



## Gifted for Love (Part 3) – Love from God through Us

Trevor Joy – July 8, 2018

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Good morning. My name is Trevor Joy. I'm one of the pastors and elders here. I'm glad to dive into God's Word with you. I'm excited to be here. If you are just joining us, we're in our third week in a summer series we're doing on chapters 12-14 in Paul's letter to the church in Corinth. We'll do a little bit of review to catch you up in a moment. This week we're going to be in chapter 13. The next three weeks, Matt will be back, diving into chapter 14, taking a deep dive there, but this week we're in chapter 13. Let's begin our time by diving in and reading chapter 13 together. It's not too long. First Corinthians 13, starting in verse 1.

**"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." Let's pray.**

Father, I know in a room this size, this many stories and men and women, just even the mere mention of the word *love* brings forth a host of emotions, some of those exciting, some of those not. It brings forth a host of memories, attachments to this word, definitions of this word, memories to this word. Some of those are exciting and positive and some of those are not.

Father, what I'd ask you would do this morning is that your Spirit might tether us to your Word in a way that we might see, believe, understand, live, and love in the way you intended us to, and whatever stands in the way, whether it be woundedness or misunderstanding, whether it be a marred view or a wrong view, you would help us by your Spirit's power this morning to see your Word rightly and by your Spirit's power walk it out rightly. We ask that in Christ's name and for his sake, amen.

Let's take a quick review. The last two weeks we've been in chapter 12. The first week we were in the first half of chapter 12 where Paul is making his main point, especially in verses 4-7. The second week, last week, we covered the second half of chapter 12, where Paul is using the body language, describing the church as a body, and he's using that by way of application of the main point.

What we talked about mainly last week, kind of the driving theme of last week to carry us into this week, was that the mission of God is an "every member" mission and how the most important contribution anyone in this room could make is to pursue answering the question...*Who has God created you to be and what has he created you to do?*

If our view of being a church continues to be just the hour and a half we spend together here once a week or if our view of disciple-making continues to be limited to only what men and women do on this stage, then everyone else here gets a pass on giving their life away. When we carry such a narrow view of what it means to be the body of Christ and don't see ourselves as needed and necessary, we rob ourselves and the body of Christ from true flourishing.

There's a rich diversity of gifting and passions in this body waiting to be unleashed. That's what we talked about last week. Who has God created you to be and what has he created you to do? You are needed and necessary. This will not move forward without you. This week, we're in 1 Corinthians 13, and we have the opportunity to walk through one of the most preached and quoted chapters in the New Testament, everything from weddings to coffee mugs. We're used to smashing some coffee mugs. We might do that a little bit this morning.

Chapter 13 was never intended to be isolated out of its context of sitting right here between chapters 12 and 14. In chapter 12, Paul is exhorting the church of how crucial it is for everyone to faithfully exercise their gifts for the good of the body and for the advancement of the kingdom. The next three weeks, as we dive into chapter 14, Paul is going to be talking about how this plays out in the life of the church, but right here in the middle is the most crucial part of understanding this entire conversation in these three chapters.

If you don't understand chapter 13, you can't do what we talked about in chapter 12 faithfully, and you'll miss the point of chapter 14 entirely. Where we ended last week... There's an analogy I can use to describe it. In chapter 12, all of the instruments of God's people are being pulled onto the same sheet of music, every instrument having a different contribution, a different sound, but when we're all brought onto the same sheet of music, when we're all doing and being what God created us to be and do, the music the church makes is what the primary theme of this chapter is. That music is love.

As I talked about a minute ago, surely in a room this size *love* brings to mind a myriad of definitions, a myriad of memories, and a myriad of backgrounds and attachments. To put us all on the same plane, I have three disclaimers. If we all can agree on this, then we can move forward. The first disclaimer is this. Paul ends chapter 12... He says, "Pursue the higher gifts," and then he says, "**And I will show you a still more excellent way.**"

What he's pointing to here, this "more excellent way," is the point of chapter 13. The "more excellent way" is the way of love. He's saying the gifts are important aspects of the Christian life and of the body's flourishing, but the gifts aren't the point. The point is love. Love is the field on which all of God's people and their gifts flourish. Colossians 3:12-14 says:

**"Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony."**

Jonathan Edwards said, "All that virtue which is saving, and distinguishing of true Christians from others, is summed up in Christian...love." Love is the garden where all of God's people and their gifts flourish.

Second disclaimer: we are always motivated by love. Always, without exception. Everything we do every day is ultimately driven by what we love. The reason Jesus talks about money more than anything else is he is saying that how somebody spends their money is the surest way to discover what they actually love.

I'd add how we spend our money and our time says, for good and for bad, what motivates us. It shows us what we actually love. Our issue (and we all come to this point) is not that we would start being motivated to live our lives according to what we love (we already do that) but that we'd begin to actually love according to what God loves and how God loves.

