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1 Corinthians 13:1-5 - A More Excellent Way - Part 1

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All right, let's open our Bibles to 1 Corinthians chapter 13. Hope you'll be here tomorrow night. You know, we usually have a couple of thousand people from the neighborhood come. And just for them to see some Christians, loving them and reaching out to them, it's just, you can do so much in the name of the Lord tomorrow if you'd like. Come and have some dinner and look for folks you can share it with.

In chapters 11 through 14, Paul speaks of the Corinthians' difficulty in gathering together as a church body and how the selfishness and the ego and the self-servingness had kind of worked its way into the church services. He had commended them early on for some of their attitude towards the things that God wanted to do, but he said he really didn't commend them much for their fellowship and how they were approaching communion or how they were having fun. It's a church that Paul had planted maybe eight years earlier, had left, was pretty far away actually in Ephesus, ministering to others when he got all the news.

And so 1 Corinthians is a great book for the church because it really addresses problems that can come in. And it is more and more a problem when the church is planted in such a difficult place as Corinth, in the world where the world tends to want to get into the church rather than the church getting into the world. And so they're corrective letters. They are very easily defined in terms of context. One chapter on the other, he doesn't bounce around.

And we've been looking at just life in the church for the last couple of weeks. And we will do that through chapter 14. But in the midst of it, as Paul in chapter 11 talked about the gifts of the Spirit, and in chapter 12 as well, the gifts of God, the way that God, the Holy Spirit, is going to be given to us. The way that the Holy Spirit works, all of the things he equips his people to be able to do to serve one another.

And unfortunately, rather than being a blessing to others, these prideful Corinthians were using God's gifts to them to flaunt themselves. It became kind of self-serving. We looked at a partial list of some of the gifts that God gives to his people in chapter 12. There's also a list in Ephesians 4, I think, Romans chapter 12. The big picture is God gives them all. They are all anointed by him. They are all given to the body to profit the church as a whole.

And though there are diversities, differences, certainly in the way that the Lord works, he's behind all that goes on. Paul talked to them about vocal gifts, and he'll talk a lot more about them in chapter 14 before he leaves this topic behind. But notice at the end of chapter, or verse 31, or chapter 12, he encouraged them to be open to the best gifts. And we talked about the best gifts being those things that you need in the place that God puts you at the time.

But then he says, let me show you a more excellent way. And he almost takes a turn away from the subject to go back to it in chapter 14, only to address what is the most important part, and that is, you know, what kind of heart is in you when you're seeking to serve the Lord. And at least for the Corinthians, it wasn't a heart of service. It was a heart of self-service. And so that kind of negated everything that God wanted to do in their lives.

So Paul said, let me talk to you about a more excellent way. It is God's love in the hearts of God's people that becomes the catalyst for everything you and I are to do. It is his love born into our hearts that is far greater than faith or hope. Verse 13. Verse 13 of this chapter. And without God's love at work in us, whatever you're doing, even if it looks very successful on the outward, doesn't make much profit for you in heaven or bring much honor to the Lord.

I think that this chapter is tremendously convicting. So we're going to do it in two weeks so we can survive the first week. It is tragic that many churches like Corinth who are not... really have all of the gifts that God intended them to have, that they fell behind in no gifts, yet has no love driving them. You know, when Jesus wrote to that very successful, large and accomplished church in Ephesus, in Revelation chapter 2, he said that he had one thing against them. They had left their first love.

In other words, the motivation which began was no longer a part of their hearts. They didn't lose their... their first love. They left it. It was one of these conscious decisions to head in another direction. It is far easier for us to be doctrinally correct than to love. Far easier to be active and hard at work than to be merciful. Far easier to be angry and feel justified than to forgive and to be kind and keep no records of wrongs.

