

“Love Is . . . a Verb?”—1 Corinthians 13:4-8

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Love Is . . . a Verb?” is 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 → *Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

How would you define the word “love?” I ask this question of every couple in pre-marital sessions. Even though most struggle as they strive to verbalize their understanding of love, usually their definition will involve a feeling which their fiancé produces in them, eliciting a desire to do anything for him/her as well as wanting to share everything together. No matter what the feelings which come to play in defining a love relationship, it will always be defined as a verb in the end. Just in case you’ve forgotten, you learned in English composition at one point in your life that a “verb” is “a word that characteristically is the grammatical center of a predicate and expresses an act, occurrence, or mode of being, that in various languages is inflected for agreement with the subject, for tense, for voice, for mood, or for aspect, and that

typically has rather full descriptive meaning and characterizing quality but is sometimes nearly devoid of these especially when used as an auxiliary or linking verb.” (Merriam-Webster, I. © 1996. Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary (10th ed.). Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster.) Well . . . maybe you know it better as a word which defines the action of the subject.

1 Corinthians 13 gives us God’s “definition” of love. It has even been labeled “the love chapter of Scripture” and is frequently heard at wedding ceremonies. Notice God’s definition reflects the characteristics of a verb as it lays before us specific activities or behaviors, encouraging us to apply His love to our behaviors, attitudes and ideals. Here Paul applied this love to the behavior of Christ’s Bride, the Church, as they expressed their relationship with their groom, Jesus.

Paul placed this “definition” of love before the Christians at Corinth because of their struggles which he observed as they tried to function in ministry together as Christ’s people. It comes during his discussion about the proper use of the spiritual gifts with which God had blessed them for ministering His Gospel in service to Him. They had been *enriched . . . in every way in Jesus, in all speech and all knowledge . . . not lacking in any gift* (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:5-7).

However, they had a lot of sinful struggles and behaviors in the use of these spiritual gifts. Exercising their gifts with sinful self-righteousness caused divisions in the congregation, contempt for fellow brothers and

sister in Christ, arrogance in knowledge and a host of immorality which was destroying the Church of Jesus Christ. It is no wonder that he gave the warning recorded in 1 Corinthians 3:17 → *If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you (i.e. the congregation) are that temple.* In the midst of these struggles, Paul taught what he called a *more excellent way* (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:31). It is the way of *love*.

Nowhere in this “definition” of *love* does the Holy Spirit describe it as a nice warm, fuzzy feeling that everyone in the church has for each other. Rather, the Spirit presents behaviors which run contrary to sinners striving to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ into the lives of sinners. It is such a perfect love, that if it does not govern the use of the Spirit's gifts, then they are worthless. Speaking *in the tongues of men and of angels* becomes simply noise if not used in love. *Prophetic powers* and understanding *all mysteries and all knowledge with faith to remove mountains* is *nothing* if not used in love. Giving away *all you have* or delivering *up your body to be burned* as a martyr without *love* gains you *nothing* (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:1-3). A behavior not governed by this love produces sin.

Looking at God's “definition” of *love* in our text we immediately see that is defined by **actions**, not feelings.

- *Love is patient*—an action of continuing to be calm and steady in presence and help, even while suffering as you serve others, even if they don't deserve it (i.e. longsuffering);
- *Love is . . . kind*—acting out of consideration for another's good first and foremost;
- *Love does not envy*—doesn't want what rightly belongs to someone else (i.e. covetousness);
- *Love does not . . . boast*—does not talk about your own accomplishments, especially in an effort to make others look bad;
- *It is not arrogant*—thinking more of oneself than is realistically true. Egotism fractures the body of Christ;
- *It is not . . . rude*—considerate and gentle while dealing with others, striving to do what is proper in God's sight;
- *It does not insist on its own way*—instead of desiring things to be done "my way" in the church we desire them to be done God's way;
- *Love . . . is not irritable*—doesn't get irritated by other's behaviors, ideas, characteristic, etc., many times displayed by outbursts of anger (i.e. "a short fuse");
- *Love . . . is not resentful*—doesn't harbor grudges with contempt and unforgiveness;
- *It does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth*—rejoices with other believers when the truth prevails over wrongdoing (cf. 1

Corinthians 12:26);

- *Love bears all things*—puts up with other people and circumstances which try your patience;
- *Love . . . believes all things*—faith generated by God’s love in Christ continues to exist in **all** circumstances;
- *Love . . . hopes all things*—it never gives up **on God**;
- *Love . . . endures all things*—continues in life under the cross of Jesus Christ no matter what.
- *Love never ends*—God’s love in Christ Jesus continues eternally.

Love is a verb, defined by actions displayed in behavior.

So . . . where do you fit into this “definition” of love? The words, “I love you” are usually understood to mean that a person has an affection for another **based upon their relationship**. However, what happens when the words “I love you” are not backed up by loving actions? Thoughts or even statements emerge, such as, “If you love me, why don’t you show it?” In the midst of abusive, sinful behaviors one might react to statements of love with . . . “You sure have a strange way of showing it!”

Yet, who could ever meet up to the “definition” of *love* given in our text, **totally** self-giving, self-sacrificing and **always** having the best interests of the other person in mind? If you are honest with yourself

when you read these words they convict you to core of your heart because you know you do not meet up to love's demands. Even your best "loving" actions can be more concerned about others **only if it benefits you somehow.**

Where do you fit in to such *love* described in our text? As the recipients of God's perfect, steadfast *love* that He displays to sinners such as you and me each and every day in the Person & Work of Jesus Christ. It is a *love* which *never ends*, enduring for eternity, based on the actions of Jesus Christ in His obedience to God's Law and His sacrifice for the forgiveness of your sins on the cross. Simply put in contrast to our frail human loving, Romans 5:8 says: *But God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

The actions associated with the *love* described in our text are not displayed toward others because we have warm, fuzzy feelings for them. This *love* is truly evident when it comes to loving the unlovable sinner before our very eyes! Repent under the conviction the Holy Spirit, knowing that you have not loved in such a manner, and cling to Jesus Who *died for* you! Only in Christ does this love bear and endure without limit, as 1 Corinthians 13:13 sums it up: *So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.*

Faith is that which simply trusts God's *love* in Jesus Christ, even if you "feel" unloved or know you don't deserve such love. You simply trust

God's love in Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. This gives you *hope* both now and for eternity. Such hope is the certainty of knowing that the Holy Spirit will work Christ's perfect love through you as you function together in the Church to bring that wonderful love to others! It is also the certainty of knowing your eternal salvation! To be God's lovers happens when we recognize we are not people who possess God's love as much as we are people who are possessed by God's love in Jesus Christ. Then we'll recognize that God's love is truly a verb, displayed in His actions toward us sinners in Christ Jesus and His actions through us forgiven sinners toward others. Amen.

For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this:

that One has died for all, therefore all have died;

and He died for all, that those who live

might no longer live for themselves

but for Him Who for their sake died and was raised.

(2 Corinthians 5:14-15)

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