

Paul's Hymn Of Love.

Text: 1 Cor 13:1-13

Suggested Hymns:

154, 394, 344, 284, 164

1) The Superiority Of Love Over Other Fine Qualities

2) The Earmarks Of Real Christian Love

3) Where Do We Begin?

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is 1 Corinthians 13:1-13, *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.

⁸ Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. ⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part. ¹⁰ But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.

¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. ¹² For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. ¹³ And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love. (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have

everlasting life."¹ In these words the fourth Evangelist explains why God sent Jesus to be our Saviour from sin.

God's profound love for the lost human race prompted Him to send the Redeemer in the fullness of the time.² Love was in the heart of Jesus when He came into the flesh and lived here, suffered here, and died here. Love motivated all that He said, thought, and did. It was His love for us that directed Him to carry out His Father's will in every detail.

This divine love, Paul wants to remind us today, should inspire love in our hearts for our fellow pilgrims in this world. It is no wonder, then, that the great Apostle writes to the early Corinthian Christians that Christian love shown in their everyday living is the basic Christian virtue, which is superior to all other Christian virtues.

Without Christian love in the heart and life all other Christian virtues add up to zero. Our theme for today is Paul's Hymn of love. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Superiority Of Love Over Other Fine Qualities

Today, we stand on the threshold of another Lenten Season. Paul's Hymn of Love is well chosen for the last Sunday before Lent; for the eternal theme of Lent is "*God is Love.*"³ That is the Biblical definition of God, and the Scriptures are very clear in teaching that Christ is God and that Christ's sacrifice on Calvary's cross is the practical proof and demonstration of this Biblical definition of God.

If we Christians are to learn anything at all during Lent, we must catch some of God's love in our hearts and apply it to our neighbours in this world. The world, as you know, is no friend of divine grace, but a relentless enemy of divine love.

The Apostle pours out a hymn of praise here, stating in marvellous, inspired words that Christian love is greater than man's greatest eloquence, greater than man's greatest prophecies, greater than all the amassed knowledge of mankind, greater than all faith, even though that faith could remove mountains, greater than any kind of generosity and open-handedness of which man is capable.

Paul tops it all off by saying that even if he gave his body to be burned at the stake in defence of his faith, if he has not the proper Christian love in his heart when he is doing it, it amounts to exactly nothing.

Christian love, however, does not justify man. It is a common pitfall in the thinking of some modern Christians that a Christian can have love without justifying faith. But Paul teaches no such thing here. Christian love, the greatest of all virtues, is the fruit of justifying faith. Justifying faith is the tree that brings forth the good and wholesome fruits of love.

When some modern theologians make 1 Corinthians 13 their one and only catchphrase, they are tearing this chapter out of its context and trying to make it stand alone, which it cannot and must not. They seem to forget that the Apostle has just declared⁴ that *“no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.”*

Now what is this, but the justifying faith in Jesus which makes a person a Christian first, and then, having become Christian, Paul stoutly declares in his Hymn of Love that one cannot remain a Christian unless he shows the chief Christian fruit of faith: love.

Martin Luther aptly comments on this passage:⁵ *“Although faith alone makes a man righteous before God, as St. Paul teaches in many other passages, nevertheless, where Christian love does not follow justifying faith, that is conclusive evidence that such faith is dead or lacking, even though the Apostle and others do many mighty wonders and miracles.”*

If our works are done to impress the general public, as the scribes and Pharisees were accustomed to do in Jesus day; if our works are done to gain a position of respectability in our community, or merely as a matter of proper public relations; if we even give up our lives on the battlefield thinking that thereby we have earned our own personal salvation — all such acts, appearing very saint-like and Christ-like to our brethren in this world — if our deeds are not motivated and activated by Christian love born of Christian faith in the heart, *“it profits me nothing.”*

This is not Paul’s teaching, but Christ’s. Christ, our Lord, Himself taught the same message long before Paul ever wrote to the Corinthians. We read in Matthew 7:22–23, ²² *Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not*

prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ ²³ *And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’*

Again, Jesus said to His disciples in the same sermon, the Sermon on the Mount: *“Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them.”*⁶ In this way Christ taught from the negative point of view.

