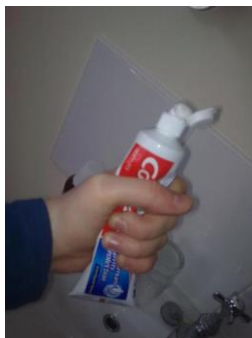


Good morning, Everyone! Pastor Andrew here and I'm so glad to have you joining this online Sunday worship as we continue our sermon series, "Love Is", which is based on the famous "love poem" written to the Corinthian church by Paul.

The love that the Apostle is talking about here in 1C13 is the agape love – this love is rooted in the goodness of God the Father, modeled in the sacrificial life of Jesus, poured into our hearts by the power of the Holy Spirit so that we can partner with God to restore lives for eternity.

The power of this life-giving, soul-renewing, and world-transforming love is exactly what we need in this socially and relationally challenging time because, when we are stressed, like toothpaste being squeezed out of the tube,



our character flaws quickly ooze out, unresolved issues are magnified, and interpersonal conflicts easily erupt.

This agape love is critical for our character development, social harmony, and kingdom mission success. We have been repeatedly saying, "Life minus love is zero." Dallas Willard states, "**The circle of our interests will inevitably grow in the largeness of God's love.**"

We want to take this opportunity to make space for Jesus and re-align our lives with God's purpose, to listen to the Holy Spirit's promptings and respond to Jesus as He "shapes us in God's love."

Paul uses 15 verbs in 13:4-8a to describe this agape love and identifies the concrete expressions of this love in action. So far we'd covered "love is patient, love is kind, and love is not envious." This morning we'll look at "**Love is not boastful or proud.**" Before we look at today's topic, I want to share with you a slice of my personal history.

My nickname growing up was “Andrew the arrogant punk” – a proud, full of myself kind of teenager; my friends in school and at church hated my guts.

After I arrived TO in 1974; I shared an apartment with my two older brothers and three other foreign students who were their friends; we all attended the same high school in HK.

I was told some time later by one of my brother’s friend that they were going to give me a pounding because I was such an arrogant jerk when they saw how I behaved while playing soccer.

Friends in my college and post-grad days mentioned, diplomatically, that because I had a certain air of self-confidence (i.e., my conceit) and intimidation (i.e., my aloofness) they didn’t think I needed any help and thus not invite me to join their study group or any social gathering like their weekly potluck. I wondered why they formed such a clique and missed out what I could have offered to the group!

When I first met Libby, my wife, in the summer of 1983, her sister asked her if she’d consider going

out with me, now guess what her answer was. “No way! He’s so arrogant.” Well, she knew I needed help and had pity on me. All ended well, of course; we got married in 1986 and will be celebrating our 34th anniversary this June.

So I guess I have a pretty good track record and I am qualified to say something about arrogance and pride! Of course, I am still learning how to love as God loves, and the truth of the matter is this: **pride and love can’t co-exist** because love doesn’t focus on self. But **in pride we are our own secret admirers!** No wonder William Penn, the founder of the Colony of Pennsylvania, wrote, “**A proud man then is a kind of glutton upon himself; for he is never satisfied with loving and admiring himself ...**”

So let’s explore what Paul means when he writes, “Love is not boastful or proud.”

The word “boastful” describes someone ...

who brags and has an inflated opinion of oneself;

who talks big and trumpets one's own accomplishment and abilities.

Since image and reputation is so important to this person, he/she would manipulate others, magnify self, and minimize God.

Whatever and however is communicated in words or deeds by this person, the purpose is using others to get what one desires, to receive kudos and compliments from others. While the person might not be the top dog, there is an excessive craving for people's attention, approval, and applause.

Now, we might not consider ourselves boastful, we are not socially obnoxious or loathsome and, in fact, for many of us we are quite religious or serving faithfully in our church or in our community.

But the early church fathers warn that, we are all vulnerable to this sort of vainglory or "user-friendliness" because when we have virtue, goodness, or done honourable acts of kindness it haunts us if others don't notice them.

So do you remember how you felt last time when you did something noble or kind for your parents, siblings, neighbours, colleagues, or the poor and needy ... and nobody even noticed, acknowledged or gave you any compliments?

Now let's talk about "the proud": a proud person is one ...

who is puff up and conceited,

who has a big head and an attitude of self-importance and superiority.

who is not aware of his/her own weaknesses or limitations;

who always has the right answer or knows exactly what needs to be done;

whose manners of speaking and acting would often come across harsh, condescending, or argumentative;

who craves power and prestige and wants command and control of one's own destiny and happiness at the expense of others.

Headstrong and stubborn, competitive and combative, other’s ideas, feelings, and comments are often dismissed, denigrated, or disparaged.

