

*UNEDITED DRAFT*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Here at Good Shepherd, we believe that all of the Bible is the true Word of God. We believe it is factually true. We believe all of it was written for our benefit, to train, rebuke, correct and train us in righteousness. That said, certain parts of the Bible are more needed by you than are other parts depending on your season of life or circumstances. A 10 year old does not yet need to study the Song of Solomon. But a married couple would benefit greatly from that study. But some parts of the Bible are just universally essential and practical for all people, all the time, no matter what season of life or circumstance.

Before us today is just such a Scripture. The chapter of the Bible we will look at today is vitally important for us to learn, remember and apply every day. This is not one of those places where I say, "You might not need this today, but remember it because someday you will." No, this is one of those places you do need today. And tomorrow. And every single day of your life. In fact, if you would memorize this chapter of the Bible, and then put it into practice in your life, it will fundamentally change every single relationship in your life for the better.

Today we will talk about love. Before us today is 1 Corinthians 13, often called "the great love chapter" of the Bible. If you've attended a wedding, odds are you've heard part of this chapter. But as we will see, this chapter does not actually specifically address husband and wife. The love spoken of in this chapter is the kind of love God wants us to have toward all.

So let's look at 1 Corinthians 13. I'll apologize up front that we just don't have enough time this morning to do justice to these verses. In fact, there is enough material in this chapter for 10 sermons (and I'm not at all exaggerating.) But what we have time for is to get a good taste of the sweet honey of God's Word here. But if you want to be filled up, you're going to have to take additional time on your own reading, studying and especially practicing this chapter.

Before we get into the details, I'd like to first of all give you the big picture. That way if you I lose you at some point, and you start thinking about brunch, or sun-bathing this afternoon, you'll at least get the main idea. God want us to know and to live real love. He wants us to receive it from him, return it to him, and live it in every relationship we have. Real love is key.

How important is real love? Jesus summarized all of God's law with two commandments; Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind. And love your neighbor as yourself. The word common to both of those commands is: Love. If we would always perfectly love, we would never sin.

But what is real love? We will see that God's definition of love is significantly different than the world's kind of love. Our world focuses on emotional love, on sexual love. Love is something that makes you feel good and meets your needs. The world's understanding of love, then, is primarily selfish. Love is great... because of how I feel and because of what I get. That's not real love. We need to learn God's love.

Real love is selfless. Real love does not depend on the how lovable the recipient is. Love is... **devoting yourself to the happiness and well-being of another, even when it means personal inconvenience or loss, even when the other person is unworthy.** So love says, "I sincerely desire your happiness and well-being, so I will act accordingly." And to make this even

harder, say this... live this... even when the other person is simply unlovable. Still desire their happiness and well-being, and act accordingly.

That's the big picture. And you may push back on this definition of love and say this is impossible. But it's not. This is the kind of love God showed us. Because of our sin, we are ugly to God. We are so unlovable. But he chose, he decided, that he would love us anyway. That means that he chose to devote himself to our happiness and well-being at great personal cost even though we were not worthy. That's love! And God says, as I have loved you, now you love one another.

If we look at the chapter that immediately precedes 1 Corinthians 13, we see a beautiful discourse on spiritual gifts. God has made us one body. We are equal in value before him. But we have different gifts in different measures all given by God for the common good.

1 Corinthians 13, then, Paul teaches that there is something that must control our use of any and every spiritual gift, and that is love. Love must be the main spring and the guiding force ruling every action we take on behalf others. So Paul says:

**1 Corinthians 13:1-13** **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.**

Paul lists the most spectacular spiritual gifts: if you could miraculously speak in foreign languages... if you had a crystal clear understanding of all the mysteries of God and all the knowledge of the universe... if you had a mountain-moving faith... if you died a martyr's death for the most noble of causes... but you don't have love, you have nothing. If you are not motivated and guided by an unselfish desire for the happiness and well-being of others, then you're great gifts are nothing. Their great value instantly drops to zero if real love doesn't motivate and govern their use.

So what does this real love look like? We've defined it, but what would it look like? How would I recognize it? If you desired and acted for the happiness and best-interests of those around you, what would that love be like?

**4 Love is patient,** Long-suffering... puts up with a lot.

**love is kind.** This is love the emotion or a sweet disposition. Kindness is love in action... useful, beneficial, friendly *acts*.

**It does not envy** (jealous), **it does not boast, it is not proud.** Love doesn't have an inflated idea of your own importance. If you do, you are jealous of what other have and you don't. You boast and are proud of what you have but others don't. Not real love!

**5 It is not rude,** (Not ill-mannered. Shows respect for the feelings of others.)

**it is not self-seeking,** "What's in it for me?" is not a question that can be asked for real love. "What can I do for you" is.

**it is not easily angered,** Or another word for this is "touchy" or easily provoked.

**it keeps no record of wrongs.** A record of wrongs means you've got what they did filed away, ready to pull out and use at just the right time. "Oh yeah, well remember when..."

**6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.** Here, "truth" is more along the lines of righteousness. Love does not celebrate sin. Love is not softness... blurring the line

between right and wrong, or ignoring wrong. Love cannot be unjust, but will encourage toward righteousness.

**7 It always protects** (bears all things), **always trusts** (that doesn't mean you're gullible, but you do have faith in a person. That also means assuming the best when you don't have all the facts.) **always hopes** (Real love is not pessimistic, but has an optimistic look toward the future.) **, always perseveres.** (It endures trials and hardships with strength and without losing heart.

**8 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.**

These other things fail, but love endures forever.

**9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. 11 When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. 12 Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.**

This side of heaven, we know imperfectly, we understand imperfectly, we act imperfectly. We look forward to the day when love is made complete.

**13 And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.** Faith is not so necessary in heaven. We'll trust God, but we'll see him. Hope... we have it there. But love... that is enduring. It continues. In heaven, you will love and be loved.

Now, we raced through that. That's why you need to read through this several more times. But I think we learned enough that I can ask you this question:

Have you shown real love? Do you live in real love for God and for everyone you meet? Where have you seen your love falling short?

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Because God's love for us is perfect, that loved move him to do something about our imperfect love, our fake love, our insufficient love. He sent a perfect Savior, who perfectly love. Can you think of the definition of love again, this time thinking of Jesus? He has your happiness and well-being at heart. You were unlovable. So his love moved him to make you lovely. Not considering self, he took action to help you! Look at Jesus and you see:

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Through his death on the cross he paid for our lack of love. Christ made us unlovable people, lovely and blameless. He made us a beautiful bride at great cost to himself! Rejoice in his great love. Rejoice in your full and free forgiveness!

Real love can only be found in Christ. If you want to know real love better, you have to know Christ better! Having received his real love, now God empowers you to really love as Christ loved you. Then you look at the list one more time as you joyfully seek the answer to the

question: “Now how can I, in thankfulness to Christ, now love as he loved me? I want to be in my daily life what he has declared me to be through his blood!”

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When you get home today, print out or write our 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. Each day (or perhaps even on a weekly basis), take one of the descriptions of real love. Contemplate your failures at showing that characteristic of real love. Ponder the various ways Jesus showed this characteristic of real love. Be thankful that he saved you from your failures through his perfect love and innocent death. Then dedicate yourself to acting in real love in that way today... this week. What will it look like in practice? What will it look like to love your children that way? Spouse? Co-workers? Neighbors? Can you imagine the difference this is going to make in each of these relationships?

Empowered by Christ love, let's go and be people dedicated to living and acting in love. Real love. Amen.