And yet, the Lord will tell us here that no matter how available you are to serve him, no matter how much you offer to him in your service, if it is not dictated by and driven by this love of God that he has placed in your heart for others, then it is no value to you and will leave no lasting consequence or fruit in your life. It's a mouthful. Our words... Our word in English, love, is a pretty small little word. It's defined in such a broad way that it almost loses some of its appeal. I would tell you that I love a good burrito I love my wife. I love to go to a baseball game and I love to go surfing. I love my children and I love Thai food. And it's all the same word. Paul employs a very rarely used Greek word for love. It is certainly rare in secular Greek. It really is defined as a New Testament word because of its prominence that the Lord gave it through his word when the church was born. And he uses the word agape. It's a very unique word in Greek. It is set apart from the other words in Greek. The word for sexual love is eros. The word for sentimental or brotherly love, emotional love, is phileo. Family. Family love is the word storge. They have lots of words for love, but this one, agape, becomes the central crux, if you will, of the discussion between our relationship with the Lord and our ministry to others in his name. Agape is defined in the Bible as the love of God as evidenced supremely in the sending of his son, his only son, to die for the sins of the world and for a people, that want nothing to do with him. It is the ultimate selfless sacrifice. And Paul is given a chance here because of the topic to fully have us consider what that word agape should mean to us and what it means to the Lord in that he has promised when we are saved to put his spirit within us and along with his presence comes that God-given characteristic of loving as he loves us.

Agape is the way God loves. You won't find it in the world around you. You won't find it in a man's heart apart from his relationship with God. You cannot reproduce it or counterfeit it. Satan counterfeits the gifts of the Spirit, but he cannot counterfeit God's love. It's the real deal. It's the genuine article. It is the heart of God set before the eyes of the world. In fact, the Lord is able to answer the question, able to declare very clearly, by this love should all men know that you are my disciples, you love one another. In other words, this love is so unique that the world who wants nothing to do with God can't help but to be moved by and pushed towards the truth by seeing the love of God at work in the lives of his people. It is the primary outgrowth of a life of faith. When Paul wrote to the Romans, he said, don't owe anyone anything but to love them. If you love them, you have fulfilled the law. And then he laid out, you shall not commit adultery, murder, stealing, or false witness, or coveting, or any other commandment. But it's all summed up, he said, in this one word, you should love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus said, as my father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now you abide, you live in, you find your life in that love. And certainly, as a people of God, we should be known by his love, more than anything else, by the love of God in our lives. It is the atmosphere in which God works. Paul will write at the end of this book, I think chapter 16, verse, maybe it's verse 7, let everything be done with agape. Let that be the most primary. And really, you can have a right philosophy or theology, but it is no substitute for his love. You can have a lot of religious works, but that cannot replace his love. Only God's presence within can mold you to be more like him. I think it's Romans chapter 5, verse 5, where Paul says, hope won't disappoint you because the love of God, agape of God, has been shed abroad or poured into our hearts by the spirit who has come to live in us. That distinguishes you. It is the love of God. It is the love of God. It is the love of God. It is this love that says, he's a believer. He's a child of God. He's part of the family. He belongs to the kingdom. And it is so distinct and so unworldly-like that it is hard to miss. It is the love that the Corinthians were ignoring. I mean, everything we've read in this book, even with us, was all about selfishness. Selfishness to do what I want, even if it bothered you. Selfishness to go my way, even God said, don't go that way. In whatever situation, they find themselves. It is the selfishness that has turned the church aside. But agape is defined for us by how God loves us. For God so loved the world that he gave, right, his only begotten son. The sacrificial giving of oneself for the benefit of another is what agape is by definition. In fact, from a biblical standpoint, agape love is not emotional, even though it can be carried forth with emotion. It is rather a willful choice, an action towards another, even if it's your enemy. Love your enemies. And you might say, I don't feel much love for them. In fact, I hate them. In fact, if I started loving them, I'd lose track of them. So I hate them so I can keep an eye on them. But Jesus said, you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. That's what you've heard them say, but I said, love your enemy. Bless those that curse you. Do good to those who spitefully use you. Pray for them that persecute you. You'll be sons of the Father in heaven. It's an impossible command unless it is a work of God in my heart, and it can be free from the emotional attachments that sometimes, you know, difficulties with others can bring. I don't like them, but I love them. I'm not happy with the way I'm being treated, but I'm praying for them. It is devoid of the love of God. The emotional investment, if you will, because I have been loved by God, and so I am responding to him in an act that would not support my emotion, but certainly supports my position. It is not a feeling. It isn't a feeling. It's a predetermined act of the will without self-interest. And so here's a chapter that challenges us to look at, are we loving with the Spirit of God, in us, as the Lord would have

