

SERMON 1 CORINTHIANS 13 THE GIFT OF LOVE

June 1, 2025

Last Sunday, I officiated at the wedding of Joey Archuleta's daughter Kathy to David Jackson. Unlike some of the interesting weddings I shared with you last Sunday, it was beautiful ceremony. The scripture text I used was from 1 Corinthians 13 which describes the kind of love that we all hope for and expect in any relationship. Now this is often called the "Love Chapter," and is probably one of the most familiar passages in the Bible to many people. Let's examine this text this morning and see how we are stacking up to this standard.

Read 1 Corinthians 13

While attending a marriage seminar on communication, Bubba and his wife Susie listened as the instructor said: "It is essential that husbands and wives know the things that are important to each other." Then he addressed the men and asked: "Can you describe your wife's favorite flower?" Bubba leaned over, touched his wife's arm gently and whispered: "Pillsbury All-Purpose, aint'it?" The rest of the story is not very pleasant.

This passage is often used in wedding ceremonies since it symbolizes the kind of love that a man and a woman should have for each other. For example, a husband asked his new bride: "Tell me, Dear, have you ever been in love before?" She thought for a moment and replied: "No, Darling, I once respected a man for his great intelligence. I admired another for his remarkable courage. And I was once captivated by another for his good looks and charm. But with you, well, how else could you explain it, except love?"

Now while this particular passage is often used to describe the anticipated love between a man and a woman, it also clearly summarizes the characteristics of Christian love – the love that we should have for our fellow human beings. The concept of Christian love that Jesus taught was so new that the early Christian writers like the Apostle Paul had to invent a new word for it, or at least to employ a very unusual Greek word – agape. In Greek, there are four words for love. There is **eros**, which is the love between a man and a woman which involves sexual desires. Then there is **phila (phileo)** which is the warm affection that exists between those who are very near and dear to each other. There is also **storge** which is the word for family affection. But this morning, I want us to focus on **agape** love, which sometimes translates as charity. If we regard a person with agape love, it means that we will always seek the best for the other person no matter what they may have done or said about us. When the well-being of another person is as important to you as your own well-being, then agape love exists.

In verses 4 through 7, Paul lists 15 characteristics of the love that each Christian should process and reflect in their daily life. Let's look at them again:

Love is patient

Love is kind
It is not jealous
It does not brag
It is not proud
It is not rude
It does not insist on its own way
It is not easily angered
It keeps no record of wrongs
It does not delight in evil
It rejoices in the truth
It bears all things
It believes all things
It hopes all things
And it endures all things – Love never ends.

Quite a list, isn't it? Have you ever met anyone who exhibited all these qualities? Now I don't mean to hurt anybody's feelings here, but I never have. Unfortunately, there has only been one person who has lived out these characteristics of true love. This love came directly from the heart of God and took on human form in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. When Paul wrote this passage, he had Jesus in mind. While we may never reflect all these qualities, Christ calls us to try each day to reflect them the best we can to the people we meet. With this in mind, let's examine a few of these characteristics; now don't worry, I'm not going to go over all 15 of them!

Love is patient. The Greek word used in the New Testament always describes patience with people and not with circumstances. It describes the person who is slow to anger, and it is also often used to describe God's relationship with us humans. We are called to exercise the same patience with our fellow human beings as God does with us. Such patience is not a sign of weakness, but a sign of strength. Someone has said that the world would be a better place if men showed as much patience all the time as they do when they are waiting for fish to bite.

Love is not jealous. It has been said that there are really two economic classes of people in the world - those who are millionaires and those who would like to be. In the same way there are two kinds of jealousy – one that covets the possessions of other people. This jealousy is difficult to avoid since this is human nature. The other kind of jealousy is worse – it is people who are jealous of the very fact that others have what they do not have. What makes it worse is that this type of jealousy is not so much interested in wanting things as the fact that it does not want others to have them. Jealousy has been called the “green-eyed monster.”

There is a fable about the devil's agents who were failing in their various attempts to lead a holy man who lived as a hermit to sin. Every attempt had met with failure; so, the devil,

angered at the incompetence of his subordinates, became personally involved in the case. He approached the holy man with great care and whispered softly in his ear: "Your brother has just been made Bishop of Alexandria." Instantly the holy man's face showed that the devil had been successful. "Jealousy," said the devil, "is often our best weapon against those who seek to follow Christ."

Love is not rude. Rudeness displays a lack of regard for the other person's feelings. Speaking the truth is never an excuse to criticize. You know sometimes we don't realize how rude and hurtful our comments can be. I know that I'm guilty of this at times when I think that I'm kidding around with someone and unfortunately hurt their feelings. In a Christian community, this is something that we all need to be aware of. It is wiser to choose what you say than to say what you choose.

