



“Let’s Rise in the Way of Love
I Corinthians 13:1-13
August 1, 2021

This morning we open a majestic portion of Scripture. This passage is familiar to people in the church and to many people in the world as well.

You have heard this portion of Scripture read at weddings. Perhaps you have seen it printed on Hallmark cards. Maybe you have even heard it on the Hallmark Channel. It is a familiar passage of Scripture. I Corinthians Chapter 13 is often called the Love Chapter or Paul’s Great Hymn of Love, recognizing its lyrical flow. This is in fact a magnificent portion of Scripture.

One author wrote commentating on this chapter that if in fact the Apostle Paul was using a scribe to write the letter of I Corinthians Chapter 13. Having penned these words at the dictation of the Apostle Paul, that scribe may have very well laid down his quill, and shook his head at the beauty and the power of what just flowed forth from the Spirit-filled Apostle.

Even people who don’t follow Jesus Christ recognize this as one of the most precious portions of written literature ever recorded. However, brothers and sisters, as we gather together under the authority of this passage of Scripture, let us take to heart that this is not simply written for our admiration, but it is written for our transformation.

It is not simply written that we might have a sense of pleasantry or delight, even as we very well in the Spirit will savor this, but this was written that we may be exposed as those who have so much to learn about what love really is.

It is written so that we will see our need for the grace of the Living God to forgive us where we fall short and fail and to fill us with the power of His Spirit that we might truly walk in the love of the Lord Jesus Christ, who has purchased us and who owns this church.

This is a corrective and instructive and admonishing awesome, wonderful portion of Scripture, and as we prepare to dig in I have felt the need to also clarify that I do not qualify to teach this. As I have been reading this and feeling the sting of conviction all week long, what is clear to me is that I am no authority on the practice of love.

With a brother pastor here in the area who always signs off his emails with *learning to love*, I just want to let you know that I am learning to love. I hope that we will all have that sense of the Holy Spirit moving in us, graciously showing us where we fall short and empowering us to rise up in the character of the Messiah, based on the power that He and He alone can give us to truly be people who love.

Let's begin by reading this chapter, receiving it as God's Word. After we read it, we will remind ourselves of the very relevant context which it was written to address. Then we will dig through it and see it unfold section by section with its meaning and application for our lives.

Follow along with your eyes as I read. I Corinthians Chapter 13. I am actually going to start with the last verse of Chapter 12. This is the Word of the Lord

³¹But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

¹If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ²And 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. ³If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

⁴Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

⁸Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. ¹¹When 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. ¹²For 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.

¹³So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Indeed, maybe you can see how if Paul was using a scribe, that scribe may very well have needed a moment to let that soak in. That is an amazing portion of Scripture.

What we have written here is profound. It flows like a river. It is a poetic gem. What is interesting is that it is distinct from the rest of the flow of the letter. If you read I Corinthians from beginning to the end, you can have the sense that Paul's tone changed a bit in this chapter of Scripture.

The Corinthians have been referred to as Paul's problem children. These were people who knew the Lord and who believed the Gospel and who had the Holy Spirit, but, boy-oh-boy, was the Corinthians church one dysfunctional church family.

Up to this point in this epic letter, Paul had been kind of plodding through problem after problem after problem, addressing the affairs of the church. So early on in the opening chapters of this letter, we see Paul dealing with division in the church. It is almost like there was a political party spirit. Over there you had, I follow Paul or I follow Apollos, I follow this leader, I am in this apostle's camp. There were various groupings of people and it was creating discord and division in the church, and Paul had to address infighting that was taking place.

As we studied about several weeks ago, Paul also had to deal with ongoing sexual immorality in the church, even a gross form of sexual immorality that was being tolerated by the church. We see then that Paul had to address members in the church who were feeling so entitled, probably to portions of property, that they were taking each other to civil court to get their way. Then we see that Paul had to deal with subtle yet destructive forms of marital abuse in the church.

