

## Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

### The Prominence of Love

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

Code: 1863

This morning, as you know by now, we return to our study of 1 Corinthians chapter 13, and I would encourage you to take your Bible there and look at it with me. First Corinthians chapter 13. So much has been said about it. If you haven't read about it, I would suggest that maybe you'd like to read a little book called *The Greatest of These Is Love* – I think that's the title of it – by Henry Drummond, dealing with the 13th chapter, or any other book that deals with it. There are many things available because so much can be said about the chapter, so much by way of relating it to the Christian life in all kinds of dimensions. It's our intention this morning, however, to deal with it primarily within the framework of its context in the book of 1 Corinthians, and that has been our emphasis as we began it last time and will be as we continue from here on.

Now, we're talking about love, and love is an important subject to talk about. I want to review briefly some of the things we've said so that you'll understand the use of the term "love." Unfortunately, in English we have this one word, "love," and it means so many things. You say you love your car, you love your wife, you love your dog, you love your new dress, and you've got to mean different things – if you think about it. Unfortunately, the English language doesn't help you any because it uses the same word. Now, the Greeks didn't have that.

Maybe you mean different things; some of you have funny looks on your face. Maybe you love your dog, your dress, your car, and your husband all the same way, I don't know.

But the English language has one word, whereas the Greek language has a multiple of words, which eliminates any confusion. In fact, the words in the Greek that are different words translated "love" in the English have absolutely no connection in the Greek so that people wouldn't even relate them. The reason we relate these words is because the English word is the same. But the Greeks would talk about, for example, erotic love, which is the love that we know as a physical attraction between a man and a woman on a sexual level. And they have a word for that that is not related to the word "love."

There is another Greek word related to romantic affection or to friendliness, the kind of warm affection and self-identification that comes when two people become very close, apart from any sexual attraction at all. That's a totally different word – unrelated.

But the word that is used here in the Greek, the word *agape*, is a word that simply means "the ultimate act of self-sacrifice." It is a word for the ultimate act of sacrificing one's self for the good of

someone else. In fact, you could easily translate it “If I speak with the tongues of men and angels and have not a spirit of self-sacrifice, I am nothing.” Now, that would be the essence of the meaning of the word “love” as it is in the Greek.

I think the spirit of its meaning is indicated by our Lord Jesus when He said this: “Love your enemies.” Now, what did He mean by that? Well, He went on to say what He meant. “Do good to those who persecute you.” That is the essence of the highest kind of love. It is an act of self-sacrifice, service toward somebody who does not necessarily care for you emotionally. Love your enemies doesn’t mean feel erotic about them, doesn’t mean feel romantic about them, doesn’t mean have a wonderful, warm, and happy relationship with them. All of those are impossibilities. What it does mean is to make an act of self-sacrifice on their behalf, love your enemies, or Jesus said, “Do good to those who persecute you.” Further, He said, “in order that you may be like your Father who is in heaven.”

In other words, love your enemies like God loved His enemies. And how did God love His enemies? God loved His enemies enough to die on their behalf. We were all His enemies. Read Ephesians 2. We were all enemies, we were all alienated from God. And so love, then, is an act of self-sacrifice toward people who are your enemies, because God has set the pattern for that kind of love. It’s not emotion but it’s self-sacrifice.

Now, that is precisely the kind of thing Paul is pointing out in 1 Corinthians 13. No matter what a person is like, no matter how he behaves, no matter how he relates to you, seek his highest good. That’s what God did. As God sends His rain on the just and the unjust, so you are to shower acts of self-sacrificing service on the deserving and the undeserving equally. Now, you’ll have to remember that this is not related to emotion but related to will. It is not an act of the emotion, it is an act of the will. To love somebody in terms of an act of self-sacrifice is not a feeling but it is a determination that you make in your mind that this is right and this is what you will do.

You say, “But, John, how can you ever get to the place where you have that kind of will, where you actually will to step out to the life of somebody who is either deserving or undeserving, either somebody you care about or somebody you don’t, and do an act of self-sacrificing service on their behalf? How can you ever get to that point?” Well, for one thing, you can’t just whip it up. You can’t get up in the morning and say, “Well, I’ve been cranky for three days and that’s too long. Now I’m going to love. Today I will love, I will love everybody,” and you go and look at your little poster that says, “Love never fails,” and you read a few Bible verses, and you go out and you really love. No, you can’t do it. Doesn’t work that way at all.

You say, “Well, where does it come from?” Well, we’ve said this last time, I’m simply going to remind you of it: When you walk in the Spirit – and to walk in the Spirit means you turn your life to His control, you confess your sin, you allow the Spirit of God to govern your thought patterns – as the Spirit of God controls you, He produces fruit, and the fruit of the Spirit is love, and love will only come in that

way. So the way you approach it is not in a self-righteous determination of your own mind; the way you approach it is simply to yield your life to the Spirit of God, "Holy Spirit, control me today, take over my life, live through me," and the fruit of love will be manifest.

