

“The Gifts of God and the Love of God”

I Corinthians 13

Want to say a couple of things before we start AA Maybe three things. First of all, it takes about eight hours to get to Saint Louis from Birmingham or Brownwood. And, Debbie and I pretty much decided the first four hours we're going to be grieving and crying and writing things down so we don't forget anything in the second half. We're going to be grieving and crying. No second half. We may be looking forward to being with family and friends, but it really has been a delight as just sitting up here one more time. I'm going through my mind. I'm tempted to call up name after name after name of people that I've had a meal with, been in their home breakfast, lunch, dinner, conversation up on a hillside, walking around playing games. It's been it's been marvelous. We really love you all. We think you're great.

I'm even to say committee meetings I got to. There's Tim, or I just have to call out one name, Tim Ayres. I got to know him and committee meetings, but I like him. And. And then there are people I got to know in, you know, a Wednesday night class that didn't have a lot of people. So it's been a delight not to speak to you and know you on mass, but to know you as individuals.

Tonight I'm gonna speak on First Corinthians chapter 13 for a couple of reasons. the first is I have to write a book on First Corinthians. So I got to do it eventually. but I am teaming up with somebody and I chose this chapter. I've never spoken on First Corinthians 13 before, which sounds odd for a man who has preached and taught as much as I have.

But it's true. And so I'm very glad to open God's Word from this book, because, of course, gives us one more chance to think about the love of God and how that shapes us as individuals and as a church. I would ask you to follow our tradition of standing for the reading God's Word one more time to read first Corinthians 13 1 to 7.

This is God's Word.

Also. Paul says, if I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 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. If I give away all I have, if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing of his patient and kind. Love does not envy or boast. It is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way. It's not irritable or resentful. It does not rejoice at wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth.

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

So let's pray for a moment.

Lord, this is a familiar passage, and I pray that somehow we might learn even more about you and your ways and how we live. Following you in our time together. We ask it in Jesus name. Amen.

Please be seated.

I'm going to tell you a story in which I look bad and the story goes like this. Maybe a month ago, a little bit more. I was working kind of early in the morning in my office, and, Debbie came in. I was working on actually this passage beginning to work on this passage, and my wife came in and, wipe the tears from her eye and said, I need a hug.

I said, what's wrong? Even though I knew the answer. The answer is we have to pack up and leave. That's what was on her mind. And, she was stressed out about the prospect of packing everything up and the prospect of leaving friends and moving back to Saint Louis. And, you know, the gap of 20 plus months. Things change. And that was troubling her. Now, here's where I look. Bad. I had a thought. Now, I'd been up since early, and I'd been up till close to midnight the night before, working on a very vexatious email that I had to send to somebody about bras with business. And then I was up very early and had been studying for two hours, and when she said, I'm stressed in my internal dialog was, you're stressed that I'm moving to. And I was working on a vexatious email till 1145 last night, and I was up studying the scriptures. And it's not an easy passage at 615 and you're stressed. I did not say that. I did not say it because I had just been reading First Corinthians 13, which says, love is patient, love is kind. Love is not irritable.

This is how God's Word does this work in our life. We read it. We take it seriously. We try to apply it even if we're not intentionally thinking, I need to apply this just reading the Word of God. Just hearing what it says often allows us to grow. Right? You don't have to plan to grow if you just read the Bible.

Good things happen. The Lord speaks to us. That's the way the Bible works. It labels sin. It gives us hope and correct us. It sets us on a new path. It tells us how to battle sin. Also how to follow Jesus. And as Paul says in chapter 12, verse 31, the verse right before the one I read, Paul says, I will show you a more excellent way, and that more excellent way.

Of course, is the way of love. There's no scripture exactly like First Corinthians 13. There's nothing in old literature exactly like it. It doesn't say God is loving, therefore loving one another. In fact, there's no commands here. There's just a description of love. It's some people call it a hymn. Some people call it a celebration. I like that it's a celebration of love that moves us to love others. Almost like a celebration of great music moves you. To stop listening to Taylor Swift and start listening to something good at that came from earlier tonight.