Going forward, Paul also had to deal with the church potlucks, the so-called love feasts, where the rich people were getting to the Lord's Supper early so they could eat the food. They then observed communion before the others got involved. Stunningly, what we find is that some of them were evidently becoming inebriated with communion wine. Mind you, we are all cut from the same fabric. We are capable of this too.

Then Paul came to the issue of spiritual gifts. Even with all of this, the Corinthian church was still a church that belonged to Jesus. It was still a church with the Spirit of God. This was a church that had a wide operation of spiritual gifts taking place in the midst of all these issues.

By spiritual gifts, we mean that each one was given some kind of ability for the common good of the church, but what was given for the good of the others was turning inward as a source of personal promotion and a sense of self-fulfillment. People with these gifts were saying, I need my gift to be operating in the way I see fit.

This was especially focused on the issue of speaking in tongues, the ability to communicate the praises of God in other languages. This became a gift that was in the limelight of the church. There were people in the church service that were speaking over one another, nudging each other out. There was a logjam of crazy confusion.

In the vernacular of our day, this church seems like it was seriously a hot mess! Corinth was crazy town. It is all here, issue after issue after issue all throughout the church.

And then Paul, carried by the Holy Spirit, got to the heart of all of the dysfunction that was taking place. He put his finger on the heart of the problem. It was a lack of love. It was a lack of self-denying, self-sacrificial, Christ-like love that reduces the self to the blessing and to the uplifting of others.

It was a lack of love that was infecting and ailing the Corinthian church. All of the body life was supposed to be totally about Him, Him, Him, Him, Christ, Christ, Christ and about you, you, you, you. However, throughout the church there came this spirit where in so many people it became about me, me, me, me.

In view of all of this, Paul said, Corinthians, Californians, I am going to show you a much, much, much better way. Is that what he said? No, that is not what he said. He said, I am going to show you the most excellent way. The most excellent way! And the most excellent way is the way of Christ-like love.

In this passage we see that we must be sobered by what we read because as it was then, so may it be now. Often it is the case that it is the case now. Times change. Seasons pass. Cities and nations rise and fall, but the human heart remains the same.

Some people in the world say to follow your heart. Don't follow your heart! Jeremiah the prophet diagnosed the problem of the heart—it is desperately sick and even wicked and evil. The human heart fallen in sin is self-absorbed. We don't follow our hearts.

By the Holy Spirit and His grace, we follow Jesus Christ. We pray and ask humbly that the Lord would change our hearts and help those hearts to follow the pattern that is given for us in Christ, who being in very nature God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped and held onto. Instead He humbled Himself and took on the nature of the servant. Down He went. Down He went. Down in human form. Not only found in human form, but became a human servant. Not only a human servant, One who served by providing a sacrificial death of atonement. Not only just dying, but dying on the cross.

That is our pattern and we see how the Lord then lifted Him and we remember the teaching of Scripture of the constant teaching of the blessing of humility. Humble thyself in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up in due time. But it is only by the Lord's grace that we can be humble and that we can love in the way of Christ.

God's Word is living and active and it is used by the power of the Holy Spirit to transform that which is within so that we might manifest qualities that are like Christ in the world among one another. That is why this passage of Scripture was written.

So let's take a look at what is here. Let us remember that the fruit of love is not the fruit of human effort. It is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. It is something supernatural that He works in us. Let's move through this passage of Scripture. This is written to us by God that we might be filled with the fruit of love.

Let's see how this happens as we see the necessity of love, the nature of love, and the permanence of love laid out for us in this passage of Scripture. First, to fill us with the fruit of love, we see how:

1. The necessity of love is asserted (13:1-3)

It is driven home as Paul spoke of five spiritual gifts raised to the highest level of operation, but becoming obnoxious and counterproductive and emptied of gain, if they are not served in love. Verses 1 through 3:

¹If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ²And 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. ³If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

That is so radical. I read this and shake my head. It's crazy. We think wouldn't martyrdom be the ultimate sign of sacrifice and maturity in character in the Lord. This text of Scripture says, No, it is not. Love is. Because martyrdom can happen in a self-promoting way. It is all about laying down life in love, lifting others up in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Without love, tongues, prophecies, knowledge, faith and generosity come to nothing. Paul did not say that a lack of love merely diminishes our impact, he said that it eliminates our impact. Without love we become a nuisance. That is what is here. It is plain for us in Scripture.

