

The Love Boat 1 Corinthians 13: 1- 13

Are you old enough to remember Captain Stubing and The Love Boat?

The theme song invited us to climb aboard for fresh adventures, exciting and new, **and** with the assistance of characters like Julie and Gopher! In almost every episode someone either fell in or out of love. Often both! One way or another, love was always in the air on the Love Boat.

The passage we are going to look at today is often read at weddings, where love is definitely in the air. I am sure that Colin and Christina are quite focused on love as they await their fast approaching big day!! The love that a bridal couple have for one another, the love that parents feel as they witness their children moving into this new chapter of their lives, promising their love to each another.... it is a time of great joy and celebration.

We use the term so easily. Love you. Or less serious perhaps, Love ya. Or, "I love this flavour of ice cream". In the 1970 movie

Love Story, Ali McGraw started the 'Love means' era which started a landslide of definitions of love with her phrase.... "Love means never having to say you're sorry". A comic strip soon appeared with endless endings for that phrase such as "love means sharing, even if its your faourite flavour, love means telling him he is right, even when you know he isn't, love means forgiving, even if you haven't been asked to. The theme song for The Love Boat declared that 'love is in the air'. Later, Tina Turner asked, "What's love got to do with it." There is no shortage of where we can find expressions of love....people sing about it, write about it, make movies and television shows about it, do art about it, and use it randomly and perhaps recklessly in all sorts of conversations. As Christians, we are called to live it!

Today I want us to have a serious look at this "Love" passage in the letter Paul wrote to the people of Corinth.

As always, context is crucial. The church in Corinth was in trouble. Paul had heard from Chloe's people that they had gone off the rails in all sorts of ways. In chapter 1 verse 10 in his letter to the people of Corinth, he tells them that he is aware of the divisions that have developed among them in the church, and they must be resolved. They have lost their way. They don't even know if they are disciples of Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas or Christ.

By the time we get to chapters 8-10, Paul is scolding them for eating food that has been sacrificed to idols. In chapter 11 he talks about head coverings and the abuse of the Lord's Supper. In chapters 12-14, he acknowledges that he is well aware of how spiritual gifts have become divisive. Some feel that their spiritual gifts are more valuable than those of others.

At the end of chapter 12, Paul states that he is going to show them a more excellent way.

So Paul is in fact scolding them. “Straighten up and fly right!” You need to change your attitudes and your behaviours. And then he tells them how they should be living their daily lives. And that is what the brides and grooms have listened to for generations.

What we think of as a lovely, warm blessing, is really a firm scolding, in an attempt to try to get them back on the right path!

The ego is a beast, and feelings like pride, fear, self worth, power, jealousy, are quick to jump in and contaminate the pond.

Paul recognizes how difficult it is for we mere mortals to love genuinely and authentically like Christ calls us to. In chapter 1, he acknowledges that we have been given grace by God and that we have been enriched by him in speech and knowledge. So it is not that we are not equipped to love, it is that ego gets in the way and we often act in lots of ways that are anything but loving.

Paul begins this chapter on love by addressing the divisiveness of the church in Corinth brought on by their misunderstanding of the

significance of speaking in tongues. He pulls no punches and claims that whatever one's gifts might be, if those gifts are not lived from a foundation of love, they are of no use. Faith, knowledge, charity, even martyrdom expressed without love, is in vain.

By verse 4, Paul gets on to defining love. Paul says love is patient, kind, not envious, or boastful, or rude. Love is not irritable, or resentful. It does not rejoice in wrongdoing. It rejoices in the truth. He says that love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. Love never ends.

Sounds simple enough doesn't it?

Let's consider patience. How do you fare in that category? Think of examples when you have really excelled in this area. Now ask someone who knows you well to weigh in on this.

Sometimes it is easy to be patient....sometimes not. Sometimes it is easy to be patient with some people and not others. I am

pretty certain that Christ wants us to strive to be patient, even when it is difficult. That is what love looks like....patient! Love is not always easy.

Paul then says, love is kind. Again, sometimes and with some people it is easier to be kind than others. Paul allows for no exceptions to the rule. That can be tough.

Love is not envious, or boastful or arrogant or rude . I think that sometimes we can come off that way without intending to do so.

Have you ever thought that someone else gives off that impression. It may be completely unintentional. They may be feeling some other way and they simply get misinterpreted.

Love does not insist on its own way. What do people who know you well say about that? Does it always have to be YOUR way? Do you insist on being right? Do others say that you genuinely

take the wishes and opinions of others into consideration? Have you ever been accused of bullying?

Love is not irritable or resentful - Let's think about irritable for a moment. There are times in all our lives when we run out of patience or when certain topics set us off. This is not saying that we will not have these feelings, but rather, out of love, we develop strategies to manage those feelings.

Next Paul says, that love does not rejoice in wrongdoings, but rejoices in the truth. There can be something within our human nature that delights when another person stumbles. Sometimes when a well known person falls, we are devastated. But sometimes we feel just a little bit satisfied. We are glad that they crashed and burned. That can't be love.

Paul ends his definitions on love with these words - "Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends."

I wanted to begin this series on Spiritual Gifts in the Body of Christ on this famous Love passage so that this would be our foundation. It is intended as a self-administered individual inventory – a place to begin. In consideration of the spiritual gifts we possess, if we are not rooted in love, the value of our gifts is insignificant. There was divisiveness and corruption in the church in Corinth. Their thoughts and actions, and their expressions of their gifts were not rooted in love. They did not function well in the Body of Christ. And so you and I are called to examine our own lives. We might be incredibly gifted and capable in so many areas of life. But unless what we do and what we say is rooted in love, it is like a noisy gang or a clanging symbol.

I want to close today by reading this passage to you again, but this time from The Message. Please relax and let these words of Eugene Peterson fall upon your heart. My hope is that you might resonate with these words and images.

16062 If I speak with human eloquence and angelic ecstasy
but don't love, I'm nothing but the creaking of a rusty gate.

2 If I speak God's Word with power, revealing all his mysteries and making everything plain as day, and if I have faith that says to a mountain, "Jump," and it jumps, but I don't love, I'm nothing.

3-7 If I give everything I own to the poor and even go to the stake to be burned as a martyr, but I don't love, I've gotten nowhere. So, no matter what I say, what I believe, and what I do, I'm bankrupt without love.

Love never gives up.
Love cares more for others than for self.
Love doesn't want what it doesn't have.
Love doesn't strut,
Doesn't have a swelled head,
Doesn't force itself on others,
Isn't always "me first,"
Doesn't fly off the handle,
Doesn't keep score of the sins of others,
Doesn't revel when others grovel,
Takes pleasure in the flowering of truth,
Puts up with anything,
Trusts God always,
Always looks for the best,
Never looks back,
But keeps going to the end.

8-10 Love never dies. Inspired speech will be over some day; praying in tongues will end; understanding will reach its limit. We know only a portion of the truth, and what we say about God is always incomplete. But when the Complete arrives, our incompletes will be canceled.

13 But for right now, until that completeness, we have three things to do to lead us toward that consummation: Trust steadily in God, hope unswervingly, love extravagantly. And the best of the three is love.

Amen