Yeah. So Paul is instructing the church. He's instructing a church that needs to know about love because they're not exactly loving. They've boasted, they brag my leaders better than your leader. My gifts are better than your gifts. And Paul wants them to know what a life of love is and what it's like. Now there's a man named Kevin Van Duzer who's one of the great theologians of our day.

I had the privilege of going to seminary grad school with him, and he wrote a book recently called *Mere Hermeneutics*, came out just six, eight months ago. And he said, when you're reading a complex passage of Scripture like First Corinthians 13 or others that are more complex, you need to pay close attention to the details, but you also have to widen the frame of reference.

And the reason is the details aren't always clear. In first Corinthians 13 you may say, Dan, you just said twice. It's not the easiest passage. It seems really easy. These statements are straightforward, but the truth of the matter is the original language is not easy. There's lots of difficult decisions to be made about what words mean in this passage, and so to get it right, you need to have a big lens.

You have that the big picture in front of you. The big picture starts with the fact that although this passage doesn't say the words God is love, it's like the passages that do, and it's like the theme of love that pervades the entire Bible. So if you just think about Genesis, for example, to create the world is an act of love.

To create us is an act of love. And then after Adam and Eve rebelled for God to say, I will smite, crush, destroy the head of the serpent and give you life, I give you covenants. That is an act of love. And then in Exodus, the people of God were slaves in the land of Egypt. And as an act of love, God remembered his covenant and brought them out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, and took them into the promised land.

Now when people know each other, when people know each other, eventually they say things about who they are. And that's what God does in Exodus chapter 34. In Exodus 34, he says he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and in faithfulness. Now, if you ask me, that sounds like love. It says he's abounding in love, and he's faithful, and he's merciful and is gracious.

Mercy is giving gifts the people don't deserve. Grace is gifts that they really don't deserve because they're sinful. And God, of course, is slow to anger, which means he doesn't like to be angry at us because he loves us. Now, if you look at the Gospels, the Gospels are a story of love. Even if the word love isn't there all the time.

Of course, there's a banner over the Gospels, which is God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son. Yes, but most of the time Jesus goes around loving people, feeds people who

are hungry, touches lepers, heals people who are blind. There's that odd episode where a rich young man approaches Jesus and doesn't want to sell everything, and follow Jesus, and it just says Jesus looked at him and loved him.

And why did Lazarus die? And Jesus weep? Because Jesus loved Lazarus. Jesus loves people. He loved the crowds that followed him, often for the wrong reasons. And he loved the disciples who were a pack of ninnies sometimes could hardly hear a word that he said. God is love. How do we know that? Well, we know it because John, who was the beloved disciple, says it.

Later on in his epistle, First John, he says these words, beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God. God is love, and this is love. Not that we have loved God, but that he has loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for sins. The atoning sacrifice beloved of God so loved us. Let us also love one another.

So there's the first order statement which First Corinthians celebrates. Now, I also want to make it clear to you that if you wish, you could read First Corinthians on your own later and go deeper than I'm going to go right now. But if you look at the description of love in first Corinthians 13 is very largely a description of Jesus, just think about this.

Jesus talks about, sorry. Paul talks about those who have prophetic powers and have all knowledge. Jesus had prophetic powers. Jesus has all knowledge. He says, if you have faith to move mountains without love, you're nothing. Jesus move mountains. He moved the mountains of Israel unbelief. Paul says love is patient. Jesus was patient when his disciples wouldn't listen, wouldn't listen.

Jesus is kind. I love it that not only did Jesus heal people, but they often touch their eyes, touch their ears, touch their skin because people hadn't touched them. They were outcasts. Jesus is patient. His card, you might say, well, I mean, it says here love is never rude. And Jesus, you know, the way you talk to the Pharisees, you know, you you snakes, you vipers, you sons of hell.

That sounds kind of rude to me, actually, a sharp rebuke is an act of love, isn't it? And if you're a parent or you've been a parent, you know that sometimes you have to give your child a strong rebuke, not a mild one, because they're straying and to give them a mild word, honey, you shouldn't do that when they're headed to ruination.

