



## 1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-13

Drums can sound great – but most impressive when they played together. Cymbals sound impressive – but only as part of the percussion set, bells sound impressive but a peal even better.

Last week we explored the idea that our attitude should be like Jesus' attitude – that he lived in a way where He considered others better than Himself – and therefore died for every man and woman down the ages by His death on the cross because He deemed their lives more important than His.

This week comes even closer to us because it is about the motives that create our attitudes. And we need to realise that it's not what we do, but the motives with which we approach life that makes the difference.

It's like our drums. You can bash them around and they work, but they only work in properly when they are put into rhythm with others.

It's the same way with our lives as Christians and as a Church. We can do lots of things – worship, pray, help one another, do community activities, share the good news – but it's not what we do, but the heart with which we do it.

We saw last week how attitude spoiled the life of the church at Philippi. In Corinth it was lack of love. They went through all the motions of what they thought it meant to be church. They were deep into what they thought were spiritual things – into the gift6s of the Holy Spirit, particularly prophecy and tongues – but they were bashing on drums and cymbals and making an awful noise because they did it from the wrong motive – there was no love in it!

### JOHN NEWTON

What's love got to do with it? John Newton links last week and this week for us when he stated: *I am persuaded that love and humility are the highest attainments in the school of Christ and the brightest evidences that he is indeed our Master.*

In other words, the sign of maturity in Christ and the biggest evidence that Jesus is alive in us is when our lives are marked by the attitude of humility and the motive of love.

### WHAT'S LOVE

What's love. Love is a word that means many things in English. In Greek there are a few words that are used because love can mean different things: "I love you, darling", "I love my family", "I love prawn cocktail crisps". The context gives us the meaning.

### TINA TURNER

To many people love is just a soppy emotion to do with romance. Remember Tina Tuner "What's love got to do with it, what's love but a second hand emotion". A pretty shallow view of love. But with that hairstyle? HAIR

### WHAT'S LOVE

Seriously though, when Paul uses love in this passage this morning, he means just one thing. It's the Greek word agape AGAPE – a word used almost exclusively by Christians to describe the love God has for us and the love we should have for one another and our neighbours. It is an attitude

that genuinely puts the needs of others before our own, whatever the consequences. Unlike Tina Turner's love, it's more than just an emotion, it's an attitude that when it genuinely applies whole range of compassion, affection, passion, respect – I could go on because there are many but the end is always life changing in the lives of others.

The Bible best describes what is meant by agape. Because God is agape – the best example of just what love is can be found in Him. 1 JOHN 4:10 *This is what love is: it is not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the means by which our sins are forgiven.* 1 JOHN 3:1 *See how much the Father has loved us! His love is so great that we are called God's children — and so, in fact, we are.*

It's so much a fundamental part of scripture. What do we learn from John 3:16? *For God so loved the world .... that He sent His only Son.* Or these verses JOHN 13:34 *"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."*

Or even these words: MARK 12:29 *'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'* 31 *The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'* *There is no commandment greater than these."*

You see the connection? God loves, Jesus loves, I love, you love. Who? God, one another, our neighbour and all more than we love ourselves. In the world it's the other way around. We love ourselves first, then maybe someone else and that's it. But that person we don't like? Never!

And without love, the way we live and the way we interact with one another doesn't work.

Many people preach on 1 Corinthians in weddings. Whereas it sounds like a good ode to love it actually isn't about marital relationships, actually it's about the way Christians should behave towards one another in the context of the local church. Corinth was a church where they did everything the wrong way around. There were many things that they were doing right. They sought for their worship and their practice as Christians to be of the Spirit. They desired spiritual gifts – particularly the spectacular ones like healing and prophecy and tongues. Some were clearly zealous for the Lord.

But like our percussion earlier, the whole symphony of sounds weren't working properly because love was missing. They didn't have that basic love and care for one another – that self-sacrifice for one another that Jesus had for them.

And we have remembered around the table this morning the love that Jesus had for us so what applies to them applies to us. We have always been a church that has tried to do things to the highest standards possible. We may miss the mark sometimes but we try. We make sure we have good policies for pastoral care, for child protection, for protection of vulnerable adults. We desire to see how we can move our church forward in mission. We desire to move forward in all areas of our life as a church – in worship, in discipleship, in our small groups. I know that many of us are very zealous to serve God in different ways. Whether that's you or whether you're struggling with your faith at the moment: I offer you these words of Paul who shows us a better way. So what does he say:

**ESSENTIAL**

◆ Love is Essential

*1 I may be able to speak the languages of human beings and even of angels, but if I have no love, my speech is no more than a noisy gong or a clanging bell. 2 I may have the gift of inspired preaching; I may have all knowledge and understand all secrets; I may have all the faith needed to move mountains — but if I have no love, I am nothing. 3 I may give away everything I have, and even give up my body to be burnt — but if I have no love, this does me no good.*

I said earlier that this passage was about motive. What's important isn't the content of what we do, but the spirit in which we are doing it. And what is love? The self sacrifice of Christ – even to death; and we are called to be the same and do the same. Wow!

