

INTRODUCTION

There are so many times you can preach but I think when it comes to loving the Lord and loving one another, we all feel we have room for improvement. If you ever get to the point where you don't feel like you need any more love, then that is evidence in itself you need a great deal more love in your life.

There was an old Baptist preacher who was preaching one Sunday night on love and how this world needs more Love. The next day he had had some concrete poured for the new patio he was building behind his house and the concrete had not set yet. Some neighborhood kids decided they would play, so they took sticks and drew in the concrete and put their handprints and footprints in it. The preacher saw it and ran outside angrily. “Get out of here, kids!!!” He had a hateful attitude and he went back in. His wife said, “Honey, I thought you preached a sermon last night on loving everybody! You didn't show much love to those kids!” He said, “What I meant was I love people in the abstract, but I don't love them in the concrete.” That's the problem with a lot of people. They say, “I love people in the abstract,” but when it comes right down to loving people in the concrete loving them where they really need to be loved that's where we are all lacking.

1 Corinthians 13 is probably the most misquoted, misused chapter in the Bible, because people often use it as a beautiful love poem or a love chapter, but we cannot study it out of its context. What is the context of 1 Corinthians 12, 13, and 14? He is talking about spiritual gifts. Look at chapter 12:31, “And now I will show you the most excellent way.” He says, “I want to show you something that is better than spiritual gifts.” Tonight we are going to study the first three verses only.

1 Corinthians 13:1-3. [Paul speaking] “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I have all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.”

In the context of spiritual gifts Paul says, “You can have all the spiritual gifts you can imagine you can be gifted but still not exhibit love toward others and if you don't have love spiritual gifts are wasted. They are worthless.

The message I want to talk to you about tonight is without *agape* love, what are spiritual gifts worth? One of the problems in the English language is we really only have one word for love. We have other synonymous words, like *affection*, *friendship*, things like that. But in the Greek language, they had four different words to describe four different kinds of love. One word was *storge*. That word never appears in the Bible but when we talk about “loving my country, patriotic love” that would have been the word *storge*. Then, there is a word in the Greek language, *eros* we get our word *erotic* from that. It means “romantic, passionate kind of love.” A form of that word only appears one time, in Galatians 6:14, where Paul is talking about how the world is crucified unto Him. He uses a form of that word, which basically says, “my passionate love” for the world has been crucified because of my love for Jesus Christ. Then, the other two

words for love in the Greek language are the words, *phileo*, which is more of a brotherly kind of love. Philadelphia is the city of brotherly love. *Adelphos* means brotherly, *phile*, *phileo* means that kind of love. But the highest most perfect most mature love the Bible talks about is the word used here in 1 Corinthians 13, the word Jesus most often used and it is that word *agape*, which means “unselfish, divine love.”

1. Without love, ecstatic worship is just noise

Notice six things about spiritual gifts without love. Number one, without love ecstatic worship is just noise. Without a doubt the one spiritual gift that caused the greatest problems in the church at Corinth was the gift of speaking in tongues. It’s obvious that when the church was gathering together in Corinth, it was practiced a lot and was abused. They were using it in the wrong way. There was a lot of ecstatic worship and Paul is saying, “You can have all the languages of man, you can even have the language of angels” and we don’t even know that there *is* a language of angels. This is the only reference in the Bible to it. Paul is probably employing hyperbole just saying, “You can talk like men and you can talk like angels but if you don’t have love all your worship is like a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.” In biblical times, there were a lot of pagan religions and worship services. Two of the most prominent were the worship of Bacchus, who was the god of wine or pleasure, and the worship of Dionysus. Part of the practice of these pagan religions was that people would get drunk on wine and would begin to babble. They also made a lot of noise. They actually had gongs they would bang on and had cymbals they would crash together. They felt like the more noise they could make, the more they could gain the favor of these pagan gods. Paul says, “You can make all the noise you want to in worship; you can speak in all kinds of unknown tongues—but if you don’t have love it’s just noise. That’s all it is.”

