



Worldwide Church of God

Camberwell

Living and sharing the Gospel

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Dear Church Family,

The Love Chapter

1 Corinthians chapter 13 is a very famous passage that has been called the 'the love chapter' and is one that is often read at weddings. On hearing it the usual response is one of: 'Isn't that lovely', or 'Ah, isn't that sweet'. The problem is that is not the meaning behind what Paul was saying. When the Corinthian church first read this, they, in no way, said, "Oh isn't that lovely"; "What a sweet thing for Paul to write". On the contrary, Paul was dropping them some bombshells that are quite astonishing to think about.

Corinth was a place of commerce. Nobody lived there or went there except to be successful. As a result, it attracted resourceful, talented, and ambitious people, and in the church at Corinth, we have a group of Christians that, in many ways, reflected the population and the culture. They were talented and gifted and thought they had arrived as Christians.

So it's not surprising to see Paul in verses 1-3 talking about what they already have. In effect he says, "Look, you might have this, and you might have that and you might have the other, but so what?" The opening of the chapter describes what they are like. Prophecy, communication, faith that moves mountains, leadership, fathom all mysteries. They are brilliant. There are teachers. There are scholars. They are very gifted. They are talented, but so what if they don't have love. This is the reason why the Corinthians, when they first heard this, were not inspired.

Interestingly, practically every Greek word in verses 4-7 had already been used earlier in the letter where Paul was criticising them for their disputing, their fighting, their factions, their party spirit and all the problems they are having in this church. In other words, verses 4-7 are a list of all the things the Corinthians are *not*.

The Love Chapter – 1 Corinthians 13

Paul was not thinking, “What should I say about love? I know: love is patient, it is kind, etc. etc.” No! He is saying, “You are the most talented group of people and your doing is great, but who you actually are doesn’t match up. Your giftedness is good, but your character is not.”

Paul speaks right into the kind of culture that puts all the emphasis on talent and achievement and says, “I don’t care how rich you are. I don’t care how successful you are. I don’t care how talented you are. If you are irritable and impatient and selfish and self-centered and self-absorbed and self-pitying and vain and driven and anxious, you have nothing. It is no good saying, ‘Well, I’m a successful person. I just have a few personal issues to deal with.’ You have nothing. You *are* nothing.” Paul hits them right between the eyes and says love is everything. It is not ability, not talent, not achievement, but love.

That was true for the members of the church at Corinth and it is true for us today. And so, in a forthcoming series of sermons, we are going to have a look at the ‘love chapter’ and examine what Paul has to say about love.

He will argue that love is an action, not an emotion. The kind of love Paul will talk about is seen, experienced, and demonstrated. This is contrary to our culture that honours personal feelings above almost everything. We do what we want when we want because we “feel” like it. And if we don’t “feel” like it, we don’t do it. But as we study this passage together we will see that there is a complete absence of any stress on personal feelings.

Hence, if love is an action and not an emotion, we need to study what God’s Word has to say about love. We need to know what love is and what it looks like when it is lived out in the church and in the world around us, since Jesus said, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” (John 13:34)

Undoubtedly this is a real challenge for all of us, but one upon which we must all embark.

I hope you will be challenged by our journey together.

Pastor Barry