

Love Is...

Sermon Series: Controversial Questions from Corinth, 1 Corinthians, part 4 (6)

Bible Passage: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

By: Pastor Enoch Liao

13 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³ If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

⁴ Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

⁸ Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰ but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. ¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. ¹² For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

¹³ So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love. (ESV)

Recap

We are in a series called “Controversial Questions from Corinth”. This is the final segment of our yearlong series in this book. We might not think love is controversial, but it was quite controversial for their day, quite a tender subject, because this was a church in Corinth rife with conflict and bitterness and dissention. So as we look at that, let’s keep that in mind; that it’s not a wedding passage, primarily – it’s really about the church. So I’d like to read for us the entirety of 1 Corinthians 13, all 13 verses, but know that I will focus mainly on verses 4 through the rest of the chapter.

13 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. **2** And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. **3** If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

4 Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant **5** or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; **6** it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. **7** Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

8 Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. **9** For we know in part and we prophesy in part, **10** but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. **11** When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. **12** For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

13 So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love. (ESV)

Our loving Father, teach us about love this morning. Some of us have wonderful parents that we would say love us, but still, teach us what you mean by “love”. Some of us may be parents. We may have spouses, or may have had spouses, and we felt powerful emotions towards them – tender, sweet, beautiful things. But still, this morning Lord, as we open your word, teach us what love is – as you intended it, as you embody it – as you show it to us.

Father, some of us this morning would say “I’ve never really known love. I’ve seen it in TV shows and movies; I’ve seen it at the park, when other families are doing stuff; I’ve seen it in restaurants, when all the couples seem to be in love...” But maybe some of us this morning, Father, feel like we really missed out on love so far in life. Teach us, Lord. Teach us that you have love for all of us, through your son, Jesus Christ, as exemplified by Him dying on the cross. Teach us what love is, we pray this morning. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

One of my majors at UCLA as an undergraduate was philosophy. I'm not going to make light of that profound discipline, but there's a little bit of a story that I want to tell you to kind start us this morning.

I was in metaphysics class. The professor, a brilliant man, came to class and said, "Today, we're going to tackle a profound metaphysical question, that's cutting edge." Papers were coming out Yale and Princeton right that year about this very topic; the topic was, "What is the 'it' in the sentence 'It is raining.'?"

We thought, "That's so stupid. The 'it' is the day...? The 'day' is raining? That's not right. The weather? Well, the weather isn't raining; it has rain. The state of affairs is "raining...?" And so, for the next hour, the professor regaled us on how little we know about the "it" in "It is raining."

I say that to you, not to blow your mind for the rest of the time, but, to come back and say that we say a phrase all the time – "It's so hot," and "It's raining," without really understanding what it means. Now, you will never say that phrase again without thinking. Additionally, we say another particular phrase often. I'm not sure we always grasp or know what we mean when we use the word "love".

"I love pizza." "I love beef jerky." "I love my dog." "I'd love to have a dog." "I'd love to not have a dog." Whatever it is, we use this word in so many ways. I'm not here to berate the English language on the fact that we don't have a special word reserved for the most important people in our lives – because a lot of people will point that out. The Greek language, among other languages, has those kinds of words reserved. Even if we did, I think between all our consumerism and our marketing, we would still say "I love _____".

We're in part 2 of a message series on Love in Chapter 13; last week, we studied this chapter from the standpoint of what "love is not." We talked about things like "love is not the same as being very talented and good with people," and "Love is not the same as having a passion for social justice or moral virtue, and even giving of yourself for those sorts of causes." We also said, "Love is not one with mixed motives, for why we do any of the things we do." Those are powerful thoughts, and there are some other things there that you could study the passage or go online to listen to the sermons, but this morning, I'm going to do what I haven't done in 4 years, which is actually go through a laborious list.

Now, as I've said before, Paul is the Apostle who wrote this book, and he's got lots of lists in many books of the Bible – lists of vices, lists of the Fruit of the Spirit, and all these things. I've tried to avoid expounding on these words, but the Lord has kept me. As a result, we're going to go through 1 Corinthians 13 and I'm going to do my best to expound on what these attributes of love are.

