

Sunday 15th February 2026 - One Body, One Church: Love Is The Function

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 February 2026

Preacher: Laura Edwards

[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. So, we are in our second week of our One Body, One Church series. And last week, Dave talked to us about belonging and how together we are the body of Christ.

All having different, essential, but complementary roles to play in being church and in sharing God's love. And it makes perfect sense that we all bring different gifts.

We all bring together and work in tandem with each other to make church. But let's be honest, being alongside each other, well, it's not always that simple.

Because even the best of people can be hard work. It's not always the easiest to get along with each other. If you ask my girls, they'd probably say I'm not the easiest person to get along with.

And I imagine you might have your moments too. So, how do we live out the body of Christ day to day? What happens when the tetchiness we sometimes feel creeps in or irritation?

[1 : 07] What if we don't agree? Or worse, what if someone behaves badly and really lets us down? Well, the good news with this metaphor of us being the body of Christ is that it's not built on hierarchy or on a pecking order of power.

Rather, the radical vision of this shared life is that it's held and knitted together through something very different. It functions because of love.

And it seems fitting that I've been writing the talk this week on love with Valentine's Day yesterday. You can't even visit a supermarket this week without being hit with a range of heart-shaped novelty items, flowers and soft toys.

And whether you partake in Valentine's Day with loved ones or you think it's way too commercialised, it's very hard to avoid. In our culture, we love to love.

And we use the word love in so many different ways. I love my wife, husband or partner. I love my children. I love my dog.

[2 : 23] I love Jesus. I love this church. I love Italian food. I love a good movie and a takeaway. The word love will mean different things in different contexts.

So what is love? Well, it's an age-old and much-debated question. And all sorts of songs and poems, books and films will propose all sorts of different answers.

But when we turn to the Bible, I think we get a very different but incredibly helpful way of understanding what love really is. And it's much more than just something we feel.

Whereas in English, we only have one word for love. In Greek, the language in which the New Testament was written, we see that there are various different words for love, each with a slightly different meaning.

So for example, in Greek, they use the word philos to describe friendship and mutual affection. The word eros is used to capture romantic love with all its passion and excitement.

[3 : 37] But they had another word for love, which wasn't often used. And that word is agape. Agape is the love of selfless commitment and choice.

It's the deliberate decision to love another person. When the Hebrew Old Testament was translated into Greek, it was this word agape that was used most often to describe God's love.

And the New Testament writers picked up on this word and used it widely to describe God's self-sacrificing love for us by sending his son Jesus.

So this word agape came to represent unconditional love. You could even choose to love your enemy, even if they didn't love you back. And I really like this quote by John Mark Comer.

Here's my best shot at a definition of agape love. A compassionate commitment to delight in the soul of another and to will that person's good ahead of your own.

[4 : 44] No matter the cost to yourself, love is the desire not to take but to give. It's the settled intention of the heart to promote good in the life of another.

To see the beauty inherent in another soul and help them come to see it as well. And this ties in with what we heard from Apostle Paul last week about the body of Christ.

About being able to see the worth and beauty of every part of the body of every person. So let's see what he has to say about love. You'll probably be familiar with this passage from 1 Corinthians 13 about love.

Indeed, you might possibly have heard it at most weddings you have attended. But this passage isn't about romantic love. Instead, let's put it in context.

Paul wrote this letter to the church in the city of Corinth in Greece. But at the time, the Corinthians church were in a bit of a mess. There were all kinds of drama and sinful behaviour going on.

[5 : 55] The Christians in Corinth were known for being pompous and proud and elevated spiritual giftedness as a sign of maturity. Some were even abusing their spiritual gifts, lording them over others to make them feel bad.

But Paul says, look, let me describe to you. Let me show you a better way. And he begins to talk about love.

But again, this is not simply love as a feeling. No, Paul is using the word agape, self-sacrificing love. Love is patient.

Love is kind. It does not envy. It does not boast. It is not proud. It does not dishonour others. It is not self-seeking. It is not easily angered.

It keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

[6 : 57] As we read Paul's description, it becomes clearer that he isn't talking about a warm, fuzzy feeling, but instead a conscious decision to love other people.

Verses 4 to 7 contain 15 doing words. Paul is talking about something we do. Indeed, although we can say we love someone, love only really makes sense when it's expressed through actions.

Though these verses can be beautiful, it wasn't meant to be poetry for weddings. This was survival language for a community. A mirror held up to this dysfunctional community.

What Paul was saying was, you envy, you boast, and you're proud, but instead be patient, be kind, protect one another, persevere.

