INTRO: Tomorrow we celebrate Valentine's Day. It is a day that has been set aside to celebrate LOVE. But the question is what is LOVE? One dictionary defines it this way: "A deep devotion or affection for another person or persons." *(Funk & Wagnalls Standard Desk Dictionary. Volume 1, A-M. p. 384).* Webster's Dictionary defines it this way: "An affection of the mind excited by beauty and worth of any kind, or by the qualities of an object which communicate pleasure, sensual or intellectual." *(Noah Webster. Webster's 1828 Dictionary. e-Sword. Version 9.8.3. Copyright 2000-2011. Rick Meyers. All Rights Reserved Worldwide).* The Bible tells us—"Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love." *(1 John 4:7-8).* The Bible tells us that "God is love". God not merely loves, but is love; it is His very nature, and He imparts this nature to be the sphere in which His children dwell. *(International Standard Bible Encyclopedia. e-Sword. Version 9.8.3. Copyright 2000-2011. Rick Meyers. All Rights Reserved Worldwide).* 1 John 4:16 tells us—"And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him."

1 Corinthians 13 is the great love chapter of the Bible. This chapter truly defines love, what it is and the way to express it. Love is a peculiar thing; it is something hard for us to explain, hard for us to define, and yet, we know when we have, and when we don't. Love cannot be hid; It shines brightly like a great light in darkness. Paul gives us some of the workings of love in this great chapter. As he concludes his great treatise on love Paul writes in v13—"And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity." I want you to notice the words “...the greatest of these...”. William Barclay wrote, “Great as faith and hope are, love is still greater. Faith without love is cold, and hope without love is grim. Love is the fire which kindles faith and it is the light which turns hope into certainty.” *(William Barclay. Daily Study Bible. e-Sword. Version 9.8.3. Copyright 2000-2011. Rick Meyers. All Rights Reserved Worldwide).*

Paul wrote in the last part of v13—"...the greatest of these is charity." Charity is love. I want to speak this morning on THE GREATEST OF THESE. Let us see first of all that...

(1) **LOVE HAS A LANGUAGE**

1 Corinthians 13:1-3—"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing."
A. **LOVE IS NOT A HOLLOW EMOTION.** Paul said in v1—"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal." Without love our speaking becomes nothing more than meaningless noise. Vv2-3 tells us—"And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing." Without love, our gifts do not build up others but are useless. Friends, "Love is more than a sentimental feeling—it's putting another's welfare ahead of your own." (The Complete Book of Zingers. Bible Explorer 4.0. Copyright 2006. WORDsearch Corp. All Rights Reserved). Love is not merely speaking, it is serving. Love is action. 1 John 3:18 tells us—"My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth." Real love is demonstrated by our actions.

**ILLUS:** John dismissed the idea that God's love is a mere theoretical concept. He rejected the notion that sentimental words are an adequate expression of love to others. On the contrary, he argued, love must take action! Biblical love is a verb! It begins with feelings of concern and compassion for those in need and always results in tangible, substantial sacrifice. (Life Application Bible Commentary: 1 John. Bible Explorer 4.0. Copyright 2006. WORDsearch Corp. All Rights Reserved). Love that doesn't understand the language of sacrifice is not love.

B. **LOVE IS A HEARTFELT EXPRESSION.** Love speaks of devotion. Love is not merely something we **profess** but it is also something we **practice**. True love is stirred by the heart. Compassion is the capacity to put love into action. (The Complete Book of Zingers. Bible Explorer 4.0. Copyright 2006. WORDsearch Corp. All Rights Reserved). Many times we substitute talking about love instead of actually putting our love to practice. Often we talk about meeting people's needs instead of actually meeting them. John Stott quoting C. S. Lewis said, "It is easier to be enthusiastic about Humanity with a capital 'H' than it is to love individual men and women, especially those who are uninteresting, exasperating, depraved, or otherwise unattractive. Loving everybody in general may be an excuse for loving nobody in particular." (David Guzik. Guzik Commentary. e-Sword. Version 9.8.3. Copyright 2000-2011. Rick Meyers. All Rights Reserved Worldwide).

