

***IT ALL COMES DOWN TO LOVE: The Necessary Ingredient*****1 Corinthians 12:31b-13:13**

You cannot skimp on a study of these chapters and last week as I prepared, it soon became very obvious that my talk would be much too long for one morning. So we wrapped up at 1 Corinthians 13:3 last week and said “To be continued”. So, here we are, continuing. But . . .

**First, a short review:**

- Paul ended his discussion of the gifts of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12 with an encouragement to . . . *eagerly desire the greater gifts* followed by a promise, And yet I will show you the most excellent way. 1 Corinthians 12:31. That most excellent way was the necessary and previously unfamiliar concept of unconditional love – the love God has for us, and the love we MUST have for one another. It was such an unfamiliar concept that it required a rarely used and relatively new word.
- The word is agape. We learned last week, that Spiritual gifts, even the seemingly great ones, (if there is such a thing as one being greater than the other) are nothing without the catalyst of agape love.
- Agape is, in short, a necessary ingredient.
  - Have you ever made cookies without flour? Almost any baker has – flour is the key ingredient and without it cookies are a buttery flop.
  - One time, at a Memorial Day picnic my brother in law, Morris, was eating a hamburger he had made. When he was about halfway done it he discovered he never put the burger in it – he put in the lettuce, the tomato, the onion, the ketchup, and the mustard, but forgot the patty – the necessary ingredient for a hamburger to be a hamburger was not there.
  - Epoxy and auto body filler need two compounds to function properly. Epoxy comes in two parts: a resin and a hardener. Mixing the resin and hardener together prompts a chemical reaction between the two, transforming them from a liquid into a solid. Auto body filler is probably a type of epoxy and it is certainly the same principle. You need both compounds. Each by itself will not work – they will be just a goey mess. They also need to be in the right amount. Measuring accurately and mixing thoroughly is essential to making sure the finished product will be properly hardened and will function the way it is intended.
- So it is with the gifts of the Spirit – they must have the compound of agape love to properly function. Paul was telling the Corinthians, and us as future readers, no matter what gift we have and utilize, the gift of love is the necessary ingredient to properly activate the gift.
- For that reason . . .

**It would be good if on a regular basis every single Christ Follower would work through the next five verses and do some serious self-examination in the area of agape. Let’s read those verses again.**

**(Read vv 4-7)**

- Love is patient. The Greek word used here for “patience” and all through the New Testament always describes patience with people and not patience with circumstances. I’ve always said I’m not a good fisherman because I don’t have the patience for it. I’m not a good woodworker and it’s probably because I don’t have the patience for it. Most of us don’t have the patience to go to Walmart and wait in one of the two lanes they have open when we see that there are another 28 that are closed. These are not the patience Paul is talking about. Love that is patient is the kind that waits for God to do his work in someone. This is the patience God has for us, it is what we need for one another. Love is patient.
- Love is kind. Church Father, Origen said this means that love is “*sweet to all.*” Another commentator wrote “*So much Christianity is good but unkind.*” We are called to holy as God is holy and we are to be like Jesus, and yet so many have the idea that Christians are sour and too often mean-spirited because what they see is people who are good, but decidedly mean-spirited. This reputation is not inaccurate. What we can do is make sure that as long as it’s up to us, to reverse that impression. Let’s be kind, because love is kind.
- Love does not envy. Envy comes in different shades. One version covets the possessions of other people. A number of weeks ago the Powerball or MegaMillions, or one of those big lotteries sat at about \$750 million dollars. Now I’m not good at math, but that is about three quarters of a billion dollars right? And

there was one ticket sold that won that money. Someone suddenly became a millionaire and they suddenly had a lot of friends. I read last week that there are really only two classes of people in this world, those who are millionaires and those who would like to be. That's simplistic, and I'm not sure I agree. Maybe I shouldn't knock it until I've tried it, but I'm not sure I'd like to suddenly have millions of dollars like that lottery winner. I think a lot of envy would come into play. But truth be told, such envy is difficult to avoid because it is a very human thing. Another kind of envy is much more insidious. And it may be what Paul had in mind here when he said that love does not envy. This kind grudges the very fact that someone has something and I do not. It may even be that I don't want it, but the fact that someone else has it bothers me and makes me envious. But agape is the remedy for envy – love does not envy.

