

The Love of God

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[0 : 0 0] Amen. And thanks to the music group for leading us in that great song. I really like that hymn sung to that tune. I've never heard it to that tune before. And Steele mentioned before that she had a surprise for us today. And that was a good surprise. I like that tune and love those words. What great words they are. The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose. He will not. He will not desert to its foes. That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake, he'll never, no, never, no, never forsake. Let's turn to God's word.

And this morning our passage is 1 Corinthians and chapter 13. 1 Corinthians and chapter 13. We'll pick up the reading just at the end of chapter 12. And I'll read from chapter 12 and verse 27.

Now you're the body of Christ and members individually. And God has appointed these in the church. First apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, ministrations, varieties of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers?

Are all workers of miracles? Do all have the gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret, but earnestly desire the best gifts? And yet I show you a more excellent way.

Though I speak with tongues of men and angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

[2 : 1 4] And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. Love suffers long and is kind.

Love does not envy. Love does not parade itself, is not puffed up. Does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil.

Does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth. And when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.

when I was a child I spoke as a child I understood as a child I thought as a child but when I became a man I put away childish things for now we see in a mirror dimly but then face to face now I know in part but then I shall know just as I also am known and now abide faith hope love these three but the greatest of these is love amen and may the lord bless to us the reading of his word the subject of today's sermon is the love of God and we'll be looking at this great chapter first Corinthians chapter 13 under three headings verses one to three we have love contrasted and in verses four to seven love analyzed and in verses eight to the end of the chapter love defended our subject is the love of God and I'll just start by saying this the love of God is very great the love of God is very great we've just been singing a moment ago about God's love as love divine all loves excelling it's an eternal love that never changes everlasting in fact in that it will never end the love of God for his people also goes back a long way in fact we read in the Bible that God has set his love upon us and he chose a people from himself for himself from before the foundation of the world it's astonishing to think that even before we were born into this world before we knew anything

God knew us and loved us and then in John chapter 3 and verse 16 probably the best known verse in the entire Bible we read that for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life in the garden of Eden Adam and Eve sinned against God and sin entered into the world and death through sin and ever since then mankind has been in rebellion against God and the fact is that as a result of the fall all who are born into this world are sinners both by nature and practice and that includes us and we read in the Bible that the wages of sin is death but thanks be to God he has made a way for us to be reconciled to himself and that way is by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ who died for sinners on

[6 : 22] Calvary's cross we've just been hearing about this in the children's talk he was buried and he rose victorious from the tomb on the third day and he ascended into heaven and one day he will return in glory and those of us who know him and love him look forward to that day with great expectation and joyful hope the day when Christ will return and take us to be with himself and we will be with the Lord forever in heaven and so when we think about the subject of God's love and we'll shortly dig into this great chapter of God's word it just needs to be said that the Christian love spoken of here in 1 Corinthians 13 is not something that's self-generated it's not something that we in and of ourselves can do it is God's love and as such is the fruit of the Holy Spirit who dwells in every believer in the book of Galatians in chapter 5 and verse 22 we read about the fruit of the Spirit in that chapter we read that the fruit of the Spirit is love and joy and peace and long-suffering and kindness and goodness and faithfulness gentleness and self-control notice that love is at the top of the list but we can only love because he first loved us God's love is a wonderful love there's nothing like it there's nothing to be compared with it it's love divine all loves excelling confusion about what love is we're not to be misled into believing that what Hollywood about love is true or what the music industry or what advertising or literature in our days says people are looking for love but the tragedy is that so many are looking in the wrong places as we open up the pages of the Bible we can learn about God's wonderful love for us and come to know that love for ourselves but we don't want to stop there we want to tell others about it and that's why we're here that's why this church is here and we want God's love to be seen in our own lives and we want to tell other people about it and so here's first point number one of our sermon today point number one love contrasted in verses one to three so let's get into this great chapter of God's word and our first point point number one is love contrasted the apostle Paul speaks of the excellence and the greatness and the superiority of Christian love and his argument flows from what he's just said in chapter 12 about spiritual gifts in the church we can see also that chapter 13 flows into chapter 14 where Paul continues his discussion on the subject how important it is in our all of our study of the Bible to put things in context and I believe here that chapters 12 13 and 14 are to be taken together we'll not have time to work through all these chapters this morning obviously but I'll highlight a few things as we go along so here in verses one to three the contrast is being made between the presence of love and the absence of love and there's a big difference isn't there what a difference love makes and we can see this very clearly and in focus here in verses one to three the apostle Paul begins by saying though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels but have not love and become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal

