



"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. 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 gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (1 Corinthians 13).

This is our fifth week in our church series on evangelism. Today I'm going to talk about community. Love used to mean just about everything except what the Bible means. For thousands of years the Bible has spoken to people of all cultures and backgrounds about this fundamental human reality: we were created to enjoy loving community. Gen. 2:18: "*It is not good for man to be alone.*"

Today's text pinpoints what's wrong with us and what's wrong with our world: we were created to have loving community with God and with others, but we don't have it. We're not fully integrated human beings because most of us aren't taking part in what God designed us to take part in.

1 Corinthians 13 is considered one of the jewels of Scripture. Adolph Harnack called this chapter "the greatest, strongest, deepest thing Paul ever wrote." Despite how often we use it, this is not a wedding text!

It was written to a church community in trouble. Corinth was a broken community, a loveless community. Paul gave more attention to community than anything else in the 1st century. Other ancient thinkers and writers dealt with the topic of community.

But it's Paul who, by the illumination of the Holy Spirit, thought and worked through what New Community is all about—the people of God called into a new community that's defined by Jesus. Paul's vision of community was built on Christ's words, John 13:35, "*By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*"

As the church, we are called to be a radically loving community here on the S.F. Peninsula.

I have three questions for you: What is love? Why do we love? How do we get and give this love?

### What is love?

In 1984 Tina Turner asked this question in the song, *What's Love Got to Do With It?* The National Endowment of the Arts lists this song as the 38th top song of the century. What is love? Tina Turner says, "what's love but a second hand emotion...what's love but a sweet old fashioned notion." Is that what love is?

What's love got to do with it? According to Paul, love has everything to do with it, everything to do with the Christian life and community. The first three verses of our chapter say all your spiritual and religious activities are worthless without love. Paul lists six impressive activities of the Corinthian community that are "nothing" without love. This church had miraculous gifts, great teaching, incredible vision casting, social justice programs, willingness to die for the faith, but no love. You can look like a really impressive person, a really impressive church, but without love, you're terribly unimpressive.

What's love got to do with it? Everything. Love is the supreme mark, the cardinal virtue of the Christian life. Without love you miss the point of being a Christian, the point of being the church. Just like the Corinthians, you and I and our church have some repenting to do. At times we have been so busy with our impressive religious duties that we've forgotten love.

So, what is love? In verses 4–7 Paul gives us 15 descriptions of the love God calls us to have as a community. These verses were contextual to the Corinthians and not a complete definition of love. What is love? It's the opposite of you. For Paul, love is not an abstract idea, it's behavior. Love is acting lovingly, it's a whole way of life towards other people. As we move through these 15, this is scary love. There's a scary goodness to the love that Paul describes. What would happen if we loved like this, if

somebody loved us like this? The opposite of love isn't hate, it's self-protection.

Tina Turner sang, "I've been thinking about my own protection. It scares me to feel [love] this way." "Who needs a heart when a heart can be broken." C.S. Lewis wrote, "To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket—safe, dark, motionless, airless—it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable."

The challenge this morning is to be brave, have an open heart.

**1. Love is patient.** Love is patient with people. According to the Bible, loving people involves patience. As a community we recognize that it takes time for people to change and mature. The Christian life is a process and we love one another while we're in process, not once we've "arrived."

The big assumption behind these verses is we're broken people who need this kind of love/patience. Love is patient. Are you?

**2. Love is kind.** Love is kind, love cares for others more than for self. Mother Theresa said, "It's not what you do that counts, but how much love is in what you do."

How much love is in what you do? What counts isn't how much you get done, but how much kindness is in what you do. Most businesses don't operate this way, most employees don't work this way, but imagine if they did.

**3. Love does not envy.** Love does not envy. Love doesn't want what it doesn't have. Envy is the Kryptonite of love, it drains love of all its power. Socrates said: "The envious are pained by their friends' successes." To truly love your friend Joe is to be content with where you're at in life and to rejoice over the good things Joe has in his life that you don't have. Can you rejoice when Joe, when Jenny, when the people you're in community with succeed and are blessed? Love does not envy.

