

Women's Bible Study – Autumn Ridge Church
Unity in Love ~ 1 Corinthians 13
March 29, 2017 ~ Angie Pankratz



Have you ever wondered what you would do if you won the lottery? Imagine Publisher's Clearinghouse shows up at your door with a large check in hand. It's written out to you and somehow (even though you never entered any contest or ordered any magazines) you've won the Publisher's Clearinghouse Lottery. What an amazing gift you have! Your life is surely going to get better. Your friends are going to appreciate you now. You will have the opportunity to bless your friends, family and even your church. How could anything go wrong? You have been awarded a gift and you can't wait to use it – Oh, yes, you have every intention of using it wisely just like so many who have gone before you and collected their big checks. Just like some of these big winners here:

- This is Lara and Roger Griffiths. Before they won a \$2.76 million lottery jackpot in 2005, they hardly ever argued. Then they won and bought a million-dollar house and a Porsche. But six years after their win, their 14-year marriage was over, a freak fire gutted their house, and every penny of their fortune was gone.
- This is William "Bud" Post won 16.2 million in the Pennsylvania lottery in 1988. However, within one year he was \$1 million in debt. A former girlfriend successfully sued him for a share of his winnings and his brother was arrested for hiring a hit man to kill him in the hopes that he'd inherit a share of the winnings. Post sank into debt and spent time in jail for firing a gun over the head of a bill collector. Bud now lives quietly on \$450 a month and food stamps.
- This is Michael Carroll. He was at his peak when he won Britain's \$15 million — jackpot in 2002, the Daily Mail reports. But a sucker for life in the fast lane — cocaine, parties, prostitutes, and cars — put him back at square one in five years. As of late, the ex-garbage man was hoping to get his old job back.
- This is Luke Pittard who won an equivalent \$1.9 million — in 2006, but spent it all on a trip to the Canary Islands, a wedding, and a house. A year and a half later, Luke was forced to take a job at McDonald's flipping burgers. <http://www.businessinsider.com/lottery-winners-who-lost-everything>
- 5. This is Sharon Tirabassi. After winning more than \$10 million, she is back renting a home and working part time to support her kids. Now Sharon lives paycheck to paycheck. She grew up moving from shelter to shelter so she wasn't accustomed to such a large sum of money, and she unfortunately

mismanaged it. One of her more frivolous purchases was a decked-out Cadillac Escalade complete with turntables and subwoofers, which reportedly cost more than \$200,000.

- <http://www.the richest.com/>

Books have been written chronicling the life of lottery winners and unfortunately many of them have unhappy endings. As soon as lotteries are awarded, there are plenty of financial advisors or lawyers available to advise the winners with their winnings but many do not take their advice. It doesn't seem to matter what it is – every gift is only beneficial if we follow the advice or directions attached to that gift. Million dollar sweepstakes are no exception and neither are spiritual gifts. Just like being given a large amount of money, you are entrusted with a spiritual gift. It can have the potential to bless you and those around you or it can have the potential to be detrimental to you and those around you if you do not follow the directions attached to your gift.

Last week's lecture on chapter 12, Svea did an excellent job talking about spiritual gifts. This week's chapter – 1 Corinthians 13 – seems to include the directions we need to follow for successful implementation of spiritual gifts – the fine print to using our gifts in a way that is most beneficial.

1 Corinthians 13 always ranks in the top three for the most familiar Bible passages among Christians and non-Christians. Even I once attended an extended family member's wedding in which I had no doubt that they were self-proclaimed atheists and yet even still they included a reading from 1 Corinthians 13 in their program. Praise God that people who do not even believe in his existence still find this passage beneficial... even though they perceive it grossly out of context we can be comforted that this is God's Word and it promises not to return void.

So as we look at this incredible description of love in 1 Corinthians 13, let's first consider how the Corinthians viewed love. In their Greek language there were four terms used for love (from Biblehub.com):

1. Eros – sexual love. It's from this Greek word that we get the term erotic. This is from the secular Greek culture though never actually used in the Bible. The basic idea of this love is self-satisfaction. This type of love is described in Song of Solomon.
2. Storge – family love. This is the type of love between a parent and a child or just between family members in general. It is a natural affection or obligation.
3. Phileo – brotherly friendship or affection. It is the love of deep friendship and partnership. Some might say it is the highest love of which man, without God's help, is capable.

