

SERMON NOTES
I Corinthians 13
“Loving Relationships”

Intro:

- *Thank you to everyone who worked so hard and long yesterday with both the funeral and the anniversary*
- *And thank you to all former pastors and members for laying such a strong and enduring foundation in the early years of the church that made possible the blessings that we enjoy today – well done, good and faithful servants*
- *Over the years, a congregation’s growth in maturity and fruitfulness is dependent upon the strength and depth and durability of its foundation*
- *One of the primary reasons that Cornerstone is thriving and prospering today is because of the excellent foundation that was laid 50 years ago in Ridgeview and 30 years ago here in Eldridge*

Ephesians 2:19 - 20 (NIV) ¹⁹Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household, ²⁰built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

- *Cornerstone Baptist Church was built on the foundation of solid biblical teaching and the Truth of Gospel – with Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone*
- **With everything else that has changed over the years – that foundation of truth has never changed – that foundation must never change**
- *Cornerstone has always had a strong Bible teaching and SS ministry – so our children know their Bibles better than these kids who said:
--Noah’s wife was called Joan of Ark
--Joshua led the Hebrews in the battle of Geritol
--Solomon had 300 wives and 700 porcupines
--The Golden Rule says: do one to others before they do one to you
--A Christian should have only one spouse. This is called monotony.
--but apparently not for Lot and his wife – Lot’s wife was a pillar of salt by day, but a ball of fire by night*
- ***Cornerstone’s future must be built upon the historical foundation of core truths such as the authority of the Bible as the Word of God // the Trinity // the Deity, Uniqueness and Supremacy of the Lord Jesus Christ // The virgin birth, miracles, atoning death, bodily resurrection, ascension and Second Coming of Jesus Christ // the doctrine of justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ // the lostness of people apart from Christ, and the need for evangelism and missions // the ministry of the indwelling Holy Spirit // the certain hope of resurrection and eternal life through Christ***
- *Everything we hope to become and accomplish in the future depends on remaining faithful to these foundational truths*
- *Yet it also takes more than truth to make a church healthy and alive and fruitful and effective in fulfilling its mission*
- *Quite a few former members and pastors have returned for this weekend’s anniversary celebration – why?*

- *Not just for banquet food or to see the facilities or to hear a sermon – though the food was very good last night – as was the historical sketch program*
- **Loving relationships – that’s what draws people back to a church // that’s what keeps people active and faithful and loyal and dedicated to a church year after year and decade after decade**
- *People are initially attracted to a church for a variety of reasons – but they stay and get involved because of loving relationships*
- *Today we’re finishing our series on the 8 quality characteristics of healthy churches – with the final one being: loving relationships*
- *In some churches, most of the core members enjoy loving relationships in a close, tight-knit fellowship – but many newcomers find it hard to make friends and break into that inner sanctum of relationships*
- *That’s why it’s vital for churches our size to strengthen and expand their small group ministry so that more people can develop loving relationships*
- ***Loving relationships are essential to the health and growth of a church – as well as to the development of personal spiritual maturity***
- *According to Jesus, the chief mark of authentic faith and spiritual maturity is not Bible knowledge, correct doctrine, spirituality, church involvement or moral behavior – the chief mark of spiritual maturity is healthy, loving relationships*

John 13:34 - 35 (NIV) ³⁴“**A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.**” ³⁵**By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”**

- *For an understanding of the importance and characteristics of that love, let’s turn to the Bible’s love chapter – I Corinthians 13*

I. THE SUPREME VALUE OF LOVE (I Cor. 13:1-3)

- *I Corinthians 13 is often read at weddings – and appropriately so – but it has a context – and Paul places this chapter where he does for a reason*
- *The church in Corinth was one of several NT churches with unity problems*
- *Some churches struggled with major cultural and religious and prejudice barriers between Jewish and Gentile believers*
- *In Corinth – and other predominantly Gentile churches -- there were serious disagreements among believers concerning the issue of eating meat that had been offered as a sacrifice to idols in pagan temples*
- *And especially in the church at Corinth there was serious controversy and conflict concerning the issue of spiritual gifts*
- *Some things never change*
- *In the American evangelical church – there are racial and ethnic divisions // there are serious divisions between Republicans and Democrats // there are strong differences of opinion over some doctrinal and lifestyle issues // and some churches are still fighting the worship wars //*
- *But perhaps the most serious divide within evangelical Christianity is the divide between charismatics and non-charismatics*
- **Christians who love Jesus and accept the authority of Scripture and agree on all of the core truths of the Gospel as well as on biblical moral absolutes and pro-life and marriage issues and are**

committed to the Great Commission – yet in many cases cannot stand to worship or fellowship together in the same congregation because of differences over spiritual gifts

