

Faith, Hope and Love
Part 3 “All You Need is Love”
1 Corinthians 13
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Well if you have your Bible this morning I am going to read to you from 1 Corinthians and Chapter 13. 1 Corinthians, one of the New Testament letters, one of the longer of the New Testament letters. And I am going to read the whole of the chapter which is 13 verses.

1 Corinthians 13:1, Paul writes,

“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or clanging cymbal.

“If 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.

“If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

“It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

“Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

“It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

“Love 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.

“For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears.

“When 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.

“Now 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.

“And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”

And no, we are not going to conduct a wedding here this morning; that’s normally the occasion when you hear these, or some of these verses being read.

But if you have been with us lately, the last three weeks we have made the last verse of this chapter the sort of springboard in which we have gone into other parts of the Bible. And in those verses he says,

“Now these three things remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”

We talked about faith as looking to God, hope as looking to the future. We will talk about love today as looking towards others.

We are not going to springboard out of this chapter this time; we are going to stay here because this is the classic chapter that we have in the New Testament on love.

Love is the greatest of all virtues. And the reason for that is that twice in the first letter of John we have these three words: God *is* love.

Now God is not faith. God is not hope. These are attributes of God, qualities that God may be the source of in our own life. But He actually is love, and I don't think that it is right to say that love is an attribute of God. An attribute is a quality that you might see in somebody.

Omnipotence is an attribute of God – He is all-powerful. Omniscience – He knows everything – that's an attribute of God. Omnipresence; He is everywhere at the same time – that's an attribute of God.

But love is His actual nature. It defines His very being. Therefore everything else that is true about God is permeated by love. Even His wrath is an expression of His love; it is because He is love that He hates those things that destroy and defile and corrupt us, which is why we see the wrath of God in Scripture, because it is a necessary expression of His love.

In fact, if He wasn't angry with sin, we would question whether He really loved the sinner.

Now the goal of the Gospel is the restoration and reproduction of the character of God within us. And for that reason, if God is love, love is intended to characterize those of us who are made in His image and designed to be a physical visible portrayal of what God is like.

We are broken of course. We are fallen. And therefore the love of God in us is filtered through that fallen nature and we see the marring of it in our own lives and our own experience. But nevertheless it is the love of God in us and through us that is the highest expression of the Christian life.

Jesus, in John 13:34 said to His disciples,

“A new command I give you: Love one another.”

And then He explained how this works.

“As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

“But this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

Now for Him simply to say, “I have a new commandment for you: love one another. You got that Peter? Go out and love Thaddeus, who is another one of the disciples you probably don’t get on with very much. John, you go and love Judas. That’s My command.”

They would say, “Well, how in the world am I supposed to do that?”

So He explains:

“As I have loved you.”

What that means is this: our first capacity for love is to know that we ourselves are loved. That alone is the reservoir out of which we are able to love one another. We know that we are loved.

And that’s why, fundamental to our experience as a Christian and the outworking of the character of God in us as Christians, is we need to know that we are loved. Not just that we are saved – that’s good, important. Not just that we have been delivered, not just that we are going to heaven one day, not just that our past is gone, but we are actually loved. You are loved.

It took me a long time to understand that because I did not have an understanding of myself that made me lovable.

Well you probably don’t either, but this is the marvel of this kind of love we are going to talk about this morning. You don’t have to be lovable because that love does not originate in the attraction of the loved; it originates in the love nature of the lover.

And as God loves us and in that love draws us into a relationship of which we need have no fear, no shame, no hiding because He loves us through and through, so we then and only then, may we love one another.

Now I know I am a pauper in this area. I get wrapped up in my own little world. I get preoccupied with my own little interests and my own little self.

But we are going to – I am going to and you are going to – stunt our spiritual growth until we learn to bask first in the love of God and allow out of that love a freedom to love one another.

Now let me just define our terms a little bit. There are two words for love in the New Testament. There are actually three Greek words for love. One is not in the New Testament.

