

Faith Walk! - Sermon Discussion

Date : 23 Apr 2023

Sermon Title : Love Loves and Endures All Things

Speaker : Rev Eddie Ho

Text : 1 Corinthians 13:7

INTRODUCTION

Love seems to be so natural that even a baby knows and is able to show it to someone he/she likes. However, do we actively practise it? Apostle Paul in his letters to the church in Corinth had spent an entire chapter to discuss this topic "Love". To truly understand Paul's message to the Corinthian church, we need to know the context in which this letter was written so as to address the nuances around Paul's emotion when he wrote this chapter.

Context

The believers in Corinth, although united by the blood of Christ, did not get along and they were arrogant as they were puffed up with knowledge. They were not kind to those who did not share their views or disagreed with them. They argued over weighty things (Ch 1-5) as well as mundane things like food offered to idols (Ch 8). They had much disagreements, to the extent that when they gathered to worship they did not wait for each other to have the Lord's Supper (Ch 11). They also did their own things without regard for each other (Ch14). They were impatient and they ignored each other even though they gathered together to worship. They could not settle their disputes amicably and took each other to court (Ch 6), which showed they did not trust their own community to remediate their disputes. They were rude to each other and as we read further in 2 Corinthians, they were also rude to Paul as they mocked him for his lack of eloquence.

In light of this context, 1 Corinthians 13 would then lean towards Paul reprimanding the Church in Corinth, rather than it being written in an affectionate tone. Paul reproached the Corinthians because even though they knew what love is, they did not practise it. Similarly, God is asking us as we read this chapter, "are we like the Corinthians?"

Different forms of love

Love can mean different things to different people and we mean love differently in different contexts. Paul wrote the letter in Greek, and the different forms of the word "love" in Greek are:

- Eros – Love for your spouse

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- Storge – Love for your children or family
- Philia – Love for your friends (most general form of love)
- Agape – Love from God

Agape

The word for “love” used in 1 Cor 13 is "agape", which means love from above, which is selfless, unconditional, and sacrificial. However, the other forms of the word “love”, could likewise be selfless, unconditional and sacrificial. This can be seen in lovers sacrificing their lives for one another in eros love; parents and children sacrificing their lives for each other or God the Father sacrificing for us, His children, out of storge love; and friends sacrificing their lives for one another as well as Christ sacrificing His life for us whom He refers to as His friends in philia love. With which form of love are we to love others?

We are called to "agape" one another

Jesus says in John 13:34:

“A new command I give you: [agape] one another. As I have [agape] you, so you must [agape] one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you [agape] one another.” (NIV)

We therefore can glean from here that the purpose that Jesus showed us "agape" is so that we can "agape" one another. At the same time as we think about how Jesus showed us "agape", we recall the greatest act of love from God when He died on the cross not just for His friends, but He died for everyone, including those who disagreed with Him, hated Him, crucified Him and those who betrayed Him. Romans 5:8 said that "God [agape] us whilst we were yet sinners". God showed agape to His enemies. The other forms of love do not go to the extent of loving one's enemies.

“Agape” endures all things (1 Corinthians 13:7)

- Endure means we be patient with our enemies and be kind to those who agitate us.

We may be willing to endure these from the people whom we love, but God calls us to show "agape" which means to extend this patience and kindness to those whom we may not like and those whom we detest – our enemies.

- Endure means that we do not give up on them even though they will not love us back. Similarly, when we show "agape" we treat fairly those that would not treat us fairly in return.
- In other words, endure means to take in the abuse from our enemies, but that is not all – we are to hope all things for them.

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"Agape" hopes all things (1 Corinthians 13:7)

In Matthew 5 we are called to love our enemies, by blessing those who curse us, do good to those who hate us and pray for those who spitefully use us and persecute us. This is "agape" love, as Jesus had shown us, which is contrary to human nature unlike other forms of love in Greek vernacular: "eros", "storge" and "philia".

We need the Holy Spirit to "agape"

"Agape" is unnatural and it cannot be built, grown, or cultivated, and no amount of willpower can bring us to truly love our enemy.

- "Agape" can only happen with the help of Holy Spirit, as it is the love that flows from God.
- It is also this love that strengthens us to "agape" our enemies.
- We need to put on faith in Jesus Christ to enable us to "agape". God had called us to be in His Kingdom, and to be in His Kingdom is to "agape" our enemies; those who disagree with us, or those we cannot stand.
- To "agape" is not a choice, as it is a calling for all children of God.

To help us ease into showing "agape" to one another, we must pray for God to give us the willingness and the ability to see other people's contexts and points of view through empathy. Paul pointed out in 1 Cor 12 that as a church, we are different parts of one body. We are all from different background and upbringing, so we may use the same word but mean different things. Most disagreements root from not understanding the other person's contexts and points of view and at the same time stubbornly sticking to our own, even though none of the different contexts and points of view are wrong.

We need to take the first step to "agape" one another so that the world will know that we are the disciples of Christ. Let us bear all things, believe all things, hope all things and endure all things because:

"And above all these put on [agape], which binds everything together in perfect harmony" (Col 3:14)

CONCLUSION

As a church, we are many parts of a whole and we are all very different, so there will be friction amongst us. We must rely on the Holy Spirit so we can truly "agape" one another, obeying this direct command from Jesus. Let us start by showing "agape" to one another in our church, in our small group and in our ministry, and expand thenceforth. If we love one another, the world will see that we are Jesus' disciples, one body united by the blood of Christ.

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B. Relate Sermon Content

Purpose: Relate with the Truth and Resolve for Transformation.

- 3a. To "agape" is to bear, believe, hope, and endure all things in others including our enemies. What are some ways these can be put into practice in your:
- (i) family
 - (ii) group?
 - (iii) ministry?
 - (iv) church?
- 3b. (i) Is/Was there a situation in your life where a disagreement arose from each party not understanding the other's contexts and points of view and at the same time stubbornly sticking to his/her own, even though none of the different contexts and points of view are/were wrong?
- (ii) What is one thing you can do to express "agape" in this situation?
- 4a. Jesus' "agape" love includes sacrificing His life for His enemies. Why is it important for believers to "agape" our enemies especially those in the church?
- 4b. Agape is unnatural and it cannot be built, grown, or cultivated, and no amount of willpower can bring us to truly love our enemy. What are some things you can do to be able to "agape" your enemies like Christ did?
- 4c. How can your group members help or encourage you to achieve 4b above, in the following week(s), until your next meeting?

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C. Testimonies, Prayers and Action

Purpose: Give glory to God, seek Him and embody His Word.

5. Share your personal testimony on how God had enabled you to endure and hope all things for someone who had wronged you.

OR

Give thanks to Jesus for showing us what "agape" is, and sending us the Holy Spirit to enable us to agape like Him.

6. With a prayer partner, bring all that has been shared to God, and ask for the Holy Spirit to give you the willingness and ability to see from other people's point of view, especially when it is difficult to do so in certain situations. Re-commit your faith in God so that by His Holy Spirit, He can transform you to enable you to truly agape people including your enemies.

Pray for your group and our church to be a community that follows Jesus' example of "agape" love so that the world around us can see that we are His disciples.

Optional items:

Suggested worship songs:

1. This Is Amazing Grace – Phil Wickham <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zPQKj2Zptr0>
2. Goodness of God – Bethel <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-f4MUUMWMV4>
3. I Will Trust – Malaysia Worship Collective
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UEfPoZD4Jxc>

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