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- Passage: 1 Corinthians 13
- Series: God's Church - Faith, Hope, Love
- Location: St Bart's Toowoomba 7.30AM; 9.30AM; 6PM [IN-PERSON; Online]
- Big Idea: The Christian life and use of gifts is to shaped by and driven by Christ-like love.
- Structure:
 - Love is Essential [1-3]
 - Love is Self-Sacrificial [4-7]
 - Love is Eternal [8-13]

- Feel free to disagree with me with the full knowledge that you are wrong
- But the Princess Bride has got to be the greatest movie of all time.
- It's got everything, swords, fights, mystery, pirates, Billy Christal, fire swamps, rodents of unusual sizes
- But these all hang off the main story of 'true love' between Buttercup and Wesley.
- Now there are spoilers ahead but you've had 34 years to watch it so
- There's an epic journey as Buttercup and Wesley try to find each other after falling in love on the farm
- And all seems to be lost until the very end when they find each other, the cruel prince is humiliated, and Wesley and Buttercup ride off into the sunset fully fulfilled, and they lived happily ever after.
- Now underneath all the silly comedy and terrible costumes, this is what our modern society has made love to be.
- Something that we fall into, something that will complete us, fulfil us, make us happy, and then have today's passage read at our wedding.
- The lie that Hollywood has sold us is that we've got to find our 'one true love' and everything else will just fall into place
- But this makes it all about us doesn't it? It's self serving, it's self-completing, it makes us the centre of attention? It's romantic, soppy, and something that just seemingly happens!

- However, the love that we are to have as followers of Jesus is completely different.
- Our lives and our use of our gifts isn't meant to be marked or driven by romantic feelings or just loving when we feel like it, or when we feel affection for our brothers and sisters

- But our lives are to be driven by a Christ-like love who loves us with an everlasting love.
- And this It is essential because without love, we are nothing.

LOVE IS ESSENTIAL

- Now as we heard last week, the Corinthians were in a battle for gifts-oneupmanship. They thought that tongues were somehow better than any other gift
But Paul said that all gifts are essential in the building up of the body of Christ. We need each other to use our gifts in service to God!
- If we were all the same, it would be boring and we would be useless. If we didn't use our gifts, then the body would be missing out.
- And then he urges us to desire the higher gifts, and then Ch12:31 "And yet I will show you the most excellent way"
- And so in chapter 13, Paul shows us this most excellent way - LOVE. He uses himself as an example to show us
- So let's look from Chapter 13:1
- "If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing."
- So even if Paul is the most gifted person in the world and uses his gifts but doesn't have love - HE is nothing.
- Notice - he doesn't say that the gifts are nothing, but he says that he himself is nothing. It cuts to the core of the person! He is of no value without love
- He produces no value, he is of no value, and he gains nothing of value.
- Firstly, he cuts to the core of the Corinthians one upmanship by saying that if he speaks in tongues or makes great speeches, he is just a loud annoying noise which just fades away after a couple of seconds
- Like a kid with a new drum kit for Christmas who doesn't have any sense of rhythm - it is just pointless noise - without love, Paul would produce nothing of value!
- Then he ups the anti here in V2
- Secondly, Even If he prophesies and knows all things, even if he has amazing faith but doesn't have love - he is nothing.
- Even with the biggest brain, the smartest ideas, maybe even a best seller at Koorong - no love? Nothing.
- Lastly, even if Paul gives away all that he has, gives up his very life and even becomes a martyr for Jesus, but doesn't have love - he gains nothing of value.

- Love is essential. Love is what marks us out as a child of God. Love is what brings us together as God's church, therefore, if we don't have love, we are nothing!
- And notice in this list that Paul gives us here - all of these things are good things aren't they?
- Preaching? Good. Knowledge? Good. Faith? Good. Giving to the poor and giving up life for Jesus? Really Good.
- These are all good things on the surface. They're great! Worthy praise! Maybe even worth putting up as a leader in God's church!
- But without love, these are nothing and the gifted person is nothing.
- When it comes to spiritual gifts - it's not about the quantity of our gifts or about the quality of the gifts. But it's about the way in which we use them. And this applies to every person and every gift.
- If we hand out newsletters, OR sanitise yet another toy, OR go and have communion with people in the community, OR wash dishes, OR unmute that microphone; OR Turn up faithfully every Sunday but don't have love, we are nothing
- If I lead a small group, lead some Ridley courses, and maybe even have a theological degree and I am fluent in Greek, Hebrew, and even Aramaic - I'm not by the way- but even if I did but don't have love - I am nothing
- If I exercise and use my gifts without love, then really I would just be doing it for my own praise and self-satisfaction!
- If we as St Bart's go forward with vision 2025 and multiply leaders in God's church, plant or revitalise congregations, have a hundred thousand subscribers on YouTube, translate whole sermons in different languages, have zero carbon impact, and make disciples BUT we don't have love? We will produce nothing of value.
- We are to be a church that's marked out, that lives out, that shouts out God's love!
- And this isn't just a job for those in leadership, this is a job for every single person here.
- To be people of love. To serve with love. To remind each other of God's love. To keep each other accountable!
- Because it's essential.
- So then this begs the question - what is this love? Paul - we want to know what love is!

LOVE IS SELF-SACRIFICIAL

- Well here is Paul's definition of love.
- It's not a gushy romantic feeling, it's not just nice, it's not just lovely.
- To love is to act, not just to feel. It's to drive and motivate our action and affections. And it's not self-serving but it is self-sacrificial - even if it is hard work, even when we don't feel like it.
- Let's see what it is from V4 - "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps

no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.”