us to love one another? And it is a very convicting chapter. Paul said in the first Thessalonian letter, the first one, chapter four, concerning brotherly love, I have no need to write to you. You yourselves have been taught by God to love one another. So increase in that more and more. And throughout the New Testament, you will read words like, pursue love. Put on, love. Increase and abound in love. Be fervent in love. Stimulate one another to love and to go to work. Every one of those words, love, is the word agape. It's the love that you can't produce, but God can place it in your heart. It's a love that you can't manufacture, but it comes out of the life of someone who loves the Lord. So Paul said, let me show you a more excellent way. And he continues his discussion here of the gifts by showing their use. In chapter 14, but especially in here, the needed connection between our service to the Lord and our love for him. If I speak wisely with my tongue, great messages and sermons, if I'm able to articulate and convince folks that are listening that the gospel is real and right, if it isn't driven by a love of the Lord in my heart, from the Lord's standpoint, I'm just making a lot of noise. Look what verse 13, verse, one of chapter 13 says, though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, if I have not this agape love, I have become a sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. More cowbell. There you go. The same truth that is applied to the one who would speak in the, in tongues with an interpreter in a public place. The Lord said, there is nothing more spiritual than God's love. Driving you to serve. And without it, you're nothing more than a bunch of noise. Imagine that you're one of the greatest preachers in the world. You have great power to pray and people gather to listen and to have you pray for them. And the Lord goes, there's no love here. And there's no registration of that in heaven. He says in verse two, and though I have the gift of prophecy, if I understand all mysteries and all knowledge, which is none of us, I think, and though I have all faith so that I could, move mountains, if I don't have this agape love in evidence in my life, I am nothing. I know it almost sounds like, couldn't we soften the language a bit? I could be something, but why nothing? If I'm a prophet and anointed by God to speak in his name, if I have the discernment to always see beyond what is going on, you know, on the surface, if I have enough wisdom and knowledge from God so that I know everything, if I can have the kind of faith that can move the mountains, which I don't have, and yet I have no love, I can't see that I've accomplished the thing. I think most of us are totally moved by a people's gifts that God has given them. Oh, he sings so well. He's such a blessing. We teach us so, I've learned so much. And we are moved by the gifts in people's lives with their faith and the power and the insight and all. But listen to the Holy Spirit here. Without a motive, all that power leaves me empty and bankrupts in terms of real ministry. Paul will say in a little while down in verse three of the next chapter that the gift of prophecy, more than anything else, is the sharing of God's word for the purpose of edifying and encouraging and comforting the saints. Yet if you aren't motivated by the love of God in your heart, it profits your life nothing. It is unacceptable to the Lord. You know, Balaam was a prophet who knew the will and the word of God. What he lacked was a love for God or for his people. And so though he had gifts, he was offered for a price to come and curse God's children who were coming into the land for a price. And he gladly sought to pursue that. Now God got in his way, but that gift meant nothing, served no one. And that gift became his downfall. On the other hand, Jeremiah was a prophet who was filled with tremendous love for the people that he ministered to. If you look at the fruit of Jeremiah's ministry, it literally is 50 years of no fruit, 50 years of rejection and rebellion and people falling and he in trouble and he persecuted and yet faithful to the Lord, 50 years driven by the love of God. For his people, he writes in chapter eight, verse 18, I comfort myself in sorrow while my heart faints within me. Three verses later, for the hurt of the daughter of my people, I am hurt and mourning and I'm astonished as I look at all of the things around me. He was brokenhearted for the people's well-being. He wrote in the very next chapter in chapter nine, oh, that my head were water, my eyes like fountains, so I might weep day and night for the slain. The daughters of my people. He loved the people. He was faithful to do what God said. How different is great knowledge without love? It really is of no value at all. Speak the truth in love. That's what Paul said to the Ephesians. Speak the truth in love. Verse three tells us, and though I would bestow all of my goods to feed the poor, I don't know anybody that's done all of that. Though I would give my body to be burned, if I have not this agape love in me, it profits me nothing. Those are some powerful words. Imagine the sacrifice that you would have to make to give away everything you owned for the sake of someone else, and the motivation wasn't to love the Lord and to love his people. Self-denial, self-sacrifice, it profits you nothing. Agape love is always about self-denying and self-sacrificing. But until that happens, you can do some of that and never be motivated by God's love. It can be without benefit. It can be without profit. In the Sermon on the Mount, I think it's chapter six maybe of Matthew, Jesus said, if you're doing a charitable deed, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing so your father who sees in secret can reward you openly. It was all about loving the Lord and serving him. But a person without the love of God in his heart to motivate his behavior or his sacrifice or his service keeps going back to the same word, there's no profit. Understand that. You know, you can do a lot of things with a lot of different interests, but if the heart isn't right, if it isn't for the love of God, God doesn't keep track. Wait till the Lord sees what I'm about to do for him, and yet he doesn't write it down. Why didn't you write it down? People are going to get to heaven with whole baskets. I can't wait for my rewards and they're going to go, here's one, here's One, how about the basket? Yeah, we took a look at the charts. We watched the video. You weren't doing it out of love. Imagine that. God wants us to walk in his love first. The Corinthians were not doing that. And so what follows here in these few verses is probably the most descriptive and certainly comprehensive Bible description of what agape love is in the Bible. There's lots of illustrations that you can find. There's tons of them. But if you want a biblical dictionary definition, you'll find it

