

Many Gifts, One Love

1. Intro

- Today we come to one of the most famous chapters in the Bible – 1 Corinthians 13, which is about love
- This is a great chapter for us to study because our world is very confused about what love truly is
- You only have to listen to the radio and today's songs about pop-culture to know this is the case
 - Beatles said 'all you need is love'
 - Not only do you need love ... but Blues Brothers tell us 'everybody needs somebody to love'
 - If you need somebody to love you ... Whitney Houston said 'I will always love you' > that's a bit hard now she's no longer with us
 - Then again it might be possible when it comes to love ... because according to Huey Lewis & the News ... 'the power of love is a curious thing'
 - If you do happen to find somebody to love you (who is alive), you better watch out because according to Queen – love is a 'crazy little thing' ...
 - Probably goes some way to explaining why why Robert Palmer was 'Addicted to love'
- The upshot of all that is when it comes to love, we're totally confused and just like Foreigner - we still 'want to know what love is'
 - [If that doesn't reveal I'm a child of the 80's nothing will!]

2. Context

- Well it's a good thing then that we can turn to 1 Cor 13 and find out what love is
- We often treat this chapter like a poem about love
 - printing it on greeting cards
 - putting it on the walls of our homes
 - Surprised no-one has made a song about it!
- Famous for most of us because it's so often read out at weddings
- As a result ...
 - Most ppl assume these verses are all about love between a man & woman
 - that these verses are like the ultimate marriage relationship guidelines for how man and woman ought to love each other

- But this chapter is much more than a sentimental poem about warm fuzzies
 - In its original context ... it was a call to an immature and divided congregation to prioritise the virtue of love over self-centeredness
 - It is a bucket of cold water on this arrogant, envious and boastful church who were failing to love one another

- You see Paul is writing to this messed up, divided, prideful church on a number of issues
 - As we saw last week in Ch 12 ... there's division within the church as some consider themselves more spiritual than others because they have what they consider to be the more desirable spiritual gifts
- Paul's answer to that was to say ...
 - "No ... anyone who is in Christ is spiritual because everyone who's in Christ has the HS"
 - "God gives **all** Christians spiritual gifts and because all gifts come from God ... there is no room for division"
- In other words ...
 - There is **one** gift giver ... therefore those who receive the gifts ought to be **one**
 - Just like there is one body but many parts, so the church is one body with many gifts

- Paul finished Ch 12 with a promise saying
 - *v31 - And now I will show you the most excellent way*
- And that was a sure way to excite a church like the Corinthians
 - "Would you like to know the way to be the most excellently gifted church in the whole world?"
- And so in Ch 13 Paul carries on his teaching to spell out what this most excellent way looks like
 - And in essence ... it's the way of love

3. Essentialness of Love (v1-3)

- In v1-3 Paul says ... when it comes to using your spiritual gifts ... love is essential
 - *If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ² 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 have not love, I am nothing. ³ If I*

give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

- It seems there were some there in Corinth who weren't using their gifts in ways that were loving towards others
- Paul is saying ...
 - It doesn't matter how impressive or prominent or spiritual your gifts are
 - If you're not using them for purpose of building up the church ...
 - If you're not motivated to use your gift out of love for others in the church
 - Then the use of your gifts is devoid of any virtue and are useless
- He's saying
 - When you speak in tongues without love ... you might think you're sounding like the angels ... in reality you sound like someone is just noisily banging away on a chunk of brass
 - When you proclaim mysteries and knowledge you think you are something ... without love you're actually nothing
 - If you think by giving away all your possessions to the poor you gain kudos and status and reputation ... truth is, without love you gain nothing
- So rather than being self-less in the use of their gifts, the Corinthians were being selfish
- **Application**
- We don't know exactly what is going on here ... but it's not hard to imagine how some in Corinth may've been using their spiritual gifts for building up themselves rather than building up others
- It could have been exercising gifts for the admiration of others
 - Stu > you're such a good preacher
 - Stu > you've got such wonderful insight
 - Stu > you pray so eloquently
 - Not real > jut fanciful desires of my imagination
- If that's why I preach ... I'm not using my gifts out of love for others ... I'm using my gifts out of love for myself in order to feel the approval of others
- I could be using my gifts to have power over others
 - To others it seems like I'm using my gift to lead

