

Today's Bible reading, is recognised (even by non-Christians), as one of the world's most beautiful, and moving pieces of literature.... It'll often be read at a wedding (It featured at the Royal Wedding last weekend...); **And**, it gets put on pretty pictures to hang on our walls...

Love...

What do you think 1 Corinthians 13 is really about? ... Well, after hearing it, you'd probably say "Don't be daft, Michael – It's about 'love' (of course). What else **could** it be about?"

That's why a Bride and a Groom delight in this splendid, almost lyrical passage...

It connects with how we feel about our closest loved ones:

- It connects with how we feel (romantically) towards that special person, who, when we look in their eyes, it makes us feel all 'gooey' inside...
- It connects with how we feel towards our closest family members – those ones we are connected to, through blood and a shared history and community...
- It connects with how we feel about those people, who we really like – our best mates; our closest friends; our cobbers; our closest companions....

That's the sort of love we know. That's the sort of love **we** understand... But if our 'understanding of love', and if our '**experience** of love', is limited to that sort of love, we're

never going to ‘get’ the sort of love that Paul’s talking about here...

In English, we have **one word** for love, which confuses things a bit. I mean like, “I love my wife like I love T-bone steak???... What’s that about”.

And so the lack of words in English confuses the issue. But in the original Biblical Greek, there are 3 different words for love. The Greeks may not be very good at managing an economy, but they were pretty good at communicating.

The first word for love was “Eros” love – from which we get our word “erotic”. It’s boy meets girl – girl meets boy, boy falls in love with girl, girl falls in love with boy – that’s “eros” love – it’s sexual attraction.

The second word for love, is “phileo” love. We describe it as a brotherly love – like love between family members, or between good mates. It’s camaraderie – Mateship. That’s “phileo” love.

But the third type of love, is very different to the first two: It’s “agape” love.

The first two types of love we direct toward particular people, whom we have feelings for.

And so, we might feel **that** love, and go “Yeah, **I** know how to love. I know **all about** love... I would give **anything** for this person. I would **back them**, to the ends of the earth. I would **defend** them, to the end of my life... I know about love...”

But “agape” love is very different. Agape love, is that love, which will drive me to die for my enemy...

You see, it’s not a feeling... (and that’s what makes it so very different) – “agape” love, is an attitude, **and** an act of the will. It’s a love, which is to be shown to all people, regardless of how we feel about them. When Jesus told us to love our enemies, and to pray for those who persecute us, **that’s** the sort of love he was talking about – “agape” love – it’s an act of the will, **and** it’s a **God-given** attitude of the heart...

And **that** is the sort of love that 1 Corinthians 13 is describing. It’s the sort of love that God has for us.... While **we** were still sinners – We were still **enemies** of God, and yet God loved us. And Christ died for usⁱ...

We could go through that passage, and substitute the word “love” with the name “Jesus”, and it makes perfect sense:

⁴ Jesus is patient and kind. Jesus does not envy, or boast. He is not proud, or rude. He is not self-seeking. He is not irritable, and He keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Jesus does not delight in evil, but He rejoices with the truth. ⁷ Jesus always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. ⁸ Jesus never fails. ...

See, it makes Perfect sense... It has a ring of truth to it, doesn’t it?

But how does it sound if you put **your** name in there. I know it doesn’t sound right when I put mine in there.

- Michael is patient – well actually I am reasonably patient – although I don't suffer fools lightly.
- Michael is kind – errr: not really.
- Michael does not envy – oww – well actually I do.
- And I'm a bit proud.
- Sometimes I'm downright rude....

I'm afraid I don't come up to scratch with that kind of love...

You see, agape love, is how God loves **us**. Before I **ever** deserved it, Jesus died on the cross for me. And before **you** ever deserved it, Jesus died on the cross for you...

And it's **because** of the cross, that **we** can love. We can love like **God** loves. The Apostle John said, "**We love, because He first loved us**"ⁱⁱ". And the sort of love that John is talking about in **his** letters, is exactly the sort of love that Paul is talking about here.

1 Corinthians 13 though, is not actually **about** love. It's about Spiritual gifts, and in the larger message of the letter, it's about relationships within the church...

At the beginning of Chapter 12, Paul says: "**Now, about Spiritual gifts, brothers, I don't want you to be ignorant**", And he carries on the topic of Spiritual gifts, through chapters 12, 13, and 14. And this passage, is right in the middle of it.

