jealous. To pray for him or her is to demonstrate love, and jealousy and love cannot exist in the same heart.
- d. **Doesn't show off** - This means the more loving you become, the less boasting you need to do. The greater your spiritual gifts, the less prone you should be to brag.
- e. **Does not boast** - Does not need to bring attention to one's accomplishments. Love prevents self-served bragging.

**Illustration of Lincoln's War Minister Stanton:** No one treated Abraham Lincoln w/more contempt than did Stanton. Stanton called him "a low cunning clown," he nicknamed him "the original gorilla". Lincoln never responded. - When it came time to pick his war minister he picked Stanton because he was the best for the job & he treated him w/ever courtesy. Years later when the assassin's bullet murdered Lincoln in the theatre, in the little room the body was taken to, there stood Stanton. Looking down on Lincoln's silent face, he said through his tears, "There lies the greatest ruler of men the world has ever seen." The Patience of love had conquered in the end!

## 2. What love is not: **Honorless Attacks**

- a. **Behaving rudely** - Being discourteous and to ignore good manners.
- b. **Selfish** - to seek one's own praise, or honor, for profit, or pleasure.
- c. **Provoked** - To be easily irritated or overly touchy. Easily upset and angered.
- d. **Thinking evil** - Those that are malicious and fault-finding; keeps a record of wrongs; questions the motives of people.
- e. **Rejoices in iniquity** - rejoices at the wrong doing to others and the visibility of sin.
- f. **Doesn't rejoice in truth** - Prefers falsehood and mocks religion if it is beneficial to their wants and desires.

**Illustration of the Hypocritical Child Psychologist:** The story is told of a child psychologist who spent many hours constructing a new driveway at his home. Just after he smoothed the surface of the freshly poured concrete, his small children chased a ball across the driveway, leaving deep footprints. The man yelled after them with a torrent of angry words. His shocked wife said, "You're a psychologist who's supposed to love children." The fuming man shouted, "I love children in the abstract, not in the concrete!"

**We may laugh at the play on words,** but let's be honest... when it comes to loving people that we live with and go to church with... we can fail. We all agree that love as a theory is good... but love as a practice is more treasured and valued. It may not start out easy... but it must start out as healthy. Love is worthy... for He is worthy.

## 3. What the potential of love is: **Healthy Faith**

- a. **Bears all things – Is not overcome. God’s love gives us the strength to endure.**
- b. **Believes all things – Is not controlled by suspicion. God’s love searches first for the good in people.**
- c. **Hopes all things – Does not take failure as final. God’s love has a positive forward look. Love never gives up on people. And the reason the believer can take such an attitude is that God is in the business of taking human failures and producing spiritual giants out of them.**
- d. **Endures all things – Holds fast to the people we love. ~ The word “endures” is a military term that means to hold a position at all costs, even unto death, whatever it takes. The battle may be lost but the soldier keeps on fighting to the very end.**

**So, love holds fast to people it loves. It perseveres. It never gives up on anyone. Love won’t stop loving, even in the face of rejection. Love takes action to shake up an intolerable situation. Love looks beyond the present to the hope of what might be in the future.**

**You might be asking... like the Corinthians did, why should I subject myself to an unrealistic love like this?** Illustration: A Peanuts cartoon shows Lucy standing with her arms folded and a stern expression on her face. Charlie Brown pleads, "Lucy, you must be more loving. This world really needs love. You have to let yourself love to make this world a better place." Lucy angrily whirls around and knocks Charlie Brown to the ground. She screams at him, **"Look, Blockhead, the world I love. It's people I can't stand."**

**Jesus would remind us of 1 John 4... NLT | 1 Jn 4:7-11 Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. 8 But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love. 9 God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. 10 This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins. 11 Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other.**

**Transition:** Love is not talk; it is action. We’re all prone to apply verses like these to others: “My mate and my kids could sure use a lesson in love. But me? I’m basically a loving person. I’m really easy to get along with.” But I ask each of you to forget about everybody else and ask God to apply these verses to you.

**It is natural to love them that love us, but it is supernatural to love them that hate us. Love never fails.**

**Closing:**

**Illustration “You’re not from around here... are you?”: "YOU'RE NOT FROM AROUND HERE."**

There is not much you can do about it. Once you have been around it everybody else knows. I'm talking about the **red dirt of western Oklahoma**. It's caused by the iron in the soil that, after being oxidized, turns to rust.

**It seems that nothing can erase or clean the stain from that red dirt on your shoes once you have walked there.** If you have new shoes – everyone knows -- because they are not red ... yet. If you are from the city (OKC or Tulsa, for example) and you make your way into the western ranchlands everyone can tell "you're not from these parts" simply by looking at the color of your shoes. **The inverse is also true**; if you go to the city and are wearing shoes that you have previously worn out "out there" everyone knows where you are from.

**It's not a judgmental thing.** The cities in Oklahoma are intimately connected to the ranches and open lands; **no one thinks they are better or inferior; it is simply a recognizable and distinct line of demarcation.** There is simply no getting around it.

**Godly love (Agapé) is like that too.** It is such a contrast from the world's love that it becomes immediately recognizable and "different." **The world looks at the sacrificial, serving, grace-filled love of God and says "You're not from around these parts."**

**It cannot be duplicated, at least not for long,** it can be "faked" for a little while (vv. 1-3) but even the masquerade is evidence that it isn't Godly love.

Paul would say to the Corinthians and to us:

**When God's Love has been poured into your hearts it cannot be hidden; that's the nature of God's love. It's just there and influences the lives of those it touches.**

**Love never fails!**