

The Love Chapter

Corinthians Explained

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To summarize the content of the Bible with one word, what is it about in the Bible, or you would say this about God, right? But what about God? Who is God? I think we can summarize the Bible with one word, the word love. Love is even more important than hoping, hoping for heaven and longing for salvation. It's more important than believing. You say, "More important than believing? There's nothing more important than true faith, that's what all this is about." No. Look at the last verse of chapter 13 of 1 Corinthians. 1 Corinthians 13:13 is the main text this morning.

13 And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

So the greatest of all those, faith, hope and charity, is love. Charity is the old word for love. So we were created in order to love, to love God and to love each other. Very creative, to be loved by God. It's all about that love, that relationship with the Triune God and in God in the Holy Trinity has always been love. Even before creation, before there was anyone to be loved, before the foundation of the world, God was love already and he loved himself. The Triune God, as we hope to see also later this morning, that God. The Jesus refers to that, "Thou lovest me before the foundation of the world."

So love is all it is about, the love of God and to love one another. So we need to know that for our society and our society, it's all about love. In our families and marriages, it's about love. In our church we hope it's all about love. In our society with the government, if it's well, there's love. And especially today, there's so much hatred, right? There are so many hard feelings and yelling and problems over the hard feelings. And it's easy to love them that agree with me but now to love them that do not, to love our enemies, that is what the Bible is teaching. So maybe we are willing and able to love them that please us, but now to love in a one-sided way like God loves his people for no reason, there's absolutely nothing in them that appealed to him, but he has chosen to love them.

So we also learn from that already that we need to love also as a choice. Or is that love not a feeling, is that love an action? And just working the ground a little bit before we go to the text. Is love only in action? Or only a feeling? It's both. There's always feeling.

Now suppose that we could love our enemy only in action and not in the heart. So it's a combination more or less.

So in the congregation of Corinth, this was also a problem. The congregation of Corinth, we know the congregation now a little bit. It was a congregation that was speaking of tongues. I don't think that means that they were speaking gibberish and that some people able to explain it. No, they spoke different tongues, I mean languages. It's the same word. Language and tongue is the same word in the Bible. So they spoke different languages and they had not gone to school for that with a special gift of the Holy Spirit to also confirm that he is the living God and that the Lord continues with saving his people and the Messiah has come. So it was not only feeling, let me back up a little bit, not only feeling, it was not only action, it was also speaking in tongues. Speaking tongues. There were some people who were proud of that, and some people were boasting about that, "That I can speak in tongues. I can speak different languages." And there was also some who had the gift of prophecy, not only predicting things also preaching the word, and deep insight in the doctrine of the Bible. There were people so able to also do miracles once in a while and pray over people, and there was so much going on in the church, so many good things. So many things also the Lord had given.

I know you read the first chapters of 1 Corinthians, you see how positive the Apostle Paul is to them and to the church of God which is in Corinth, "to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours: I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ." So it was a congregation with also God-fearing people and yet there was also a lack of love. We saw that coming already in the previous chapter. In chapter 12, verse 31, "But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way."

So this is same as that greatest is the charity. Oh, that love is so important. Now, in the Bible, in the New Testament are at least three words, three Greek words for love. They have different shades, different hues, different connotations, we say. So there is the word "eros." We recognize the word also in English, don't we? Eros. That's kind of sexual love, intimacy, physical love. That's not used here. There is the word "phileo." We know what phileo means, right? A bibliophile is someone who loves books. So phileo, that is friendship and it comes from both sides and it is nice, but it is not eros. It is just kindness towards each other and being friends together. And there is the word "agape." You may have heard about that, agape. There were agape meals, right, in the congregation of Corinth, love meals. That word "agape" is very deep, often one-sided, and it is sacrificial, people sacrifice and they just, they give, they don't take. It's known from both sides in the first place. It is also forgiving very, very, very generous to the other. And that word "agape" is translated in the King James as "charity." Charity is a word that nowadays has a different meaning. Now charity, charitable organizations are organizations of benevolence, of doing good, doing well to others. But in the original language, agape means that love that does not find a reason in people to love them for and yet there is love. It is that choice, that well-meant choice to love.

You know it, let me just insert it. Why did the Lord love his people from eternity? Because he has chosen to. He's chosen his church and because he has chosen them he began to love them. It's not so that he has to love them and saw something in them that appealed to him and that's why he has chosen them, but he has first chosen them and he's chosen them as enemies, has chosen them as people with nothing in them. And Lord in his free and sovereign grace has chosen and drawn them out of the darkness and brought them unto light. And that's also a lesson for us, isn't it? That love often is a choice. We should not wait for our feelings to surface again to say, "You know, I hope that love comes back or love will be given here or there," because you can't make it yourself. I see your point but love is also a choice.