....

Over the last couple of weeks, we've been learning about how Spiritual gifts are given, for the building up of the church. But we've also become aware, that all this teaching on Spiritual gifts, was written, because there were some in the church at Corinth, who had gotten it so **very** wrong... They were a church divided. They **didn't** love. And even the way they were using their spiritual gifts, was unloving...

And so Paul here, touches on the temporary nature of Spiritual gifts, and the permanency and the **primacy** of love...

He tells them about all these amazing Spiritual gifts, and then he says, "**And I will show you a still more excellent way.**" ... Love ...

Spiritual giftedness, without love, is worthless... Actually, it's worse than worthless. It can be downright annoying...

Is anybody else here, old enough to remember the old Styrofoam iceboxes, and the old Styrofoam water-bottles... Every now and then (back in the day), you'd see one of them, on the side of the road, all smashed to pieces ... And you'd never quite know – "I wonder: Did it blow out of the back of a ute?; or, is it an object of road-rage???"

I'm still not sure, if the most annoyed I've ever seen my Dad, was in the sheep yards, or whether it was with a poorly packed Styrofoam water-bottle that wouldn't stop squeaking... You'd head off on holidays, and you'd go over a bump, and the luggage would shift, and the water-bottle (that had been

silent up until then), would start squeaking...: Squeak; squeak; speak; squeak.... Nothing was more agitating...

Paul says: **If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.**

There's nothing more annoying, is there, then just a reverberating, resonating, meaningless noise... Except maybe, a squeaky water-bottle...

No matter how spiritual our words might sound, no language (or words) can ever compare with love. Nor could they ever be a substitute **for** love...

Even the gift of Prophecy – a gift that Paul tells us is the **highest** of the Spiritual gifts, and is so important, that we should pray for it, and ask God for it... –

- Speaking the very word of God Himself, is nothing, without love...
- Understanding the mysteries of God, is nothing, without love;
- Knowledge – even Spiritual knowledge, is nothing without love.

- Even the strongest of faith (a faith that would move a mountain), without love, is nothing...

What about 'sacrifice'? Can sacrifice be divorced from love? It sure can...

The greatest sacrifice without love = nothing gained...

V³ If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

When we give to the poor, do we give because we love? Or do we do it because we're commanded to?

When we give our tithes and offerings, to the ministry of the church, do we do it because we love? Or because we see it as something we're commanded to do???

In 2 Corinthians 9:⁶ The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also **reap** sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also **reap** bountifully. ⁷ Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a **cheerful** giver.

God wants us to be so filled with love, that we'll give to the poor. He wants us to be so filled with love, that we'll give to the ministry of the church...

Even if I sacrifice my life, if I do it without love, I gain nothing... **That's** the difference between the message of Jesus and the message of Mohammed:

- Mohammed says, "Kill those you hate, and if you lose your life doing it, you'll be rewarded"...
- Whereas Jesus says, "sacrifice without love = nothing gained"

What's **our** motivation? Love? Or Reward? Because if we sacrifice (give our stuff away), for reward, guess what... **There is no reward...** But if we sacrifice because we love, that changes everything. The rewards are enormous... It's **sacrificial love** that's rewarded – not the sacrifice itself.

*A lot of churches will give an offering message, just before the offering's taken up... And often, the message will revolve around "Give lots of money, and God will repay you with multiples of what you give." ... **That** shouldn't be our motivation for giving – that's a 'get-rich-quick scheme'. Our motivation should be "Love". Giving, without expecting anything in return.*

- I love God;
- I love those who give up their secular jobs, to preach the Gospel
- and so I give.
- I give cheerfully – not reluctantly, or under compulsion,,,,, because I love.

....

This passage, is about Spiritual gifts, and relationships within the church. And first and foremost, the relationship between Christians should be (actually, I'm going to strengthen that statement, "**MUST BE**") a relationship of love...

John – the apostle who described himself as "The disciple whom Jesus loved", tells us in 1 John 4:²⁰ If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has

seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. ²¹ And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God **must** also love his brother.

What does that look like? If we have a distorted view of love, what does an undistorted view of love look like?

- No, it's not just a matter of words. We can't just tell someone we love them.
- Nor is it a matter of faking it. We can't just **pretend** that we love someone

This love, is a God-given attitude of the heart, **and** it's an act of the will... Attitude **and** action... If I really love my brother or sister in Christ, it **must** be a matter of attitude **and** action...

