



I Want To Know What Love Is

Part 1 – Love is Required

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Last week, we looked at spiritual gifts and this week, we're launching into a series, *I Want To Know What Love Is*, that's going to take us all the way to Easter. Today, we're going to be in the first three verses and then we're going to use the next verses, 4-7, as an outline as Paul gives these great descriptives on love.

Today, we're talking about *Love is Required*. Last week, we looked at it, so we want to pick up from 12 going into 13. We spent a lot of time on the fact that you and I, as we profess faith in Jesus, are part of the body of Christ. You have a part to play. We looked at your spiritual gifts and how to function in those, how to discover those and how to get moving on those.

Now Paul, in 1 Corinthians 13, is going to pull, from 1 Corinthians 12, some of those spiritual gifts and he's going to use those to talk about the importance of love as we continue to do life as the family of God, as we continue to be the body of Christ.

We have unity in our essential beliefs. As we talk about unity... We've talked about this for years at our church and we've taught this in Starting Point going back almost 17 years now, that we find unity as the body of Christ in our essential beliefs. We did a series a couple of years ago on The Creed and we marched through, one week at a time, everything we hold as an essential belief – what we believe about God the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, what we believe about the Bible, what we believe about man, what we believe about end times, what we believe about sin. We covered it all and we say we are united around this. This isn't something we ever sit around as elders discussing if we still believe this or still hold this true. We are united around these core beliefs, these essential beliefs.

We have liberty in our non-essential beliefs. There are also beliefs that you and I have that we would call non-essential. There are things we can disagree on, but they don't need to affect our unity. They don't need to change the way you and I have fellowship, one with another. We call those non-essential beliefs and in those, we have liberty. We can disagree and still be brothers and sisters in Christ. And all God's people said... Amen.

The church I grew up in, the non-essentials they would always talk about and sometimes they bled over into essentials, but this is whether or not you should wear jeans or shorts, the haircut you had, the Bible translation that you read from, dancing was a big no-no. Many of you grew up in churches that had dances. Going to movies is a non-essential. Do you know what's on the non-essential list for me? Yoga is on the non-essential list. We can disagree on it.

I have pastor friends that we don't see eye to eye on some of this. Wine is on the non-essential list. I have pastor friends that disagree with me on boarder security. I have one friend that gives me such a hard time because he is big time into gun control. He's always giving me a hard time. He's never spoke here. Nor will he ever speak at Bass Pro Community Church. I told him, "If you were to get up and spout off some of this..."

I talk about non-essential stuff all the time, but just don't ever hold that to what you believe about God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. I told him, "I don't put the Second Amendment on the same level with the scripture. I don't put it above it. It's down here." He'll text me. I love this text. He goes. "Hey Ted, do you remember that verse where Jesus said to take up your Glock and follow him?" I send him back all sorts of texts that I won't share with you. I have to tell you that we can discuss this stuff and it not shake our union because we are united around essential beliefs and we have liberty on the non-essential beliefs.

We show love toward one another in all our beliefs. Whether we are discussing essential beliefs with the lost or with each other, whether we are discussing non-essential beliefs... I love what Travis Brawner says, "Christians need to talk less about non-essential beliefs to one another when the world is watching." Sometimes, we just put it out there too much. We can discuss this, we can have these conversations, but whatever we're talking about, whatever we're discussing, essential or non-essential, may in all of it we show love.

Love is required with everything I say, believe, and give. What Paul is going to establish in Verse 1-3 of 1 Corinthians 13... He's going to simply, and I'm going to paraphrase here. Love is required with everything I say, believe, and give. Love is required in all of it. When I speak to people inside the church or outside the church about what I believe, may it be done with love. When I practice my beliefs in the home... "Dad says he believes this, but does he live this?" I want my kids to know. Jim Daily at Focus on the Family says, "Your orthodoxy – what you believe – and your orthopraxy – living out what you say you believe – line up."

