



1 Cor. 13:1-7

Without Love, You Ain't Nothing

NKJ 1 Corinthians 13:1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.

2 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.

3 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.

4 Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up;

5 does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil;

6 does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth;

7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Brothers and Sisters, as these are some of the most important verses in the entire book of 1 Corinthians, I intend to break our consideration of these verses into two sermons. The first sermon will concentrate on verses 1-3 and the fruitlessness of Christianity without love and then next week we will concentrate on verses 4-7 and consider the true nature and virtues of love itself.

Let me begin with a word on whether the word Love in these verses should be translated *Love* or *Charity* as it is in the KJV. This may seem like a minor technicality but it is actually critical because it the nature and practice of this word which Paul unfolds.

The word itself is one of the Greek words for *Love – Agape*. It was first rendered as *Charity* by Jerome in his Latin Vulgate translation of the Scriptures. He did this because he realized the unsuitability of the Latin word *Amor* which speaks primarily of romantic love, so he used the Latin *Caritas* from which we get the English *Charity*. Wycliffe who produced the first English translation of the bible made his translation from the Latin Vulgate, and so he introduced the custom of saying *Charity* which was then followed by many subsequent English Bible translators including the translators who produced the KJV.

Agape however while it is connected to charity, does not mean charity. Charity is *eleemosune* in the Greek, *agape* on the other hand means love. But *Agape* was not a word in common use before the New Testament, because it is not one of the common forms of love worldlings are used to: Leon Morris explains –

“It is a new word for a new idea. Whereas the best concept of love before the New Testament was that of a love for the best one knows, the Christians thought of love as that quality we see displayed in the cross. It is love for the utterly unworthy, a love which proceeds from a God who is love. It is a love lavished upon others without a thought of whether they are worthy to receive it or not. It proceeds rather from the nature of the lover, that from any merit of the beloved. The Christian who

has experienced God's love to him while he was yet a sinner has been transformed by the experience. Now he sees men in a measure as God sees them. He sees them as the objects of God's love, as those for whom Christ died. Accordingly his attitude towards them is one of love, of self-giving agape. He comes to practice the love which seeks nothing for itself, but only the good of the loved one."

With that understanding of what this word *Agape* that Paul is using actually means. Lets discuss these verses. John Broadus, the Southern Baptist theologian and preacher rightly describes them as *"a gem of literary beauty not surpassed in all the world's literature, that eulogium upon love which blazes like a diamond on the bosom of scripture."*

Most of you are probably very familiar with them. We have a portion of these verses in a little frame on our wall for instance, and I would guess that many of you do as well. We hear these verses all the time at weddings, you see them whenever true love is being described or talked about. And yet the way they are normally discussed is usually well removed from their actual context and we need to keep them in their context here.

Paul has been discussing the gifts of the Spirit given by God and also how they have been misunderstood and misused in the Corinthian congregation, they have in one sense been wandering in the dark in their use of them. The gifts are present in the congregation but they have not edified, they have not built men up in grace or knowledge. They have been used selfishly, often to puff themselves up and instead of lifting up and exalting the Son of Man before all men so that He might draw men to himself, the gifts have been used to exalt individuals and movements in the church. Now Paul is discussing what he calls a more excellent way, the way of love. This way if followed will be as light in the darkness, but if it is not followed, the results will be that they will ultimately accomplish nothing of any lasting value. Without love, Paul is telling us, the Christian faith is meaningless. As the 70s Christian Rocker Larry Norman put it so well in his song, Righteous Rocker:

"You can be a righteous rocker or a holy roller you can be most anything,
You can be a Leon Russell or a super muscle you can be a corporate king,
You can be a wealthy man from Texas or a witch with heavy hexes

WITHOUT LOVE YOU AIN'T NOTHING' WITHOUT LOVE

Without love even the most extraordinary gifts are nothing, the Christian way is pre-eminently the way of Love. We see that it is possible to be in the church and to have the gifts and yet not to love the author of the gifts. For instance we read in the Old Testament that at one point the Spirit of God came upon King Saul and he prophesied for a day and a night, even more sobering we read specifically that Judas was among the 12 of whom we read in: *Mark 3:14 "Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach, 15 and to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons:"*