- But in reality I'm leading because I like to have authority and be the decision maker > I want power
- I could be using my gifts because I want material comfort
 - So if I used my gifts to take lots of funerals and weddings ... it looks like I'm being pastorally caring ...
 - But in my heart, I'm really doing it because ministers get paid a gratuity for taking those types services
- If that's why I do those things ... Paul says I am nothing and so are my gifts
 - Our gifts are useless if we use them for building up ourselves, rather than building up others
- So this is a real warning to the church about the heart motive that stands behind the way you and I use our gifts to serve the church
- Last week we learnt that all Christians have at least one spiritual gift and the implication is we ought to use our gifts for the sake of the body / the church
 - But what matters more than serving with your gifts ... is the heart motive behind your serving
- When you ...
 - Morning tea, read Bible, welcome newcomers, pray
 - Is it ... for the building up of yourself ... or is it for the building up of others?
- When you ...
 - Lead GG, Kids Church, Youth group
 - Is it for your glory ... or is it for God's glory?
- When you ...
 - Make the coffees, preach, lead church, kids talk
 - Is it out of love for yourself ... or love for others?
- Paul is telling us ... that without love ... our gifts are useless
- Why? Because ...
 - character is far more important than competency; and
 - being gifted, doesn't make you Godly [repeat]
- The Corinthians were being tempted to over-value what is impressive in the world's eyes rather than viewing things from God's perspective
- Surely this is our temptation too ... is it not?
- What does the world value?

- Skills > prestige > wealth > fame > beauty > impressive performances
- Character and godliness are secondary
- If you happen to be the best leg spinner to ever play the game of cricket ... it doesn't matter what you do in your private life ... the Aussie public will still love you
- If you're a charismatic, good looking, articulate President ... your moral indiscretions are over-looked
- You can be a sexist, arrogant, foul mouthed man, but if you're the best hip-hop artist around ... then those other things don't matter
- And when we see the superstars of our culture behaving badly ...
 - We feel uncomfortable don't we?
 - We know something's not right
- What Paul has to say here gives us clarity to something we intuitively know to be right
 - That character matters much more than competency
 - Being gifted doesn't mean you're good
- Whether you're Christian or not ... what Paul has to say here is helpful to all of us ...
 - Whatever your competency
 - Whatever the resources you have your disposal
 - Whatever the talents and gifts you've been given
 - If you use merely to serve yourself
 - If you don't use them in love for others
 - They are nothing and so are we
- Love is essential

4. Essence of Love (v4-7)

- And so having outlined the essentialness of love ... Paul outlines the essence of love
 - What is love's nature? What does it look like?
- He doesn't just leave us with this vague, abstract of an idea called love that we're work out how to live by
- He actually puts some meat on the bones to show us what it looks like
- In v4-7 he paints a picture in both positive and negative terms of what love looks like
 - ⁴ *Love is patient, love is kind*

- *It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.*
- *⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.*
- We so often think about love as an emotion or a feeling
 - Rugby tour > singing Righteous Brothers song to “You’ve lost that loving feeling”
 - That song, like many songs ... reflects how we how think about love
 - That love is a feeling we have in our heart
 - Love is what we feel for our spouse, child, boyfriend / girlfriend, parents
- Love is a feeling ... but love is not just a matter of feelings
 - Feelings come and go ... whereas love lasts
- Love is much more than an emotion or feeling ... Paul is showing us here that love is also an action
 - Love finds its reality in action
 - Love is expressed in tangible ways ... and it’s in tangible ways that are directed towards other people
- Paul’s showing us what love looks like in action
 - Patient, kind, protective, trusting, hopeful, persevering
 - Not – envious, boastful, easily angered, harbours grudges
- Paul holds up a mirror to these Corinthians and says ...
 - If you want to know how to relate to one another in church ... then here’s what it looks like
- Of course, these characteristics of love aren’t limited to those in church
 - Paul’s merely showing where the Corinthians need to apply this the most – which is amongst their divided congregation
- But the nature of love that Paul is speaking about to the church in Corinth is the same nature of love that ought to be applied in all relationships
 - Not just how you love the people here at church or in your growth group
- How you love your
 - spouse
 - kids
 - school mates
 - parents
 - colleagues
 - neighbour

- Notice Paul is not telling or commanding the Corinthians (nor us) to love like this
 - He just holds up a picture of love like a mirror for us to look at
- But like any mirror, it shows us a reflection
 - And as we look into this mirror of love that Paul is holding up ...
 - It forces us to reflect and consider how we love others and whether or not we fit the description of love in action
 - So if you substitute your name for the word 'love' you can consider if the description is true of you
 - John is patient > Sarah is kind > Helen does not envy > Kylie does not boast > Emma is not proud > John is not rude > Michael is not self-seeking > Julie is not easily angered > Rick keeps no record of wrongs > Tim does not delight in evil > Bryce rejoices in truth > Lee always protects > Wayne always trusts > Craig always hopes > Ethan always perseveres
- This is the essence of love that ought to define the way we relate with others

5. Endlessness of Love (v8-13)

- We have the essentialness of love and the essence of love
- Finally in v8-13 we see the endlessness of love
- And Paul's point in these few verses
 - Gifts like prophesy, tongues and knowledge are temporary ... but love is endless
- There will come a day when such gifts are no longer necessary ...
 - imperfect prophecy and knowledge will pass away
 - but love will remain
- Why?
 - Because God is love
 - Love is the essence of God's character
 - And eternity will be centered around him
- And so because God is eternal ... so will love be eternal
- And because love is eternal ... because love is the thing that lasts ...
 - Love is the thing we ought to value
 - Not giftedness, or impressiveness, or being the star
- The eternal nature of love means we ought to practice love now
- **Application**

- If you've ever heard anything about Christianity before ... this message of love is fairly familiar ... and you may know that Christianity is characterised by love
- When the religious leader asked Jesus one day
 - "Which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"
- Jesus replied:
 - *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." ... ³⁹ And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'*¹

- Love is essential ...
 - not just for the way we use our gifts and resources
 - but in the way we relate to God and the way we relate to others
- Now in one sense ... this is wonderful
 - To be part of a community that genuinely loves one another is a wonderful blessing
 - And often it is the church that welcomes and loves the outsider that the community rejects

- But the essential and eternal nature of love also creates a problem
- Because, I don't know about you ...
 - but when I look into that picture of love that Paul gives us in v4-7
 - when I substitute my name in that list of love characteristics
 - In my heart I know
 - I'm not patient with Liana
 - I'm not kind to those I like to think I'm superior to
 - I'm proud and defensive when I think I'm being criticised
 - I am easily angered with my kids
 - I could go on

- And I'm forced to concede ... I'm unable to do this?
 - My heart is too corrupt > I'm too self-centred
 - I'm too driven by my heart's desires for approval and power and comfort to forsake those things in order to love others the way I should
 - I'm no different to the Corinthians
 - I'm just as envious, boastful, proud, rude, self-seeking, angry, begrudging and evil as they are
 - How can I love like I should?

¹ Matthew 22:36-39

- Then I am reminded that ... it's not dependent on me and my willingness to love
 - My love is dependent on God's willingness to love me
 - **1 John 4:9-11** ⁹ *This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.* ¹⁰ *This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.* ¹¹ *Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.*
- Love starts with God
- And his love is seen most clearly in sending his son to go to the cross
- For it's at the cross that we see
 - Jesus patiently enduring what we deserve for all our impatience
 - Jesus kindness in dying to for all the times we failed to show kindness
 - Jesus humbled himself to atone for all the boast we do about ourself
 - Jesus was not self-seeking ... he was seeking to save you & I
 - Jesus doesn't keep records of wrongs ... at the cross he wiped away our record of wrongs
- You see at the cross ... we see love in action
- He showed us love ... for all our failures to love

- As I gaze upon the cross and God's love for us in Christ ...
 - This will enable me to love others
- You see the cross equips me to overcome all those desires of the heart that stop me from loving others as I ought

- Here's how
 - Because all those things that are stopping you from loving others like you should are taken away when you know the love of God for you in Christ
- That admiration you desire from others that causes you to seek your glory
 - Christ's death on the cross for you shows you that you are more admired by God than you can imagine
- That envy you feel that causes you to resent the person rather than love them
 - Christ's death means he's secured you a share in eternity that even if you gained the whole world it would be nothing in comparison
 - And so there's nothing anybody else can have you don't already have in Christ

- The comfort I desire that means I won't go out of my way to love others because it might cost me in time or money or inconvenience me
 - The cross shows me that Christ put aside his comforts so I can have all the comfort of eternal life

- You see friends ... to the extent you grasp Christ was loving towards you ... the more you will be equipped to be loving towards others

- So friends ... when you look into the mirror of love that Paul holds out for us ... what do you see?
 - Do you see imperfection like me?
- The way to grow in love is not to clench your fists and be determined to love better
 - I'm going to be more patient > kinder > humble > forgiving
 - Because that won't work
 - The selfish desires of your heart will always win in the end
- The way to grow in love ... is to look to the one who exemplifies love
 - And look to the cross and see how love is displayed in action
 - How in love he was crushed for all the times we failed to love

- And as you do ... you will see the love Christ has shown you and I
 - Far outweighs those selfish desire of our hearts that stop us from loving others
 - Then it frees us and equips is to love others like he loved us

PRAY