- Isn't this just an awesome picture?
- But there's something about this list that's familiar. This is pretty much a list of everything the church in Corinth wasn't. Paul's really cutting to the heart of the matter here.
- He's essentially saying Love is patient, but you aren't; Love is kind, but you aren't; love does not envy, but you do; love does not delight in evil, but you do!

The Corinthians were prideful, they boasted in their leaders, boasting in what they had and their status in society whilst the poor went hungry, rejoicing in abhorrent immorality, using their freedoms inappropriately.

BUT Paul points out that the most excellent way is love. If the Corinthians had the love that Paul points out here, all their problems would be solved!

- But before we go pointing the finger at the Corinthians, we should have a look at our own lives.
- *Can I say in good faith, in utter confidence, in all truthfulness that “Michael is patient, Michael is Kind? Michael does not boast, Michael is not proud? Michael is not easily angered?”*
- *Just put a camera in my car in Brisbane peak hour traffic after a drive from Toowoomba, and you'll see that this just doesn't hold up!*

- So then, what is this love meant to look like? What's the standard?
- It's patient and kind - It's generous towards others, it's others focussed.
- It doesn't boast - it's impossible to be both prideful and loving at the same time.
- It doesn't dishonour others - it doesn't look down on other people who aren't like us, it doesn't have any oneupmanship, it doesn't put down others, it doesn't gossip about others behind their back
- It doesn't keep a record of wrongs - it forgives and utterly clears the records when sinned against
- It rejoices in all that is good - it avoids evil and it seeks to live in the light, not in the darkness.
- It's completely other focussed. IT's not just nice - it's hard.
- Our culture says that love is love...that all we need is love...that we need to try and find a love that completes us...that we are lost until we find it...and when we 'fall out of love' then it's all over.
- But the bible says that love isn't just love. Love just doesn't happen. *I know that it doesn't just happen for me! I mean you're all lovely people but my heart is sinful!*
- Love is something we need to constantly do and work on!
- Biblical love is costly. It's hard. But when it works in perfection, it's beautiful.

- And we don't pursue this just because it's moralistic or ethical, or because we want to be good citizens in the world; we don't pursue this love because doing good things and loving others will save us.
- We do all of these things because we have been deeply, truly and perfectly loved by our great God in Jesus Christ.
- Jesus has been infinitely patient and kind towards us.
- Jesus is the one who didn't consider equality with God something to be taken hold of but took on the nature of a servant - he didn't boast
- Jesus didn't dishonour others, nor did he rejoice in evil but he is the light of the world
- Jesus is the one who loves us enough to be killed though blameless, and raised victorious - so that our record of wrongs has been done away with. Shredded. Gone.
- This is how we have been loved, and this is the love that we are called to.

A Christ-like love. A self-sacrificial love.

- And because we have all been loved with this same love, instead of this being a burden or a chore - it becomes just a natural overflow from what we have in Christ.
- The solution for the Corinthians and us isn't just to pull up our socks and just try to be more loving; no the solution is to keep on reminding ourselves of who we are in Christ.
- A bunch of everyday, normal sinful people who have been saved by his amazing grace because of his love.
 - This love which brings us to our knees in worship is eternal and ultimately brings us into eternity.

• **LOVE IS ETERNAL**

- When Jesus comes again, everything else will pass away, all gifts would have served their purpose, but love will never finish even into eternity.
- Love is bridge that brings us into the new kingdom! We can only enter it because Christ has loved us.
- So then it's eternal.
- V8 - "Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears."
- All gifts that we have right now serve the purpose of building up the body of Christ, and pointing each other towards him and the new Kingdom.
- So then, when this Kingdom comes, we won't need them. They are temporal. They have a used-by date!
- Prophecies won't be needed because we will know God in full

- Tongues won't be needed because we will be able to speak with God face to face
- Knowledge will pass away because our human knowledge is minuscule and nothing compared to what we will know when we are brought into eternity.
- Right now We know God because he has come to us in Jesus, and he has given us his spirit, and he has made all of this known in his word.
- But still our knowledge is only partial. We will only know God fully when he comes again.
- *Imagine being there for the first brushstrokes of the sistine chapel? Hanging out with your good mate Michelangelo*
- *You may have got the gist of it, you may have seen the basic idea but it would have never compared to the glory of the completely finished artwork*
- But this is what our knowledge of God is like this side of the fall and this side of eternity.
- It's like we only know God right now through a mirror, or Zoom, or Facetime! In-part. Imperfect.
- But when Jesus returns, all this imperfection will fade away and we'll have full knowledge and maturity.

We will put away those things which served us here and now, such as prophesy and tongues, and enjoy being with God in love for eternity.

- We will know him fully even as well as he knows us right now.
And the thing that brings us there is his amazing love for us.
- So this is what remains. This is what is most important. This is the most excellent way. This is the greater virtue. This is greater than any gift - love.

- If we don't have it, we are nothing.
- If we reject God's love and turn away from it, we will be nothing.
- If you are here today or tuning in online and have not yet accepted God's love yet; if you haven't yet turned to him and allowed yourself to be loved by him - I urge you to accept it. Turn to him and all your guilt, shame, and wrongs have been forgotten because of his love for you.
- If you are a follower of Jesus, then how is your love life? No, I'm talking about your relationship with your spouse, but how is your love for God's church here?
- How is your relationship with God? Do you remember how much you are deeply loved by him?
- God is patient, God is kind, He is not self-seeking, He is not easily angered, he keeps no records of wrongs.
- He loves you with an everlasting loving kindness even to death. And until our times is up on this earth or until he comes again, our role is quite simple.
- To remember his love for us...and in all we do, do it in, with, and by this kind of love.
- Love is Essential
- Love is Self-Sacrificial
- Love is Eternal