The Corinthians had thought these gifts were everything, and that their possession was what was most earnestly to be desired, but what Paul is saying is that it is *love* that is the pinnacle of the Christian faith. He then shows how these gifts were meaningless without love. First he discusses the gift that the Corinthians, and indeed many sections of the modern church value most highly, tongues. Tongues is not the most important of the extraordinary gifts of course, Paul rates it dead last in his list and puts

prophecy well ahead of it. But it certainly got the Corinthians excited. He says however that even if he speaks as the Apostles did with the tongues of men or with tongues of angels themselves, but does so without love and presumably for self-seeking motives it is merely sound without true substance.

The sound of gongs and cymbals was common in Corinth as the worshippers of Dionysius and Cybele used them in their worship services particularly to whip up religious enthusiasm. A gong is incapable of producing melody, just a monotonous clanging tone. Roger Ellsworth points out that a tiresome gong is perhaps most apt for describing the tone of modern spirituality. He says if you listen long enough you will notice only one repeating note: "ME! ME! ME!"

He then speaks of prophecy and states that even if he had the ability to understand all things exhaustively even as God does, it would be nothing. Gnosis, then as now was considered of paramount importance but without being tempered with love that was nothing.

If we have faith enough to perform even the mightiest of miracles, even the gift to move mountains, and we can imagine that they would have been as excited by that prospect as modern name it and claim it crowd would be. And yet it is meaningless.

Even acts of supposed sacrifice, the gifts of helps and the giving of charity even to the point of begging oneself. One thinks of the Robber Barons of the 19th century who were very models of Philanthropy in their day. Their business practices were unscrupulous in the extreme but they established all sorts of trusts. But this was all but the giving of Ananias and Saphirra for show and to assuage the conscience, and unfruitful works righteousness.

Even Martyrdom without love can be yet more false works righteousness. Becoming a religious martyr is not something that only Christians can do. In Islam the highest calling is to become a *Shaheed* a martyr one who dies in battle during holy war. Indeed Islam teaches that the only people whose place in paradise is absolute are the *Shaheeds*. Therefore there is no shortage of young Muslim men and women eager to drive car bombs or put on bomb belts or engage in operations which they know they cannot possibly survive. But such a death, while it is the greatest of sacrifices has no love to it at all. It is an act of desperate even despicable works righteousness and at its heart is hopelessly selfish. It is antithetical to true *agape* love.

Paul composes fifteen aphorisms which show the true nature of love and its vital necessity. The fact that the Corinthians did not have it and manifestly did not care was abundantly exposed by their loveless behavior at the *agapen* the love feast at the Lord's Supper.

What we should notice is that these are qualities of love they way God exercises them towards his people, and the way that which should respond as well. These qualities of love stand in stark contrast to the selfish way that the gifts were being exercised by the Corinthians. Next week we will talk about what this true love looks like.

But for now I want to apply the teaching of these verses to us, our need of them is just as critical as it was back then. Perhaps of all the things the modern Church lacks the most critically is *love*

We can have a Church filled with excitement, music, dancing flag waving, skits, if we have not love, it is nothing.

We can have a church supposedly manifesting all the extraordinary gifts of the spirit, miracle healing services, and yet it can be so much noise and fury and signify nothing.

We can have the most brilliant teaching, every sermon can be a lecture of astounding depth. And yet without love it is nothing.

We can take the path of the liberal church and make the social gospel our aim, but if it is without the love of God or even true love of his people. It is nothing, and are we truly loving if our desire is to make sure that men have full bellies and warm coats while they are on their way to hell?

We could even go the way of the Donatists and Novatians who literally couldn't wait to get into the Arena to die for their faith. And yet, such actions ultimately were more about their own claims to have a better, stronger, more noble faith than all other Christians.

John 13:35 "By this all will **know** that you are **My** disciples, if you have **love** for one another."

What is most important though, most critical, is not even our love for one another, it is our love for Christ.

Peter made great boasts of his faith and his love and his devotion to Jesus. Matt. 26:33 Peter answered and said to Him, "Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble."

John 21:15 So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Feed My lambs."

16 He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My sheep."

17 He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep."