

"The Church in the World:
Studies in 1 Corinthians" No. 15

"The Most Excellent Way"

1 Cor.13:1-13

--CEFC 8/29/21

Love is certainly one of the most important words in the Bible,

but what does it mean?

If you peruse social media at all,

you've probably heard the slogan: "Love is love."

I know it has a particular cultural meaning

related to sexual orientation and gender identity,¹

but on its face, it is obviously false.

Not all love is the same--

Love comes in many forms.

Is the love a mother has for her child,

the same as the love between two friends,

or is it the same as the love of a husband and wife?

Of course not.

These are all different types of love—all of them are very real.

So saying, "Love is love" is not saying much of anything.

So what do we mean when we use the word "love"?

¹ The Urban Dictionary defines it as "A phrase meaning that the love expressed by an individual or couple is valid regardless of the sexual orientation or gender identity of their lover or partner."

I suppose one could ask the cynics--

Ambrose Bierce defined love as "a temporary insanity curable by marriage."

Or Somerset Maugham said "love is only a dirty trick played on us
to achieve the continuation of the species."

Then there is Miss Piggy of *Sesame Street* fame—

she's always a sure source of wisdom about life.

She says,

"When you are in love with someone you want to be near him all the time,
except when you are out buying things and charging them to him."²

What do we mean by the word "love"?

Perhaps rather than the cynics, we should look to the children.

When asked "What is love?"

One little girl answered,

"Love is when your mommy reads you a bedtime story.

True love is when she doesn't skip any pages."

I appreciate what Nanette Newman has compiled

in a book entitled *Children's Thoughts on Love*,³

Listen to what these 7 and 8 year-old children

² *1,911 Best Things*, III.73.

³ This comes from Roy Clements, "Postscript: The Love of God—A Sermon on Hosea 11" in *Nothing Greater, Nothing Better: Theological Essays on the Love of God*, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ed. (Eerdmans, 2001), pp. 203, 204.

thought love was all about--

Zoe said, "I love my daddy because he gives me a good ejukashun"--

that's education spelled **E-J-U-K-A-S-H-U-N!**

Norman, gave this response--

"Babies need to be loved by their own mothers in case

everybody hates them when they grow up."

(as one writer observed, a budding Freudian psychologist there!)

But often these children's conceptions of love are colored

by a background of family tragedy--

Jean--"My daddy went to prison

and we have to keep remembering to love him."

Hellen--"My mom says I must love everybody,

even the lady who took by daddy away, but I don't."

Daniel--"My daddy does love me, but he's very busy making money."

Anne--"My mommy and daddy are in love most of the time,

but when I go to bed they shout a lot."

And then the very poignant comments of Paul--

"I love my mother because I have a photograph of her,

and she sends me presents."

Marriages and families, where love is most meant to be lived and learned,
the place where most people first encounter a deeper meaning of the word,
can no longer be counted on, it seems, to fulfill that role.

Is that also true of churches?

Could it be true of our church? /

What do you mean when you use the word "love"?

It's a crucial question, you know, for as one writer observes,

Love is a many-splendored thing--

"In tennis love means nothing;

in marriage love means everything.

And in between it can mean anything."⁴

Theologian N T. Wright comments:

"The English word 'love' is trying to do so many different jobs at the same time
that someone really ought to sit down with it and teach it how to delegate."⁵

The Greeks, as you may know, had several words for love.

ΔEro" is a romantic love;

it's the word which we get the term "erotic"—

it's a love of passion and desire.

Then there is filia—that's a fraternal love;

the love of companionship shared among friends.

⁴Bruce Shelley, *Gospel*, p. 164.

⁵ *After You Believe*, p. ?.

Another is storgh—that's a paternal or maternal love—
that natural and instinctive affection
that family members commonly have toward one another.

But the word for love Paul uses in our passage this morning is ajgavph.

There was nothing special about the meaning of the word itself—
It was just a general word for "a warm regard for and interest in another."⁶

The deep significance of the word ajgavph comes

not in the way the Greeks understood it,
but in the way Paul and the early Christians used it.

They filled it with a new and deeper meaning

to characterize their new understanding of what love could and should mean
in the light of what God had revealed in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

When Jesus said, "**A new command I give you: Love one another,**"

what was new, was not the command to love one another—

That was found in the Old Testament.

What was new was the new way that command to love was now to be understood

in light of the way Jesus has loved us.