**4 & 5. Love does not boast; love is not arrogant.** Boasting and arrogance were a problem in Corinth. Everyone was very impressed with themselves. Are you your favorite topic? Love doesn't draw inordinate attention to self. Love does not boast. Love is not arrogant.

**6. Love is not rude.** Love is not Simon Cowell! Love is honest, but not rude. We should tell one another the truth as a community, but we're not rude about it—we don't package all of our observations and critique of someone into one big verbal report that crushes them. Love is not rude. If you've been the Simon Cowell of your community group, or of your marriage, or behind

the scenes; if you've been Simon Cowelling our church or people in the church, today's a great day to repent. Love is not rude.

**7. Love does not insist on its own way.** Ouch! Love isn't always "me first," "my way." Paul isn't saying be a doormat for other people, let people walk all over you, be loose in your convictions and let others have their way. But, to a church that had forgotten how to love, to a people that had become deeply selfish, Paul says if you really love someone you're not always insisting on your own way.

Do you insist on your own way? Why? What are you so afraid of? Why are you so enslaved to self-protection and insisting on your own way?

**8. Love is not irritable.** People will always annoy you. People are annoying, Christians are annoying, but as you grow in love you're not totally tweaked by it.

**9. Love is not resentful.** Scripture says love "*keeps no record of wrongs.*" Love doesn't keep score. As you love your friend Jenny you don't keep score, you don't measure her, constantly examining her performance. You love Jenny by ditching the report card, forgetting the past, and just loving her.

How's your memory? Do you keep a record of wrongs, do you create criminal profiles of people that they can never escape once they've hurt you, or do you forgive and forget? Love keeps no record of wrongs.

**10 & 11. Love does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.** Love and truth always go together. They are like new grandmas and cameras—you can't have one without the other. Love and truth always go together. Love turns its back on wrongdoing and walks in truth. This love we're called to show as a Christian community is not a watered-down, wimpy love that just goes with the flow. Christian love is truth love, which sometimes means tough love.

**12, 13, 14 & 15. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.** In other words, love puts up with a lot of junk, love sees the best in others, love never gives up, love never looks back. Is there a bearing, a believing, a hoping, and an enduring quality to your love of other people?

These are the 15 character traits of love. When you say to someone, "I love you," is this what you mean? "I'm committed to patiently and kindly love you, I will not insist on my own way, I will endure all things in my relationship with you."

Have I ever really loved anybody? The test? Substitute your name for the word "love": "Justin is patient and kind; Justin does not envy or boast; Justin is not arrogant or rude. Justin does not insist on his own way. Justin is not irritable or resentful. Justin bears all things, endures all things."

Nobody would ever say this about me! How does your name do in the list? How does the name "CPC" do in the list?

What is love? We've heard 15 character traits, but let's sum it up in a sentence and let's make it concrete to our relationship with "Joe." Loving Joe means lavishly acting for Joe's best without any consideration of Joe's worthiness. Most of us don't love people like this. Most of us have never been loved like this. Most people here in the Bay Area haven't seen love like this in the church. Now we know what love is. Next question: why?

### **Why do we love?**

One message that pastor Bob Kirk wished he could convey to people in his church, but felt people couldn't hear it, was: "I'd like to tell the church to let people be human. I'd like them to learn to enjoy humanity, both their own and others'. To enjoy and accept humanity, with all its warts and weaknesses, without pulling away in fear and judgment—this is the one thing the church doesn't know. Most churches, I think, are frightened of human beings."

Why are we afraid of each other, afraid to love? I think this problem in our relationship with each other has to do with a problem in our relationship with God. Have you ever thought about this? The way we relate to other people mirrors how we relate to God.

Being in community tells you the truth about yourself. In your relationships, if you're always keeping a record of people's wrongs, if you can never forgive people, what does that say about you? What does that say about the kind of relationship you have with God? If you can't forgive other people, what that tells you is that you can't forgive yourself, you don't really believe that Jesus has forgiven you. The way we relate to other people mirrors how we relate to God.