The Bible talks about you how you can worship God with your lips but it not even be true worship at all. Jesus quoted this verse from Isaiah 29:13. Look at it the Lord said, “These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men.” The Bible warns us it is possible to come to worship service and stand up and sit down and sing all the right words. You can say, “Amen.” You can say, “Hallelujah.” But you can never make connection with your heart and that’s just noise. It’s not true worship. You can come to church on Sunday and you can stand up and sing, “Oh, How I Love Jesus” and then on Monday morning you can crucify Jesus with a crooked business deal or you can blow your witness by doing something. The Bible says that kind of worship is in vain.

2. Without love, deep preaching is just empty talk

Secondly, without love deep preaching is just empty talk. In verse 2, Paul refers to the second most prominent gift that he talks about. Truth can come out of lips that are void of love. It’s like an iron lion with water coming out of its mouth in a fountain. There’s fresh, pure, clean water coming out of the mouth of that lion but that lion doesn’t taste a drop of it. It’s possible to teach a Sunday School class and it’s possible to stand in a pulpit and preach a sermon and truth can come out—but if there is no love, the Bible says it’s just a lot of empty talk. 1 John 4:20 says, “If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ yet he hates his brother he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.” You can stand up and say,

‘I love God,’ ‘I love Jesus Christ’ but if there is no love in your heart, you are a liar!

I want you to compare two different preachers. Their names both start with “J.” One preached the truth without love and one preached the truth with a deep, compassionate love. The first was a character in the Old Testament named Jonah. You remember the story of Jonah. He ran from God and ended up in the belly of a fish and was vomited up onto dry land; went to Nineveh and preached God’s truth. He said, “Repent! Or you’re going to be destroyed!” He was preaching the truth. But do you know what? There was absolutely no love in his preaching. The Bible says they listened to his preaching and they repented. The Bible says all the people in Nineveh from the greatest to the least of them put on sackcloth and ashes. The Bible says in detail that they even put sackcloth and ashes on their livestock on their animals to depict their great humility before God. God spared the city. Look at old Jonah. He is sitting outside the town under a gourd vine moping and complaining—angry and bitter at God. There is no love in his preaching.

The other preacher I think about whose name also started with “J.” We could talk about Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, because when he preached, his heart was broken and he wept. But I want to talk about the Master Preacher, the Lord Jesus himself, because the Bible says in the book of Luke that when Jesus stood on the Mount of Olives overlooking the beautiful city of Jerusalem He wept! There are two times in the New Testament in the gospels where it says Jesus cried. John 11 at the site of the burial of Lazarus the Bible says, “Jesus wept!” It’s the shortest verse in the Bible, but that word for *wept* there means a tear slid down his cheek. The word used of Jesus weeping in Luke 23, is a word that says his body was literally racked with sobs. He was crying out with a loud voice. He was so broken over the sins of the people of Jerusalem, he wept over them. “Oh, Jerusalem. Jerusalem. How often I would have gathered you in as a mother hen gathers her chicks but you wouldn’t let me.” And he preached the truth and he preached it with love. You see the Bible says, “You can preach but if you don’t have love, it’s just a lot of empty talk. You know there is a whole lot more to preaching than there is just speaking. Y’all know that, don’t you?”

One of my favorite stories is about the old college professor who went around in the last century and appeared in a lot of county fairs and a lot of exhibitions, because he was a great orator. He recited the great works of literature. He had a deep, melodious voice and when he spoke, the people hung on to every word. His elocution and his enunciation were flawless. After he recited these great pieces of literature, crowds stood to their feet and applauded. He finished at one exhibition and said to the audience, “Are there any requests here tonight?” An old preacher on the back row of that hall stood up and said, “Sir. Would you quote the 23rd Psalm?” And that professional orator said, “I will, sir if after I quote it, you will quote it.” The preacher said, “Yes, sir. I will.” So the orator drank a glass of water and got his voice in shape and started in to it. “The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want...” He went all the way through and it was beautiful. People hung on to every word. When he came to the last verse, “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I’ll dwell in the house of the Lord forever,” the crowd gave him a spontaneous ovation. Then he said, “Now, sir. It’s your time.” The old preacher who came to the podium that night had a raspy voice from years and years of preaching without any kind of PA system and he didn’t have exactly the right articulation. He didn’t always even have the right pronunciation but he stood up and spoke from his heart and he said. “The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside the

still waters He restores my soul.” And he just went all the way through it. When he came to the end of it, his voice was merely a whisper and he said, “Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

When he finished, there was no standing ovation. There was absolute silence! And as the old man shuffled back to his seat, the orator stood to his feet and with a great deal more wisdom than most people gave him credit for he said, “Do you understand the difference? I know the Psalm but this dear brother knows the shepherd!” It takes more than just speaking the truth to really communicate truth.

