

1 Corinthians 13 – Chapter Study

INTRODUCTION

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III. Main Body 1:18-16:18

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3. Spirituals Ch. 12

Paul's instructions on the use of the gifts in their gatherings stretches over 2 chapters; 12 & 14.

Sandwiched between them is ch. 13, the famous "Love Chapter."

It's quoted at weddings, funerals, & in endless other settings.

Believers & non-believers alike recognize what the Apostle Paul has to say about love here as among the loftiest thoughts in all history.

The *literary eloquence* of these verses is nothing less than awesome!

Some regard 1 Cor 13 as the *ultimate expression* of language employed to articulate the greatest of all thoughts.

But remember the chapter & verse divisions weren't written by Paul; they were added hundreds of years later.

The apostle puts his eloquent treatise on love in the middle of his instructions on the gifts of the Holy Spirit to correct a glaring problem in the church at Corinth – *disunity*.

The church at Corinth was divided into hostile factions.

Their public meetings were *expressions* of this disunity.

Their gatherings were chaotic as everyone used their spiritual gifts without regard to any sense of order.

Though the manifestations of the Spirit were given *to each one* for the *profit of all*, as Paul says in 12:7, they were being used with a motive of *self-* rather than *Christ-*promotion.

The picture we get of the church at Corinth was that it was a highly charismatic church.

They believed in & used the gifts of the Spirit → A LOT! But it was chaos!

And the gifts of the Spirit, instead of bringing about *fruit* of the Spirit as they ought, were being *abused* & were *grieving* the Spirit.

Jesus said the Holy Spirit would come to make His followers more like Him.

Instead, the gifts were being mis-used w/selfish motives to reinforce their pride & disunity.

It was *charismatic chaos* at Corinth & Paul wrote chs. 12-14 to correct it.

In the very center of it, are his words on love – which has to be the motive, not only in the use of the gifts but in all of life.

Before we dive into ch. 13, I want to begin by taking a look at Galatians 5 –

Galatians 5:22-23 • ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

These are all the qualities of character the Spirit seeks to install in us as we grow in grace.

These are the *virtues* that frame our life in Christ.

At the head of the list is LOVE.

In fact, some scholars think that love is **THE** fruit of the Spirit, and that joy, peace and all the rest are the expressions or flavors of that Fruit.

We know the Spirit was come to conform us to the image of Christ.

In I John 4, we read that God **IS** love.

So it makes sense that spiritual maturity is best seen in our growth in love.

4. Love's Primacy Ch. 13

a. love; the motive vs. 1-3

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.

I want to take all 3 of these verses as a whole.

There's value in breaking them down by verse, phrase & word but if we do, we can lose sight of

Paul's *larger point* –

Which is that love has to be the motive-core for *all* we do.

You may have the gift of tongues, or prophecy, or have amazing insight into spiritual things.

But if your gifts don't flow from love, their worthless.

You may have the gift of special faith so that you can perform great feats of the miraculous.

But if what you do isn't shaped by love, it's nothing!

You can perform amazing acts of benevolence – even become a martyr.

If love isn't the root – there's no profit in it.

These words were a stinging rebuke to the Corinthians!

As they read them they realized that in the midst of all their arguing about which gifts were greater, they'd lost sight of the primacy of love.

You see, there was one thing that was *beyond dispute* & well known by all believers since the beginning of the church – Love was central!

Love is the mark and the measure of true Christianity.

15 times in the NT believers are specifically called to a life of love.

In John 13:34-35 Jesus said –

³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵ By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

Not by spiritual gifts or by charity or even martyrdom – but by love.

With Paul's words here, the Corinthians realized they'd forgotten this central, most important part of the Faith.

Read the Letter Jesus wrote to the Church at Ephesus sometime. You'll find it in Revelation 2.

He commends them for their zeal to maintain right doctrine & for their diligence to stay busy with good deeds.

But He threatens to withdraw His presence from them if they do not return to the most important thing – love!

First for Him, then for others.

The warning Jesus gives is shocking – He will not stick around a loveless church.

b. love described vs. 4-7

Paul knew some of the Corinthians, reading this, would respond with, "Hey, we love God. We love each other."

So he goes on to *describe* the kind of love he's speaking of.

It's not a "said love"—it's a motivation that *works itself out* in many ways to that bring blessing to others.

