

**Date:** October 15-16, 2022

**Title:** 212: *Compassionate*

**Scripture:** 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

**Speaker:** Kurt Bjorklund

So, let me ask you, do you consider yourself a loving person? My guess is you don't have to think about that very long. Almost everyone I know considers themselves loving. I know very few people who would say, yeah, I don't really love people. In fact, I think in our society we have a term for people who would say, I don't really love anybody. It's called a psychopath. But by and large, most people that you know and I know would say, yeah, I'm pretty loving.

And if we don't act in a loving way in a particular instance, it's always because somebody provoked us or somebody did something that caused us to have to act in the way that we acted. Do you know what I'm talking about here? This is where you're maybe having a little disagreement at home. And your spouse or your child or your sibling says or does something. And there's a moment where it's like, well, if you hadn't done that, I wouldn't have had to do it. Okay, nobody else. Come on.

And what we want often is we want credit for our intentions, meaning we want people to say, well, you meant well. And what we often do with others is we want to hold them accountable for their actions, not their intentions, but we want credit for our intentions rather than our actions.

Well, today we have come to First Corinthians 13. If you've been around, we've been working our way through the book of First Corinthians, and First Corinthians 13 is known as the love chapter because it's about love.

And if you've been to a wedding, you've probably heard part of this chapter read, not the part that you just heard read, but the verse is after it, because the part you just heard read had some weird stuff in it, and therefore it's not read at weddings. But the next part is love is patient, love is kind, love is all of this. And we'll come to that next week. We'll talk more about those verses.

But these first three verses speak about the importance or the priority of love and the role that it should have in a person's life, especially a follower of Christ. And as we have been working our way through this section of First Corinthians, we've talked about how there are these practices or these qualities that become true in our lives that actually help us connect more deeply to Christ. And if you will, have raised our spiritual temperature to 212 or the boiling point.

And I think what's happening in this section is that as the Apostle Paul is writing to the Corinthians about all of their gifts and their church life, that what he's doing here is he's basically saying, it's easy for you to be deceived into thinking that there is a high-quality spiritual life. But if you don't have love, then your spiritual life isn't as great as you think it is. And he does it with three *if* statements. One in each verse.

So, First Corinthians, chapter 13, verse one, is the first kind of false way that we can assess our spirituality. And I'm just going to say that it's sensational experiences. And when I say that, I don't mean sensational as in not true. What I mean is truly sensational experiences. In other words, some of us will say, if I have a great experience with God somewhere, then that means that I am spiritually maturing. I'm growing.

And what Paul does here is he says, you can have a great spiritual experience, but if you don't have love, he uses the phrase, he says, you're like a clanging cymbal, basically, or a resounding gong, meaning just an annoying sound that just keeps coming at you. That's what he's saying here.

Here's what the verse says. It says, "If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal." And so, I want to take a few moments to talk about this idea of tongues. If you've been here, again, we've talked around this a little bit. This will be a short version of this.

But I think it's important here to talk about it because it's in this verse and it is also one of the verses that people use to say the tongues are both of men and of angels. And what they'll say is that tongues of men might refer to known languages if you go back to chapter two where tongues first happen, it's clearly a known language.

So, people spoke and heard languages. What happened was people who didn't know a language would speak a language that was known and other people heard in their language, and they would hear the gospel and they'd go, wow, that's the Holy Spirit. That's God. That's how it happened in Acts.

And then they'll look at this and they'll say, but there's also this category Tongues of Angels, which must mean some kind of ecstatic utterance like you see and hear about today. Now, I will do a longer Perspectives Podcast on this, where I'll dive into some of how I get to where I'm going to talk about here in a moment, and I'll explain verses and some more of that so you can watch for that. That'll come out probably in November after we get through all of this material in First Corinthians.

But today here's what I'd like to do. I'd like to try to take something that is complex and make it simple. And by that, what I mean is there's a lot of verses, a lot of arguments. And I'm going to try to say, how can I just make this understandable so that in the future you can go, oh, I get how this is working right now.

I did hear one well-known pastor. If I said the person's name, probably many of you, maybe most of you would know this person's name who said, I never preach on the Holy Spirit because it just wigs people out. To which my reaction is that seems a little off to ignore a third of the Trinity because you're afraid that people can't handle it. I think you can handle it. Okay. So here we go with this.

So, I want to say that when it comes to the issue of tongues, and by the way, if you are saying what is this, if you're around the church for any amount of time, sooner or later somebody will say something to you like this. And that is, have you encountered the Holy Spirit, and the way that they'll say that you know you have the Holy Spirit is if you speak in this ecstatic utterance, these tongues, this prayer language. And the insinuation will be that the way that you really encounter God, go on with God, is if you speak in this prayer language. That will come around at some point.