But the two that are there are the words *phileo*, which is to have affection, friendship. The name Philadelphia (two Greek words) means to love your brother. It’s the kind of love that says, “I like you and you like me, so that’s nice; I like you; you look me. Let’s have a friendship.” And

a lot of friendship – most friendship is formed on that basis. “You are my friend; I am your friend.”

That’s phileo love.

Agape is the second word that the Greeks outside of the New Testament writings hardly ever used (they did use it but it was extremely rarely) because it is a love that describes the love of God. It is not simply an emotion – you like me; I like you; we are having a wonderful friendship.

It is essentially an act of the will. It says, “I love you whether you love me or not, whether you reciprocate my love or not, whether you turn your back on me or not; I love you.”

That’s agape love. It’s a love that is not conditioned by how it is reciprocated or received.

You know Jesus talked about this in Luke 6:32. He said this:

“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ love those who love them.”

(That’s the phileo love – that’s you be my friend; I will be your friend; you love me, I’ll love you and we have this mutual thing going together.)

But if you love those who love you, that’s no credit - even sinners do that, He says.

“And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ do that.”

“And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that ... Even ‘sinners’ lend to ‘sinners,’ expecting to be repaid in full.

“But you love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back in return.”

That’s a different kind of love, isn’t it? Any Tom, Dick, Harry, Mary can have what He calls there the “even sinners love this way.” Anybody without Christ loves this way where you love someone because they love you back. You invite them for dinner because maybe they will invite you back for dinner. You loan to them in need because you are going to get it back eventually. Anybody does that.

No, said Jesus, the kind of love I am bringing into your lives is a supernatural love.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German martyr in the 1940’s said about this text,

“By our enemies Jesus means those who are quite intractable and utterly unresponsive to our love, who forgive us nothing when we forgive them all, who return our love with hatred and our service with derision.”

That’s the love that we give when there is no response to it. We forgive everything and nothing is forgiven back. Our love is returned with hatred and our service is treated with derision, said Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who knew, by the way, exactly what he was talking about from his years imprisoned in a Nazi jail, and eventually his execution just a few days before the end of the war.

This is agape love.

Now in this chapter here, in Chapter 13, I want to divide it into three sections, and we will look at these three fairly briefly.

First of all, in the first three verses he talks about what I am going to call loving activities. Then in Verse 4-7 it is about loving attitudes, and then the last part about loving aspirations.

Firstly, about loving activities. If you know this section of Scripture, he has been writing about spiritual gifts in the previous chapter, the fact that God gives different gifts to different people for different functions. But they come from the same Spirit and they all contribute to the same end, as the body works together; they are supernatural and they energize the church.

And having talked about that, he finishes that chapter by saying in Chapter 12:29,

“Are all apostles?”

The obvious answer to that question is no, they are not all apostles. Some are.

“Are all prophets?”

The answer would be no.

“Are all teachers?”

No.

“Do all work miracles?”

No.

“Do all have gifts of healing?”

No.

“Do all speak in tongues?”

No.

“Do all interpret?”

No.

So he listed these various gifts. He then – the assumption is that these are not for everybody – different people have different gifts for different purposes but they all work together as a body.

But, he says, when he finishes that,

Although these are all different, he says,

“Eagerly desire the greater gifts.”

And then, though these gifts are all good and necessary and supernatural, he says,

“And now I will show you a most excellent way.”

And what is that excellent way?

It is love, because then he says in Verse 1 of Chapter 13,

“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong.”

“I’m just a clanging cymbal; I’m just a noise, an obnoxious noise at that, if this is without love.

“If 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...”

Impressive as all that faith and knowledge may appear, I am nothing, he says.

And Verse 3:

“If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.”

All these qualities he has talked about in Chapter 12 that are good, that are Holy Spirit enabled, that are supernatural in their function; if I exercise any or all of these apart from love, he says, “I am nothing, I do nothing, I gain nothing.

When I was looking at this earlier in the week, I asked myself the question, how would people and why would people do some of these things without love? I mean he talks about, “if I give all I possess to the poor but have not love, I gain nothing.”

I mean who is going to give all they possess to the poor unless there is some motivation of love and generosity, surely?

