

1 Corinthians 13

Good morning RCM. This morning, as we continue our time of worship, I invite you to turn with me to 1 Corinthians 13. If you're using a device, or whatever, swipe, scroll tap to 1 Corinthians 13. And today as is almost always the case, I'm in the CSB.

This chapter in 1 Corinthians is often described as The "Love" Chapter. Such a beautiful picture of love, that it's often used for weddings. Victoria and I had a friend of ours from school read this passage at our wedding. Because it's beautiful. But...if we limit our use of this chapter, 13 short and concise verses, to weddings (the love between a husband and wife) we miss the point. Because Paul isn't writing to individual couples here. He's writing to a church. And we have to understand these verses in the context of the entire letter to the church at Corinth.

If you're with us in our ALIVE reading plan, we started working through 1 Corinthians last week, and worked through most of it this week – 2 chapters left for tomorrow morning. And if you've noticed anything from your time in the Word this week about the church at Corinth, you've noticed it was all kind of jacked up! Like big time jacked up.

- There were factions in the church – Paul, Apollos, Peter, Jesus
 - Truth – Paul planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth
- Throughout the book there's this contrast between the wisdom of the world, and the foolishness of the Gospel to those that have yet to believe
 - "The Lord knows that the reasonings of the wise are futile"
- There were all kinds of immoral activity happening – not like out there – but in the church. Paul tells them to practice church discipline.
- There were members in the church suing each other
 - 6:7 – To have legal disputes against one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?
- We have in 6/7 some of the clearest teaching on human sexuality – that God's design for human sexuality is to be enjoyed within the bond of a marriage between a man and a woman. And anything outside of marriage between a man and a woman is sinful
- There's this teaching about idolatry and eating meat that was sacrificed to idols. A very real issue in the 1st century church. Paul tells them, look you're free in Christ to eat. But if it causes your brother or sister in Christ to stumble, don't eat it. Don't use your freedom to the harm of others. And ultimately, do everything for the glory of God.
- And if that's not enough, like I said, they were all kind of jacked up, if that's not enough apparently there were people coming to church, getting drunk at the Lord's Supper!
- But wait, there's more – they were arguing over spiritual gifts – and he tells them, look guys, there's different gifts but 1 Spirit. They were kind of like the 6 year old kid that finally gets to play with the 10 year olds. And that 6YO is always saying "LOOK AT ME, LOOK AT ME, LOOK AT ME!"
- And Paul uses this to teach them that the family of the church, is designed by God to work together like a body. Just like your eye doesn't try to get rid of your hand – all parts are necessary.

And this is the context in which we get the LOVE chapter. 1 Corinthians 13 – about the attitude within the church.

READ 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

If I speak human or angelic tongues^[a] but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I

have all faith so that I can move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. ³ And if I give away all my possessions, and if I give over my body in order to boast^[b] but do not have love, I gain nothing.

⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. Love does not envy, is not boastful, is not arrogant, ⁵ is not rude, is not self-seeking, is not irritable, and does not keep a record of wrongs. ⁶ Love finds no joy in unrighteousness but rejoices in the truth. ⁷ It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

⁸ Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. ⁹ For we know in part, and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰ but when the perfect comes, the partial will come to an end.

¹¹ 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 put aside childish things. ¹² For now we see only a reflection^[c] as in a mirror, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I will know fully, as I am fully known. ¹³ Now these three remain: faith, hope, and love—but the greatest of these is love.

PRAY

The first thing from this text this morning, when we consider the setting within which it is written, that this is written to a church, a jacked up church, the first thing to see is that our attitude matters as much as our actions. What I will say, is motives matter.

1. Motives Matter

- Speaking but not loving → just making noise. It's of no value.
- Prophecy/Knowledge/Faith → those are all really good things. But they're nothing without love. Because our attitude matters as much as our actions. Paul says without love we are nothing!
 - **Love has to be the motive behind all that we do.** A love for God and the Gospel of His grace, that leads us to lovingly serve others!
- Giving everything to the poor, being martyred → without love its worthless.

Motives matter. Don't miss this. You can do a lot of religious stuff. You can do a lot of charitable stuff. But if it's not motivated by a **love of God, a surrender to Jesus → that fuels a love for others**, your deeds are worthless. My deeds are worthless.