And then, when I give, that it wouldn't be out of control or manipulation or out of guilt, but that I would be giving out of love.

Let's look at the very first verse of 1 Corinthians 13. By the way, some of you have probably heard this passage spoken a lot at weddings, but the context of this passage is the body of Christ. It's unity in the body of Christ. While there will be application for romantic relationships, it's not the context of this chapter.

1 If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong... which makes a big splash but it's very temporary. ...or a clanging cymbal. Eloquence in the 1st Century was greatly admired and the Corinthians were no exception. They loved to hear eloquent speakers. And they found very little of it in Paul. I love what he does in this text. He draws from Chapter 12 from the spiritual gifts. And I agree with most scholars on this that he's using hyperbole here not just to speak of the gifts of tongues or interpretation, he's drawing on them and is including any type of speech, all forms of speech, that if it comes to you whether by men or by angels. Paul says, "If speak well and I can

get up and I can speak in a way that you're just hanging on my every word... If I do that and I speak well, but I don't have love, it's not what I'm going for." That we would speak the truth in love, that we would communicate in love.

How I speak is more important than what I say. The big idea behind 1 Corinthians 13:1 is how I say it is more important than what I say. Let me just say this again. This isn't in the context of romantic relationships, but I just want to help the husbands out. I'm going to share this on behalf of your wife. How you say something to her is more important than what you are saying to her. She, as Gary Smalley taught us, has a hidden marriage manual and she reads through your words and she picks up your tone and she picks up your body language.

I love this about my wife. I'll say something that's the right thing to say and Amy will go, "Do you want to try that again?" That's grace. She's giving me another shot at it because I didn't say it well the first time. Or you tell your kids to say I'm sorry and they say it with frustration. I'm sorry is a good thing to say, but the way you just said it is bad. If you ever tell someone, "I'm sorry you feel that way," that's a terrible apology, first and foremost, telling someone how to feel or how not to feel, is invalidating to what the person is going through. So, you may be trying to give an apology, and you think you're saying the right words, but are you thinking about how you say it?

You know this in all of your relationships, from your marriage to your family to everything you say online. My approach gets me in way more trouble than my opinions. The way I share my opinion, the way I throw it at people, the way I spew it gets me in so much trouble.

When social media started taking off and people thought, *hey, I have a phone, I have an opinion, and the world needs to hear it.* No, not necessarily. It's what we're trying to teach our kids. Not everything that pops in your head needs to come out your mouth. Dad's trying to learn that as well. I have these moments and the kids are like, "What are laughing about?" "Something awesome, but I can't actually say it. That one was just for me." There's a skill to that.

When social media came out and people started really sharing, this line came out and pastors really jumped on it. You started hearing it a lot in the church. It never sat well with me and it doesn't to this day. This is the line they would say: "The church should be known for what we're for, not what we're against." I think sometimes we're trying so hard to be creative that we don't always say the right thing. I think our creativity is running ahead of truth at times.

The point was when you get up and preach in affirming language but don't call things out... I've been to plenty of churches where I speak on marriage and when I speak on marriage, I've had pastors say to me, "Oh I love what you said; could you not say anything about co-habitation?" I know it's really ruffled feathers of some pastors when I say, "I want my son to embrace his biological sex and marry the opposite sex." I'm for marriage and I'm against everything that comes against marriage. I struggled with this. I'm just telling you where I was and still am with this line. I'm for life, which means I'm against abortion. I can give you a list of what I'm for, but it means I'm against something. We just speak boldly around here and we don't want to shy away from every calling out sin, like actually using the word sin.

Then I felt some other folks started having a struggle with this language and it kind of changed to this, and maybe you've seen this. "The church should be known *more* for what we are for than what we're against." Better, but I don't know why I still don't like it. I don't think this is going to be out there any time soon, but the church would be known for both: what we stand for and what we stand against. What we stand for and then what comes against it. But, in all of it, why can't we say it, why can't we proceed with love?