I really like to listen to good music and we all do and you might expect me to say that that I like music I'm a musician by trade and a music teacher that's my job that's the work I do so I like to listen to music classical music and many other styles as well as far as classical music goes we'd have to admit whether we like classical music or not that the Royal Scottish National Orchestra is one of the great orchestras in this country and musicians in that orchestra are first class if you go to the Usher Hall buy your ticket and take your seat to listen to the concert you'll listen to all kinds of music brass instruments cymbals woodwind instruments and the musicians are playing trumpets and violins and all kinds of other instruments and it will sound amazing if you go to a concert you're not really going to hear a racket are you like what we hear read about here in first Corinthians 13 verse 1 if you go to hear the SNO you'll not hear sort of tin cans being played suspended from bits of string it played with a branch of a tree like we used to the sort of thing we did when we were children you'll hear a cymbal playing in the orchestra and the cymbals will be sounded sparingly and in the right place you'll hear trumpets being sounded and played so well and in tune if you go to the concert and hear a cymbal playing sort of crashing cymbals for a whole two-hour concert i think you'll find that he'll be sacked on the spot and you'll not longer be a member of the orchestra historians tell us something about the sort of pagan ceremonies that used to take place in Corinth in the early centuries of the Christian church and they mentioned the sort of repetitive music which was an integral part of their festivals they speak of the sort of monotonous clattering of gongs and cymbals pieces of brass and they say that the sound was obnoxious to the ear and similar to the sound of a continuous barking of dogs i don't know if you like dogs but dogs bark all the time that can get annoying actually Corinth was famous for its manufacture of brass and this sound must certainly have been a racket you can compare it to the unwanted sounds that we sometimes have to endure in our daily lives the loud music that we hear from the neighbor's flat right through the night and into the early hours of the morning or indeed the dog in the neighborhood that seems to just continue barking all the time i've got such a dog in my neighborhood anti-social neighbors who turn the volume right up to the max with no thought at all about anyone else but the apostle paul says here if even i was the greatest speaker in all the world i could speak in the tongues of men and of angels but if i have not love and become nothing more than a racket just sounding brass and clanging cymbals and we can deduce from this that paul must have been referring to those instruments used in pagan ceremonies of his own day not the sounds of fine instruments like trumpet and cymbals played by great musicians so when paul wrote the letter to the corinthians the spiritual gifts of tongues and the interpretation of tongues were in operation and chapters 12 and 14 tell us a lot about this and here in verse 1 we read about the tongues of men and angels it's likely that this refers to the gift of speaking in tongues that is unknown languages in the church which was genuinely practiced in the early church paul paul goes on in verse 2 to speak about the gifts of prophecy and also about knowledge and faith

and using very bold words he says even if i could understand all mysteries that is things which god alone can know and make known but if i have not love i am nothing and even if i have all faith so that i could remove mountains but have not love i am nothing without love all is meaningless and worthless and then in verse 3 the argument continues and though i bestow all my goods to feed the poor and though i give my body to be burned but have not love it profits me nothing i just wonder how many people in the world today are trying to buy their way into heaven by doing good stuff by doing a lot of work for charity or supporting good causes or giving money money to the poor these things are not bad in themselves but the fact is that there's nothing that we can do to merit favor with god there's nothing that we can do to pay our way into heaven the only way to be right with god the only way to be saved is by the grace of god through faith in the lord jesus christ and that's the good news in fact it's the best news ever it's the sort of news that you just want to shout from the rooftops to let everyone know that jesus saves and that the way to be saved is not by attempting to pay our way into heaven that just can't be done we're all sinners and have broken god's law and fallen short of his glory we're all sinners and the wages of sin is death and ultimately eternal separation from god in a place called hell but the gift of god is eternal life through jesus christ our lord let's just think about that for a minute if you've not yet trusted in the lord jesus you have a death sentence hanging over you it's as serious and it's as stark as that but praise god that there's a free offer of pardon and forgiveness for all who turn to him from their sins and put their faith and trust in the lord jesus christ there's no other way to be right with god the wages of sin is death but the gift of god is eternal life in christ jesus our lord that this offer of life stands if you've not accepted the offer all i can say is this don't delay take it and put your trust in the lord jesus he'll give you a new life and he'll put his love in your heart and the way that you never thought was possible and you'll have a bright future ahead of you no matter what joys and troubles you may have in this world because you'll one day see the lord jesus face to face and you'll be with him forever in heaven and all the days of your life here on earth he'll be with you and you'll know him to be a friend that sticks closer than a brother he'll be your shepherd and your guide and you'll live your life as it's supposed to be lived for the glory of god without the love of god in our hearts all is meaningless and all is lost and there's no good in it and verse three of our passage reminds us of this the idea that a person of a person giving his or her body to be burned scholars scholars tell us probably refers to the branding of slaves to indicate their ownership the meaning then would be though i not only give away all my goods but if i should sell myself as a slave for the sake of the poor it would profit me nothing jonathan edwards in his great commentary on this chapter sums up the verse when he says

