

1 Corinthians 13

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Date: 29 September 2019

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- [0 : 0 0] God. Paul says, I will show you the more excellent way. If I speak in the tongues of men and angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.
- If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have the faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.
- 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.
- Love is patient. Love is kind. It does not envy. It doesn't boast. It is not proud. It does not dishonor others.
- It is not self-seeking. It is not easily angered. It keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth.
- [1 : 0 9] It always protects. Always trusts. Always hopes. Always perseveres. 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.
- For we know in part, and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child.
- I thought like a child. I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror.
- Then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part. Then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.
- [2 : 1 2] And now these things remain. Faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.
- Let's pray. Father, we don't want these words that we have read just to remain words.
- We want them to find a root in our lives. We want them to be effective there. That we might grow in that deeper relationship with yourself.
- And so, Father God, as we come now to consider your word this evening, we pray for your presence among us. We pray, again, for your Holy Spirit to take those words and so, again, apply them to our lives.
- That we might truly be the people of God you want us to be. Amen. Well, first of all, can I say a very warm thank you for your welcome to the church today.
- [3 : 3 2] I've really, as I always enjoy, come across to Whitby and to share fellowship with you as a fellowship. And, again, just thank you particularly to Frederick and Janet for their kind hospitality today.
- I had a wonderful time, so thank you very much for that. But we're here to worship God. We're here to see what he has to say to us.
- And so, enough about everything else. This evening, I wanted to consider, really, just a phrase. In the church that I attend in Middlesbrough, we share the midweeks.
- And I've been in a series on one another sort of passages. And one of the ones that I'll be looking at is edify one another.

And I think, well, what does the word edify mean? Well, it simply means to build up. It's where the word edifice comes from.

[4 : 39] To edify. So, really, Christians who love one another will seek to build each other up in that most holy faith. And so, again, Paul writes in Romans 14, Let us, therefore, make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.

And I really wonder if we consider how we can help others to grow.

Because, really, that's a responsibility that every single one of us has in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

To minister one to another. And this involves edification. This involves building up. Now, probably most of you would realize that it's easier to break down than to build up.

And I remember when I was in Bible College, we did various chores around the college. And I was given the wonderful job of demolishing some walls in an old toilet block that had to be broken down.

[5 : 59] So, I was given a sledgehammer. And I was given a jackhammer. I had a wonderful time. Every boy's fantasy type thing of, you know, slamming bricks with a great big hammer and things like that.

And, you know, it didn't take that long to do. Just simply whacking away at things. And soon the walls came down.

It's easy, in one sense, to break things down. It's not so easy to build them back up again. But it's an art.

To build, you need to lay good foundations. To build, you need to use the right material. The right tools. The right tools.

You need to have everything laid out. It takes time. It takes patience. If you want to do a good job.

[7 : 12] And that's the same in our relationships with each other, isn't it? It's easy, as it were, to pull somebody down. To criticize. But to build somebody up.

To have that word in season. That word which is going to lift and encourage. And surely we should all desire to be those who are builders and not demolishers.

So how do we go about this? How do we build each other up in the faith?

Well, one thing we can do is we can do it by our example. And so I'd like us to turn to Romans chapter 14.

Because really in this passage of scripture, Paul is writing to address a problem that existed in the church of Rome.

[8 : 23] There were disagreements within the church. Particularly in relation to what people should or shouldn't eat.

The weak Christians said, well, we should only eat vegetables. And they were judging the stronger Christians who believed quite rightly that they were able to eat all things.

And arguments over disputable matters. Over the non-essentials brought about dissension and division.

And so Paul, at the beginning of this chapter, chapter 14 of the book of Romans, he says, receive one another. Or receive one who is weak in the faith.

As it were, accept each other. And then verse 19, he speaks about edifying, of building one another up.

[9 : 25] And then in verse 13 he writes, therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way.

Because we do affect others by what we do or what we say. So Paul says, I know, and I'm convinced by the Lord Jesus, that there's nothing unclean of itself.

But to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love.

Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died. Therefore, do not let your good be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

And so Paul is seeking to readdress something, the balance there. He's saying, what are your motives behind this? Are you so concerned about what you eat and drink that you're doing it to the neglect of caring for your brother or sister in Christ?

[10 : 56] Come on. Think about it. We're reminded here that the example of the stronger Christian should encourage the weak Christian to grow.

We must be very careful not to, as it were, run ahead of someone else's Christian experience. We cannot force our maturity on someone else.

Just as you can't force a baby to grow. They've got to do it in their own time. In fact, there are stages of a child's life when it takes a great deal of patience, love and kindness to bring that child into maturity.