So what do we see here? In chapter 13, the first three verses, we see five times the word, do you see it? What word do you see in the first three verses five times? "Though." Though. Though I speak with tongues. Though I have the gift, Though I have all the faith. Though I bestow my goods to the poor. Though. So that refers to the first thought. The theme is "The Love Chapter," and the first theme is without love. The second point rich in love, the verses 4 through 9. And then in the third place, remain in love in the verses 10 through 13. So the love chapter: without love, rich love, and remain in love.

So as I said, in the first three verses five times "though." Let's go over them. "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels." So some people are given to speak those tongues and suppose they would even speak the language of angels, suppose they would be able to. I don't think there is an angel language. It doesn't say there is something like that. There is not a special language the angels are talking. I don't think so, but as if, if that would be so.

"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity," I have no love, "I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal." So he is saying to the congregation, "You know, you may have all those gifts but if the love and the charity, that agape is missing, then you're just sounding brass, just a gong. You make lots of noise. It's not music anymore. It's frightening. It is bothering the ears." So there's such a banging, banging noise on metal. It's not pleasing to the ear. So if I speak in the tongues of men and supposed angels and have not that love, that agape, I am become as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal. And later on he says that means I am nothing. And later on in verse 3 he says it profits me nothing. It is absolutely useless. So that speaking in tongues that he was so proud of is what was worthless. It didn't make any sense to him. You could easily miss it because if charity is not in there, it is nothing.

Without love also prophecy is worthless. "And though I have the gift of prophecy," so prophecy in the sense of preaching or in the sense of predicting, Isaiah says. So some people had that gift, right, of preaching and they had eloquence and they could speak well and people were amazed at their gift of prophecy and they looked up to them, and the Apostle Paul says, "Hm, you can be a pastor and an elder and a deacon and whatever you are, and you can have the gift even to pray and to word things well, and it might look just fantastic and from the outside it looks like you're such a God-fearing person, you can look so fantastic, so sound, so old-fashioned, so of the old truth, so of you name it, so

evangelical, so generous, but if the love is missing." So is that possible? Is it possible to preach a very good sermon without love? Apparently.

"Though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries." So nobody knows all the mysteries, do we? But suppose you would know all the ins and outs and all the details of the Bible and you would be well-versed in the scriptures, and you were just very familiar with the truth, and have read all the books of our forefathers and knew exactly about justification and sanctification and all the difficult words and the theology, and you have it all in your brain. "Though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all, all the mysteries, and all knowledge," and then it is still possible that you are on the wrong road and that the love is missing and people may not know that but the Lord knows it and the Lord sees it and the Lord also deals with that. Meaningless, it has no effect, it has no result for the Lord, it's not to his glory. So it wasn't honest preaching of this, right?

The Apostle Paul goes on to say as long as the doctrine is well, as long as you behave very well, as long as you have some gifts in the congregation, you are doing well, you're a Christian. Yeah, I see it. I see that you love the Lord from your outer appearance, what you're doing, what you say, and yet it is possible that it's missing, that the love is missing, no charity in it and then we are nothing. And even he speaks of faith, right, in verse 2, "and though I have all faith." Now if people have all the faith, are they not saved? Well, it depends is this saving faith or is this just gentle faith and believing in the Lord's help and believing in the Lord's providence and believing the Lord will help us through it, the Lord will guide me and that the Lord knows better and that I should be still and know that God is God and just surrender. It is possible that someone can give all the glory and has all the faith, that he or she moves mountains, as the Lord Jesus uses the example, if you miss the love for God, for his people, for his day, for his word, for the Lord Jesus himself, if you miss that, you are nothing. You missed the point.

So, "and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing." So three times you see that accusation, right? You're like a tinkling cymbal, you are nothing and it profiteth nothing. So he's very clear about that. "And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor." I don't read it like that people make good donations for charitable organizations and give lots of money away, but they give it all away. "And though I bestow all my goods." Suppose that someone sold all his properties, all the land, and all the houses, and all the businesses, and all that someone may have and you sell it all, you have nothing left and you give it all away here and there, you are such a generous person before you die, right, you give it all away to all different people, you would say that's such an act of love. No, not necessarily. "And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned," even if you are willing to go to the stake, if you're willing to be killed for faith's sake, if you would be like those Muslim boys who are willing to blow themselves up so they can go to heaven and so people sell all the properties and share it with everyone and then are willing to go to prison and willing to be killed, you'd say, "Minister, it's clear those people love, those people do everything for the Lord. So how can you be possibly critical of them? You just see that they're just fantastic people and just examples to others. They have all the faith and all the knowledge and they speak all the tongues of angels, so to speak, and they give

their bodies to be burned, so what else do you need?" Love. Not only the action of love also the feeling of love. Not per se those fuzzy feelings and those warm feelings for enemies, but at least you see them as humans with souls for eternity.