- Love doesn't boast. Love is not a braggart. Barclay says, "*True love will always be far more impressed with its own unworthiness than its own merit.*" Love doesn't brag because . . .
- Love is not proud. It's not inflated with its own importance. It's enough to know that God sent his son to die for us, we don't have to pump ourselves up with self-importance.
- Love does not dishonor others. Barclay says this, "*Love does not behave gracelessly*" and points out that the Greek words for grace and charm are the same. Love is gracious. Sometimes Christians think they need to wield truth like a bludgeon. Truth must be administered in love and not with dishonor. Another commentator points out that "*love does nothing to raise a blush.*" This is why it is not loving to confront someone in a crowd. They may be in the wrong, but if you choose to point that wrong out publicly, you are in the wrong too. This is why parents should always settle their differences of opinions quietly and behind closed doors. For one parent to belittle the other in front of their children is not showing love, but contempt.
- Love is not self-seeking. Love is not out for its own way. This one is very timely in this Me! Me! Me! Culture when you realize this actually means love does not insist upon its rights. Many people insist on their rights and privileges and are always seeking what life owes them. On the other hand Christ Followers remember their responsibilities and what they owe. Barclay points out that "*Whenever we start thinking about "our place", we are drifting away from Christian love.*"
- Love is not easily angered. It doesn't fly off the handle. In reality, this means that agape love never becomes exasperated with people. A red and frustrated face can be a sign of defeat. I know from personal experience that when you lose your temper, you risk losing everything. Someone quoted Rudyard Kipling who said that "*it was the test of a man if he could keep his head when everyone else was losing his and blaming it on him, and if when he was hated he did not give way to hating. The man who is master of his temper can be master of anything.*" We live in society that is caving in to emotion and it is very destructive. Anyone who has been a parent or a boss or owned a new puppy knows what anger is. But to control it is Godly. Paul tells us in another place, "*In your anger do not sin*": *Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.* Ephesians 4:26-27. Never give Satan any satisfaction, keep your cool.
- Love keeps no record of wrongs. The Greek word translated as keep here is an accounting word. Love doesn't keep a savings account of wrongs. The most miserable people I know (and I know you know some too) are those who can't forget a slight or an insult. It's almost like the savor the hurt. Get over it. Don't hang on. It only ends up in misery.
- Love does not delight in evil. Love finds no pleasure in evil-doing. And even better what is to realize that agape love finds no pleasure in anything that is wrong. Barclay rightly points out "*It is not so much delight in doing the wrong thing that is meant, as the malicious pleasure which comes to most of us when we hear something derogatory about someone else. It is much easier to weep with them than to rejoice with those who rejoice. Christian love has none of that human malice which finds pleasure in ill reports.*" There is so much anger and hate in our society these days that delighting in this kind of evil has become a delicious pleasure – even for some Christians. It is straight from the pit of hell. This is because . . .
- Love rejoices with the truth. This not always easy, but it is always the right thing. The truth is what agape always seeks, because . . .

- Love always protects. A Christ Follower who perfects this kind of love has become very much like Jesus. It sticks up for others and stands in the way of harm. It is a love that shields.
- Love trusts. This goes two ways: This love takes God at his word. The bumper sticker that seems so trite that says “If God said it, that does it.” works here. It believes God’s promises. When Jesus said, *And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*” Matthew 28:20b or when God promises, “*Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.*” Hebrews 13:5 this kind of love takes those words at face value. And it trusts others as well. This kind of love believes the best about other people. Being untrusting can become a self-fulfilling prophesy. Instead of waiting for someone to do something wrong, try catching them doing something right. You can always hope. In fact . . .
- Love always hopes. Jesus believed that no person is hopeless and neither should we. No one is beyond redemption if they are still breathing. One commentator puts it this way, “*Love hopes, not with unreasoning optimism, but in expecting ultimate triumph by the grace of God’s love endures, that is to say, in an active positive sense. When love has no evidence, it believes the best. When the evidence is adverse, it hopes for the best. And when hopes are repeated repeatedly disappointed it’s still courageously waits. Come what may it is undismayed*”.
- Love always perseveres. This isn’t a type of resigned patience – it’s a prevailing spirit with triumphant fortitude. Agape is a victorious love so it wins out in the end.
- And then Paul tells us there are . . .

### **Three final things about Christian Love**

- In just three words Paul lays the truth – the necessary ingredient, *agape love never fails*. 1 Corinthians 13:8a. It’s not going away. As God is eternal the love he fashioned has absolute permanency. *But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.* 1 Corinthians 13:8b When all has passed away, love remains. Song of Solomon is appropriate on Valentine’s Day, *Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot sweep it away.* Song of Solomon 8:7. The one unconquerable thing is love. Love never fails.
- Love is also absolutely complete. The necessary ingredient has all we need. It’s all in there, but the truth is, it’s going to get better. As things are, what we see are reflections in a mirror. Apparently Corinth was known for the quality mirrors produced there – but they were a far cry from what we have today made from glass. The mirrors Corinth was known for and what was mad up until about 900 years ago were made of polished metal. Prisons have these kinds of mirrors even now in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and they are far from perfect. Paul is saying that agape love is complete – but the work goes on until the realization when we see Jesus face to face that the best is yet to come.
- And finally Paul points out, the absolute supremacy of love. As awesome as hope and faith are, love is even more awesome. Barclay points out, “*Faith without love is cold, and hope without love is grim. Love is the fire which kindles faith and it is the light which turns hope into certainty.*”
- Agape love is the necessary ingredient for the victorious, fulfilling, and fruitful life.

**Conclusion:** Last week I gave you an assignment – I suggested you read 1 Corinthians 13 at least once over the week – but that every day would be better. I had a method to my madness. This world needs agape love. This world needs to see it in the Children of God. Christians need to be known for the love of God. We’ve been stained by accusations of hatefulness that have often been inaccurate and even false. But too many accusations (one is too many, actually) have been true. So we need to step up with the necessary ingredient – agape love. So, let me give you a long standing assignment that is similar to last week. Do what Kenneth Foreman suggested instead of writing a commentary on this chapter. Listen, “*Read one Corinthians 13 over and over for yourself. Learn what love is - Christian love, God-like love. Read the chapter in all the different translations you can lay your hands on. Read it and meditate on it and let it grip your imagination and fire your soul. Read and practice it. Then you begin to know what in this world can never be fully known, the true meaning of love*”. When we do that, we’ll turn the world upside down. Amen.