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This week I listened to a challenging sermon about love. Love. It was of course taken from 1 Corinthians 13, the whole chapter, and it re-affirmed to me the importance of love in the unique body of Christ. The church.

Because Paul says you can be uber this and uber that and all this religious stuff, super religion but if love isn't there, it's just like a dog barking next door when you're trying to sleep. Irritation.

That's a particular challenge to me. First of all I'm not very touchy-feely. I'm shy and reserved and have a life long case of inferiority complex. So I've got all this working against me. I'm the opposite of Joe Biden. When I actually should be hugging, I don't. And people read that all sorts of ways. Aloofness. Coldness.

I'm painfully aware of that, and here is why. I'm committed to teaching this book, and the distance, the separation of what this book actually insists is right, and our current society, our current culture, the gap is huge and getting larger.

So I've got this natural separation from shyness, the problems I stated, and then I've got this book to teach that is polar opposite out of sync with our culture, and then Paul tells me, without love, it's like an irritation. Put a huge vacuum tube amplifier with giant speakers next to a water faucet dripping into a tin pot, and that's this book being taught without love.

Without love it's just irritating noise. Just wanted you all to know, these are things I think about. I desperately want to teach you the depths of this book, but I just as desperately want to have God's love radiating out of this pulpit and out of this church. Otherwise, I'm wasting my time. I could be off on Model A adventures totally self absorbed.

That's why I always pray for God's help when I begin these teaching sessions. Because that equation is impossible for me to add up by myself. If the Holy Spirit doesn't add the excitement and the love, this is useless knowledge.

Now I just as quickly need to tell you that Jesus definition of love and Paul's definition of love is diametrically different from our cultures definition of love. So besides the other difficulties outlined, there's the problem that if you don't fall in cadence with what our culture wants to define as love, you're automatically a hater.

So there's this confusion that I may be obediently teaching some tough love perfectly in line with what Jesus did, like we'll study this morning, and what Paul did, and the culture will accuse me of hating them even though, biblically, I'm loving them.

It's impossibly difficult, and honestly, it's hopeless, unless God joins us and helps us. That's really my only hope. And that's why I stick very close to this book. The power, the love, is all interwoven in the words of this book.

Paul says I am not ashamed of the gospel (it separated him from his culture too) for it is the power of God unto salvation. The power for the other-worldly love, the agape love, is this book. God pours the love through His vessels, His people, when they un-ashamedly but lovingly confront this culture with this book.

And that's what we're going to see, clearly I hope, this morning in this third confrontation with Jesus and the religious jews. This is the third minor clash with what Jesus is doing and what the culture thinks He should be doing. What they're doing.

The first conflict, well, actually we could say the first conflict, with the jews and what God is doing through His Son is not with Jesus, but with John the baptist when John calls them a brood of vipers. False religion is John's charge against them and he's pretty rough on them. Lovingly rough. Let's listen to some love in action!

*Matthew 3:7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 "Therefore bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance; 9 and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father'; for I say to you, that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. 10 "And the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.*

I rest my case. Our culture would call this man a hater. Scary frightening hater. But these words were love coming directly from God to the scribes and the pharisee's. Your false religion will gain you eternal fire.

It's only days away from the events we're looking at this morning before Jesus is going to also call them a brood of vipers, but we're not quite there. Not just yet. But Luke is showing us the digression to that.

There were two conflicts already before what we'll look at this morning. We've studied them in the previous weeks. By the way, love must have conflict. If someone is walking into a fire, if we love them, we need to pull them the opposite way. Conflict is a necessary component of love. Our culture doesn't get that.

First conflict: When Jesus forgives the paralytic. The scribes and pharisees, the religious top dogs of judaism and Israel have come to see what's going on up in Galilee. Who is this Jesus they're hearing about?

They come to check Him out and the first thing He does is introduce the conflict that will ultimately cost Him His life. The paralytic is dropped in front of Him, through the roof, and instead of just healing him, which only God can do, Jesus says, your sins are forgiven you, which only God can do.

Our culture would say, you know, that wasn't very loving of Jesus to immediately go on the attack. Your sins are forgiven you!! Why couldn't He just heal the guy and not rub that salt in an open wound. Wouldn't that be the loving thing to do?

He could have left them in their ignorance, not knowing He is God, just done the healing and not poked them. But the loving thing to do is to let them, and us also for all time know, Jesus has the authority to forgive sins.

And there is conflict because this group of religious scholars rightly says, Only God can forgive sins. Correct. And only God can tell a man who is paralyzed who has physical deficiencies that need the power of creation to be set strong and correct, get up, pick up your bed, and go home. They claimed he was a blasphemer.

So that was the beginning of conflict. And immediately in Luke's gospel

we go right on to Matthew Levi. Jesus forgives the most despicable deeply offensive, unclean vile person possible.