I will tell you this: I think the sound of a crashing cymbal or a resounding gong is kind of cool, once. But like the sixth time in—crash, crash, crash, crash, crash, crash—it gets really annoying! Paul was saying, This is how it comes across, even when spiritual gifts are operating in a self-absorbed kind of a way.

So what becomes evident here in this portion of Scripture in I Corinthians Chapters 12 through 14 is that there was distinction between the gifts of the Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit. The gifts of the Spirit have to do with endowments and abilities that God by His grace gives. However, the fruit of the Spirit is character. It is Christlikeness that is formed within us.

It is possible to operate one without growing or having the other. Ministry activity can take place without the love of God. That reality was plain in Corinth and it becomes plain in every generation. It becomes evident. We are living in a day where this generation has seen the rise of a great many skilled pastors.

These pastors are unbelievably talented. They are gifted in their abilities. They can preach and write and rally people and have amazing levels of strategic leadership. They can speak to the issues of the day. Yet, you still find a trail of heartache and heartbreak in their wake. Then when it becomes exposed, you have people flummoxed and dispirited.

They are people that still belong to Jesus. Still loved and cared for by Jesus, but people hurting. That is not only the case with big churches, but that can be in all churches. Big churches, midsize churches, and small churches all have power brokers that like to go around forcing their way and having their own way at the expense of others. We see that at all levels.

So we need to take this to heart. It is interesting because Paul, he wrote all this in the first person. If I, if I, if I. Perhaps intending to lessen the sting of conviction, but if you are anything like me, the conviction and the sting of conviction registers no less.

We are seeing the absolute necessity of love here in this text being pushed. It is being driven home. It is being asserted. As we continue, we may very well be asking with a level of desperation in our lives, what then is love? What is love like? What does it look like?

For starters, many have pointed out that Paul needed to utilize a totally different word that was not in common usage for love in the Greco-Roman world. I read that multiple times this week and I thought that was really, really interesting.

The word agape was not in common use prior to the New Testament like it is now. The concept of agape is about giving. It is all about sacrificial service. The Greek liked to talk about eros, which is romantic love. They liked to talk about partnership and phileo, which is really a good thing. It is the sense of warm affection between people.

They also talked about storge, which is parental love toward children. But agape is all about laying yourself down for the good of other people. But as we look at what is here in I Corinthians Chapter 13, there is more to it. The Spirit is going to be at work doing even more because it is not just that we lay ourselves down, it is that do so with a certain character.

There are qualities to agape love that the Holy Spirit is going to be nurturing among the people and we must pray, Lord, help me not to resist the Holy Spirit but to go with what He is doing and producing these characters of love in us.

So let's read through this again and see how:

2. The nature of love is described (13:4-7)

To fill us with the fruit of love, the nature of love is described for us. Here are these famous words once again. What does it look like when we are laying ourselves down under the influence and power and in the fullness of the Holy Spirit?

⁴Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Here has been my experience all week, even while seeing and observing the beauty of these words, the effect of them has given me a sinking sense not of condemnation because I have the Savior, but definitely of conviction and sobriety.

We have the built-in tendency to think that we are such a loving person. Oh really? We read about love here and we have to assess that in the power of the Holy Spirit. Here in this text, there are sixteen qualities of agape love.

Eight of them are stated in a positive way and eight of them are stated in a negative way. That means as the Spirit is bearing the fruit of love in our lives, there are going to be some things that we do because they are good and they build people up. There are attitudes the Spirit is going to be producing.

Then there are some things we don't do and some attitudes that are crucified in us because they tear down rather than building up. So we have all these qualities of love and what occurred to me is that this passage of Scripture has an ushering ministry of its own.

This portion of Scripture, it ushers us to at least three different places, perhaps even four that I will talk to you about after the sermon. The first place this passage ushers us to is to the mirror and it puts before us the qualities of what true, genuine, Christlike love is. We get to see ourselves in comparison.

What this mirror does is reveal to us that we don't naturally love. Instead of being God-centered and other-centered, we are so self-centered. That comes out in all of our irritabilities and grumbling and our murmurings, all of the things that come so easily to us.

This ushers us to the mirror. What does self-sacrificial agape love look like? If you doubt that it is not here to convict, just look at the very first characteristic of Christlike love. "Love is patient."

Love is patient. The Greek word is makrothumia. It is a compound word. Macro means larger. Thumia meaning heat. And, no, it does not mean big temper, explosive! No, it is the exact opposite. It means long fuse. It is going to be a long time before anger smolders or gets released.

There are two words that are very similar in the New Testament. One is patience and one is endurance. You read through how these words are used and it becomes evident that endurance is used most often in terms of difficult seasons and times of life. Patience is used in terms of irritating people in life. Are there irritating people in life? Oh, no. Oh, yes!

What is the first quality of love—agape, Christlike love! It is patience. Slow to anger. Longsuffering with the people that drive you nuts. Then look at what patience is joined in matrimony with. "Love is patient and love is kind."

So not only is it going to take a long time before you get angry with people, it is not that you are just going to be putting up with them, it is actually having a heart of tenderness and kindness and goodness toward them. Love is patient. Love is kind. Kindness is the opposite of what is there at the beginning of Verse 5. It is not rude.

We could do a whole series just going through the sixteen qualities of love, but I will also point out the fact that it says here at the end of Verse 5 that love is not resentful. That word resentful is from the colorful Greek word logizomai. It is an accounting word. Sometimes it is translated as love keeps no record of wrongs that you hold onto, so that you can use as leverage over people.

Then you have that whole crescendo of things that love does. Understand that love does not sit there and tolerate wickedness and abuse because the one who manifested love perfectly, Jesus, He turned over a table or two, even with a spirit of love desiring the greatest good of those who were doing harmful things. So it is not done in the spirit of animosity.

We are so easily irritated. I have been getting irritated all week long because the neighbors went on vacation and the person that went with them parked their car in front of our house all week long. Why didn't they park in front of our house? They could have parked in front of another house.

Here is what is funny: we live under this giant Sycamore tree that has a propensity of dropping giant branches. I have been thinking that this would be a good time for one of those branches to fall. What is inside of me? Love does not rejoice in wrongdoing. Who is that person in your life, and there may be more than one?

You hear news of something tragic that happens to them and you may think they got what they deserved. According to this, you do not love that person. This passage of Scripture takes us to the mirror, revealing us as we are. The Law of the Lord reveals reality and left to ourselves, loving is not what we are and even as those redeemed by the Spirit, we still have this struggle to truly love.

This was happening in Corinth. I am sure it is happening all around Bethel Grace because we are a church that is a hospital of people that are forgiven of sin, but still dealing with sin. Brothers and sisters, can we just be honest and confess that love is a challenge when we see what true love really is.

When we start confessing our lack of love, that is when we bring things into the light and things start getting healed. That is why we have groups gathering together. That is why we have fellowship groups. It is to dig into the Word and say that the struggles out there are real, and the struggles in me are real.

This passage of Scripture ushers us to the mirror. Hallelujah, brothers and sisters, I will tell you somewhere else it ushers us to. Because this is written in God's Holy Word, and all of God's Holy Word points us to the Redeemer, this passage of Scripture also ushers us to the foot of the cross of Jesus Christ.

Here we are exposed as the sinners that we are and this passage also ushers us to the cross, where there we see One nailed and crucified and One pinned to that rugged wood, and One who manifested all of these qualities of love to absolute perfection, internally and externally. There was Christ, the pure and unblemished Lamb of God, sacrificed for sinners like us.

This week I also read that you can read through these qualities of love and you can put the name Jesus before it all, and it becomes a vivid description of Jesus. Picture Jesus incarnate in this world dealing with His disciples.

