

# **FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH**

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*SCRIPTURE: I Corinthians 13:1-3*

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*Series: Love Matters More*

*SERMON: The Necessity of Love*

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## **Introduction**

Author and former pastor, Jared Byas, tells the story of a friend, we will call him Sam, who came to Jared with a problem. Sam's problem is that his daughter is sleeping with her boyfriend, and Sam feels this is a sin. Sam's wife told him that if he makes too much of it, he will lose his relationship with his daughter. But Sam feels compelled to let his daughter know his convictions.

Poor Sam. He's struggling with a tug-of-war in his spirit. He feels like he's being forced to choose between **truth**, which for him says, "I just have to tell her the truth." And **love**. He says to himself, "I love my daughter and I want what is best for her. But if I tell her she needs to change, she may not speak to me anymore." Sam feels torn between '**accepting his daughter**' and '**trying to make her do the right thing.**'

Author Jared Byas said, "Sam came to me with tears in his eyes and asked my opinion about what he should do."

What would you say to Sam? How would you advise Sam? (pause)

This scenario or similar ones are repeated over and over again almost everyday day in many of our lives. Where we feel forced to choose between '**truth**' – "**risking telling someone what we think**" and '**love**' – "**accepting them as they are.**" We feel like we have to choose between **acceptance** or what we deem to be **rightness**.

Some other common **examples**: You find out that your friend is having an **affair**, and planning to leave his or her spouse, and move in with a coworker. And they ask you to help them **move**.

What do you do? What do you say?

Or, your child lets you know he or she is **gay** or a **lesbian**.

Another example: Your coworker tells you they have come to the conclusion that many of the stories in the **Bible** are only **myths**. What do you say? What do you do?

What would you have said to **Sam** or in any of these other scenarios I gave?

Jared said, he asked Sam, concerning the situation with his daughter, why Sam felt the need to make sure his daughter knew what he approved of or didn't approve of in her life. She had not asked for his opinion. And perhaps more importantly, the fact that she grew up in his house meant she probably already knew what he valued. She most likely already knew his opinion about her choice.

What she wasn't sure of, was whether her dad would love and accept her unconditionally, even if she made a choice he didn't approve of.

His opinion about her decision wasn't in question. But his ability to love her, even if she made a decision that went against his opinion, that **was** in question.

So, Jared said: "I advised Sam, "**Love her without judgment.**"

Somehow Sam had come to believe, like so many of us, that it was his Christian duty to tell people his opinion about their moral decisions. Or about their beliefs. He had come to believe that "**speaking the truth in love**" – a phrase from a bible verse, often thrown about in Christian circles, was about **telling people where they were messing up – or were wrong**.

At the root of this belief is **the fear that if we don't tell people they are wrong**, and if they don't feel the **discomfort of our judgment**, they will have **no incentive to change**.

So where did Jared come up with his suggestion, "Love without judgment?"

Jared believes, and I agree with him, that “**Love Matters More.**” (The title of our series)

I believe, loving people, in ways described by the Apostle Paul, and modeled by Jesus, matters more than trying to correct them, judge them, show them they are wrong, and punish them with our disapproval of their actions and even beliefs.

This conviction comes from Paul’s letter to the Corinthians. 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians Chapter 13.

Let’s spend a little time with the first three verses this morning, and discover:

### **The Necessity and Importance of Love**

Paul begins:

#### **1 Cor 13:1-3**

**If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn’t love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup> If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God’s secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn’t love others, I would be nothing. <sup>3</sup> If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn’t love others, I would have gained nothing.**

Why does Paul say this about love and knowledge, and faith and other spiritual gifts?

The context will be helpful for us. So let us consider it.

Immediately before this passage, at the end of chapter 12, Paul makes a strong statement, a **command** if you will. The Corinthians had asked Paul several questions about how to deal some issues that had come up in the Church.

In Chapter 12, Paul has just concluded addressing their question of: **which spiritual gifts are superior to other spiritual gifts.** He concludes, and here is the command:

**1st Corinthians 12:31a “You should earnestly desire the most helpful gifts.”**

Which gifts are superior? – The ones that are most helpful, Paul says.

So, **(1)** desiring spiritual gifts is a good thing. **(2)** Some spiritual gifts are more helpful

than others.

In chapter 14, Paul will say a little more about this. He will say, **“Try to excel in those gifts that build up the church.”** See, building up the church is what is most helpful as we think about how to use our spiritual gifts.

Right at the beginning of chapter 14 Paul gives another command.

**1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 14:1 “Follow the way of love.”**

Then Paul will go on in chapter 14 to say more about spiritual gifts and appropriate behavior in worship gatherings, and a little bit about doctrine.