I rented a car this weekend and it was awesome. It had this safety feature on it. I don't even know what it's called. Maybe some of you have it. It had the two lines, so it had a dotted line on each side with a car in it, kind of swerving off to the side. It's a feature. You press the button and it beeps at you when you cross the center line. Does anybody have that on their cars? So, these are all the rich people in here. Look at all these rich people.

This thing was awesome. It beeped when I would cross the center line. I was driving from Denver to Colorado Springs. I had an hour, so I was like, *let's see what this baby can do. Let's do a little test on it.* So, I would go over the line and it would beep. If you go over too far, it actually nudges you back into the lane. It's incredible. The steering wheel kind of gets away from you and pushes you back. The whole way down, I'm seeing how much I can get away with. At some point, the message comes up on the console, "Put both hands on the wheel, this is not a replacement for driving." I was waiting to get pulled over for a DUI. I had my answer all prepared. "I haven't had a drop to drink; I'm just testing the safety feature. I loved it.

As I thought about that, I thought about how this is exactly what the church is doing for so many of you. It's like you're crossing the center line. You're making some bad decisions. You're not headed down the right path and we just go beep, beep, beep, and nudge you back into where you should be. Not because we hate you, because we want you to live. We want to save your life. I think if a church is truly loving and you hear the beep, beep, beep, they actually, in a loving, kind way, are giving you a nudge back. How many of you are grateful you had parents that did that for you? I'm grateful I had parents that did that for me. It was more than a nudge. I know clearly what my parents are for and what they are against. And I've never questioned for a moment how much they love me. May this church be one where we have no problem saying, "Hey, this is truth, this is what we believe, this is what we're for and hey, this is what we don't believe, this is what we're against." But may we always do it, from our children's ministry to our student ministry to every home group to everybody who ever stands up here and proclaims the Word of God, with love.

While we're at it, let's just go ahead and add this to it. **Our mandate to love trumps our First Amendment right of free speech.** Do you see what I did there? I wanted to include it once. You're like, "I have a right to speak my mind." But your mandate to love is over that. Do you know someone that says it like this: "I just say it like it is. And, you know what? I think people really appreciate it." Maybe some do, but some are going, "Man, you need to tone it down." Or have you had anybody, a family member or a friend, say, "I speak my mind." Again, everything that comes in your head doesn't have to come out your mouth. If you're one that speaks your mind, may this become your prayer: "Set a guard over my mouth, Lord. Set a guard over my thumbs. Keep watch over the door of my lips. May everything I say, everything that I teach my children come out with love.

How about the next one, Verse 2. Without love, my faith is meaningless. Now he's going to get even stronger in his language. ***2 If I have the gift of prophecy...*** Again, he's pulling from 1 Corinthians 12. ***...and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge...*** Utterances of knowledge, meaning I can speak boldly about what God is saying to me, to you. I can do all that ***and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.*** I'm just running my mouth.

Again, if how I speak is more important than what I say, how I live is more important than what I say I believe. Your children, your spouse, your friends, your family, they have a front row seat to your faith. And it is easy to say you believe something, but are you living it out? You can proclaim this is what we believe, but you have plenty of people that are watching. Does his, does her orthodoxy – what they say they believe – match the way that they live? You've heard this cliché: "People don't care what you know until they know that you care."

I've been reading Bob Goff... I've been reading his books in preparation for him coming to Branson pretty soon. I love what he says. "Sometimes we forget that people often times need your love more than your advice." For someone who loves to give his advice, for someone who loves to point things out, for someone who doesn't even give the early warning sign of beep, beep, beep, I need to be reminded of that. How many of you love giving people advice? You just love throwing your opinion out there. I love this throwing my advice out there, but, again, they don't care until they know that I care.

1 Corinthians 8: 1... This is a great chapter. We're going to go back a few. Carolyn already shared it with us as we took the Lord's Supper. In Chapter 11, there was this unity in the church around the Lord's Supper and before Paul says to examine your heart as you prepare to take the Lord's Supper, he calls this out. He says when you get together to even take the Lord's Supper, there are divisions among you. Again, throughout all these chapters, Paul is calling out what he is for and what he is against. He is saying there is division among you and here's how the Lord's Supper must be taken.