To do this, I will take a nod to a very significant theologian of the previous century - Karl Barth. He has an exposition on the topic of love and I appreciate the way he broke it down in the passage. I think it's helpful to remember it. I don't think it's the only or, perhaps, even the best way to understand it. However, rather than give you 12 to 13

attributes of love, I thought that it would be helpful for all of us to kind of appreciate one of the most significant theologians in the last couple hundred years and how he understands love. Additionally, I've added my own twist and I would like to say, this morning, 3 things that "love" is for us, then we'll go through them one at a time. The three things are:

1. Love's essential nature – what is love's essential nature and quality?
2. Love's effects – what are the effects of love in you, in other people, in our view towards God?
3. What is love's enduring quality? How long does love last? What does God say about Love's endurance?

Love's Essential Nature

First of all, what are the essential qualities of "love?" There's going to be this long profound list. Maybe you've read this list to someone. Maybe you've had someone read it to you. Maybe you've heard it at a wedding, but there's a long list of things. I would like to suggest appreciating the structure because the first two traits in this section, beginning of verse 4, are probably a good way to capture the rest of the chapter. **Love's essential nature is patient and kind.** Let me show you, in 1 Corinthians 13, beginning at verse 4; we can see the essential nature of love. Beginning in verse 3:

If I deliver up my body to be burned," – or as some in the footnotes say, "deliver up my body, *that I may boast*, but have not love, I gain nothing.

If you were to write the list of love, what love is, what would be the first thing you would say? I'm stricken by the fact that, of all the things the writer could say right after that, he said "Love is patient." and "Love is kind." I would even go so far to say that I think patience has to come before kindness because **I don't think that you can become kind without patience.**

Just think – if I were to get 100 college students, or teenagers, or married couples, in a room, and say "I want you to do word association for the word 'love'!" and they write their answers down, how many people would really describe it as "patient?" That's about as brilliant and unexpected as God's first character we see, which is jealousy, which is based on the Old Testament 10 commandments.

Love is patient. And friends, I don't think that you can have kindness without patience, but we'll get to kindness in a moment. Love is patient and kind. Now, the Greek word for "patient" is "long-suffering"; some of the old translations say this – love can suffer for a long time. That's very much true if you have an Asian culture background. Long-suffering –we identify with that, or at least our grandparents identify with that. A parent might say "I was long-suffering for you. 12 hours of labor I long-suffered for you." But is that what long-suffering completely means? Well, if you were to write down a keyword for patience, I would say this: **Love has perfect timing.**

I think that's what patience is. Because, friends, if patience is merely waiting and waiting, that's hard and gets old really quickly, but that's what we think it is. But when God says love is patient, and as you go through the rest of the chapter, you'll see – patience has an endpoint. Patient doesn't mean don't do anything and deal with it and put up with it. Patient means “I will exercise restraint and control and timing for *kindness*.” That is why I believe Paul says “Love is *patient*, and love is *kind*.”

Now “kindness”, beautiful in the translation, is “desiring the best for the other person.” That's what kindness is. Kindness is desiring the best – God's best – for other people. Now, you think we can desire the best, but not be patient, right? Like, “Son, I just want you to get good grades! Now go study!” And that would be that. But I don't think your and my intentions will register as love if there's kindness without patience. But I think if you have patience – and the purpose of me showing kindness is to say “I will pray and discern the optimal timing to show the kindness that I need to show you at a time when it makes most sense, at a time when, maybe not when you feel ready to receive it, but at the time when I think it is for your best interest – then your kindness will register as love.

I'm thinking there are two or three things the Corinthian church fundamentally struggled with, and maybe they do with our relationships – because, again, love is not primarily about marriage in this passage, it's about the church and how the church witnesses to the world. So, a couple of things that, I think, are the hardest things the Corinthian church are dealing with are this:

1. How do you handle love when confronting sin or an unhealthy pattern in someone else's life
2. The challenge to forgive or give another chance

Let's take the example of confronting in sin, or as God thinks, as something bad for you, even if you think it's good or fun or great, or something that's He thinks is not good for you in the long-term. Let's say we are confronting a destructive pattern in our life that you or I may not even realize. Kindness says: “I definitely want to bring it up to you because I care about you so much. I just can't watch you ruin your life.” Patience tells me when I bring it up.