4. Agape – unchanging, self-giving love. It gives without demanding or expecting repayment. It is love so great that it can be given to the unlovable or unappealing. It is love that loves even when it is rejected. It gives because it loves; it does not love in order to receive. The word has little to do with emotion; it has much to do with self-denial for the sake of another. Kenneth Wuest says, "It is a consuming passion for the well-being of others." This word is used 320 times in the Bible and rarely used in extra-biblical writings.

So it's important to know that when the Corinthian church read this passage, no one thought, "Hey, what a great love poem! I think I'll have that read at my wedding between the candle lighting and vows!" The Corinthians knew that the love word that Paul used here was big – It had nothing to do with erotic or romantic love. It was costly. It was self-sacrificing and they knew it was not their natural bent!

To be honest, I can understand their pain. Too often I look at this chapter and get discouraged. I consider it just one more of those checklists in the Bible that I fear I don't measure up to – like Proverbs 31, the Sermon on the Mount, the fruits of the Spirit, etc. But then I recall that we as Christians – followers of Christ – are not expected to muster up this ability to love. We are given this incredible love by our Creator God....

"For God so (agape) loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."
John 3:16

"But because of his great (agape) love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved." Ephesians 2:4-5

(Agape love is all about grace – God's riches bestowed on us even though we were enemies of His!) We benefit from that agape love. When we receive God's love, we are able through the power of the Holy Spirit to extend that same (miraculous) love to others.

"For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and (agape) love and discipline." 2 Timothy 1:7

And as Svea said we don't just "pocket" the good gifts from God. Every gift that we have been given is to be used – not set upon a shelf. In John 15 we are told that if we abide in God's agape love that we will become like Him – able to extend this agape love to others. Therefore, we do not have to "muster" up the ability to love. We love because God first loved us and when we chose to follow Him, we have access to that same ability to love sacrificially!

Praise God we have that power within us because we are not just called to love our friends, our family or our church family. Yes, we are called to love them but we are also called to love our enemies.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you... If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?” Matthew 5:43-44, 46

So as we read 1 Corinthians 13, let's just be mindful that though everyone from the Rolling Stones to the Spice Girls have sung and talked about unconditional love – It is not easy, it's not romantic but a direct result of God's work in our lives. God is love. Love comes from God and it is how others will recognize that we are Christ-followers – by our agape love!

Right off the bat, we are told several if/then statements about love. If you use your gifts in a way that is beyond comprehension but do not have love it is of no value. So if you speak so eloquently but don't have love – it's not even that you are nothing – you are a noisy gong or clanging cymbal. It would have been better that you said nothing at all. If our words do not have the love of God weaved within them, we are far better off keeping our mouths shut!

Maybe your gift is prophesying, wisdom or faith... Paul states,

“If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God's secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn't love others, I would be nothing.” 1 Cor. 13:2

Well, if I could stand up here and tell you everything that was going to happen to you tomorrow, if I could answer any question you had about God or if I could right now tell that hill behind the church to move one more mile to the north and it obeyed me, we are told in this passage that if I could do all of those things but didn't have love, **I would be nothing!** Intimacy with God does not come through knowing everything there is to know about Him. (And aren't we glad about that!) God cannot use you if you lack love even if you do the most amazing things for Him. Your impact on the Christian community is nothing and God sees you as no benefit to His work if you do not love. The equation for the day to remind you of this is spiritual gifts minus love equals zero.

Then Paul moves onto sacrifice – possibly the greatest sacrifices anyone could make. He says in verse 3,

If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn't love others, I would have gained nothing.” 1 Cor. 13:3

No matter how much we may sacrifice, if we are not motivated by love, there is no profit to it. I don't think I've ever known someone who has given all that they own to the poor and I've read about martyrs but I don't recall ever knowing one

personally... But if I did I couldn't help but esteem them. Here we are reminded that even these ultimate sacrifices that one could possibly make are useless without love.

