

Grace and peace from God our Father and all joy to you in the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. (2 Timothy 1:2,9,10) Amen.

1 Corinthians 12:31b–13:13 (NKJV) — 31 *And yet I show you a more excellent way. 1* Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. **2** *And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3* *And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. 4* *Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; 5* *does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; 6* *does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; 7* *bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 8* *Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. 9* *For we know in part and we prophesy in part. 10* *But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away. 11* *When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. 12* *For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. 13* *And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.*

This is the word of the Lord.

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We now implore God the Holy Ghost for the true faith which we need the most, Lord have mercy. Amen.

AGAPE ' – the Greatest Gift

1. Because words and works are empty without THIS LOVE
2. Because God is THIS LOVE
3. Because THIS LOVE never fails

In Jesus name, who is, who was, and who is to come, our Savior in flesh and in glory, dear fellow sinners declared righteous in Him,

The Greek language has three basic expressions for our English word “love.” These three are “eros,” “philia,” and “agape” (pr. a-gap-ae ‘). The first, eros, describes a passionate love which is based on emotion and sensuality. From it we get the English word “erotic.” The second, philia, you might know from the meaning of the word “Philadelphia” – the city of brotherly love. Philia describes a brotherly friendship love. It is the type of love which you have for a family member or friend; this love cares on

the basis of common bond. Then we come to the third type of love: agape. This is to the Greek language the highest love – a love which elevates the object to a higher level; it is a giving, active love on the other's behalf. This is the word which we find repeated nine times in our text. And its interesting to note that beginning in verse 4 as the Spirit describes love, He uses the article to indicate not just any love, but "the love." As the world talks about different kinds of love, none compare to this love. As Paul writes in v. 13, **AGAPE IS THE GREATEST GIFT.**

1. Because words and works are empty without THIS LOVE

1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.

For the past few weeks we have been studying the gifts of the Spirit. We have seen how the Spirit had bestowed on the Corinthians various gifts according to His purpose – gifts of healings, speaking in tongues, various miracles, administrations; we have seen how God has appointed gifts among us through apostles and prophets, pastors and teachers.

The greatest miracles and highest lip service is worthless if it does not flow from agape love. With all the spiritual gifts that were being revealed among the Corinthians, there was indeed a temptation to rely on the impulsive nature of our flesh; to see these gifts as only designed to draw attention to me, to show how I possess the highest gifts.

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" (Matthew 7:21-23)

Words are empty apart from this love from Christ and for Christ.

3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.

The gift of the Spirit is not do good deeds to make a show of itself. Paul here suggests that even giving up your own flesh to be burned at the stake is worthless if it has not AGAPE. It is like a spouse who keeps saying "I love you" but is repeatedly unfaithful or uses abusive language and underhanded actions.

In Matthew 22, we find a lawyer, one of the experts in the law of Moses, ask Jesus to name the greatest commandment. Jesus reveals the true fulfillment of the law in one word: AGAPE. Love God. Love your neighbor. If you want to fulfill the demands of the law, it is simple, Love. But not just any love – demonstrate this AGAPE love of 1

Corinthians 13. Now we see the true nature of the Law. Consider the depth of the Lord's righteousness. When we say that God is love, we do not mean that He merely does good; we mean He is good.

To earn heaven by your works, the Law must be fulfilled with this perfect love. This means we cannot be impatient when waiting in line at the grocery store. This means we cannot envy those who supposedly have the better life. This means when we do good, we cannot be doing it because it makes us feel good; we must do it entirely for the good of others. We cannot be impulsive, doing good only when we feel like it. Agape gives and serves when we least feel like it or others least deserve it. Do see why we simply cannot determine who goes to heaven and who goes to hell based on outward words and works? Do you see how any work done to earn righteousness for one's self really ceases to be selfless? As Paul says, even if I give all that I have to the poor, if it is done to earn something for myself, is not AGAPE; it is an empty work.

All words and works are empty without this AGAPE.

2. Because God is THIS LOVE

You'll recall the basic difference we noticed between eros, philia, and agape is that eros and philia are emotion or attachment based, but agape is free. In the end, eros and philia serve themselves, but agape serves others. Eros and philia wait for others to be worthy before they will love, but agape loves when there is no deserving. Eros and philia are earthly. Agape, as used by the Spirit, is heavenly. Agape is the greatest gifts, because God is Agape.

As John writes – He who does not love does not know God, for God is love (AGAPE). In this the love (AGAPE) of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love (AGAPE), not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. (1 John 4:8–19)

LOVE has come to us not in what we do, but in what God has done. It is God's UNDESERVED AGAPE that has fulfilled the Law for us. In this is LOVE – not that we loved Him, but that He loved us. God is AGAPE love. As you read through 1 Corinthians 13, do not try to see yourself; see Jesus and let all things flow through His love.