Not when “I can't put up with it anymore! I can't deal with it anymore!” Not when “I'm fed up with it!” or when I muster the courage to tell you. Not when “In all the counseling that we've gone through and I've had the chance to witness and share my own struggles, I will confront you when there's no choices left. Because there are no choices left.” Not when it's “I've finally mustered up the courage after sharing your sin with 40 people and they're all praying for me now –all those people that I've gossiped with. I'm ready now to confront.” Because, in that case, the timing wasn't for your sake, it was for me, to get the courage, to maybe gossip, and to get the affirmation even if I didn't mean it.

Alternatively, maybe I have no more patience left, so I'm finally going to tell you what I think about you. We might say things like: “I'm going to finally tell my child to stop seeing that person.” “I'm going to tell my coworker he really needs to start pulling more of his weight on the team.”

Love Is...© 2014 Enoch Y. Liao (<http://www.enochliao.com>)

All rights reserved. May be used free of charge, but must be acknowledged. Permission granted to reproduce for personal and educational use only. Commercial use not permitted.

Patience says: “The reason and the time when I tell you is not my courage, is not my comfort, and is not my emotional well-being. It is the optimal time to tell you something hard that you need to know for your own good. I derive no satisfaction saying something difficult to you.” **Timing to show someone God’s best for them –that’s what love is.** That alone is extremely hard.

And again, friends, I think Paul was really filled with the Spirit when he wrote this. First of all, love is patient, because if you’re not patient, if you’re not in control, nothing else counts. You could say the right things, but if you’re screaming, it’s not going to go through. You could say the right things, but if you’re breaking vases and punching holes in walls or using a belt or hand, it’s not going to come through as love. First of all, “Love is *patient* and *kind*”, or to put it this way: **love is the perfect timing to show someone what’s best for them.** That’s the essential quality of love.

Friends, if we’re going to say we need love, maybe we need to say “God, don’t just give me the sense of ‘I want what’s best for them’, but also give me *wisdom* to know *when* and *how* to show that love, to say that love, to display that love, to stop doing this thing ‘in the name of love’, to stop giving help, which is actually enabling a bad pattern, ‘in the name of love.’ Perfect timing to do what’s best for them.

That’s actually much easier than just waiting. “Just wait” – that’s really tough. However, if you say, “Wait for the best time to show them the kindness of God,” then that’s when you’re going to tell your kid, your roommate, your spouse, your coworker, your parent about their health, not because they’ve given you no more choice, you’re fed up, you’re emotionally ready, but because that timing is what’s best for *them*. What is love’s essential quality? It’s perfect timing to do what’s best for someone else.

Now, if that’s true, what does it look like? How does that play out? What are the effects, in my life, in your life, in the life of people, like a church? Even if you’re not a believer, what does it look like? So we move to the second point:

The Effects of Love

The first point we saw was love’s essential quality. I think you could phrase it differently, but I think patience and kindness are a very interesting and unexpected opening two points about love from Paul. However, the next three things, the next part about love’s effects on us, and I’m going to lean on Karl Barth’s insights here, say: love deals with darkness in our relationships. I mean darkness in the sense of evil, wicked, self-centered – love deals with darkness. We’re going to see:

- A. Love deals with darkness in ourselves.
- B. Love deals with darkness in others.
- C. Love deals with apparent darkness in the heart of God.

Love Dealing with the Darkness in Us

The next 5 things on this list have to do with the struggles when it comes to loving people.

4 ...love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way;

When we say “this is love”, I think you can really say that these things are struggles that you and I deal with in our own hearts - being jealous, being rude, being self-seeking, being, in terms of pride, boastful. When we say “love is not proud” or “love does not boast”, it talks about being inflated with your own importance. Rudeness actually does mean public courtesies – “Love is not rude” – according to the cultural norms and etiquettes of that day. When the Bible talks about “love is not self-seeking”, the better way to translate or understand that is thinking of it this way: **love does not make another person an object.** Because if that person is a person in your mind, created in the image of God, worthy of all the dignities that a human should have in the order of God’s creation, then you can’t be self-seeking. However, **whenever we make someone the object of our desire, when we use them for our own personal selfish gain, we have turned that person into an object.**

I think there’s a phrase in English that captures this so well – when a person, typically a guy in a song says something like this – “Without you, I can’t live.” or “I can’t live without you, I’d die without you.” I think it’s especially more often said from a man to a woman.

