

What Is Love?

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[0 : 00] I brought something with me today. It's not a sword, not this time. Although it might be quite dangerous if you get too close. If I can get it out of the bag.

I have two, which is always very useful. These are shoes, obviously. These are my running shoes, as well as fencing. I also do a little bit of running.

I keep telling people I don't enjoy running. I don't know if anyone believes me. I don't enjoy it, but I do it. I run to try and keep fit. And while I've been here, I've been running in the castle grounds, which are really nice. They're a nice place to run. Nicer to walk, but if you're going to run, it might as well be somewhere nice. And I was out for a run the other week, and I was trying out some new routes. I was taking a different route around the castle grounds for a bit of variety.

So I came along, and I came down a path, and I reached a junction, and I turned. And I thought, ooh, downhill. Downhill is nice. I ran downhill for a bit. But something in the back of my head was saying, I don't think I should be going downhill just now. And then I turned around the corner, and I thought, what's the sea doing over there? The sea should be on the other side of me.

And then I realized that I had turned the wrong way, and I was on the wrong path. Now, sometimes in life, that can happen to us. Not literally, but even if we're following God, we can take a wrong turn, and we can end up on the wrong path.

[1 : 50] Now, thankfully, I realized this quite quickly, and all I had to do was turn around. All I had to do. I'd run a little bit extra, so I was going to have to run further, and I was going to have to stop, turn around, and start again going uphill.

So although it had seemed nice for a little while to be running downhill, I'd actually made my run harder for myself by taking the wrong path. It seemed nice, but it was harder.

And if we've taken a wrong turn, and if we're not following God's way for us, he will still get us where we need to be. But we could well be making it much harder for ourselves.

So it's important to make sure that you stay on the right path. You don't always take the path that looks easier. You take the path you're meant to be on. But there's a worse wrong path you can be on.

Because I was talking about if you're following God. And if you're not following God, then you really are on the wrong path. You really are going the wrong way.

[2 : 57] And it's not just going to be a case of adding a little bit of extra uphill section. In fact, your whole path might seem easier right until you get to the end. Because that path, the Bible tells us, leads to destruction.

So if you are not following God, you are very much on the wrong path. And you need to turn around right now before you go any further. If God is still speaking to you, it is not too late to turn around. To turn your back on the direction you've been going in. And to run God's way. Get on to the right path. That's something that I had to do when I was running and I turned the wrong way.

And it's something that we all have to do. By nature, we are all on the wrong path. And it doesn't matter who's running with you. And it doesn't matter which way they're running. You need to turn around and run God's way.

Run to him and he will see you home. So just remember that. If you're on the wrong path, turn around and run to God.

[4 : 05] I'm going to push those trainers out of the way a little bit so that they don't cause me to black out from the smell. We're going to say the Lord's Prayer together now.

Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever. Amen. If you would turn with me for our scripture reading to 1 Corinthians 13.

1 Corinthians 13.

[5 : 13] We're continuing our study of this passage, this chapter in Paul's letter to the church in Corinth. This is the living word of the living God and we pray that he would bless it to us as we read it.

1 Corinthians 13. If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

And if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient and kind.

Love does not envy or boast. It is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way. It is not irritable or resentful. It does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.

[6 : 16] Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.

As for prophecies, they will pass away. As for tongues, they will cease. As for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.

When I was a child, I spoke like a child. I thought like a child. I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, then I shall know fully, even as I have been known. So now faith, hope, and love abide. These three, but the greatest of these is love.

I want to particularly consider the verses that we find in the middle of this chapter, verses four to seven. Love is patient and kind. Love does not envy or boast. It is not arrogant or rude.

[7 : 26] It does not insist on its own way. It is not irritable or resentful. It does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

What is love? How would you answer that question? It's one that's occupied with thoughts of philosophers and poets and greetings card writers for centuries.

And in our own times, popular music has frequently tried to address the question, hasn't it? What is love? I want to know what love is. Is this love?

Love is all around you. It's all you need. It's the law, the drug, it's suicide, it's the key, it makes the world go around, it will find a way. It bites, it hurts, it can build a bridge, it can set you free, it can bring us together, it can tear us apart.

During the Euros, we were even briefly reminded once again that love's got the world in motion. Our culture is obsessed with love. Everybody wants to know what is love?

[8 : 53] But no one seems to have an answer that really nails it down, that goes beyond being a fine sentiment. No one, that is, except God.

And this is our third look at 1 Corinthians 13. We've looked at the context, how Paul wrote this letter to a divided church, arguing over spiritual gifts and told them of a more excellent way, love.