On the other hand, Jesus also from the positive point of view, as He said in the Upper Room, *“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.”*⁷

Jesus repeated His command in John 15:12, ¹² *This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.*

2. The Earmarks Of Real Christian Love

Love suffers long and is kind. Christian love knows the divinely ordained discipline of patience. For example, Joseph, after 20 years of separation from his father, still loved his brothers and refused the temptation of Satan to take sweet personal revenge upon them in their predicament of impending starvation.

Likewise, Moses, always galled and irritated by the murmurings and complainings of Israel in the wilderness, still loved them and prayed that Jehovah might visit His wrath upon him personally instead of them, and take his name out of the Book of Life instead of theirs.⁸

Likewise, the Prophet Hosea patiently bore public shame and disgrace by keeping a straying wife in his own household and bosom, just to show how long-suffering the Lord can be and is with His chosen people.⁹

The lesson to learn is that Christians of today must express a Christian love in our lives that will stand up under the rudest rebuffs, and severe derisions which an unsympathetic world may heap upon us.

Peter urges this same idea, *For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men ... Love the brotherhood. ... When you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God.*¹⁰

Love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up. Love is not jealous or boastful. Christian love is a stranger to the jaundiced, evil, green

eye of greed and human selfishness. Rather than being envious of the good success and reputation of others, it rejoices with them in the plain truth that such achievements have been reached. Christian love prevents the Christian from getting the “*big-shot*” complex when success comes their way.

Christian love must not be “showy.” Christian love is not arrogant, not conceited, but rather reserved and modest, following the Lord’s principle of “*do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.*”¹¹

Love prevents selfishness. A parishioner asked her pastor to preach on the sin of selfishness. When her pastor asked why, she replied that she had lost her husband more than three years ago, and since then all her old friends were too busy to associate with her, too busy going somewhere, getting somewhere, and being somebody, rushing onward in life as if no one else mattered in this world.

Now, allowing for a sense of understandable loneliness and a feeling of being oversensitive, has not this common accusation more than a grain of truth in it? We are often in a hurry, making haste while God is not a bit in a hurry, strutting about as though we were “*big stuff*,” striving to “*get ahead*” in life, all the time acting as though we do not have the time to show Christian love and concern for those who have suffered bereavement and loss.

Let us learn from Philippians 2:4, *“Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.”* The Apostle Paul charged the generation of his day in no uncertain terms as we read in Philippians 2:21, *“For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus.”* Christian love “*does not seek its own.*”

Love does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil. It is a mean, sordid, stupid, and hard-headed philosophy of Satan, that a man has, when he rejoices in another’s downfall, while he himself thinks that he is so sweet and good that a kind God smiles down upon him, and him alone, while others appear to be less deserving to the sure mercies of a loving God.

Or what kind of people are they, who, without God, without Christ, and without hope in this world, think that they are rich and full and well-clothed, but in reality are poor and blind and naked in the sight of God; who are secretly happy when the people of God are treated violently and suffer injustice of the meanest sort?

Such selfish people, says Luther, are like Shimei, who thoroughly enjoyed the frustration of King David, when the King was forced to flee from his own flesh and blood - the overbearing, arrogant revolutionist and opportunist, Absalom.¹²

Love goes the second mile. How different the wonderful virtue of Christian love. *It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things!*

It is the sterling virtue, it is the calm, unruffled spirit, it is the solid integrity, it is the unflagging devotion that Christian love must show. For example David Livingstone when he said: “*Sacrifice? Why it never once occurred to me when I went to Africa that I was making any personal sacrifice whatsoever. God pointed out to me the loving path of duty, and I rejoiced in doing His will.*”

This is the spirit of bearing one another’s burdens and so fulfilling the law of Christ. For love is the fulfilling of the Law. It is the unconquerable, irrepressible spirit of the Apostle Paul himself, who gladly *endured all things lest he hinder the gospel of Christ.*¹³

Likewise, we read in Romans 15:1-2, ¹ *We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves.* ² *Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification.* This is the noble frame of mind that will never stoop to lying, betraying, or slandering our neighbour, but stoutly defends him, speaks well of him, and puts the best construction on everything. That is what it means when our text says “*believes all things.*”

3. Where Do We Begin?

Begin with yourself, right where you are, even though the world is our field!