Social science and the Bible tell us that men and women are equal and they have similar needs, but some of those needs manifest differently. A man really needs to feel respected and is maybe being a contributor – maybe that’s why men tend to idolize their work and can throw themselves too much into their work. Women, generally speaking, and social sciences and the Bible affirm, need to feel cherished and secure –which is why women, if they make an idol, stereotypically speaking, tend to focus on their children.

Men sin by working too much and women struggle with the household and the family and things like that. That being said, I often hear that song phrase sung from a man to a woman – “I need you; I can’t live without you.” For a woman, the idea that a man tells you “I can’t live without you,” sounds profoundly loving. It’s the ultimate “I need you so badly, baby.” However, if you just pause, it won’t take so long to realize that the man is totally ignoring the needs of the other person.

Why do you think she’s the one you should marry? “I can’t live without her.” Really? Jesus would have you say “Why do I think she’s the person? Because I don’t think there’s anyone I could serve more with my life for the rest of my life.” How’s that? Talk about making a woman really feel valued and cherished – I need you because I think you’re the one that God has called me to serve for the rest of my days. **“I can’t live without you” sounds romantic, but it’s really about “my” needs.**

The thing about this love is that love has a way of dealing with the dark tendencies in our hearts, like being rude. I've got to say, having done a bunch of weddings, I find that rudeness, although you probably don't think is a big thing, is actually quite divisive. When it comes to dealing with in-laws, parenting, and handling financial pressure, rudeness can rip apart families.

The basic - and I don't mean easy but foundational - social skills to deal with family members and in-laws, spouses, and children, courtesies of being appreciative and grateful, when we lose patience, all those courtesies are the first to go. The rudeness, the self-seeking, the boasting, and the "I'm doing a lot more of the work around here, what's going on? I'm doing a lot more of the work at church, I'm doing a lot more of the work at home, you're not carrying your weight!" - and then we feel bad about saying it, and then we get ourselves into a vicious cycle.

Friends, the hope the Bible offers is this: **Love is essentially perfect timing to do and show what's best for the other person, and in doing so, the effect is that love has a way of dealing with the darkness in our hearts**, whether it's being self-centered, whether it's being inflated in our importance, whether it's being rude, whether it's being jealous. There's a jealousy that's holy for the other person, such as God's jealousy, where He looks at His people and says, "You belong to Me, because, frankly, I made you, and, frankly, I'm best for you." God's jealousy is: "I want to give you what's best, which is My love, My never-ending relationship, My ultimate forgiveness." When humans are jealous, often, at least in my life, it has to do with our insecurities, with our needs, and with more of our own issues. That's not the kind of jealousy that the Bible talks about. However, if I'm jealous for you because you're going off in some other relationship, and they're not good for you, that's fine. But when we talk about jealousy here, we're talking about jealousy for our own needs, the darkness in our own hearts.

First of all, under this point #2 "What are the effects of love?", the good news is that love, painfully, will deal with the darkness in our own hearts as we relate to one another in the church or just as people in general.

Secondly, under the sub-point "Love has a way of dealing with the darkness in us", love gives us resources to deal with the darkness in others. The next three things on this list are found in verse 5:

It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.

Other translations will say that love is not easily angered or easily provoked. Love keeps no records or wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices in the truth. Love gives us the resources to deal with the darkness in others.

When someone tells you that love is not easily angered or provoked, they are actually talking about other people. They are talking about how other people relate to you. After reading and reflecting on the phrase "love is irritable or exacerbated", here is another way I would put it: No matter how angry you make me or how frustrated I get, I will

never be bitter towards you. I will always give us a chance to start fresh. I will never keep holding anything against you, which has to do with keeping records of wrongs. That is why we begin to delight in evil; we begin to think that the other person doesn't do anything, doesn't care about any of us, and only cares about him or herself. Love gives us the resources to deal with others.