So, what does it look like?

1. Firstly, Love is patient

In the Greek, the word is μακροθυμεῖ, (makrothymeī) (Makro "big") (thymia "suffering). Big suffering. Long suffering. It puts up with a lot. If I love someone, I'll put up with a lot of niggling... It's the opposite of being short-tempered.

2. Secondly, Love is Kind.

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he's thirsty, give him something to drinkⁱⁱⁱ" ... If that's how we are to treat our enemies, how do you think we're supposed to treat our Brothers and sisters in Christ? ... Love is Kind.

3. Thirdly, Love does not envy.

There is a fine line, between “eager striving”, and “envy”. In the Greek, the word is ζηλοῖ (Zeloi) (Zelos).... And in the good sense, “Zealot” means “eager striving”...

In Chapter 14, Paul uses the same word, to tell us to “**earnestly desire the Spiritual gifts**”, especially the gift of Prophecy....

But if our zealousness stops being “church-centred” – if we stop being zealous for the building up of the church, and we become “self-centred” in our zeal (even for spiritual gifts), we cross the line into the domain of envy, and love does not envy.

4. Fourthly, Love does not boast.

Those who love, don’t brag about themselves, or about their gifts...

5. Love is not arrogant (or proud).

One commentary I read, puts it like this:

Love does not “*cherish inflated ideas of its own importance*”... In the church, the way of love, is *respect and concern for the welfare* of our Brothers and Sisters in Christ – “*not attention seeking*” designed to impress others, with our own supposed importance^{iv}.

6. Sixthly, love is not rude

It avoids every manner of unseemliness. Love, acts with good order; good taste; courtesy... It doesn’t ‘sprout off’

“inappropriate stuff”... *My wife (at times) chastises me for being “tactless”... Why does she do that? Because tactlessness is rude. It’s not love.*

7. Love is not self-seeking or selfish.

There is no pre-occupation with self... As we said last week – The spiritual gifts aren’t given for the building up of self – they’re given for the building up of the church.

8. Nor is love irritable, or easily angered...

Some people very easily take offense... Sometimes over the most minor issues, in a fit of self-righteous indignation, we take offense, and we hold on to that offence, as if it is our **right**, to be offended...

And somehow we think “I’m the one who’s been offended here”, and we feel that that puts **us**, on the higher moral ground... It does not... ,, because love isn’t irritable; it isn’t touchy; it isn’t easily offended... Remember, “Love is patient”. It puts up with a lot...

9. Nor is love resentful. (A better translation is “Love keeps no record of wrongs”)

In the Greek, it’s actually an “accountancy” term – λογίζεται (logizetai)...

Some of you might be familiar with a “data logger”... It’s an electronic device that records data – it keeps records... And so the automated weather station here at the airport, logs the data, and so we can look up the records, from this time last

year, and see what the temperature was, on that day. It never forgets...

But a better example of record keeping, would be the account I have at Ag-Engineering... *I walk in there (without my wallet); I pick up the items I need; I take them to the front counter; and there they record the items. And then, without paying, I walk out the door, taking the items with me... Now, those items have not been forgotten. They've been logged into the computer. And at the end of the month, they email me an account – "Pay up buddy" ...*

How do we, relate to our brothers and sisters in Christ?

- Do we compile a list of their every fault?
- Do we remember, every little offence against us (or even against others)?
- What about when we tell them, we've forgiven them? Do we still hold the account of those offences open? Do they still owe us? If so, we haven't actually forgiven them at all...

Now, get this: Love keeps no record of wrong... And that's just as well... In Hebrews, we're told that when God forgives, He remembers our sins no more^v... Now, if when you repent, God forgives you of your sins, why should I keep an account of them??? God's forgiven you. They're gone. They're erased.

If God **doesn't** build up a case against my brother or sister in Christ, why would I do it?

If we don't forgive like God forgives – if we continue to keep accounts on others, **OUR** forgiveness is in grave jeopardy...

The Parable of the unmerciful servant in Matthew 18, scares the living daylights out of me. It tells the story of a slave, who is forgiven a great debt. But then he goes and demands that a fellow slave, pays up what he's owed... And his master says: "You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had on you? And in anger, his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart...."