But actually we can give to the poor, not as an expression of love but an expression of our ego. It can be selfishly motivated because Jesus talked about that back in Matthew Chapter 6:2 when He said,

“When you give to the needy...”

So that’s the giving, that’s the generosity, that’s the kindness.

“When you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the street corners, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.”

He said when you give to the needy, don’t give to the needy making sure other people know about it.

The word hypocrite actually used to be a positive word. It’s a negative word now. It was used for actors – they would have facial masks, you know, and they would come on the stage in a play and they were behind this mask and run back and another mask. And it was called, positively, hypocrisy.

You might say to somebody after the show, “Man, you were a brilliant hypocrite today! It was excellent hypocrisy.”

It was acting, stage acting. Now it has become more negative in its connotations to us because what they are doing is stage acting.

So they are going to give but there is nobody watching, so, “Oh man, nobody is noticing. Get out a trumpet. Oh, here they come! Here’s my gift, my donation to you!”

And Jesus said it has absolutely no currency in heaven; they get no reward from heaven. They get reward in full, right now, which is they think people think they are generous, but actually, actually most people see through a phony. So even that hasn’t worked.

Their motivation is their reputation, to be seen, to be known. And they carefully stage manage how they control their generosity for that purpose.

There is a tragic example of this in the early church. Read it in Acts Chapter 4 and then Acts Chapter 5.

Barnabas – he’s my favorite character in the book of Acts actually – Barnabas was a good man. He had some land in Cyprus and he sold it and he took all the money that he got from the sale of that land and laid it at the apostles’ feet in Jerusalem and said, “This is for the furtherance of the Gospel.”

It was purely voluntary on his part, motivated purely by kindness and love.

There was a married couple in the church in Jerusalem who saw this. They were impressed by it. And they were impressed by the way people loved Barnabas for his kindness and generosity. And so they agreed that they would sell some land. They would keep back some of the money but present the money they gave as being the full value of the property. In other words, they would mimic Barnabas, externally meanwhile keeping some of it back.

The husband (his name was Ananias) brought the money they had agreed to give, brought it, laid it at the feet of the apostles as Barnabas had done and said, "This is money that we have gained from the sale of a piece of property and we wanted to give it to the work of God and the spread of the Kingdom."

Well Peter saw right through it. You know phonies aren't difficult to see by a person with discernment. And Peter said, "Why did you decide to lie to us? Why did you decide to lie to the Holy Spirit?"

And then he said, "This was your land. You didn't have to sell it. And if you did sell it, you didn't have to give all the money to the church – you didn't have to give any money to the church. But you said, in giving this little bit, you were giving it all. You have not lied and been a phony before us," he said, "you have lied and been a phony before God."

At that point, Ananias fell down dead. There were some young men there who were the ushers, and the ushers came forward, took him out and buried him.

Three hours later it says his wife Sapphira turned up. And when she turned up, Peter said to her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for this land?"

And she said, "Yes, that's the price."

And Peter said, "How could you agree to lie and test the Spirit of the Lord?"

And then he said, "Do you hear the footsteps of those men coming up the path? They are just coming back from burying your husband and they are going to go back and bury you."

And at that point, Sapphira fell dead.

And so when the ushers came in, they had to carry her body out and bury her next to her husband.

You know ushers in those days didn't just hand out bulletins you know. They had much more fun.

I wonder what would happen if the Holy Spirit penetrated our hearts here this morning and all the phonies dropped dead. I wonder if I would leave this platform alive.

If I give all I possess to the poor, but have not love, I gain nothing, I am nothing.

It talks about giving our bodies to the flames. If I surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. This is martyrdom; this is as people are being burned at the stake. We don't have any example prior to this in the book of Acts to just see as an example of this.

We have the example of the first martyrdom which was Stephen. And when Stephen was martyred it says that his face was like the face of an angel.

And when they took those stones and they smashed the bones of his body and smashed his body itself until he lay in his own blood, dying, and his last words he fell on his knees and cried out in Acts 7:60.

“‘Lord, do not hold this sin against them.’ And when he had said this, he fell asleep.”

That's a euphemism for dying. He didn't feel like falling asleep; he was just crushed to death.