But this is what I want us to see. I Corinthians chapter 13, often called “the Love Chapter,” is sandwiched between two commands. “Desire gifts that build up.” And “Follow the way of Love.”

These two commands sandwich this amazing passage about love.

But **chapter 13 is not just a stand-alone passage about love.** As if for a moment Paul got sidetracked and went down a rabbit hole. It is not as if love is just some nice warm abstract feeling or just a beautiful sentiment.

In chapter 13 Paul is giving **an ethical instruction.** Paul is telling the Corinthians, and I believe us as well, instructions on how **to behave towards one another.** How to love one another. And how **important** it is to love one another.

In fact, Paul is giving instructions about what is the **most important aspect** of any relationship between two people or groups of people. Particularly if the people are followers of Jesus.

Unequivocally Paul’s answer is, the most important aspect of any relationship is **love.** Paul would say, **“Loving Others Matters More.”** More than anything else you might do to express your spirituality and your love for God.

I like the phrase someone used a couple weeks ago when they called it ‘extravagant love.’ Paul would say, “Extravagant Love Matters More.”

Now, If you’re familiar with the whole letter of 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians, you may know that there were **problems, struggles, conflicts** and **divisions** in the church, between the church attenders. There were problems with their **behavior**. There were problems with how they were trying to **correct each other’s behavior**.

There were problems with what they **believed**. And probably most importantly on this issue, there were problems with **how they believed** or how they treated each other because of their differing beliefs.

In regards to the **divisions** or disunity in the church:

People were feeling like they needed to **choose one side over another**. They felt like they had to choose between following a certain leader rather than another leader.

They were struggling with what real **wisdom** is. (We will talk more about this next week)

They were struggling with the issue of **spiritual pride**. Some thought their spirituality, expressed by certain spiritual gifts, made them **superior** to others who did not have those same spiritual gifts.

They were struggling with **sexual sin** and they were struggling in **marriage relationships**. They were struggling with certain **religious practices**.

Part of their struggle was over whose **knowledge** was superior.

They were struggling over their **individual rights** and what to do with those rights in light of how their **expression** of their individual rights affected others in the congregation.

This is all the **context** of Paul’s letter. All of this is going on in the congregation. They have asked for Paul’s help to heal the congregation. And Paul comes up with Chapter 13.

(slowly) So when we get to chapter 13 Paul didn't just come up with a great chapter describing love, **Paul is showing where love fits in.** In dealing with all these other problems, Paul says, "Let me tell you about Love."

After Paul talks about all the good gifts of the Spirit in Chapter 12, he says: Now let me tell you about **"a way that is beyond comparison."** Or as it is translated in some versions: **"I will show you the most excellent way."**

In other words, there may be different ways to deal with conflicts, disagreements, disputes and so on. **"But for me," Paul says, "there is a way that is beyond comparison – the most excellent way. It is the way of love. And Love matters more."**

Now let's look at the 1<sup>st</sup> three verses again.

### 1 Cor 13:1-3

**If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels,**

Paul is talking about speaking in tongues – there was a big argument over tongues in Corinth.

**but didn't love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.**

**2 If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God's secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains,**

Paul is making reference to those who had a **special word** from the Lord and along with their **knowledge** had begun to feel **superior** to others in the church. Earlier in the letter, Paul said their **knowledge made them puffed up - proud.**

They were also using their knowledge to **exert authority and control** over others. "Hey, I know more than you. You have to listen to me." That kind of an attitude.

They were even using their knowledge to exercise their **individual rights and freedoms.** But they were doing it to the detriment of others. In Chapter 8, Paul talks about how some claimed **'to build up' their brothers and sisters** in Christ with their knowledge, but they

were actually destroying them spiritually, with their knowledge.

When Paul talks about their **faith**, he uses one of Jesus' comments about faith. He mentions '**faith that can move mountains.**' This is good faith to have. Such faith is what we strive for. But Paul goes on:

"If I have that kind of faith but didn't love others, I would be nothing."

See even faith, if we mistakenly define it as "just the facts we believe about Jesus," and don't love the people we are interacting with, such faith is of no benefit to us.

Paul goes on in verse 3:

**3 If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn't love others, I would have gained nothing.**

Paul's opening sentences of Chapter 13 would've had a sobering effect on the Corinthians. He brings up speaking in tongues, prophecy, knowledge, faith, even self-sacrificing behavior.

And the way Paul expresses this in Greek, presupposes, that they both agree that all of these things are important. They all have value. These are all good things. Paul has just told them to strive for these things. But there is something that matters more.

Why is this discussion so important? It is not as if these activities or gifts are a problem.

All of these things Paul mentions are good. **What is not good** is when people try to act religious, and display their spiritual gifts, but **don't do it** in a loving manner.