- How did the Apostle Paul deal with these kinds of controversial issues in the NT?
- *By encouraging churches to divide into Jewish churches and Gentile churches // and then further subdivide into charismatic meat-eating churches and noncharismatic meat-eating churches and charismatic non-meat-eating churches and noncharismatic non-meat-eating churches ??*
- As Paul would say: *God forbid!*

- When a core truth of the Gospel was at stake – such as salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ apart from circumcision or the works of the law – *Paul was not shy to declare dogmatically what was truth and what was not*

- But when it came to controversial issues where no core truth of the Gospel was at stake – such as charismatic gifts or eating meat offered to idols – *Paul refused to take sides to declare one side right and the other wrong – instead he affirmed freedom of conscience for individual believers in disputable matters*

- **When Gospel truth was not at stake – then unity was to be preserved by love and humility and mutual respect and acceptance of differences**

- *Paul warned his fellow tongues-speakers against exalting the gift of tongues or any other supernatural gift – and he warned against any gift creating chaos or disorder in a worship service*
- And he warned the noncharismatics against forbidding tongues or any other gift given by the Holy Spirit

- All spiritual gifts were to be used to build up the church body – *and no gift was any more important – or any less important – than any other gift*
- **Every gift – and every member – is valuable to the whole body**
- *There is no place for superiority – or inferiority – complexes in the body of Christ*
- **We need each other – we especially need those members with different gifts than ours**
- *The Holy Spirit is the Author and Designer of both the Unity and Diversity of the Body of Christ*

- **No spiritual gifts – in and of themselves – are divisive – lest we accuse the Holy Spirit of being the Author of division in the body of Christ**
- *Disunity is not caused by spiritual gifts – charismatic or otherwise – rather disunity is caused by misunderstanding and misuse and critical spirit and spiritual pride and lack of love and lack of acceptance of God-given diversity*

- Paul tackles the controversial subject of spiritual gifts head-on with 3 chapters of teaching --- concluding with this exhortation:

1 Corinthians 14:39 - 40 (NIV) ³⁹Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. ⁴⁰But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.

- *Straightforward instructions – not hard to understand – yet rarely put into practice in churches today*
- Instead – charismatic churches obey verse 39, and noncharismatic churches obey verse 40 – and the body of Christ remains divided over this issue

- **And into the heart of this teaching on spiritual gifts – where Paul emphasizes the value of both diversity and unity in the body of Christ – Paul inserts his love chapter – beginning with these words:**

1 Corinthians 13:1 - 3 (NIV) ¹If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ²If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

- **No spiritual gift – supernatural or otherwise – nor any financial gift or act of sacrifice for the cause of Christ – is of any value without love**
- *If there is no love in the exercise of my gift or in my ministry or service for Christ – I gain nothing – there is no value or profit without love*

- What is the biblical solution to the unity challenges brought about by diversity in the body of Christ?
- *Avoiding controversial issues? // Forbidding controversial gifts? // Dividing into separate congregations where everyone agrees on the subject??*
- None of the above
- **LOVE – that is the biblical solution**
- *That's why the I Corinthians 13 Love chapter is placed strategically between I Corinthians 12 and 14*

- **Without love, the church will lose either its unity or its diversity**

- *What often happens is that as a church grows in diversity – and begins to experience differences in convictions and beliefs about disputable matters – the church's unity is strained and conflicts develop and people begin to fear losing their unity – and so the solution is to sacrifice some diversity for the sake of maintaining unity*
- *And so the church body does a Van Gogh imitation and lops off an ear, or maybe cuts off a hand or a foot that has some unwelcome opinions or experiences or gifts, or maybe suggests that a few fingers or toes might be happier elsewhere*
- *And then the church once again celebrates its unity – minus a few appendages*
- *But it is a sub-biblical unity because it is the result of diminished diversity*
- **The only way for a church to maintain both unity and diversity is by the power of love**

- Let me ask you: *Do you believe the love of Jesus Christ in our midst is powerful enough to bind together in harmony different members with different opinions on disputable matters and different spiritual gifts and different ministry passions and different political convictions and different worship preferences and different ethnic backgrounds and different social-economic status?*

- **I do**
- *I believe God is doing something special here at Cornerstone in becoming a church that is strong in the Word and in the Spirit – in truth and in love – in unity and in diversity*

- *We have a long way to go with plenty of room for improvement – but I believe that we are becoming a church that is growing in diversity while also maintaining a unity that is based on loving relationships and the core truths of the Gospel*
- **Continued progress will require submitting to the Headship of Christ and the authority of Scripture while growing in Christ-like love and acceptance of one another**

Romans 15:5 - 7 (NIV) ⁵May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, ⁶so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁷Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

II. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF LOVE (13:4-7)

- If I were to ask you: *are you a loving person?* – what would you say?
- If I were to ask you: *are you a patient person?* – what would you say?
- **Many people don't necessarily even make a connection between being loving and being patient**
--but God's Word says that *love is patient*