here in the next few verses, beginning in verse four and then really ending in verse eight or so. But we're only going to go to verse five tonight. What we have in these verses are 15 very short statements that define the love of God as brought into your heart by the Holy Spirit. 7 of them are positive. 8 of them are negative. All of them are descriptive words that are verbs in the Greek, which means this love is not a sentiment. It is rather an action. It doesn't simply say love is patient. It says that love acts patiently. My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed or in truth. That's what I believe John wrote in his first John letter. In every way, Jesus is the perfect fulfillment and total fulfillment of the definitions that you find here. If you read through these verses and you put the name Jesus in where the word love is, you won't hurt the text at all. Where the text begins to suffer, if you take out the word love and put your name there. For example, Jack suffers long and is kind.

Hey, don't laugh. Now you try it. Jack doesn't envy. Jack doesn't parade himself around. He's not puffed up. Well, he's buff, but not puffed up, I hope. Jack suffers long. Put your name in there, and all of a sudden, boy, you begin to violate the very things that God would have you to be. It is a good exercise to read these words with love and replace them with Jesus, but it's a good exercise to go back the third time and put your name in there and see how you're doing. How far have you been brought along? Tonight, since we're having communion, we're going to look at one positive and eight negatives through verse five. Next week, we'll look at only the positive ones, but learn these well. Make it a note for yourself. Keep them with you. Memorize them, if you will. Follow them in practice, because when you get to verse eight, it'll say this, is love, and you will never fail. In other words, if you want to do well, you want God's blessing. You want God to use you in a mighty way. It is this pursuit of his love and the willingness to let his love fill your heart and drive your heart that will cause you to not fail. Everything else is going to come up with zero, nothing, of no help. So verse four, and we'll put the word love back in there so you stop laughing. Love, his love, suffers long, and it is kind. Now think about this and spend some time, you know, putting yourself in that position. The two descriptions go very well together. One speaks about a length of time. The other speaks of the attitude or the character or the response of the heart during that length of time. The word suffers long is one compound Greek word. The word is makrothumeo. It means just what we have here, long suffering. It means that God's love in your heart will put up with suffering and allow you to continue to tolerate difficulty. I think most of us can put up with one or two, you know, or maybe we get to three setbacks before we say, this is the third time you've said that. This is the third time this has happened. This is the third time I've had to speak to you about this. I've had enough. Yet God's love, other-centered love, has the ability, the Lord dwelling in you, to be inconvenienced, to be taken advantage of, to be mistreated, time and again, for its interest is in the offending individual, not in itself. Very different. If you're interested in the person that's harming you more than you are in defending yourself, then you have the right to offending you, now God's love is at work. How convicting is that? When Peter there in Matthew 18, you know, thought he had figured it out when the Lord said, how many times should we forgive? And he quickly said, seven. He thought, that's about as good as it gets. High five, Lord. I'm Peter. I get an A. And I am sure he expected applause. I'm sure he expected to show off in front of his buddies. I'm sure that he thought everyone should think that that was a very magnanimous answer. But instead, he heard from Jesus, well, Peter, how about 70 times seven? Or in other words, constantly, forgiveness should be a matter of the heart, not of mathematics. And then he follows up, Jesus said, with that parable of the unforgiving servant and that punchline, you know, when you get to the end there, when you get to the end of the parable, you know, when you get to the end of the parable, where, you know, the story, right, of a fellow that was forgiven, you know, by the master. And he had a servant that owed him so little by comparison. And though his master gave him a pass on more than he could ever pay, he held, you know, his servant, the fellow he had helped, his feet to the fire. It's how you throw him in jail. And he's got to get everything from him. And then the Lord returned to him and said, look, didn't have a compassion upon you. Why did you not have pity upon him? And it said the master was angry and delivered him to the torturers. And then he said this, he tells the story and then he says, he makes a spiritual application there in Matthew 18. He says, so shall my heavenly father do to you if all of you from your heart do not forgive your brother his trespasses. And the simple lesson is, if you realize how much God has loved you with, you are now obligated to extend that love to others. Love is long suffering and it is kind. Stephen went to be with the Lord being stoned by the very folks he had just shared the truth of God's word with. Was it a bold message? Terribly so. Was it offensive? Probably to the audience that was listening, it was very offensive because they were guilty. But the last words out of Peter's mouth there in Acts 7 verse 60 was, Lord, don't lay this sin or don't, charge them with this sin. And he died. He fell asleep. His last word, forgive them. Jesus' last, one of his last words on the cross, Father, forgive them. Forgive them. How about fry them in their place? How about show them who's the boss? We're so quick to cry out. The world calls this kind of attitude, by the way, foolishness and softness. Get a backbone. Stand up for yourself. And yet when you are born again and the Holy Spirit moves within, it's his love that rules, not the rules of the world. It's his love. You die to yourself. It's hard to be offended if you're dead. Hard to demand rights if you're dead. The Lord is not slack, we read it concerning his promise, but is long suffering. Same word. He's long suffering towards us, not willing that any should perish at all would come to repentance. How long suffering is God? Or let me ask you this. How long suffering is God with you? I know. I feel the same way. How long did he put up with you before you got saved? One mighty have slammed the gavel down and declared enough is enough. I've taken all. I can't. But he didn't. And he still hasn't. You were close.