And then two weeks ago, we considered what the church would look like without love. How all our gifts and all that we value become as nothing without love for God and for one another.

And this week, we're going to look at what the Bible has to say in answer to the question, what is love? What is love?

And I want to consider three different aspects, three different headings as we look at this passage. First, I want to acknowledge that it's more than a feeling.

[10 : 04] Then I want to consider whether love is the law. And finally, I just want us to try and answer that question. Complete that sentence. Love is?

So first off, what is love? Well, love is more than a feeling. I think it would be fair to say that most people today would think of love as an emotion, something that you feel.

And it ranges from a kind of fondness, a mild affection, to an obsession. It takes in filial duty, sentiment, passionate desire, and everything in between.

But that's not how the Bible tells it. From the Bible's viewpoint, love is more than just an emotion, a feeling, a sentiment.

And what we have here is Paul not so much defining love as describing it, describing what it looks like and what we would expect to see.

[11 : 20] It's effect. So, let's take some time this morning to take a look together at what he tells us. And the love that Paul is describing here is a love which specifically focuses on others and it's a love which, in biblical usage, includes a relational aspect with God.

It's not a love that stands on its own. So, how does Paul describe this love? So, let's start by looking at verse 4.

In verse 4, Paul tells us that love is patient and kind. He groups these two together. Love is patient and kind because the one flows from the other.

You can't have one without the other. And these are words which, in our common usage today, I think, have been robbed of much of their depth.

love. Because what Paul's talking about here is not a kind of a passive patience, a resigned stoicism. It's not simply about being content to wait.

[12 : 42] If you have older translations, older translations might say that love is long-suffering, which catches a bit more of the nuance here. the Greek word actually has its roots in a kind of a metaphor which means something like slow burning or long burning.

Not something which flares up and is consumed, but something which lasts. And it speaks particularly of being patient and enduring in the face of injury and offense, provocation, even persecution.

And this kind of patience allows us to withstand what we might consider distasteful in others. And not just for a little while, not just a kind of a grin and bear it, it will be over soon, but on an ongoing basis.

And it goes beyond that because love doesn't just put up with provocation, it responds with kindness. Patience withstands injustice, but kindness repays good with evil.

Sorry, repays evil with good. And that sounds a lot harder than the kind of sentimental love we hear about in songs and read on Valentine's cards, doesn't it?

[14 : 12] Because this is a love which places demands not on others, but on us. It's the first hint that this love, unlike the love which the world is more likely to be speaking of, is centered not on ourselves and on how we feel at any given moment, but on the other, on other people.

And this is what love is. This is the love which the Corinthian church was lacking, as they each jockeyed for supremacy and looked with contempt on those who they considered to be beneath them.

Furthermore, though, not only is it patient and kind, but this love does not envy or boast. That is, it doesn't compare itself to others or compete with others.

It doesn't measure its worth against the worth and the value of other people. It doesn't seek first place and it never, ever considers itself better than others.

There is no room in this love for that kind of attitude, for chasing what someone else has or thinking that what we have makes us more important than them.

[15 : 45] Remember what Paul said back in chapter 12, the church is a body of many parts, many members. Is the hand more valuable than the foot or the eye more valuable than the ear?

No. That's what Paul's talking about here. Be content with what God has called you to and value others as they have been called and gifted.

Love is also not arrogant. Literally what it says here is love is not puffed up or overblown. It's almost a comic image, isn't it?

Something trying to magnify its importance by making itself look bigger. And make itself appear to be more than it really is. Look at me.

See how special I am. How grand I am. Love doesn't do that. Love doesn't strut and swagger. And then in verse 5 we're told that love is not rude.

[16 : 52] Now, that means more than just good manners. It doesn't mean less certainly, but it means more than that. Rudeness in this context is not just the opposite of being polite.

Rudeness speaks of inappropriate conduct, unseemly behavior towards others. Rudeness is uncouth and crass. So love avoids giving offense or trampling on the sensibilities of others.

love. Even even while avoiding the appearance of puffed up pride, love behaves with decorum. And it doesn't insist on its own way.

And again, if we look at the Greek here, it literally means something like it does not seek or strive for itself. which takes us back to chapter 12 again, and this time verse 7, where Paul reminds the Corinthians that each of us is given gifts by God, not for ourselves, but for the good of the church, for the common good.

It's not enough not to be grasping at things we're not entitled to. We need to stop thinking about what's best for us. what we are entitled to.

[18 : 15] We need to stop insisting on our rights and consider instead how we have been gifted, sometimes uniquely so, for the benefit of the body of Christ that we have been called to be part of.

