

**The Character of Love**  
Series: The Greatest of These...  
1 Corinthians 13:4-8a  
May 6, 2018

Welcome again to worship. Now, last week, we started a message series about love, but after last week, I think we need to talk about something else: repentance. Some of you had way too much fun smashing a pie in my face, including my wife. Maybe I need to preach 101 repentance commands.

But on the other hand, the Bible also has a lot to say about love. In fact, from beginning to end that is its theme: God's love for each of us, and our love for Him, which results in our loving one another.

Some children were asked what love is. Their answers were interesting. Let me just mention a few of them.

- One said, "Love is when your puppy licks your face even after you've left him alone all day."
- Another said, "Love is when my mommy makes a cup of coffee for my daddy and takes a little sip before she gives it to him to make sure it tastes okay."
- One boy said, "When someone loves you, the way they say your name is different. You just know that your name is safe in their mouth."
- Another thoughtfully responded, "You really shouldn't say, 'I love you' unless you mean it. But if you mean it you should say it a lot, because people forget."
- And finally, 7 year old Bobby said, "Love is what's in the room with you at Christmas if you stop opening presents and listen."<sup>1</sup>

The Bible clearly teaches that the most important virtue we exhibit as Christians is our love for one another. So the Bible has a lot to say about the subject of love.

But so does the world. The problem is that the world doesn't say the same thing that the Bible says. And because we hear the world say so much about love, we tend to get the two mixed up.

For a few weeks, we are studying love as described in the Bible's Love Chapter. I invite you to turn to page 7 in your bulletin as I read from 1 Corinthians 13:4-8:

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-8

As I mentioned last week, there are three words in the Greek language which in our language are translated love. There is the word *eros*. That is the word for passion, the word used for lust. This word does not occur in the New Testament at all.

Then there is the word *phileo*, which means "affection." We find that root in our words Philadelphia and philanthropist. It means a love of human kind, a love of a sister or a brother. It means human love at its highest.

The third word is *agape* and it is the highest word for love in the New Testament. It means "divine love." It is more than love in the emotion; it is love in the will. It is love that chooses its object. It is a definition of God, for God is love.<sup>2</sup>

And that's the word that is used in this passage: *agape* kind of love. And I see 5 characters of love, Christian love, in this passage.

**First of all, Christian love is always rooted and grounded in God.**

---

<sup>1</sup> Robert Eggars on SermonCentral.com

<sup>2</sup> Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

The world tends to look at love as strictly a relationship between human beings, and we have been taught by the world that if we just love each other enough, we can create for ourselves an utopia on earth.

We sing songs about it. “What the world needs now is love, sweet love.” These are noble words, words that we need to hear. But as long as love is seen as strictly a product of human effort, without involving God, it will never succeed in making our world a better place.

We have tried that as long as human beings have been around, and we still steal, rape, and kill each other. This world that ignores God is not becoming a better place. It is becoming a terrible place.

John says in 1 John 4:7,

*Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God.*<sup>3</sup>

Love originates with God. And it is not until we have felt and understood God’s love, and respond to it, that we really begin to learn how to show love to one another.

I am convinced that there are many marriages that would not survive if it weren’t for a mutual faith in God.

Myra and I have been married for nearly 13 years now – short time for some of you, and a long time for some other marriages. We have had some rough times – 3 sons to raise, very busy schedules, sickness, surgeries, financial pressures, living in the bubble of clergy life – all those things. And sometimes we might wonder how our marriage has survived. But I’m convinced that it was because our love is deeply rooted in the love that God has for us, and that He has demonstrated to us through Jesus.

So the first essential of Christian love is to recognize that God’s love is the source of all love, and that our love for one another must be deeply rooted in our mutual love for God.

**The second attribute is this: Christian love grows deeper with the passage of time.**

Did you notice what Paul said? He said, “Love is patient.”<sup>4</sup> Love is not in a hurry, and years from now, the love that is rooted in God’s love will be greater and more mature than it is even now.

The world looks at love and says that love diminishes with time because it sees love in an entirely different way. It thinks love is something that just happens to us. It is something that you fall into and you fall out of, like falling off a bicycle. You didn’t intend it, but it just happened. It was out of your control. At least, that is what the world tells us.

Elvis Presley sang, “I can’t help falling in love with you.” And The Doors sang a song with this line in it. “Hello, I love you. Would you tell me your name?” Rogers and Hammerstein wrote, “Some enchanted evening you may see a stranger.” Then wham, bang, you are suddenly in love. Your eyes meet, and you are in love.

