

Famous Love: Love Chooses

Series Introduction

What comes to mind when you think about the phrase, 'famous love?'

Perhaps Romeo & Juliet? Maybe a poem or a quote? Or even a movie? My bet is that most of us do not turn to the Scripture.

I want us to spend a few weeks during this Christmas season refocusing on the example that God gives us in the Bible about his view of love. Our primary text for this series will be **1 Corinthians 13:1-10**.

The Text: 1 Corinthians 13:1-10 (NKJV)

The first paragraph sets the stage for the importance of love.

1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. 2 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, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.

The second paragraph looks at the description of love in action.

4 Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; 5 does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; 6 does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

The third paragraph focuses on the endurance of love.

8 Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part. 10 But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.

This series consists of three different messages focusing on famous (to me, at least) messages on the topic of love. They have influenced my life and I pray they influence yours as well.

The Schedule

Love Chooses – December 7 (**1 Corinthians 13:4-7**) (Greg Mazak)

Love Wins – December 14 (**1 Corinthians 13:8**) (modified Rob Bell)

Love Does – December 21 (**1 Corinthians 13:1-8**) (Bob Goff)

Knowledge Objectives

1. To see a biblical view of love
2. To debunk common beliefs about love
3. To know the greatest lover of all time: God

Today's Lesson: Love Chooses

Greater than ninety percent of this lesson came from Dr. Greg Mazak's sermon, "Choosing to Love." You can listen to it on SermonAudio.com. Dr. Mazak was one of my psychology professors at Bob Jones University.

Introduction

If you asked an engaged couple in America, "Why are you getting married?" the typical response would be, "We're in love." **You fall in love and then you get married, right?**

Here is what most people do: Boy meets girl; Boy likes girl; Boy dates girl; Boy falls in love with girl; Boy proposes to girl; Girl asks, "Am I in love with him?" Girl decides, "Yes, I am in love, therefore I will marry him"; Boy asks father for permission to marry his daughter; Father asks, "Are you in love?" to which boy replies, "Yes"; Boy marries girl.

What is the foundation for marriage in that scenario? Being in love. **What determines whom we marry?** Whether or not you are in love. **What is the logical next step to being in love?** Getting married. So at this point, you are saying, OK, so what is your point?

Points

1. A biblical marriage is not based on being in **love**

Genesis 2 describes the first marriage. Let's turn there to see if we can find anything there about being in love.

Genesis 2:18, 21-24: 18 And the LORD God said, “*It is not good that man should be alone* [So what was the problem? Adam’s loneliness. So what does God do?]; *I will make him a helper comparable to him.*” [jump to **Genesis 2:21**] **21** And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. **22** Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. **23** And Adam said: “This is now bone of my bones And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man.” **24** Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. [Two questions.]

Was Adam in love with Eve? We do not know. **Was Eve in love with Adam?** We do not know. God took one woman to one man and performed one marriage ceremony. No mention of love at all.

A biblical marriage is not based on being in love because nowhere in the Bible is this made even remotely clear. If being in love were important, then it would be clearly stated in Scripture. Now, this doesn’t mean that there’s anything wrong with being in love prior to marriage, but there’s nothing in Scripture that says the most important thing to have in place before marriage is being in love.

So, you might ask, **what is a biblical marriage based on?** I am glad you asked. Turn to **Malachi 2**.

In **Malachi 2** God is rebuking Israel because they claim to know God and they have an outward piety, an outward religiousness, but inside their hearts are cold. **Malachi 2:14: Yet you say, “For what reason?” Because the LORD has been witness Between you and the wife of your youth, With whom you have dealt treacherously; Yet she is your companion And your wife by covenant.**

2. A biblical marriage is a **covenant** before God

What is a covenant? A covenant is a legally binding **contract**

Now, generally when you have a covenant, there are witnesses to the covenant. Look at **Malachi 2:14. Who was the witness?** The Lord. **What was this covenant all about?** “**She is thy companion.**” This contract is all about two people making an agreement before a holy God saying they will be lifelong companions together.

Definition: Marriage is a covenant of **companionship**. See **Proverbs 2:16-17** and **Ezekiel 16:8** for more verses that discuss marriage as a covenant.

What is marriage? Marriage is a covenant before God to be lifelong companions. You can do that if you are in love and you can do that if you are not in love.

Did you ever think about marrying someone you were not in love with?