And again, it's true for those who are babes in Christ, children in Christ. They need to grow. They need to learn.

They need to be taught. And if you're an older Christian, more established in your faith, well, here's the job. This is something that you can be involved in.

[12 : 13] Yes, in Christ Jesus, we have liberty. But it's possible to use this liberty selfishly.

And we end up tearing down rather than building up. I may be able to go certain places, which are fine for me.

But perhaps for someone who is weaker in the faith, it might be for their hurt. I can take part in a certain activity as a growing Christian.

That's not going to destroy me. But it might destroy somebody else. Again, just think about it.

I remember before we had children, you know, we could leave knives and scissors and pins and things lying around the house. It didn't matter. But when the children came along, we made sure those things were put away.

[13 : 19] There was nothing sinful, as it were, about leaving knives and scissors lying about, but it could have caused harm to our children.

And because out of love for them, concern for them, we made sure that the environment was as safe as possible. And I hope that you can see the illustration.

Again, for young Christians, we want the environment to be as safe as possible for them. It's important that we think and are considerate.

And sometimes, yes, it might mean denying or putting aside our Christian liberty for the sake of others. Our example then will do a lot to encourage, to build up our brothers and sisters in Christ.

And then secondly, our words. What we say. Paul says to the Ephesians, do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouth, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it might benefit those who listen.

[14 : 51] Have you heard the expression, sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me? Young people here this morning, this evening, hear that expression? Yeah?

Is it true? No. It's not true. Words can be some of the most damaging things.

Now, I work in a special sort of school. Basically, I work with those who can't access mainstream education.

Some of them have been excluded from other schools. Some of them suffer from social, emotional needs. But most of them, most of these young people, they come from backgrounds where they don't hear a kind word.

They're told that they're useless, that they're rubbish, that they're not going to amount to anything. And so what do we find with these young people?

[15 : 58] They believe it. They believe that they're not going to amount to anything. They believe that they're rubbish. That's what they've been told. That's what they've been drummed into them.

Words can be damaging. Words can pour people down. And sometimes we have to confess that we have used words unkindly.

And perhaps we want to think of ourselves as bigger or greater or better than we are. So what do we do? Instead of trying to improve ourselves, we can attack others and belittle them and drag them down.

And such things should not be seen in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. We're not to be those who pull down. We're not to be those who demolish.

we are to be those who build up. Just think of it. You've had a really, really rubbish day.

[17 : 15] Things have gone wrong. You feel miserable. you wish you'd never got up that morning. And then someone comes along with that word of kindness.

With that word of encouragement. And your spirits are lifted. It's not so bad. But likewise, you can have a really great day.

Things have gone fantastic. And then you get a text or an email and it's critical.

It's condescending. It's horrible. And from there you're brought down to there. Words have an impact.

And so Paul says instead speak the truth in love. And if we do that we will in all things grow up into him who is the head that is Christ.

[18 : 33] We need the truth. Yes. But we need the truth in love. Sometimes the truth can hurt.

but if we realise that when someone speaks to us in such a way they're doing it for our benefit to help us to help us grow then we can appreciate that.

We need truth and love. Someone has said that love without truth is hypocrisy.

truth without love is brutality. And surely we don't want either of those.

So again Paul says in Colossians 4 verse 6 let your conversation be seasoned with salt so that you may know how to answer everyone.

[19 : 43] Sorry I've missed a phrase. It's let your conversation be always full of grace seasoned with salt that you may know how to answer everyone.

Full of grace. Again can I ask you when you speak to others are you seeking to encourage and to build up?

I hope so. Another way that we can encourage others and build each other particularly in the church is the use of our spiritual gifts.

God gives gifts to his children. Why? Why? Why does God give us gifts? So that we can boast, look at me, I can speak in tongues, I have a word of prophecy because that's what was happening in the church of Corinth and they were boasting that they could do this, that they could do that, that God had given them these wonderful gifts.

gifts. And so Paul, when he writes in 1 Corinthians 13, basically the verse in 1 Corinthians 12, verse 31, could be interpreted, you eagerly desire the greater gifts, but I will show you the more excellent way.

[21 : 34] And then we have this expression about Christian love. These believers in Corinth, oh, they were delighted in that they had these most, or what was termed here by Paul, the greater gifts.

But Paul says, you know, if you have those things but do not have love, you're nothing. It doesn't mean a thing. Spiritual gifts are given to the church for the benefit of the church.

And it doesn't have to be the great gifts or what is termed here the great gifts. Gifts of service. Gifts of hospitality.

