

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

I'm sure you've probably heard this before. "L is for the way you look at me , O is for the only one I see, V is very, very extraordinary, E is even more than anyone that you adore and..." Love is all that I can give to you, Love is more than just a game for two, Two in love can make it, Take my heart and please don't break it, Love was made for me and you.

What do those lyrics tell you about love? Are they right? Obviously there's some feeling attached to love, but is that it? Is love just a feeling? It's really not. At least, according to God, it's not. Well, this morning, God tells us what real love is. It's a way for Jesus to reveal himself. It's the way Jesus reveals himself...through our Love for Others!

Now, I know we've been hitting the topic of sanctification pretty hard over the past couple of weeks, looking at our new lives as believers and how we now live. As we've looked at sections of 1 Corinthians, we've seen Paul's encouragement not just to the Corinthian church, but to us as well. The encouragement to be who you are, a part of the body of Christ, each of you having your own separate function, each of you having different spiritual gifts, given you by God.

Well, this morning, we're going to continue that along that line of thinking, kind of. Instead of talking about our many and varied gifts, and talents, and abilities, we're going to focus on one. Can you guess what it is? It's the topic for the entirety of chapter 13. Love.

Now, that was something lacking in the Corinthian church. Oh, they thought they were showing love. They loved to brag about their gifts. "Oh, I can heal sicknesses. Yeah, I'm pretty important." "I can translate for people who are speaking in tongues, in different languages. No other gift can top that."

That wasn't love. That was being boastful, selfish, individualistic, but not being a part of the body of Christ.

Now sure, there were important roles in the church. Paul lists some of them in our verses today. Apostles, prophets, teachers, workers of miracles, those with gifts for administration or healing. Great roles because of the wonderful privilege they had, to use their positions to help further the gospel.

But all of them, without the greatest gift, love, they were worthless. Do you know why?

Listen to what Paul says, "If I speak in tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal." Even if a person could speak in the language of the angels, pretty impressive, but there was no love in their words, that gift would be nothing more than just an incessant and annoying clang of a cymbal or a gong, just noise.

Paul says, "If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. Even if someone had unlimited knowledge, but doesn't exercise that gift in love, it's nothing.

Paul says, "If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing." Even if you became a champion for Christianity, going as far as to become a martyr by being burned at the stake, the supreme sacrifice, but it wasn't motivated by love, that sacrifice would accomplish nothing.

Can you see where Paul's thought is going? I mean, it would be the same as this, no matter how many times I said I love you, but that was all I did, with nothing to back it up, is that really love?

Is love really just the feeling? Is love really just the words? Those of you who've attended our Bible Class over the past couple of weeks know the answer to that. I'm guessing most of you probably know that answer. Of course not.

Love is never just a feeling, something that can be as trivial as what many today try to make it out to be. Like when people say, "I'm just not in love with you anymore," or "I've fallen out of love with you."

See how Paul describes love. To summarize, it's patient, kind, not envious, not boastful, not proud, not rude, not self-seeking, not easily angered, no hanging on to other's sins against you. It delights in good, not evil, rejoices in truth, it protects, trusts, hopes, perseveres. Love is not just a feeling, is it? It's always an action.

And it's here in this wonderful list of what characterizes love, the greatest spiritual gift, that you and I see our sins. We probably wouldn't have to do anything other than just read these verses to see how we aren't always using that spiritual gift, love.

Love is patient...it's not easily angered...but when my kids are fooling around when they should be working or getting ready to go, I just lose it and get frustrated and yell at them...or when someone criticizes me or says something I don't agree with, oh, I'm pretty quick to go on the defensive.

Love is kind...it is not rude...when I want to be. They have to be nice to me first, otherwise I find it perfectly ok to be a jerk back to them.

Love does not envy...it is not self-seeking...but that doesn't quite work that way for me. It's always about me, what in this for me, what do I get if I do this for you, otherwise I'm not going to act at all.

Love always protects...but when I see a fellow brother or sister in Christ being torn down or when I hear others saying mean things, false rumors about them, I don't stand up for them.

Love always trust...but I have such a hard time doing that. I always try to see the worst in everyone, and I don't always take their words and actions in the kindest possible way.