In Greek, there are 4 main words translated as "love."

Eros was sexual love. Thus we get our word erotic from it.

Eros isn't really love at all.

It simply refers to physical intimacy & pleasure.

Love is merely a *euphemism* when it comes to eros; it's more a love of pleasure than others.

Storge is the love of family.

This speaks of the *devotion* family members have toward one another because of familial loyalty.

Philia is the affection friends share.

This kind of love carries the ideals of devotion & loyalty.

It's the highest kind of love man or woman can muster on their own.

And it runs the gamut from mildly caring about your neighbor to the sense of committed partnership life-long pals share.

Agape is the highest kind of love.

Whereas the previous 3 loves require a *reciprocity* in order to work, agape is *unilateral*.

It doesn't wait for or depend on anything outside the one who gives it.

Agape gives without demanding or expecting anything in return.

It gives to the unlovable & unappealing.

It continues even when rejected.

Agape loves because it wants to.

A *mistake* often made when considering agape is to think it's *not* an emotion.

That's only partially true; it would be best to say it's **MORE** than an emotion.

Eros, storge, & philia also aren't only emotions. But they carry an emotional element to them, often times a *strong* feeling.

Eros is marked by *desire*.

Storge produces a deep *loyalty*.

Philia is attended by a profound *devotion* to friends.

These emotions *produce actions* which give evidence to them

The same is true with Agape.

Agape is a *strong desire*, a *passion*, to bless another for their sake without concern for reward.

And just like the other 3 loves, *real* agape *produces action*.

Paul describes that now . . .

⁴ Love suffers long and is kind;

Agape is *long-suffering*.

It isn't quick to take revenge, although it has the power to do so.

It's merciful & patient, preferring the wrong-doer come to their senses & apologize of their own accord than to get back or get even.

Agape remains kind even when the person shown kindness *deserves wrath*.

In 2 Peter 3:9 we read –

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

love does not envy;

Since agape's goal is *the blessing* of others, it can't be upset when they are by sources other than the author!

Since agape has no concern for its own reward or return, it doesn't resent when others are promoted or prosper.

Envy may seem a small sin in comparison to such things as adultery & murder.

So consider . . .

Cain murdered Abel because he envied him. [Gen 4:3-8]

Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery because they envied him. [Gen 37:11, 28]

It was the envy of the religious leaders that put Jesus on the cross. [Matt 27:18]

love does not parade itself,

Because agape isn't concerned about itself, it has no need to call attention to its display.

The moment we want a pat on the back or recognition for some good thing we've done, we're moving away from agape.

This is where the ultra-rich often fail miserably.

They give millions of dollars to some charitable work or noble cause, then issue a press release about it.

They *want* to be *seen* as *benevolent*. In reality their *gift* was a *payment* to acquire a *reputation*.

is not puffed up;

The word in Greek is *phoosio*; it sounds just like what it is – the blowing up of a balloon.

It means to inflate, to swell up.

It was used of the arrogant whose pride was based on nothing but their own lofty evaluation of themselves.

Used here, Paul means love isn't self-important, demanding everyone's attention.

⁵ does not behave rudely,

Because agape is *selfless*- its kind & careful, showing good manners at all times.

Hey, listen—this is something we need to heed because there are a lot of rude Christians!

They show little to no tact when speaking to our about others.

They're critical, mean, & loud. They interrupt & just blast their way through life as though now one but they exist.

Love isn't rude!

does not seek its own,

Paul lays bare the very core of what agape is – it's *selfless*.

is not provoked,

This is another dimension of the long-suffering nature of love.

Agape *isn't reactionary*.

Its behavior isn't due to what others do but to its own desire to bless & do good.

Jesus once told His followers to turn the *other* cheek & go an *extra* mile.

The context was how to respond to evil.

He said – don't *react* to evil *with* evil; rather always ACT out of love & what's right.

You can't defeat evil with evil; evil is only conquered by good.

thinks no evil;

This is an unfortunate translation because the words literally mean love keeps no record of wrongs.

Not only does agape not expect anything good in return, it refuses to keep a list of the bad things it's suffered.

We already know it's long-suffering. Now we learn it doesn't keep a *list* of all that suffering; treasuring up all the hurt in some memory warehouse, then returning every so often & taking inventory to make sure it's all still there.

