

The Body of Christ: What is the Nature of Our Unity? Part 3 – Unity Under His Love

Don't carve a tiki Jesus: letting God define the love that unites us

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, June 20, 2021
PASSAGES	1 Corinthians 13:1-13; 1 John 4:8-10; Deuteronomy 4:1-2; Deuteronomy 4:15-18; 2 Corinthians 4:2-4; Romans 9:3; Matthew 6:1-4
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:11:38 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

The church is united under the banner of God's love – but only if we let God tell us what that love is. Defining love by our instincts and then calling it God is a quiet form of idolatry. In 1 Corinthians 13 Paul shows that every gift and good deed is worthless without love, that gifts, faith and hope will one day pass away, and that love – right action with a loving heart – is the greatest, because it lasts.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ We are not under Christ's authority if we define Jesus for ourselves; the same is true of love. We must be shown what God's love is on his terms.
- ◆ Loving something a lot is not idolatry – Paul could wish himself cursed for his people. Idolatry is crafting an image of God, even an image of the true God, by our own understanding: a “tiki Jesus.”
- ◆ Beware the syllogism: God is love, love is this, therefore God is this. The world's default is not tuned to God's love; the god of this age blinds minds.
- ◆ God's love sometimes offends, sometimes cuts to the heart, hates evil and says no. We need to be taught what it is like.

- ◆ 1 Corinthians 13 is not a wedding reading first but Paul's correction of a gifted, loveless church. Without love, tongues are noise and even martyrdom gains nothing.
- ◆ Do good in secret, as carefully as we hide our sins, so that our reward comes from the Father.
- ◆ Gifts, faith and hope are tools for now; in heaven they are fulfilled. Love remains – and it needs both the right action and the right heart.

► 1:12:13

Matt, Hope's associate pastor, loved the morning's worship – Deb and Jack “so casual but focused on the Lord,” Steve popping up mid-set – “that was peak Hope Chapel... we're serious about God, but we're not uptight about ourselves.” He announced a church-wide cook-off, warning that he might bring his award-winning sweet Yankee cornbread, which once took third place, before turning to the third week of the series on what our unity consists of.

Love on his terms

► 1:15:24

“Today's focus is on love. We are united under the same banner of God's love for us... motivated by the same love.” But we can get lost when we define what love must mean “and reverse-engineer that back onto God.”

► 1:15:59

He recapped last week: we are under Scripture's authority because we are under Christ's, since he purposely spoke plainly to the apostles. Defining Jesus for ourselves is “like a camouflage – walking under our own authority, but it looks like we're under Jesus' authority.” The same danger applies to love.

What idolatry is – and isn't

► 1:18:05

Two misunderstandings, Matt said: that anyone can intuitively figure out what love is; and that loving something a lot must be idolatry – “I love my wife, I love my kids, I love bowling, I love the Dallas Cowboys.” Not so. Paul wrote,

“I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people.” “That's a high level of love and devotion, but there's not even a whiff of idolatry here.”

► 1:19:36

“Now, Israel, hear the decrees and laws I am about to teach you... Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the Lord your God that I give you... You saw no form of any kind the day the Lord spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire. Therefore watch yourselves very carefully, so that you do not become corrupt and make for yourselves an idol, an image of any shape, whether formed like a man or a woman, or like any animal on earth.”

DEUTERONOMY 4:1–2, 15–18 ↗ (NIV)

► 1:21:57

This is in a context where other gods are already ruled out. The warning is against an image of the true God. “You could say, look, I crafted this giant ox because oxes are strong, and God’s strong... that’s the God that took us out of Egypt. Still idolatry.” And that is our temptation with Jesus: “a persona that we kind of crafted, custom made for ourselves.” Matt calls it “a tiki Jesus. It’s still Jesus, but it’s idolatrous.”

► 1:23:45

The same goes for love, “one of God’s essential characteristics.” The easy syllogism: step one, God is love; step two, love is this; step three, therefore God is this.

