

# **ARM Prison Outreach International**

## **"Ministers' Minute" Volume II Number 2**

**Do you need an idea for a Valentine Weekend message?**

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Editor's Note: This sermon is the 2nd email message of 2003 in a series that ARM is sending as an encouragement to preachers and Christian workers around the world. This message by Gary A. Kins, Danville, IL, focuses on the great 13th Chapter of I Corinthians and the kind of love that is supposed to be the mark of the Christian. May God bless your labors! -- Rod Farthing, Regional Development Director

### **The New Commandment: The More Excellent Way**

**I Corinthians 13:1-13**

**OPEN: The Son of Thunder became the Apostle of Love**

Luke 9:53 When the Lord's emissaries were not received in a Samaritan village, The Sons of Thunder, James and John, asked if they could bring a firestorm down upon them. This is the same John who lost his fiery disposition as he followed the living Christ; he became known as the Apostle of Love. Traditionally says that when John was too old to walk by himself, he was carried to the front of the congregation and his admonition to them was always the same, "My little children, love one another."

Jesus before His departure said, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." John 13:34,35

In the Old Testament, the law of love was laid out but the law of laws became more popular until love, mercy, and compassion were pushed to the background or out all together. Unconditional love like the covenant love that God has for all people does not allow for preeminence, power and purse-filling that so many people seek. Jesus had to die to show what being a loving servant really meant.

When Jesus left the earth after His resurrection, He left behind a group of gifted people to carry on the work. Ephesians 4:7-16 expresses that the purpose of these gifts was so that they could equip the saints for ministry and build up the church.

Peter, in 1 Peter 4:10,11, sums up all the gifts given to the church as either speaking gifts or serving gifts. The purpose of them, he said, was to exercise our stewardship of the manifold grace of God and service to each other. The speaking gifted were to be careful to express the Word of God and not their own opinions. The serving gifted were admonished to serve with the strength God gave to them and not worry about what others were doing. This would be evident by bringing God glory (presenting Him worthy of praise to others) by the way we live.

Paul expresses in Romans 12:36-12:21 this same concept by saying that our lives are to be dedicated (sacrificed) to worshipping God with our bodies and offer our gifts to each other so total function is achieved and the purpose of God is enhanced. He also says here that love, unfeigned (Unconditional - AGAPE) and love, devoted (true friendship - PHILEO).

The church at Corinth was struggling with many issues and neglecting people needs. One of these issues was the exercise of the gifts God had given to bless the church and the world. Some were regarding themselves as the more important because of their gifts and stood in danger of destroying with their gifts the very body they were to build. Paul gives in 1 Corinthians 12:1-31 a long list of gifts but is careful to express that they are to be used for the common good not for personal grandstanding. He states that they are given to fulfill God's purposes and to exercise the body of Christ for mutual benefit. In chapter 14 of 1 Corinthians he further develops the idea of exercising gifts and the abandonment of their destructive misuse of God's grace.

Sandwiched in between the two chapters dealing with the misuse of gifts is Paul's explanation as to the most

excellent way, LOVE. The key ingredient in our relationships with each other has to be love. We will never be perfect in church government. We will never be perfect in doctrine. We will never be perfect in our approach to worship. But we can be perfected by unconditional love because our Great God is not only the epitome of love – He is Love!

In First Corinthians 13 Paul demonstrates how the most excellent gift will enable us to bring unity and purpose back to our church as we bring the love of God into the presentation of our lives. Consider these four important truths that form an acrostic of LOVE...

I. Love Is the Lord's **Leveler** - 13:1-3

II. Love Is ----- **Opportunity** In Action - I Corinthians 13:4-6.

III. Love is ----- **Victorious** Over All Things - I Corinthians 13:7.

IV. Love Is ----- **Eternal** - I Corinthians 13:8-13

### **I. Love Is The Great Leveler - 13:1-3**

A. The problem of self-glory is an "I" problem. In these three verses Paul expresses that selfishness is at the root of the misuse of God's gracious gifts. The word " I " is used seven times here. No gift is more important than another. No person is higher than another. Christ alone is our Head, we make up His Body. Solo flights are flights of fancy.

B. Giftedness without love is just noise. (13:1,2a) It is like a symphony at practice time not when they are in concert. You have never heard a cymbal solo or a gong pep band, have you? Oratory skills without love is to speak into the air.

C. Faith that could move the Nodine Minnesota Hill to our side of the river so that it would have to be called West Salem Hill is nothing without love. ( 13:2b ) Faith without love does not please God.

D. Generosity, even if you sold all that you possessed and gave it to meet the needs of others, is meaningless. (13:3a ) Philanthropy without love is self centered and vain.

E. If you stand so firm for principle and truth that you must forfeit your life it was a wasted effort if you were not motivated by love. ( 13:3b) Martyrdom without love profits you nothing in the eyes of God.

### **II. Love Is Opportunity In Action, Not Some Dead Definition - I Corinthians 13:4-6**

A. Love is Patient (13:4a ). This does not describe a person who is patient with circumstances and things but one who is patient with people. The King James expresses it more clearly as it says " suffereth long." Unconditional love expresses itself by putting up with people even when they are insufferable.

B. Love Is Kind ( 13:4b ) Compassion and concern are best shown by our actions. For the Christian, our acts of kindness are to be deliberate not random. Unconditional love expresses itself by being like Jesus. Peter told the group that had gathered at the house of Cornelius, Acts 10, that Jesus was anointed by God with holy Spirit and power and that this was evidenced by His going about doing good and working miracles of kindness to the oppressed. Unconditional love will unleash the power of God, the Holy Spirit within us when we are deliberately kind to others.

C. Love Is Not Jealous ( 13:4c ) Unconditional love will not express itself in envy for what others have or for what they are. We are unique. If any two of us were the same, there would be no need for one of us. Don't waste your time wishing you had more or were given a greater gift. Utilize the treasures that God has given you and you will find satisfaction.

D. Love is Humble (13:4d) Arrogance is for the immature and self-centered. All the things that we have come from Him. All the things we are came through Him and we owe all to Him. The bottom line is not what's in it for me but "To God Be The Glory."

E. Love Is Becoming (13:5a) Written into the military code of justice is a clause for officers who can be court martialled "for conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman." As a soldier in the army of the King, we are to conduct ourselves in such a way that attracts people to the Way not drives them away. Unconditional love behaves itself and is not ill mannered. To win some you must be winsome.

F. Love Is Undemanding (13:5b) . Unconditional love does not seek its own rights but works hard at not stepping on

the rights of others. It is self-giving and others minded. Those who care not about the rights of others often find no one to care about theirs when they are threatened. Love that asks for nothing in return seeks to secure the rights of others in spite of the cost.

G. Love Is Even Tempered (13:5c) I like the translation that adds the word " easily " to the "provoked" because it gives me some wiggle room but actually, it is not there. The love that is worth everything is not provoked into angry actions. Paul expresses it this way, "As much as in you is, be at peace with all people." Romans 12:18.

H. Love Is Not Vengeful (13:5d) Several times in the New Testament we are admonished, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay," says the Lord. Unconditional love waits upon the Lord and His timing. " I don't get mad, I get even!" and "I don't get even, I get ahead!" are not Proverbs from the Bible. We may get impatient like the saints under the altar in Revelation 6:10, who cry out, " How long, O Sovereign Lord, Holy and True, will it be before you judge and avenge our blood?" ... but love waits upon the Lord.

I. Love Is Godly - (13:6) The same Grace that brought us salvation teaches us to deny worldly desires and ungodliness and to fill our lives with self control, righteousness, and godliness, in this present world while we await His return. Titus 2:11-13 Godliness is seeking to please God at all costs and seek Truth to guide our lives. True love centers on purity and rejoicing in truth.

### **III. Love is Victorious Over All Things - I Corinthians 13:7**

A. Bears all things - Holds up through all adversity (13:7a)

B. Believes all things - Trusts God through all doubts and fiery darts of the evil one (13:7b)

C. Hopes all things - Clings to the promises of God even when things seem hopeless. (13:7c)

D. Endures All Things - Perfect love casts out all fear & the peace of God sustains us. (13:7d)

### **IV. Love Is Eternal - I Corinthians 13:8-13**

A. Love Never Fails (13:8 ) Preaching abilities will fade, tongues will cease, knowledge will be swallowed up by time. I think of this every time I visit someone with Alzheimer's. Love, on the other hand, is recognized even by those who no longer know your name.

B. Love Is Whole (13:9,10) The partial will end but loves goes on--intact to the other side. Love is the stuff that the universe is made of because the source of the universe is Love.

C. Love's End - Perfect knowledge (13:11,12) To one who has many questions, this is the greatest promise of the Bible beyond being saved. All the things that puzzle me, all the doubts I might have, all the things that I would like to have studied, all the things that I studied and did not understand; will be mine when I am brought into the presence of God. "I shall know as I am fully known." That's awesome.

D. Love Is The Greatest (13:13) Faith will become knowledge, hope will become reality, but love continues on. God is not just the epitome of love, He is Love.

Conclusion: In the scheme of things, love is greater than any plan. Considering security for your old age? Love pays greater dividends than any IRA. When we can no longer exercise our physical and spiritual gifts, love will be the exercise that sustains us to the end and beyond.

"We know that we have passed from death to life because we love one another. Whoever does not love abides in death.... We know love by this, that He laid down His life for ours and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. How does God's love abide anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need at refuses to help? Little children, Let us love, not only in word or speech but in truth and action." I John 3:14-18

"Beloved, let us love one another for love is of God and every one that loveth is born of God and knoweth God, for God is Love. " I John 4:7,8

Little children, love one another!

**Rod Farthing,  
ARM Regional Development Director  
"Remain faithful unto death .." Rev. 2:10B**