Love is not irritable. It is not easily provoked, nor is it resentful. Literally, it does not count up harms. In other words, it doesn't respond angrily when it's slighted or injured. Neither does it bear a grudge, keeping note of all these injuries and nursing them, letting them accrue and harden the heart.

It lets them pass and it lets them go. So we don't get to snap back when someone slanders us. We don't get to get annoyed when someone mistreats us.

And we can't carry a grudge about what someone did to us that one time, remember? We are showing love. We have to let all these things go.

[19 : 24] love. And then in verse 6, we read that love does not rejoice at wrongdoing, unrighteousness, or injustice.

It's not made glad by the downfall of others or amused by seeing them get their comeuppance. And it doesn't get a vicarious thrill out of watching other people lead lives characterized by recklessness and risk and ungodly behavior.

It doesn't think it's okay to get a buzz out of that as long as we're not doing it. No. Instead of rejoicing at these things, it rejoices with the truth, with goodness, with sincerity lived out.

And then finally, verse 7 tells us that love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, things, it is ongoing, it is constant, it is trusting, it hopes for the best and it assumes the best of others, even those that have let it down before.

It wants the best for others and it endures, it stands firm, it doesn't get worn down and decide that enough is enough.

[20 : 47] It withstands disappointment, it withstands aggression, and it even withstands betrayal, and it endures. Now that is all a long way from the hearts and flowers sentimentality of how the world views love, isn't it?

This is hard. I mean, we talk about tough love, love, and what we usually mean by that is love which is tough on other people for their own good, but this is really tough.

And all of these points Paul chose because the church in Corinth was failing to live up to them. As the rest of the letter shows, this was a people who multiplied divisions, who sought honour for themselves at the expenses of others, who treated fellow members of the body poorly, and who lacked compassion for their weaker or less well-off brothers and sisters.

This passage really puts them to shame. But what about us? What about you?

What about me? I know that this passage makes pretty uncomfortable reading for me. love is love.

[22 : 17] And it matters. It really does. Why? Well, at least in part because of our second point. Love is the law.

Now, that's a phrase you might have heard from time to time, and it's usually not used in a way we would be comfortable with endorsing. application. In its most famous application, it's a very libertine view that we can do whatever we like as long as we think we're doing it with love.

It can be used in a kind of a stark authoritarian manner which views love as a set of rules which keep us in place for our own good. truth. truth. But what I'm meaning here is something quite different, something which is central to the Bible's teaching.

Because for some, love and law exist as polar opposites. But that's what we would call a false dichotomy.

Love and the law are not in opposition. Far from it. Love is absolutely integral to living according to God's law properly.

[23 : 38] We cannot hope to even begin to fulfill the law without love. Real, living, giving, sacrificing love of the kind described here by Paul.

When Jesus was asked in Mark chapter 12, what was the greatest commandment? Consider how he responded in verses 29 to 31 of Mark 12.

Jesus answered, the most important is, hear O Israel, the Lord our God. The Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.

And the second is this, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these. And this teaching from Jesus is sometimes presented as if it was novel, as if it was something new, but it's not.

It's very much rooted in the Old Testament law codes. Just to pick one example, Leviticus chapter 19 verse 18 says, you shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

[24 : 58] I am the Lord. Sound familiar? Love doesn't strike back or keep an account of wrongs. Galatians chapter 5 verse 14 tells us that the whole of the law can be summed up by the statement, love your neighbor as yourself.

And Romans 13 verse 8 tells us that this is the fulfillment of the law. And Jesus takes it even further in Matthew chapter 5 verses 43 and 44 where he tells his disciples it is not enough to love your neighbor but hate your enemy.

You must also love your enemies and those who persecute you. love. And if we had time we could go through the Ten Commandments in detail and see how each of them is impossible to live out without love.

And how it's the lack of this love for God and others which leads us to break them. If we love others we can no longer see them as simply objects for our own gratification.

If we love in such a way that we don't look to our own needs and desires first we won't covet we can't covet or steal. Lies, murder, adultery, all of these fly in the face of the love of 1 Corinthians 13.

[26 : 27] Now it is true that we no longer live as a people under the law. It is no longer in the law that we find our salvation. But Jesus says in Matthew chapter 5 that he did not come to abolish the law but to fulfil it.

So we also don't just cast it aside and live without it. If we want to live God's way, if we want to walk God's path to go in God's direction, we need to live lives empowered by this self-sacrificing, other-valuing, all-consuming love which Paul describes.

which kind of brings us to our last point. Love is because as Paul has been describing this love, I wonder if you've noticed something interesting.

He talks a lot about what love does or doesn't do, rather than talking about what a person who loves would do or what we would do.