For Jesus adds to that command,

"As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (John 13:34).

So in our passage, as consequence of his understanding of the gospel,

⁶ so BAGD. It was not commonly used in sexual contexts, but it could be (cf. the LXX use of the word in the Song of Songs [2:4,5,7; 3:5,10; 5:8; 7:7; 8:4,6-7], and even of the lustful attraction of Amnon to Tamar in 2 Sam. 13:15).

Paul is at pains to spell out how Christians are to understand love

ajgavph love--

now that that love has been revealed in Jesus Christ.

Turn to 1 Cor. 13—a beautiful biblical passage--

which we will consider in three sections--

- I. The Supreme Importance of Love in vv. 1-3
- II. The Practical Description of Love in vv. 4-7
- III. The Divine Permanence of Love in vv. 8-13

Love--let's let God's word fill this word with new meaning this morning.

I imagine if I gathered one hundred Christians together at random
and asked them what is really important in a church--

what makes a church a *good* church--

I'd get a wide variety of answers--

I'm sure some would immediately speak of **charismatic gifts**—signs and wonders--

speaking in tongues, words of prophecy, dramatic healing--that sort of thing,

adorned with spirit-filled, hand-clapping "high impact" worship--

that's the mark of real spiritual vibrancy in a church.

Others would insist on **solid exposition of the Bible from the pulpit**--

good teaching, sound doctrine--that's the first priority.

Many people today would talk about **social justice**--

concern for the poor, a passion for justice for the oppressed--

doesn't that best represent the heart of Jesus?

No, not at all, others would say--

Jesus' Great Commission is to **make disciples**--

to evangelize, to take the gospel to the ends of the earth.

A church that is not on the cutting edge of missions and evangelism

has missed the boat.

So what do you think?

What makes a good church?

Churches and even entire denominations are founded on

one of these distinctives.

And what Paul has already written in this letter to the Corinthians

suggests that their church had split into various parties

along just these lines--

In chap. 1 he rebukes these believers--

I hear there are quarrels among you--he writes.

One of you says, "I follow Paul";

another, "I follow Apollos";

another, "I follow Peter";

still another, "I follow Christ."

And, as we saw last week,

a similar kind of bickering seems to lie behind Paul's discussion

of the various spiritual gifts in chap. 12.

Some in the church seemed to have been gifted speakers,

others were concerned with the administration of the church,

others had miraculous powers of healing,
others spoke in strange tongues as a part of their worship--
and each seemed to believe that their role was the most important.

No, Paul says--

the church is like a body--
and a body has various members with quite different functions--
with eyes and ears, hands and feet;
and all are essential for the proper working of the whole.
It is God who gives unity to the church,
and it is God who also gives diversity—we must value both.

All this quarreling is foolish, it is childish--
for you've forgotten one thing.

At the end of chap. 12 we read,

"Let me show you the most excellent way--"

You Corinthians value verbal excellence—rhetorical flourish--
and you talk about speaking in tongues--
you have your mystical spiritual experiences,
rapt in moving moments of worship--

"But if I speak in the tongues of men and even of angels--

but have not love," Paul says,

"I am just making noise.

I'm no better than the resounding gongs or the clanging cymbals

found in the pagan temples." /

"You intellectual types talk about your gifts of preaching and teaching,
you take pride in your understanding of the mysteries of God--
your profound theological knowledge.
Others of you talk about your miracle-working faith,
your power-ministry that brings out great crowds who gasp in wonder.
But if I know all mysteries and can move mountains by my faith,
but don't have real love—
in God's sight, I am a big zero--I am nothing," he says.

"Some of you are impassioned for social justice--
you speak out against the excesses of capitalism,
and raise money for the hungry in the developing world.
Some are consumed by the evils of war or of abortion or of racial injustice
and they join in protest marches and even get arrested for the cause.

"But I tell you, I can live a simple lifestyle--
I can give away everything I have --
I can even give my life for the sake of some righteous crusade--
but if I do not have love--I gain nothing--nothing at all."

You've got it all wrong--
each of you is overstating your case--
and in the process, you may be missing the point of it all.

The one indispensable requirement for a God-honoring church is love--
Not everybody will speak in tongues,

or be a preacher or a theologian.

Not everybody will have a miracle-working faith,
or be called to asceticism or to public protests.

But every believer is called to love.

