Love Protects

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 November 2026

Preacher: Revd Simon Durrant

[0:00] I'd like us to begin, if you are willing, to use your imaginations. I'd like you to imagine! I'd like you to imagine a church. It could be our church. Where people gave their time, energy,! And money, both sacrificially and incredibly generously. I'd like you to imagine that service and generosity was actually mainly towards the poor.

I'd like you to imagine a church where faith levels were so high and expectation for God to be moving in powerful ways was through the roof. The church gatherings were teeming with people. The sermons were amazing, insightful, authoritative. And people were prophesying. They spoke prophecy, words of wisdom to one another. The music, it lifted people to the heavens. Sounds good, doesn't it?
Inspired, even. Now what if a church like that existed, but Jesus looked on it as nothing?
As just a loud racket in his ear. Well that is the possibility that Paul explores in this rather famous passage in the letter which is now known to us as 1 Corinthians. And as you may be familiar with it, it's a passage often read at weddings for good reason. It's about love and it's poetic and it's heartwarming.
[1:48] But when you put it into its context, this passage has, if you like, a real kick to it. It's actually a strong warning. We're going to explore a little bit about that today.

You see, the church in Corinth, ancient Corinth, was actually coming close to what I asked you to imagine there. It was gifted, full of talented people. They were open to the spirit.
They were even producing good works. They were serving the poor. But there were clear signs that are indicated throughout Paul's letter, which is part of a correspondence with them, that there was something missing, something core, something essential, and without which all their worship, all their activity would mean nothing.
That may even make all that they were doing not just nothing, but displeasing to God, to the God they professed to be worshipping and serving. So for example, we find out that when they met to eat together, or even celebrate the Lord's Supper, some were stuffing themselves silly, and others went away hungry.
There were some people there whose gifting, their God-given gifts, were esteemed. They were elevated. And others were just being belittled, pushed aside. Some in that church were using their freedoms in Christ in a way that was crushing others.
[3:20] They were crushing their consciences and actually preventing their freedoms from having a life of their own. Something was missing or lacking that made them sound off-key and was actually doing more harm than good.

What was that thing? Love. Without love, ministry and mission can just be a series of power plays. Provocative statement. But without love, mission and ministry can just be a series of power plays. Let me just read the first three verses of chapter 13. I'm hoping they might also come up so you can follow along.
It says, If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal, just a noise in the ear. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have faith that can move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing.
If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing.
[4:35] So it's quite a striking passage, isn't it? These activities that Paul lists are good. They're desirable. Even admirable. Even. But without love, they can really just boil down to empty gestures and, as I say, power plays.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

Impressive speech, for example, whether it is sort of divine speech or otherwise. Big faith. You know. Or even our giving can be used to manipulate people rather than encourage and lift them up. We can easily elevate the one who has gifts, the one who's doing some of these amazing ministries, whilst actually, at the same time, sort of disregarding the very recipient who's supposed to be receiving those gifts and ministries, even harming them.
And the Apostle Paul can clearly see the potential of these sort of evils happening from a rather good-looking church where it lacks love.
And sadly, through church history, right up to the modern day, Paul has been proven right. As leaders of churches and the institutions that surround them have sometimes carried out ministries that elevate themselves rather than others, love others.
[6:01] And that can happen in subtle ways. It can happen in fairly obvious ways, or at least for those of us who are looking from the outside in. And if we take those power plays further along the spectrum, away from love, when those ministries get distorted and those ministries slip down the slide towards abuse, then all those things, prophetic speech, the questioning of people's faith levels, calls to sacrifice, calls to give, they can become forms of sometimes verbal or emotional or psychological or even financial abuse.

And I recognize that this is, as I said at the beginning of the service, a very delicate subject, but Paul doesn't shy away from it. And I just need to make sure that we spend some time grappling with this.
And how does that happen? How does it happen that people who set off knowing Jesus and wanting to make him known, who perhaps have leadership roles in churches or in groups, and they end up doing more harm than good?
And I think it's a question we do need to grapple with because it can happen to any of us. And there's something important to recognize in the crossover, in the intersection between our human hearts and our relationship to power.
So our heart, that is the sort of seat of our desires. That's how the sort of Bible talks about it. Our hearts are so often vulnerable and prone to selfishness and greed.
[7:46] And that, coupled to this kind of need for influence or for control, that's power, can make a really nasty sometimes combination.

And we see the patterns. As someone gets more influential, they obviously gain more power. And those people can often become sort of indispensable to an organization or to a church.
And people sort of look at them and they overlook the stuff that isn't so good about them. And it can breed this culture where that person or that group of people can become sort of untouchable and harder to call their behavior into account.
And that elevated position of power, it lures that person into the impression that they can get away with stuff. Perhaps even they deserve those little extras or, you know, they can get away with this, that, and the other.
And they can even begin to convince themselves that what they're doing, well, it's actually not wrong. It's part of who I am and what I do. And they lose sight gradually over the time or sometimes quickly.
[8:56] They lose sight of the humanity of others around them. And they use them to get what they want. And it's, as I say, a slippery slope, sometimes subtle, sometimes glaringly obvious when we look back at it in hindsight.