No. I remember hearing that discussion of two men who were arguing about God's existence and the fellow. One said to the other, I'll give God five minutes to strike me dead if he exists. And the other fellow said, there's your problem. You think you can wear out the goodness of God and his long suffering love in five minutes? You cannot. So suffers long, takes it on the chin, and add the second part of it, in the midst of that is still kind. Not just bearing it up and getting by and a woe is me, but long suffering with God. Kindness. Love suffers long. Love suffers long. Suffering takes. Kindness gives. And by the way, again, it's a verb of action to bless, to respond with kindness, to overcome evil with good. God's love does not seek vengeance. It isn't interested in retribution. But even under severe pressure, it seeks. It seeks to bless and to honor the Lord. Jesus, again, Sermon on the Mount, as he laid out the ways of the kingdom to a fairly new group of disciples, said, look, if anyone sues you to take away your tunic, give him your cloak also. And if they compare you to go one mile, just go two. And if they ask for something, just give it to them. If they want to borrow, don't turn away. Just give. And you go, really? Well, if you want to follow me, because it's that love of God in my heart that seeks me to be more like him. Now, that's the one positive. Here come the negatives. Verse four. And there's eight of them. All the rest of the positives we're going to hit next week.

Verse four, verse, the second part, love does not envy. Since agape love does not seek its own way, it's not interested. In itself, it's interested in blessing others. It might surprise you to read the words does not envy in its very definition. The word for envy means to covet earnestly or to burn with zeal. It is most often translated in the Bible, jealous. Love is not jealous. And the word jealousy, at least by biblical definition, just in the context in which it's used, it's not jealous. It's not jealous. It's not jealous. It's not jealous. Those words are found, has two meanings. One is, I want what you have. The second is, I don't want you to have it. So it's more than just, I want what you have. I'm just upset that you have it and I don't. And that's not God's love in any stretch of the imagination. There's a good example of this envy and jealousy in that parable that Jesus told, I think it's Matthew chapter 20. And you might remember that the Lord talked, about the kingdom of heaven. And he said, it's kind of like a fellow who owns the land and he needs some people to work it. And so in the morning, some people come and he said, what are you doing? He said, well, we've got nothing to do. He said, we'll go out in the work and work all day and I'll pay you a denarius. And they said, well, we'd love to work. And off they go. And nine o'clock comes around and there's some other folks. And the Lord says to them, what are you doing? They said, well, we don't have any work. Nobody's invited us. He said, well, go in the work and I'll pay at the end of the day what you're worth. Did the same thing at noon. And then maybe an hour before closing time, he found some last words. Fellas who said, what are you doing? We've been standing around all day. We don't have any work to do. And the Lord said, I'll just go into the field I will pay you what you're worth. And when the time came to pay, as you read there in Matthew chapter 20, the Lord began with the fellows who had come the last and he paid them the same as he paid the guys who had been working all day. And obviously they didn't like it. They were upset. And the Lord says, it wasn't my money. Can I do what I want? Didn't you agree with me that this was good for you? You're happy to have the work, but that's how sin works, right? We're just, we're envious. We're not satisfied. We don't, aren't happy with what the Lord has given to us. It's difficult to rejoice over the promotion or success of somebody else. I always love those verses where Jonathan and David got along so well. And you read a couple of places that Jonathan just loved David like his own soul. But I mean, just reading the context, Jonathan was in line to be the next king. I mean, his father saw, okay, he was a bit much, didn't do very well. But Jonathan had, at least for a time, every reason to believe he'd be the successor. And when he found out otherwise, rather than being jealous or envious, he prayed for David. He blessed David. He said he was better than he was. He was chosen by the Lord. He honored the choice that God has made and he found rejoicing in it.