So now let's look at what love is. You'll find that most of these words that are used to describe what love is are verbs. There are fifteen verbs in three verses. We must remember that love is dynamic and active – not something static. This agape love is not an inner feeling or emotion. Love is not conveyed by words - it must be shown...

Love –

1. ...is patient. Self sacrificing (agape) love is patient. Other words for this are steadfastness, persevering and long suffering. Sometimes with love we must suffer long. (Ugh!) If you haven't had to suffer long in your love to someone else yet, then consider yourself rare and blessed. If you are in the midst of long suffering love to someone, let me encourage you to not give up. You are a shining example of God's incredible sacrificial love to that individual even if you don't see any fruit yet. God does not waste any sacrifice made in the name of love and he will use your perseverance to make you mature and complete.... not to mention a light to those in the darkness.
2. ...is kind. To be kind is to show others that they are valuable by how you treat them. No one can be loving and unkind at the same time. I know that this word gets so overused but honestly, we need to be nice. We cannot treat someone rudely and yet say we love them. Kindness looks for ways to contribute to the lives of others. It will even return good for evil.

This is taking your mother-in-law to her doctor's appointment. This is letting the person with two items go in front of you at the grocery store. Being kind is gently confronting a friend privately when you disagree with her. It's not telling her off on Facebook when you disagree with her opinions. Often kindness shows up in small ways when we consider others before ourselves. Unfortunately in America, it seems that being rude is the new normal. In our self-absorbed society your kindness will draw others to you and hopefully point the lost back to their Creator.

3. ...rejoices with the truth. This is a big one. We must remember that love should not require us to lie, stretch the truth or stuff our true thoughts. That is not love. Our culture has confused love with approval. Because I don't approve of a decision that you have made does not mean that I don't love you. However, too often the world will tell us that love always accepts and must praise every action or word that is spoken. I recently saw on a church billboard in this town, the quote – “We are for love. We're not against stuff.” Now I don't know exactly what the church meant by this quote but because I have agape love for others I am against sin – no apologies made. I know the devastating effects of sin not to mention that it leads to death.

If love rejoices with the truth then we must know that as Christians we do not have to be "soft" on sin in order to love. I would not tolerate bullying against my child but I would still love the bully. We must not let the world make us think that we are unloving because we do not approve of that which grieves the Lord. In fact, we do the world a disservice if we do not communicate how sin leads to death and distance from God. If we remain silent and do not tell others about salvation in Jesus Christ, we actually are showing that we really must not love them at all! Love is always aligned with truth.

Now let's consider some of the things that love does not do...:

Love...

1. ...does not envy. The Greek word translated "envy" means "to burn with zeal." Literally, the sense is "to be heated or to boil over with envy, hatred, or anger." In the context of [1 Corinthians 13](#), the idea is that love does not focus on personal desires. It is not eager to increase possessions. God's type of love is selfless, not selfish. <https://www.gotquestions.org/love-does-not-envy.html>

In Proverbs 14:30 we are told that envy rots the bones. When we desire what someone else has we hurt ourselves because we are not grateful for all that God has given us. Instead of envying others, we are called to love them.

2. ...does not boast. Agape love is not about you. It is fully focused on the recipient of your love. A bragger, on the other hand, is full of himself and too occupied with self-exalting to notice others. The goal of boasting is to have others envy you. However, love is all about humility. Jesus humbled himself when he came to this earth to live among us and to pay the ultimate price for our sins. Jesus showed that agape love to us.

I tried to do some research to see what percentage of Facebook posts are self-exalting. Unfortunately, I couldn't find that number but I'm sure it's a lot. Christians are not immune to this. We brag about our spouses, our trips, our jobs and our beautiful and obedient children. We are sinners saved by grace alone. If you boast, boast in your weakness and from that which the Lord has saved you – that is the only boasting we must do!

3. ...does not get easily angered. Love does not get easily irritated or is not easily provoked. Anger is not a sin but can easily lead to sinful actions. God himself is slow to anger; abounding in love. How many times we saw how God was merciful with the Israelites as we studied Numbers last fall. If God is slow to anger with us, we should not get easily angered with the frustrations of this world. Love covers a multitude of sins and so we cannot be showing the world agape love if we fly off the handle every time something or someone does not do what we want!?