In fact, a person cannot be a Christian and not love--
at least, not according to Jesus--

**"By this shall all men know that you are my disciples,
that you love one another,"** he said (Jn. 13:35).

Get that into your head—

without love, everything you think will be for your gain
will come up empty;

Without love you are a big zero—your whole life will count for nothing.

Such is the supremacy of love.

For love Paul says, is the most excellent way.

And why is love supreme?

Love is supreme, first and foremost, quite simply, because **God himself is love.**

Listen to the Apostle John—

**"Whoever does not love does not know God,
because God is love"** (1 Jn. 4:8).

God is love,

and he is eternally love—

He doesn't start loving when he creates a world to love.

He was already love before the world began.

He was love because he has always existed

as an eternal communion of three loving persons—

the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

God doesn't need anything—he never has—he has love within himself.

So everything God does is an expression of his love.

Creation itself flowed out of his love.

And he created us as human beings in his image

to reflect his own personal nature as a God of love.

To love is the very thing we were created for,

because God is love.

1 John 4:16--"God is love. Whoever lives in love

lives in God, and God in him." /

Creation is an expression of God's love,

but the gospel is the supreme demonstration of God's love.

Rom. 5:8-- "God demonstrates his own love for us in this:

While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

Again, the words of 1 John—"This is how God showed his love among us:

He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.

This is love: not that we loved God,

but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (4:9,10).

Love is supreme because God is love.

And love is supreme because **love is the sum of all virtue.**

What does God want from us more than anything else?

When Jesus was asked what was the greatest commandment,
what did he say?

**"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength,
and you shall love your neighbor as yourself."**

Paul expresses the same thing:

Rom. 13:9—"The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery,"
"You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet,"
and whatever other command there may be,
are summed up in this one command:
"Love your neighbor as yourself." . . .
love is the fulfillment of the law."

You could say that every divine commandment
is simply a way that love is to be protected and to be expressed.

Love is the chief result of the Holy Spirit filling our hearts.

In Paul's list of the fruit of the Spirit in Gal. 5, love heads the list
as the heading under which all the rest falls.

As Augustine once said,

"Love God and do whatever you want,"

for love embodies every other virtue.

Third, as I've already mentioned,

love is supreme because love is the distinguishing mark of the Christian.

If we do not show love to one another,

we have no right to call ourselves followers of Jesus.

If we do now show love to one another,

we have no right to call ourselves a church, the body of Christ.

Jonathan Edwards in his exposition of this passage said,

**"An envious Christian, a malicious Christian, a cold and hard-hearted Christian
is the greatest absurdity and contradiction.**

It is as if one should speak of dark brightness, or a false truth!"⁷

Finally, love is supreme because love makes us like Christ.

That's the goal of the Christian life, isn't it—

to become more like Jesus Christ.

Rom. 8:29 says that's what God in his electing grace has predestined us for—

to be conformed to the image of Christ.

C. S. Lewis puts it this way—

⁷ *Charity*, p. 146.

"The Church exists for nothing else but to draw men into Christ,
to make them little Christs.
If they are not doing that, all the cathedrals, clergy, missions,
sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time.
God became Man for no other purpose.
It is even doubtful, you know, whether the whole universe
was created for any other purpose."⁸

We are to become like Christ—"little Christs"—
and to become like Christ is really nothing else but becoming truly human.

And becoming like Christ is to live a life of love,
for Jesus showed us above all what love looks like:
"As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (John 13:34).

1 John 3:16—"This is how we know what love is:
**Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.
And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers."**

Again Edwards writes of love,
"This makes a man more like Christ
than if he could work ever so many miracles."⁹

Love is from God—
and it is his greatest gift to us.

⁸ Cited in Brian G. Hedges, *Christ Formed in You*, p. 238

⁹ *Charity*, p. 159.

Nothing else even comes close.

And love comes to us through the gospel of Jesus Christ—

Love is the source of the gospel—

as it flows out of the very heart of God,

who sent his Son to redeem us.

Love is the substance of the gospel—

as it is demonstrated in the Son of God

who gave up his life for us on a cross.

Love is the power of the gospel—

it melts hard hearts,

and sets us free from a slavery to self-centeredness,

as God sends his Spirit—his Spirit of love—into our very souls.

And love is the goal of the gospel—

that we may share in the life of God himself—

that Trinitarian life of eternal love.

What a beautiful thing love is.

