

“About that love” 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.

For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Love. This is one of the most beautiful and one of the most powerful words. For it refers to something that we all long for deep in our hearts. We are created to be loved and to love. We want to be loved. We want to be accepted.

We want to be significant to someone, cherished and adored, and we want to respond with our love. And how blessed we are as Christians for we are loved by the most wonderful being, by our God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, who Himself is love.

But what have we as the society done with this word “love”? What have we as the church done with this word “love”? Too often this wonderful and so powerful word “love” is used to describe attitudes and activities that are nothing else but manifestations of selfishness.

It seems that too often this little word “love” is turned into a convenient fence that effectively defends what otherwise couldn't and shouldn't be defended. One just need to say that “are you against love”, or “why are you so unloving” and the conversation is over. For who would want to be against love, or who would want to be seen as unloving?

And the Church obviously hasn't been spared from these influences and this misuse of the power of this word “love”. If someone dares to condemn a sin, or a sinful behavior, how is such person often labeled these days? Yes... why are you so unloving? Why are you shaming people?

On the other hand, if someone cowardly endorses sinful behavior, and it is our sin, by the way, that drives the Holy Spirit away, and threatens our salvation, then such actions are often wrongly described as ... “showing Christian love”.

Or, how are Christians who faithfully care for the truth and pure teaching of the Gospel, that by the way leads to eternal life, how are they often called these days? Yes... unloving and narrow. But those, on the other hand, who would gladly tolerate false teachings that distort God's message, are often described as ... "showing the spirit of love".

We live in confusing times, we do. And where can we go but to our God, who is God of wisdom and truth and love. And as it happens, today we have for our meditation the famous chapter 13 from the 1st letter to Corinthians. Some have called it Psalm of Love.

We just heard it read a few minutes ago. What are your thoughts? People often like this text. What about you? I guess a lot depends on how we read this text. If we just take this one chapter out of its context and read it, sounds great. Beautiful, uplifting, elevated, inspirational...

But what happens if we read it in the context of the letter to Corinthians, knowing to whom Paul was writing and what issues he was trying to address? And what happens if we then apply it to ourselves?

Then this can be a very scary chapter. Paul was writing to this congregation that most certainly was lacking this one gift of God – genuine love. They were divided, boastful, puffed up, too often self-centered, arrogant and so on. And to such community Paul sends this description of love saying that without love the rest of spiritual gifts and our activities mean nothing.

Try for a moment to picture that we are Corinthians, that we are struggling with all the problems that we can read about in this letter. And sometimes we do. And then you hear that unless you have love, true love as Paul describes it, then nothing else, nothing that you have valued and boasted about, nothing matters, for there was no love.

These are very heavy words. Let's take a closer look at this chapter and see what we can learn from it. Traditionally this chapter has been divided in three parts. First speaks about the necessity of love for us as Christians. Second describes what true love is like. And the third tells that the gift of love is the one that endures forever.

It is interesting how Paul begins this chapter. He speaks in the first person. **"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal."** Corinthians valued highly this gift of miraculously being able to speak in other languages. Paul had this gift himself.

But now he says that even if he could speak in tongues of men and angels, but didn't have love, it would mean nothing. **"And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing."**

Again, Paul definitely had prophetic powers and had received incredible revelations, and who among the men would understand mysteries of God better

than Paul, and who would have faith greater than that of Paul's?! But ... even if we had all these gifts, but had no love, we are nothing.

“If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.” Paul had left his previous life. He had given himself fully to the service to His Lord Jesus Christ. And we can read what this commitment had cost him. And as one who has done all of that, he writes, that we can do all of that, but unless we have love, we gain nothing.

This helps us to reflect on ourselves. We too may do great things. We may have great spiritual gifts. We may even give everything away, even sacrifice our lives for others, but if that is done without true love, it means nothing.

Or put it this way, if we use the gifts the Lord has entrusted to us, to build up ourselves, instead of building up the Church and serving our brothers and sisters in Christ, then it means nothing, whatever nice and praiseworthy our lives may look to the world. Love is what make the whole difference.

Thus we come to the second part that describes the true love. **“Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”**

Does it feel like Paul was describing us? By no means! How far are we from being able to love this way! But how good would it be if we were loved by such love? And the Good News is that you are loved by exactly this kind of love. For this summarizes well how the Triune God loves you.

Love is patient and kind. This is how God reveals Himself to us. Jesus is patient with us, when He waits for us. He is patient when we ignore Him. He is patient when we run after other gods.

He is patient when we don't listen to Him, and don't want to follow Him. He is patient when we neither love Him, nor our neighbors. He is patient when we fail Him again and again.

And our God is kind. His kindness knows no boundaries. In His kindness He provides for us our daily bread. He defends us against all danger and guards and protects us from all evil, as we said it in the Creed. In His kindness He rescues us from sin and death and devil and makes us His own.

In His kindness He calls us by the Gospel, enlightens us with His gifts, keeps us in the one true faith, until we will see Him face to face. You are loved by God who is patient and who kind to you. We are loved much more than we deserve, and much more than we can understand. That's why we tend to forget about it.

And when the Holy Spirit assures us of God's love, when we realize that it is true, that we are loved beyond comprehension, then God's love flows through us to others as well. True love, divine love does not envy or boast. Jesus rejoices

whenever anything good happens in your live. And when we realized how loved we are, we too begin to rejoice for others. True love is not arrogant or rude. We all have challenging situations and challenging people in our lives. Sometimes even among our brothers and sisters in Christ. Jesus is gentle with us, and He helps us to be loving to others as well.

True love does not demand things to be my way. It cares for others, it cares for the body of Christ. And it rejoices in the truth. It longs for God's truth. It bears all things. Sometimes we experience it as parents, bearing with our children.

But that is how God loves us daily. Bearing all things. And He alone knows how much we make Him bear. But He does it, for that's what true love does. And true love believes all things and hopes all things.

Our God believes in the good within us. That we will listen to Him, that we will welcome His Spirit and will not resist as He transforms us. And He hopes that one day He will see us all in the place that He has prepared for us.

He believes and hopes it despite of who we are, how we live, and how little we care about Him. For this is how He loves us. This love endures all things. This **“love never ends.”** And here we come to the third section in this chapter.

Everything in this age will pass away. Even the spiritual gifts that help to build the Church up these days. Prophecies, tongues, knowledge, and so on. All of that won't be needed, when the New Heavens and New Earth becomes reality.

But while in this age, Paul compares us with children, for even in our Christian maturity and understanding we are like children. Partly it is because we cannot yet see things as they will be revealed. Now we see divine truth like in a mirror.

Meaning, we don't see the realities that the Bible speaks about as they are. We see them with our ears, with our God given imagination. But the age is coming when we will reach full maturity. When we will become who God intended us to be. When we will be revealed in new, glorious bodies.

Then we will see things of God as they are. Then we will see our Lord and our God, Jesus Christ as He is, and then we will be like Him. Then we will know Him fully, and we will feel His love fully, and we will be able to love fully.

And then we will understand why it is love, that is the greatest. For we will be loved, and we will love with true, genuine, powerful and all-consuming love. Then what we all long deep in our hearts, will come true.

And, by the way, it will be infinitely more beautiful that we can possibly imagine. Come, Lord Jesus, come, and take us to our true home.

Amen.