When Paul wrote, the Philippian letter from jail. And it was a hard time for Paul. Having just got to Rome and arrested and all and left kind of to languish for several years. But as he was writing some of these prison epistles, he wrote to the Philippian church and he said, you know, there are plenty of people in town that preach Christ out of envy or out of strife. They want to make it worse for me. They can't, you know, they think they're going to hurt me by, you know, just taking away God's glory or soiling my nail and whatever. And then he said, there are some others who preach the name of Jesus from goodwill. Some are driven by selfish ambition, not sincerely. They want to add to my affliction. Others are driven by love in defense of the gospel. I'm just happy that Jesus's name is getting out there. And I'm just going to leave that be and not, you know, let it bother me or hurt me. And so he was so sure God's word would prevail over the hearts of men that he was thrilled. James comes along and writes that short little book that's like a, I don't know, a bat to your head. And he says in chapter three, look, if there's any bitter envy or self-seeking in your heart, don't you boast against the truth because that wisdom doesn't come from above. It comes from below. It's demonic. It's sensual. It's earthly. Envy and self-seeking leads to confusion in every evil. Or Paul, by definition, says God's love avoids that. If you're envious, that's not God's love at work. If you're not long-suffering, if you're not kind in the midst of all of those things, if you're defending yourself and just can't rest. But when the love of God rules your heart, envy and jealousy are not a motive or a concern. So you check yourself. Is this the Lord's work? People sometimes say, I wonder if the Lord's directing me. I usually say to them, go through this chapter and see what you can eliminate. When you ask yourself, why are

you doing this? What is your motive for this? A lot of times you can get rid of, oh, I guess that's not the Lord. That's something else. The third part of verse four says that this love does not parade itself and is not puffed up. The word parade itself is a very long Greek word with about six syllables, but it literally means boasting or bragging. With the purpose of provoking other people's to be jealous of you or to be envious of you. We hate it in others, but we often do it ourselves. We live in a world of hype, aren't we? Everything's about money and gain, sports salaries, star homes, cars they drive, fascinated with income and possessions and pre-nups and how much did your dress cost and whose designer clothes are you wearing? And then there's Jesus. Jesus is love is not parading itself around at all. We read in Philippians chapter two, Jesus was in the form of God, didn't consider robbery to be equal with God being God. He made himself of no reputation. He took the place of a bond slave or bond servant. He came in the likeness of men. He humbled himself, became obedient to the point of death on the cross. Here's our example. We shouldn't be interested in what people think of us in the terms of parading ourselves around. We should rather not boast or brag. We should seek to serve. If you're dead to yourself and alive to him, there really is no other way to go. And the word puffed up is an interesting word because it's the literal word for inflated or swollen. But it always has attached to it the issue of it is inflated or swollen because of pride. It's the idea of acting superior. The old better than now kind of, you know, attitude.