That terrifies me... But if I love, it's never a problem, because Love keeps no accounts of wrong....

10. Love does not rejoice at wrongdoing.

Strangely enough, some people delight in the downfall of others, because it gives us a chance to take the higher moral ground... It's a bit of a pride thing... Some people aren't happy, or they are at their most zealous for God, when they can be zealously against something...

They're happy, at the downfall of the other, because in their mind, it elevates them in their position of righteousness... *We see this in politics all the time... Nothing gives a politician more joy, then when the wrongdoings of an opponent are revealed...*

In the church, we're not opponents. We're brothers and sisters in Christ, and wrongdoing, is something to be grieved.

11. And so love rejoices in the truth.

Love doesn't pretend. It's not into cover-ups. If I truly love someone, I don't just pretend that everything's OK between me and them. If it's not OK, we have to make it OK. Love **rejoices** in the truth. It brings things out into the open...

What about bad news? Do we rejoice in bad news, or should we try and cover it up??? Some people have the theology, that they won't ever admit to anything bad, because they see it as a sign of "faithlessness"... The whole 'name-it-and-claim-it' thing – *If I ask for it, and I believe it, then it's done...*

I've asked for healing. Therefore I'm healed. And even though I'm getting sicker and sicker, in faith I believe I'm healed. And so I tell everybody that I'm healed. Nothing to see here. Move on. Everything's OK... Now, is that truth? Or is it a lie????

Why does love rejoice in the truth, even if the truth is 'bad news'??? Because when we're truthful with one-another, that's when love springs into action... That's when the church can be what the church is designed to be – a community of reconciliation – a loving community that gathers around the one who is hurting, to love them, and support them...

Love rejoices in the truth... And of course, the ultimate truth is Jesus Himself. ...

12. Love bears all things.

That means, it never tires, of support. It puts up with a lot. It protects. It covers. It's like a supporting roof structure – it is load-bearing, and it protects.

13. The next one (It's an unfortunate translation in the ESV), "Love believes all things"... It makes it sound like "Love is very gullible". That's not at all, what it means....

A better translation is "Love never loses faith".
πιστευω (pisteuo) is faith; belief; trust.

Love, is open to seeing the best in others. It trusts. It never loses faith.

14. fourteen, Love never exhausts hope

15. And finally, Love endures.
Love never gives up. It always perseveres...

- It continues to pray, even when our prayers seem to remain unanswered
- It continues to love, even when the response is bitterness
- It continues to be patient and kind
- It continues to seek the good of the other
- It continues to forgive
- Love just goes on and on.

Love never ends.

Wowers!!!... This love thing – it's enormous, isn't it???

Where do we ever begin? How can **I** possibly begin to love, with this kind of love???

Well, the starting point is to **receive** love. We can never love like this, unless God has brought us into His love.

Next, we have to recognise that our feelings, are feelings of ‘imperfect’ love (and perhaps even ‘distorted love’).

And so we repent of our distortion of what love is, and we begin to love others, like God loves us. We pray, “Lord, fill us with Your Holy Spirit... The fruit of Your Spirit is Love. Please, fill us with Your love. Overflow us with Your love. May Your love, become an attitude of our heart. May it be the attitude that overrides all others...

And then we make love, an act of the will, flowing out, from the God-given attitude of love, that He’s placed in our heart.

Let’s pray.

Oh Lord,

In the past, there’s been times we’ve **felt** love, and we’ve taken this as “Yeah, we are loving” ...

But in the light of your word this morning,

It becomes so obvious, that our concept of love, at times, can be greatly distorted.

Oh God, forgive us.

You have loved us, but we have **failed** to love.

Lord, fill us with Your Holy Spirit.
The fruit of Your Spirit is love.
Please, fill us with Your love.
Overflow us with Your love.
May Your love, become an attitude of our heart.
May it be the attitude that overrides every other attitude in our heart.

Lord, help us to love you.
Help us to love our Brothers and sisters in Christ.

For Your glory.
Amen.

ⁱ *Romans 5:7* For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.

ⁱⁱ *1 John 4:19* We love because he first loved us.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Romans 12:20 (ESV)*

²⁰ To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head."

^{iv} Thiselton, A.C., 2000. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: a commentary on the Greek text*, Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

^v *Hebrews 8:12 (ESV)*

¹² For I will be merciful toward their iniquities,
and I will remember their sins no more."