

All You Need Is Love?

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[0:00] In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. So, the Beatles, those great theologians of the church, once said, all you need is love.

Well, let's ask, were they right about that? Now, as I think about this, I'm reminded of one of the greatest theological TV shows to ever air. I'm thinking of the show King of the Hill.

Any other King of the Hill fans out there? No? Oh, man. I've got my work cut out for me, apparently. So, I think about the episode where the protagonist, Hank Hill, is out with his father, who's this kind of rugged old World War II veteran. Now, Hank's dad scoffs at this Christmas ornament that has the word peace written on it.

And without hesitation, Hank says, not hippie peace, dad. Jesus peace. So, Hank sees a difference between Jesus peace and hippie peace.

[1:16] Now, I actually think this TV cartoon character is onto something here. And that's basically this. That the world's definition of peace and the Christian understanding of what peace is aren't really the same thing.

The worldly understanding of peace. And the peace that we have in Jesus really do differ from one another quite a bit. And I'd say the same thing about love as it's represented in 1 Corinthians 13, our epistle passage pointed for this morning.

The worldly understanding of love, which is probably, if we're being honest, what the Beatles were getting at, isn't the same thing as the Christian understanding of what love is.

The worldly understanding of love seems, at least at its worst, to focus on merely warm feelings and being nice.

Now, the biblical understanding of love goes so much deeper than that. The love of God isn't always fuzzy and warm.

[2:24] It isn't always nice, as much as we might want it to be that way. Now, as C.S. Lewis writes in his classic book, *The Problem of Pain*, what would really satisfy us would be a God who said of anything that we happen to like, what does it matter so long as they are contented?

We want, in fact, not so much a father in heaven as a grandfather in heaven. A senile benevolence who, as they say, like to see the young people enjoying themselves.

And whose plan for the universe was simply that it might be truly said, at the end of each day, a good time was had by all. Now, first of all, I want to apologize to any grandfathers out there.

I'm not calling you senile by quoting this. But, you know, when the world thinks about how to be loving, it's usually an imitation of that kind of senile benevolence, as Lewis calls it.

And that is a cheap kind of love. It's a cheap imitation. And we tend to fail even at the imitation, though, don't we? As Lewis says in that same book, everyone feels benevolent if nothing happens to be annoying him at the moment.

[3:45] I won't ask for a show of hands on that one. So what does the love of God actually look like? How do we live that out in our lives?

Well, I don't think that we can find a clearer answer than we find in our epistle lesson appointed for this morning in 1 Corinthians 13. Now, as we start to think about this morning's passage, we should start with a question.

Where do we find the deepest and fullest expression and example of love? Don't we find it in God's grace to us in Jesus?

Don't we find it in the lengths to which God was willing to go to save us? That is where we find it. Now, as one contemporary hymn puts it, how deep the Father's love for us, how vast beyond all measure, that He should give His only Son to make a wretch His treasure.

That, my brothers and my sisters, is how God shows His love for us. And if that is truly the deepest expression of real, authentic love that we can find, and I think that it is, I think that we'll find that it has to match the description of love that we find in 1 Corinthians 13.

[5:18] Well, does it match up? I think that it does. So let's take a look and see, starting at 1 Corinthians 13, verse 4. Love is patient and kind.

Is this what God has demonstrated to us? It is, right? Don't the Scriptures tell us that God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked? That God is patient toward us.

Even though we're rebels and we are sinners, God has chosen not to let us perish in our sins. And He made that choice at the great cost of the precious blood of His only Son.

Let that sink in. It's love patient and kind. It does not insist on its own way.

Now, here's a painful reality check. How often do we find ourselves envious or boastful? Arrogant or rude?

[6:28] Insisting on our own way? Well, let's ask. What reason do we have to be either envious or boastful? Every good thing that we have, every gift that we have, every ability that we have is a gift from God.

It was given to us. Now, our Lord Jesus, on the other hand, was perfect. But did He act arrogant or boastful or envious?

No! What does Philippians 2 say? Though He was in the form of God, He did not count equality with God, a thing to be grasped. But He emptied Himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men, and being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Jesus, who was never short of perfect, subjected Himself to obedience unto death, to pay a debt that He didn't know.

Jesus, who was perfect, humbled Himself to save us from the effects of our pride. Is that love? In Jesus, the love of our perfect and almighty God shows itself to us in humility.

[8:04] But that's not all. Love, our passage tells us, is not irritable or resentful. My brothers and sisters in Christ, I have to ask, have you found free, total, all-sufficient forgiveness of your sins at the foot of the cross?

And if you have, then you know that that is God's demonstration of what love without resentment looks like. In your life in Christ, have you continued to struggle with sin?