Now, precisely at that point do we enter the picture of the Corinthian church. The Corinthian church was not walking in the Spirit. The Corinthian church was not yielded to the Spirit. The Corinthian church was not under the control of the Holy Spirit. They were selfish, self-designing, self-willed, self-motivated, doing everything they could to promote their own ends. Everybody doing his own thing for his own good with no regard for anyone else. It didn't matter what anybody else was doing, it didn't matter what anybody else needed - everybody out for himself. That was the motto of the Corinthian church. So there was no love. They were not walking in the Spirit, no love was produced, so everything they did manifested this antagonism, rebellion, discord, disunity, and disharmony.

Now, it's precisely at this point that Paul speaks to them in 13 and says, "The only thing that's going to hang your whole assembly together is love. The only way the spiritual gifts are going to operate is love. The only way you're going to get out of this envy and jealousy on the one hand and pride and boasting on the other hand is love. Love is the key to the unity that will paint the portrait of Christ so that the world can see what He really looks like."

I would just remind you that, you know, take Grace Church, for example. If we depended for our unity and a single visible testimony to the world, if we depended on the fact that we all agreed on everything, we'd be in a lot of trouble, wouldn't we? Because no matter what we do, somebody wouldn't agree with it. That's a fact. Now, some of you may say, "Well, I don't agree with the way that you're doing this in such and such a place." "Well, I don't agree with this certain situation." "Well, I don't like where my class meets." "Well, I don't agree with what the elders decided about this." "Well, I don't agree." "Well, I wish they'd have put that pillar over there and that post over there?" and "Why aren't these things higher?" and "Why did they put the tree here?" You know, there's always that.

I mean there are people who disagree – I'll show you my mail. There are people who disagree with me. I mean every Sunday, I come down the stairs, and I want to get down in a hurry because somebody might say something and make me fall over, you know, because you know it's going to happen. We get a lot – we get good mail, too, which we keep. Everybody doesn't agree, see? And we realize everybody doesn't agree, but that isn't the point. We could never get everybody to agree on every little thing. But you know what we want to do? We want everybody to love in a biblical way so that whether they agree or not is irrelevant. What they have most in mind is making sure that they sacrifice their own opinion for the sake of the unity of the whole. You see? So it isn't a matter of whether you agree.

I don't always agree with every little thing that goes on in everybody's life, but sometimes I have to take a back seat and say, "I think the Lord is leading in a certain way, and I'm sure willing, lovingly, to

acquiesce to somebody else.” That’s the spirit of unity. It’ll never be on the basis of agreement, but agreement can be overruled by love, and that’s his point here. The Corinthians had too many clashes going on. There was no way to get them all to think the same way, all to agree on the same thing, to have every little, tiny thing in the same box. That just wouldn’t work. The only way you can pull that off in a church is to get a guy in the pulpit who’s an absolute dictator and drives out everybody who disagrees. And then you don’t have a church, you’ve just got an absolute dictator and a whole bunch of rubber ducks quacking along with him. That’s it. And that isn’t true unity. True unity will come out of all of those people with all of their varying ideas and ideals who are willingly and lovingly anxious to sacrifice their own will for the sake of the unity of the believers.

Now, the Corinthians didn’t even know the meaning of this because they were trying to do everything they did for themselves. Can you imagine what that would be like? Never any agreement, all seeking the showy gifts and all trying to get the glory and all trying to lead the group and all trying to be the spiritual big shots, and it was just chaos. Just chaos. So Paul stops in the middle of all this and says, “Now, let me talk to you about love.” He says, “It doesn’t matter what you do, it doesn’t make any difference how many talents you have, it is irrelevant what your gifts are, it is inconsequential how seemingly great you are, your popularity is absolutely unimportant. It doesn’t matter how much power you have over other people. If you are not motivated and guided by the reality of self-sacrificing, caring, serving love, you are a zero spiritually, a zero. Not even a one, a zero. You don’t matter. You make no contribution. If love is not the major contribution of your life, you make no contribution.”

Now, what does he say specifically? In this chapter, he says four things about love. He says the prominence of love, the properties of love, the permanence of love, and the preeminence of love - must be remembered. These four areas, you must understand. Love has to be prominent. You have to understand its properties. Love is permanent, it overrules everything. And love is preeminent above all things – you’ve got to understand that. So that’s the division of the chapter.

Now, we’re looking at point one, the prominence of love, in the first three verses. Let me read them to you again: “If” - substituting for “though” - “If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels and have not love, I am become as sounding bronze or a tinkling cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge and if I have all faith so that I could remove mountains and have not love, I am nothing. And if I bestow all my goods to feed the poor and if I give my body to be burned and have not love, it profits me nothing.” Now, there it is. Love is prominent, without it zero, zero, zero – just noise.