And the more I've considered it and the more I've read it, it starts to feel like what Paul is describing here is not a thing, it's not an abstract, but a person.

[27 : 58] Perhaps the question that we should be asking this morning is not so much what is love, but who is love? who can you think of who wholly and fully and perfectly embodies all of the characteristics Paul outlines here in these verses?

I'll give you a clue. It isn't me and it isn't you. Let's think about this.

Love is patient, it suffers long, it endures much. Who does Isaiah's prophecy, chapter 53 of Isaiah, who does that describe as being a lamb led to the slaughter silent before the shearer?

Well, that's the same question that the Ethiopian eunuch asked Philip in chapter 8 of Acts. And the answer? Jesus.

Love is kind. kind. Now that word for kind also appears in two other very important places in the New Testament. You look at 1 Peter chapter 2 verse 3 where he says, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

[29 : 22] And here Peter's quoting the Greek translation of Psalm 34, taste and see that the Lord is good. good. And the word that's translated here as good is the same one that Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 13 for kind.

So this kindness, goodness, is ascribed to God. But let's also consider Matthew chapter 11 verse 30. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Again, the English translation obscures this a bit, but the word easy, yep, same word in Greek, kind. And who says this about himself?

Jesus. Love does not seek for itself. Whom does Philippians 2 verses 6 and 7 say, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

Jesus. Love does not retaliate and it keeps no account of wrongs. Who, as he was dying, asked for his killers to be forgiven.

[30 : 54] Jesus. And who cried out from the cross, tetelestai, it is finished or it is paid, signifying that the account of the sins of those who trust in him is wiped clean.

Jesus. Jesus. We could go on. there are so many examples which show how Jesus and he alone perfectly fulfilled this description.

Love is not what but who. Jesus is the one who personifies and exemplifies this love.

Paul calls on the church in Corinth, in Stornoway, everywhere, to be conformed to this kind of love and the only way we can do that is to have Jesus at the heart of our lives as individuals and as a church.

To be seeking, to be following him and to be transformed, to be more like him every day. So if you were a bit downcast considering Paul's description of love, if you were thinking, I can never live up to that, well you're right because on our own none of us can.

[32 : 35] But by the power of the Holy Spirit and through Jesus' work, we can be empowered by his love to strive to be the church that he has called us out to be.

We can love because he loved us first while we were still his enemies. He loved us.

So we need to cry out to him in prayer. We need to seek him and we need to ask him to help us to live out this love as his body in our communities.

And if you haven't done it yet, you need to ask him into your heart. you need to ask him to help you to know this love, to be filled with this love so that you can be part of that body as well, so that you can live in this way, so that you can know the love that Paul describes for yourself only in and through Jesus because this is love.

Let's bow our heads and ask for God's blessing. Oh Lord God, we ask that you would make us a people characterized by love.

[34 : 22] we ask that you would fill us with an awareness of the love that you have for us, that it would spill out from us, that we would become known so much as a people who love, not just in an abstract kind of way, but in the back-breaking, self-sacrificing way which Paul describes here.

help us never to be content with anything less, but to constantly be begging you to fill us and we do Lord, please we beseech you fill us with this love.

Hear our prayer Lord, we ask and respond in your graciousness. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. We are going to sing now, closing our service in the psalm that Peter quoted there, Psalm 34, the Scottish Psalter version of Psalm 34.

And we're going to sing from verse 3 on page 247. Extol the Lord with me, let us exalt his name together.

I sought the Lord, he heard and did me from all fears deliver. And we're going to sing down to verses 8 and 9 there where we read, oh taste and see that God is good, who trusts in him is blessed.

[36 : 04] Fear God his saints, none that him fear shall be with want oppressed. And we pray that we would all know this truth and those we love would come to know it as well. Let's sing then to God's praise from verse 3 to verse 9.

Extol the Lord with me, let us exalt his name together. exalt the Lord with me, let us exalt his name together.

I sought the Lord, God's heaven groan Where their faces This poor man cried God heard and saved Him from all his distresses The angel of the Lord

Encroaches and rounden compasses All moves upon That to him fear And then he liveth O taste and see That God is good Who trusts in him Is blessed Fear God is saved Thou that in fear Shall be with all to rest

Just a reminder that as we leave To maintain social distancing as much as possible You'll be asked You'll be directed out Exits are located Here and here And just maintain Safety as you do so Lord God we ask Now that as we depart We would depart with your blessing That we would depart knowing your grace Your peace and your love From Father, Son and Holy Spirit Now and always on us And those we love We ask in your name Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen

Amen Amen Amen Amen

[39 : 51] Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen