

“The Way of Love”

March 24, 2019

I John 4:10-19

Please open your Bible with me to the thirteen chapter of I Corinthians. I Corinthians 13 stands almost in a class of its own. It measures the one thing we all need more than anything else; love. It describes it. It exalts it. And it makes it very practical. So I've titled today's message “The Way of Love.” Shall we pray?

Everybody knows something about today's topic. And it's probably the most overused and misunderstood word in our world. Everywhere you go, someone has something to say about it. And, from a company called “Grace note,” which is a Global Music Data company, no one knows how many songs have been written. But the closest guess is that roughly 64% of all songs are love songs.

And, what passage do newlyweds turn to when they stand before God at the altar to be joined together in marriage? I Corinthians 13. Well, as you are about to see, the way of love even towers over marriage.

But I want to begin with I Corinthians 12 because it's in the twelfth chapter where Paul sets the stage for the need for the way of love.

Here's chapter twelve. Paul discusses your speech, the Holy Spirit, the Body of Christ, and the gifts of the Spirit. Find with me, if you would, the final verse of I Corinthians 12. Here's what we have. I Corinthians 12:31 “*But covet [pursue] earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.*” The highest pursuit, Paul says, is to pursue that more excellent way, the way of love.

The Holy Spirit in Paul presents this more excellent way. It's even better than having the best gifts God bestows. And that more excellent way is the way of love.

So, here in chapter thirteen, Paul presents love like this.

Things you can do without it.

The fourteen actions that show it.

The power and the eternal nature of love.

Now, before we read, just a brief comment on the word “charity.” This is the Old English term. But today, we simply say “love.”

Please read with me I Corinthians thirteen. I Corinthians 13:1 “*Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. (2) And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. (3) And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.*

(4) Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth [gives high praise to] not itself, is not puffed up, (5) Doth not behave itself unseemly [improperly], seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; (6) Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; (7) Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

(8) Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. (9) For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. (10) But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. (11) When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. (12) For now we see through a glass [mirror], darkly [in an obscure way]; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. (13) And now

abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.”

Let's start with the Old Testament. Please hold your place here in I Corinthians thirteen and turn to Deuteronomy chapter six and find with me verse four.

Deuteronomy 6:4 “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: (5) and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.”

The Hebrew word for love is the word “אהבה” pronounced “Ahavah.” And the root verb “hav” means “to give.”

Usually when we hear the word “love”, we think of romantic love. Now, you can have marital love, parental love, brotherly, physical relationship love, and loyalty, all as expressions of אהבה.

So, the first command God gave to the Jews, and, by extension, the first command He's given to everyone is אהבה. And we are to do so whole-heartedly, with our entire personality, with all our might. And God gave this command for the very same reason He gives all commands; for our own benefit. The basic need of a human being is to have a love-relationship with God. Obviously the LORD made us to love Him. He knows just how deeply we need to love Him and how much it will help us. But, He also knows that this is the one thing we will have the most trouble with. Folks, you can never love God too much. Your love for Him must go beyond your love for yourself. So, yes, God is highly honored when you put your heart and soul into loving Him. That's the Old Testament word for love.

Now, the original New Testament was written in Greek. And there are four Greek words translated “love.” The one we find in I Corinthians thirteen is the word “ἀγάπη,” which means “sacrificial love.” But, it's also the Old English word “charity” which, just like אהבה it carries the idea of “giving.”

And the best way to understand the New Testament word is to see this; I John 4:16 “And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. (17) Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the Day of Judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. (18) There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. (19) We love him, because he first loved us.”

What is God in His basic nature? He's a Giver, by nature. God's character is love, meaning, all that God is is rooted in this. He is love. He gives. The Source of love is Person; God.

And this is how God showed His love to us; verse ten of I John four. I John 4:10 “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”

The Cross is God showing His love. He gave His Son to be The One and Only Perfect Sacrifice, a Propitiation for your sins.

So, first, the Old Testament word is אהבה. The New Testament word is “ἀγάπη.” Next, what is the more excellent way? I Corinthians thirteen presents three things. First, things you can do without love. Second, the 14 ways you can show love. And last, the eternal nature of love.

First, what can you do without love? I Corinthians 13:1 “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.”