Now that's a man – he's already described as full of the Holy Spirit and full of wisdom and full of faith, but I suggest that's a man full of love. In his dying moments, his body no longer able to stand, broken, bones smashed, “Lord, don't hold this sin against them.”

You know, without love all our spiritual gifts and all our ministries are empty. Without love someone can preach on this platform and it comes to nothing. It may be interesting rhetoric, it may be interesting ideas, it may be stimulating to our minds but it won't go anywhere, it won't accomplish anything, nobody will be different without that.

Without love we can be a musician and we can play beautiful music but that's all it will be – beautiful music. It won't do anything in people's lives.

Without love you can be an usher but all you are doing is just showing people to their seats. There is no communication of your spirit with theirs and investing in a way that feeds into people's hearts and lives.

Without love you can go on a mission team and you will just be a tourist.

Without love you can be on the staff of a church but it's just a job. You become clanging cymbals that come to nothing.

I once shared a conference some years ago, organized by the New England Association of Evangelicals – that's the six New England states – and it was being held in Boston. It was a leaders/pastors conference.

And one of the other speakers at that conference was a man called Juan Carlos Ortiz from Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Juan Carlos Ortiz had seen the church he went to pastor there grow at a phenomenal rate. He is actually the brother in law of Luis Palau, who some of you will know.

And there were about 300 people when he went there. Within a very short time it had grown to 1000 and more than 1000 people. And he said, "I felt quite pleased to be known as the pastor of the fastest growing church in Buenos Aires."

One Sunday he had prepared to preach on the text "Love one another."

He said, "I had my message worked out. I had the different Greek words for love and explanations and so on."

And during the first part of the service in the time of worship, he began to feel, "I shouldn't preach this message."

He said, "I was sitting on the platform and when the worship leader finished a song he said, 'Now our brother Juan Carlos will come and preach us his message.'"

And Juan Carlos Ortiz said he came to the desk and he said, "Brothers and sisters, my text this morning is love one another."

And he stopped, closed his Bible and went back to his seat. There was a silence. People weren't quite sure what was happening.

The worship leader said, "Are we supposed to sing another song?"

He sat quietly.

He got up a second time, came to the desk and said, "Brothers and sisters, my text this morning is love one another," and went and sat down. Silence again.

He said his wife was sitting in the balcony and she thought, "He's flipped. I knew it would come one day."

He got up a third time after some uncomfortable, I don't know how many, minutes of silence.

And he said, "Brothers and sisters, my text this morning is love one another," went back to his seat.

He said sitting over in the congregation, somebody turned to a person next to them and said, "Is there any way I can love you?"

And then somebody else began to talk and before long the whole church was alive with people talking to one another.

And he said this – he said, “We had 28 unemployed people in the church that Sunday morning. Every one of them went home with a job.”

He began to give other details. I was writing my notes quickly as he was talking and I didn't get the numbers, but he talked about single parents that were present, how many, what their needs were and what happened as a result.

He talked about people who were living in absolute poverty. He said, “I could have preached my message on love. On the way out they would say, ‘Thank you, Pastor, that was a good message. I enjoyed the distinguishing between those Greek words and all the rest of it.’ He said, “But 28 unemployed people would have gone home unemployed.” And he said, “To be absolutely honest, people in the church could not care a dime. They just wanted a message. They didn't want truth, they didn't want life.”

He said next Sunday he got up and it was time for the message and he said, “Brothers and sisters, my text this morning is the same as last week – love one another,” and went back to his seat.

And people this time stood up and said, “Who can I help today?”

He said, “For three months I had no liberty to preach. Each Sunday I got up and said, ‘My text this week is the same as last week, which is the same as the week before, which has been the same for the last three months – love one another.’”

He said 300 people left the church. They left because they said, “We employ you to get up there and teach the Word of God to us and you just get up there and for three months you have just said this same thing.”

And he said they were the unloving people. They were very biblical, very doctrinal. Some of them had been around for years. But they just wanted their doctrinal i's dotted and t's crossed.

He said, “After three months I got up and I said, ‘Brothers and sisters, the Lord has given me a new text this morning.’”