It's not loving at all. And so Jesus says, your sons of hell, they are sons of hell. They need to hear it. It's an act of love to tell them you are headed toward destruction. And I tell you that in love. And the good news is, in the book of acts, some of the Pharisees believed and walked with the apostles because Jesus told them the truth about their legalistic ways.

Jesus embodies the last lines love bears all things, endures all things, believes all things, hopes all things. Surely Jesus endured. Surely Jesus bore our sins. Surely Jesus believed in his disciples

and their ability to carry out his commission. This is a description of Jesus Christ. And then it's an invitation to be like him, as were transformed by his love.

Now, I'm going to say it all a little bit differently. Half the time I'm going to talk tonight, I'm going to talk about the big picture. And the reason is the details aren't always clear. So if you read five commentaries, I probably read seven on what a gong is. There's actually a dispute about what a noisy gong is.

And it says gave us someone gives their body to be burned. There's actually a very big debate about what exactly that means. So we have to say, as I told you a minute ago, we may miss a few details, but if we get the big picture, we're going to be all right. I'm going to give you a very odd illustration.

At least some people think we'll think it's odd. Some of you here have heard of the music group called Dire Straits, which was very popular. 70s and 80s, sold millions, millions of albums and then and then had a long period of retreating to who they really are, which is kind of folky, jazzy people. And Mark Knopfler is the one who wrote basically all their songs.

He wrote a song called The Dream, A dream of the Drowned Submariner. I recommend it to you. It's a beautiful song. It's also a mysterious song. Clearly, guitars are the main instrument, there's no doubt about that. They're two guitars playing, but it's hard to tell what's in the background. Is it? One side says that the background instruments are an oboe, a soprano saxophone, horns, and a tuba.

Didn't sound like a tuba to me, but maybe so. So I thought, okay, I'm going to go over to Apple Music and see what they say. At Apple Music, they say synthesizer, harmonium. Raise your hand if you know what that is. Pump organ, clarinet. The two. The two lists don't overlap at all. They do not have a single thing in common, nor do either of them say guitar.

And clearly a guitar is the main instrument, along with most likely an eight stringed bouzouki not a bazooka, but a bouzouki. Now here's the thing. You can wonder what all that means. What? What instruments is he playing? And why does a soprano saxophone kind of sound like an oboe? And how could it sound like a tuba? But an eight year old can still listen to mom or dad listening to that song and say, that sounds kind of sad, daddy, but I really like it, right?

You can like it and enjoy it without knowing everything. Large swathes of God's word are like that. You don't need to know everything you can say, I love it. This is God's word to me. It's a description of love. So again, First Corinthians has all kinds of mysterious details, but really it's a story very simply of a description of love.

And to be honest with you, it gives me a chance to say something I wanted to say. And that is the first prayer I believe almost every pastor has when they join a church, when they become part of the church, lead the church, senior pastor, associate pastor, assistant pastor, youth leader is Lord, help me love these people.

And I have to say, that was my first prayer and I give thanks that you're lovable. And so we're celebrating love tonight. All right. So what does it actually say? It says first that we need to we need to accept chapter 13. You can pop your Bibles open if you want to. If you do, you will notice the chapter 12 and 14 are all about gifts, spiritual gifts, tongues, prophecy, the things Paul mentions.

If you have tongues and prophecy but have not love, you're nothing. Paul was just talking about tongues and prophecy. These are people who have many gifts. It's a fractious, cantankerous, argumentative church that was richly gifted by God. And Paul says to them, you have to exercise your the gifts for the common good. Instead of thinking, I speak in tongues of men.

Oh, I speak in tongues of angels. I have the power to heal. Stop it, he says. Just love one another, love one another. So chapter 12 gifts. Chapter 13 love. Chapter 14 gifts again, because some of the people are proud of the phenomena they had, the gifts they had, they were boasting about their gifts instead of exercising them in love.

So what Paul does is enter into the story in a first person manner. He says, not you. You're failing to love. He says, I know I'm is he talking about himself? Maybe a little bit. Maybe just talking about people who struggle. And he says, I will show you more. Excellent way. As an insider, I speak to you as one of you.