In other words: Does the person – displaying their spirituality in some way, like speaking in tongues, prophesying, showing great faith, expounding on their great knowledge, even self-sacrificial giving,

Is this person also acting in a loving way?

**“If not, Paul says, that person’s life before God adds up to zero.” (Fee)**

Love matters more than anything else in the life of a follower of Jesus.

The Corinthians felt that they had arrived spiritually, based on all of these things that they were displaying.

The problem was, their **knowledge** led to pride. And they actually hurt other people with their knowledge. (8:2, 11)

Their **wisdom** led to quarrels and rivalry. (1:10; 3:4)

Their **speaking in tongues** did not build up the congregation at all.

In short, theirs was a spirituality that lacked the most important evidence of the Holy Spirit: **They lacked behavior that could be described as ‘having love.’**

For Paul to ‘**have love**’ means to **act lovingly**.

I like to watch sports talk sometimes, to hear people, with much greater knowledge than I have, give their opinions on games or a player’s performance. I am amused when I hear someone say – “I don’t know a certain player personally, but **I love** that player.” And then they proceed to tear that player down mercilessly. That doesn’t sound much like love to me.

**To act lovingly means to ‘actively seek the benefit of someone else.’** And for Paul to act lovingly is defined by what God did on behalf of his enemies. We read in:

**Romans 5:8 God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.** In verse 10 it says

**“while we were God’s enemies, Christ died for us.”**

**Love is God acting for our benefit.** Even when we are opposed to God.

To have love towards another person means to be towards others the way God, in Christ, has been towards us. We are to love others the way Jesus loved us. **We are to act in ways that are beneficial to others** – even if we disagree with them, or they don’t like us.

As bible scholar Gordon Fee says in his commentary, **Paul is arguing for the absolute supremacy, and necessity of love, if one is to be a Christian at all. Without love one misses the point of being a Christian in the first place. (Fee)**

For Paul the way of love matters more because it has already been demonstrated in the coming of Jesus Christ to die for the sins of the world.

Love is not an idea for Paul. It is not even a motivating factor for behavior.

Love **is** behavior. To love is to act. Anything short of action is not love at all.

Let Paul remind us of what this looks like.

### **The Way of Love**

#### [I Cor 13:4-7](#)

**Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud<sup>5</sup> or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged.<sup>6</sup> It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out.<sup>7</sup> Love always protects, always trusts, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.**

These are action words. **Being patient, kind, not rude, not demanding your own way, not keeping record of wrongs** – that means to continuously forgive. Love **protects** – means to cover over someone's sins - in the sense of not holding it against them, always **trusting**.

The story I began with, involving Sam and his daughter and makes me think of the story of the prodigal or wayward son, that Jesus told in Luke 15.

In the story a young man made a choice which, I am sure, he knew was against his father's values. He knew it was against his father's opinion of what is a good choice. But the father agreed to give him what he wanted anyway.

And we know young man messed up about as bad as a young man can mess up. And he wasn't sure **how his father would respond** when he finally decided to risk going home.

Would he be **allowed** to come home, and set foot in the house again? Would he be **accepted**? Would he be on **probation** for a while, until he proved his reliability? Had he **forever forfeited** his place in the family? This is how Jesus described the young man's welcome.

### [Luke 15:20-24](#)

**So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, [the father] ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him.**

**His father said to the servants, 'Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. <sup>23</sup> And kill the calf we have been fattening. We must celebrate with a feast, <sup>24</sup> for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found.'** So the party began.

That is the way of love. We could go down through I Corinthians 13:4-7 and find so many of the descriptors displayed by the father – Whom we believe to represent God.

Patient, kindness, keeping no record of being wronged, choosing not to hold his son's sins against him, always hoping, never giving up on his son.

I ask us to consider the difference between this picture and the picture we so often see or experience, in how we relate to those with whom we disagree, or with those who have wronged us. Or those who are making what we think are bad decisions.

And I don't just mean in our families. I mean in any relationship we may have. Most often the question is not, "I wonder what they think of what I did, or what I believe?" Often the question that holds us back from loving relationships is: "Will I be accepted by that other person, without judgement?"

Here is what I am inviting us to do this week.

Revisit in your mind, or better yet, with several other people and talk about it. Talk about some of the examples I gave at the beginning of our message, Sam and his daughter, your co-worker who is having an affair, your friend who has a different view of the bible from you. Or some other point of disagreement you may have with someone.

Talk about how you think you would respond. What would you say? What would you do? And then compare your response to “The Way of Love,” As Paul describes it, or in the story of the prodigal son.

But also, I want us to spend time thinking about: What is some of the messiness? What are some of the objections that we have? What are some of your fears? How has God expressed the Way of Love towards you?

Paul says, Jesus says, “Love Matters More.”

**PRAY**