

THIS THING CALLED LOVE
Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13

INTRO: We are nearing the day we know as 'Valentine's Day' and we have had read for us this morning 1 Corinthians 13, the love chapter of the Bible. It was only on Thursday of this week that I determined to do a message on love. That is because it is only this past week that I came to a final conclusion to my own satisfaction as to what love is after years and years of study. I did have most of it together for some time, but now I feel confident in the conclusions I have come to.

I might add that I had done a little research on Valentine's Day some years ago and now I just briefly looked at a few things on internet but I do not have time to deal with either the history of this day or whether or not Christians should be involved in any way. The common view is that the Roman Catholic church changed that ungodly Roman festival called Lupercalia into the so called Christian Valentine's Day. In my brief research, that view also may be questionable. However, I will leave that out and just deal with the matter of love itself.

Some time ago I did some messages on forgiveness, and I mentioned that I believe it is one of the most misunderstood subjects among Christians. I am not alone in that view. But, when it comes to this matter of love, I believe it is as misunderstood if not more so. And so, after many years of study, I have come to some conclusions which I want to share with you today, but I can only do so very briefly.

Now, how many of you have heard John Cash's song, "A Thing Called Love"? Let me read it for you now, and later you can think through this song and come to your own conclusions as to his understanding of this thing called love. I use this song because most of us have a similar understanding or misunderstanding of love. It goes like this:

Six foot six he stood on the ground
He weighed two hundred and thirty-five pounds
But I saw that giant of a man brought down
To his knees by love

He was the kind of man that would gamble on luck
Look you in the eye and never back up

But I saw him crying like a little whipped pup
Because of love

Most men are like me, they struggle and doubt
They trouble their minds day in and day out
Too busy with livin' to worry about
A little word like love

But when I see a mother's tenderness
As she holds her young close to her breast
Then I thank God that the world's been blessed
With a thing called love

You can't see it with your eyes, hold it in your hands
But like the wind it covers our land
Strong enough to rule the heart of any man
This thing called love
It can lift you up never let you down
Take your world and turn it around
Ever since time nothing's ever been found
That's stronger than love

Well, in the chorus he has this line that says, "This thing called love." Well, love is not exactly a thing, but that is what I have called this message, "This Thing Called Love." So, let us give our time now to this thing called love.

I. THE KEY INGREDIENT OF LOVE

In my studies, I have concluded that there is a key ingredient to the different kinds of love we will talk about later. That key ingredient is either an attraction or an attachment to someone or something. It was in my own private studies that I came to this conclusion and it was after many, many hours of study. Colin Brown has edited an extensive three volume Dictionary of NT theology, and as I was going over this again this week here is what he says about one of the Greek words for love, "*phileo* is the most commonly used word, indicating a general attraction towards a person or thing." Though he says that of only one of the four main words, that comes very close to saying the same thing that I have concluded, and that is that love is an attraction or an attachment.

In this message we will centre our thoughts on love as related to people. You see, someone who loves money, and many do, that person is attracted or attached to money. There are those who love math or science, and some even love cats or dogs or horses. The key ingredient in all of those is this attraction or attachment they have to the thing they love.

Then there are those who fall in love. You talk about attraction or attachment, there it is supreme. In the Song of Solomon, the Shulamite woman says of this love that it is as strong as death (8:6). That is what Johnny Cash speaks of in part of his song.

But here is the sum of my first point: The key ingredient in every kind of love is an attraction or attachment.

II. THE DIFFERENT KINDS OF LOVE

That brings us now to a further consideration, and that is that our English language suffers for words to describe the different kinds of love. When we consider this huge subject, we are left with one word to describe it all. We have just the one word, love. We may have a number of different things in mind, like Johnny Cash in his song, but we do not distinguish those meanings by using different words because we don't have them. So we are limited to our one word love.

The Dictionary of NT Theology says that the Greek language had quite a number of words for love, but the main four are *phileo*, *stergo*, *erao*, and *agapao*. So these four words are used to describe the various kinds of love or attachments. So, let us imagine a large circle. In English we have one word to describe that circle. It is this thing called love. But now take two lines and divided this circle into four equal parts. Do you have it in your mind. That is the Greek language view of this thing we call love. And now I want to show you what those four parts are like.

So, let me explain this from the view that the basic ingredient of love is an attachment. But there are different kinds of attachment. For example, we could

attach two boards using nails, or we could use wood screws, or we could use glue or we could use dowels of some kind. Each of those could be used to attach two boards. Yet each of those is a different kind of attachment. So it is, as I see it, with this thing called love.

So, the first attachment is described by the word *phileo*. I want you to go to John 11:36. Lazarus had died and Jesus came to see where they had laid His friend. The word for this love is *phileo*. The word for a friend is *philos*. The word for a kiss is *phileema*, etc... And the Jews said of Jesus, "Behold, how He loved him!" What they are saying is how attached Jesus was to him as a friend. You see, the word 'philadelphia' has *philos* added to *adelphos* which is a brother, or brotherly love. So, I will call this kind of love friendship love.