LOVE HAS A LANGUAGE it speaks of DEVOTION but also let us see...

(2) **LOVE IS A LIFESTYLE**

1 Corinthians 13:4-7—"Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth: Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things."

A. **LOVE HAS A NEGATIVE ASPECT.** I want you to notice that many times in these four verses we see the word "**not**" used in reference to love. Our little
word "not" used here is translated from a Greek word which means "the absolutely negative." Vv. 4-6 give us eight things love is not. What are some of negative aspects of love?

- **LOVE DOES NOT ENVY.** Love does not show resentment toward another because of that person's success. Envy is a strong jealousy of another person. Envy stagnates the church, causing the envious believers to remain self-centered and self-focused, feeling sorry for themselves, and not fulfilling their God-given role. (Life Application Bible Commentary: 1 Corinthians, Bible Explorer 4.0. Copyright 2006. WORDsearch Corp. All Rights Reserved). Love is not jealous.

- **LOVE DOES NOT EXALT.** Love does not have a feeling of being better than someone else. To "vault" oneself is to be filled with pride. It is to boast of one's accomplishments. What a wicked attitude this is! We see on display in almost every area of life: the home, the job, the Church, and sad to say, the whole world. The Scripture says here that love is "not puffed up". It means to be "blown out of proportion." We have all known people and we have all been guilty ourselves of being swelled up, refusing to speak, pouting over some little thing that didn't amount to anything because we didn't get our way. Love in action can work anonymously. It does not have to have the limelight or the attention to do a good job, or to be satisfied with the result. Love gives because it loves to give, not out of the sense of praise it can have from showing itself off. (David Guzik. Guzik's Commentary. e-Sword. Version 9.8.3. Copyright 2000-2011. Rick Meyers. All Rights Reserved Worldwide).

- **LOVE DOES NOT BEHAVE RUDELY.** V5 tells us that love "Doth not behave itself unseemly...". Love does not behave impolitely, discourteously, or crudely. Love does not humiliate others, put them down, nor make them feel small.

- **LOVE IS NOT EGOCENTRIC.** The word egocentric means "regarding oneself as the object of all experience and acts." (Funk & Wagnalls Standard Desk Dictionary. Volume 1, A-M. p. 203). Love "seeketh not her own." (v5). Love is not self-seeking or self-centered. The Bible tells us we are to others-centered people instead of self-centered people. Philippians 2:4 tells us—"Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." Self-seeking people want only things they think are best for them. They always want their own way. They are easy threatened. A selfish heart loves for what it can get—a Christlike heart loves for what it can give.

- **LOVE IS NOT PROVOKED EASILY.** Love is not high-tempered; does not fly off the handle. Love is not touchy. Paul says that true love isn't easily angered. Sometimes we're irritated or angered by others, and we don't know why. Not all irritability stems from sinful or selfish motives, although the irritable treatment of others surely is wrong. Much irritability comes from a love of perfection, a deep desire that programs, meetings, and structures be run perfectly. A desire to run things perfectly can erupt into anger at events or people who get in the way or ruin that desire. Those who are easily irritated need to remember that perfection exists only in God. (Life Application Bible Commentary: 1 Corinthians, Bible Explorer 4.0. Copyright 2006. WORDsearch Corp. All Rights Reserved).
• **LOVE THINKS NO EVIL.** Love sees the best in people instead of thinking the worst. Love does not have a suspicious nature. Love does not keep a record of wrongs nor does it keep bringing these wrongs to mind. The Scripture here says that love "thinketh no evil". Literally, this means "love does not store up the memory of any wrong it has received." Love will put away the hurts of the past instead of clinging to them. (David Guzik. Guzik Commentary. e-Sword. Version 9.8.3. Copyright 2000-2011. Rick Meyers. All Rights Reserved Worldwide).

• **LOVE DOES NOT REJOICE IN EVIL.** Love does not delight in evil nor take pleasure in another's fall. Instead of rejoicing we should mourn when we hear of bad things that happen to others. Love always seeks the best for others.

LOVE HAS A NEGATIVE ASPECT but also...

**B. LOVE HAS A POSITIVE ASPECT.** When something is positive it means it is "actual, imperative; openly and plainly expressed." (Funk & Wagnalls Standard Desk Dictionary. Volume 2, N-Z. p. 514). What are some of the positive aspects of love? :

• **LOVE IS PATIENT.** Love "suffereth long...". Love bears with annoyances and inconveniences without complaint. No matter how gifted a body of believers are, without love, people will be impatient with each other, short-tempered, and irritable. Love endures for a long time.

• **LOVE IS POLITE.** Love "is kind". How does "kind love" look among believers? Such love is considerate and helpful to others. Kind love is gentle and mild, always ready to show compassion, especially to those in need. (Life Application Bible Commentary: 1 Corinthians. Bible Explorer 4.0. Copyright 2006. WORDsearch Corp. All Rights Reserved). We are living in an unkind society. people respond to kindness. Our word translated "kind" means “to show oneself useful; to act benevolently.” That is what love does. Love shows itself in little simple acts of kindness.

• **LOVE REJOICES IN TRUTH (V6).** In a world filled with deceit, love responds and rejoices in TRUTH. When we hear the TRUTH it is an occasion for rejoicing. We should always seek the truth, promote the truth, protect the truth, and proclaim the truth whenever and wherever possible. Love will always stand with and on the truth because love is pure and good like truth.

• **LOVE IS PERSEVERING WITH OTHERS.** We are told in v7 that love "Beareth all things, endureth all things...". Real love bears with the faults of others. Many church members choose to walk off and leave the church because of a fault they see in someone else. Rather than trying to work things out, rather than staying and trying to solve the problem, they walk off. The word beareth is translated from a Greek word that means "To cover with silence." When you truly love a person you will overlook their faults. When you truly love a person you will try to protect them from embarrassment, gossip, and other harm aimed at them. Real love perseveres.

• **LOVE PROMOTES.** Love "believeth all things...hopeth all things." Love has great faith in the people we love. Love is apt to believe well of all
men, to entertain a good opinion of them when there is no appearance to the contrary. (Matthew Henry. Matthew Henry's Commentary. Volume 6. p. 574). Love sees great potential in people. Love gives others the benefit of the doubt. Love looks forward always, not backward.

LOVE HAS A LANGUAGE, LOVE IS A LIFESTYLE, and finally...

(3) **LOVE IS LASTING**

1 Corinthians 8a, 13—"Charity never faileth...And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity."

A. **LOVES NEVER FADES.** In the original Greek the word that is translated “faileth” means “to drop away.” True love remains constant. True love will never cease to have force or authority. When something begins to fade it starts to lose its power and effectiveness but real love never fades.

B. **LOVE NEVER FAILS.** In Jeremiah 31:3 God promises, "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.” Friends, that is the quality of LOVE WE MUST SHOW OTHERS! LOVE is permanent! Love has no end!

**CLOSING:** Friends, God measures how much we love him by how much we love others. (The Complete Book of Zingers. Bible Explorer 4.0. Copyright 2006. WORDsearch Corp. All Rights Reserved). William Barclay said, “More people have been brought into the church by the kindness of real Christian love than by all the theological arguments in the world, and more people have been driven from the church by the hardness and ugliness of so-called Christianity than by all the doubts in the world. (1001 Quotes, Illustrations, and Humorous Stories. Bible Explorer 4.0. Copyright 2006. WORDsearch Corp. All Rights Reserved).

Friend, let me ask you today, “What is your Christian life focused on?” It should all come back to faith, hope, and love. If our lives are not focused on these three then we need to refocus our priorities on where they belong. 1 Corinthians 13:13 tells us—“And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.” Love is THE GREATEST OF THESE!

Are we showing love to God so that we can show love to others?

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