You can amaze and astound people with your language skills and not act in love. You can be a master communicator and not act in love. You can be fluent in numerous languages and be able to communicate perfectly with people who do not speak your native language; even to the extent of being able to speak the language of angels. But, to do so without love, is to become as a gong. Back in the 1970's NBC carried a show called “The Gong Show” where people would present their talents. It came back to ABC in 2017. And if

you were really talented, great. If you were really bad, they would “gong” you; very loudly. And you would be humiliated off the stage. Same idea if you are a language expert and have no love.

Second, verse two, you can delve into the depths of the mysteries of mankind; have a mind filled to the max with knowledge. And you can accomplish great things, even to moving mountains with faith. And you can be Mr. or Mrs. Magnanimous to the extreme of giving all of your possessions to help the poor. And you can even be the top martyr and give your life to be burned at the stake. All that; and if you can do all that and do it without charity, God says you are three things. One, a clanging gong. Two, worthless; having no value whatsoever. And three, do all that for absolutely nothing; no profit to anyone.

Folks, way of love is the way God calls you and me to live. You see, He reads your heart. And only if love is motivating you will it make any difference here on earth or later, in the days when you are in Heaven.

Can you tell that God, not only knows what He’s talking about; but that He is calling you to live by the way of love; the more excellent way?

You see, at the root of everything is your motivations. What motivates you? It may be that everything you do is motivated either by fear or by love. I John 4:17 “*Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the Day of Judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. (18) There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. (19) We love him, because he first loved us.*”

Apparently love is the most important thing in the world, after all.

Someone has phrased it like this. “*God is love. When we take up permanent residence in a life of love, we live in God and God lives in*

us. This way, love has the run of the house, becomes at home and mature in us, so that we’re free of worry on Judgment Day—our standing in the world is identical with Christ’s. There is no room in love for fear. Well-formed love banishes fear. Since fear is crippling, a fearful life—fear of death, fear of judgment—is one not yet fully formed in love.” [I John 4:17-18 The Message].

First, the OT word is אהבה.

Second, the NT word is “ἀγάπη.”

Third, what you can do without love.

Fourth, then, the 14 things love is able to do.

Please look down at verse four. I Corinthians 13:4

“Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth [give high praise to] not itself, is not puffed up, (5) Doth not behave itself unseemly [improperly], seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; (6) Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; (7) Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.”

Fourteen ways for you to give. Fourteen things you can do to express love. Memorize verses four through seven. Meditate on them. Pray them. Apply them. Consider what a difference it makes in how you live; how you deal with people; how you conduct your business; how you treat your children or your parents or your siblings.

God is love. And He is the Enabler of love. Look at it like this.

How many of you would like to live a trouble-free life? Guess what. It’s very unlikely. We might *want* to live without trouble, without problems with people, without the stresses that come from interpersonal relationships. But, it’s very unlikely that it will ever happen this side of death.

So, with your trouble-prone life, what can you do? Look at verse four. I Corinthians 13:4 “*Charity suffereth long, and is kind; ... (5) ... is not easily provoked...*”

Have you ever heard the term “irascible”? It means “easily provoked to anger.”

A man said the following to me this week. “I used to be so angry that my mother made sure there were no guns in the house. And I was always angry at my sister. But, do you know what stopped my anger?” I said “What?” He says “This Book you gave me.” A Bible. “This Book was the only thing that helped me stop getting so angry.”

So, how to proceed? How do you deal with the people in your life? Take your case to the LORD. He says that this is what love does. Now, ask Him to enable you to suffer long, to be kind and to be not easily provoked.

Who can possibly enable you to be longsuffering with people? Who’ll enable you to be kind to them? Who’ll stop envy and jealousy and enable you to be content in your heart? Who’ll stop you from praising yourself? Who’ll show you how to behave properly? Who will help you seek others and to stop you from being provoked. Who is the One Who can put a stop to evil thinking in your heart? Who will create a spirit of rejoicing over the truth in you? Who will strengthen you to bear everything, to be an optimist, and to endure whatever comes your way? Only a God Who is Love. Love keeps on loving no matter what.

So, according to the Holy Spirit in Paul, you now know what you can do without love. And you know what you *can* do with love.