Thirdly, we have to understand a foundational aspect about love as the Bible talks about it before we can dive into the finding it together. This is a challenge for us, because the English language is actually really impoverished when it comes to the word *love*. We have one, maybe two words max that really get to the meaning of love. The Greek language, for example, has four really deep, rich words for love.

What we have to recognize is that love is first and foremost about self-denial. The opposite of love is not hate; it's pride. Sin is fundamentally an orientation to self. To truly know, experience, and walk out biblical love doesn't require happiness or affinity; it requires selflessness. To truly love you have to die to yourself. That's the foundational framework for understanding Christian love.

Philippians 2:1-5 says:

**"So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus..."**

Christian love is a selfless love. So, as we dive into our chapter, it really breaks down into three clean sections. The first I've entitled *love through you*, the second is *a love from God*, and the third is *a love into heaven*. Let's start in the first three verses, loving through you. It says in verse 1:

**"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."**

Church, this, to me, is one of the most frightening passages in all the Bible. Paul is saying, in essence, we can do all God has gifted us to do... I can attain the highest level of Christian maturity. I can perform the most selfless acts. I can make the ultimate sacrifices a mortal man can make for the good of God and others, but without love it's nothing. It's nothing.

The frightening question we have to ask in light of this passage is, "How is it possible that I might be who God created me to be and use his gift he has created me to use for his glory and it be nothing more than what it says here: a detestable sound?" The answer to that question is the point of this entire chapter. It's a detestable sound when what drives us is not love.

Our biggest challenge, I would argue, to understanding love goes back to the disclaimer I shared with you earlier that love ultimately can't be about us. We've developed a tragic version of Christian love. One of the ways we've probably all experienced this... I think most of you, if you spend any time in the life of the church or in a Christian bookstore, have probably seen this. It's the cup analogy.

We often describe Christian love as we're that cup. God fills us with his love, and that love fills up, and when it gets full it pours out over onto others. The primary reason we use this analogy... It's misquoting a psalm, but it's pointing to the importance that we need to live out of God's provision and focus on our walk with God.

I get all that. It's great, but there's actually a huge problem with that understanding of how Christian love works. If I view myself as a cup God needs to keep filling with his love and only when it gets full and runs over will people actually get the dregs of what falls over, then I've missed the purpose entirely, because I've made the point about love me. The cup mentality holds that the highest and primary purpose of God's love is you.

That doesn't line up with how Paul is describing love here. The primary way we understand, experience, and live in God's love is when we live out of God's love. Another way of saying that is

that the primary way we understand the love of God is not by living in it but it living through you. We alluded to this verse last week, and I said I was going to come back to it, so I will. Second Corinthians 5:17-20:

**"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God..."** Focus on this. **"...who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore [in light of all this], we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us."**

Nabeel Qureshi wrote a book called *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus*. It's really just a biographical story of a Muslim coming to faith. He grew up as a Muslim in a Muslim home. If you haven't read the book, I really recommend it. He talks in the book about one of the biggest challenges or hurdles to him considering following Christ. In the Muslim faith and in his family's culture, for him to depart the Muslim faith would mean to literally be exiled from his family.

He knew "To follow Christ means I lose them. To love Jesus means I die to them." He talks about it in his book. After he has found Christ or rather Christ has found him and he starts following Christ, in his prayer life he starts mourning, and he's literally saying out loud, "God, I wish you would have just killed me when you saved me. I wish you would have just let me die and taken me home then, because to be alive and watch the agony my family, who doesn't understand, is walking through as they grieve the loss of their child, because to them I am dead, I'm gone..."

He said, "To live and watch the pain and agony of my family is unbearable. I wish you would have just killed me when you saved me and taken me home and spared me and them from this pain and division." Then he has this moment, as he's praying and reading the Scriptures, where the Lord begins to open his eyes. This is a quote from what he said:

"While I was wallowing in self-pity, focused on myself, there was a whole world with literally billions of people who had no idea who God is, how amazing he is, and the wonders he has done for us. They are the ones who are really suffering. They don't know his hope, his peace, and his love that transcends all understanding. They don't know the message of the gospel. After loving us with the most humble life and the most horrific death, Jesus told us, 'As I have loved you, go and love one

another.' How could I consider myself a follower of Jesus if I was not willing to live as he lived? To died as he died? To love the unloved and give hope to the hopeless?"

He says, in essence, "When I was praying and reflecting on the pain I'd caused, I realized my problem was I was viewing it as it being about myself, and I realized God's love was not about me. When I did that, the pain in these people began to have a different purpose." We are not intended to be cups for God's love but rather conduits for God's love.