You can. People used to do it all the time. Sounds odd, but that is the way it was done. People throughout history did not fall in love and get married. The way we do it is kind of a new thing. Boy meets girl, they fall in love and get married. I'm not saying it's wrong, I'm just saying just because we do it that way does not make it right. My concern is that we have many Christians who fall in love, get married thinking it is the right thing to do and it never really occurs to them that they are entering into a covenant relationship with each other before God to be lifelong companions.

3. A biblical marriage must include the **choice to love, whether you are in **love** or not**

Most of you know **Ephesians 5:25: Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her**

I am married and I am commanded to love my wife Julie. You say, "What if you don't feel like you are in love with her?" It does not matter. I mean, it does matter . . . she's here. And I'm in . . . honey . . . I'm in love with you. However, even if I were not, I am not allowed to say, "God, I'm not going to love her anymore because I only have to love when I'm in love." No, God says, "**Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her.**"

Does God ever command a wife to love her husband? Titus 2:3-4

Titus 2:3-4: 3 the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things—4 that they admonish the young women to love their husbands

Now, this is a different Greek word for love, but certainly a related concept.

Guys, when you were single, how did you know you were in love? You saw your wife and she was pretty. You found out she was spiritual. She was pretty. Maybe she had a heart to serve the Lord. She was pretty. Maybe she was talented. She was pretty. Right? And every time you saw her, what happened? All kinds of things happened in every part of your body.

From your head to your toes, when you saw her, life was different. You might ask, what is that called? I could call that biological cognitive emotional arousal. That is what we could call it. It has to do with hormones. We are not going to talk a lot about that, but I am just saying there is something going on there. Call it what it is. You say, "It's love." It's not love; it is arousal. I am not saying it is bad, it's just not love. Love is a choice.

You might say how do you know that? Let's go to the love chapter—**1 Corinthians 13**. Let's find out what God says about love and the idea that love is a choice. Again, I am making the point that a biblical marriage is making the choice to love whether you are in love or not.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7: 4 Love suffers long [Have you ever fallen into suffering long? You cannot just fall into suffering long. You have to choose to suffer long.] **and is kind** [Have you ever found yourself falling into kindness? You cannot fall into kindness. You have to choose to be kind. Why? Because love is a choice.]; **love does not envy** [this is a choice]; **love does not parade itself** [this is a choice], **is not puffed up** [this is a choice]; **5 does not behave rudely** [this is a choice], **does not seek its own** [this is a choice—What do we do when we "fall in love?" I want to meet her. I want to be with her. I want to spend time with her. Why? Because it is what I want. What is that called? Seeking its own. However, love seeks not its own. Love is not demanding—love does not say, "I have to be with you at all times." Love says, "Hey, what's best for you? I choose to do that." Love is a choice.], **is not provoked, thinks no evil** [this is a choice]; **6 does not rejoice in iniquity** [this is a choice], **but rejoices in the truth** [this is a choice]; **7 bears all things** [this is a choice], **believes all things** [this is a choice], **hopes all things** [this is a choice], **endures all things** [this is a choice].

Do you see what I mean? There is a difference between **choosing** to love and **being** in love. My concern is that we confuse these two concepts. I think they can overlap, but many times, they are distinct events.

I do not, however, want to leave you with the impression that choosing to love is easy. It can be gut-wrenchingly difficult. Nevertheless, it is the truth.

Applications

1. Before getting married, do not try to determine if you are in love. **Decide** if you are willing to **choose** to love.

Now, I know that most of us are married or have been married. Please know that this is not an attack on anyone's past. I have been in love with other women before I met my wife. I was engaged to someone else before I met my wife. We all have a past. This lesson is about today and your tomorrows. So, if you have never made the decision to choose to love your spouse forever—I would recommend that you do that today. It may save your marriage one day.

Here are some questions you can ask:

- **Do I make a covenant before God to be a lifelong companion?**
- **Do I choose to love my spouse forever?**

If you are in love, that's fine. If you're not in love, you know, maybe that's OK too. The question is: **Are you willing to make the choice to love?**

2. You must choose to love your spouse even when you **fall out** of love

I want you to think about how incredibly logical guys are when they leave their wives. It makes perfectly good sense to me.

Why did you get married? We are in love. Therefore, the basis for the marriage is being in love.

Why did you leave your wife? I fell out of love. That makes perfectly good sense to me. If the reason I married you is I am in love and now I am not in love, I am going to leave you. That makes perfectly good sense. Guess what? If you fall out of love and do not even like each other anymore, it is not an excuse for leaving. Again, this lesson is about today and your tomorrows. None of us can change our yesterdays. Do right right now.