Dear friends, if you're not a Christian here this morning,

I urge you to set your eyes on the beauty of love

as it comes to us in Jesus Christ.

This is where true love is to be found.

But we still can't be sure exactly what love means--

It's important, but still we ask, what is it?

What does this thing called love look like in our daily lives?

And to this question Paul turns in vv. 4-7,

as he gives us--

II. A Practical Description of Love.

Words are funny things, you know.

Have you ever wondered why we park in a driveway

and drive on a parkway?

The meaning of words all depends on how we use them--

and that meaning can change with time.

A classic example is the word "nice"--

It's original meaning, or at least what it meant

in its first recorded use in 1290, was "stupid and foolish."

In 1365, however, Chaucer used it to mean "lascivious and wanton."

For the next 400 years it drifted in meaning from "slothful" to "elegant,"

and by 1769 "nice" had come to mean "pleasant and agreeable."¹⁰

Now what does our word "love" mean?

¹⁰Bill Bryson, *The Mother Tongue*.

I see it moving in a dangerous direction.

It's used in all sorts of ways--

perhaps most commonly we hear people say, "I love apple pie,"

or we hear people say "I'm in love."

Notice that in both of these "love" is simply an emotional state--

it describes how I feel.

There's something arbitrary about it--

You happen to love vanilla ice cream,

I love chocolate--

it's just a matter of personal preference.

Cupid is the perfect symbol of this conception of love--

He's an arbitrary imp--

either he strikes you or he doesn't,

you fall in love, and you fall out of it.

It's totally beyond your control.

Love is no longer something you can depend on,

for there is no assurance that my feelings of love will last.

But do you see a difference in the meaning when we say, for example,

not, "I love chocolate ice cream," but "I love my country"?

This is a more old-fashioned use of the word--

In this usage, the word "love" is associated with virtues like fidelity

and unselfishness and sacrifice.

And that is the dimension of the word that is intended
in the traditional wedding vows
when the bride and groom pledge to love each other
so long as they both shall live.

This is not just a prediction of their future emotional states.

This love is a promise--

It is a commitment directed to the will.

This meaning of the word seems to have fallen out of fashion,

and it is liable to be lost altogether,

but it is this kind of love that Paul is describing for us in vv.4-7.

And you will notice that his description is filled with moral content--

love is not an arbitrary whim,

love is a virtue because it deals with our duty--

how we ought to act.

The key issue is not how we feel about other people,

but how we treat them, how we behave toward them.

And the real test of love is how we behave toward people

when our own feelings toward them are at their most cold and hostile.

Jonathan Edwards, in his exposition of this section,¹¹ brings this out,
when he draws out the meaning of these verses by seeing them
as the kind of Jeopardy answer to six questions--

1. First, Paul gives the answer to the question,

How does love *behave* when you *feel* hurt by others?

Are you spiteful--looking for a way to get revenge?

Do you sulk--and feel sorrow for yourself, withdrawing from the situation,
carefully avoiding any contact with the other person?

"Love is patient, love is kind," Paul says.

Do you explode with rage when someone offends you?--

or with "righteous indignation," as we are so quick to label it?

"Love is not easily angered," he writes.

Do you nurse a grudge--pretending that all is well,

but filing the grievance away in your internal hard drive,
accumulating incriminating evidence,

that you call up in an instant whenever the need arises,

just as you would access a whole file of information

by the simple tap on a computer key?

"Love," Paul says, **"keeps no record of wrongs."**

This is not a denial that we have been hurt--

¹¹ *Charity and Its Fruits*, cited in Roy Clements, Sermon, 2/14/88. I have followed him extensively here.

Our hurts must be dealt with.

We must really put them before the Lord

and receive the release that only he can give.

Repressed hostility can be dangerous--

going deep into our subconscious like a computer virus,

causing some dysfunction someplace else in the system.

Many psychologists point to repressed hostility

as a major source of depression, for example.

Nor does love deny that moral wrongs matter.

Confronting someone who has done wrong may itself be a significant act of love.

But love keeps no record of wrongs.

It forgives and moves forward,

no longer holding an offense against another person.

Then Paul gives us the answer to a second question--

2. How does love behave when we feel disadvantaged

by other people's superior talents or good fortunes?

How do you behave when you go to that high school reunion

and see that your old classmate has become the business success

you always wanted to be?

How do behave when your officemate gets the promotion you wanted?