The scribes and pharisees are saying, are you kidding me??? That guy?? and to make it worse, Levi throws a giant party, all invited, and every low life in 4 county's shows up for the party. Every unclean, vile, despicable, untouchable, seperated from Israel and Israels religion person possible shows up at the party! With Jesus!!

First He thinks He's God, forgiving sins from people we know God would never forgive, and now He's in there feasting with them! Touching them! This can't possibly be the Messiah. He's polar opposite of their religion.

So they ask His disciples, they don't have the fortitude to ask Him directly, they ask His men, What's up with eating and feasting with unclean horrible people. You become unclean by association with those people. You can't even be in the same room with those people . . . and be acceptable to God, according to their religion.

And right on cue, Jesus reads their minds, and He comes out and joins the confrontation. The physician doesn't come to heal the well, but the sick. I haven't come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. And Jesus is being lovingly sarcastic, because if they ever understood their own scriptures they would understand, they are not righteous.

They have this quasi righteousness going on, legalism and rules galore that they flaunt continuously in front of the people so everyone will know they're religious rock stars.

And Jesus says, I didn't come to call you righteous folk to repentance, but sinners. He's actually mocking them with sarcasm, because in God's eyes they're no better than the gross sinners at Matthews celebration of having his sin actually forgiven.

The scribes and pharisee's righteousness isn't good enough for God, so they are hopelessly locked into a false system that will ultimately bring them to hell.

Third confrontation. Love is very confrontive, isn't it. This is gentle Jesus, meek and mild, that our culture wants to re-invent as all inclusive. And He IS inclusive. He feasts with outcasts and sinners, but He doesn't allow them to remain there.

He calls those who are broken hearted about their offense to God, their sin that has rendered them seperated from God, out of their sin and into a sweet fellowship with God because the sin is forgiven.

He tells the woman caught in adultery; *neither do I condemn you*. And our current culture would stop the story right there and go no further. They're very selective about the Jesus they have re-invented. They want a Jesus that doesn't condemn this adulterer. But they DO NOT want the next sentence. *go now, and sin no more*.

Jesus inclusiveness is real. But it's based on repentence. Leaving the sin behind, forgiven and left behind, and a new life comes where sin no longer has bonds holding you to it. That's real love. Real love seperates you from sin and connects you in a new life together with God.

*VS. 33 And they said to Him,*

Who is the they in this verse? It goes back to the previous confrontation where the scribes and the pharisees are grumbling. The "they" are the folks who are grumbling about Jesus who doesn't do religion how they do religion. 30 *And the Pharisees and their scribes began grumbling at His disciples . . .*

We've got these folks today in spades. There are countless people on

line, religious folk, who have the gift of discernment. And they can find things wrong with everybody. Grumble grumble grumble.

The word in the greek and our english word are Onomatopoeia words. Words that sound like what they are. egongyzon. egongyzon! You can just see this religious scribe with a furrowed brow saying egongyzon. grumble-grumble-grumble. It sounds like what it is.

This group are the grumblers. And they're grumbling about Jesus who doesn't do religion like they do religion, so He has to be shunned. He isn't with us. He's a phony. He isn't part of our group. We're the real deal and Jesus is a phony. We have the gift of discernment and Jesus is OUT. Here is our "finding".

*33 And they said to Him, "The disciples of John often fast and offer prayers; the disciples of the Pharisees also do the same; but Yours eat and drink."*

Often fast and offer prayers. This is with regulated repetition. Similar to the muslim prayer rug ritual. Fasting is done twice a week, according to the hypocrite who was praying that Jesus said God didn't hear. We're over here being super religious following all of the traditions.

Fasting is only required one time in the Bible. Did you know that. On the day of atonement there was to be a fast. An affliction to your soul while you contemplate your sinfulness before a holy God.

All other fasting is not required. Many times it occurs naturally. If you're in the hospital praying over some loved one who is teetering between death and life and I show up and say, let's go get a hamburger. Totally out of sync with what's going on. Sometimes we fast and pray because eating is the very last thing we want to do in the situation.

But these folks had gone beyond the bible and introduced these days of

fasting, twice a week, which probably wouldn't hurt me at all for a while, but that's another problem. They had introduced required fasts for their religious program, outside of God's requirements. Religious rote.

If you wanted to be a good pharisee in the scribes and pharisees club, you had to fast two days a week. Religious folk in the religion of judaistic legalism would not just fast, they would fast and then make sure you knew they were fasting. Put on a long face and make it visible how excruciating your religious commitment is. Parade your fasting. Everybody needs to know you're fasting.

That's what's behind the question. Actually it wasn't a question. It was a finding. We're religious. You aren't. We're punishing ourselves to please God, but you guys are a bunch of partyers with a bunch of drunks.