In my years as a pastor, I've discovered that unforgiveness is one of the most dangerous & damaging things there is.

I've seen it destroy marriages, families, friendships, & bring down whole churches.

I've watched unforgiveness ruin the physical health of several people.

And I've learned firsthand that trying to get someone to repent of unforgiveness *can* result in becoming the focus of their wrath.

One of Jesus' most oft repeated teachings & warnings was on the necessity of forgiveness.

He said to be forgiven by God means being forgiven.

He went so far as to say that if we don't forgive – it's a sign we haven't been forgiven.¹

It's so important it's in the prayer He taught the disciples.

6 does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth;

Since the ultimate result of sin is always & unavoidably ruin & death, love could never take delight in it.

This means agape won't be satisfied with the *quick fix* or *easy way out*.

Those may seem like a blessing at first, but they're usually just a delay of loss.

Love longs to see others blessed & freedom is one of the greatest blessings of all.

Since the path to liberty is bounded by truth, agape delights in it!

7 bears all things,

The word translated "bears" means *to cover*, in the sense that it *doesn't call attention* to something, which is what the King James translators meant by the word "bears."

It means to put up with something in such a way as to *not turn* it into something it doesn't **NEED** to be turned in to.

Peter puts it this way in 1 Peter 4:8 -

And above all things have fervent love for one another, for "love will cover a multitude of sins."

Listen to what Charles Spurgeon says on this – it's really good.

Love covers; that is, it never proclaims the errors of good [people]. There are busybodies abroad who never spy out a fault in a brother but they must needs hurry off to their next neighbor with the savory news, and then they run up and down the street as though they had been elected common criers. It is by no means honorable to men or women to set up to be common informers. Yet I know some who are not half so eager to publish the gospel as to publish slander. Love stands in the presence of a fault, with a finger on her lip.

This is not to say we keep secret the sins that would disqualify people from ministry.

If those who'd suffered abuse in the scandals that have lately rocked the Catholic church had spoken up years ago when they first occurred, hundreds of other victims would have been protected.

Such sinister crimes as that have to be exposed, but lesser foibles of weaker believers ought to be carefully handled so as not to bring shame & disgrace, allowing the Spirit of God to heal & restore.

There probably isn't a person in this room who isn't thankful God helped them overcome some sin in private without the humiliation of public disclosure.

believes all things,

The words convey the idea that love makes a choice to look out for the good rather than the bad.

hopes all things,

¹ Luke 6:37 Matthew 6:12, 14-15 18:21,35 Mark 11:25 among others

Love holds the hand of faith so has confidence in God & His ability to work all things together for good.
endures all things.

Paul comes full circle, back to the long-suffering aspect of agape.

Love doesn't set a deadline.

Listen – you can't read this & square a negative or critical attitude with love.

Paul now changes gears & seeks to move the Corinthians off their fascination with the gifts onto the more solid ground of the fruit of the Spirit.

c. love endures vs. 8-13

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.

The manifestations of the Spirit are only needed now because we're not perfected yet.

But when we arrive in the glory of heaven, we won't need the gifts any longer.

Love, on the other hand, is eternal!

The love we have in heaven will be even fuller & richer than what we know now.

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.

We live with only a partial revelation of God now. But when we're gathered into eternity, we'll see Him face to face and know as we are known.

Paul now uses an analogy for how the present relates to the future glory & consummation of heaven.

¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

Childishness belongs to being a child. But the passage of years means growing into adulthood with adult responsibilities & capacities.

This present life is a kind of *spiritual childhood*.

Heaven is our *true coming of age*, into all God created us to be.

¹² For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.

The mirrors of that day were pieces of burnished brass. The reflection they gave was pretty poor.

You certainly couldn't have shaved, applied make-up, or tweezed by them.

Paul says that our current apprehension of the spiritual realm is like looking into a mirror; the best we get is an undefined image of reality.

We might see the general shape & some larger features, but the finer details are still unclear.

Heaven means spiritual 20-20!

¹³ And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these *is* love.

While the Corinthians were pursuing spiritual gifts, Paul says what ought to occupy their attention are faith, hope, & above all, love.

Faith is trust in & reliance on God *right now*.

Hope is faith applied to the future, that just as God can be relied on now, so He will be tomorrow.

Love is what it's all about. It's what faith & hope make way for – a relationship with God that gives purpose & meaning to our lives.