3. Without love, spiritual knowledge only inflates

Paul says the third thing is without love, spiritual knowledge only inflates. Notice what he says in verse 2, “If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.” If you don’t have love only going to be inflating yourself you’re going to be puffed up. Paul said earlier in 1 Corinthians 8:1, “Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.” It’s a whole lot more important to have a right heart than to have a bright head. You can be real smart and have all kinds of knowledge, but if you don’t really have love, that knowledge is worthless.

John Wesley made this statement: “All learning without Jesus Christ is only splendid ignorance.” You can be a college professor or some great Dr. Wigglejaw or something and have so many letters by your name that you look like your own alphabet, but if you don’t have love the Bible says you are absolutely worthless! There is a certain kind of fish called a puffer fish. The fish can be a normal size, but whenever it is threatened, that fish has the ability to puff up and it becomes a lot larger. That puffing up is to pose a defense against any threat. The Bible says that’s what happens to people who are proud of the knowledge and proud of the information they possess. It just puffs them up. You had better be careful, because it’s not how much you know that counts it is how you love people and that’s what really counts.

4. Without love, strong faith is dead

Well, the fourth thing Paul is talking is without love, strong faith is dead. James 2:17 says, “In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.” Faith is not enough. Faith is wonderful. Without faith it is impossible to please God. You have to have faith to come to God, but if you don’t have love and action with that faith the Bible says it’s dead. Paul says this is very interesting for a number of reasons. “If I have a faith that can move mountains.” (verse 2) Do you recognize those words? Who said, “You can have faith to move mountains”? That was the Lord Jesus Christ. When Paul wrote this letter, the four gospel accounts hadn’t been written yet. So we know the Apostle Paul was aware of the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, because he is in essence quoting Jesus. He says, “I can have enough faith that I can move mountains, but if I don’t have love, it’s worthless.” Paul is saying it is more important to remove malice and bitterness and hatred from your life than it is to remove mountains from your path. You can have all kinds of faith but without love it’s worthless. James is the one that talks about this more in depth in James 2:14-17. “What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith

but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food...If one of you does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?” James is saying faith is dead. It has no life. Faith plus works leads to love. What did the Lord Jesus say? He said, “If you come to worship and you have your gift and you come to the altar and you want to offer that gift to the Lord and there you remember that you have something in your heart against your brother” He says, “Don’t worship. Your faith is no good. You leave your gift there and you go to your brother and you make it right then you come and make your offering.”

5. Without love, proud charity is worthless

Number five, without love proud charity is worthless. He says in verse 3, “If I give all I possess to the poor...but have not love, I gain nothing.” Jesus said in Matthew 6:2, “So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.” Have you ever noticed we sometimes substitute giving things for love? Sometimes parents do that. Some parents may spell love T-H-I-N-G-S to their children. Your kids spell love T-I-M-E—they want *you*. They don’t want the things you give to them. Sometimes husbands and wives substitute giving each other things instead of giving each other themselves. It takes real love to give yourself to someone else. That’s what Paul is saying. You can give alms to the poor, but if you don’t love them in heaven’s balance book it counts as a big, fat zero! If you have a King James Bible—I think it is rather unfortunate that they chose in this instance to translate the word *agape* as “charity”—that has mislead a lot of people, because charity is a good word that means to give away to those who are needy and that is a part of love. But you can have charity without having true love. You have heard me say this before but listen carefully to it. You can give without loving, but you cannot love without giving.