Or your friend makes the team and you get cut?

How does the infertile woman behave
when her neighbor gets pregnant again?

Naturally, you feel threatened;
you go on the defensive;
you pick holes; you criticize--
That's why they say that if you want to know a person's faults
just praise him to his friends.

But Paul says love does not envy.
Love can celebrate the success enjoyed by another person.

As one writer puts it--
"Love can admire without resentment,
it can praise without cynicism in complete sincerity."¹²

Third, Paul answers the question--

3. How does love behave when we feel we are at an advantage?--

Perhaps you are the one who have the privilege of education,
or wealth or opportunity or experience or just plain good fortune.

Do you make it known?

Do you suppose that you somehow have greater rights than others?

Do you look down at others as if they were less worthy than you?

¹²Clements, sermon.

Do you subtly engage in put-downs and sniping jokes at others' expense?

"Love," Paul says, **"does not boast, it is not proud."**

There is an English proverb--

"You can tell a real gentleman not by how he behaves toward his king,
but by how he behaves toward his servant."

Love imitates the humility of our King in his behavior toward us,
offering to serve us, even to die for us.

Again, love is not a feeling, but a way of living--

**4. How does love behave when you feel opposed?
when people don't like your ideas?**

"Love is not self-seeking"--

also translated as "Love does not insist on its own way."

A Peanuts cartoon is illuminating here--

Lucy says, "Charlie Brown, you're being very obstinate."

He replies, "No I'm not"

"Yes," says Lucy, " you are being very obstinate."

"No," says Charlie Brown, "I'm being *tenacious*."

Often that is a fine line to draw--

when are we standing up for what we believe is right?

And when are we simply being stubborn,
just wanting to have our own way?

Paul would say that stubbornness begins where love ends.

But we don't like to give in--

Giving in shows weakness, we say.

But often just the opposite is the case.

The weak and insecure manager never accepts advice or counsel
from his subordinates.

The weak and insecure husband never accepts advice or counsel
from his wife.

Love does not insist upon its own way.

5. How does love behave when we feel moral outrage when we see the sin of others?

Do we harbor a certain inner delight in telling others about it--
that's the reaction of the gossip.

Does the fall of others help us to feel better about ourselves?

That's the reaction of those who are self-righteously censorious.

"Love," we are told, "does not delight in evil but rejoices in the truth."

Love looks for truth--

it looks for success to applaud,
virtue to praise.

Love has no interest in running people down.

Is your newsfeed full of stories about scandal

because Google knows that what you like to read about?

I encourage you to be sensitive to your own conversation--

especially when you talk about other people--

Are your words edifying or destructive?

Will they help solve a problem or only spread it around?

May we speak the truth in love.

Again, love is not a way of feeling, but a way of living--

Finally, we ask

6. How does love behave when we feel

disappointed in our love life?

We have loved but then been let down,

we've put ourselves on the line,

and then been hung out to dry.

v.7--"Love always protects, always trusts,

always hopes, always perseveres."

Love has a persistent optimism about it, an unending loyalty--

love is willing to forgive and go on--

How often?

"As many as seven times, Lord?" asked Peter.

"No, seventy times seven times," replied Jesus.

Love operates with a desire to interpret the words and actions of others in the best,
rather than the worst, possible way.

It gives those we disagree with the benefit of the doubt.

It hopes that their motives are good,
rather than always assuming that they are evil.

But how can this be?

How can love go on loving?

Our love perseveres only as it reflects God's love--
for God's love is everlasting.

Which leads to the third section of our passage--

III. The Divine Permanence of Love--vv. 8-13--

When you think of the transitory nature of life
you have to ask yourself what really matters?
What is of lasting value?

Paul says that love, real love--the kind of love that God gives--
that love never fails--

it never fades, it never withers--it will last forever.

Everything else, he says, will pass away.

Our entire lifetimes are like the brief moments of childhood

when compared to the eternity of heaven.

And when that perfection comes, in its heavenly glory,

all our theological elegance will be like the mere babbling of a baby.

When we see face to face,

we will realize that all our profound spiritual insight

was like looking at an image reflected on a piece of used aluminum foil.

All our spiritual gifts,

all our great efforts for God,

all our theological treatises--they will all pass away.

As one expositor put it--

"They are all paper money--

but love is pure gold.