We're the please God with our legalistic asceticism party, you guys are the hang out with drunks party. You definitely can not join our club!

Jesus will answer their finding with metaphors and parables. When the confrontation is complete, if we were in Matthew, we'd be in chapter 9, and by chapter 12 Jesus himself tells these folks they are a brood of vipers like John did, and by chapter 13 the confrontation devolves to the point that Jesus will only teach them with parables.

God judges these folks and part of His judgement is that clear teaching and clear understanding are replaced with parables so they can never understand. We aren't quite there yet at this point, although, here He uses metaphor's and parables to explain that His kingdom is not their kingdom.

His religion is not their religion. What Jesus is offering is not an addendum to their false judaism. Their brand of false religion. He is uniquely seperated from them.

They say, you're not in our religious club, and with these illustrations He's going to tell them, He'll never fit in their club. Their version of false religion. Listen to the Master teacher.

*34 And Jesus said to them, "You cannot make the attendants of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them, can you?"*

Fasting is inappropriate at a wedding. Totally. Show up at a wedding with a long face and a sandwich board on that says: I won't be joining the feast because I'm fasting today in order to please god.

The fact that these uber religious folk WERE fasting while Jesus and a bunch of sinners were having a celebratory feast just shows the gap of separation. They're not a little bit apart in their ideology. They're a million miles apart with an ocean in between.

Jesus and His disciples are enjoying a celebration. Matthew has left his sin behind and has begun a new life. It's a celebration! These long faced folk do not believe in any of it. They don't believe Jesus can forgive sins. They don't believe Matthew can ever be forgiven under any circumstances. And they believe they are on the path to god by wallowing in mournful legalistic self torture.

They're a million miles apart. And Jesus lets them know they are a million miles away from His kingdom which is the Kingdom of God.

But note, he doesn't say prayer is wrong. He doesn't address prayer at all. And He doesn't say fasting is wrong. He only says, it's inappropriate to fast right now while the King is having a celebration.

Walk into the King's wedding and tell Him he shouldn't be feasting! He should be fasting. See how that goes for you. Jesus is very patient with them, honestly. He loves them. But He isn't going to join their fast.

And then He says something remarkable.

*35 “But the days will come; and when the bridegroom is taken away from them, then they will fast in those days.”*

This is prophetic. And the word translated "taken away from them" is actually more violent than what we get in our translation. It means snatched away. Like if you were praying alone in a garden and soldiers showed up and arrested you and hauled you away. More like that.

This is the very first mention, prophetically, of what will happen to Him. He says, sorry, we're in the middle of a celebration right now, but these guys *will* fast, and it will be an appropriate fast, not phony like yours is, when the bridegroom is acosted and taken away.

And then He gives them three illustrations. Three metaphors. Three picture stories to try to give them a picture of their problem.

With just a tiny bit of explanation, these will become quite real to you. We're so far removed in the 21st century that we have to take a minute with each one to re-create the context that would have been totally second nature to them.

*36 And He was also telling them a parable: “No one tears a piece from a new garment and puts it on an old garment; otherwise he will both tear the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old.”*

Their garments were made from animal skins. Animal skins shrink and get darker as they age. And His point is simple. You've got a nice new garment. You wreck it by tearing a big piece out of it to patch an old garment. And when the patch you sewed in shinks, you've got 2 wrecked garments.

The original one is no good because you tore a big piece out of it. And

the new piece shrinks after you sewed it into the old garment and pulls it all to pieces. Both of them are ruined.

We'll look at the next illustration before we apply the meaning because they're different stories with identical meanings.

*37“And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the new wine will burst the skins, and it will be spilled out, and the skins will be ruined. 38“But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins.*

Same principle but working the opposite direction. They made wine by crushing the grapes and then they would pour that liquid into a goat skin.

They would skin the exterior off of the goat complete, cut the head off, and then sew it back up so that it became a big leather sack. Pour the wine in where the head used to be, add some yeast, then you sew that shut and let nature take it's process. It ferments and the supple leather expands while that process is taking place.

They would do that a number of times while it aged. But what happens if you pour some grape juice and yeast into last years skins that have laid around getting dry?

We had this at our house a couple of weeks ago. Tina had brought us some peaches canned in jars. There were four jars sitting there and after about 9 months, cablewy. Peach syrup all over the kitchen.

Jesus point is this. The Kingdom of God, the authority of God to reign on earth, will not fit into Judaism.

Judaism is the vehicle that brought us the Messiah, but the Messiah, the King of all the earth, is something different than their brand of judaism. The true religion will not fit inside the false religion.

Jesus and the religion associated with Him that bears His name, is unique. Different from all other religions, all other philosophy's, all other ideologies.