The early church fathers consider pride at the root of all other vices; St. Augustine writes that “first among the vices comes pride” which is love of superiority. Of course, some would consider Adam and Eve’s desire to be just like God – pride - is the essence of sin.

So as you see on screen I have summarized the essential characteristics of the person who is boastful and proud:

<p style="text-align: center;">The Boastful</p> 	<p style="text-align: center;">The Proud</p> 
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Big Mouth</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Big Head</i></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Attention, Approval, and Applause</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Power and Prestige Command and Control</i></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Manipulate Others, Magnify Self, Minimize God</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Dismiss, Denigrate, Disparage Others</i></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>User</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Abuser</i></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Want Others’ Worship</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Create Other in Own Image</i></p>

Well, they are really two sides of the same coin:

The boastful uses a big mouth to strut their stuffs to get attention, approval, and applause by manipulating others, magnifying self, and minimizing God; the person uses people and want their admiration/worship.

The proud has a big head and craves power and prestige, command and control; and in order to get what one wants the person dismisses, denigrates, and disparages others; the person abuses others and make others in his/her own image.

Now you and I can immediately think of someone who fits either of the description ... except us! Let's do a quick self assessment by answering the following questions:

- 1. Have I exaggerated something I had done recently in order to impress those listening?**
- 2. Have I made fun of another individual so that I might look better?**
- 3. Have I done something silly or outrageous so that I might get some attention?**

4. Have I used flattering words to get what I secretly want from others?

5. Have I belittled other's feelings and looked down at the other person?

6. Have I refused to listen to other's point of view and insist that my way is always the best way, if not the only way?

7. Have I lied or misrepresented other's intent, words, or action out of my desire for approval?

If we answered "yes" to any, a few, or all of these questions, we need to increase our love-quotient, for "love is not boastful or proud."

So how then can we grow in agape-love? Let's take a page out of Jesus' life and practice three practical lessons from Paul's teaching.

In the beginning of Jesus' public ministry Mark the Gospel writer tells us that Jesus is charismatic and sensational – he is lit and attracting big crowds because of His teaching and miracles – proclaiming the message of the kingdom of God, driving out demons and healing many. We read in the Gospel:

“1:27 The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, “What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him.” 28 News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee ... 36 Simon and his companions went to look for him, 37 and when they found him, they exclaimed: “Everyone is looking for you!” (NIV)

One would think that, like many celebrity movie stars, musicians, artists, writers, politicians, and preachers, etc., Jesus would welcome more attention, approval, and applause. But Jesus didn't ride the waves of popularity and fame; neither did he soak in the admiration of people and build bigger platforms.

In Jn. 6 we read that Jesus fed 5,000 and the crowd chased after him and wanted him to be their king, i.e., they were user-friendly because Jesus seemed to fit the bill of the much anticipated political, charismatic leader/messiah that would free them from the Romans and give them what they wanted.

Jesus turned the offer down: **“6:15 Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.”** (NIV) And earlier in Mark we are told, **“35 Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.”**

Jesus is neither boastful nor proud; He is not craving for attention, approval, and applause from people and He knows the purpose of His mission and His food is to do the will of the Father who sent Him (cf. Jn. 4:34).

Here we learn the fundamental heart posture of a humble servant. The antidote to boasting and pride is to **honour God in prayer and listen to what He wants us to do**. So before you begin any thought, speech, or act, say this breath-prayer, ***“Lord, it's not about me; Jesus, it's all about you!”***

The self is at the centre of the universe of the boastful and the proud; they are the objects of their own love and worship. Since we are created in the image of God and live as imitators of Jesus, to love

in a humble way doesn't mean we "think less of ourselves but to think of ourselves less" (cf. C.S. Lewis). Contrary to the performance based, self-promoting celebrity culture, love that is not boastful or proud looks outward and focuses on the needs of others.

The Apostle Paul gives the best practices of humble love in Phil. 2:

³ ***Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit.*** Rather, in humility ***value others above yourselves,*** ⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to ***the interests of the others.***

1. Do nothing out of self ambition or vain conceit: In whatever we do, are we drawing others closer to Jesus? And are we doing it out of our love of God?
2. Value others above ourselves: Are we using others to get what we want? Are we respecting people's worth and dignity as they are also made in the image of God?
3. Look to the interests of the others: Are we listening to the heartbeat of the other person,

finding out what's their pain point, joy, and life calling so we could empower them to become what God intends for them?

I want to complement Paul's words- "Love is not boastful or proud"- with the words of the late 4th century renowned preacher, Chrysostom ("Golden Mouth"), who said: "**Humility is the mother of all goods.**"

Let us practice humility this week for "love is not boastful or proud."