God shows us what love is

► 1:24:23

“Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”

1 JOHN 4:8–10 ↗ (NIV)

► 1:24:59

“Not that we loved God.” We do not naturally love what is pure; the world around us is not gently pushing everyone toward faithfulness to Jesus. We were dead in trespasses, following “the course of this world... the prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:1–2) – “you’re a fish, that’s the stream.” The same letter that says God is love says “the whole world is under the control of the evil one.”

► 1:27:11

“The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:2–4). Without the Spirit and the gospel, it would be absurd to think anyone’s gut would be spot on about what love and God are like.

► 1:28:17

The religion of our world says love never offends, never hurts feelings, always agrees and smiles, never says no – “just don’t be evil, but beyond that, you do you.” Say “God is love” into that and the world hears a God who is always smiling. But the disciples told Jesus the Pharisees were offended (Matthew 15:12) – “Jesus is probably like, yeah, I knew.” Peter’s hearers were cut to the heart. God hates lying and the shedding of innocent blood; Jesus got angry, said no, made high demands.

► 1:30:52

Every generation has its own pitfalls “but every single generation needs to be humble and receive what he has to say about himself.” We are united somewhere specific: in his body, under his authority on his terms, under his banner of love – “and at every step of the way, it matters what it’s really comprised of.” Then he handed over to Wes.

Wes: 1 Corinthians 13 in context

► 1:32:40

It being Father’s Day, Wes did his “obligatory” teasing of “Father Geno.” Two weeks earlier, at his first outdoor service, Wes watched Geno get up mid-sermon and tap Matt on the shoulder, and spent the rest of the talk sure he was in trouble. Asked later, Matt said Geno had only told him he would be away the next week.

► 1:34:42

Chapter 13 is “the wedding passage – every wedding, every TV show that’s had a wedding.” Those things are true at a wedding, but they are not what Paul was mainly saying: he was still teaching the Corinthians how to use their spiritual gifts. It is like the high-school math student who plugs a problem into every formula and gets the right answer the wrong way – zero credit.

► 1:36:26

“If I speak in the tongues of men or of 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 a 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.”

1 CORINTHIANS 13:1–3 ↗ (NIV)

► 1:37:24

With a two-year-old at home, Wes knows clanging cymbals – pots, pans and every toy that makes noise. A supernatural gift used without love for the person beside you “might as well just be making noise.” Mountain-moving faith, an echo of the mustard seed, is nothing without love.

► 1:38:17

The last example is the most instructive: giving everything “that I may boast.” Jesus said the same: don’t announce your giving with trumpets; “do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing... then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you” (Matthew 6:1–4).

Oversimplified: “Do you want all your kudos in life, or do you want your reward in heaven to be given by God?”

► 1:40:15

Paul is not exaggerating, Wes thought. There will be people who give everything away or even die as martyrs, and God will say “you did all these great things, but you did them for yourself.” We all know the coworker who recounts every good deed on Monday – “that person is getting all their rewards now.”

► 1:41:13

“If we treated the good things we did almost in the same secrecy of the way we treat sin, I think it would actually revolutionize how the church operates.”

You would hear about good deeds from the people helped, not the helpers – and think far more of them for it.

What love is like – for Corinth

► 1:42:59

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not 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. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.”

1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-7 ↗ (NIV)

► 1:43:57

This is not an exhaustive definition – it does not say love is humble or self-sacrificial, both true of Christ. It is Paul’s list for a church that was falling short. “When Paul says love is patient, it’s probably because the Corinthian church weren’t very patient with each other.” “Keeps no record of wrongs” – picture the gossip about bad business deals and unanswered prayer requests. Wes suggested taking one phrase a day and praying over what it looks like from Christ’s perspective.

Gifts will pass away

► 1:45:41

“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... 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” (1 Corinthians 13:8–12). Beautiful – “but what’s it mean?”

► 1:47:09

Paul is giving perspective. People who say gifts are everything and people who say gifts mean nothing both argue from these chapters. Corinth over-emphasized gifts as a tier system – “I have this awesome gift, that means God has blessed me... I am the eye, so I am much more important than you, who are just the foot.”