Then there is *stergo* love. Go with me to Romans 1:31 (read). The words translated, 'without natural affection' in the KJV or 'unloving' in the NKJV is our word *stergo*, only it is negated by adding an 'a' to the beginning. So it is *astergeo*, without love. So, in your pie of 4 pieces, the second part is *stergo*. In my understanding, this love is what I would call loyal love. This is a love that man may have for others or for animals, and animals may have this love for man. Dog's are very loyal animals. They *stergo*, love, their masters. They are loyal to their masters.

Turn to Romans 12:10 (read). Notice the words, 'be kindly affectionate to one another'. The words, 'be kindly affectionate' are the translation of one Greek word, *philstorgos*. Here we have *phileo* and *stergo* united into one word. Here we have friendship and loyal love together. Christians are commanded to be related like this.

Now in your circle of four pieces of the pie, the third is *erao*. This word never occurs in the NT. This is physical, intimate, human love. So let me call it romantic love. The Theological Dictionary of the NT calls it the love between a man and a woman. This word belongs to married people of the opposite gender. I think this word is not used in the NT

because of its misuse in an evil sense, as most of the world is prone to do. Like in our day, almost all erotic data is evil. For those who are married, you may wish to write down 1 Corinthians 7:3-6 to see how decently the apostle Paul spoke of this. This love is very, very important to human life, but because of its excessive abuse in sinful ways, one seems to even need to avoid the use of the word.

When Johnny Cash sang of the man who was 6 foot 6 and he fell to love, it is this idea that is predominant. But when he sang of the mother holding her child, it was an altogether different love that is in view, but he does not distinguish them in his song. It is all just love and that is the problem of having only one word to describe love.

There is yet one more section in your circle that has no name. You can tell me what the word is that belongs to that fourth piece of the pie. What is it? Yes, it is the word we know as *agapee*. The verb is *agapao*. What is most interesting to me about this word is that it appears that to the Greeks, this was certainly not a favorite word. Kittle, in the Theological Dictionary of the NT says, "Yet in the Greek writers the word is quite colorless" (pg. 7). Colin Brown, in the Dictionary of NT Theology, says, "Agapao, in Greek is often quite colorless as a word..." (II:539). Yet when you come to the NT, you find that this is by far the predominant word! How so? We must know what this word means to find that out.

I want you to go to John 21 to see this word. Follow with me as I read and explain (read): John 21:15, "So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love (agapao) Me more than these?' He said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; You know that I love (phileo) You.' He said to him, 'Feed My lambs.' 16 He said to him again a second time, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love (agapao) Me?' He said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; You know that I love (phileo) You.' He said to him, 'Tend My sheep.' He said to him the third time, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love (phileo) Me?' Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, 'Do you love (phileo) Me?' And he said to Him, 'Lord, You know all things;

You know that I love (phileo) You.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed My sheep.'"

That is a very interesting passage for which we cannot take much time except that it seems to me that Peter did not yet really 'agapao' Jesus. He did 'phileo' Him. It will take some very hard experiences before Peter actually loves the Lord Jesus with this most important of all loves. And when Peter breaks and comes to that point, he loves the Lord right up to death. That love, is agapee based love.

So, just what is agapee love? Well, in my view, if stergo love is loyal love; and phileo love is friendship love; and erao is romantic or sensual love, agapao is intelligent, truth based love! As I see it, the first three loves are to a large extent based on emotions. Agapee love is based on reason and facts and truth. It is intelligent. It considers facts and makes decisions accordingly, regardless of emotions or inconvenience. Let me illustrate. Let us go to Luke 10 to read a very familiar story (read 25-37). Now the central issue of this story is agapee love; love for God and love for man (27).

Now, you see, in this story, none of those who came along could have any loyalty or friendship love for this man because he was a stranger to them. He was a neighbor, but a stranger. When all other loves are absent, agapee love still has a place. Agapee love is a knowing love. It is based in the intelligence or knowledge, not in emotions. The Samaritan did not cry over this man, he helped him. That is agapee love.

For those of you who know Vanderhoof, my home town when I grew up, you know that when you come from the east you go down a long hill until you come into the Nechako River Valley and the town is situated in the valley. And one day I came down this long hill. A lady came dashing out onto the highway with a stricken look in her face and she was flailing her arms in desperation to stop me, which I did. Her son, a young man, had been working underneath his car. He had the car blocked up and he had taken the drive shaft off. And when the drive shaft was off, it allowed the car to roll off the blocking and he was trapped underneath and panicking with claustrophobia.

Nobody had to tell me that the right thing to do was to help. I could have said, "Well, I don't even know you. You are not my friends nor am I bound to be loyal to you. So good-bye. Find yourself a friend or a relative." I had never seen these people before, but I loved them, agapee love! How so? I did what anybody should do for anybody in such a situation.