4. ... does not keep a record of wrongs. Love forgives and forgives and forgives. Matthew 6:14-15 gives us a great reason to be forgiving to others... "For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins." The life app for this past month in Kids Club was forgiveness and they gave a very simple definition to the kids of what forgiveness was... "Deciding that someone who has wronged you doesn't have to pay."

Refusing to keep a record of wrong is a clear expression of God's love and forgiveness. We may say we forgive someone but then the minute that things get heated up again we boil over with past wrongs that we have supposedly forgiven. This is not love. True, godly love forgives and refuses to keep track of ways we've been wronged. Obviously, we should not allow people to continue to hurt or abuse others or us. That's not what this is saying. But we should have a spirit of reconciliation and a forgiving heart if we want to show the world God's agape love.

5. ... does not end. Because love is a basic attribute of God and God is eternal, then love is eternal. In the beginning God loved us while we were sinners – even his enemies - and yet He loved us and provided a way for us to have a relationship with Him.

In the end, when time will be no more, it will be God's love that endures. Paul even mentions the top spiritual gifts that the Corinthians most likely pursued and elevated would one day come to an end.

There will be no need for prophecy, tongues or knowledge when Christ returns. Time will be no more – there will be nothing to prophecy because Christ will be with us! There will be no need for tongues because people from every nation will bow and every tongue will confess and proclaim Jesus is Lord. I do not know what language that will be in but I know God will hear us and we will be unified. Luke 8:17 says, "For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open." So there will be no need for knowledge either because the imperfect will disappear, as the Perfect Lamb will be revealed.

We may see as a poor reflection right now but in the end when Christ returns we will clearly see him face to face and have no need for our spiritual gifts. Christ, the head of the church will speak directly to us and will fulfill the prophecies of his return. We are but children right now but some day we will understand fully the mysteries of God. Paul reminds us that though we may experience the Spirit's power in spiritual gifts, it is only the beginning of what is still to be attained. Though our spiritual gifts will cease in heaven, love will not cease. God is eternal. God is love; therefore love is eternal and never ends.

Our love is the most powerful tool we will ever have in our Christian witness but it is important to truly understand what love is and what it is not. God's love is eternal. Psalm 136 restates this idea again and again and again. I'd like to read this together. After each phrase I read, I'd like you to state in unison the italicized line, "His love endures forever."

Psalm 136

¹ Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good.

His love endures forever.

² Give thanks to the God of gods.

His love endures forever.

³ Give thanks to the Lord of lords:

His love endures forever.

⁴ to him who alone does great wonders,

His love endures forever.

⁵ who by his understanding made the heavens,

His love endures forever.

⁶ who spread out the earth upon the waters,

His love endures forever.

⁷ who made the great lights—

His love endures forever.

⁸ the sun to govern the day,

His love endures forever.

⁹ the moon and stars to govern the night;

His love endures forever.

¹⁰ to him who struck down the firstborn of Egypt

His love endures forever.

¹¹ and brought Israel out from among them

His love endures forever.

¹² with a mighty hand and outstretched arm;

His love endures forever.

¹³ to him who divided the Red Sea [\[a\]](#) asunder

His love endures forever.

¹⁴ and brought Israel through the midst of it,

His love endures forever.

¹⁵ but swept Pharaoh and his army into the Red Sea;

His love endures forever.

¹⁶ to him who led his people through the wilderness;

His love endures forever.

¹⁷ to him who struck down great kings,

His love endures forever.

¹⁸ and killed mighty kings—

His love endures forever.

¹⁹ Sihon king of the Amorites

His love endures forever.

²⁰ and Og king of Bashan—

His love endures forever.

²¹ and gave their land as an inheritance,

His love endures forever.

²² an inheritance to his servant Israel.

His love endures forever.

²³ He remembered us in our low estate

His love endures forever.

²⁴ and freed us from our enemies.

His love endures forever.

²⁵ He gives food to every creature.

His love endures forever.

²⁶ Give thanks to the God of heaven.

His love endures forever.