So, here's the simplistic way to think about this. In all of the interpretations that people do in the Bible, you can reduce this to three views. And as far as I know, I've not seen this done this way. People talk about different things, but I'm going to give you three soundbites that if you just remember these, you'll be able to know where people are coming from.

One is *everyone should*. There's a huge section of churches that they're teaching on. This is everyone should speak in tongues. And within this, there's a wide range of different people. There are some who say if you don't speak in tongues, it means you don't have the Holy Spirit. And if you don't have the Holy Spirit, you don't actually know Jesus. And if you don't know Jesus, you're probably not a Christian or you're not a Christian. It means that hell is in your future. So, lack of tongues equals hell. Okay? I mean, I'm painting it really quickly, but that is out there.

On the other side of this are people who will just say, you know, once you want everything God has to offer and if God offers this to you and it's available to you, just experience this in some way. And in this viewpoint, there are those who would say that basically, tongues are evidence of the Holy Spirit and the way that people typically get here is they would say that whatever happens in the Book of Acts is normative. Therefore, it happened then; it should happen now. And they would say

that this is experienced by tarrying, Luke 24:49 and praying, asking God to bring it. And we see that in the Book of Acts.

Now, if you move over to the far other end of the spectrum, there are those who would say *it's done*. So you've got *everyone should*. Then on the other end of the spectrum, you have *it's done*. These are people who would say tongues have ceased. They existed in the first century for people to be validated as messengers of God, and once the New Testament was done, then it wasn't necessary anymore. And then they would say that Acts is historical, and First Corinthians 14 is seen through First Corinthians 13:8. I'll come back to that in just a moment. And they would say that it's experienced falsely, generally speaking.

Now, again, on this part of the continuum, you have people that are more toward the middle who would say tongues is generally just a known language in the Bible. So that is what it should be in every instance. And then on the other side of this kind of continuum, you have people who say, if this isn't of God, this must be demonic or a psychological phenomenon of some kind because if it's done, then it can't have any relevance.

And then kind of in the middle is the *some may* viewpoint and the *some may* viewpoint is basically this. And that is tongues is a gift that God gives to some but not to everybody. Acts is historical, and it's seen through First Corinthians 14 because that regulates it, and it's experienced spontaneously sometimes as God gives a gift.

Now, why First Corinthians 13:8? Here's how those who say that it's done often argue for this. First Corinthians 13:8 says, "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."

And we teach from the NIV here and for stylistic reasons probably, there are three different ways that this is stated. And so, when you read it in the NIV, the implication or the thought is this is all saying the same thing. The prophecy, tongues, and knowledge will all cease when the completeness or some versions say, perfect comes.

If you read a more literal translation like the ESV or the NASB, what you'll see is that prophecy and knowledge have the exact same word in the exact same form after it in verse eight. So, prophecy will pass away, knowledge will pass away. And then verses nine and ten say, "For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears."

And the argument is basically this. And this is again, those who would say that *it's done*. They would say that prophecy and knowledge will cease when we're told, a passive verb in the original language, it will cease when the perfect comes. And most people would say that's when Christ comes back.

But the tongues has a different word and a different form. It's a middle verb, meaning that it will cease in and of itself. So, it's outside the loop. And then they would say, history says that it already did cease, therefore it doesn't exist. By the way, this is the position generally of Presbyterian churches, Episcopalian churches, and Anglican Churches. On the other side, the *everyone should*, tends to be the assembly of God and many kinds of charismatic churches. In the middle are churches who say, we don't know what to believe. I'm kidding about that.

But here is the challenge. And again, I'm just trying to give you an idea so you can say, okay, I know where people are coming from. And again, I'll give some more detail on this at another time. But here's what I think is important today. And in this passage, here's what Paul is doing. He's saying you can have a sensational experience of either going on a mission trip and speaking a known language that you don't know and having people go, oh, my goodness, that's clearly God. You can even have an ecstatic personal prayer language, utterance, and believe that that is God, have that be God in your life. And He says, but if you don't love, it's like you're just hitting a symbol over and over again. It doesn't mean much.

And what often happens, in especially churches that say *everyone should*, is the idea is unless you have this gift, unless you experience this, then you are not at least spiritually complete. Now I can speak to this a little bit. As a kid, my family moved around several different kinds of churches. I spent a couple of years at an Assembly of God church and grade school, so I was fully immersed in it.

And I can tell you my experience, not saying it happens in every Assembly of God church, but my experience was that they said, if you don't speak in tongues, it's likely you don't have the Holy Spirit. And if you don't have the Holy Spirit, it is likely you don't really know Jesus. So, you better come forward today and speak in tongues, or you probably aren't a Christian. So as a little kid, I'm like, I better go forward. I want to speak in tongues. Nothing happened. They're like, well, come on in the back room and repeat after us and maybe it'll start to happen for you.