⁴Jesus is patient and kind; Jesus does not envy or boast; He is not arrogant ⁵or rude. Jesus does not insist on His own way; He is not irritable or resentful; ⁶He does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷Jesus bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Precious Jesus was nailed to the cross with the ultimate manifestation and a display of love. He was there nailed to the cross out of love for us, His people, His chosen, His bride. That, the holy and righteousness and the measured wrath of God might fall on Him instead of us, so that we might be set free and forgiven, and the justice of the Living Holy God be satisfied and the outpouring of His grace and mercy be released so that we might be forgiven and made new.

Brothers and sisters, guess what? This passage of Scripture not only does it usher us to the mirror or to the cross, but it also ushers us to the empty grave, where we find that Christ Jesus conquered death. Not only do we know that Jesus conquered death, but the power of His resurrection is now available to His people as they are filled by the Holy Spirit.

So, Jesus in His power and Spirit, He actually intends to build these qualities in us. Jesus is helping us to be patient. Go with the flow of the Spirit of Jesus! Be renewed in the Spirit of your mind, knowing that is His will for you and that is what He is going to do in you, and He is kind.

He is not irritable or resentful, so that when these qualities surge up remember that you have a power that flows forth from the empty grave to put that to death and to put the positive qualities to life. This is not something that you can manufacture on your own. It is the fruit of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

What we can do is just realize that it is all about the Lord, and it is all about His work and grace in our lives, asking Him to pull us into the gravitational pull of His glorious grace and form us into people who loves. Jesus wants to do this work in us. He is able to do this work in us, so rejoice in this by the power of the Holy Spirit that gives us the joy to be able to do it.

We continue to something else that helps as we think about the love that He creates. We finish by understanding that this is something that will last forever and ever and ever and ever. Love will go on and on and on.

To fill us with the fruit of love:

4. The permanence of love is proclaimed (12:8-13)

⁸Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. ¹¹When 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. ¹²For 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. ¹³So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Paul was talking about the fact that the operation of love is going to outlast all of the spiritual gifts that we see operating in the world today. That is amazing because spiritual gifts can be a very, very impressive and uplifting and powerful thing.

In 1998 there were a whole lot of college students that gathered up at Hume Lake, California. It was Hume Lake Young Adult College Weekend. The Spirit of God was at work in that place. There was preacher who was preaching the attributes, holiness, omnipresence, love, and the omniscience of God.

This preacher was preaching with such prophetic vision. There was a young man sitting among the thousands other young adults and college students. As this vision of the holiness of God was being proclaimed from Isaiah Chapter 6—the One God, holy, holy, holy—absolutely surrounded an angelic worship. It was a vision of God being proclaimed.

The preacher then went into Psalm 139, this same God being present and aware of every single detail of our lives, knowing our going in and our coming out, our words before they fall out of our mouths. This young man was sitting there saying, How do I even sit in view of the fact that this Holy God is present.

Then the preacher went into the love of God and Jesus' teaching, As the Father has loved me, so have I love you. There was this young man who was being shaken to the core by the power of prophetic preaching. I can tell you that for a fact because you are looking at him twenty-five-years later. It is amazing because preaching can be such a powerful and moving thing.

Yet, when we get into the presence of the King, the spiritual gifts that had been so powerful in this age are going to be turned down and turned off. There we will be in the presence of the Messiah with the power of His love filling us, flowing from us, and absorbing us with glory and healing power.

We will see Jesus face to face and love is going to be flowing like a river throughout all eternity as we get the privilege of serving Him and His people in new and profound and wonderful ways. Love never ends.

So these three remain—faith, hope, and love. Someday faith is going to be sight. Someday hope, that expectation of the glorious return of Jesus Christ and us in His presence, that is going to be the actual reality that we experience.

Faith becomes sight. Hope becomes the actual experience. Love continues to grow and grow and grow and grow. So, let us submit ourselves in the power of the Spirit to the Lord, asking Him that there might be a head start, that we might love one another in the ways that Christ loved us, to His glory and to the good of those we live among.

Let's close in a word of prayer.