Now, last time, we looked at verse 1 and we saw the first point that I gave you on your little outline in the bulletin: Languages without love are nothing. Languages without love are nothing. We saw that it doesn’t matter if you have, in the situation of the Corinthians, the gift of tongues. Doesn’t matter, in fact, if you could speak angel talk, remember? It doesn’t matter if there isn’t any love there. Eloquence is a desired thing. Being up front and speaking is a great thing. And claiming that you’ve

got the voice of an angel, that you're talking angel talk, doesn't matter. If there's no love, it is absolute noise. It's a pagan din. Now, you know, eloquence is a desired thing. And if we just take the point that he's making here and just push it to its ultimate limits, what he's really saying is the best speech on earth and the best speech in heaven doesn't matter if there's no love.

You know, everybody wants to be eloquent, everybody who speaks. You know – and you hear people say, “Oh, he's so eloquent, he can speak and sway.” They use to say about Jonathan Edwards that when he was done preaching, the people would be lying on the ground, crying out to God for mercy. Man. Imagine the response to such. When we go to seminary, they try to teach us how to speak eloquently. They – it doesn't work on all of us. And they worry about diction and all. You know, I remember the first assignment I had was I had to sell a class some toilet paper. You could pick anything, I don't know why that was assigned to me, but anyway, I had to sell that to the class, just to get you to – and they're allowed to scream and yell and throw things at you and shout and boo and – trying to get people to get out of themselves. Some guys who go to seminary to become preachers, they don't – they just stand there and go, “Oh,” you know, they can't overcome it, you know, and there's some of us who get right up on the desk and scream at them and throw the rolls and everything, you know. And, you know, “Get – you're going to get this.” This is the thing they're trying to get you to do, and they want you to be – have your good diction, so you'll learn funny little things to say and, you know, you're like Demosthenes with a mouth full of rocks, trying to speak and – this eloquence is very important.

But even if you could talk angel talk and you didn't have love, it wouldn't matter. To be able to speak and convince people and capture their minds and capture their hearts and turn their wills to a certain behavior is a tremendous power. But it doesn't matter. To be able to play an audience like a master plays a piano, to begin to move them to inspiration, to a calm, to an arousing, to a convincing, to a persuading, to a convicting, is an art that some men have mastered. But if they don't have love, it doesn't matter. And in the case of the Corinthians, they had turned the gift of languages into a fleshly ecstasy, a fully pagan activity, and Paul says, “It doesn't matter. You've wasted it.”

Now, that leads him into the second of the list there, verse 2: Prophecy without love is nothing. “And though” – or “if” – “I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge and though I have all faith so that I could remove mountains and have not love, I am nothing.” Prophecy without love is nothing. You know, this is even further – going further than the gift of languages, to be able to speak eloquently, to be able to speak the voice of angels, to have the gift of prophecy, which is the ultimate gift. If you read in chapter 14, you'll find that prophecy is hailed as the greatest of the gifts. Why? Because it is the proclamation of God's truth in the language of the people, and they hear and they understand.

And I believe that prophecy has two aspects: the aspect of revelation in the Bible, when the prophet spoke the revelation of God, and reiteration, when he re-spoke the revelation of God. I want you to

know that I speak to you the revelation of God, but not the first time. I simply re-speak it as I read it in the Bible. And if you study, for example, the sermons of Peter, the sermons of Paul, and the sermon of Stephen, you will find that sometimes they were speaking new truth and sometimes they were quoting old truth. So you have in the element of prophecy, revelation and reiteration.

But even if I had the ability to speak the Word of God for the first time, or if I have that power to proclaim old truth with force and meaning and dynamic and drama and don't have love, it's nothing. The word "prophecy" means "to speak before someone," and he's talking about the people with the public proclamation, the people who can stand out there and eloquently and dramatically preach the truth of God. Imagine what a gift this is. The power to declare the things of God, the power to interpret life, the power to bring the Word of heaven to earth, the power to draw eternity into time – tremendous gift, the gift of proclamation. Though without love it doesn't matter, it is zero.

In Ephesians 4:15, a little phrase Paul says is something that always stuck in my mind. It's this: "But speaking the truth" – What? – "in love." "But speaking the truth in love." There's the balance. I've always felt there are two great enemies of a preacher, two great enemies. The first enemy is a departure from the truth, and the second is a chilling indifference to the people. Two great enemies: departure from the truth, indifference to the people. There are many people who are out of balance. There are people who have a great love for the people but don't ever give them the truth. They don't ever diligently prepare to give them the truth. There are people who give out the truth but could care less about the people. And you fight to keep the balance.

