

***IT ALL COMES DOWN TO LOVE: A New Concept***  
**1 Corinthians 12:31b-13:13**

**INTRO:** Can you finish these:

*But when I kissed a cop down on Thirty-Fourth and Vine  
 He broke my little bottle of \_\_\_\_\_*

Answer: *Love Potion Number 9*

How about this romantic line?

*Hello, I love you, \_\_\_\_\_?*

Answer: . . . *won't you tell me your name?*

And if it weren't true about the two previous ones, this doo-wop number will date you for sure:

*I wonder who. . .*

*Who wrote the \_\_\_\_\_?*

Answer: *Book of Love?*

You can tell by the songs I'm choosing that I don't know any modern songs, and maybe it's because they don't know how to compose poetry anymore, and maybe I'm betraying my close-minded bias, but how about this one?

*But darling, most of all*

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Answer: *I love how you love me*

And one more . . .

*There's nothing you can know that isn't known*

*Nothing you can see that isn't shown*

*There's nowhere you can be that isn't where you're meant to be*

*It's easy*

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Answer: *All you need is love*

Now, I'm an incurable romantic. I love a good love song or a romantic sonnet. I have a computer file entitled "Romantic" that consists song lyrics, poems and sonnets that have touched my heart. Sometimes I'll send those words to Kathy in a card, email, or text. Some people would call the songs from our little quiz "Love Songs" but the only one that would really come close would be the Paris Sisters' *I Love How You Love Me*. And with the Beatles' anthem *All You Need Is Love*, when you really look at the lyrics, you realize they don't say anything of substance at all. They do say, all you need is love, but what kind of love was John Lennon and Paul McCartney referring to when they wrote it in 1967? By the way, that year, 1967 was the year of what was known for THE SUMMER OF LOVE when thousands of young people went to San Francisco and people like Scott McKenzie smoked something and wrote *Are you going to San Francisco?* And for those who were going to there they should *wear some flowers in their hair*. Because, *Summertime will be a love-in there*.

Well, what in the word was a "love-in"? Officially, it was "a peaceful public gathering focused on meditation, love, music, sex and/or use of psychedelic drugs." The Viet Nam War was reaching a crescendo and young men were dying for a confusing cause and young people were reacting and experimenting and ending up more confused than they were before. Those kids are now senior citizens and, in many ways, they are the reason we live in puzzled and confused society some 50+ years later.

Love has been maligned even more since then. But a misperception of what love isn't, is not something William Shakespeare or Jim Morrison or John Lennon or Billy Idol or John Legend have invented – it has been misconstrued for all of history and that is why Paul needed to set us straight with his teaching to the church in Corinth. They needed a refresher course in the subject of love for sure, but so do we. The truthful answer to the Monotone's question is that God wrote the book of Love and Paul shows us here in our text for today, Listen,

**(Read 1 Corinthians 12:31b -13:13)**

In many ways this was a new concept for the Corinthians. FB Meyer makes this observation on 1 Corinthians 13, "*With what wonder his amanuensis (the person to whom he was dictating) must have looked up as the apostle broke into this exquisite sonnet on love?*"

German Theologian wrote, Adolph Harnack wrote, “*This chapter on love is the greatest, strongest, deepest thing Paul ever wrote.*”

Kenneth Foreman says this, “*Anyone who attempts to comment on this chapter of the Bible, not to mention others, comes away feeling that he is only left the mark of soiled and clumsy hands on a thing of beauty and holiness. It is a chapter that does not call for explanation so much as illustration, the kind of illustration that can be supplied only by the reader. What is true of the Bible as a whole is strongly true here: these high thoughts are meant to be lived.*”

I agree and disagree with Dr. Foreman. I know what he means when he says anything I can say about this passage has the possibility of muddying the water of such a clear stream of holy truth. But on the other hand, rather than feeling inadequate in teaching this, instead I come away feeling elated at such cleansing, encouraging, and hopeful words. This chapter, if rightly applied will enable any Christ Follower to live in victory. So, let’s dig in and cover the opening verses and then we will this, the Love Chapter, next week on Valentine’s Day.