It is the currency of heaven--it never devalues--it abides forever."¹³

Toward the end of Jonathan Edwards's

exposition on this chapter he asked--

¹³Clements, sermon.

What is it that makes the church like heaven?

He answers it like this--

What is it that makes the church like heaven?

Not preaching--in heaven prophecy will be no more.

What is it that makes the church like heaven?

It is not charismatic gifts--in heaven tongues will cease

What is it that makes the church like heaven?

It is not theological education--

all our acquired knowledge will have been made superfluous.

No--What makes the church like heaven is love--

for "heaven," Edwards said, "is a world of love."¹⁴

And in the gospel, we proclaim that this heavenly world of love has come down to us--

it has come down to earth in a perfect demonstration of love--

in Jesus Christ--

Do you want to know what love means?--

then look at Jesus--

he has given the world a new definition of the word love.

For Jesus was patient, Jesus was kind--

he did not envy or boast, he was not proud--

"Here is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son--"

¹⁴ *Charity and Its Fruits*, pp. 323ff.

"God demonstrates his own love toward us,
in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

Jesus is love.

Are you looking for love?--many people are, you know.

Some years ago, the phone lines at a Seattle newspaper office
began ringing frantically.

Some pilot had just written in smoke across the sky, "I love you."
and dozens of lonely ladies wondered if they had a secret lover.

It turned out to be just the whim of a pilot
who had finished a skywriting job elsewhere
and had a bit of smoke left over.

But God hasn't left us in suspense about his love.

On a hill outside Jerusalem 2000 years ago
he spelled it out for all the world to see.

"I love you," he declared, in the form of a cross,
and those words continue to echo through the ages.

Jesus is love--

not the fleeting emotion of the moment that we in the 21st century now call love.

His is the lasting, enduring, faithful, selfless, virtuous love

that Paul has set out for us in this chapter.

If you're looking for love, there's where you'll find it--

in Jesus Christ.

And Jesus Christ will be present with us,
only to the extent that we demonstrate his love to one another.

And it is that love--
that love that is Christ--alive and at work among us--
that will allow us to enjoy a taste of heaven here and now--
for love is the most excellent way--
for heaven is a world of love.

I close, again with the words of Jonathan Edwards:

**"If your heart is full of love, it will find vent;
you will find or make ways enough to express your love in deeds.
When a fountain abounds in water, it will send forth streams.**

Consider that as a principle of love is the main principle
in the heart of a real Christian,
so the labor of love is the main business of the Christian life."¹⁵

May it be so among us.

Prayer—

Closing Song: *By Our Love*

Benediction:

¹⁵ *Charity*, p. 148.

Phil. 1:9-11 [May] your love may abound more and more

in knowledge and depth of insight,

so that you may be able to discern what is best

and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ,

filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ --

to the glory and praise of God

**"The Church in the World:
Studies in 1 Corinthians" No. 15
Aug. 29, 2021**

"The Most Excellent Way"

1 Cor. 13:1-13

In a world where the word "love" has all but changed its meaning, Paul offers a "hymn to love," which offers us a divine perspective on this ultimate reality.

I. The Supreme Importance of Love (vv. 1-3)

Why is Love Supreme?

- A. Because God is love**

- B. Because love is the sum of all virtue**

- C. Because love is the distinguishing mark of the Christian**

- D. Because love makes us like Christ**

II. The Practical Description of Love (vv. 4-7)

III. The Divine Permanence of Love (vv. 8-13)

Heaven is a world of love.

"The Most Excellent Way"

1 Cor. 13:1-13

- What are common markers of "success" in our culture? What are some common marks of "spirituality" in our culture? What are common marks of "Christian maturity" in the church? How are we to assess the value of those things in the light of our passage?
- What hinders us in living a life of love?
- Take one or two of the attributes of love listed in vv. 4-7 and ask God to give you an opportunity to develop that today. Then be on the lookout for what God will do!
- Read vv. 4-7 as a description of Jesus Christ. Now read those verses, substituting your own name for the word "love." In what areas do you feel most convicted? Seek the Lord's power to live up to those words today.
- Read vv. 13. Why are faith, hope and love so central to living as a Christian? Why is love the greatest of these?
- How can we grow in love? How does our grasp of the gospel relate to our life of love?
- Let the words of Paul in Eph. 3:14-19 be your own prayer today. Reflect on heaven as "a world of love." Could anything be more beautiful and attractive than that? Ask the Lord to give you a heart of love.