The Apostle Paul was very open about it and did he not experience this as well, "I am nothing. If I do all those things, I still am nothing." The Apostle Paul knew what he was talking about. He has come to that place of being nothing. You with all the gifts you have donated, with all the faith you had, with all the mysteries you knew, have you come to the place where you said, "But I missed the love and I am nothing." I believe the Lord brings all his people to that place that they are nothing, and they see that all those righteousnesses are as filthy rags, that they cannot be saved by that, even though they speak the language of angels, even if they have all the faith that they can remove mountains, even five times "though, though."

So the Apostle Paul is quite clear about that and I read also the same things in, for example, Job 40, "Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth." So that you discover that love is missing, you say, "I am vile. I have done all things for the church and people think the world of me but I'm vile." Or think of Isaiah 6, "Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts." You see, to become nothing. And that's what the Apostle Paul was missing in Corinth. They were so religious, they were so pious, they were so good at things, it looked so special and, in fact, it was nothing in the hearts of many.

Also without that charity, it's all missing and thus the Apostle Paul wrote about that in Romans 3 as well, that nobody is good and nobody seeks after God, and the fact that nobody is loving the Lord by nature. Do we miss that love? Before I go to the second thought, who had such a love? Who had such love that he was not only speaking with the tongues of men and angels and had all the knowledge and understanding, and had all the faith and bestowed all his goods to the poor? Who is that? It's the Lord Jesus, no? That he had love in his heart, yet he had chosen a people, received the people and the Lord Jesus, he is generous. The Lord Jesus, he is wise. The Lord Jesus, he speaks that language. But he gives it all away to save a people from their sins. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." So the Lord Jesus lay down his life for his church.

So five times "though, though," which brings us to the second thought: a rich love. In the middle section of this chapter, we read about 15 characteristics of what love is and what love is not. So the first part was five times "though," and now 15 times the kind of aspects of love. Very interesting. Let's go over them, briefly of course. You could preach weeks about this chapter. I'm not going to do that.

So I read in verse 4, "Charity," love, "suffereth long." Suffers long. What is longsuffering? Longsuffering is an old word for patience, right? If you love someone, if you have love in general, you're a patient man. A loving man is a patient man. He can wait. He does not need to have it now. He can just wait and has understanding, is flexible,

is able to wait. Charity suffers long, is not easily provoked. It takes a while before you act.

Charity is kind, "and kind." Think of lovingkindness. Think of being mild or being gentle if you don't agree with someone. If you just feel, "This is so wrong. This is terrible." To be patient and be gentle and be kind at home, in church, in school, in the care home, in society, everywhere. Be gentle. Just calm down so that people may see that person is a Christian, is a kind person. Maybe not deep down in his heart but there is kindness in there. That is important. You know, the early church was not called the Christian church but the kind church. The kindness of people. I heard of Pastor McShane that he was in Egypt one day and that he went to an hotel, probably on his way to Israel. And there was a person helping out there in the hotel and he didn't say a word but he saw something and she just noticed something, she could not understand him. He spoke a different language but she noticed this love in this man, this kindness, and that motivated her to begin to read the Bible.

Charity is patient. Charity is kind. Are we kind in our marriages? In upbringing? Are we kind to our brothers and sisters and colleagues? If you miss that love, it's nothing. Is that what our church is known for? They say, "Oh, that person in the office, he goes to that church there. Those are loving people." Really? Kind.

"Charity envieth not," is not jealous. You know, people are easily jealous, "He has something that I don't have and I want it too and why not me?" Something to be upset about that. You can't stand it. You were in school together and he is just, she is just doing so well and look at me. If you would be a loving person, you would say, "That's fine. It's completely fine. They may have all they have in the world. I don't personally have to match up with that. I don't have to measure up."

"Charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself." Is not boasting, you know? If you are not loving, you are boasting and you just are bragging and telling people about all your accomplishments, and you feel good about that. That's not love. Love does not make you vaunting yourself, does not make yourself boast. You're just under the radar. You just don't want people to know all those things. They don't have to know. It kind of gives you a good feeling if they would know, right? They think highly of the person, just look what he is doing, but just be quiet about that. Just don't do it. No boasting. No bragging.