Love always perseveres...but when the going gets tough, when Satan and his goons attack, I give up. I don't fight against sin, but just lay down my arms and let them win.

Love never fails. But I do. Love never delights in evil, but rejoices in the truth, in following God's commands. But I don't. Sinning is often fun, and then when "Dad," God, tells me what I'm doing is

wrong, I throw a fit and refuse to obey him because it's often not fun; it's often not a delight to do what's right.

The greatest gift, love, and we don't always have it. And if we don't have love, all of our other spiritual gifts would be worthless and useless. And since we don't always show love, we definitely don't deserve to be shown love by God.

But love never fails. More specifically, God's love never fails. You know why? Because simply, God is love. Love permeates everything God is, everything God does. And that cup of love overflows into our lives.

Drink it in! The greatest display of God's love, you know what it is.

In his love, God promised a virgin that she, a sinner, would give birth to a baby boy. His name would be Jesus because the name literally means "he saves." That's exactly what that baby, the Son of God, came to do.

In his love, God the Son, Jesus, lived a life here on earth where he dealt with the same temptations to sin that every one of us do, but he was different. He was living for us, so he didn't give in. Jesus was perfect.

In his love, God the Son, Jesus, gave us the ultimate gift of grace, which is undeserved love, but Jesus revealed that gift to us, made it ours, through his death, where every drop of blood he shed, every tear he cried, every nail pounded into his flesh, every agonizing word he exhaled was for you. By his death, Jesus' love covered over all our sins and forgave them for good.

And then, in his love, God raised Jesus back to life. An overwhelming display of majesty as Jesus rose from the dead, giving us the confidence and the assurance his love is ours forever. His forgiveness is ours forever.

Take a moment, and drink that all in.

All that love, and you know what, it's ours. God's love is patient with us, not punishing us for our sins, but punishing Jesus instead. God's love is kind, saving us when there was nothing deserving of that in any of us. God's love is not self-seeking. He did what had to be done to save us, even though it meant sacrificing his own and only Son. God's love keeps no record of sins. Self-explanatory. And above all, God's love never fails.

And it's that same love God has given each of us, the greatest spiritual gift. You know, there's a reason why this section is so often used in weddings. If I want to have a Christ-like love in my marriage, this is what it looks like.

In the body of Christ, in the marriage between Christ and his church, Jesus, he's got his role down pat. Have you seen the how the Bridegroom has revealed his love for you? Through gifts of forgiveness, life,

health, family, forgiveness, food, clothes, a house to live in, forgiveness, a job, even toys to enjoy, forgiveness.

Well, it's not good enough in a marriage to just say I love you, is it. How much better to show that love, by what you do for your spouse. Taking out the trash without even being asked, that's love. A long day of work, but you go home and slave over the oven to make dinner for your loved one, that's love. Doing the laundry, fixing the house, buying flowers, saying I love you, that's love.

And in the body of Christ, God's love affects how our love acts, how we act as believers, doesn't it? The Bible says, "We love because God first loved us." How true is that? We've seen God's amazing love, and that's our motivation to love.

For example, when I use whatever gift I have, I don't use it because I'm forced to or because I'm afraid of what God will do if I don't or because I'm looking to be greedy and selfish and get as much out of it as I possibly can.

No, we strive to have a love like what Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 13, for this reason, and this reason alone: God loves me. God saved me. God forgives me. Now I live for him. Now Jesus reveals himself through my love for others....for everyone.

I found this neat quote online this past week, "If you can tell someone how much you love them,.....Don't.....let your actions speak a thousand words." I find it interesting that if you look through Scripture, the amount of times you will find God actually saying "I love you"? But how many more times do you see the love of God in action? In the Bible? In your whole life?

"God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son..." "This is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be an atoning sacrifice." "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God." "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us."

How awesome! Just a small sampling of God's gift of love to us. And in his love, God has given us the gift to love, to reveal Jesus and his love by how we act. That's the greatest gift there is. That's the gift to want. And by God's grace, it's ours. And by God's grace, we will always use that gift of love. Amen.

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. Amen.