But it is one that many have slipped down. And I'm afraid we've seen it all over the news this week and the last week with celebrity culture, haven't we?
The sexual abuse they were able to get away with, no doubt sort of protected by their status and their persona. And no doubt they thought they could get away with it. And they perhaps even deluded themselves to think that what they were doing wasn't wrong.
And it's quite easy to point to celebrity culture, isn't it? But again, sadly, we in the church are not immune from it. People have risen in influence and become seemingly indispensable and unimpeachable.
And they've left those who they were meant to look after are harmed or just with no voice and trampled upon. And sometimes these things can happen.
[10:03] They're sort of hidden in plain sight, they say, don't they? Or they're drastically covered up. And often that's come from ministries, churches, that have done some amazing things.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

And there's no doubt about them. There's a tension there. What do we do with that? But overall, the lens through which Paul sees that is that there, at the heart of it, is a lack of love.
and in fact, letting a love of power and selfish desire distort hearts and our vision that has led to the harm of others.
So, it's a complex, it's a difficult, and it's perhaps scary for some of us to really consider the depths in which our human hearts can go and the distortion that can come out of them.
And I'm aware that people listening today, even on the recording, perhaps a higher proportion of us than we perhaps would like to imagine have experienced some form of abuse from someone in the position of power over them, of influence or trust over them, inside the church, outside the church.
[11:12] People who have used their power, their giftings, their position to actually crush you, to harm you in some way. I want to say three very brief things if that is you in any way, at any stage in your life that has happened to you.

First of all, the first thing to say is it is not right. You have been mistreated. Something evil has happened to you. Secondly, please be heard.
It's important that you are listened to, that you are respected as a human being. You know, even if in the past you have been silenced or been made to feel that it's not worth you speaking out about what happened so long ago or you've minimised it really just as a way to keep going, to get on in life.
I just want to say however this works out, please be heard. You are worthy and you are a valuable human being. Your voice counts. And I guess I want to say if you do, if you would like to talk to someone, whether that's me or Margaret maybe, please get in touch.
It doesn't need to be today. We will listen or put you in touch with organisations that can help you. And I appreciate that will be a very, very brave and challenging thing to do. But I want to say that here at Christchurch we want to be a place where survivors of abuse and those who have been hurt in any other way are both welcome and that we want to help you, we want to hear you and walk alongside you.
[12:48] And then the third thing to say very briefly to those who have been harmed there is hope. With the hurt that you carry it may well seem very dark but there is a way forward and I believe that that rises from a right understanding of and perhaps more importantly an experience of healthy love.

And wonderfully we get this incredible description of healthy love in those verses those famous parts of these verses in 1 Corinthians 13 and let me just read them again because they're just so wonderful.
Verses 4 to 7 say this Love is patient Love is kind It does not envy It does not boast It's not proud It does not dishonour others It is not self-seeking It's not easily angered It holds no record of wrongs Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth It always protects always trusts always hopes always perseveres love love Now in an age love love love love I think that this description could not be more important So please do put it on your fridge magnets please do have it read at your wedding ceremonies or whatever it is This is what love looks like not the shoddy imitations that are often sold or have perhaps experienced it's gentle it lifts people up it's full of grace towards others and it's long lasting and it says this kind of love has a sort of backbone to it doesn't it there's a strength that comes from this kind of love that Paul describes here and if I really just for the sake of time just focus in on just one of those descriptions it's incredibly rich verse 7 says it always protects that is love love always protects at least that's the way that the NIV that's the translation we use here says love protects but most other
English translations say it bears all things perhaps you're familiar with that phrase or it covers all things and as I read that I kind of sat up and I thought oh hang on that sounds like a cover up to me does it conceal all things that seems to be at odds with the sort of transparency of healthy love seems to require so this intrigued me and so I went to the original Greek and the word that Paul uses here is stego and this word is used in various other bits of literature about a described a thatched covering a thatched covering or a roof over something and so it's a covering to keep off something that threatens or to bear up against something and I love that image of love being like a little roof covering what is precious from the elements and all that might threaten it love always protects if we don't protect we don't love now a good definition of safeguarding is the practical action taken to help people to be safe and to prevent harm