He says, if I have prophetic powers, if I have all faith but have not love, I am nothing. I here represents Paul and the person who has gifts and may not use them with love, because if one has spectacular abilities without love, it's just noise. It's like a clanging gong, King James says, sounding brass. King James probably is a really good translation, because in the ancient world they didn't have microphones, you know, and they couldn't put, polished stone to make the sound bounce.

And so they put brass jars behind speakers when they wanted to project their voice. He said, you're just like somebody projecting what somebody else does, or you're like a clanging cymbal. Cymbals, as we know them, didn't exist at the time. It's just a giant metal plate like you seen in movies when they hit a gong with a metal mallet and it just goes on.

All your words are just a big noise, he says. If you don't have love now, he's probably talking about people in his day known as the sophists, who would teach anybody how to make an impressive speech, grand, persuasive speech, stylish, but move people to anger or to tears or to passion. The problem with the surface was not that they taught you how to give a speech.

The problem of the surface is they would teach anybody how to persuade anybody of anything. They were like the worst political operatives who would help an extreme Democrat, an extreme Republican, extreme person in the middle. The middle is extreme. These days, of course. Anybody, anywhere. I will help you sell your message, because all I care about is helping you sell your message.

I don't care about the truth. Says the worst of the political consultants. I just want to help you sway the audience. Paul says you can give a great speech if there's no loving it, there's no value in it. If I have verse two says, prophetic powers understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and have all faith to move mountains, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Now. Prophecy just mentioned three gifts. Prophecy, knowledge and faith are all spiritual gifts. Prophets in the Old Testament. You know this. I said it about six months ago in the morning and I know you remember everything I say. Prophets in the Old Testament were the ones who said, thus says the Lord in the New Testament prophet is one who said, thus says the Lord, I repeated unto you, the people who took the places the prophets in the New Testament were the apostles and the New Testament.

You had to. Chapter 14 says, test what the prophets say, because prophets, you might say in the Old Testament, are capital P. Thus says the Lord, a New Testament, the apostles were capital A, and then there are these other people who speak persuasively or deeply or with conviction. What God has to say. But you have to test them because they're merely humans.

And here's the danger when you're merely a human, when you're small prophecy, you can be convinced you're speaking to God. When you're maybe not. There are a lot of teachers and pastors over the years. I hate to say it, who've used their persuasive skills, and they've given themselves more credit than they should have. There's many. And Robert Dabney, southern theologian, came from vaguely around here who said this.

I quote in full, if a speaker has intelligence but not integrity, the plausibility of what he advances will be felt. But the more ability he shows, the more will the people fear to commit themselves to his opinions. If they have no guarantee that he is not employing these forces of his genius to injure them? I know it's a double negative, but you heard it.

You can't really trust somebody unless you know their character, he concludes. Eloquence will dazzle and please godliness and love bring conviction. That's Dabney rephrasing what the apostle Paul said. Let's say it differently a worship leader can hit every note perfectly, singing or playing. And yet sing for their own glory. In fact, the whole church, the whole choir, the preachers, the teachers, the musicians can do it all in a magnificent building and if they do it for themselves, it's empty.

It's vain. It's nothing. Even a spectacular act of service. Paul says, if I give away all that I have is an interesting word, for this is the word forgive is not the ordinary word. The word that forgive is something like dole out like, M&Ms to children. You don't give, you don't tell children to hold out their hands for M&Ms and give them 400 M&Ms.

Give them three and they eat them. And then you give them a few more or popcorn. You don't give them everything you can give out gifts to children. You can give all of your money bit by bit to people who are poor, carefully doling it all out, examining every case, trying to do your very best to dole it all out perfectly to the most needy people.

But if you don't love them, if you're doing it so you can feel generous, it's nothing you can. Even the text says, give your body to be burned. Now here's a debate. I have to tell you, this is a debate because about 60% of translations say give your body burned and 40% say give up my body in order to boast.

You say, whoa, those aren't close. Well, in the original language they are to burn is cow face. Am I to boast? Is cow case? Am I just one letter difference? And furthermore, the earliest transcripts all have give away my body to boast, and the later ones mostly have give away my body to be burned. And so the scholars are divided.

But here's the thing. Although we don't really know exactly what it means, we do know this. You can even give your life away to boast about it, or to suffer the most horrible way of dying. You can even give your life away. And if you're doing it without love, it's nothing. Love is everything.