The ability to draw alongside somebody, that's a gift. And they're for the sake and the well-being of the church as a whole.

And so again, Paul says in the next chapter, 1 Corinthians 14 verse 12, since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church.

[23 : 02] They're not to draw attention to oneself. They're there to bring glory to God. God. They're there for the well-being of Christians.

At Corinth, they were proud that they didn't lack in any gift. But the fact is, they were using these gifts as toys to play with, or worse still, as weapons to fight with, not as tools to build with.

They were showing off. They were seeking to build their own egos. And so Paul had to write them and rebuke them, really saying your meetings do more harm than good.

And surely when we come together as a church, we should come with our aim, firstly, yes, to glorify God, but secondly, with our aim to encourage one another.

And so, as we come into a service like this, the hymns that we sing should be edifying. The prayers should be edifying.

[24 : 36] The preaching, hopefully, should be edifying. No, definitely should be edifying, not hopefully. Our fellowship ought to be edifying.

We ought to use our spiritual gifts for building up, not for tearing down. How often do we come to church with the attitude, what am I going to get out of it today?

And sometimes we go home and say, you know, didn't think much of that today, didn't get a lot out of it. We should be a people who say, what can I put into it?

How can I help to build others up in their faith? because even a small word of encouragement can go a long way.

Love. If we need anything, we need love. Knowledge puffs up.

[25 : 53] Love builds up. And some can use knowledge, yes, even knowledge of the word of God to tear down rather than to build up.

And I remember speaking to my mum and dad and speaking about our respective faith, my parents, the Roman Catholic, and, you know, I can win any argument based on scripture when I talk to mum and dad.

because, well, I've been to Bible college, yeah, but no, I spend more time reading the word of God than they do.

I know what the Bible says and I can win arguments but I can also alienate by pushing by, as it were, by winning.

Now, my dad has died, he's passed on, but my mum, I still obviously talk to her week by week. I love my family.

[27 : 12] I want what's best for them. And so it's not about winning arguments. It's about showing love.

And again, using what God has given to build rather than tear down. Jesus said, a new commandment I give you, love one another as I have loved you, so you must love one another.

Do you know, if you love someone, it should be impossible to speak with hatred and criticism.

Love shows itself in so many ways, but it is seen probably most clearly in Paul's description in 1 Corinthians 13, the passage we read earlier.

It is patient and kind, it does not envy or boast, it is not rude, it is not self-seeking, not easily angered, keeps no record of wrongs.

[28 : 27] Love never fails. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Love never fails. So again, how do we build others up? By showing love towards them.

And can I say that love is not just an emotion. Love is a work. It's an act of the will. God commands us to love, to love one another, even to love our enemies.

It's an act of the will. And then coming, we need to close just a few things, our prayers. Have you ever thought that, you know, we pray this evening for Hannah?

No, I don't know Hannah. but you do. And it's refreshing, it's wonderful to see people praying for someone who's had an operation, who's recovering.

[29 : 36] And Paul speaks of his friend Epaphras. He says, Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Jesus Christ, sends greetings.

He's always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in the will of God, mature and fully assured.

Epaphras possibly was from the city of Colossae. He's one of you. He's wrestling in prayer.

He shares something of your needs and he's seeking God on your behalf. What a way to build somebody up, to bring them before the throne of God.

Do you have a prayer list? Sometimes we pray, we can pray very generally, can't we? Bless our church, bless this, bless that. Let's be specific.

[30 : 40] And do you know, the more specific we are, the more specific should be our answers to prayer. It's just bringing people to God.

And then finally, how can we build people up? God's answer is using this, the word of God. I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up.

The word of God is a wonderful tool for building, particularly building one another up in the faith. When discussing a problem with people, use the word of God.

When folk may call to complain about something, use the word of God. Drop it into your conversation. Share the word with others.

Now, we don't always have to go around and quoting verse by verse, but the contents of God's word.

[32 : 01] They should be part of us. It should be natural for us to speak of the things of God. I can't remember who it was, but it says that when you cut into him, he was Bibline.

You know, it just came out. And again, let your conversation be full of grace, seasoned with salt.

Again, where do we see grace? We see it in the word of God. God. We don't go around saying, thus saith the Lord.

But we do say, well, you know, the Bible does speak about this. God's answer to this problem was this. And we share something of the word with them.

whatever the method, our example, our words, love, God's word, whatever, we should be those who are seeking to build others up in this most precious face.

[33 : 32] The world seeks to pull us down. They want us to fail. So we need each other. We need that encouragement.

So I would plead with you, be those who are builders. Encourage one another in the faith to the praise and the glory of God.