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

I'll say that again the practical action taken to help people to be safe and to prevent harm in other words safeguarding is love in action and so I want to encourage you when you hear safeguarding here or in your workplaces or in your schools or whatever it is to first and foremost think of love and the kind of love that Paul describes here you see safeguarding isn't a bureaucracy getting in the way of real ministry safeguarding isn't about adding another burden to your already busy schedule instead it's an invitation to see protection as an obligation but as love made real and it may well require some sacrifice and as Paul invites us here to honour others above ourselves it might cost us something it might look like giving up your time for criminal record checks and training sessions it might look like following processes even when they feel inconvenient it might mean challenging behaviour when even from people you respect it might mean paying attention to power dynamics and appropriate boundaries it might mean supporting volunteers with proper supervision and care it might mean speaking up when your gut tells you something is off now none of this might feel particularly spiritual in the moment but safeguarding isn't a distraction from ministry it is ministry it's not separate from discipleship it is discipleship because it is a form and expression of love so finally what if what happens if we feel that our lives our ministries maybe a ministry that you're involved in maybe us as a church or our relationships whatever aspects of our life what happens if we feel they lack love what if we feel we are ripe for
[18:29] Paul's warning here you know that actually is what we're doing real love or is it more of a power play are we lacking love in some way well firstly I want to say of course we are of course we're lacking love no one experiences perfect love in this life we've all been harmed in some way or to some degree and we've all harmed others to some degree so what are we going to do about that are we going to just try harder are we going to take our lack of love and stretch it further so that it becomes even weaker and even more ineffective no that's not the answer the answer says Paul is to draw love from its eternal source let me just read a few of these final verses verses 8 to 10 love never fails but where there are prophecies they will cease where there are tongues they will be stilled where there is knowledge it will pass away for we know in part and we prophecy in part what's

Paul saying here Paul is reminding us of the eternal nature of God and that God is love and whatever we do in this life whether we prophesy whether we speak tongues whether we do impressive ministries whether we have important looking roles or not there will come a day when they're not going to matter those gifts and ministries and roles are not even going to be necessary the day when completeness comes and we see God face to face and similarly we may well be feel we are well loved in our lives on earth or we might feel we're just known by no one Paul is saying that when we see God face to face that will change in an instant verse 12 famous verse for now we see only a reflection in a mirror through a glass darkly as some translations put then we shall see face to face now I am known in part then I shall know fully even as
I am fully known to be known by God to be loved by God that is what we are made for and for those who believe in Jesus that is the hope we are waiting for for that full experience of being fully known and loved by God that's the promise of hope that we have as believers Emma shared a little bit about that last week about our heavenly hope from Revelation 21 and actually I look forward to sharing a little bit more next week on a similar theme the love of God experientially in its fullness forever that is what we long for and hope for and that's the future hope we have but the fact is we have already seen the fullness of this love before and a portion of that love is available a generous portion of that love is available to us here on earth now yes not in full but with such potency it will transform your life and change the way you love
God change the way you love yourself change the way you love others forever because when Jesus walked the earth he embodied this love that Paul is writing about the patience he showed love is patient the patience he showed to the ignorant to the slow to understand disciples around him love is kind the kindness he showed to the lost to the least to the lonely and he didn't use his immense power to lord it over others he was humble the humility he showed particularly in the face of the cross taking upon himself the lack of love of humanity the distorted love the evil that we have created and caused sacrificing himself so the punishment for it can be paid so that it can be turned upside down dying in order to honour others above himself that is love that is pure more than healthy love and he did that in order to forgive sins ripping up our record of wrongs love keeps no record of wrongs to heal our hurts to pour his love into our hearts by his holy spirit to give us that hope that one day he will meet us face to face where we will know and experience that love in full

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

so that is love here is love in the face and person of Jesus love
I had an image when I was away the other week on a little retreat which was glorious but it was an image of a bucket and it was full of sort of slosh I guess it was used for kind of cleaning I suppose and I thought well the way I've learnt to love the way I was parented the way I grew up the way I've learnt to navigate the world and people around me the word that came to me was like that is a kind of insipid love it's diluted and it's awash with all sorts of rubbish and this bucket had the leaks in it as well so it was just kind of going all over the floor as much as I filled that bucket up with the love I'm trying to shed and lead a church with it was just slosh and the Lord was inviting me to think of love spread myself thinly but actually to receive from him the picture I had was of a little tiny medicine bottle you know little glass ones maybe an old fashioned one and the liquid that was in there was tiny compared to the bucket but it was so potent so rich with love that even if I was to share a little bit a little bit of my time then actually it would be transformative and I don't know what's going on with you but there's something about
[25:17] God the promise in Romans 5 pouring out his love into our hearts giving us a deposit of what's to come so it says in Ephesians that we get a download of God's love before that day when we receive it in full you know and that deposit can be incredibly large or it's incredibly potent we miss that out when we've got leaky buckets and all the rest of it but that is a love that will begin and continue the journey of healing for you pour out the love of the Father into our hearts in the name of Jesus come Holy Spirit for you

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host