

Marvelous to Mundane

Choosing Wisely When the Culture Clashes, October 30 & 31 | 1 Corinthians 13:1-13
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CORINTH HAD AN APPETITE FOR EXCITEMENT

Like many other pagan cults, Isis worship in Corinth was exciting.

Sailors coming into Corinth's eastern harbor would have been greeted by a temple of Isis.

The goddess Isis came from Egypt where she had been worshipped for over a thousand years.

In Egyptian mythology, Isis married her brother Osiris, and the two ruled the world together until Osiris' younger brother murdered him. Isis brought Osiris back to life. Kind of. Osiris then became the lord of the dead. Interestingly, Isis giving life back to Osiris made her possibly the most powerful and important of all the Egyptian gods.

By the first century, Isis worship spread all over the Mediterranean world, including Corinth.

People looked to her as a mother goddess, the queen of heaven, the giver of life after death, and even the protector of sailors. Which is why her temple greeted sailors.

People believed Isis was particularly magical. By reciting certain incantations at the right time and in the right way, her worshippers believed they could change their lives.

Her worship in public was memorable and exciting. From October 31 – November 3 each year, her followers conducted an elaborate play remembering the death and new life of Osiris. The celebration when Isis gave new life to Osiris was wild!¹

Consequently, the Christians in Corinth had a lingering appetite for excitement.

Many of the Christians in Corinth had been pagans before they became Christians.

Some of them had probably learned and used Isis' magical incantations.

Most if not all of them had participated in Isis' fall celebration.

They were shaped by such pagan worship to expect certain things from their religion. They expected religion to provide them with power and spectacular public celebrations.

Their culture taught them to expect excitement from their religion!

The Apostle Paul had to deal with all that cultural baggage and the constant pull it had on the Christians in the church in Corinth. Paul addressed it head-on in 1 Corinthians.

In chapter 12, Paul called them back from sensationalism to service with their spiritual gifts.

The Christians in Corinth had a penchant for thinking of spiritual gifts as divine power.

They liked the power gifts like miracles, healings, and speaking in tongues.

Paul had to call them back from looking at the sensational impact of some gifts to valuing all spiritual gifts equally as ways to serve, unify, and build the Church.

Then in chapter 14, Paul called them back from outbursts to order in worship.

The Christians in Corinth also continued to display a bent toward ecstatic displays in worship.

Paul had to call them back from their outbursts to orderly worship that proclaimed the Good News, glorified God, and put people in relationship with God.

Here in chapter 13, Paul dealt with their appetite for excitement head-on.

Instead of indulging their appetite for excitement, Paul counsels them to decide to love.

Paul gives us a series of mental moves to make it so that we can choose wisely when the culture clashes with our Christian faith. This week the mental move Paul is calling us to make is about addition, not subtraction: **Let's add a decision to love to our appetite for excitement.**

WE TOO HAVE AN APPETITE FOR EXCITEMENT

In 1 Corinthians 13:1, Paul implies that the old ways still cling to us all.

1 Corinthians 13:1 reads:

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

Very simply, Paul is saying that if he has exciting spiritual gifts like speaking in unknown languages that can be practiced in exciting ways in worship but doesn't have love, it's useless.

The words he chooses to describe the uselessness of such gifts are important, though. A noisy gong is just that—chaotic noise. However, the clanging cymbal at the end of the verse is an instrument used in the worship of pagan gods.²

Paul's meaning is clear: there is a strong pull in us toward exciting things. Sometimes our pull toward exciting things is neutral. Sometimes it comes from a dark place.

Watching NFL football in 2020 provided powerful reminders that we have an appetite for excitement.

The NFL watched as other sports broadcast events in the early days of the pandemic.

They learned again just how important excitement is to us.

When we go to a football game and scream along with 70,000 other fans, we really get into it.

When we watch a football game and hear 70,000 screaming fans, we get the sense that we're watching something important. We cheer when they cheer; we boo when they boo. We like it!

But without cheering fans, we don't get the excitement and sense of importance to the event that we're craving. It's just a bunch of guys playing football.

So, the NFL put crowd noises into empty stadiums, and broadcasters put recorded cheers and boos into their broadcasts so that we would get the excitement we crave.³

We all have some inherent appetite for excitement.

In 1 Corinthians 13:2-3, Paul points out that our appetite for excitement extends to spiritual matters.