In Chapter 8, there's this issue in the church around eating meat sacrificed to idols. Newer believers are like "You can't do that, that was sacrificed or could have been sacrificed to a pagan god. We can't eat that." Paul comes in and he shares in Chapter 8... We don't have time today to read it, but go back and read it. In Chapter 8, he shares his opinion and he says we know there's only one true God and we know that idols are nothing, and we know that this meat that may have been sacrificed is not causing me any physical or spiritual damage to eat it. However, not everyone has this knowledge. He's thinking about those who are far more standoffish from it. He says, "You know what? Your relationship with me is far too important. I can share my opinion..." As he does in the text, as he teaches in the text, as he gives truth in the text, but he says, "I'm going to make sure that love wins out here."

This is how he leads out Chapter 8 – ***But knowledge puffs up while love builds up.*** We're seeing this in the church today. There are churches that are moving towards it. We want to always known for love. Paul isn't saying knowledge is bad, but knowledge tends to puff up and when it is without love, it can become very dangerous. Let's look at this for just a second.

Knowledge without love. Some of the meanest Christians I've ever met are people who know the Bible better than anyone I know. They know the scriptures and they have it memorized. They don't practice it with love, and they can be some of the meanest Christians, they can be some of the smuggest Christians.

Love without knowledge. But then on the flip side of that, you have Christians saying it's just all about love and they have love without knowledge. These are some of the most insecure believers I know. These are some of the most temperamental believers I know because any wave that hits them, anything that crashes against them, the first person that is unloving toward them, everything about their faith gets shaken. They need the knowledge. The need to know who God is, what God said, and they need to be able to stand on his promises when they're not feeling it. So, we don't want love without knowledge.

Knowledge with love. We want to know the truth of God's Word and we want to share it, communicate it, believe it, hold it true, give it away with love.

Without love, what I give is meaningless. Again, watch this strong language from Paul. ***3 If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast...*** This is now speaking of martyrdom. If I actually sacrifice myself for the faith... He's saying here you can do that in a very selfish way. You can do that with great self-interest in mind. He says if I do all of this, ***but do not have love, I gain nothing.*** He just got finished saying I am nothing and by going through the motions, just doing what those around me are doing, and I do it without love, I gain nothing. Again, you see the idea taking us through all three of these verses. In Verse 3, he says ***how I give, how you give is more important that what you give.*** Don't get caught up in the amount. Get caught up in the heart. Don't get caught up in what you have or what you don't have, get caught up in how you're giving it: the attitude, the motive behind it.

Today, we're going to take a mercy offering. As you leave, there are boxes set up out there. If you are brand new to our church, the mercy offering is money that we give as a church family to meet the physical needs of families and of individuals here at Woodland Hills. We give to Care for Kids and the Shoe Drive, and to CAM, to Jesus Was Homeless. There are a lot of ministries around town that we give to, meeting the physical needs of those in Stone and Taney Counties, north of us and south of our counties, but we do that through other organizations that are doing very well.

The mercy offering – you may come from a church that used the term benevolence – is the money that is given here and is given to help members here. You've moved people out of hotels into permanent housing with this money. You pay for utility bills, coats; all sorts of needs are met. Food, car repairs, all of that comes out. That offering ranges between three and six thousand dollars when we take it.

The money counters at the church sometimes tell me, "When you talk about it... Usually if we have this many one-dollar bills piled up, when you talk about it more, we may have a pile of ones like this." There are times I think an offering basket gets passed or a box is out there, and you think *I need to do something*, but you haven't really thought it through, you haven't really prayed about it, and it wouldn't be considered sacrifice in your life to help someone else. As we read in Acts 2 and Act 4... In Acts 4, people sold property and brought it to the apostles to be distributed among those who were in need.