Sometimes in your ministry you get down to study and it's time to study so you can give them the truth, but all of a sudden you face the fact that here's a person in your congregation who has a need, and so you're caught in the balance between whether I stop and go do a deed of self-sacrifice or whether I keep studying. Am I going to concentrate on the preaching or the people? That's not easy because the preaching is an act of love to the people. But that's the balance of priorities that you struggle with.

I'm afraid, unfortunately, there are many preachers who opt out on both ends, who in the name of love for the people water down what they say so much that that's not really the kind of love the people need because it's love without any truth and you know what happens? That kind of love doesn't protect them from error. On the other hand, there are people who decide to opt out for the truth and don't love the people, and the people are soon convinced that God probably doesn't love them much more than the preacher does anyway. And so there has to be a balance.

There are preachers with no love. There are preachers who have one objective, as Albert Barnes said in his old commentary, "They have one objective, not to feed the flock but to fleece it." They don't love the people, they're in there for fame or power or prestige or personal gain or to make money or to be somebody and they're up for the highest bidder. That's true – sad but true. Let me show you

one. Numbers 24. You thought I was going to read you an article, didn't you? Numbers 24. There are a lot of these kind still around. It's amazing, you can – it's incredible to me how – you know, I've decided that most Christian people don't know who's good and who isn't. Really, they don't. Just think about how many people stay supported on the radio and television and that'll prove it. They don't know who's good and who isn't, really, because they're untaught in so many ways.

Numbers 24:15, and this is about Balaam, the son of Beor. Numbers 24:15: "Balaam, the son of Beor, has said and the man whose eyes are open has said, 'He has said who heard the words of God and knew the knowledge of the Most High, who saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance but having his eyes open.'" Now, there's a description of Balaam. I mean, he really got a good thing. And he says in verse 17 – here's the prophecy – "God, I shall see Him but not now." Something coming but not yet. "I shall behold Him but not near," it's going to be a while. "And there shall come a star out of Jacob and a scepter shall rise out of Israel." Who is it? Well, no doubt the ultimate end of that prophecy is the Messiah. The scepter is connected with Genesis 49:10 and it's the Messiah. Listen, here is a man who was given the marvelous, unequalled privilege of predicting the Messiah. "Man," you say, "fantastic. That Balaam must have been something." No, he was nothing. You say, "Why?"

Verse 1 of chapter 25, it says in the second line there the people began to commit harlotry, whoredom, with the daughters of Moab. Now, the prophet had told them about the Messiah and now the next thing we find out, the people are committing whoredom with the daughters of Moab. You say, "Well, we can't sure blame that on Balaam, poor fella. Probably just didn't listen to him." No. Look at Numbers 31 and I'll show you something. This is the commentary on Balaam. All this harlotry was bad news. And verse 16 of Numbers 31: "Behold, these caused the children of Israel" – these women, Moabite women – "to commit trespass" – notice – "through the counsel of" – Whom? – "Balaam." Now, wait a minute. Balaam, who knew the truth and spoke the truth – same guy, but he didn't love the people. The Moabites came and said, "Hey, Balaam, how much you want to corrupt the people of Israel?" And they bought him off, and he enticed the children of Israel to commit whoredom with the Moabites.

Look at verse 8, the end of the verse (31), "and Balaam also the son of Beor, they" – What? – "slew with a sword." You want to know something? Throughout history we recognize Balaam's ass as more acceptable in the ministry than Balaam. Is that right? You know why? Because he was a prophet who spoke the truth but didn't love the people, right? You see, there has to be that. There's got to be that genuine love, that genuine concern for the people. It wasn't there, Balaam prostituted it, turned it into hate; they sinned, and it cost him his life.

Matthew 7:21 would draw your attention to another element of the same idea. Matthew 7:21 says: "Not everyone that said to Me, 'Lord, Lord' shall enter into the kingdom of heaven but he that doeth the will of My Father in heaven." Then verse 22. Matthew 7:22 says: "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name?'" Hey, remember us? And He'll say to them, in 23:

“I never knew you. Depart from Me, you workers of iniquity.” Counterfeit prophets. To speak the truth without love is nothing; it’s counterfeit; it’s empty. You know, you can draw that down to your area. You may not have the gift of preaching but you have the same responsibility. Do you really love the people you speak to about Christ? Do you really love them? Do you do deeds of self-sacrifice for them? I believe that unless you do, you really haven’t earned the right to speak the truth.

I remember, a young girl came to me with tears in her eyes after I spoke one time and she said, “I have a Sunday school class here in the Acts group,” and she said, “I thought I loved those little girls there but,” she said, “I know now I that I didn’t love them because I never made any sacrifices on their behalf.” That’s the essence of it. Do you love the people you preach to? Do you love the people you teach? Do you love them enough to make a sacrifice on their behalf in a personal way? You see, the power behind the message is the motive, or the message is empty, and the motive is the love of God in our hearts shed abroad. The power of the message isn’t the vocabulary, it isn’t the cleverness, it isn’t the diction; it’s the genuine loving heart of the man who has the message, or the woman who has the message. How much do you love? Without love, eloquence is like the comparison between a melodious organ and a screeching siren. There’s no music to a screeching siren, and that’s eloquence without love. The tongue without love is a snake, it hisses and it strikes and it poisons with its venom. Only love gives it gentleness and tenderness.