When I think about that, I think, "Wow, that is really amazing." The kind of love that says: no matter how many times you make me angry and no matter how angry I get, no matter how many times I have to tell you things, I promise I will never be bitter towards you. That is impossible without a supernatural love; however, that is the resource available.

To settle for anything else is mere human-manufactured love, not love from God. Human love says, "I could never be mad at you baby" or "I could never see myself be angry with you" but you give him or her a week and things suddenly change. Maybe in the moment, on your wedding day or when he or she said yes to the engagement, you think, "I just can't imagine feeling anything but this amazing, powerful emotion and attraction to you." That's love too; it's pretty powerful. That is Biblical and the way love used to be before humanity sinned and fell.

When we talk about heaven, here is an echo of heaven. The echo of heaven happens when you love someone so much you cannot fathom doing anything else but loving, serving, and giving everything to him or her. That is actually Biblical and God's design. Then, however, human depravity kicks in and all of a sudden everything runs amuck and you think, "I can't imagine I ever thought that", "I don't know what I even saw in him", or "I can't believe I fell for her". The Bible says that the love that is from God is what powers us to live out: no matter how angry we get, we will never be bitter towards each other. Those are the resources available to us.

The third category is more profound. It can either be hopeful or cynical, depending on where you are personally. Firstly, we talked about how love addresses the darkness in us, such as: jealousy, boasting, pride, rudeness, and self-seekingness. Secondly, we talked about the power of love to deal with darkness in others, referenced in the part "not easily angered or provoked, not keeping records of wrongs, not delighting in evil..." Thirdly, love helps us deal with the apparent darkness in God.

Remember, this is not a passage about weddings or husbands and wives. This passage is about Christ and His Church. Now that we recognize that this passage is about God and His relationship with His people and not about romantic love, let's take a look at the last four categories of love, beginning in verse 7:

7 Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

That was never meant to be just about a husband and a wife. That's about us and God. What is the downfall of your relationship and my walk with God? One day something happens to us and we might think, "I guess God is not good" or "Maybe God just doesn't love me anymore. Maybe I messed up."

I've used this illustration in the Mandarin speaking service previously. How many times have I been late to an appointment or late for a meeting and proceed to excuse myself by saying, "I'm not usually that late" or some other variation of it. The idea here is: whenever I do something bad to you, I excuse myself as an aberration. The example I've used before is: you have an out-of-town friend and you take that person to a restaurant to eat. You talk up this dish, but then as you're eating and then you realize it's not that great. You say to that person, "I'm sorry. I don't know what happened. The food is much better." We say things like "he is usually more in control" "she usually is more punctual", and "they usually are more on top of things."

When it comes to God, we don't seem to cut God that slack. We don't find ourselves saying, "God is usually much nicer than this. I'm sure it's something else", "God is perfect and kind. It must be something else." The darkness we seem to see in God is not only about faith; it is about love. If we understand the love from God, love that is perfect timing for your good and mine, then could God, the all-knowing, all-powerful being, have a different timing than our timing? Could I say, "God, I need this job now" and God, in His wisdom, say, "I know you think you need this job now. I know every human on this planet tells you you need this job now, but I'm telling you I'm going to give it to you later, or maybe never."

Maybe if you're longing to be married or want a companion, you might think, "I need one now!" God is saying, "I know you feel that, but do you believe that I love you and that I know more than you?" That is why Paul uses the illustration of a child. Let's look down at verse 11:

¹¹When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways.

Many commentators, when they read this verse, will point out that it is about being immature. That is possible and I think there is some truth to that. Let me tell you this: children care about what they get and instant gratification. Children are prone to say, "Mommy, you don't love me because you aren't giving me that lollipop. I hate you." Children have an instant gratification mindset. Children don't quite appreciate patience and timing with parental love. That is also what Paul is saying here.