Not being puffed up it says at the end of verse 4, "vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up." Puffed up nowadays is being arrogant. You know, when people do well they can be quite arrogant, right? They have accomplished something and they look down on people and they are bragging and they are puffed up like a turkey, puffed up, and just strutting in this world and just hoping that people look at them. That's not love.

"Doth not behave itself unseemly." Unseemly is just simply rude, rude to others because if you think the world of yourself and you're puffed up and you're boasting, then you just put people down, right, and you behave yourself unseemly, unseemingly.

They that love do not seek their own. It's not all about me but there's empathy. Charity means empathy, to see the other, to be unselfish. It's not about me, it's about others. See how deep we fell? See how we were created? We were created to never boast and always be thankful and always be loving and always see the other, and we have lost the image of God and that's the image of God, right? The image of God is also explained here, who the Lord is.

"Not easily provoked," meaning not irritable, not short-fused. There's some overlap in those words.

"Thinketh no evil," meaning not resentful, not keeping track of all the mistakes you made. Love does not say, "I remember a year ago, two years ago... And you always, I remember you always..." Love does not say that. Love does not bring up the past all the time. That's resentment but you wish good for your enemies.

And, "Rejoiceth not in iniquity." Does not rejoice in people's wrongdoing and people's ruin and they do not smile and laugh when others are suffering and thinking, "Oh, that's good. Let them suffer, not me."

Charity is different, does not rejoice in iniquity, "but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things." Accepting.

"Believeth all things," not always questioning people's motives and being so critical and being so negative about others.

"Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things." Being positive.

So that sounds very practical, doesn't it? So what do you learn from this list of 15 things for your marriage? For your church membership? For your being a member of this society? What is your weak point? If you could pick one of those 15, which is the first one you have to work on? And then think when you are considering this, think of the Lord Jesus, how different he is and what a Savior he is, who is so mild and so forgiving and so good and so patient and so longsuffering, all those words, right?

And this is not the only chapter in the Bible that speaks all those things, of course. Here are a few more. Proverbs 10, "Hatred," that's the opposite of charity, "stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins." Love covers all sins. Love is important. Proverbs 15, "A wrathful man stirreth up strife: but he that is slow to anger appeaseth strife." Slow to anger, it's the same as longsuffering. Or Proverbs 29:22, "An angry man stirreth up strife, and a furious man aboundeth in transgression." Or James 4, "From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?"

So blessed are the peacemakers and you can be honest and open, yet be a peacemaker. The Apostle Paul elsewhere also uses a similar list as the fruits of the Spirit, "But the fruit

of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance." Do you see that, how similar? That's such a big part in the Bible, the meekness, the gentleness, the carefulness, the being considerate to have low thoughts of yourself, not boasting and being puffed up and we all learn from this, don't we? Sometimes we have a good cause and we are just fired up, that the cause is worth it, there is the gentleness.

So the Lord Jesus experienced also or let me go at it a different way, the Lord Jesus missed that love, the feeling of that love on the cross. His Father seemed not to love him anymore. He did not feel loved anymore on the cross, and that's why the Lord Jesus spoke, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Do you know why? In order to give that love, to give that love away, to also make sinners partakers of that love.

What a rich love and that love is so important that it does not go away, that "Charity never faileth." Look at verse 8, charity never faileth, never falls flat, it never is gone. You know, "but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail." The servant someday is not a servant anymore. "Whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away." So all those things will disappear and love will remain.

Our third thought. So there are three sections in this chapter. The first section was the five "though's," and then the 15 explanations of what love is about, and then the verses 10 through 13 about the "when and then" verses. Let's read them again. Look at the words "when" and "then." "But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake 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 through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity." So the Apostle Paul is comparing, when/then.

So when, what? When that which is perfect is come. Do you see that that's the 10th verse when he changes the tone? So he speaks about all those gifts and if you have those gifts but you are missing charity, you are nothing. You profiteth nothing and you're like a tinkling cymbal. It's all absolutely meaningless. Your whole religion is worthless. It's so fake. It's so phony. It's so artificial. But you know, the real love is this, 15 pieces of that. And then he says, "But you know, there is a time coming when that which is perfect is come." So he refers here to the Second Coming of Christ. He's talking about the new kingdom and in that kingdom you don't need faith anymore. In that new kingdom you don't need hope anymore because you have it. You don't have to believe in that future thing if it has come already.