► 1:49:18

Who waxes a rental car every morning? You keep it running until you get your own. Gifts are temporary, for now. What use is prophecy in heaven, when God can speak to Billy Joe himself? Or healing, where there is no sickness? “These gifts are a picture, a small sliver of what heaven is going to be like, and each one of us has been given a piece of it.”

► 1:51:03

Someone with a supernatural gift of joy stays joyful in Christ whatever happens; Wes, who can get frustrated, looks at them and thinks, “that is what the love of Christ is supposed to look like.” “We all

have pieces of what God's true love really looks like," and together we form a complete picture, a body that shows Christ's love outward.

► 1:52:55

If we can't love each other with our gifts, what message do we send? "You guys say this is love, but you guys are always infighting... I went to church on Sunday, I see what's going on." So, Wes said, be wary of teaching that puts gifts at the center; "churches should talk about the love that gifts are supposed to display."

► 1:53:47

Ancient mirrors were polished metal – recognisably you, but discolored, "definitely not what I actually look like." One day the childhood ways are put away and we will no longer be mirrored versions of ourselves.

The greatest of these

► 1:55:13

"And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love."

1 CORINTHIANS 13:13 ↗ (NIV)

► 1:55:45

Why is love greater? Aren't they interdependent? Paul's reason is that faith and hope also pass away. Once we are in heaven, "it's kind of hard to have hope for things that have already happened."

► 1:56:13

You hope for a new bike before Christmas; on the twenty-sixth, riding it around the neighborhood, you don't say "I believe my parents are going to give me that bike." Faith and hope, like the gifts, are tools for now, and we will be better for not needing them because they will be fulfilled. Without love they lose all meaning.

► 1:58:03

But Wes guarded against "it's only intent that matters." Saying something harsh and hurtful "in the name of love" is not love, and giving someone what is harmful is not love. "If you do the right thing for them, it means nothing without love; but if you try to love someone without doing the right thing, then the love doesn't mean anything either... you have to combine them into one."

► 1:59:24

Corinth was full of people seemingly doing good deeds for one another without loving one another, “and that was a blight on their witness to the world.” Paul spent three chapters teaching them a better way.

► 1:59:56

We prayed with thanks that “the only way we know how to love others is because you have first loved us, and that if our definition of love does not line up with yours, it is us who are at fault and not you” – and that, as Jesus did nothing on earth to make himself look good, we would love not to be seen but to serve.

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- [Romans 9:3](#) (NIV)
- [Deuteronomy 4:1–2, 15–18](#) (NIV)
- [1 John 4:8–10](#) (NIV)
- [Ephesians 2:1–2](#)
- [1 John 5:19](#) (NIV)
- [2 Corinthians 4:2–4](#) (NIV)
- [Matthew 15:12](#)
- [Acts 2:37](#)
- [1 Corinthians 13:1–3](#) (NIV)
- [Matthew 17:20](#)
- [Matthew 6:1–4](#) (NIV)
- [1 Corinthians 13:4–7](#) (NIV)
- [1 Corinthians 13:8–12](#) (NIV)
- [1 Corinthians 13:13](#) (NIV)

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Matt said loving something a lot is not idolatry, but crafting a “tiki Jesus” is. Where are you tempted to shape Jesus – or love – to fit your own instincts?
2. How does the world around you define love, and where does God’s love, as shown in sending his Son, contradict that definition?
3. Wes read 1 Corinthians 13 as a correction to a gifted but loveless church. Which line of verses 4–7 most exposes your own church life or friendships?
4. What would it look like for you to treat your good deeds with the secrecy you usually reserve for your sins?
5. Wes said love needs both the right action and the right heart. Where this week do you need to add one to the other?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Matt Ryniker is Hope Chapel's senior pastor — his own description of the job — and reports to the church's governing board, who he cheerfully calls his boss. He and his wife Mandy have been held up from Hope's own pulpit as an example to the congregation. He spent a stretch of his working life as a public school teacher, and he still teaches the parent dedication classes where families commit to raising their children to follow Jesus — a theme that runs straight into this message.

Watch the full message:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zDY1m_ZvnZA&t=4298s

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.