For some of you, it's just like *grab a dollar or two so I do something*. If I can just encourage you to begin to pray. It's between you and the Lord. It's not between you and the church. If we have a weather day where we don't meet on a Sunday and we know the offering will be impacted by that, we don't send out letters reminding you to give. We truly do trust the Lord at this church to meet the needs of this church, the families of our church, and of our community. But this is between you and the Lord.

Some of the motives to think through how you give: **Giving is not for show**. By the way... I'm guessing on these numbers from what I see, but like 25% to maybe a third of our congregation has been giving online. So, if you're watching online, you get to participate in this if you have not found a home church. You need to find a home church in the community that you live, plug in, and be part of the body of Christ there and give there. But, for you to really process through your gift.

Jesus said it this way in Matthew 6m ***"So when you give to the needy..."*** As you're going to do today to give to those in need in our church. ***"...do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others."*** The motive of your giving is not to be honored by others or not to get a slap on the back. Not to have some say they really appreciate it. It's between you and the lord. ***"Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 3 But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your giving may be in secret."*** It's between you and the Lord. ***"Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."*** Don't give as a show.

We gave out these shirts a year or so ago. It was just a simple shirt and it was for you to wear to show when the offering basket was being passed. On the front it said, "Don't judge" and on the back it said, "I give on line."

I know many of our seniors are like, *Man, when the basket comes... I grew up in a church and I grew up in an environment where when the basket was passed, you put something in it*. There are a lot of different ways to give and what we all need to be reminded of is it is, again, the method of giving. The amount of giving is not what we're talking about right now; we're talking about the heart of giving.

The other motive to think through is that giving is **not out of guilt**. You want to give out of the motive of love, not out of guilt. We never, as a church, want to come across as if you don't give, boy snack time with your children is the first thing that's going away. Or if they're getting six Gold Fish this week, they're only getting three next week. You know, the little snack crackers. We never want to operate out of a motive of guilt.

Paul says it this way in the next letter to the Corinthians, Chapter 9. ***7 Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*** Again, it's between you and the Lord, not between you and me, not between you and the elders, but between you and the Lord.

Love is required for everything I say, everything I believe, and everything that I give. Here's the outline that we're going to be going through for the next several weeks, leading us up to Easter. We're looking forward to the teaching team walking us through this text.

1 Corinthians 13 - **4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.** I love that because this is a text that's saying when someone around you falls, love doesn't rejoice in that. Follower of Jesus, we don't rejoice when other people are hurting. We do rejoice in truth, but we don't delight in evil. **7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.**

Jesus said it this way... And to be reminded as we close just continuing in our love throughout this series. John 13 - **34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."** Not by what you know, not just that you're kind to people, but that what you know and what you say and believe is practiced in love, that you have taken the gospel of Jesus and you live it out in your life. You love one another, you care for one another the same way your Father in Heaven cares for you. "You'll be known as my disciples." Jesus says, "I'm the model of this. I showed you guys how to do this. Now you love each other as I have loved you."

Paul to the church in Thessalonica. He said, **9 Now about your love for one another we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. 10 And in fact, you do love all of God's family throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers and sisters, to do so more and more...** - 1 Thessalonians 4 So, for those of you who say, "I'm doing an okay job loving," he's going to say, "Press on." We all have much to learn in this area. We all have ways that we can grow. And all God's people said... Amen.

Father, I pray for the weeks to come. I pray for all of our time leading up to Easter. That this church would be known for the way we love one another, for the way we love our community, for the way we care for one another, for the way we're kind to one another, for the way we forgive one another, for the way that we come alongside each other when one is hurting or one has messed up and needs that warning signal to come on and a gentle nudge back.

May we always practice everything we say that we believe and everything that give with love. May it be a challenge to us in the weeks to come as we learn more about it. We're grateful for our time. We're grateful for this church and how you continue to use us in this community.

We pray all of this in the name of Jesus and everyone agreed and said... Amen.