1 Corinthians 13:4 - 7 (NIV) ⁴Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

- ***Love is patient and kind*** (vs. 4)
- Patience here is referring not so much to enduring difficult circumstances as much as putting up with difficult people
- *And as some of you are thinking of some difficult people in your life – just remember that someone else is thinking of you just now!*

When we lived in Ely, MN, there was a TV newscaster in Duluth who concluded every broadcast with the words: *Be kind*

Kindness is a powerful force for health and harmony and joy in relationships

-it is difficult to resist the power of consistent kindness

-even if there are strained relationships in the family or church, if you consistently show kindness to someone, it is very likely that their heart will eventually soften and respond to your love

-don't wait for the other person to start being kind first

-you take the initiative to serve them and help meet their needs

(2) Love is not jealous or envious

- *Love does not envy the gifts or abilities of others*
- Love is not jealous of the attention or recognition that others may receive for their ministry or service in the church

(3) Love does not boast, and is not proud

Love is characterized by a spirit of humility rather than pride

--Pride destroys relationships and unity – while humility builds loving relationships and strengthens unity

- In every significant relationship in life, we hurt each other – even the people we love – sometimes ***especially*** the people we love
- *Pride keeps us from owning up to our part in hurting others – keeps us from seeing our own faults – and pride keeps us from apologizing even when we do see our own faults*
- It is difficult to mend relationships when one or both people in the relationship finds it difficult to say “*I was wrong. I'm sorry. Please forgive me.*”
- *And spiritual pride is just as damaging as any other kind of pride*
- Sometimes, as Bible-believing Christians who believe in absolute truth – *we assume that if we believe we are right on an issue – that it is then OK to gossip about others or tear down others or injure the reputation of others* – because, after all – we're right and they're wrong and we've got the Bible on our side
- *But God opposes the proud – even if they are right – (and usually the proud aren't right quite as often as they think they are)*
- God opposes any behavior or attitude that damages or destroys relationships within His family

- Parents: have you ever seen pride in any of your children when they've been quarreling with each other?
- *Do you rejoice when one of your children wins the argument at the cost of damaging their relationship?*
Neither does our heavenly Father
- **I Peter 3:8** ⁸Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble.
- *There is a direct connection between humility and living in harmony with one another.*
- Humility doesn't have a critical spirit // humility is not judgmental // humility admits faults // humility asks for forgiveness // humility asks for help // humility accepts advice // humility listens to opposing points of view // humility considers the feelings of others – *Humility builds healthy relationships*

Philippians 2:3-4 ³Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. ⁴Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

- *Practicing humility builds loving relationships and strengthens unity in the church*

(5) Love is not self-seeking

It has been said that the opposite of love is not hate, but rather self-centeredness

--Love has a servant spirit that looks out for others

--in order to grow in Christ-like humility and servanthood, we need to admit our self-centeredness, surrender control of our heart to Christ, and depend upon Him to supply us with the power to transform our selfishness into a humble, servant spirit

(6) Love is not easily angered

Love is not easily provoked / Love has a slow fuse

People who have a short fuse and are easily provoked and get angry a lot usually struggle with these kinds of underlying issues:

-A Controlling Attitude - *the expectation that everything in life should go your way and in accordance with your timetable / and when it doesn't - you can manipulate others into seeing things your way with intimidating anger*

-A Personal Rights Mindset - *the demand that life be fair and that everyone treat you as you deserve / the conviction that you deserve much more in life than you're getting / the belief that whenever any of your multitude of personal rights are violated, you have the right to lash out in anger at the offender*

Ask God to produce within you the humility, the patience, the servant attitude, and the yielding of personal rights that will help you to develop a longer fuse

(7) Love keeps no record of wrongs

“Things We Can Learn from Our Dog”

-When someone is having a bad day - be silent, stick close by, and nuzzle them gently

-Avoid biting when a simple growl will do

-Never hold a grudge

Pretty good advice for marriages and families and churches, too, isn't it?

Ephesians 4:32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Love forgives

--*Nothing is more demoralizing and destructive to the health of relationships than keeping a record of wrongs*
-for as long as a record of wrongs is kept, there can be no fresh starts / no second chances / and therefore no incentive for trying to do better next time

There are no sin-free churches because there are no sin-free people

-the difference between churches that are healthy, growing in love, and able to recover from their mistakes and conflicts - *and churches that are tearing each other apart* - is often the presence or absence of a forgiving spirit

(9) Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres

Love bears all things

-*Love doesn't tolerate evil, but love does tolerate imperfections and accepts personal differences*