3. You must choose to love your spouse even when you fall in love with **someone else**

Now you are thinking, you are telling me that you can fall in love with someone else? Sure, you can (with all of the same feelings you have for your current spouse). Guess what, guys? What are you going to do when you fall in love with a girl at the office? You may start to have feelings for another woman (and biblically, the proper response there is to run away from lust), but if the only reason you married your wife is that you are in

love, then adultery with another woman makes perfectly logical sense (I believe this is one of the reasons why there is so much adultery today).

4. You must choose to love your spouse because you made a **covenant** before God

Remember the covenant where God was present? That matters. **Why do I need to be faithful? My God.** The reason I am faithful has everything to do with my God. When I made a vow to my wife, I did that in the presence of God. I will be pure and stay loyal to my wife, not primarily because of my wife, but because of my God. That is what having a God-centered marriage is about.

5. You must choose to love your spouse if you are to picture the love of **Christ** for the church

Why does God love you? Does He love you because He fell in love with you or does He love you because He chose to love you? God chose to love you. What we have is a wonderful, loving, kind and righteous God that made you and me and we rebelled. We turned our backs on Him—through sin—and you know what He did? He chose to love us anyway.

What am I saying? Love is a choice. Choose to love forever. And whether you are in love or not, and if you are married I hope you are, would you do what you promised before a holy God to choose to love, not because of her or not because of him, but because of God?

Memory Verse

1 Corinthians 13:4: Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up

Next Week

Love Wins (we are going to pull this one back to the original meaning)

Famous Love: Love Wins

Memory Verse Review

1 Corinthians 13:4: Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up

The Schedule

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Knowledge Objectives

1. To see a biblical view of love
2. To debunk common beliefs about love
3. To know the greatest lover of all time: God

Today's Lesson: Love Wins

Last week, we looked at Love Chooses and we saw that love (especially as expressed through marriage) is an intentional decision to choose to love another. Today we continue our series on Famous Love with another sermon that significantly impacted my life. Rob Bell (the Nooma DVD guy) preached this sermon a few years ago. A few years after preaching this sermon, he published a book that claimed that this concept would continue in perpetuity. I will address that at the end of today's lesson.

How many of you have ever seen someone wearing a cross as a piece of jewelry? Have you ever said to yourself, "I wonder if they know what it means?" Many Christians, if you ask them what the cross means, would say, "Because Jesus died on the cross for my sins, someday I'm going to heaven." And I praise God for that answer. My question is, "What does it mean tomorrow?" And what does it mean two hours from now at lunch? Is there anything else that God's saying to us through the cross?

We're going to look at passages today to see how Jesus responded before, on, and after the cross—to see if there's anything for us right now about what God's saying through the cross.

Matthew

So let's start in **Matthew 21:23**. They question His motives (always puts me in a good mood, you?).

Flip ahead to **Matthew 26:14-16**. So one of His most intimate friends, who He has spent years with is behind His back negotiating how to sell Him out. I'm glad now days that nobody ever betrays a friend.

He predicts one of His disciples is going to deny Him, then **Matthew 26:36-45a**. So people question His authority, His motives, one friend is negotiating to sell Him out behind His back, and then in His time of need when He's saying, "My body is weak," His closest allies can't stay awake.

Then He's turned over to the Sanhedrin, the religious group, and then **Matthew 26:67-68**. His friends are falling asleep on Him; another friend is betraying Him behind His back; the religious establishment is questioning His motives and His authority, they spit in His face, strike Him with their fists, and mock Him.

Then listen to this section about His friend Peter in **Matthew 26:69-74a**. Now, one of His best friends denies that he even knows who He was.

Let's look at **Matthew 27:27-31**. They make Him carry His cross, then **Matthew 27:41-44**. If we were just to make a list of all these things—He's questioned, He's betrayed, deserted, denied, spit on, struck in the face, mocked, stripped naked, insulted, beaten, lied about, falsely accused, convicted, condemned, crucified, humiliated, scorned, pierced, bruised, rejected, hated, stared at, left naked in public to die, killed.

So what is His response to all of these things? **Luke 23:34: Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."**

Jesus' response is **forgiveness**—and the people continued to mock Him. Then **Luke 23:39-43**. Jesus' response is forgiveness and **invitation**.

More of His response is in **John 19:25-27**. So He's on the cross, He's naked and He's been whipped and beaten and spit on and crowds are yelling at Him and according to this passage, His thought is (since He's the oldest son), "Who's going to care for my mother when I'm gone?" Jesus' response is forgiveness, invitation, and **caring**.