Let me show you such a one in Jeremiah. Jeremiah chapter 1. Jeremiah chapter 1. What a great fellow he was. What a hard ministry he had. Jeremiah 1, verse 5, “Before I formed thee in the womb, I knew thee. Before you came forth out of the womb, I set you apart. I ordained you a prophet unto the nations.” I mean, he didn’t even have a choice. People who struggle over the sovereignty of God should study the subject of God’s call of the prophets. All of them were called the same way, Isaiah, Paul, Peter, everybody who proclaimed, even the disciples. Jesus walked along the beach and told them what to do. And here it was the same with him. “And then I said” – verse 6 – “Ah, Lord God, behold, I can’t speak, I’m a child.” I’ve got a bad voice, my diction is lousy and my mind isn’t too sharp either. I’m rather infant in my understanding. But the Lord said, “Don’t say you’re a child, for you’ll go to all that I send you and whatever I command you, you will speak.” Boy, that sounds terrific. I wish the Lord had said that to me, “No study, no preparation, you just go along, open your mouth, and I’ll put it all in there.” Boy, would that be super.

And then by this time Jeremiah’s probably feeling pretty good about it. Then verse 8 says: “Be not afraid of their faces.” Now, that would stop me right there. “Well, what do you mean?” Well, they’re going to get ugly when you talk and they’re going to screw up their faces and be very upset at you. “But don’t be afraid of it because I’m with you to deliver you.” Now, he knows his whole lifetime is going to be being delivered from things. “Then the Lord put His hand and touched my mouth and the Lord said to me, ‘Behold, I have put My words in your mouth.’” What a great statement. “See, this day I have set thee over the nations and the kingdoms to root out, to pull down, to destroy, to throw down, to build and to plant.” Listen, that’s probably the greatest verse in the Bible on the power of preaching.



Preaching is the ability to rule nations and kingdoms, to root out, pull down, destroy, throw down, build, and plant. Preaching is tremendous power.

And you're going to have it, Jeremiah. Verse 16: "I will utter my judgments against them, touching their wickedness." And then he says in verse 17: "All right, get your clothes on and get out of here, and say everything I command you and don't be dismayed at their faces" – again, He says – "lest I confound you before them." If you start doubting and getting afraid, I'll make you look bad. "I have made you a fortified city and an iron pillar and bronze walls." You are going to be something; they're not going to be able to dent you. Now, you can just, you know, put yourself in that situation, and by now you're saying, "Boy, I'm going to give it to them and I'm going to stick my ground, I'm going to be an iron pillar, you know, very insensitive, I don't care" – you know. But watch Jeremiah. Here he is, an iron pillar, a bronze wall, a fortified city.

And I want you to see his spirit, chapter 4, verse 19. Now, he's been in the ministry for four chapters and you start – he's starting to get a little feedback. You're going to get a little to do with his attitude here. Verse 19: "My distress, my distress, I am pained at my very heart, my heart makes a noise in me." I'm not a cardiologist, so I'm not going to try to define that, but something wasn't right. His ticker was ticking louder than it was supposed to. "I can't hold my peace because thou hast heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war." He's saying to these people, "You're going to get taken into captivity, you're going to be destroyed, there's coming a war, the Babylonians are coming and I can't stand it, it makes my heart run, it makes my soul grieve." Yeah, you see, he loved his people. He cared.

Look at chapter 8, verse 18: "When I would comfort myself against sorrow, my heart is faint in me." He feels like he's going to have a heart attack. That's how much anxiety. He's skipping beats. He says, "I can't stand it, the voice of the cry of the daughter of my people." Verse 20: "The harvest is past, the summer is ended." And notice this, he doesn't say, "You are not saved," he says what? Why does he say "we"? Because he makes a total identification with the pain of his people. He was saved but he can't separate himself – this is empathy. "We are not saved, for the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt. I'm black and dismay has taken ahold of me and there's no balm in Gilead, there's no physician to take and heal me." Now, you see, he was in pain.

Look at chapter 9, verse 1: "Oh, that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!" A man with a broken heart, a man with tears, a man who cared, a man who loved, and you can go right on through to chapter 23 and past that and find incident after incident after incident of the tears of Jeremiah. He's the weeping prophet.