Now, I admit that may have tainted me some in terms of my view, but as I've studied theology in the Bible, here's what I've come to believe. Tongues is, at best, a gift that God gives to some. I think what A. B. Simpson said, who founded the Christian and

Missionary Alliance is well thought out. And that is he said, seek not, forbid not. That captures kind of this middle view.

And First Corinthians 14 says do not forbid to speak in tongues. So, I personally have landed kind of in the *some may* category, and I admit I would be farther to the side that's closer to the *it's done* side. And saying basically in the New Testament, if you read tongues as a known language, the whole thing makes sense but I also don't want to limit God and whatever God's going to do. So, that is where I've kind of landed.

And I know that if you're somebody who says *everyone should*, then probably Orchard Hill isn't a great fit for you. But here's what I want you to get. And that is what Paul's saying is, if this is your issue and you don't love, what is His word, it's like you're just a clanging gong or clanging cymbal. It's not going to amount to much. And here's what I think his bigger point is, you can be theologically right but if you don't love, so what. You can be somebody who has all kinds of great experiences, but if you don't love, so what. And so many times in church world we care more about being right or what we experience than we do about loving people that God has put in front of us.

Henri Nouwen says it this way, he says, "Compassion is hard because it requires the inner disposition to go with others to the place where they are weak, vulnerable, lonely, and broken." It's a lot easier to say, give me an experience now, God and me, we're tight, than it is to love people that we find hard to love.

Here's the second statement. This is in verse two. And if verse one speaks about sensational experiences, verse two I think speaks about significant impact. It says this, "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 do not have love, I am nothing."

So, prophecy again is somewhat debated. I've said that it's speaking truth. I believe that it means speaking truth that's been revealed in the Bible and again, that would put me outside of some camps of people. But however you understand prophecy, it is challenging people in a way that they respond to the truth of God. And what that means is that this is talking about significant impact because he says when you can fathom all mysteries and you can speak truth in a way that's compelling and moves people forward, if you have faith that can move mountains, if God works mightily through you but you do not have love, what does he say, again, nothing. Nothing.

And what this teaches us, as well as the fact that love is the priority, is that sometimes we can be deceived personally or in assessing others by saying because they have

great gifts, they're highly favored by God. And what we know is that somebody can have great gifts, not be loving, and not be really significantly seeking God in their own lives. Love is the indicator in the New Testament, not impact. And certainly, we should know that from just even seeing some of the scandals in the broader church in recent years, that people who have great gifts aren't necessarily living in accordance with what is taught in the Bible. And so if you and I want to know what is the true state of our heart, the true state of our heart is not how is God working through us, it is what is God doing in my heart and how am I responding to the people right in front of me.

T.S. Eliot once put it this way, he said, "We are all absorbed in the endless struggle to think well of ourselves." What we want to do is we want to say, how am I making an impact in some way? And so, we borrow something to say, I think well of myself, sensational experiences, significant impact. When what is true is that if you're a follower of Jesus, what is stamped on you is this notion of being loved by God regardless of what it is that you have done or have not done.

Here's the third thing. Verse three, another *if* statement, that is, sacrificial contribution is not a sufficient way to gauge where we are spiritually. It says this, "If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing."

And what he's doing here is he's saying, there's nothing that you or I do that will define us. We are defined simply by what God has said about us. Now the word love, maybe you've heard this, is the Greek word *agape*. And maybe you've read C.S. Lewis, his work about four loves which said there are four kinds of love and this is the highest love and all of that. And that's somewhat helpful, not to question C.S. Lewis, but my point is this, and that is those words for love are often used interchangeably in the Bible. But the idea of *agape* love, the word is used in its different forms 320 times in the New Testament, and what it connotes is selflessness that says, I am choosing to prioritize somebody else over myself.

Moises Silva, in his acclaimed work on New Testament words, said, "That this is the greatest of the gifts of the spirit." And when he talks about it specifically in how it's used in First Corinthians and Paul's letters, he says, "As well as the force that holds Christian community together and builds it up."

And what he's basically doing is he's saying that when you come to understand what this word means, you understand that this is actually the priority that God has and that if you are defining your spirituality and your life by something else, what you're doing is you're using religion to try to get God in our debt, to force Him to do something on

our behalf, like God, take care of my family. God, make this work. God, help me get ahead in this way. Rather than simply saying, as Christianity really teaches, that we are ultimately savoring the position that we have that God has given us in Jesus Christ.

Now, to love, if you really want to push into this, means that there is some kind of emotion, although I don't think that's all of it that leads us toward action. And by the way, sometimes the emotion that leads us to action can be not necessarily a true heartfelt emotion. I had somebody last night after the message come up and say, can I love somebody that I really dislike? And I thought, yeah, probably, because sometimes you won't like how somebody acts. And in fact, I would say that love might be even more loving when it's somebody that you dislike because it's easy to love people that love us and like us and we love and like. It's a lot harder to love somebody who's hard for us.