That’s the way the world looks at love. It is something that just happens, an infatuation, if you will. And as long as it is infatuation, it fades with time. But the Bible says that real love matures and grows deeper with the passage of time.

I remember the first time I was in the hospital room with a parishioner as she passed from this life into eternity. I stood with her husband while we watched helplessly as his wife breathed her last breath. I’ll never forget him leaning over her bed and

---

<sup>3</sup> 1 John 4:7a (NIV)

<sup>4</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:4

whispering, "Honey, I love you." Through decades of marriage, their love had grown ever deeper and become more mature.

Love grows with the passage of time. That is an important characteristic of love. As time goes by, real love gets wider and deeper and more meaningful as we share the experiences of life with one another.

**A third attribute of love is that Christian love has strength of character.**

Real love in the Bible exhibits strength of character. But that is not necessarily true today.

Did you hear about the man whose fiancé broke their engagement and his heart? However, she later sent him a very apologetic letter and begged for their reconciliation. It read:

"Dearest Jimmy, No words could ever express the unhappiness I've felt since breaking our engagement. Please say you'll take me back. No one could ever take your place in my heart, so please forgive me. I love you, I love you, I love you! Yours forever, Marie. PS: Congratulations on winning the lottery!"<sup>5</sup>

You know, the world also sees love as something syrupy sweet. It says that parents who love their children never discipline them. Just love them, and hopefully, they'll love you back and everything will just be wonderful.

It says that preachers should only preach a message of love, and never about sin and judgment. Just preach about love and everybody will love each other a whole lot more.

But true love has strength of character. Parents who really love their children discipline them. They develop guidelines and enforce them. And those who preach the gospel must hate sin and evil in the world. They must present the gospel so that people recognize that they are lost and dying without Jesus Christ.

Love sees both sides. Love is realistic, and it deals promptly and effectively with those things that are wrong in life.

**Fourth, Christian love is self-denying.**

It willingly gives of itself for those it loves.

Jesus had it all. He had all the riches, glory and prestige of heaven. But He gave all that up to become one of us, even to suffer death on the cross for us.

The world looks at love and says, "Love is getting whatever you can get out of relationships. Then when you are tired of them, just cast them aside."

But Christian loves means that you love others so much that you behave the same way Jesus behaved. You give of yourself for the sake of the ones you love. How are you doing in that department?

For example, you're going to take a shower and you find that there are only two clean towels left. One of them is so thin you can almost see through it, and the other one is a nice fluffy one. You know that your spouse is going to take a shower right after you do. Which towel do you use? The fluffy one, or the thin one?

Are we self-denying? Or are we always trying to get what we want? Are we self-sacrificing, or are we always trying to promote ourselves to the detriment of others?

**Finally, Christian love always demonstrates itself.**

A few minutes ago I read a part of the Apostle Paul's description of love from the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of 1 Corinthians, which is often called the "Love Chapter" of the Bible.

---

<sup>5</sup> From "Radical Love" by Todd Leupold - SermonCentral.com

Following Paul's lead, someone has written a "Mother's Version of Love."

"If I live in a house of spotless beauty with everything in its place, but have not love, I am a housekeeper - not a homemaker.

"If I have time for waxing, polishing, and decorating, but have not love, my children learn cleanliness - not godliness.

"Love smiles at the tiny fingerprints on a newly cleaned window.

"Love wipes away the tears before it wipes up the spilled milk.

"Love picks up the child before it picks up the scattered toys.

"Love is present through the trials.

"Love reprimands, reproves, and is responsive.

"Love is the key that opens a child's heart to God.

"Before I became a mother, I took glory in the perfection of my house. Now I glory in God's perfection of my child.

"As a mother, there is much I must teach my child, but the greatest lesson of all is love."<sup>6</sup>

Christian love is love that willingly sacrifices itself. Love touches. Love hugs. Love demonstrates itself in a thousand different ways. It is rooted and grounded in the love of God. It grows as the years of life pass by. It exhibits strength of character – stands for what is right, and opposes what is wrong. It is a love that is always on display.

That's exactly what Jesus did on the cross. He loved you and me so much that He died on the cross for our sake. Even before we loved Him, He loved us and gave His life willingly. And as we share today in communion, the bread and the juice reminded us of that sacrifice of love.

---

<sup>6</sup> Bobby Scobey on SermonCentral.com