

Ahhh...Love. This passage makes our hearts pitter-patter. I think of the movie *Ferdinand the Bull*, and his sidekick, Lupe, the calming goat/bull-fighting coach, who had never experienced love before. And, when she experiences love for the first time, she says, "I love love."

This passage has become a staple in weddings, even secular weddings, which is easy because Paul doesn't mention God or Jesus in this passage. But I think the apostle Paul would be a little bit surprised this passage, that was meant to be a challenging one to the church of Corinth has become an ode to love, for weddings and marriages. Let's be honest: Is this kind of love even humanly possible?

Let's look at this. Love is patient...really? We really have to be patient when we can do the task so much faster? Love is kind...I can be kind after I've had my morning coffee. I can be kind to the school drop-off drivers as long as they are following the rules and not trying to cut in front of me.

Love bears and endures all things. It's easy to stand in front of all our friends and family and God on our wedding day, with love beaming in our hearts for that person who is standing across from us, and vow that this love we have for him or her, will bear and endure all things. But, our current divorce rate of 50% suggests otherwise. We really aren't capable of bearing and enduring ALL things on our own.

Through our experiences, we certainly agree with Paul about what love is. Not. When we are envious or jealous of someone's accomplishments or gifts, when we brag about how awesome we are, when

we're arrogant and rude...all of that comes from our ego, not love. When we insist on our own way – "My way or the highway" – when we are irritable or resentful, or just miserable to be around, that all comes from a place of ego or selfishness or woundedness, not from a place of love. We get that, and if we've been married or in a relationship for 5 minutes, we probably have experienced all of these things. We know what human love is and isn't.

All of these descriptions of love, the kind of love that we all want and need, make us feel warm inside, but Paul did not mean for this passage to be used as a way to describe love between a couple. If we really want to make sense of this passage, we need to put it back into the context it was written.

The church of Corinth. Paul heard there was turmoil within the church of Corinth. Church drama. We don't know anything about that. We also have to hinge it to last week's passage that comes before this passage, in which it talks about spiritual gifts. We talked about how we all need to come together and use our God-given gifts, to turn the church around.

The church of Corinth had troubles of their own. The people of Corinth had lost their way. They thought that the people who had gifts to speak in tongues and interpret those tongues were better than the others. It was thought that they were more spiritual and had more status in the church. That only caused a huge pecking-order party. "Well, I may not be up here, but my gift of faith is pretty important, so I'm here. Yes, but my gift of proclamation is more important than your gift of faith because one has to proclaim before one has faith. No, one has to have faith before one can

proclaim it.” It was reminiscent of a playground squabble.

So much turmoil and bickering were taking place in the church of Corinth that they had lost the whole point of being together -- Christ’s love. Paul reiterates in this passage that all gifts are equal and come from the Holy Spirit, so one is not better than the other. They are designed to complement one another, so we can come together in one love. We serve together because of this one love.

This passage describes Christ’s love. This kind of love is not humanly possible, but we rely on the Holy Spirit to equip us in order to love like Christ loves. This is the kind of love that we strive for when we interact with others in the church and in the world. This is the kind of love that will solve the problems in the church and the world.

Let’s look at this passage again through the lens of Christ’s love. Love is patient...Christ is patient with us when we are stubborn, self-seeking, or when we’ve lost our way. Christ is kind to us when we’re stubborn, self-seeking, or when we’ve lost our way. Christ is kind to us when we aren’t kind to ourselves or others. Christ is kind to us when we aren’t even aware that our words or actions are unkind.

Christ’s love is not jealous or envious or arrogant or rude or irritable or resentful. Period. Christ’s love doesn’t need coffee to function nor holds on to the past, remembering every time someone wronged it. Christ’s love is able to bear and endure all things, as Christ was able to bear and endure his own trails of persecution, violence, and crucifixion with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Christ’s love never ends. We’ve all experienced a human love that comes to an end or certain gifts we once had are depleted. Everything comes to an end except Christ’s love. There is nothing we can do to make Christ not love us. Christ’s love is always there, waiting for us, at every turn.

All we have to do is open our hearts and accept it. Christ’s love is the greatest spiritual gift, and we all receive this gift. It unifies us, centers us, grounds us, as one, so we can love each other equally, treat each other equally, and see each other as a valuable part of the team. This is how we serve in love. We are serving from a place of love, not ego, as a response to God’s generous love.

We serve in one love, Christ’s love. It’s our whole purpose and motivation. It’s our source to accomplish what God calls us to do. Once we’ve experienced this kind of love, a love that is patient and kind and endures all things, a love not of this world, we love love. And, we want others to love love too.

Loving God, we thank you for giving each of us special gifts to use in service to you and to others. We thank you for giving us the greatest gift, Christ’s love. This love is the whole purpose of our existence, and the antidote to all our problems. Please forgive us when we become stubborn, self-seeking, and lost. Forgive us when we serve and complain about it, brag about it, or think our gifts as better than someone else’s. Forgive us when we lose our patience and kindness, when we’re irritable, arrogant, rude, and resentful. All of these times, we are serving from a place of ego, not love. Help us, equip us, to stay focused on your love. Fill us with your love. Unite us in your love. Ground us in your love. In Christ’s name we pray, Amen.