And so, love is feeling something. Maybe it's just feeling that I should do something different and choosing to act, and it doesn't waver when it's treated poorly. And here's why that's important, because part of what agape means is, is this is a love that's undeserved, that's unmerited, that can't be returned. What a lot of us want to do, especially when we see ourselves as loving, is I'm loving as long as you're loving. And then we'll all love each other and we'll get along. But as soon as somebody breaks the cycle of love, then we say, well, now I'm justified in not acting in a loving way.

And again, here I think Paul's whole point is he's saying if that's you and you've broken relationships because somebody did you wrong, somebody hurt you, somebody annoyed you, somebody has acted in a way, believed things that you don't like, then you can have all of the sensational experiences you want, all of the sacrificial contributions, and all of the significant impact you want. But it is Paul's words, nothing, nothing. And again, I believe what he's trying to point to is this idea of saying, don't be fooled into thinking that your spiritual temperature is defined by something that it is not defined by in the Bible.

I love how Anne Lamott speaks about this. At one point she says, "You can safely assume that you have created God in your own image when he hates all of the same people that you hate." When you or I make groups of people the enemy, and we say God is also seeing them as the enemy, what are we doing? We are saying, God is in my image. Now, I'm not suggesting that you agree with everything, that every other group or person says. That isn't love. Sometimes the most loving thing you can do is disagree with somebody in a way that is saying to them, I care too much about you not to say something about what I think that you're believing.



But the point is that it's not something where you say, God and I are on this side and everybody else is over here. The proper understanding of Christianity is there's God and there are all of us who need a Savior. And here's where love really comes from, because you can try to love more, and that's not bad. But if you've ever tried to love more, even in your own home, have you ever woken up in the morning and said, today's the day I'm going to be really loving and giving. And you try it for like an hour and then somebody does something that you think, you aren't there. Now you say, okay, God, this is where I need something else.

And here's where this comes from for us ultimately. First John, chapter four, verses 19 and following says this, "We love because he first loved us. Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister."

So where does love come from? The love of God. What's the evidence? That you love people. Now all of us will have some moments, some people, where every time the person's name comes up, you're a little bit like, ugh. Love means saying even when that reaction is there that I am going to choose to say that I am so loved by God that God has looked past His ugh, with me. And so, I'm going to choose to do that with people in my life.

Another verse that highlights this is Romans chapter five, verse eight. Here's what it says, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." And here's what is true about spiritual growth and spiritual maturity, the more you understand your need for grace, the more you are actually growing spiritually, and that will actually produce love inside of you.

I heard about somebody once who was part of a 12-step program, an addiction. And addiction is a terrible thing when you get caught in it because you end up doing things that you know aren't good for you, but they seem good at the moment. And then you go down a path and you say, how did I get here? I've let people down that I love and that I care about. I've turned my back on God in some substantial ways. And somebody who had been through this cycle over and over said, what I've learned is that there's no end to the grace of God. And what that means is when you and I can see that there's no end to the grace of God, experience his love for us, that is where we'll have the overflow, the reservoir to love people in our lives.

Maybe today you're struggling to love people in your house, people in your family, people you work with, neighbors, friends, and former friends. But what Paul is doing

here is he's saying if you really want to have a dynamic, spiritual life, focus on how much God has loved you and love them out of the overflow. Don't focus on these experiences, these contributions, or the impact because that is where you experience God's changing work in you.

I want to take a moment and pray together. So, would you just bow your heads and close your eyes with me for a moment? And let me just say this. If you're here or watching later online or wherever, and maybe you've just thought all along that the way that spirituality works is kind of like a scorecard, that you do things, God gives you credit, and if you get enough credit, you punch a ticket to heaven. I just want to clarify what we've already talked about, and that is that the way that you're connected to God is not because of what you have done. It's actually in acknowledging that you haven't done enough, that Jesus has done it on your behalf, and believing in Him.

So today can be maybe your day just to say, God, I've been believing that I was punching a scorecard, but I haven't been loving and I know that comes short of your standard, and so I trust Jesus as my savior. And in the overflow of that, you can love.

Maybe today you are somebody who says, I believed this for years, that message of Jesus being my savior, but I've become less loving to some of the people in my life. Maybe today is just a reminder for you to say, I need to sit at the foot of the cross and be overwhelmed by the love of God for me so that I'm more loving to the people that God has brought into my life.

God help me, help each of us who calls Orchard Hill our church home, to be people who love God. Help us as your followers to be people who are known not as much even by the positions we take, but by the love that we give. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Thanks for being here. Have a great week.