After this, His disciples desert Him, He dies, and they go back to fishing and fishing is not going well. Jesus appears and tells them to go on the other side of the boat. They go on the other side of the boat and then they have all sorts of fish.

Jesus is brought face-to-face with one of His best friends in **John 21:10-13**. So He spends a couple of years telling what's going to happen and when it actually happens, instead of staying true to what He said, they just desert and they go back to work and they deny Him. Then He shows up and it is not, 'Let's even the score,' it is, 'You want some breakfast?'

And then **John 21:15-17**. And so, essentially, Jesus tells John, 'I've got work for you to do. I know that you denied me, I know that everything fell apart, but I've still got work for you to do because I haven't given up on you.' Jesus' response to everything that has happened to Him is forgiveness, invitation, and caring. Jesus' response with Peter is **restoration**. I think you can sum all those up in to one—love.

Jesus had choices. He was wronged and He was betrayed and He was deserted and He was gossiped about and He was mocked and all sorts of things happened to Him and Jesus had choices about how He would respond. He had choices about whether or not He would respond with evil—whether or not He would spit back, throw a fist back, or pick up a club and fight back.

And in every passage that we're given, He responds with love. He never once returns the evil that is done to Him. You never hear Him say, 'Just give Me time and I will get even.' He responds with love every time.

The Resurrection

And a few days after the cross, He rises from the dead. **Hebrews 4:15** says, **For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.** Jesus says this in **John 16:33: These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.**

Jesus is saying, 'I **won**.' No one had ever lived the perfect life and no one had ever been able to restrain and hold back from doing at least one act of evil, but Jesus was loving the whole way through—He did it.

This tells me that the cross was a transitional point from an old time (a time where no one had ever lived a perfect life) to a new time (a time where Jesus did it—where He won).

If the cross is just about getting me out of hell and into heaven, then I have missed some additional significance. Jesus overcomes death so now things are different.

Everything since the cross functions differently because of Jesus. So when somebody says, 'So-and-so got me and I will wait and I will get revenge. I will get even with them.' They are demonstrating that they are living according to the way things used to work. But things work a different way now.

Paul saw it in **Romans 12:21: Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.** Paul understood that every day we're faced with these endless choices of how we're going to respond to the world. **Will I respond to the world with or without love?** (Hint: it is a choice)

If I view things the old way, the evil-against-evil way, then you will continue to get revenge. I'll pull ahead of them, then I'll pull into their lane and then I'll slow down. Yeah, that will show them—they will just pull over by the side of the road and weep in repentance!

If I view things the old way, when my spouse brings up something from the past and hurts me and I think, 'What could I bring up to get her back? If I view things the old way, then I have to push one more button than she does. I have to hurt her a little more than she hurts me. But I can view things the new way—the way things work since the cross changed it all.

Public Spectacle

Now let's take this deeper. Look at **Colossians 2:15: And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.**

Now think about who was the public spectacle on the cross. Who was it? It was Jesus, right? Jesus was left naked in public to die. Romans 1, Jesus 0. It's a public victory by those who want Him dead. **But if you can kill somebody and they still live, then who wins?**

You killed me but I am cooking fish. The **public spectacle** says, 'You can do anything to this Jesus and He still overcomes it.' If you can do the worst public thing to someone and He still lives, then it goes from a public defeat to a public victory.

Let's put it this way, the powers that put Jesus on the cross, that mock Him, divide up His clothing, spit on Him, slap Him, beat Him on the head with a stick, pierce His side—those powers at that moment appear like they're winning. But in the end they lose because He just rises from the dead. The person who appears naked and bloody, as if He is losing, actually wins.

If this is the case, then the cross is God's way of saying, 'Love **wins**.' The cross is God's way of saying, 'Listen, listen, listen, I know what they did to you, but love wins.' 'I know what they're saying about you and you have these choices, but whatever it is, love wins.'

It does not mean that we condone sin; it does not mean that we brush over sin; it means that love wins.

So that when you're in traffic, love wins. Love wins—not the double-gun salute, no. Love wins. No matter what is done to us, love wins. Love wins at the next family reunion. Love wins tomorrow with the person four cubicles over who is a contestant for 'Most Annoying Employee in the World.' Love wins. Love wins and we have choices about how we're going to respond.

1 Corinthians 13:8a says, **Love never fails**. It doesn't and it can't. It's incapable of failing. Which I think raises a new thing—love always wins.