Love always trusts - believes the best about the one being loved

-- *love gives others the benefit of the doubt*

--When you hear something negative about a church member or leader – and you don't have all the facts firsthand – you give the benefit of the doubt to the person being talked about – *you assume their innocence until presented with clear evidence of their guilt*

Love always hopes

Dale Burke: *Love is optimistic and smiles at the future*

It is hope that enables love to endure

-*Love always perseveres*

This is the ultimate test of love and character and spiritual maturity

-in the face of difficulties / in the face of mistakes and failures / in the face of pain and suffering / in the face of disagreement and conflict - *mature love stays the course / mature love hangs in there / mature love is willing to endure the pain of the moment and trust God to work for a better future - **Mature love never gives up***

III. THE PERMANENCE OF LOVE (13:8-13)

Love never fails / love lasts forever – Agape love is powerful enough to bind together in harmony different church members with different opinions and different gifts and different passions and different personalities

1 Corinthians 13:8 - 13 (NIV) ⁸Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. ¹¹When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. ¹²Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. ¹³And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

- This is one of those passages of Scripture where there are some differences in interpretation among Bible-believing Christians
- *Everyone agrees that the main point is that spiritual gifts will one day cease whereas love is permanent and abides forever*

- The ceasing of spiritual gifts – specifically mentioned here are gifts of prophecy, tongues and knowledge – is tied with the phrase in verse 10: *When perfection comes, the imperfect disappears*
- Some interpret *Perfection* as either the perfecting of the church or the completion of the NT
- *The majority interpretation is that “perfection” is related to the Second Coming of Christ because Paul refers here to “seeing face to face” and “knowing fully as we are fully known” – which are more readily understandable as references to the future return of Christ rather than to our present state --even with the NT, our knowledge is still partial and incomplete and imperfect – as evidence by all the doctrinal disagreements among Bible-believing Christians*
--but when Christ returns, then we shall see Him face to face and we will know fully as we are fully known
- *But regardless how you interpret these verses – and there is room for acceptable differences of opinion here – the main point is clear: **Love is of greater value than spiritual gifts because love abides forever whereas the gifts will one day cease***
- An example of the permanence of love is that the love that Charles and Shirley have shared for nearly 60 years is a never-ending love that death cannot snuff out because the abundant life that Jesus gives is a never-ending life that death cannot snuff out
- Jonathan Edwards: *What makes the church like heaven? It is love. The church manifests the glories to come not in the gift of tongues or prophecy or giving or teaching – but rather in love.*
- D.A. Carson: *The greatest evidence that heaven has invaded our sphere, that the Spirit has been poured out upon us, that we are citizens of a kingdom not yet consummated -- is Christian love.*

(Conclusion)

- And where does this love come from? Where does the power to love one another like this come from?

Romans 5:5 (NIV) ⁵And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

1 John 4:19 (NIV) ¹⁹We love because he first loved us.

This agape love described in I Cor. 13 comes from God

--Our capacity to love with I Cor. 13 kind of love flows from Christ's Spirit within us, not from self-effort

-Loving is not about trying harder - it's about abiding in Christ - relying upon His power - allowing His love to flow through us

- ***This love is the most powerful force for health in the life of the church***
- *Sincere, practical Christian love endows a church with a much greater magnetic power than all the marketing efforts of this world*
- Lots of people can resist the truth we proclaim – *but few people can resist the love that we show* – and as they experience the love – many become more open to the truth
- I believe that the love of Jesus Christ is very strong in our church fellowship
- *I have witnessed that love in action this week as many of you have poured out your love to Shirley Milnes during her illness and to Charles following her death*
- I have seen the fruits of that love as we celebrated God's faithfulness at our church anniversary banquet last night

- *I have witnessed many different members employing many different gifts to serve the needs of others in love*
- I know that there are individuals in this church who have experienced substantial emotional and spiritual healing and renewal by experiencing God's love through the love of Cornerstone people
- **People expect Baptists to excel in biblical knowledge and truth – but many people don't expect Baptists to excel in love**
- *We want to be a church that excels in both truth and love*
- *After all, what is the ultimate purpose of biblical instruction?*

I Timothy 1:5 ⁵The purpose of my instruction is that all the Christians there would be filled with love that comes from a pure heart, a clear conscience, and sincere faith.

- ***The purpose of biblical instruction is to produce love from a pure heart***
- **Therefore, if a church truly excels in teaching biblical truth it will also excel in loving relationships**
- **Love is a life-transforming power – especially when combined with proclaiming and living the truth of the Gospel**
- *May God continue to shape us into a church that worships God by the Spirit and glories in Christ Jesus and stands firm on the core truths of the Gospel while also extending Christ's love to the hurting and broken all around us*
- ***And may the love of Jesus Christ in our midst be powerful enough to bind us together so that we can maintain our unity without sacrificing our diversity***

Prayer

Hymn # 198 “Wonderful Grace of Jesus”