But then at the end of the chapter, Paul proclaims the superiority of love, not just over spiritual gifts, but over everything else.

[8 : 05] And now these three remain, faith, hope, and love, but the greatest of these is love. And of course, faith and hope are among the highest virtues we can have, but they are primarily for this life, and like spiritual gifts, they are temporary.

But love, love lasts forever. Indeed, Paul continues to prioritise love in his other letters. For example, as he continues to teach and guide the church in Rome in his letter to the Romans.

And here he offers wisdom on how they should live. For the first 11 chapters in Romans, Paul shares the gospel. But now in chapter 12, he instructs them how to live.

And the first thing he talks about isn't gifts, power, or growth. It is love, and how to live a life of love. So let's hear it.

Love must be sincere, hate what is evil, cling to what is good, Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves.

[9 : 16] Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse.

Rejoice with those who rejoice. Mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position.

Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone.

If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath.

[10:16] For it is written, it is mine to avenge, I will repay, says the Lord. On the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed him.

If he's thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

There is so much packed in here. So let's see how it can help us by picking out a few headlines. So firstly, love must be genuine.

Christian love isn't performance. It is genuine, sincere, not pretending, or a forced smile, or acting nice while in church.

Rather, it is deep, sincere, and costly love. Love is tied to truth. Paul tells us, hate what is evil.

[11:19] It doesn't enable sin. Love and truth together look like Jesus. And secondly, love the church like family.

Paul shifts from general love to family love. He says, be devoted, show honour, serve, rejoice, be patient, pray, share, practice hospitality.

Now, of course, this family love is an ideal. You'll know as well as me that while families can be a huge blessing, they can also be pretty difficult. Paul is obviously aware of that, but here, he's calling us to treat each with the loyalty and devotion that the ideal of family life assumes.

Everyday love is not necessarily dramatic or exciting, but faithful. And I've seen so many examples of this here. Love looking like sending a text or a card, praying with someone, listening, bringing a meal, genuine care.

And thirdly, we're called to love when it hurts and refuse revenge. Paul raises the bar here.

[12:45] We know it's easy to love our friends, the people that are easy to like, easy to love. What about those who hurt us, upset us, criticise us or exclude us?

The world can say to us, pay them back, protect your pride, get the upper hand. But the message from Paul is bless them, be humble, love them.

That love doesn't mean that we don't seek justice or protect the vulnerable or defend the rights of the oppressed. And love doesn't mean putting up with behaviour that might harm us.

But love does mean that not wishing ill on those who act in such ways, but instead desiring the best for them, even if that best is achieved through correction or restraint.

Paul tells us not to retaliate. We don't need to get even or take revenge. Forgiveness isn't pretending it doesn't hurt, rather it is choosing to trust God to deal with it.

[13:51] Only God can give us the strength to live like that. And then fourthly, love overcomes evil with good.

Once again, Paul is telling us that love is active and not passive. It actively seeks to do good even to our enemies. Jesus is the ultimate example of overcoming evil with his sacrificial love on the cross.

On the cross, Jesus made space for all of us to belong. And throughout all of his teaching, Paul isn't just describing something we need to try harder at.

He is describing Jesus. Jesus is patient. Jesus is kind. He keeps no records of wrongs.

God's grace The church in Romans 12 looks like family. Serving, open homes, patience, forgiveness. It looks like Jesus.

[14:58] It is so hard, even impossible, to love like this through our own strength. But through receiving his love, we can then pass it on.

We love because we've been loved. and when we live this way, the body can function as it's meant to, as a family. And I wonder how our church community would fare with this mirror of scripture held up against us.

It all sounds very lovely and easy to do. But in fact, we are all human and it isn't. There will be people we find much easier to love than others.

We may, deep down, be still bearing a grudge from years ago about someone. We may put more time and effort into people we like or who are like us.

Maybe with the same views about God, politics, or life. Or we might just be tired and want to come along to receive and we haven't got the energy to get to know people.

[16:07] But as Paul has showed us this morning, we are called to choose, we're called to commit, and we're called to love without condition.

So, this morning, I challenge you and I challenge myself to think about love. How and who?

How does God want you to love? love? We've seen agape love described with verbs, doing words. How is God calling you to love others around you? How is God calling me to love others? And secondly, who? Who is God prompting us to love? And it might not be our first choice or feel easy, but we have learned that agape love is a choice, a commitment, and that God through his spirit will help us to honour. The body of Christ is healthiest when every member loves like Jesus. Let us be that kind of church, not one with perfect people, but a place with real love.
[17 : 25] Amen.