And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Paul gives us two further scenarios here.

The first scenario implies that we are people with exciting spirituality.

The second scenario implies that we are people with exciting levels of hard work and sacrifice.

We can have exciting spirituality and exciting levels of hard work and sacrifice without love.

However, it's important to note that our appetite for excitement amounts to "nothing."

We may think we're exciting people, but we're really nothing.

We may think we're accomplishing exciting things, but we're really accomplishing nothing.

We have an appetite for excitement, but it doesn't always guide us well.

GODLY LOVE, BY CONTRAST, INVOLVES A DECISION

In 1 Corinthians 13:4, we learn that Godly love reflects God's nature.

1 Corinthians 13:4 begins:

Love is patient and kind ...

To say that love is patient and kind sounds so very simple, but it's not.

To say that love is patient means that it refuses to give one the consequences of one's negative actions and is willing to suffer for the other.

To say that love is kind means that it takes positive action to bless the other. It's his nature!

God basically tells us that his name is "Patient and Kind" in **Exodus 34:6** where he introduces himself by name to Moses. God called himself,

... "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness ..."

Merciful, gracious, and slow to anger: that's patience.

Abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness: that's kindness.

God is patient and kind, so godly love is patient and kind as well.

Godly love requires that we make a decision because we aren't naturally patient and kind.

Then in 1 Corinthians 13:4-5, Paul points out that godly love pulls us back when the culture clashes.

1 Corinthians 13:4-5 continues:

... love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful ...

In these verses, Paul went through a litany of the mistakes the Christians in Corinth had made when they were pulled back into their culture.

Envy led the Corinthian Christians to rivalries and political divisions.

They had wrongly boasted in their wisdom and spirituality.

They displayed arrogance in their attitude toward Paul and their defense of sinful behavior.

They were rude to one another in worship.

They insisted on their own way over the good of others in their controversies concerning eating meat sacrificed to idols.

In general, they were irritable and kept a long list of wrongs real and perceived.

Paul's list of what love is not, reads like a laundry list of the mistakes the Christians in Corinth made because they chose wrongly when their culture clashed with their Christian faith.

By contrast, Godly love chooses wisely when the culture clashes with our Christian faith.

Next, in 1 Corinthians 13:6, Paul writes that godly love never allows the ends to justify the means.

He writes:

...[love] does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.

Godly love never pushes lies, deceit, or harm on another.

We get tempted to think that a good outcome justifies doing wrong to get there.

However, that's the pull of the culture.

To choose wisely when the culture clashes with Christian faith, godly love chooses godly ends *AND* godly means.

In 1 Corinthians 13:7, Paul adds that godly love never gives up.

It says:

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Other kinds of love quit. Not godly love.

Godly love involves a decision, not an appetite.

We have an appetite (a natural longing) for excitement.

We even have appetites for other forms of love.

The Greek language describes different kinds of love with different words.

"Eros" love is romantic love. Of course, we have an appetite for romantic love.

"Storge" love is love based on kinship. We feel kinship ties with family members, team members, and even fellow citizens. We have an appetite for belonging.

"Phileo" love is mutual affection. Again, we have an appetite or desire for friendship.

"Agape" love or godly love is the love wherein we choose God and God chooses us. It's unconditional love. It's the love of choosing. We don't have an appetite for godly love. Instead, Godly love requires a decision.

GODLY LOVE ENDURES

In 1 Corinthians 13:8-10, Paul writes that godly love will be there when some spiritual gifts are gone.

In eternity, all the spiritual gifts that build up the Church in this age will pass away.

Verses 8-10 read:

Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰ but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.

Even when the spiritual gifts are gone, though, love will remain.

Consequently, in 1 Corinthians 13:11, Paul implies that we must grow into godly love.

He wrote:

When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways.

Paul gives us the image of a person growing up. He makes the straightforward statement that when we're children, we act like children. As we grow up, we stop some of our childish behaviors and begin to behave like adults.

By implication, Paul is saying that there is something child-like about our appetite for excitement. In a child-like way, we crave excitement.

The decision to love in a godly manner is a grown-up characteristic, an adult decision. Once we choose godly love, it's a decision we never outgrow.

Plus, in 1 Corinthians 13:12, Paul puts godly love on the path with God's plan to save the world.

