

# Day 49: A New Kind of Love

*Today's Reading*

*1 Corinthians 13:4-7*

## Devotion

*"God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son"*

**John 3:16**

The ancient Greeks had many words for love. They had a word for the love of lovers, one for the love of friends, another for the love of country, and another for the love of beauty. Yet another word for love was seldom used: agape. In classical Greek, agape is used only four times, and in each case it has an anaemic translation: "goodwill."

Bible writers grabbed agape and poured gospel meaning into it. They used it to describe God's love for us and for the kind of love God gives us for the people we know—and even for those we don't. Agape refers to a set of our mind, a determination of our heart. Agape means to seek another person's highest good, even if it demands putting that person's good ahead of our own. This is the kind of love Jesus meant when he said, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44).

Philosopher Immanuel Kant read Jesus' words and dismissed them as absurd. You can't command love, he said. In talking about "love as a feeling", he was right. It is possible to love your enemies in the sense of seeking their best interests.

We can determine to never return evil for evil or seek revenge (Romans 12:17, 19). We can even pray for those who cause us trouble. We can, by God's grace, love like he does.

## Prayer

*Father, thank you for the love you put in our hearts because of your Son, Jesus. May we love like you, because you first loved us. Amen.*

# Day 50: Love Lasts

*Today's Reading*

*1 Corinthians 12:31-13:3*

## Devotion

*"Love never fails."*

1 Corinthians 13:8

The word for "fails" (píptei) in our verse for today was used to describe a flower that was fading, or a tree that had fallen in the forest, or a joint that had come loose or had broken. So when Paul used this word here, he was saying, "Love never fades, it never falls, and it never gets pushed out of place." Love endures.

An outstanding scholar said, "What discourages me most about all that we do is that I know a hundred years from now most of our study is going to be obsolete." He is correct. It's not just true for academics; it's also true for car mechanics and computer gurus.

Who would want to research medical solutions from a 1930s encyclopaedia, use an air conditioner built in the 1940s, or pack a cell phone from the 1990s? Even a history textbook from twenty years ago is outdated. National boundaries get redrawn. Interpretations change like fashion and then disappear.

Don't misunderstand. Paul is not saying spiritual gifts and knowledge are worthless. Paul is saying that such things are not to be emphasized first in our lives. While these gifts are good things, they will pass away.

So, since we are made for eternity, we should major in love.

## Prayer

*Lord Jesus, help us to focus, as you have taught us, on love. As you have loved us, so let us love one another, so that everyone will know we are your disciples. Amen.*

# Day 51: Childlike Love

*Today's Reading*

*1 Corinthians 13:11-13*

## Devotion

*"When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child,  
I reasoned like a child."*

**1 Corinthians 13:11**

"I know this, because it's a fact. The T-Rex's were so angry because they couldn't get hugs." – Henry, age 5.

We laugh at the logic of children. We think it's cute the way preschoolers think. They have learned a lot, but there is still so much to learn.

But our "adult" knowledge too is partial and incomplete. We know some things, but we have a lot of questions. We often say that when we get to heaven there are things we will ask Jesus, or Paul, or some other biblical character. It's quite possible that when we get to heaven we will realize that on earth we didn't even know the right questions to ask. Issues that tear denominations apart here on earth might in heaven be totally unimportant. We may find that much of our great earthly knowledge is unimportant compared to the "surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus [our] Lord" (Philippians 3:8).

## Prayer

*Father, we know only in part. As we wait until the day when we will see you face to face, give us humble, gospel grace to love one another. Amen.*

# Day 52: Tongues vs Prophecy

*Today's Reading*

*1 Corinthians 14:1-19*

## Devotion

*“Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy.”*

1 Corinthians 14:1

Paul now turns to the focal point of his discussion: the question of how the gift of tongues is to be exercised in the context of public worship. The problem that Paul addresses is not with tongues per se but with uninterpreted tongues in the public assembly – a gathering in which unbelievers are assumed to be present. As such, he limits the expression of tongues to two or three speakers and only if an interpretation accompanies them.

The associated problem that Paul confronts is that those speaking in tongues were being accorded too much prestige at the expense of other gifts, on the basis that this particular gift was seen as a sign of divine inspiration. Paul corrects this way of thinking by setting forth a new yardstick: it is what contributes most to “building up” the church that ought to be the benchmark for ranking the relative value of gifts, particularly for public worship. Accordingly, it is the spoken gifts that are intelligible to all (including outsiders) that are to be most valued. Prophecy is a prime example of this, as it can lead even unbelievers to repent and recognise God’s presence among them.

In saying this, Paul is in no way wanting to suppress their spiritual experiences, which in and of themselves are great things. Instead of throwing the baby out with the bathwater, he walks the path of the ‘radical middle’ and implores the Corinthians to exercise the gifts in their proper God-ordained manner.

## Prayer

*God, thank for the variety of gifts that you have given our church, which enable us to better proclaim your Word to our communities. Give us wisdom, sensitivity but also boldness in how we exercise these gifts, so that you would be honoured, your people cared for, and outsiders invited into a relationship with you through the Church. Amen.*

# Day 53: The Preference for Prophecy

*Today's Reading*

*1 Corinthians 14:20-25*

## Devotion

*"...if an unbeliever or an enquirer comes in while everyone is prophesying...they will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, "God is really among you!"*"

*1 Corinthians 14:24-25*

After addressing some of the potential abuses of the gift of tongues, Paul provides a compelling case for the benefits of the gift of prophecy to the gathered church. He describes prophecy as having the potential to penetrate the innermost sanctum of an unbeliever's soul with the laser light of divine judgment. It exposes the secrets that are buried like splinters in the hidden recesses of the heart, lays them open and heals them – though it might be a painful process. It presents evidence that causes the individual to be scrutinised, exposed and convicted of sin or of the truth. It calls the individual to account, probing the unbeliever with all that is said.

Above all, Christian prophecy causes unbelievers to experience an overwhelming sense that they are in the presence of God. It leads them to recognise the truth of the Christian faith through the divine inspiration of the speakers. It leads to confession and to worship of the one true God. Indeed, the positive sign that God is present among "the believer" is the conversion and the confession of the outsider.

Interestingly, the context that Paul is describing all of this taking place in is a house church, not a grand temple or auditorium. Moreover, this kind of prophecy happens through the instrument of simple people articulating God's power and love in plain language, without pomp and circumstance or spiritual fireworks. This ought to encourage and compel us to see more of this gift in action in our midst!

## Prayer

*Lord, of all the gifts you have given us by your Spirit, we are especially thankful for the gift of prophecy, which has such tremendous benefits both for the believer as well as the unbeliever. We pray earnestly that you will fan into flame the gift that is already at work in us, as well as raise up many more men and women who can faithfully steward and exercise this gift for the building up of your church and the extension of your kingdom.*