Love does not insist on its own way. Someone said that there are two kinds of people in the world – those who always insist on their privileges and those who always remember their responsibilities. There are those who are always thinking of what life owes them and what's in it for them. But thankfully, there are also those who never forget what they owe to life and what they can give back. Our communities, country and world would be a lot better place if people would think less of their own rights and more of their duties and service to others. Love never seeks its own way at the expense of others; it is not self-seeking, not self-centered, but other centered, Christ centered.

Love keeps no record of wrongs. The word used here is translated "store-up," and is an accounting term. It's like keeping a ledger of all the hurts; it's a who-done-me-wrong list. Unfortunately, we humans are creatures who like to keep score. We save up our negative feelings just like some people save coupons. I had an employee in Santa Fe who didn't have a rosary, but kept grudge beads. Every time she got mad at someone in the office, she would mentally pull out her grudge beads and go over them one-by-one since the day she went to work for the agency, over 30 years. One of the greatest lessons in life is learning not only to forgive, but also to forget. As Christians we are called to forgive and forget. We are to wipe the slate clean as our Lord and Savior has done for us.

Love does not rejoice in wrong-doing. This can be better translated as – love finds no pleasure in anything that is wrong. This is not as much delight in doing something wrong as it is enjoying hearing derogatory comments about someone else or about their problems. Unfortunately, it is human nature that we often prefer to hear about the misfortunes of others rather than their good fortunes. We would rather listen to their problems than hear about their joys. What's the old saying: "bad news travels fast." Christian love finds no delight in the troubles that others are experiencing. It does not participate in gossip or critical comments about others. Love rejoices in the virtues of others, not in their vices.

Love bears all things or as one translation states “love puts up with all things.” In other words, love never exposes the faults and mistakes of others. You know there are some people that if you make a mistake, they will make sure that not only you but everybody else is aware of it. However, Christian love will seek to resolve issues behind the scenes one-on-one. This is the kind of love that is always positive, not negative; always building others up instead of finding fault and being critical.

Love believes all things, trusts all things. There is a twofold application here. First in relation to God, it means that love takes God at His Word and promise. Second, in relation to our fellow human beings, it means that love always believes the best about other people. It is often true that we make people out to be what we believe them to be. If we show that we do not trust people, we make them untrustworthy.

Love hopes all things. In the eyes of Jesus, no person is hopeless. Adam Clark was one of the greatest theologians of his time, but at school he was a slow learner. One day a distinguished visitor came to his school, and heard the teacher single out Adam by saying that he was the stupidest boy in the entire school. Before the visitor left, he went over to Adam and kindly said: “Never mind, son, you may be a great scholar someday. Don’t be discouraged but try hard, and keep trying.” To the teacher, he was hopeless, but not to the visitor. Who knows, it may well have been that word of hope which made Adam Clark who he became. Do we see the good in others; do we offer words of encouragement?

I particularly like verse 12 in 1 Corinthians 13: “Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.” These qualities of love as Paul describes here were completely illustrated in the life of Jesus Christ Himself. As we look into our mirrors today, we can only see a poor reflection of this love, but the closer we walk with Jesus each day, the clearer this picture becomes until the day we meet Jesus face to face; then the love in us will be complete.

I have often thought that life is a mirror. What we reflect into it, reflects right back to us. If we show hatred, it comes back to us. If we are negative, critical of others, it will come back to us. But if we show love, try to live out this love that Paul describes here, then love will be reflected back to us from those we meet and from our relationship with God. Have you ever noticed that people react more positively to you if you smile instead of frowning? What do you see in your mirror?

In John 13:34-35, Jesus tells us: “A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this others will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” What distinguishes us as disciples of Jesus Christ is the love that motivates our thoughts, words and actions. We show the world Christ when we love each other; when

we practice agape love, always seeking the best for others no matter what they have done or said to us. Love is the litmus test for those created in the image of God.

Paul closes this beautiful text with these words: “And these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.” Great as faith and hope are, love is still greater. Faith without love is cold; hope without love is grim. Love is the fire that kindles faith, and it is the light which turns hope into certainty. All that the Bible says about God, can be summed up in one statement: “God is love.”

I challenge each one of us to read and reread 1 Corinthians 13 and then make it our business to love like this. Let us be a church where this love is practiced each and every day. May we look for the good in each other, be positive and encouraging in our comments, and be supportive of each other. May Rio Rancho and the world know whose disciples we really are. Reflect Christ’s love to all you meet. In the end, love is the greatest thing we can be part of, for it’s the only thing that will last. Amen