Paul writes:

For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

In verse 12, Paul is contrasting now with the age after God recreates the world.

Now we know God and ourselves partially.

Then we will be fully ourselves and will know God and ourselves fully.

By extension, now we can choose godly love in a partial kind of way. Then we will choose godly love in its fullest sense. Between now and then, we grow in godly love as we choose it over and over again.

Finally, in 1 Corinthians 13:13, Paul states that in any comparison, love always wins.

He wrote:

So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Earlier, Paul wrote that spiritual gifts are temporary. Compared with temporary spiritual gifts, a cardinal virtue like love always wins.

Here, Paul compares love with other cardinal virtues like faith and hope.

Paul doesn't say that they will pass away; we ARE people of faith and hope.

However, in the future God has planned, faith will be different because we will see God face to face.

Plus, in the future, our hope will be fulfilled.

Godly love then comes out on top of all the cardinal virtues as the most critical virtue, the one that will never ever go away.

Our decision to love supplements and does not supplant our appetite for excitement.

Unfortunately, our culture clashes with our Christian faith in what our culture teaches addicts us to our appetite for excitement.

However, our appetite for excitement is God-given! Our appetite for excitement is (in some ways) our longing for God Himself! We want to be blown away by God's presence and plan.

Instead of supplanting it, our decision to love *supplements* our appetite for excitement!

To choose wisely when the culture clashes with our Christian faith, **Let's add a decision to love to our appetite for excitement.**

HOW CAN WE SHOW GODLY LOVE RIGHT NOW?

God's Story shows us what godly love really looks like.

God's Story from Creation to Conclusion begins with Creation. God created the world and everything in it. He created us—you and me. He did so simply to love us. That's godly love.

In chapter 2, Brokenness, we sinned against God. He could have and should have destroyed us, but he didn't because he loves us. That's godly love. Instead, God created a plan and a people through whom he would save us. That's godly love.

In chapter 3, Jesus, God the Son took on human flesh. Jesus lived a perfect life and paid the perfect price for our sin on the cross. That's godly love. Now, if we repent and believe in him, we can be saved. We can be forgiven of our sin, given new life, and adopted as sons and daughters of God. That's godly love.

In chapter 4, the Church, God sent his Holy Spirit into the world to give us gifts for living and serving him. That's godly love!

Finally, in chapter 5, Return, Jesus will return to make the world as it is into the world as it should be. We will be resurrected and live forever with him. That's godly love!

God's Story tells us what godly love looks like!

It's critical that you grasp the fact that God loves you.

We think and talk so much about what we are to do and how we are to live.

That's all good and important.

However, our relationship with God isn't built on our good deeds or on our love for him. Our relationship with God is built on his love for us.

God loves you. Understanding that fact is critical to understanding what godly love looks like. Godly love starts with and comes from God.

Now Paul tells us to go and give godly love to other people.

Paul is following Jesus' example here.

Jesus told us to love others with godly love.

He showed us how to do it and commanded us to do it.

He commanded us to love one another, and he commanded us to love people who are different from us in every way.

Paul is following his example and telling us to give godly love to other people.

How can we show godly love right now?

If you're married, how can you show godly love to your husband or wife?

If you have parents, siblings, children, and other relatives, how can you show them godly love?

How can you show godly love to your brothers and sisters in Christ?

How can you show godly love to your non-Christian neighbors?

How can you show godly love to people far away and around the world?

God has shown us what godly love looks like in Jesus. Godly love means taking up my cross and dying to myself daily for the people around me.

Paul has told us that godly love is the character of God in action, it's the pathway to wisdom when the culture clashes, it's a preference for right that guides us through moral dilemmas, it's the choice that helps us endure, and it's the cardinal virtue that will go with us into eternity.

How can we show godly love right now?

¹ <https://www.nationalgeographic.co.uk/history-and-civilisation/2020/03/worship-of-egyptian-goddess-spread-egypt-england>,
<http://persweb.wabash.edu/facstaff/royaltyr/AncientCities/web/rel%20372%20project/ISIS.htm>,
<https://blogs.uoregon.edu/rel399f14drreis/isis/>

² Gordon Fee, 632.

³ <https://www.nbcbayarea.com/news/sports/the-invisible-crowd-inside-the-nfls-fake-crowd-noise-system/2381799/>