And they broke out in applause. He said, “My text this morning is love your neighbor as yourself.”

And there was silence. Somebody got up, went out to the door. Somebody else got up. He said within a few minutes that parking lot was empty. People had gone home. He said he, his wife and two daughters went back their home, parked their car. They went down their street and knocked on the door and said, “Is there anything we can do for you?”

He said it was a week or two before Christmas. He says it was the worst time to do it. “We had Christmas presents for one another in our family and we gave them away to people who had a bigger need than we did.”

He said, "That transformed our church." He said, "We had had all kinds of strategies on evangelism. We had numerous meetings and committees looking at evangelism and nothing worked."

He said, "You know what began to happen?"

He said, "The telephone at the church began to ring and people said, 'Is that the church that helps people?' People came to knock on our door. People started to come in on a Sunday because they were needy people."

I am sure that is a divine moment that God gave. I am not going to try it next Sunday because you can't artificially repeat something that God does authentically in another situation. But I am very challenged by it.

Loving activities, first of all. Secondly, very quickly, loving attitudes because in Verses 4 to 8 he talks about this wonderful description that is probably the best known of all statements on love anywhere in any literature.

"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

"It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

"Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

"It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres."

It is interesting; the first three verses are about spiritual gifts without love and it comes to nothing. Verse 4 to 6 is about love with no mention of spiritual gifts, and it is powerful.

You know the Corinthian church; you read this letter and you see it was an absolute mess, you know. It was divided, it was broken, there were people who had their own little cliques. Some said, "I follow Paul." Some, "I follow Cephas." Some, "I follow Apollos." There were 'spiritual' ones, "I follow Christ."

Paul says, "You are all divided there."

They were suing each other, taking one another to court, you will read about there. They were getting drunk at communion. You know there was none of this thimble of grape juice stuff; they made it a feast and they would swig back the bottles of wine and they got drunk at the communion services and Paul writes to them about that.

They had gotten spiritual gifts out of perspective. Some were saying there is no resurrection from the dead. He has talked about all this in this letter. And he has tried to address those issues one by one as well, as they rose up.

But he says, “Here’s the most excellent way – the most excellent way; it is love” and then gives these wonderful descriptive verses.

Let me make a suggestion to you. You can read those verses, Verse 4, and you can take out the word love and you could put the word, or the name, Christ there. And I will read it and see if it makes sense.

“Jesus Christ is patient, Jesus Christ is kind. He does not envy, He does not boast, He is not proud. He is not rude, He is not self-seeking, He is not easily angered. He keeps no record of wrongs.

“Jesus Christ does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

“He always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.”

That makes sense when you put Christ into that. It’s a beautiful description of the character of the Lord Jesus Christ, isn’t it?

Here’s a third way to read those verses. And I suggest doing this humbly and on your knees. Put your own name there in place of the word love.

I wouldn’t dare put my name there in public and read it, but put your name there. I have read this in my name this week several times – is patient, is kind, does not envy, does not boast, is not proud, is not rude, is not self-seeking, is not easily angered, keeps no record of wrongs, does not delight in evil, rejoices with the truth, always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Does that make sense when your name is in there?

I’ll tell you what that tells us: that is the ambition that God has for every one of us. If you want to measure how am I doing in my Christian life just go back and say, “Lord, these areas – patience, kindness, not envying, not boasting, no proud, not rude etc. – these are the most excellent way that he is talking about.”

And then thirdly and lastly, loving activities, loving attitudes; here are some loving aspirations in Verses 8 to 12, aspirations of what we look forward to. And there are several things here that we are looking forward to but he begins in Verse 8,

“Love never fails.”

Some translations put it “Love never dies.”

Never is a very, very long time – never. And the great thing about agape love is it never ends, it lasts; it doesn’t end in failure.

Now conditional love may end when the conditions change in the object of our love. In fact, we don't know how conditional it is until we run into stretching difficulties and our love gives up, turns away.

But agape love never gives up, it never fails.

Certain things do fail, certain things don't last forever. Certain things will pass away.

Verse 8:

“Where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.

“For now we know only in part and we prophecy only in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears.”