Last week we talked about being gifted and growing from chapter 12. There Paul talked about a number of gifts that Christ Followers have been given by the Holy Spirit, but as he ended that discussion, he teased us on with *Now eagerly desire the greater gifts*. 1 Corinthians 12:31a, which shows that there is something more Christ Followers must have. And this week we began with *And yet I will show you the most excellent way*. 1 Corinthians 12:31b, showing that no matter what gift or gifts we possess here is the gift that holds them all altogether. That gift is love. It all comes down to love which is the necessary ingredient, and if it is missing, any gift’s effectiveness drops off precipitously. Putting it bluntly . . .

#### **A spiritual gift without love is essentially useless**

- Jesus came with a concept of love that was so foreign to the world that a new word for it needed to be coined. It was love so sacrificial and other-centered, that it caused him to die for the salvation of a lost world. Foreman writes, “*The Greek world was not unlike our Hollywoodised world; the word love had been dragged through a lot of mud. The usual word for love in the Greek speaking world was a word that invariably suggested physical sexual desire and not much else. That word survives in our English word erotic. There was a second word several shades brighter, but still a little pale, suggesting a kind of placid friendship. What was needed was a word that would express the Christian experience of the love of God himself, the love that is out poured even on the loveless and the unlovable, the love that sent God's son to suffer and die with, and for, us. A word was needed that would be used also to refer to the attitudes of Christians to one another - some word that would reflect the total unself-seeking quality of God's love and go far beyond the always partly, and sometimes wholly selfish desire that often goes by the name of love.*” (End Quote)
- That word is the Greek word agape, and it is so unique that there is no English word that truly describes it. God’s love and the love Christ Followers are to have for one another, and the love that no Christian marriage should be without, is indescribable in many ways. That makes it impossible to narrow it down to just one word. Agape is love for the undeserving. It is a love that always gives. Paul describes it in Romans with *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us*. Romans 5:8. It is something you do even more than you feel. It is the love God has for us, and it is what people, you and me, are to have.
- Paul is describing a love that is strong, sustained, and other-centered when it comes to the relationship with God and others, and he was sharing it with a people who struggled with selfishness to whom an other-centered love was a new concept.
- As I said earlier, nothing we do, even the exercise of our God-given gifts, is as effective or helpful if it is not administered with agape love. The gift of tongues was a very prevalent gift in Corinth even in pagan religions. It was a gift that was utilized in the Church from its very inception on the day of Pentecost. It was very obvious when a person had the gift of tongues and even though it was a very important gift and sought after – it was not even close to the greatest gift. So, Paul needed to give some direction concerning it and we will look at that when we look at Chapter 14. Here he points out that even if we have the golden

tongue of angels but no love to activate the message, we are just a bunch of noise. Everything we do needs the catalyst of love.

- Verse 2 tells us that that active ingredient of love is necessary even for the person with the gift of preaching or prophecy. Barclay points out that there are two kinds of preachers. “*There is the preacher whose one aim is to save the souls of his people and who woos them with the accents of love.*” On the other hand, he points out “*there is the preacher who dangles his hearers over the flames of hell and gives the impression that he would rejoice in their damnation as much as in their salvation. The preaching which is all threat and no love may terrify but it will not save.*” I think both you and I have experienced both types of preachers. There is the preacher who loves on us with his or her words and the other who preaches with a seemingly angry fervor that does more harm than good. Love is the attractant that settles the agape message of a God who so loved the world into a lost soul.
- Verse 2 also talks about how we can have the gift of intellectual or head knowledge. But is that knowledge encounters love that will make a path to the heart, all the knowledge in the world will not suffice. I had a friend in college who was a sweet and kind person. As he sought to grow deeper in God, his reading became deeper and deeper and it seemed took him further and further away from God. In the end his mind was full of deep philosophical wisdom and his heart was hard. Love had been supplanted by worldly thought. In Barclay’s words, “Only a knowledge whose cold detachment has been kindled by the fire of love can really save men.”
- In verse 3 Paul points out that giving that is devoid of love is empty. You can give everything and it will mean little or nothing. Not only that, but for the receiver, there is nothing more deflating than receiving something without love attached. Giving with love prevents any chance of contempt from the giver and any signals of the same for the receiver.
- We need love, it’s the necessary ingredient and we’ll talk about that next week – on Valentine’s Day. Until then, how about you read through 1 Corinthians 13 at least once between now and next Sunday morning. It all comes down to love – soak it up and pass it on. Amen.