Last, the power and the eternal nature of love.

Love is always worth it; whatever *it* is. It’s always worth the risk. Look with me at verse 12. I Corinthians 13:12 “*For now we see through a glass [mirror], darkly [with an unclear view]; but then face to face [clearly] now I know in part [partially]; but then shall I know even as also I am known [completely]. (13) And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.*”

And, according to Jesus, the one quality that marks a Christian disciple is this. John 13:34 “*A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. (35) By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*”

There are very few permanent things. But, among and above all the things that are quite long-lasting, there’s one thing that will last and last and last and last: “*the greatest of these is charity.*”

I wanted to try to illustrate the eternal nature and the power of love in some way. So I chose a man by the name of Roberston McQuilkin. I met him five or six years ago and I heard him speak about what I’d like to share with you.

He’d spent twelve years as a missionary in Japan and while there he was used of the LORD to plant five Churches. Then, in 1968 he returned to the United States and became the President of Columbia Bible College in Columbia, SC.

Dr. McQuilkin had plenty of experience with the two things we need most: suffering and love. Robert, his oldest son died in an automobile accident in 1988. But the key ingredient of his life and the key ingredient of your life is the same: love. It’s powerful and it’s eternal.

And, something happened in Dr. McQuilkin’s life that I want to share with you as it pertains to love. In 1990, at the age of 63, Dr. McQuilkin resigned his position as president of Columbia to spend his days tending his wife Muriel who had Alzheimer’s; which he did until she went home to be with the LORD in 2003.

Here’s what he said about her before he resigned.

“*The board arranged for a companion to stay in our home so I could go daily to the office. During those two years it became increasingly difficult to keep Muriel home. As soon as I left, she would take out after me. With me, she was content; without me, she was distressed,*

sometimes terror stricken. The walk to school is a mile round trip. She would make that trip as many as ten times a day. Sometimes at night, when I helped her undress, I found bloody feet. When I told our family doctor, he choked up. "Such love," he said simply. Then, after a moment, "I have a theory that the characteristics developed across the years come out at times like these." I wish I loved God like that—desperate to be near him at all times. Thus she teaches me, day by day."

I heard Dr. McQuilkin speak long after 2003; long after his wife Muriel had gone to be with the LORD. But when he spoke, he described what it was like to care for his wife.

As you've heard me say, he told how his wife was terrified to be without him even for a very few minutes. This is what he said when he finally had to resign his position as President of the college.

"When the time came, the decision was firm. It took no great calculation. It was a matter of integrity. Had I not promised, 42 years before, "In sickness and in health . . . till death do us part"?"

The disease *"did not seem painful for her, but it was a slow dying for me to watch the vibrant, creative, articulate person I knew and loved gradually dimming out."*

This was no grim duty to which I stoically resigned, however. It was only fair. She had, after all, cared for me for almost four decades with marvelous devotion; now it was my turn. And such a partner she was! If I took care of her for 40 years, I would never be out of her debt."

<https://youtu.be/MqtG-XfxMC4>

"It's not that I have to; I get to." Have you ever seen love in that light? We don't have to; we get to – love God with our whole hearts and then we get to love our spouses and we get to love others; all because we "get to."

The reason why love is eternal and so powerful is because of I John 4:16 "God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him."

One final word from an interview with Dr. McQuilkin. "I don't feel like I've given anything up. Our life is not the way we plot it or plan it.... All along I've just accepted whatever assignment the Lord gave me. This was His assignment. I know I'm not supposed to have that kind of reaction, but you asked me, and I have to be honest. I never went to a support group. I had enough of my own burdens without taking on everybody else's.

Sometimes I have accepted an invitation to speak at one of these. A lot of angry people. They're angry at God for letting this happen—"Why me?" They're angry at the one they care for, and then they feel guilty about it because they can't explain why they're angry at them.... I say, in acceptance there's peace." "When it comes to love, "It's not that I have to; I get to."

How can I Corinthians 13 become more than just a blessing to you? Memorize a section of it and meditate on it. Ask the LORD to make these things yours because you are His and that's what He's like.

This is God's way. Leave your way behind and set your heart in His way. This is how to live the Christian life."

Hymn # 321 "When I Survey"