So he says prophecies (which he has been talking about earlier), which are important, but they will cease, so do keep them in perspective. This is not an ever-ending thing.

Tongues will be stilled, so keep them in perspective. Knowledge will pass away, so keep it in perspective. All these have a shelf life. They will go. But love has no shelf life attached to it. It will never fail. It will never pass away.

You know, the big issue for you and me is not what do our minds say about God and therefore about people; it's how do our hearts connect with God and therefore with people? And this is the permanence of this love.

So aspirations in the Christian life may be to grow in skills – that's good but it will pass away. To grow in giftedness; that will pass away.

But ultimately our goal must be to grow in love – that's our goal. Not that I know more, I do more, I am better equipped, I am more able, but I love more. That's the engine, the dynamism of what we do.

And it is progressive. He says in Verse 11,

“When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child.”

Of course, we do when we are a child.

“But when I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.”

Here is a picture of growth and it is slow, plodding growth where you don't see much difference today to the difference you saw yesterday. But in a year you may see a difference, in ten years you see a difference.

And as we mature we are putting away some of these childish things. So we have still got those childish things. I am childish at heart, still have some childish things. But as we grow and mature spiritually those childish things get put into their right perspective and we grow.

“Now we see,” he says in Verse 12 “but a poor reflection as in a mirror; but then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.”

I love that phrase. I will know fully, but I am already fully known.

Do you know when we can quit pretending we can strip ourselves of any managed externals when we know we are fully known and we are secure? And in fact the One who fully knows us loves us fully, totally, with all the junk and He is at work within us.

And equally then, that love from us – people don’t have to dress up to be loved by us, they don’t have to look good, they don’t have to put on a front, don’t have to pretend things – they are loved because of who they are.

And love is costly of course. I will finish with this little story.

In 1949 the Communist Revolution in China had taken place. There were many Western missionaries over many years who had gone into China. For about a century it had been one of the main areas for the sending of missionaries from other parts of the world.

But by 1951 every one of them had been driven out of the country. And in that year, 1951, 24 leaders of what was known as the China Inland Mission (it’s now the Overseas Missionary Fellowship) was founded by Hudson Taylor, a great pioneer missionary.

But 24 leaders of this mission met in Manila in the Philippines to consider the future of their personnel who had been expelled from China – all of them safely, fortunately (not every Westerner left; some died).

And of course as the leaders were concerned about the risks and the future of the work, and as they met and talked they had no sense of direction, they had no sense of God leading them.

But visiting Manila at the same time was the last surviving daughter of General William Booth, who was the founder of the Salvation Army. Her name was Kate Booth Clibborn and because she was in Manila, they invited her to join them for one of their day’s discussions.

Apparently she listened quietly to the discussions and then at one point she said, “May I ask a question? How do you spell love?”

There was an embarrassed silence as eyes met eyes around the room and somebody was just about to say the obvious l-o-v-e, but before they said it, she said, “Would you allow me to tell you how to spell love? It is spelled s-a-c-r-i-f-i-c-e – sacrifice. That’s how we spell love.”

I have not spelt it that way in my marriage. I have not spelt it that way in my home – not always spelt it that way in my work. But this is the nature of love.

I take you back to that verse of Jesus: “As I have loved you,” how did you spell the love of Jesus? S-a-c-r-i-f-i-c-e.

We partake of communion this morning as a reminder that His love was a broken body, poured out blood.

“As I have loved you, now you go and love one another.”

But if you want to protect yourself, fine, but you won't love. That means everything you do will just be a noise, just a noise, after a while obnoxious noise, it gets in the way noise. It doesn't produce fruit.

Do you really know that God loves you, and out of that do you love one another?

“These three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”

Let's pray together.

Lord Jesus we are humbled before You and humbled before Your Word, because You know our hearts, You know that selfishness, that ego, that longing for comfort that lies there within us.

We pray, Lord Jesus, that we will so know what it means to be loved by You and so secure in that love, so full of joy because of that love, that loving others will not be an obligation, not be a chore, not be something we are supposed to do, just something we do as the natural outworking of Your love for us.

We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.