It's our greatest contradiction to claim to be a Christian but not pursue a life characterized by this love. Christian love is not about this private reservoir created for you by God but rather a river of life that now flows through you from God. This love from God is...what? He talks about this in this passage. Before we get to define that, there's another hindrance in our way. Self-centeredness is not our only hurdle to understanding God's love.

Another huge hindrance for many of us to understanding and extending God's love is that many relationships that were intended to image God's love were imperfect or became vehicles for hurt and shame instead. Much of my and, I would argue, *our* misconceptions of God's love come through our negative experience who were supposed to be examples of God's love to us.

For example, if you had a mother or father or spouse who was abusive or neglectful, then probably somewhere in the framework of your heart there are some hurdles to overcome to fully understand what love is, because all you've known is hurt in love's clothing. In January I preached a message on missions, and one of the points I made was if you don't believe God loves you then you probably don't feel very useful for his purposes.

I'll restate that to say it a little bit differently. If what was supposed to be a relationship to image God's love to you brought you hurt or shame, then you probably don't feel very equipped to extend that love to others. Paul in these few lines is recapturing and redeeming love as we know it, this love from God. What does he say here?

**"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."**

I sat here to write out a paragraph expounding on the love of God in these few verses in hopes of helping us recapture what for many of us is a marred view of God's love but for most of us is probably at least a misunderstanding of God's love. A while ago, my wife shared a song with me that has been wrecking my world. The writer of this song writes it way better than I could.

A powerful tool for learning is participation, so we're going to do something a little bit different. In a minute we're going to sing this song together. You don't have to stand. We're just going to sit and sing it together. This is why. I want to invite you into participating. As we gather, the normal part of our liturgy, our service, is to gather and sing, preach, sing. What's happening in that exchange is I'm standing up here talking and preaching to you; you're sitting and receiving.

As we sing, that's the part of our service where we're not just sitting receiving; we're responding. We're preaching to ourselves and to one another. So I want us to take this opportunity to sing this song together, to participate, to pull ourselves into the story of God's love as we sing and rehearse this together.

There are a couple of things I want to say about this song and why I chose it. The beginning of the song describes God's love as unreserved and unrestrained, and it says, "Your love is wild, your love is wild for me." I can't speak to the intent of the author here, but what we mean when we sing this is that God's love is not bound by any human element. Spurgeon called him the "hound of heaven." Nothing will keep him from those he intends to save.

God is ever-present and all-knowing. The Bible says he searches our hearts, knows our minds, thoughts, and motivations. Think about that for a moment. The God of the universe knows every thought that enters your mind, and he loves you anyway. Nothing could hold God back from doing what he intended to do, ultimately defeating sin and death for you. We see this kind of language in the bridge of the song toward the end.

Your love is not passive  
It's never disengaged  
It's always present  
It hangs on every word we say

We have a Father who is attentive to us, the Father who knows every hair on your head, hears every word you say. He doesn't hang on every word you say out of some need for you; he hangs on every word you say out of his love for you.

So let's sing about the love of God, and may the Spirit of God bring healing to hearts wounded by imperfect love or perhaps belief to those who don't know that love. Let's engage in this in such a way that we might participate at a deeper level and preach God's love to ourselves and to one another. Let's sing.

[Song]

It's a love that's from God. Lastly, he ends with this idea of love goes into heaven. We see this in verses 8-13. **"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."**

He's saying love is not a spiritual gift; it's an entire way of life. Gifts are significant, but love is supreme. Gifts are temporary; love is eternal. This says prophecies, tongues, and knowledge will all end. What we thought we knew will then fold completely. What we thought we could see will come into full picture, but love will endure. I love how the hymn says it this way:

Faith will vanish into sight  
Hope will be emptied in delight  
Love in heaven will shine more bright

When faith as we know it gives way to vision and hope is swallowed up in realization, love remains unchanged, even when it attains perfection. We talked earlier about how in 1 Corinthians 12 it's pulling all of God's instruments, unique in design and contribution, onto the same sheet of music. Love is the music of heaven we make together here and now as a people.

This is why this chapter is so crucial for us to be and do who God has created us to be and do, for the church to be and do what God has created her to be and do. We have to live in and live out of God's love. John 13:35 says, "**By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.**"

The primary way the world is going to know that we are truly followers of Christ is how we love. Love is the music of heaven that captures the attention of the world. Love is the point. As followers of Christ, it flows from God through us and endures forever. May we be a people who have been captivated by this love and radically live it.

In just a second we're going to finish our time by singing another song together that beautifully pulls all of these pieces together. The song is unfolding the story of God's love and how we, as a people, are to respond. The end of the song says this:

I can see your heart in everything you've done  
Every part designed in a work of art called love  
If you gladly chose surrender, so will I  
I can see your heart eight billion different ways  
Every precious one a child you died to save  
If you gave your life to love them, so will I

Church, let's stand and sing this together as we close.