In the book of Revelation, John the apostle gets this vision, and is told to write down what he sees. And in the early parts of the book of Revelation, John writes letters from the Lord to these churches. One of the messages was to the church at Ephesus, and a lot of scholars note this as the "Loveless Church". Here's what the Lord would say to this church, from Revelation 2:1-5

"Write to the angel^[a] of the church in Ephesus: Thus says the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand and who walks among the seven golden lampstands: ² I know your works, your labor, and your endurance, and that you cannot tolerate evil people. You have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and you have found them to be liars. ³ I know that you have persevered and endured hardships for the sake of my name, and you have not grown weary. ⁴ But I have this against you: You have abandoned the love you had at first. ⁵ Remember

then how far you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. Otherwise, I will come to you^[b] and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.

Like don't miss the magnitude of this. **Loveless religion is something to be repented of!** This church checked a lot of boxes.

- Hard working – CHECK
- ENDURE – CHECK
- No tolerance for evil – CHECK
- No patience for false teaching – CHECK
- Tireless – CHECK

But the Lord calls them to repent for a loveless religion. Hear me, or better yet hear the words of the Lord, and the words of the apostle Paul → **loveless religious activity is worthless.** Motives matter.

When Jesus was asked about the law, which is the greatest commandment. You remember his response? Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind; and the 2nd with it, love your neighbor as yourself. And then later in his earthly ministry, Jesus gave a new command, to love people (all people) the way He loved them.

Without love, we've missed it. What I would say is that all of our actions are fueled by our beliefs. And if, if we believe in Jesus, if we have turned to Jesus and found life in Jesus having turned from our sin and trusting in Him, **if we love Him above all things, that will work its way out in our lives as a love for people – Our love for Jesus will express itself in a love for other people.** A love that is pure, and motivated by the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

A love that Paul says is

- Patient
- Kind
- Not boastful or arrogant

This is how we are called to love each other, and to love others. But hear me, it only makes sense through the lens of the Gospel. As we lay aside our personal preferences, our own selfish desires, and pursue together the mission of God in the world.

As we love people. A love that

- Is not rude
- Is not self-seeking
- Is not irritable
- Keeps no record of wrongs
 - If you're keeping a tally of people that have wronged you, you'll never love them. It's human nature to keep a record. But it's wrong.
 - Remember how many times Jesus told Peter he had to forgive his brother that had sinned against him? Pete goes to Jesus and says, "**Hey how many times should I forgive my brother, 7?**" And Pete thought he was really raising the standard. Jesus, though, says to Pete not 7, but 7 times 70. And don't miss the point, it's not like we keep record, and then go warn your wife,

“hey babe you’re at 487 I only have to forgive you 3 more times!” The point is, there is no limit to the forgiveness you are to offer your brother or sister in Christ.

- Because love keeps no record of wrongs. Sadly though, for most of us our default setting is to keep a record. **Like we’re all got PhD’s in “Grievance Accounting.”**

Like, I see and know why we read this chapter all the time at weddings. Because **Paul’s calling for a selfless, God-centered, Christ-honoring type of love**. But we can’t limit this type of love to just our marriages. It’s more than that. It’s how we are to relate within the church.

- Finding no joy in unrighteousness
- Rejoicing in truth
- Bearing all things
- Believing all things
- Hoping all things
- Enduring all things

Show me a church that loves this way, and I’ll show you a church that is centered on the Gospel, the glory and greatness of Jesus, and His mission in the world.

In this other letter, later in the New Testament, the apostle John wrote a lot about love in the church. Huge theme in 1 John. And as we close our time of worship this morning, I want us to hear together the words of John from 1 John 4

⁷ Dear friends, let us love one another, because love is from God, and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ The one who does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ God’s love was revealed among us^[b] in this way: God sent his one and only Son into the world so that we might live through him. ¹⁰ Love consists in this: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice^[c] for our sins. ¹¹ Dear friends, if God loved us in this way, we also must love one another.

¹² No one has ever seen God. If we love one another, God remains in^[d] us and his love is made complete in us. ¹³ This is how we know that we remain in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴ And we have seen and we testify that the Father has sent his Son as the world’s Savior. ¹⁵ Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God—God remains in him and he in God. ¹⁶ And we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us.

God is love, and the one who remains in love remains in God, and God remains in him. ¹⁷ In this, love is made complete with us so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment, because as he is, so also are we in this world. ¹⁸ There is no fear in love; instead, perfect love drives out fear, because fear involves punishment.^[e] So the one who fears is not complete in love. ¹⁹ We love^[f] because he first loved us.

PRAY