the time when the apostle wrote to the corinthians was a time when christians were often called not only to give their goods but their bodies also for christ's sake where the church then was generally under person were then or soon after put to very cruel deaths for the gospel's sake but though they suffer in death it would be in vain without love therefore the doctrine that i would that all men can all men can do all they can suffer of sincere christian love in the heart jonathan edwards jonathan edwards was right wasn't he it was love contrasted let's move on to point number two now love analyzed and with god's christian love is and what it is not verses four to seven of our text really need very little comment from me the meaning is so clear so apparent so plain but i think the very best way to read these verses is with prayer and as we work our way through these verses which explain in such beautiful language what love is and what it isn't i'd like to invite you along with me to pray silently to ask the lord to help you and i to understand something more of his love and to give us grace to change where we need to change so that god's love would be seen in our lives and lived out in practice i don't know but maybe the best way to read these verses is with prayer and also with tears in our eyes i know i myself fall very sharp short of the standard of love that we're going to read about here and if we're all honest we have to admit that we all fall short of god's standard but as we read let's not be content to remain the same let's not be content with the status quo let's ask the lord to fill us with his love and help us express god's love to our families to our friends to our work colleagues to our neighbors to our fellow church members here in this place and to the community outside these doors and to all so let's read these verses i'll speak slowly to allow us time to think and consider these things prayerfully verse four begins with the words love suffers long or if you're reading the niv this verse reads love is patient in other words it patiently endures even when provoked it's not quick to assert its own rights and it's not resentful love is kind it's good natured in the greek new testament the root meaning of this word is useful i don't know about you but i'd like to be more useful like to be more useful in life and in work and in christian service and if we can show kindness to other people then surely we will truly be useful love does not envy it doesn't have a wrong attitude towards other people about the good of others and their gifts and talents and abilities love does not envy it doesn't have a wrong attitude towards other people about the good of others and love does not parade itself it's not looking for the applause it's not looking for praise or admiration it doesn't brag about itself love is not puffed up it's not boastful proud and desiring of praise i don't know if you've ever heard of a type of fish called a puffer fish you've maybe seen them on the television it's a tiny little fish and yet it puffs itself up like a big football with spikes

it's not big in size but it blows itself up like a football we're not to be like the puffer fish inflated and proud we're not to make ourselves big and wide we as christians are called to be modest and humble and not think of ourselves more highly than we ought verse 5 love does not behave rudely it does not nothing of which to be ashamed it doesn't cross the lines with regard to good moral standards it doesn't behave disgracefully or end up in embarrassment and shame love doesn't seek its own it doesn't insist on its own way it doesn't say to others it's my way or the byway or the highway rather it doesn't seek its own way it doesn't insist on it no matter what the situation love is not provoked are you a person who's easily riled or would nothing rile you we all have different temperaments but love is not quick tempered love thinks no evil the bible commentators give us at least three different interpretations here and they all seem to be good and valid firstly love does not plan evil secondly it doesn't point the finger at others and thirdly it doesn't lay the evil to the charge of the one who has done the wrong instead of being resentful it is forgiving you remember the account of the martyrdom of stephen in acts chapter 7 we read how stephen was dragged out of the city and he was stoned to death for his faith in the lord jesus christ i remember what he said as he was being stoned he said lord do not hold this sin against them that's just the same thing here isn't it love thinks no evil instead it is forgiving and we should also remember the very man who wrote the letter to the corinthians and who wrote this great chapter about christian love at one time was actually giving his approval to stephen's death that's quite a thought isn't it paul or rather saul as his name was then his name was changed to paul had blood on his hands and he was an enemy of god and of every christian he hated christians and yet the lord had mercy on him and met with him in a very amazing way on the damascus road he basically stopped him in his tracks and completely transformed if he sort of picked him up by the collar and said that's enough now you belong and from now on you'll do my work and you'll preach the gospel to the gentiles people's lives and although we can't expect a damascus road experience god is still tarsus a man who described himself as the later as the chief of sinners and take away his hatred and fill him with the love of god under the inspiration of the holy spirit to pen the amazing words we're reading today in first corinthians 30 we praise god for his amazing grace that's what we don't deserve now i wonder if paul all his cheeks as he wrote these words love thinks no evil love does not to the charge of those who has done the wrong remember how we read of jesus when he was hanging on calvary's cross what did he say he said father forgive them for they know not what they do it is forgiving let's move on to verse six love does not rejoice in iniquity

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