You can't treat others better than you let Jesus treat you. Do you see that? Are you aware of how well Jesus treats you? Do you see how much he loves you? This is scary love! Take your name out of that list, put the name of Jesus in it. Jesus is patient and kind. Jesus is not irritable. Jesus keeps no record of wrongs. Jesus bears all things. Jesus believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things in his love for you.

Why as a Christian community are we called to radically love each other? Because Jesus is 1 Cor. 13. Because Jesus has loved us, does love us, and will forever love us with a radical love. Do you know that God keeps no record of your wrongs? 2 Cor. 5:19: *"...in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them..."* If you've trusted Jesus, his blood has changed the ink on your record to say, "clean, pure, righteous, beautiful, forgiven." Do you know that God's love for you is not based on your worthiness/lovableness? Romans 5:8: *"God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* We don't deserve his love, but he loves us—and that's true love.

Do you see that on the cross Jesus wasn't doing his religious duty. He hung there because he wanted to, because he loves you. Is the cross just a fact in your head or is it a reality that melts your heart?

You can't treat others better than you let Jesus treat you. Take in the loving treatment of Jesus. A better definition of love is this: to treat others the way God in Christ has treated us. 1 John 4:10&11: *"In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."*

We love one another because God first loved us. And we're a community of love because our God is a community of love. Our Triune God has always enjoyed perfect, loving community—Father, Son, and Spirit. And created in his image we, the church, represent him on earth. That's our job, to radically love one another, to be a community of love, just like our God.

### **How do we get and give this love?**

Let's apply this chapter, "the greatest, strongest, deepest thing Paul ever wrote," to our life together as a church. But realize you can't do all 15; you'll fail on your drive home. Apply one part of truth to one part of your life.

**1. Mediate on one part of Christ's love for you.** Take 1 of the 15 characteristics of love mentioned in this passage, maybe the one you have the hardest time believing, and mediate on the fact that Jesus loves you like that. Jesus' love for me is "patient." Jesus doesn't have a short fuse with me. Take in how Jesus really treats you. What is the Spirit saying to you right now? Which of these 15 do you need to pick? Meditate on one aspect of his love for you.

**2. Work on one part of the love you are called to show to others.** Don't work on all 15, work on one. I want to be a man known for his love for others, so I'm working on this one first. Take one and work on it. And remember, you have the Holy Spirit. You have a power to change that other people don't have. Love is a fruit of the Spirit. Work on that one aspect of your love for other people, believing that the Holy Spirit is alive inside of you, growing you.

**3. Engage in community here at CPC.** All this applies to your marriage, friends, etc., but Paul has primarily in mind a church community; not just people who like each other or have the same interests, but people who share the same Savior. You can't obey this passage simply by attending services. If you're already engaged in community here, right where you are, work on that one aspect of your love for others. Don't go looking for more lovable people or better circumstances. Don't wait for other people to love you; Jesus loves you. If you're not engaged in community here, it's time to engage.

Paul Hiebert says of his 90-year-old, deteriorating wife, "I don't love her because she's beautiful, she's beautiful because I love her." What we're doing as the church is making each other more beautiful. We're messy people with messy lives. Community is messy, church life is messy. But the mess is worth it; we're making each other more beautiful. If you're not engaged in community here, you need it and we need you.

## CONCLUSION

There's a lot that we do with our lives that's not going to last. That's what Paul says in the final verses of our passage, verses 8-13. Paul mentions all these activities that will pass away. But, love, he says, will never end.

The church is the one institution that lasts into eternity. Practice now what you'll be doing forever. The one thing that lasts forever

is loving community, a community that's loved by God, that loves God, and that loves each other.

One day, we're going to see God "*face to face*" (v. 12). On that day, Paul says, "*then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.*" When we see God face to face, all our doubts about his love for us, all the hurt from people who've failed to love us, and all of our own failures in love will melt away. Face to face: we shall know God fully. But right now we have Paul's startling words, "*I have been fully known.*" Right now, God fully knows you. Right now, God sees you face to face.

Fully known. Fully loved. He knows you perfectly...he loves you perfectly. Let's believe this together and let's love one another.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*