Sometimes stumbling, sometimes falling. Now when that has happened, haven't we found it to be true that if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness?

He doesn't respond to our mistakes with irritability. When we fall, He, like a loving parent, picks us up, dusts us off, bandages up our wounds, and gives us the grace and encouragement to keep moving on.

That is what love without irritability looks like. I do want to say, though, that our text makes it clear that love without irritability isn't love that withholds the truth.

[9:39] On the contrary, love rejoices in the truth. Now I think that this is a major area where the biblical definition of love differs from the worldly definition.

Love is not complacency. Love is not, I'm okay, you're okay. No! God does not treat us that way. Does He?

God's love doesn't leave us in the mess that we are in. God's love doesn't flinch from the truth, even when the truth is hard to hear.

God's love doesn't speak peace when there is no peace. Now C.S. Lewis, quoting him again, really nailed this point when he wrote, love may forgive all infirmities and love still in spite of them, but love cannot cease to will their removal.

God doesn't desire for us to remain in falsehood, even comfortable falsehood. God doesn't desire for us to remain broken. God doesn't desire for us to be weighed down by our sins.

[11:01] And sometimes, when we find ourselves in that shape, it can be hard to hear that. But we have to hear that because love rejoices in the truth.

Now let's think for a second. The Holy Spirit's task of convicting the world of sin, the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, living in the heart of the believer, is proof that God does not cease to will the removal of our infirmities.

God wants us to be whole and holy, abiding in the truth. And that is love. Lastly, love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends. My Christian brother and my Christian sister, haven't we seen that God loves us with an everlasting love?

That even though we stumble, even though we fall, even though we fail, the love of God endures through it all. Haven't we seen in the lives of those who have been examples for us, who have gone on before us in the faith?

[12:24] And haven't we seen in our own lives that God is both willing and able to finish what He started in us because He loves us? We've seen that, haven't we?

If love truly endures all things, and love never ends, then the greatest example of that that we can find is the eternal love of God.

I think with all of that in mind, we'd have to agree that the love of God is the perfect expression of the description of love that St. Paul gives us in 1 Corinthians 13.

I think we'd also have to say that the passage is clear that we are supposed to imitate that kind of love. Well, how do we do that?

But before we move on to that question, I do want to say something. I don't know if this is the case, but if there is anyone here this morning who has never experienced or never really personally known the love of God, I want to speak to you especially.

[13:37] I want you to know that God loves you and that Jesus died for you, that however you might have sinned, however many mistakes you might have made, you can find free and full forgiveness with God through the blood of His Son and that you can have full assurance of eternal life.

I plead with you to place your faith in Jesus, to receive Him as your Savior, to ask God to forgive your sins through the blood of His Son, to receive the gift of eternal life.

If that's you this morning, know that in Jesus you will find joy, you will find peace, you will find hope, and you will find love that you never thought possible. If you have never known God personally, never known His love personally, know that He calls you today to know His love and place your faith in Him.

For those who do know the Lord, how do we grow in that love as Paul describes it in 1 Corinthians 13? How do we better imitate the example of love that God has given us in the Gospel?

How do we learn to love in a way that is patient, that is kind, that isn't boastful, a way that rejoices in the truth and a way that endures? the first thing that we have to realize is that we can't do this on our own steam.

[15:06] If we're trying to do it in our own power, the best that we'll accomplish is what Lewis described, that feeling benevolent so long as nothing is annoying us.

That's as far as we'll get in our own power. If we want to actually grow in our capacity to love, we have to draw nearer to the God who is love.

Our relationship with the Lord is where we will find the strength to grow in love. If our relationship with the Lord is strong, our capacity to love will also be strong.

So how do we grow in our relationship with the Lord? Well, I think we spend time with Him in ways that He has assured us will be occasions, opportunities for growing in grace.

So we gather weekly, right, to hear the preaching of the Gospel. We gather weekly to receive the grace that God gives us in Holy Communion when we receive it in faith, repentance, and thanksgiving.

[16:13] We spend time daily in prayer and we spend time daily studying the Word of God. And as our relationship with God grows, we will find that our obedience to God will grow with it, that our love for God and for God's people will grow, and that our very capacity to love will grow.

And that is huge, so important, because love will never end. now faith will come to an end when our faith becomes sight, when we see the Lord as He is.

Hope will come to an end once we have received what we have hoped for. But love, love will endure forever.

Brothers and sisters, by growing in love, we are preparing for eternity. At the heart of the Gospel, and at the heart of God's very character, is love.

God created us in love. God redeemed us in love when we fell into sin, and He will bring us into the eternal joy of His love. love.

[17:37] To quote C.S. Lewis one last time, God will look to every soul like its first love, because He is its first love. And that is eternal.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.