There's a proverb, I think, chapter eight of Proverbs that says pride and arrogance are the evil ways of a mouth that is perverse. And the Lord says, I hate it.

here's where the work of God's spirit in our lives run into the flesh. You know, here's the collision between your old life and the new. God's love is not puffed up, but it will build up. John the Baptist says, He must increase, I must decrease. I don't know how easily he would have said that, you know. He had thousands of people following him to the middle of nowhere. There was revival when John was here. And when his disciples were upset and said, well, they're all going to Jesus. He went, yeah, that's the way it's got to be. But that's not natural. Natural is I want to be seen. I want to be noticed. If you read these things, are you convicted that maybe we need some help in the love department? Or do you think it's just the Corinthians that weren't doing the work? I don't think so. five says that the love of God in us does not behave rudely. The word rudely is an interesting word because it literally means unbecoming. Or if you will, weird. The love of God does not behave itself in some weird, unacceptable manner. God's love will fit in. It won't make a spectacle of itself. It won't draw attention to itself. It isn't rude or standing out for all the wrong reasons. God's love is just acceptable and embracing. Who could resist that kind of kindness? The second part of verse five says, neither does God's love seek its own. Wow. I remember Jesus saying the Son of Man didn't come to be served, sorry, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

How do you see God's love in your life? When you deny yourself. When you don't insist on having your own way. It's the antithesis of, hey, it's my ball, my rules, or I'm going home. It is not needy to have things done just so. By implication, it doesn't seek its own. But the implication is it doesn't seek its own direction and way. Sometimes God has different ideas. And his love should keep us from struggling with that. We read in verse five, the third part, his love is not easily provoked, to emotion. If we're dead to ourselves, it's hard to get you to be upset. Yell at a body that's dead doesn't do much. Can you imagine not being able to be provoked? Can you be provoked? Oh, I can be provoked. Sometimes quite easily. Especially driving.

Highway to hell is a true statement. Just to get home. Love is not provoked, not driven to outbursts of emotion. Just love of God in the hearts of his people. Because God's in charge, isn't he? I can rest in that. Yeah, but have you heard what he said? Did you see what he did? Yeah. What are you going to do about it? Nothing. Nothing. You see how this goes. And then at the end of verse five, it says, this love of God thinks no evil. Now, there's no sense even going over that because none of you do this, right?

Thinks no evil. Interestingly, the way that it is written, it would suggest that God's love working in your life does not hunt for hidden motives or suspect the worst. But as we will read in verse seven, rather, his love is believing of things and hopeful. And enduring. It is a very positive outlook of life. It isn't the opposite, which is unfortunately what we're seeing a lot of in our country today. Even among Christians, maybe it's the whole political thing. And by the way, let's pray for next Tuesday that God does not give us what we deserve.

Give us, Lord, what we can do to most honor you.

It says a love that hopes with endurance. It's not cynical. It's not negative. It's not willing to even in thought keep a record of wrongs, plan a revenge. God's love is very positive. Doesn't think evil. Love does not think evil as the plots of God. God's plans to you are good, right? Not evil. Jeremiah, what does it say? What is it? Chapter 29. I know the thoughts that I think towards you,

say, Lord. Thoughts of peace, not of evil. To give you a future and a hope. are some heavy verses, I think. I read them and I say to the Lord, how long are you going to put up with me?

And he hasn't answered me. I don't know what he's going to do. But like I said, read through these again. Put Jesus's name in there. And then when you're all by yourself, put your name in there. Don't do it on the pulpit with a mic. But I think you read it a few times and you just say, God, help me. I want to be. No wonder I've fallen so short from what you intend for me. So in the context of the use of the gifts in the local body assembly for worship, where Paul is dealing with a church that is so driven by this carnality and babies and not growing up and all, he gets to the use of the gift and says, you know, let's talk about your motives. Because indeed, if you walk in love, a lot of this stuff goes away. A lot of these chapters are answered when God's love begins to rule in the heart. John would write at 90 some years old. And we have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love. And he who abides in love abides in God and God abides in him. And love then is perfected among us that we can have boldness in the date of judgment. Because as he is, so are we in the world. That's a mouthful.

May our God reduce us to love, because if that's what we have, church can be powerful and fruitful. And without it. Hey, we're just playing church and God's not keeping score. Amen.