Love makes people listen, you know? It makes people listen when you're saying things or makes them watch when you're doing things. Because if you love, you ask the question, am I communicating? Is this doing what I want it to do? Lord, am I doing what you want me to do? Is this actually bringing you glory? Is it bringing good to the people around you?

And simply asking that question changes what we do.

Love is everything. Once upon a time, I was the interim pastor in a large southern church. Church was strong in all of its fundamentals. They loved the Lord, loved the gospel. They loved the Word of God. They loved each other, but they came upon a difficult time. Many hard things happened. If you came once a month, you probably barely noticed what was wrong.

If you came twice a month, you might have gotten a whiff. If you were on a leadership team, you might have been pulling out your hair and praying on your knees. Lord, when will you restore us to the life that we had? When I was at that church, I noticed that people were sometimes very low about their church.

I had the conviction that their church was a big and beautiful building, and the people in the church couldn't see how beautiful it was. I thought the church was like a beautiful building and a tree had hit the roof and caused the leak to drip down on the floor seven, six and five. And people said, oh my goodness, the roof and the leak and the broken windows is terrible.

It's terrible. We're terrible. And I thought, no, there's a mess on four, seven, six and five. But your great actually is what I thought. And I noticed the people were praying and I noticed that they didn't like the hardships, they didn't like the tensions that they had and that they wanted to live according to the love that was in them.

By God's grace, they did love God. They do love the word. They do love each other. They just need to remember how to go about doing it. It's so easy when people love God and they love each other and they've just strayed somehow. If I have love, I have everything. Paul would also say. Now there are 15 more descriptions of love in this passage, and I'm not going to try to hit all them.

I may have a few of them just so we hear what it says. Those words love is patient. Love is kind. Love is not irritable. All those are actually verbs, every last one of them. Although our translation puts them in as adjectives. They're all verbs. They're all every last one of them is an action or something we don't do.

It's actually two things we do, eight things we don't do, and then five more that we do. The two things we don't do first are. Sorry. The two things we do first are love is patient, which means we're patient with each other. We're patient when things go wrong, we aren't quick to judge. God is slow to wrath. We are slow to wrath.

Friends, are you patient?

Do you listen to podcasts and put it on 1.75? And as a consequence, do you think everybody you ever see talks too slowly? Would you please hurry up and talk faster?

You get upset when people drive slowly. Somebody was driving below the speed limit today. What is wrong with these people? People walk slowly in front of you, trying to go somewhere.

Love is patient. Love is kind. Love is kind. Do you know when Christianity took off in the ancient world? Took off in the third century, 200 plus early third century when a series of plagues. It was quite sure what they were. Maybe an earlier form of bubonic plague, maybe smallpox. It's hard to be sure. Maybe both ravaged the Roman Empire and millions of people died.

And people who could fled the cities, leaving their loved ones behind if they had the disease, abandoning them to die. And the Christians stayed, and they take care of their family, and they stick and took care of their pagan neighbors. And the name of Christians began to change. Christians had been called Christianity. Christ once, but the word for kindness is Christ.

And they started calling them Christianity kind ones. And Christianity grew and grew as a consequence. Now there are a lot of negatives here. Love does not envy. Who wants to envy makes the bones rot, says Proverbs. I once heard a Christian leader whose name I could declare and you would say, I've heard of him. And he said to me, and I quote, why do they follow him?

He named another Christian leader more than they follow me. I don't get it. And I was stunned to silence, but I thought maybe they follow him because he's glad when other people prosper and you're not. Love does not show. Envy does not boast. If you're envious of others and you get something, you probably boast about it. Love is not arrogant or rude.

If you're a boaster, you're probably also arrogant. Tell the world all about how great you are. Rude is a little different. Rude means I can do whatever I want, but rudeness is a little bit deeper than that. In the Bible, rudeness and crudeness has sort of a sexual overtone to it. Sometimes love is not rude means it doesn't make dirty jokes.

Does it make sexual innuendos? What's wrong with that? I mean, it's funny, right? Well, certainly Entertainment Today thinks that sexual innuendos and rudeness are appropriate for all adult education, which starts at the age of 11. It seems.