The apostle Paul was no different. In Acts 20:19, Paul said: "I have ministered with tears." In Romans, he wept over Israel. In 2 Corinthians, he wept over the carnal Christians. In Acts 20, he wept over the

influence of false teachers. He cried his way through his ministry because he cared. He had that balance, as Jeremiah had that balance, as Balaam didn't have it, of the truth and love that has to be there. And to exercise the gift of prophecy apart from deep love for God, deep love for His Word, deep love for His people, to do it for self-glory or fame or success or pride or indifference is to be a zero in God's eyes, no matter what you are in the eyes of the world.

Thirdly – languages without love is nothing; prophecy without love is nothing. Now back to 1 Corinthians 13, knowledge without love is nothing. And this is a cumulating thing. He started out with speech that was connected with languages, then he got more into it with prophecy, and now he goes even further and assumes all knowledge. "If I understand all mysteries and all knowledge and don't have love, I'm nothing." What does it mean to understand all mysteries? What is a mystery? A mystery is – that term, incidentally, and I'll just stop a moment to help you with it. That term is used 30 plus times in the Scripture. Now listen, it is never, ever used casually. It is always used technically. And its use technically is: A mystery is a divine truth revealed in the New Testament, basically. Revealed in the New Testament. Something hidden in the past and now revealed. And you can go through the New Testament and find all the mysteries. The mystery of godliness; God in human flesh; the mystery of Christ in us; the mystery of Jew and Gentile, one new man (Ephesians 3); the mystery of iniquity, which already works.

There are many things that are called mystery. It doesn't mean something that's now hidden; it means something that was hidden and now is revealed. And we are the ones who know those sacred secrets of God. They're called in Matthew 13:11 the "mysteries of God's kingdom which have been hidden from the wise and prudent and revealed to" – Whom? – "to babes," to us. And there are many verses that deal with that. But a mystery is God's sacred secret, and they are related to His redemptive plan and His ultimate plan for history.

God has certain redemptive truths which He has revealed to us. Now, there are others that He hasn't revealed. But let's assume that you knew every single secret in God's mind, all mysteries, all redemptive truth, that you could not only know every redemptive fact, but you could perfectly correlate every redemptive truth. That if you knew every single fact about God's ultimate purpose for time and eternity and you could correlate every fact. If you had all that and, additionally, if you had all knowledge – and the word *gnosis* means "all facts that can be ascertained by investigation." Not only did you know every secret relative to redemption and God's plan for the ages, but you knew every single fact in existence in the universe, how many grains of sand there are on Mars; every fact, every single fact in the universe, every mystery in the mind of God connected with redemption in the history of God's rule over man, if you knew every bit of that and didn't have love you'd be what? "Well," you'd say, "you've got to be at least a two or a three." No, you're a zero. You're not even a one. Why? Because love is important.

Boy, that boggles my mind. The superlatives here are fantastic. And, of course, you can't know all that, that's why he uses *ean* with the subjunctive, it's hypothetical. But even if you did, you'd be a zero. And it always amazes me that there are some people who think that because they know everything, they have no responsibility to love anybody. And there are people who've got all the doctrine systematized, and all the doctrine categorized, and they've got all the answers, and they don't love anybody. And you know what they are in God's eyes? They're what? They're zero. They're big zeroes. It doesn't mean anything. Love is superior to intellectual eminence. I'm sure glad for that. Did you ever hear of anybody, though, that got a Ph.D. for love? We call people "doctor" for their intellectual eminence. See, our value system isn't all it ought to be, is it? Spiritual insight, insight into the Scriptures, intellectual achievement, without love is nothing but spiritual snobbery, that's all. It's Phariseeism and it's condescension. You see, knowledge without love kills. It's like the letter without the spirit. Knowledge without love is ugly. Knowledge with love is beautiful. Knowledge without love is impotent. Knowledge with love is powerful.

In 1 Corinthians 8:1 Paul already hinted at this when he said to the Corinthians – listen - "Knowledge builds pride." He put it this way, "Knowledge puffs up, love builds up." Knowledge puffs up, love builds up. If you have a choice between learning to love and learning some facts, learn to love. The Bible emphasizes this again and again. Oh, it's important to know things. You can't depreciate knowledge, not at all. God doesn't want a whole bunch of loving ignoramuses. They'll love themselves right into all kinds of error – they sure will. They'll go around loving so much that they won't make any discrimination between who's right and who's wrong, who's saved and who's not, and they'll mess up everything. Got to have knowledge. That's why the Bible talks about love with knowledge.

Philippians 1:9, "And this I pray, that your love may abound more and more in knowledge." Do you see? You can't separate those two; you have to keep them in a perfect balance. And I think here at Grace Church, we have to keep that balance because it would be easy for us to get heavy on the knowledge end of it, a little light on the love side. If you have a choice between coming to a class or coming to a service to learn something and on your way helping somebody who just had a flat tire, stop and fix the flat tire. Love is better than knowledge.

