

## REFLECTING ON GOD'S WORD

**Reading:** 1 Corinthians 13 (NT pages 1153-1154)

### BACKGROUND TO THE READING

The apostle Paul had to make it clear to his readers what love really is. He was speaking of God's love and the word he uses is important because there are different Greek words for love, each meaning something different. There are *Phileo*, connoting natural affection, which occurs some 25 times, with *philadelphia* (brotherly love) five times, and *philia* (friendship) only in James 4:4. *Storge*, connoting natural affection between relatives, appears occasionally in compounds.

By far the most frequent word is *agape*, generally assumed to mean moral goodwill that proceeds from esteem, principle, or duty rather than attraction of charm. *Agape* is very similar in meaning to *hesed* in that both denote dedication. *Agape* specifically means to love the undeserving, despite disappointment and rejection. *Agape* is especially appropriate for divine love.

He was urging the Corinthian church to accept God's agape love and live this love. Why? Because they were divided and fighting with one another.

So let's look at the text:

In some Jewish traditions, angels preferred to speak Hebrew, but most Jewish people would have agreed that angels understood human languages, especially since angels were appointed over various nations.

Although cymbals were used in some pagan worship (as well as in Jewish worship), the point of Paul's comparison is undoubtedly simply that, though loud, by themselves they communicate nothing. Corinth was famous for its "bronze," and bronze vases (not "gongs," as in most translations) were often used for amplifiers in the outdoor theaters of this period.

"Moving mountains" seems to have been a figure of speech for doing the impossible. "giving one's body to be burned" no doubt alludes instead to the standard Jewish tradition of martyrs, some of whom threw themselves into the fire to avoid being forcibly defiled.

The point of Paul's rhetorically polished description of love is its contrast to what he has earlier said about the attitudes of the Corinthian Christians with regard to their lack of showing love to all their brothers and sisters.

As in verses 1–3, Paul demonstrates here that love is a greater virtue than the gifts; in this case it is because love is eternal, whereas the gifts are temporary. Some OT prophets predicted the outpouring of the Spirit in the final time, accompanied by ability to speak under the Spirit's inspiration (Joel 2:28); but other prophecies noted that all the citizens of the world to

come would know God, hence there would be no reason for exhortation (Jer 31:33–34).

Mirrors (13:12) were often made of bronze, and given the worldwide renown of Corinthian bronze, would perhaps strike the Corinthians as a local product (also 2 Cor 3:18). But even the best mirrors reflected images imperfectly, especially those of the poor people who could not afford the expensive “bronze”.

The focus of Paul’s concern was the church, its unity and purity. Paul was fighting to keep this church from disintegrating into a number of competing and bickering factions divided over moral and doctrinal issues. Furthermore, he wanted to keep the focus of the church on Jesus, the exalted Lord. He wanted to focus on the real issues of their faith namely that God loved them unconditionally. And that God’s love is far more important than any other issue. His love is also the only thing that will remain in a world where everything is temporal and changing. God’s love never changes...

## **SERMON**

The text for the sermon is verse 7: “God’s love “always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.”

God’s word clearly states that we must love one another in the same way. But this love does not mean “like”. God did not “like” our sins or agreed

with it. He respected us in such a loving way that He pardoned us and redeemed us from all our sins. He expects the same of us.

We do not have to “like” all people or socialise with them or agree with them and what they are doing, but we have to respect them. And to respect them is love! Just like God loved us. And how did He love us? Well because of His Love, He forgave us all our sins through Jesus Christ. Because of His love Jesus was resurrected and ascended to heaven. Because of his love, God gave us His Holy Spirit to help us and guide us.

Rick Warren – a famous theologian says it very clear: “God has never made a person He doesn’t love. God has never made a person Jesus didn’t die for. God has never made a person He didn’t create for his puposes. God has never made a person He doesn’t want in heaven.”

So this love is not a fleeing emotion. It is not only visible on Valentine’s day or Christmas or Easter. No this love, God’s love, agape love is a commitment of sacrifice and forgiveness. Life and all relationships are full of barriers. Love is the bridge to cross all barriers with the help of God’s Holy Spirit. Love, like forgiveness is not a once in a life time moment but an ongoing process of sacrifice and bridge building.

We all know how it feels when relationships in family life becomes strained because of something that has happened or something that someone has said. In our day and age the consequences of seperated couples are a reality and we often see the devastated effects it has on our children. Now

in Scotland people talk about the rift that developed because of the outcome of the referendum. It was almost inevitable that some people would be extremely happy and others not. This causes so much hurt and division.

But God is telling us once again this morning that we can face our future with renewed hope, if we live His love wherever we go. It is amazing how His love can transform and renew people. It is amazing to see how the most strong willed person can forgive because of God's love. I have experienced such an act of loving forgiveness at a funeral I conducted on Friday. The family had a big fallout which resulted in a ten year separation where the eldest son did not see or speak to the rest of the family. The daughter phoned him to say that his father is dying. He visited his father in his last days. So at the funeral tea he stood up and offered his apologies to those he wounded within the family saying: I am sorry. Let's forget the past and live now in the present. Let us now move forward and care for our mother". Love is not always easy!

God wants us to find the lost. He does not want us to just be in our own comfortable groups and cliques – just loving those we like. No, He wants us to cross bridges through His Love and reach out to all people. He is calling us to jump over each and every hurdle, trusting Him to reach people that has not experienced His unbounded and forgiving love. God's love is so much needed in our broken world, in you and me, in our broken selves.

God created you and me because of He loved us. He commanded us to love as well with the same token. His Love is the cement of any fellowship. If we do not share it, then our fellowship will fall apart. If we are spreading negative comments or gossip, we are just like dry rot, eating away the love and respect that must exist in any fellowship and relationship. So let us all share God's love now and everyday by not thinking only about ourselves and our own needs and our own agendas.

Let us love and praise God now with everything we have, and love others like we love ourselves.

And if you find it hard to love, then at least you know you have the RIGHT love because to live God's love is not suppose to be easy and comfortable. Afterall His love Love is patient, His love is kind. His love does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. His love is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ÓHis Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth."

Amen