It's wrong to talk about the proper functions of the human body, which God created and made with those functions. It's wrong to scoff at the bodies that God made. It's wrong to mock the functions of the human body. Love is not rude. Love is respectful. Love does not insist on its own way. It's not irritable, resentful. I'm just going to talk about one of them.

It does not seek its own way. It doesn't look for its own privileges and try to manipulate the situation to get what I want. So, you all know my name is Dan, but people call me Dr Doriani, and I have to be mindful of my title because I know that if I call up a doctor and I say my name is Dan Dorian, I'd like to see doctor So-and-so.

I might be waiting three months, but if I call up and I say hi, this is Doctor Dorian, I might be waiting three hours right? And it would be tempting to do that. Except here's the thing there might be people need to see the doctor a lot more than I do. And love does not seek its own way.

I will tell you that I used I really used my title manipulative one time, and I'm glad of it. My father was about 89 years old and deep into Alzheimer's, and my mother is just too sweet, too kind to ever push anybody to do anything. She's a nicest person. She's with the Lord now, the kindest, nicest person ever.

And, and, and he had a doctor who just kept canceling his appointments over and over and over. And then he, you know, be a test and, and who knows when the results would come in

three weeks, six weeks, nine weeks, three months later. And my parents, my mother called me and said, I don't know what to do. I mean, he's not responding at all.

So I called the doctor. his name is Hans-Georg, a young woman. Because he bungled everything. Hans-Georg. Doctor Bungle man, this is Dr Doriani. My father is a patient of yours, and he can't seem to get an appointment that sticks or get any results back from any of his tests. I wonder if you can help. Oh my goodness, Dr. Doriani.

Yes. Your father. Your father. I'm seeing him tomorrow, in fact. And the. I'll have the test results in hand. I said, by the way, what's your field? I said, history of Christian thought.

But he did keep the appointment.

I was not easily provoked. That's it. That's an absolutely true story. That is, there is zero embellishment in that. Just in case you're wondering, they're all true. The names are changed to protect the guilty. His name was not Doctor Bungle, Man. Everything else is true. Love is not provoked. Now, here's the thing. Provocation can actually be a good thing.

in Hebrews 10:24 it says provoke one another to love and good deeds. It's good to push people sometimes. It's good to prod them sometimes, but prod them for the right reasons. That's what the apostle says. Prod them in love when it says love is not resentful. What it actually says is love does not count. Evil's love doesn't count.

Evil. What does that mean? It is kind of like resentful. But what it means is love does not remember all the things that you did to me in order to hold it against you and get even someday and make you feel miserable or punish you or any such thing. Love forgets what a beautiful thing it is when somebody apologizes to you.

You've done this kind and loving people do this. Somebody apologizes to you for an act of unkindness. You say, I don't know what you're talking about. I don't remember that at all. Or if you said or did it, I didn't notice. Have you done it? Think back. You've done it. You've probably done it. When you were doing that, you were showing love. You were not provoked. Finally, love believes and hopes and endures one more time. I tell you this a portrait of a Christian, but also a portrait of Christ. Isn't it? We read the words. Look at them again with me. When you read the last words. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. What is this but a picture of Christ who bore all things, who endured all things, and who continues to believe in us and the hope in us? Now of course we believe, and we hope in each other. We're not fools. We don't trust ourselves to everybody, but we believe and we hope and we endure. We bear. Let me do that because it's always, Lord, with us. And as he works in us, we slowly become more like him. He forgives us and he changes us. And songs and poems about love are part of that. So even if we don't know exactly what every part of this picture means, we still have a very clear idea of what love is. God is love, and we can love because God loves us.

Let's pray.

The father, we thank you for this portion of your word and the way in which it encapsulates so much of your truth, the way it describes you. Without saying that, but we are thankful that we have so many pictures of your love, your covenanted, faithful, redeeming love in the pages of Scripture and you offer us a picture of love that allows us to walk in your ways, because you've cleared the way for us to live in you, with you, and for you forever. Thank you, Lord, for this. In Jesus name, Amen, Amen.