

## **Epiphany 4 - Love – 1 Corinthians 13: 1-13 Luke 4:21-30**

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be pleasing to you  
O Lord.

Love's a wonderful thing. So, what's this wonderful thing called love? Ask a young lady who's in love for the first time and then ask a young man the same question. Do you think you'd get the same answer from both? Have you ever asked anyone what is love? If you have, you probably have received a wide range of answers. Think about it. What's your answer? What do you mean when you tell someone "I love you?"

People say they love things all the time. I love my dog, I love ice cream, I love my job, and I love winter weather. I love swimming, I love my new bathing suit, I love to read, and I love driving my new car. Is love always being happy and getting what you want? Does love always feel good? Is love always easy? Is love a feeling or an emotion? When we say we love some thing or someone, what does that mean? What is love?

If you ask a group of young people what they love, you get a wide range of answers. They love staying up late, sleeping in late, having no homework, having freedom; they love their boyfriend or girlfriend, they love when they are with their friends, they love wearing nice clothes, and they love good music and having fun. Then ask them what's love? You probably will get a puzzling stare from them all.

Ask a group of adults what they love, and listen to what you hear. They may say that they love their quiet time, vacations, their car or maybe their dog. Surely, we

would hear they love their spouse and children or grandchildren; maybe we'd be told they love money, their job or their home, or perhaps they love having freedom and playing golf. Then stop and ask them what is love? How do you define love? Some would say it's a wonderful feeling, having what you need and being able to be happy and be healthy. Love's having no worries and being comfortable and being able to do what I want with whom I want. Love's being successful and having plenty of resources to have fun. Love's being with someone with whom I like to be. Is this how you define love?

The questions I've asked lead us to the typical secular way of defining love. It's centred on self and on one's own desires, pleasures, and feelings. Our media, television, print, internet and social media communications all transmit this definition daily to us defining love as centered on self, feelings, affections and sexual pleasure. This is why when we ask people what they love and what is love we get a wide range of answers that are secular in nature and not spiritual.

One thing that needs to be made very clear at this juncture, love's not a feeling and it's not about self!

How important is love? The apostle Paul had established a church in Corinth. Then while continuing to travel on his mission Paul heard about conflict in the church in Corinth and returned to give them some more instructions. The apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 13: 1-3, "If I could speak in any language in heaven or on earth but did not love others, I would only be making meaningless noise like a loud gong or a

clanging cymbal. If I had the gift of prophecy, and I knew all the mysteries of the future and knew everything about everything, but did not love others, what good would I be? And if I had the gift of faith so that I could speak to a mountain and make it move, without love I would be no good to anybody. If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrifice my body, I could boast about it, but if I did not love others, I would be of no value whatsoever.” Then in verse 13 it is declared, “There are three things that will endure – faith, hope and love – and the greatest of these is love.” That tells us just how important love is for God’s children. To love each other is one of Jesus Christ’ commands. So, what is love?

Again referencing 1 Corinthians 13, we hear verses 4 –7. Chances are you have heard this passage read at a wedding and it is a good choice. Remember though that these words were spoken to a church in conflict. In verses 4-7 we read, “Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. Love does not demand its own way. Love is not irritable, and it keeps no record of when it has been wronged. It is never glad about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

Love is actions and not feelings. Re-writing the above using God instead of the word love clearly shows God’s loving actions toward us. God’s patient and kind. God isn’t jealous or boastful or proud or rude. God doesn’t demand its own way. God isn’t irritable, and He keeps no record of when He’s been wronged. God’s never glad about

injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. God never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

All are actions of love, patience, kindness, humbleness, understanding, pleasantness, truthfulness, and honesty, caring, giving and never losing hope or faith. What's the most powerful act of love? Forgiveness is the most powerful act of love. If you do not believe so wait until you need forgiveness and it is withheld.

The fact is God gave his only begotten son to die for our salvation. What a powerful act of love. Jesus Christ suffered public whippings, beatings, being spit on, thorns crushed into his head and crucified on the cross. He hung on a cross with nails piercing his hands and feet in the blistering sun until he suffocated with exhaustion. On the third day Jesus rose from the dead and LIVES sitting at the right hand of God the creator of all things. God allowed his son to be the sacrificial lamb to free us from our sins and give us eternal life. That's a powerful act of love!

Love's not about self. It isn't self-serving or looking for gain or comfort. Love isn't a feeling; love is actions of kindness, forgiveness, giving, teaching, sacrifice, and putting other people's needs first. When we truly love others, we invite others to love us. Think about it. Have you ever had someone love you with actions of goodness, forgiveness, sacrifice, understanding, assistance, caring and kindness that you in turn couldn't love back? Love generates more love. You might say that it is contagious.

Is love easy? No. Is love always comfortable? No. Are loving actions always beneficial in return? No. Pure love is not self-serving. It is humble, quiet, considerate, and giving actions for the sole benefit of another without any expectation of anything in

return. Sometimes this means serving, which may cause you to suffer. Sometimes this means sacrifice that may cause you pain and discomfort. Love can mean giving that will deplete self. Love's forgiving when doing otherwise would be easier. Love takes energy when energy is sparse. Loving others can be hurtful.

But remember, there are three things that will endure above all – faith, hope and love – and the greatest of these is love. God is love, and love is God. As Christians, we need to try to be Christ-like, which means we should love thy neighbor as thy self. Give, serve, help, teach, forgive, assist, sacrifice, and deplete yourself to loving acts. God's love for us is never ending; He showed us that through his son Jesus Christ. Even when we fail to love as Christ commanded, we should never give up as God has never given up on us.