Fourth, he says not only languages, prophecy, mysteries and knowledge, connecting those as one, but he says: "Though I have all faith so that I could remove mountains and have not love, I'm nothing." Now, the concept of faith can take many, many directions, and I want to hastily show you what he's saying here. He is emphasizing the gift of faith, and the gift of faith is not saving faith, it's the kind of faith that is expressed in prayer that releases God's power. See? It's that. It's Matthew 17:20. Don't look it up, I'll read it to you real quick here. There's a couple of them, but Matthew 17:20 comes to mind: "Jesus said, 'Because of your unbelief, for verily I say unto you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you can say to the mountain, "Move from here to there," and it will move and nothing will be impossible unto you.'" All right? Jesus said, "You need to have the faith to believe God in prayer and you can move mountains." Now, a lot of people get mixed up at that verse because they

say, “Oh, I’ve never seen anyone do that.” Well, that isn’t the point.

God doesn’t want people going around just moving mountains; that would make all kinds of problems. You can’t just do that. That isn’t the point. That is not a literal thing. You know, the other one in Matthew 21 says, “You could say to this mountain” - the Mount of Olives - “Be removed into the sea.” Well, Jesus doesn’t want somebody to dump the Mount of Olives 4,000 feet down into the Dead Sea, that would mess up the Second Coming. That isn’t the point. The point is that there are some people who have the gift of faith, and the gift of faith is the ability to believe God continually without giving up when the rest of us have bailed out and said, “Oh, God, you must have missed the boat on this deal. What’s happening, God? Oh, I’m beginning to question.” And somebody else is a rock and saying, “God is still on the throne. I’m just waiting until God releases His power and I’m praying and asking Him to do it.” You see, it’s that person who just goes like a rock through every trial while the rest of us are flying apart. That’s the gift of faith. And that person is waiting and waiting in confidence until God’s power is released and we begin to see why He did what He did. Those are the kind of people who pray and pray and pray.

It’s a kind of trust in God which never gives up. It is an uninterrupted trust, maintaining vital contact with God, awaiting His release of power, when a lot of us have bailed out long before. And that’s the kind of faith that can remove mountains – not literal mountains; He’s referring to it in terms of an analogy. He doesn’t want people moving mountains around, that would be ridiculous. Doesn’t accomplish anything. And if you read Zechariah 4, you’ll find that there’s an interesting statement there. I’ll just quote it to you, Zechariah 4:7. But he says: “Who art thou, O great mountain?” In other words, he says, “Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord” – in verse 6 – “Who art thou, O great mountain,” and he’s not talking about an actual mountain, he’s saying, “Boy, when I have the power of God, what mountain can stand in front of that?” So this is the ability to believe God to do things that most people wouldn’t hold on to see happen.

So he’s saying, “Look, if you had all faith, if you never doubted, if you just believed God – and never a tinge of doubt, never a tinge of question. You are a rock and run right on out to the limits of faith so that nothing was impossible for you, nothing brought a question to your mind, nothing was a cause for doubt, you never shook, you never wavered in anything, you never questioned God, without love you’d be” – What? – “a nothing.” That’s incredible. He’s knocking the pins out from under everybody.

So the sum of it all is, it doesn’t matter what gifts you have, it doesn’t matter how eloquent you are, it doesn’t matter what you know, it doesn’t matter what you believe, you could be a celebrated Christian, theologian, missionary, pastor, teacher, author, scholar, and if you don’t have the agape of God as the driving force in your life, you’re a nothing. That’s pretty simple, bottom line. Check your motive.

Hastily, the last two in verse 3, and these are simple. I'll just mention them. Benevolence without love is nothing. And this is the flipside, folks. Love is self-sacrifice, but all self-sacrifice is not necessarily love. Did you get that? Oh, there are a lot of Mormons making sacrifices. There are a lot of Buddhists who burn themselves. There are a lot of people doing a lot of strange things for a religion they believe in and they're not doing it out of love, they're doing it out of what? Fear and self-righteousness. You can do it for a lot of reasons. Love is self-sacrifice, but he flips it over and says, "Self-sacrifice is not necessarily love." Make sure it is.

So, "though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor and give my body to be burned and don't have love, it profits me nothing." I could give all my possessions to feed the poor. And this is a most interesting thing. The word "feed" here, the verb *psmiz*, has a noun form, *psmion*, and it means "morsel." And the idea here, here is a guy who is literally giving away his fortune one morsel at a time. In other words, the ultimate act of benevolence, he's not just writing a check for the fund, he is going out and giving every little morsel away. Even if I was involved in the actual act of charity and made every gift myself and gave small amounts to masses of numbers of people, it wouldn't matter if I didn't have love, if I did it for obligation's sake, if I did it out of legalism, if I did it to salve my conscience, if I did it to get recognition, like Ananias and Sapphira did, if I did it because of peer pressure - it means nothing.