So that's all fine, "And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity," because that remains. It remains, "then that which is in part shall be done away." So all those gifts, the Corinthians practices will be all obsolete and what remains is that love. That's all there is in eternity, in the kingdom. One word fits there, the

word "love," to be loved by the Lord and to love him back and to love one another. It's the kingdom of love and the Bible speaks very clearly about that, that love is so personal, it is face-to-face, not through a glass darkly but face-to-face. In Corinth, they had the first mirrors and mirrors were not glass mirrors like we have on our vanities, but they had metal mirrors and they made them shiny and flat as possible and still when you looked in them, it was distorted.

So the Apostle Paul says and so our knowledge and all those gifts are distorted. You know, so the vision of God, to look at God it's so distorted, you see through a glass darkly. It's a mirror darkly and vaguely. "For now we see through a glass darkly but then face-to-face." Imagine, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." That will be just everything, right, to be with the Lord and to be loved by him and to love him back, and to see him as he is and to be loved by him in an infinite way. You know, Jacob experienced something of it and Jacob called the name of that place Peniel, "for I have seen God face-to-face and my life is preserved." And Moses, he was speaking to Moses face-to-face as a man speaks unto his friend. And that will be reserved for heaven, to speak to God face-to-face as a friend. In the kingdom of God, it will be true when all God's people experience that love. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God and it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is."

Any desire to see him? Or would you like to stay here for eternity? You know if it is well it is love, there is also time again the desire to see him as he is and to be loved by him and to know him. Jeremiah 31, some loose ends now, just some texts to fill it in. "And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD," nobody will say, "Know the LORD, for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD." Or that the faith is no longer necessary in Hebrews 11, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Do you see? So but then you see it, you don't have to believe it anymore. We are saved by hope but hope that is seen is not hope for what a man sees why does he yet hope for? You see, the hope is also fulfilled but the love remains. It's now vanished except that love, being loved by a Triune God, loving him because he loved us because he has chosen to love his church.

So he that covereth the transgression seeketh love and that's what the Lord is doing, that he that [unintelligible] separateth even friends. What I like is John 17, we talked about that at Catechism classes. John 17 about the Trinity, right? In the Trinity the Triune God is loving himself and kind of spills over, John, as it says, in the church. It's all about love. "Father," high priestly prayer, "Father, I will that they also whom thou dost give me be with me where I am." The Lord Jesus praying, "Father, I will. Thou hast given them to me. I will that they will be with me where I am." Why? "That they may behold my glory which thou hast given me for thou hast loved me before the foundation of the world." You see, the Lord Jesus was loved by his Father before the foundation of the world and he says, "That they may behold my glory which thou hast given me for thou hast loved me and I have declared unto them thy name and they will declare it that the love," now it comes, "that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them and I in them." So

the love of God the Father is the love for the Lord Jesus, that the love wherewith thou hast loved me will be in them and I in them.

Do you see the connection between the Father's love for his Son and the love of God to his people? Congregation, if God loves so much we should love each other. That's the motivation. So maybe you have trouble loving someone, well, think about this, do you want to be loved by a Triune God? Do you know something of that? Maybe that's the problem that you miss love altogether, you don't know what love is. 1 John 4, "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God. And he that is loved knows that we love God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another." And that love is a love poured out by the Holy Spirit in the heart, no? "That hope maketh not ashamed because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us, but God commandeth his love towards us that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us."

So God loved his people before they were born, before they fell even, and he is pouring it in their hearts, shedding it abroad in their hearts. So that love is this all that really counts, no? "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" You know, when you're suffering and you have problems in your life and there is tension, first straighten it out with God. You need to know something of him, of his love, and that will also have a consequence for your daily life, for how you live and how you deal with people. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril of sword? No, nor height nor depth or any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus."

Beloved congregation, do you love God? Can you live without it? He is still alive, he is still in the heavens and he is still generous. He is that God who is explained in his Bible. He bears all things, endureth, longsuffering, does not behave himself unseemingly, does not seek his own. In a way he does but also in an unselfish way. He also sacrificed himself, gave himself for the sacrifice of sin to save a people from their sins. But examine your heart. It is possible that all the outer things are okay but that the love is missing, the new heart is missing. What's missing is that being nothing, to be a lost sinner and to seek salvation only in the Savior. So can you live without God and without the loving Savior? And if you know of those things, if you cannot deny those things, what a blessing. Render the Lord thanks for his love wherewith he loved us and that love will stay, will not go away because "now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity." Amen.