Let the Christian minister read 1 Corinthians 13 often during his ministry and where the word “love” is written, replace it with, “The Christian pastor.”

The Christian pastor *suffers long and is kind*; the Christian pastor *does not envy*; the Christian pastor *does not parade [himself], is not puffed up*; ⁵ *does not behave rudely, does not seek [his] 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.*

Let every married couple read this chapter often all throughout their married life; not separately, each in his or her own room, but together, and they will stay together, pray together, and receive the Holy Spirit of God together.

The question of a divorce will never overshadow their lives. For love is the most invincible personal armour plate in the arsenal of God's blessings. For love always goes the second mile, at home, in the church, and in the world. Wherever you are, show love, and love conquers.

Love lasts. "*Love never fails.*" The enduring permanence of Christian love makes it the crowning glory in the life of God's own people. Faith and hope are absolute prerequisites for us Christians to reach heaven.

But when we reach eternity we shall then no longer need faith and hope. Love, however, will endure. It will continue on forever and ever in the realms of bliss and eternity.

That is why the Apostle, in the concluding section of this grand ode to Christian love, emphasises the enduring nature of Christian love. It lasts, it stands the test of time, it outgrows the limits of time and space, and therefore it must be ranked above faith and hope when we view world history in the light of eternity, and when we strive to get the proper over-all picture of Christian doctrine and life.

Watch out, then, how you use God's gifts. It is not enough merely to count your blessings one by one, to list them, or brag about them like the Corinthians of old. You and I must see to it that, as we use God's manifold gifts, we are motivated in all that we do by Christian love.

If we use God's gifts only to promote our own glory and honour, and not for the betterment of our neighbour, then we fail miserably in understanding and applying the Bible doctrine about the greatest and most superior of God's gifts to man, the gift of love.

Chrysostom, put it well when he uses this picture of the loving, love-motivated Christianity of the children of God: *When a person from the country comes into the city to see the king, he knows where to find the king. He goes to the court and finds a regal personage surrounded by nobles and courtiers and princes. He notes with keen-eyed delight the robes of the king, the silken stitching, and the sparkling jewels. But he is not convinced that this kingly-*

appearing man is actually the king until he sees with his own eyes the golden diadem, the glittering crown that adorns the brow of the king. So it ought to be among brethren in the Lord!

When our everyday life is adorned and crowned with the gold of love for our neighbour, the diadem of brotherly concern and kindness and love for those with whom we live in this generation, then everyone, both pious and impious, both believer and unbeliever, will look upon us and know at a glance that we are true disciples of the Master.

Jesus says in John 13:35, ³⁵ ***By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.***” He spoke this on the night of His betrayal as He washed the feet of His disciples.

And Paul, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, writes for our admonition and application in Galatians 5:13–14, ¹³ ***For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.*** ¹⁴ ***For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”***

So let us conclude and summarise with these words of our text, ***And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.*** Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ John 3:16

² Gal 4:4

³ 1 John 4:16

⁴ 1 Corinthians 12:3

⁵ 1 Cor. 13:1-3

⁶ Matthew 6:1

⁷ John 13:34

⁸ Exodus 32:32

⁹ Hosea chapt 1-3. Adulterous wife and faithful husband cf chapt 4-14 Adulterous Israel and faithful Lord

¹⁰ 1 Peter 2:15, 17, 20

¹¹ Matt. 6:3

¹² 2 Samuel 16:7

¹³ 1 Corinthians 9:12