When you come to church and you give, why do you give? Do you feel obligated to give? Do you feel you have to give to earn God's favor? Do you feel you want your conscience pacified for the sin you committed this week, so you're going to give a lot this week so God will balance the scale? Do you want recognition from the people around you? Do you tell people what you give? Do you feel peer pressure if you don't give, you can't talk about it next time the group gets together? Any of those reasons, you're a zero.

Now, that hits me as hard as it hits you, people. What's the only motive for giving? Love. That's why we're to do it secretly, privately. It doesn't matter how benevolent you are if you don't love. The Pharisee says, "Oh, I tithe, you know, and I thank thee that I'm not as this publican over here, I give tithes of all that I possess," and so forth. And He said: "You're a zero." Jesus said, "That's the man that went home justified," right? So benevolence without love is nothing.

Lastly, martyrdom without love is nothing. You could even be a martyr. Verse 3 says, "And if I give my body to be burned and have not love, it doesn't matter." Now there are – it's an interesting discussion about what it means to give your body to be burned. Some think it means to become a slave. In those days, when you became a slave they branded you with a hot iron that burned your flesh. And some say Paul is saying here, "Even if I became a slave, it wouldn't matter." That's possible. But in line with the ultimate nature of Paul's discussion here, it would seem to me that the epitome of what he would say would be, "If I would give my life to be burned, it wouldn't matter."

Now, the argument against that is, some people say, “Well, there was no precedent for that since that didn’t go on in that day.” Well, that’s true. There was not a burning-at-the-stake persecution at the time of Paul; that came later, and Christians were burned at the stake. But there are several ways to look at it. One, he could have been referring to the burning that was going to come. And he could have been – by virtue of the insight of the Holy Spirit - been looking forward to those many Christians who were going to die at the stake for the wrong reasons. You know, one of the interesting things about the early martyrdom of the church was that many of those Christians developed a martyr complex, and they wanted to die as martyrs in order to become famous like other Christians who had died as martyrs. Now, maybe he was anticipating that in the mind of the Spirit.

There’s another possibility, too. There were some in the past who gave their lives to be burned: Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Though God delivered them, they were willing. But also, interestingly, right in the city near Corinth, the city of Athens, there was a tomb called the Indian’s tomb. A certain Indian had gone in that very spot and had lit himself on fire and burned himself to death after he had written his epitaph. They built a monument there and this is what it said: “Zarmanochegas, an Indian from Bargoza, according to the traditional customs of the Indians, made himself immortal and lies here.” So here was a guy who burned his body to gain some religious immortality. So maybe he had that in mind.

Whatever. Whether it was the ultimate act of becoming a slave or whether it was the ultimate act of burning his life, dying as a martyr, without love it doesn’t matter. You can be a Christian martyr in the second century, you can be a kamikaze, you can be a Buddhist who burns himself, you can be a missionary – What did I say? You can be a missionary – there goes my eloquence. You can be a missionary on a field that is, you know, eaten by the cannibals; it doesn’t matter if the motive is not love. And I don’t think it’s cynical to recall that many early Christians did seek to be burned to remain famous as martyrs, and I don’t think it’s cynical to say that deeds that look sacrificial on the surface are the products of pride – I think it’s true. And some of it is this: languages or prophecy or knowledge or benevolence or martyrdom don’t mean anything without love. And Corinthians; didn’t matter what they did. It didn’t matter what they did without love.

It doesn’t matter what you do. It doesn’t matter what I do. It’s nothing. It adds up to nothing. In fact, interesting to look at, verse 1 says, The loveless person produces nothing of value, just noise. Verse 2 says, The loveless person is himself of no value. “I am nothing.” Third verse, The loveless person receives nothing of value. “It profits me nothing.” Just a big nothing. Life minus love equals zero. And that’s why in – we saw briefly last time in Revelation chapter 2, says this: “To the church at Ephesus, I know thy works and thy labor and thy patience and how thou canst not bear them who are evil and thou hast tried them who say they are apostles and are not, hast found them liars, hast borne and hast patience for My name’s sake has labored and not fainted.” Boy, they had worked hard. They had right doctrine. “But I have something against you because you have left” – What? – “your first love.”

And you know what He did? He removed the candlestick and the church was dead and it's never been there since. Grace Church can be in the same situation, if it doesn't have love. And so can you as a person. Let's pray.

Thank You, Father, again for Your clear Word to us, strong and straightforward and so beneficial. We must know this, Lord, so that we can enter into the ultimate blessing with You. We must follow the principles You've given us to know the blessing You've promised us. We pray that we might truly know the love of Christ, shed abroad in our hearts, as we yield to the Spirit, and it's produced as a fruit. That we might touch the lives of other people, and all that we do might be done that our love might abound more and more in knowledge for Your praise in Christ's name. Amen.

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