Friends, love is amazing. Love is essentially perfect timing to do what is best for others. When it is dealing with our own hearts, it deals with and exposes the darkness in our own hearts like being rude, boastful, jealous. When it is dealing with others, it helps us realize that there is a kind of love that makes us not so easily exacerbated or provoked. It makes us say, "No matter how angry or bitter I get, I will not keep any records of wrongdoing and I won't rejoice in evil, meaning I won't delight if you get punished. I rejoice in the truth." Love gives us the resources to deal with when things happen and we question God's goodness. This is when love kicks in. Love never fails.

⁷Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

I actually don't think you can say that about other people. You can say that about God. Those, friends, are the effects of love. Firstly, the essential quality of love is: love is patient. Love has perfect timing to show kindness, to show the best for other people. Secondly, the effects of love: love affects the darkness in ourselves, love affects the darkness that we see in others, and love affects the apparent darkness we see in God.

3. What is love's enduring quality? How long does love last? What does God say about Love's endurance?

I said last week, verse 8 is often tacked onto the end of the previous paragraph after verse 7. Most English translations show that it is actually not the end of the paragraph, but the beginning of the next paragraph. Don't ever put verse 8a anywhere on your poems!

⁸ Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away;

It goes right into this idea of the enduring quality of love.

⁸ Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰ but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. ¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. ¹² For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

¹³ So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

So actually, in this very "pretty" part of the passage, are probably three of the most controversial parts to interpret of 1 Corinthians, but I'm not going to touch on them today. We don't understand why tongues or prophecies are going to pass away and we are not exactly sure what the word "perfect" in verse 10 means because there are different interpretations of that. The other difficult thing in these verses is understanding the last verse.

¹³ So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

That's pretty challenging because you don't think that, in Heaven, there is hope or faith because, in Heaven, there is Jesus. Faith is believing in what you cannot see, but Jesus is there in front of your eyes. Hope is something you don't have, so that's actually a huge theological conundrum. The basic thing you see here is, if you look at that last paragraph: love doesn't end.

All the sappy songs are true. That is why we love ridiculous, hyperbolic, over-the-top love songs. We love them – not because we are smacked with sentimentalism and not because we are trying to escape our normal, challenging relationships. Deep down, all of us have a yearning: we want that kind of relationship – not just marriage, but with any other person, especially if you're a believer in the church. You can have this. This is written to a church.

This idea that this love is enduring is exactly what we should not give up upon; it is exactly what we are not going to have here. How do we not give up on it when you're never going to get it here? That is where Jesus Christ comes in.

You could take this whole section on love. If you took this whole passage and replaced the word "love" with "Jesus", I think you would begin to understand, especially if you're not a believer, the kind of love Jesus has for the church. Jesus is patient and kind. Jesus does not envy or boast, even though He is God. He is not rude. He does not insist on His own ways because He laid His life down for the Father and for us. He is not irritable or resentful. He does not rejoice at wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth, even though He is the Judge. Jesus bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. Jesus never ends.

This is not a manufactured love. This kind of love cannot be generated. This kind of love is the kind of love that you can reciprocate. You cannot understand the height of love that Paul has elevated this to. Perfect timing –doing everything and says everything for the best of those around you, not for ourselves. Love that deals with the darkness in us, the darkness in others, the apparent darkness in God. Love that never ends. This is astounding.

Friends, I want us to yearn for this. This is what Heaven is like. Plant the seeds because it is this vision of Heaven that gets Paul motivated to go to prison, to get beaten, to get arrested, to be persecuted. The key thing to understand here is this: Paul has a vision of life, of the people of God, that is so amazing that it gives him hope but never lets him settle for what is here and never lets him become cynical.

God is saying that we will never experience that perfect kind of love until we see him face to face. Only by receiving this love, the love Jesus showed on the Cross, can we have this hope.

We saw last week that Paul chose several attributes that were very difficult for the Corinthian church. We said that love is exactly the good that is hardest to show to the people you cannot stand, hardest for you to show personally, but they need. This is the church.

Friends, we talked, a few weeks ago, about spiritual gifts. We need your spiritual gifts and your contribution. More than that, we need your love. If you're a believer in this room, this church absolutely needs you and every one of us here to learn God's timing to show the kindness to other people. If you aren't a believer in this room, I pray that you would stay around here to experience God's love for His people.