Think about it. Think about the folks in this building this morning. Some you know well, some you don't. Some you may like, some you might not like. Jesus died for the benefit of all of them. How

far are we prepared to go for them? Love means going the extra mile, risking our lives even to benefit one another. Yet 99.9% of the time God never expects us to stretch ourselves too far for others let alone risk our lives – but how far are we prepared to go?

It's one thing to have all the right words, or all the right religious actions – but what motives? It's a challenge to all those who desire what they may see as spiritual – the gifts of the Spirit, preaching, an understanding of the things of God, faith to move mountains . But if I've no love – I am nothing. I know so many people who have strived after all these things. I know of those who preach with supposed authority and who moralise on this that and the other – yet there's no love in their words. Paul says - "If I don't have love, then I'm nothing - if there's no love, then it does me no good."  
NOTHING

What are we striving for in Christ? Who are we striving to be in Christ? Without love, whatever our strivings are – it will all be nothing and for nothing. EXEMPLARY

#### ◆ Love is Exemplary

So what does a love filled Christian look like? Paul even helps us by giving us the characteristics:  
VERSE - 2

*4 Love is patient and kind; it is not jealous or conceited or proud; 5 love is not ill-mannered or selfish or irritable; love does not keep a record of wrongs; 6 love is not happy with evil, but is happy with the truth. 7 Love never gives up; and its faith, hope, and patience never fail.*

Now we are going to do a little exercise. We are going to read this out again, but we are going to each substitute our own first name whenever we come across the word "love". Let's read it together.

Now ask yourself the question – is that really me? Am I like that? If the answer is no then I give you the verse we had earlier - If I don't have love, then I'm nothing – it does me no good.

Challenging isn't it. I've made it personal but it wasn't written in that context – it was written in the context of the church. Let's read this passage again. But this time, let's substitute "our church" for "love".

That's even more challenging. What makes our church attractive to others? Is it our worship? Is it our community programs? What about our children's work, women's work, men's work, small groups? They all have merit don't they? What really draws people I suggest are our motives and attitudes. We had humility last week, this week we have love. What makes the difference isn't what we do but the spirit in which we treat each other and we treat our community. And the results will be self evident.

#### BISAGNO

John Bisagno stresses the need for churches to be loving communities - *Love - the visitors in church may not be able to explain it or define it, but they know when it is there and when it is not. .... For many, the love they receive in church is the only love they will experience all week long.*

#### ETERNAL

##### ◆ Love is Eternal

*8 Love is eternal. There are inspired messages, but they are temporary; there are gifts of speaking in strange tongues, but they will cease; there is knowledge, but it will pass. 9 For our gifts of knowledge and of inspired messages are only partial; 10 but when what is perfect comes, then what is partial will disappear.*

The important thing about love is that it has an eternal quality. Jesus showed His love towards us dying so that we may know eternal life. The consequences of His love are eternal. And we are called to the same mission – to love others into the kingdom as we show the same love as Jesus did and go to the same lengths to bring the message that Jesus body was broken for them and His blood was shed for them so that their sin is dealt with and they will have eternal life if they put their faith and trust in Jesus.

So we're not just called to love one another, but to love and reach those who do not know Jesus. Yes, there are exciting things that go with the Christian faith, including, healings, prophecy tongues that astonish and amaze. But the only astonishing quality about God that endures is love. We are called to love.

## VERWER

As a young Christian I was impressed by the works and words of George Verwer, the founder of OM which as you know is primarily a literature based ministry. He wrote a book called A Revolution of Love which was about loving people into God's kingdom. He said this:

*This world in which we live is a sick world. It is a world of misery and tragedy such as most of us cannot begin to imagine. Millions are sleeping on pavements, starving to death, knowing nothing of the love of God for them. The church sings, "My Jesus, I love thee." And at the same time 150,000 people a day slip away into eternity. And we say that we love them. I say we don't. If we loved them with Christ's love, we wouldn't stop until we had sold a million books and distributed 100 million tracts. And as we did it our tears would bathe these lost souls. I know too little about it. I have wept little over souls and much over my unloving heart. But I can say today before God, "I WANT IT!" You can take all that I have! You can take my family (and I do not say this lightly), BUT I WANT A LIFE OF LOVE! I WANT GOD! (George Verwer)*

**FAITH, HOPE, LOVE**

*13 Meanwhile these three remain: faith, hope, and love; and the greatest of these is love.*

Why is it that these three remain – because through faith, we gain an eternal hope. Great – but the greatest is love, because we shall experience the outworking of God's love throughout eternity, because we will be there because of Jesus, not because we ever deserved it.

Is our desire to see the nations won for Jesus; to see His eternal life and love in the lives of men and women. So often we ask God for this don't we (or maybe not enough). Yet the difference will start when we become more like Jesus – and at the root of that is that we love, because He first loved us.

**Prayer**

**REVIVAL**

**"Send revival, start with me"**

*Preached by Mark Reid  
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