I know what you are thinking, 'You don't understand my brother-in-law.' Yeah, I do. Love still wins.

'But you don't understand my spouse.' Yeah, I do. Love still wins.

'But you don't understand my sixteen year old kid.' OK, I don't. You're right, I don't. Love still wins.

'But you don't understand my neighbor. My neighbor is of a different orientation.' Love still wins. 'My neighbor is of a different color.' Love still wins. 'My neighbor is of a different political party.' Love still wins.

Now, I do not know about you, but I need reminders of this—a lot. I need this at home, at work, I don't necessarily need it on the bumper of my car, but I need it on the bumper of the car ahead of me. I need it on the forehead of every person that I meet. This would help me; because I need to be reminded on a regular basis, otherwise I fall into patterns that are not love winning.

I ordered 40 "Love Wins" bumper stickers (just like the one on the back of my truck) for today's lesson and they did not arrive in time. They will be bookmarks in next week's Christmas gift. But even in that—love wins!

You're gonna get slapped, and you're gonna get beaten, and you're gonna get mocked, and you're gonna get spit on, and you're gonna be betrayed, and you're gonna have friends who put the knife in your back, and you're gonna get criticized, and you're gonna have people who keep falling asleep on you—even people who you really love aren't gonna be there for you at key times and it's in those moments when you need to know that love wins.

I say we need to speak this to each other—we need to speak it a lot. We need to call our friends and just say, “Hey, love wins.”

The cross is God's way of saying to us, in all of our brokenness, in all of our tendencies to respond in all of these different ways, that Jesus went through everything and more, and responded in love—it has been done. Somebody did it, they actually responded in love the whole way through. And He did it and God has sent the Spirit to live inside of you and me and we can do it too.

About that book . . .

Several years after preaching this sermon, Rob Bell turned the phrase, 'Love Wins,' into a book. He claimed in the book that this concept would continue for all time and that the ultimate result would be that God's love would win over those in hell so that they would eventually follow after God. The reality is that almost any theology taken to the extreme breaks apart—and this one does too.

Love wins forever for the believer. But love never wins for the unbeliever. **1 Corinthians 13** is written exclusively to believers about things that God is giving believers. This does not apply to unbelievers and that is why Rob Bell's theology of hell breaks down—because God does not work that way.

Memory Verse

1 Corinthians 13:8a: Love never fails

Next Week

Love Does

Famous Love: Love Does

Memory Verse Review

1 Corinthians 13:8a: Love never fails

The Schedule

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Today's Lesson: Love Does

Two weeks ago, we looked at Love Chooses and we saw that love (whether inside or outside of marriage) is an intentional decision to choose to love another. Last week, we looked at the concept that Love Wins—that God's gift of love to the church will endure and will never fail.

This week, we finish our series and our calendar year with a lesson that has been burning inside me since I put down the book—*Love Does*. Bob Goff is an attorney in a Washington law firm, the founder of Restore International, and the author of *Love Does*.

I'm going to teach today's lesson much like Bob Goff writes *Love Does*—in a series of stories. Let's start with **1 Corinthians 13**—specifically that second paragraph with the description of love in action.

4 Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; 5 does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; 6 does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. How many verbs are in that passage? 15. Love is a verb because love **does**. **Bob Goff: Love is a do thing.**

Engaging

Bob Goff: Either way, I'm with you

Calvin Whaley → "That's what we do"

Tim Fleming → "How can we help?"

Lance & Sherry Gregory → "Of course we are"

Love can be very messy. Love can be difficult. But love requires our engagement. **Donald Miller** (from *Blue Like Jazz*): **Something was broken in the world and we were supposed to hold our palms against the wound.**

Get your hands messy and bloody. Pour yourself into others. The Holy Spirit will fill you back up so you can do it again.

Find someone and tell her, "Either way, I'm with you."

Ushering

Brother Herbert → "Whatever He wants me to do"

Charles Alexander → "You can do this"

Bob Goff: We're simply the ones who show people their seats that someone else paid for. Ushering perfectly illustrates this concept.

Bob Goff: There's more room. . . . Love draws more people in. . . . Love doesn't recognize boundaries and never obeys the rules we try to give it.

Find someone and tell him, "There's more room (for you)."

Incarnating

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 exemplifies the Christmas story: **4 Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; 5 does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; 6 does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.**

Bob Goff: After Jesus arrived, God whispered to all of humanity . . . "It's your move."

Homeworking

Bob Goff: Love Does—so what do I do?

Tell someone, "Either way, I'm with you" & "There's more room (for you)"