The gospel is unique. Christianity is exclusive and unique. No mix and match. Jesus said, *I am the way, the truth and the life, No man cometh unto the Father, but by me.*

Peter said in Acts 4:12 *“And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved.”*

This exclusivity is what drives the world crazy. It makes them deranged when first you tell them they are seperated from God because they're sinners, and then you tell them, Jesus and Jesus alone is the only one who can forgive sin.

Evangelicals are busy trying to be more accomodating to the world. We're trying to fix what Jesus tells the pharisees here is impossible to fix. We're busy trying to sew christianity into the worlds gaping hole. We're trying to pour christianity into the worlds dry old wine skins.

You can have your cake and eat it too. Don't go away. We can fix this. There must be a way to make Jesus fit into; Jesus plus. Add Jesus to your ideology

Jesus +     philosophy  
              academia  
              science  
              marxism  
              sacrodotal religiosity

Jesus says, you guys are old dry wine skins and I'm new wine. You guys are an old seasoned shrunk garment and if you tear a piece out of me and

try to sew it into you, you just end up with two worthless garments.

Now, caution! Do not do what we were talking about last week and make the old testament the old dry garment and the old wineskin and the new testament the new patch and the new wine.

The old testament fits perfectly into Jesus and the religion He began. Jesus completes every picture, every law, every righteousness they couldn't achieve, He achieves perfectly, for us.

Jesus doesn't replace the old testemant, He completes the old testament. If you have questions about that, please reach out to me. I love to have one on one conversations about this, or anything else. I do love you folks. Very much. I consider it a privilege if God allows me to help you understand some of these things that are sort of difficult.

The religion of Jesus isn't really a religion. It's a relationship, a love relationship with the bridegroom. It's unique in all the world. No other religion is a feast, a marriage, a dance, a love with God who purchases you out of sin, pays your debt, and then showers you with love and grace.

The disciples would fast when Jesus was taken away, but then He came out of the grave, and a feast has been set for all nations to enjoy with Him.

Sure, we sorrow along the way in this life, and there are times of fasting, but that's never the norm. The norm is joy. Deep seated joy that survives the long years and will some day be triumphant when we see Him face to face who has loved us.

The world doesn't understand that. They're blind to our love and deaf to our words. And Jesus tells us why in the final picture story.

39“*And no one, after drinking old wine wishes for new; for he says, ‘The old is good enough.’*”

At our house we've been drinking the same coffee made with the same brand of beans for 15 years. Maybe 20. I forget where we first came across it. But it's a french roast bean that I love. I always grind it and prepare it the same way. Stronger than most folks like. Once in a while someone will have some and go, my goodness, this is lovely.

Now if you come to my house and try to get me to change my coffee, there will be a fight. My mind is made up. I'm satisfied with my old standard. I'm not interested in change.

That's how we are isn't it. We're that way about things that satisfy us and that we are comfortable with. Politics. You're not going to change me. My wife. Nope, keepin' her.

And something about human nature and ego, if we're satisfied with the status quo, it becomes a deep seated stubbornness. I won't go to Patricks house with my MAGA hat on. Unwise. (I don't really have a maga hat)

And that's also why Jesus isn't going to waste much time calling pharisee's out of their pharisee-ism. That's why He's having a party with sinners. Sinner's know they need something different. Sinners who know they're sinners before a holy God are close. Pharisee's who think they're righteous are a million miles away.

They like their old wine and they aren't about to think about changing anything. After all, they are the status quo. They're the religious rock stars. They're the movers and shakers, the king makers. Why would they walk across the street to be like Jesus?

Jesus is lovingly teaching these pharisees, these ultra religious jews who are the leaders of life, the models of jewish religion, that repentance

means leaving their old life behind and following the God-man, who forgives sin, wherever He leads you.

I think it's safe to say, most of them preferred the old wine. They wouldn't think about changing. But every once in a while, you get a Nicodemus, or a Joseph of Arimathea who come to Jesus and count the cost. A Paul.

It'll cost everything to leave the status quo behind. The familiar. The homies. The club. The clique. Sometimes the family, the most intimate. But there are those who count the cost and say, it doesn't matter what it costs, I've got to have Jesus, and they cross over into life.

Saul of Tarsus who become Paul recounts the transaction, the cost to have Jesus instead of his old life;

*Ppn. 3: If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: 5 circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. 7 But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but dung in order that I may gain Christ*

Jesus tells the Pharisees, in our current jargon, you don't get to have your cake and eat it too. You don't get to keep your old life and sew Jesus in like a patch. Jesus doesn't mix with this lost sinful world. He is unique. If you want Him, it's all or nothing. You come out of the old, into the new.

That's a difficult message for our generation who think they have all the answers. When you insist on that message, the world says, you're a

hater. It was Jesus message, and it needs to be ours.