

The month of February marks the imminent arrival of Valentine’s Day. You probably don’t need a reminder because the seasonal aisles of stores have been loaded with red hearts, cupids, and other Valentine’s Day merchandise.

I know that Valentine’s Day is still over a week away, but I wanted to take this opportunity to reflect on our Epistle text which was written as if it were designed for Valentine’s day. Hopefully this sermon can give us some food for thought on the nature of true love ahead of the holiday, so we can be inoculated against some of the misconceptions of love in our society today.

I have prepared for you a sermon where we’re going simply to sit before the text, unpack it, and learn from it. Today we learn, **MORE THAN ROMANCE OR A VALENTINE, CHRISTIANS VALUE CHRIST'S EVERLASTING LOVE.**

First, I. Christians value Christ's love over romance (v. 4–7). We start in the middle of our text and let me re-read verses 4 through 7 for you today. **“Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”**

It almost feels like we’re at a wedding, doesn’t it? Indeed, these are good verses to reflect upon at a Christian wedding, but it’s important that we don’t put the cart before the horse. We know what true love is only because of God’s love for us.

Yet it doesn’t matter if you were born in the 1930s or the early 2000s, there are anthems of each generation that sing of love. Whether it’s Elvis Presley singing, “Love me tender, love me sweet Never let me go You have made my life complete” or Taylor Swift singing, “All's well that ends well to end up with you.” Our culture tells us that as long as we have a boyfriend or girlfriend, a husband or wife, we’re okay, but if we don’t then we’re somehow incomplete.

That’s not to downplay the value of having a boyfriend or girlfriend, or the many blessings that the Bible promises about marriage. However, it’s important to see that as we read this passage in 1

Corinthians 13, Christ fulfills all these aspects of true love without him ever having been married or in a romantic relationship.

He is patient and kind to you as you sin again and again. He does not envy or boast as He set aside all the rights of being God to be the last of all and the servant of all. He showed true humility, even suffering to the point of death on the cross. He did not insist on His own way as the cup of the Father's wrath was poured on Him even when He respectfully asked the Father that that cup would pass from Him. He did not resent those who tortured Him and falsely accused Him yet He did not rejoice at their wrongdoing.

Christ in His love for you bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. He rejoices in the truth even as He calls us to walk in the truth.

We find that as we look to Christ first, we know what true love is, and it overflows both to our romantic relationships as well as our non-romantic relationships. In knowing Christ's love, we too can love our children, friends, parents, and coworkers better.

I have been listening to the audiobook of *The Hiding Place*. It's the story of Corrie Ten Boom, a Dutch woman of faith who saved many Jews' lives in the World War II era. As a young woman, she recounts her heart being broken over a young man who rejected her and married someone else. She remembers her father consoling her saying, "Do you know what hurts so very much? It's love. Love is the strongest force in the world, and when it is blocked that means pain. There are two things we can do when this happens. We can kill that love so that it stops hurting. But then of course part of us dies, too. Or we can ask God to open up another route for that love to travel."

For many people, love hurts so much. Maybe some of you are lonely: either never married, widowed, your marriage is troubled, or maybe nobody of the opposite gender in your class even seems to know you exist. Understand that the Lord knows your pain. And you can pray to Him to take that pain and understand that there are ways that that love can flow to others. That doesn't necessarily mean romantic love, but the love of Jesus encourages and uplifts all who come into contact with it.

Second, II. Christians value Christ's love over valentines (v. 1–3).

For our next point, we circle back a few verses where we read, **“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.”** In other words, as the saying goes, “Nobody cares how much you know until they know how much you care.”

Growing up, my dad would hang up my art projects. In some cases, he framed them. Now, let’s be real, the only subject I was worse in than art was gym. Nobody would pay money for my fifth-grade drawing of an apple. It was a testament to my dad’s love for me rather than my skills.

In the Church in Corinth, there were many who were very skill obsessed. They supposed you could tell how good of a Christian you were based on how well you could speak in tongues, prophesy, and sacrifice for the church.

We can certainly rejoice in the spiritual gifts God has given us. We want to use these for the benefit of our neighbor. However, your place in God’s kingdom is not about the gifts you have, but how you can exercise those gifts to help others. “Nobody cares how much you know until they know how much you care.”

People can be funny, right? We think people will love us if we just do X. If I learn to play guitar, all the girls will love me. If I just wear this outfit, guys will start talking to me. If I give my grandkids cookies, they’ll want to visit me more often.

Paul reminds us that it doesn’t matter if you can play the guitar better than Hendrix, or you have a cute outfit. You can be the best baker in the Midwest. You can give the best Valentine’s Day gift ever. All these skills and gifts pale in comparison to love itself which we have from the Lord who shed His blood for us.

Jesus loves you, and that changes everything. You can love others even when the only instrument you can play is the smoke detector when

you try to bake cookies. Peter in his first epistle reminds us that a gentle and kind spirit makes a woman more beautiful than a thousand-dollar outfit. This love is the only valentine that counts in God's book.

Finally, III. Christians don't put an expiration date on Christ's love (v. 8-13). Paul gets cryptic in the last part of this chapter, **“So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”** In this last paragraph, Paul helps us put love in perspective.

Valentine's Day is coming, and we have hopes for what's going to happen then. We may have faith that it'll be great. But when we fall asleep on February 14th, there'll be no faith and hope because everything on Valentine's Day will have happened.

We walk by faith in Christ. We have the certain hope of eternal life. One day, we'll see Christ, and eternal life will be ours. In this way, faith and hope will one day become obsolete.

This is by no means trying to downplay the importance of faith and hope in this life. We are saved by faith alone, and sometimes only the hope of everlasting life gets us through the day. However, the love of God that we experience in glimpses and hints in this life will be fully revealed in the life that is to come.

The acts of love we do in this life matter. Paul writes to Timothy, **“for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.”** Likewise, **“Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.”**

As we share the love that God has so graciously given to us, it will always spring forth and make a difference. This could look like the love for our family, but also the love for other people at church, friends, people in our neighborhood, and even complete strangers. You don't need to have a Valentine to make love count this Valentine's Day. What a great blessing the love of God is!