Now in light of that, listen to these verses which speak of agapee love:

John 14:15: "If you love Me keep My commandments."

John 14:21: "He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him."

John 14:23: "Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him."

John 15:10: "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love."

1 John 5:2-3: "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome."

You see, agapee love is based on facts and is intelligent choice. It is not related to emotions or feelings. So, listen to these agapee verses:

John 13:34, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another."

John 15:12, "This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."

John 15:17, "These things I command you, that you love one another."

What does this mean? It means you do what is right based on truth no matter how you feel.

III. THE OVER-RIDING LOVE

Well, let me ask one more question: Is any one of these four loves an over-riding love? Well, as I understand it, in Greek thought, probably the least appreciated love was agape love. And most likely in all cultures except where the Bible is rightly taught, romantic or friendship love is the over-riding love. But in the NT, agapee love is the over-riding love. It trumps all other loves.

Let me give you an example. Some people say they love their child too much to spank the child. That is stergo or phileo love, but it is not agapee love. I give one word to parents here; if you do not spank your child, you do not agapee love your child. Agapee love is the over-riding love. It over-rides your phileo love for your children and spansks when it is needed.

Maybe you know a truth about a certain person that should be revealed, but you do not do it because that person is your friend or your relative. Then you do not love, agapee that friend or relative. Let me add that true agape love is never cruel. It does not expose out of cruelty. That is not true love. 1 Corinthians 13 does remind us that agapee love suffers long and is kind, but agapee love acts and it acts based on knowledge of facts.

Someone recently told me this, "Truth trumps relationships." Do you know what that means? If I have a very close relationship with someone, yet I will do the truth though it may cost that relationship. Truth over-rides it all. Agapee love does the right thing though it is costly.

If my assessment is correct, when we had these church problems a few years ago, there were folk who were very uncomfortable with what was going on, but they did not want to question things lest they find out some truth that would cause their conscience to come into conflict with what they wanted to be true. They

were afraid if they discovered something that was contrary to what they wanted, it would uncomfortably upset their way of life or their family. So, they chose rather to not ask.

Consider loyal love. Let us say I am very loyal to a certain hockey team. Some of us are? And let us say that my team does something very unsportsmanlike but I argue for them because I am loyal to the team. I know about this kind of thing from my own life. You see, if I do that, loyal love has over-ridden agapee love and that is wrong. That holds true for loyalty to people as well, even good friends or relatives. When loyalty or friendship love wants to creep between agapee love, I must be willing to forego that loyalty or that relationship and live by agapee love. Agapee love, truth based, fact based love over-rides all other loves.

True marital love is the only love that rightfully embraces all aspects of love. The love of a mother for her child may include three of the four loves. It will cause her, as Solomon knew, to even give up her child for the child's benefit. But agapee love over-rides all loves.

CONCL: Now, in conclusion, let me read Johnny Cash's song and see if you can see a little more clearly, this thing called love:

Six foot six he stood on the ground
He weighed two hundred and thirty-five pounds
But I saw that giant of a man brought down
To his knees by love (romantic love)

He was the kind of man that would gamble on luck
Look you in the eye and never back up
But I saw him crying like a little whipped pup
Because of love (romantic love)

Most men are like me, they struggle and doubt
They trouble their minds day in and day out
Too busy with livin' to worry about
A little word like love (ummm??)

But when I see a mother's tenderness
As she holds her young close to her breast

Then I thank God that the world's been blessed
With a thing called love
(Here is the love of a mother for her child but it is not
the other love he was talking about.)

You can't see it with your eyes, hold it in your hands
But like the wind it covers our land (not agapee love)
Strong enough to rule the heart of any man
This thing called love (romantic love)
It can lift you up never let you down (certainly not
romantic love. It can let you down.)
Take your world and turn it around
Ever since time nothing's ever been found
That's stronger than love (He's referring once more to
romantic love.)

So, in my estimation, Johnny Cash got things mixed up a little in this thing called love. Yes, eros love covers our land, but not so agapee love. And yes, eros love can pick you up, but it can also let you down; but not so agapee love. It will never let you down. And then he says, "Ever since time nothing's been found that's stronger than love." Well, he is not talking about agapee love, and let me tell you what the Bible says about that: "And now abide faith, hope, agapee love, these three; but the greatest of these is agapee love."

And now, since this is the month of romantic love, let me add one other matter. Regardless of the history of Valentine's Day, I do like the idea of taking one day in the year and setting it aside especially for married folk to focus their thoughts on the importance of their marital relationship in order to keep it strong and vibrant. And although this love is not the over-riding love, it is very, very important. So in this month when we think of romantic love, may God bring you as husband and wife closer together. I would not minimize the importance of this very special relationship. It is one of the most important of all relationships. Remember it, guard it and nurture it.