For it was Jesus who truly lived a life of AGAPE love. He denied all eros impulses. He did not envy others. Even though He was the only human to ever truly deserve the praise of God and men, He did not parade this around – as it says in Philippians, "He did not consider equality with God a thing to be paraded about, He made Himself of no reputation taking the form of a slave and coming in the likeness of men. He became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross." He did not seek His own,

but freely gave Himself up – not for those who loved Him, but for you and I who have hated Him, who have rebelled against Him in countless and willing ways.

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. (Romans 5:8–9)

When we get to this topic of love, so many think in terms of acceptance. If you love me, you'll accept me just the way I am, sins and all. You won't judge me or mention my sins. Is this the love of God? Is this agape?

6 [This love] does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth;

The love of God does not accept sin. He does not let the culture define it. He does not celebrate it. He in fact lays it bare for its corrupted nature. He becomes sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21). He enters into the guilt and separation we deserve. His death brings us to never rejoice in sin, but to hate it. Each Sunday we hate and expose sin by confessing together that all our sins and iniquities.

Together we rejoice in the truth. The truth is we are redeemed by the endless love of Christ who gave Himself for our ever sin. We rejoice in the forgiveness of sins that is freely and unconditionally ours. We share this unending gift of the Spirit with each other – the end of bitterness, envy, hatred, selfishness. We rejoice in the truth that God is love.

3. Because THIS LOVE never fails

Did you know there was actually a Greek god named "Eros." This was a great and powerful god who drives us all and compels the world of men to fulfill their highest desires. Philosophers like Plato thought very highly of this god, Eros.

This Eros god is also prone to many weaknesses. Impulsive love can break into anger with the snap of a finger. It gets very frustrated when it is not getting what it expects or desires. As the years roll on in a marriage, for instance, sin will take its toll. Whether its between brother and sister, father and son, husband and wife, or fellow Christian to fellow Christian, to rest our relationships on eros love or even philia love, will crumble. An impulsive "eros" love will drive you just as quickly to the next infatuation; a friendly "philia" love will not overcome the sins we commit against each other. Only this AGAPE love will last; this gift of the Spirit will never fail.

8 Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. ... 13 And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

These prophecies and tongues and knowledge all serve a Spirit given purpose. However they will not last forever. The purpose for speaking in tongues has ceased. New prophetic revelations has also come to an end. Even with this perfect gift of His word, the gift of knowledge is still limited.

When all is said and done, only three remain. Without faith, hope, and love all other gifts have lost meaning. Yet only one is the greatest – AGAPE. How can God say this? Wouldn't you think faith is the greatest? After all, faith saves us. Love is the greatest in the sense that it endures eternally. Faith and hope are indeed a most precious treasure for us in this world. These receive what cannot be seen – the love of Christ, the hidden God, the promises of eternal life, and our heavenly destination. Yet when we reach heaven, what will be the need for faith and hope? When we know fully even as we are known now, what will there be to hope for. We will see Him as He is. God Himself does not have faith; God does not need to hope. But what He does possess and share with us eternally is love. This love is heavenly and will remain as unblemished in heaven as it is in our text.

However this AGAPE love of God was never meant to stay in heaven. It comes from heaven to earth in the person of Jesus Christ to dwell among us. God loves us that we would love Him and all people. John writes *Beloved, if God so loved us, [namely, that He gave His only Son,] we also ought to love one another. No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us.* God dwells among us in the love of Christ. He is known among us in this selfless love which we preach, believe, and live.

Whether a Council member or a member of the Ladies, a husband or wife, child or parent, ... for our fellowship, our work life, our married life, all things, this love is the the greatest gift. Where eros and philia come up short, agape does not. Agape is founded in the love of Christ which doesn't wait for us do something first, which asks nothing in return after its been done.

However, as experience shows, our earthly relationships will never live up to this love. We could insert into our text, "where there are sinful creatures, they will fail." Our love comes up short. This is why we so desperately need something more reliable – a love from above. What hopeless creatures we would be if our spiritual bond to Christ were based on an earthly eros love. Thanks be to God that He has not built the foundation of your faith on any such emotional or impulsive thing at all. Heaven rests not in your ability to love like Christ, but in the love of Christ. God has given His Son to stands before Him in your place, to give you the forgiveness of sins, salvation, and love; ... to give you the gift of eternal AGAPE.

Amen.

2/3/13 (Epiphany 4, Ascension Batavia) Sermon
1 Corinthians 12:31b-13:13
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