The story is told of an old Scotsman who was at the point of death. He was a wicked, evil man who never professed to be a Christian. He never went to church and the local parson was visiting this Scotsman as he lay dying and was giving him no hope for his soul. Even at this late stage of his life this stubborn Scotsman was not willing to confess Jesus Christ and repent of his sins and put his faith in Jesus. The old Scotsman said to the parson “I know I have lived a wicked life.” The parson said, “That’s true.” The Scotsman said, “I wonder if it would help if I gave a thousand pounds to your church?” The parson said, “Well, it certainly wouldn’t hurt.” But you know what? That parson was wrong, because it really would hurt. It would give that man some false assurance that he could earn acceptance by God by some work he could perform. Anybody who thinks they can earn access into heaven by performing a good deed by giving something to the poor by helping people is wrong! We don’t give to the poor so we can gain the favor of God. We give to the poor, because Jesus has put love in our hearts for them. So you can have charity but without love it is worthless.

6. Without love, noble sacrifice is selfish

Finally, without love noble sacrifice is selfish. Look what he says in verse 3 as he finishes it. “I can surrender my body to the flames [martyrdom] but if I have not love, I gain nothing.” Is it possible for someone to die for a selfish motive? Absolutely! What about the Japanese kamikaze pilots of World War II? They did what they did not out of any kind of love but out of a sense of

duty and out of a misplaced sense of some reward in the afterlife. There was no love involved, but they sacrificed their lives. What about some of these Islamic terrorists who die as martyrs because they believe it will give them an elevated place in paradise? There is no love involved there but they give their lives. We even read about a few early Christians who willingly died thinking they would have some kind of special reward in heaven. The hardest thing to do is not to die for Jesus—the hardest thing to do is to *live* for Jesus. If soldiers broke in here tonight, and they had machine guns and they lined all of us up against the wall and said, “Everybody who denies Jesus Christ may leave. Your life is spared. But if you refuse to denounce Jesus Christ, we are going to shoot you dead!” I think a lot of us would stand there and die. I think when it comes right down to it, that would be kind of easy for us. Here we all are together. We know we would go to heaven. But there are a lot of you here tonight who say, “Yes sir, Pastor. I would die for Jesus tonight!” Well are you willing to live for Jesus on Monday? You say, “I’ll die for him on Sunday.” Will you live for him on Monday? Sometimes people have such selfish motives for things we confuse for sacrifice. The best example of it is in the book of Acts. The early church members were selling all they had and they were bringing it to the church saying, “I’ve sold everything I have and here it is for you I give it to the Lord I give it to the church.” It is a total sacrifice.”

An example of selfish giving is Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5. “Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. With his wife’s full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles’ feet. Then Peter said, ‘Ananias, is this the gift you are bringing to the Lord?’ ‘It sure is and it’s all I got for that property.’ Peter said, ‘Ananias, Satan has filled your heart to lie to the Holy Ghost.’” The Bible says Ananias fell over dead right there! Later, his wife died right there on the spot. They were faking sacrifice and their motive for faking sacrifice was a sense of selfishness. They wanted to be recognized as people who were really sacrificing. There was absolutely no love in their sacrifice.

Worship is wonderful. Let’s worship the Lord in the spirit of holiness, but let’s have love! Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God and how shall they hear except there be a preacher? There needs to be preaching, but there ought to be love! We all ought to strive to have all the spiritual knowledge we can, but we also must temper it with love. You have to have faith. You have to have unselfish charity and give to the poor and those who have needs. Of course, we all ought to sacrifice, but remember that he is saying here that without love all of this is worthless. Paul says the fruit of the Spirit is much more important than the gifts of the Spirit. There are a lot of you here tonight who are saying, “Oh, I’ve doubted this gift” or “I want to know what my spiritual gift is.” Much more critical ought to be, “I want the fruit of the Spirit to be expressed in my life. I want there to be love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, meekness, faith, self-control produced in my life through the Holy Spirit.”

The Bible makes several definitive statements about God. 1 John 4 says, “God is love.” And Jesus said, “The clearest characteristic of a mature Christian is love.” It’s not scripture memory. It’s not church attendance. It’s not tithing. He said, “By this all men will know that you are my disciples if you have love one for another.” So what does love have to do with it? It has everything to do with it!

OUTLINE

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2. Deep preaching is just empty talk
3. Spiritual knowledge only inflates
4. Strong faith is dead
5. Proud charity is worthless
6. Noble sacrifice is selfish



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes