

# ***Spirit Filled Worship*      The Most Excellent Way**

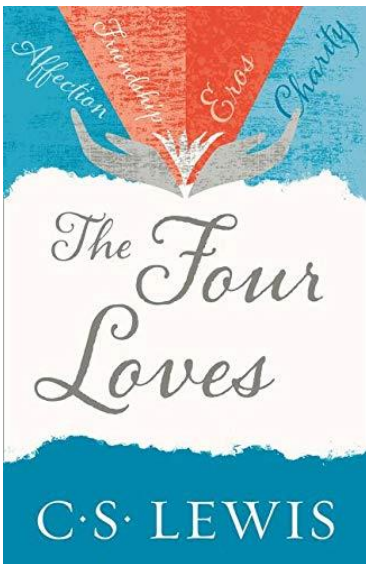
## **1 Corinthians 12:31b - 13:13**

This week we consider Paul's great chapter on Love.

### **Introduction**

"All you need is love", sang the Beatles in the 1960's. But what sort of love do you think John Lennon had in mind when he wrote the song?

The English language uses the word 'love' fairly loosely to refer to all sorts of loves, from a love of ice cream to the love of the Lord!



C. S. Lewis wrote an influential book on love, in which he identified 4 different Greek words for love:

**Storge** = natural love and affection such as a parent has for a child  
**Philia** = love between friends  
**Eros** = the sense of being in romantic love with a physical element to it (not just raw sexuality)  
**Agape** = unconditional love, which Lewis called 'charity'; describes God's love

By what is the word *agape* translated in another language which you know?

Lewis also distinguished between "need-love" and "gift-love". What do you think he meant by this distinction?

### **The passage**

Read 1 Corinthians 12:31b – 13:13. Paul uses the word 'agape' for love throughout.

- Why do you think it was necessary for Paul to write a chapter on love to the Corinthian Christians?
- In vv 4-7 Paul chiefly shows what love is not! Why does he need to do this?
- In vv 1-3 Paul lists some outstanding Christian behaviours, which he then says are worthless unless we are loving one another. In what ways does love transform gifts?
- What did Paul want to teach when he talked about the mirror?

### **Research**

What do we discover about the meaning of Christian love from each of the following passages?

- (a) John 13:34 and 1 John 4:19
- (b) John 13:1b and Ephesians 4:2
- (c) 1 John 3:18 and 2 Corinthians 8:24
- (d) Luke 6:32-25 and Matthew 5:46

**Issues** (*Leaders to select from the following*)

- Why does Paul say that love is greater than faith and hope?
- How would you describe a truly loving Christian?
- There appear to be some truly good, loving, and charitable people around who are not Christians. What is the difference between a truly loving Christian and a truly loving non-Christian?
- Do 'loving' parents punish their children? Give reasons for your answer. What words in 1 Corinthians 13 help us to answer this question? Hebrews 12:4-11 sheds some light on this.
- Paul urges us to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). Why is this sometimes so hard to do? Have you ever had to tell someone a truth that hurt them?
- John Stott once said that a balanced Christian is committed to both Love and Truth. He went on to say that there are some Christians who focus all on Love and neglect the Truth – they are too soft! Others focus all on Truth and neglect Love – they are too hard! What do you think? Is one more important than the other?
- Jesus told us to love our enemies. Do you have any experience of putting this into practice?
- What would you say to someone who says, "There are certain people whom I just can't love!"?
- To what extent do you feel that the church you belong to values love above all things?
- Somebody once said, "Love is a decision not a feeling." What do you think were they getting at?

**Reflection**

**"1 Corinthians 13:4–7: Perhaps the best thing to do with a passage like this is to take it slowly, a line at a time, and to reflect on at least three things: first, ways in which we see this quality in Jesus himself; second, ways in which we see it (or more likely, alas, don't see it) in ourselves; and third, ways in which, if we were like that, it would work out in practice."**

*Wright, Tom. Paul for Everyone: 1 Corinthians (New Testament for Everyone).*