

Lesson 6

Love Is...

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Overview

As Paul opened 1 Corinthians 13, he described the world without love. Without love, the things we say, the knowledge we possess, and the ways we serve are useless. Our words are little more than noise. Our knowledge is nothing. Our acts of service and sacrifice are worthless. Love is *the* essential in the Christian life. Now in verses 4-7, Paul presents the best description of true love that has ever been given.

Underlying it all is a growing absence of selfishness. This is the love of choice, that may be exercised in the void of sentimentality or warmth, but nonetheless, it is still practiced. This is the type of love that never gives up. It endures. It loves and loves and loves. It is the type of love with which God loves us. It is the kind of love God expects us to practice inside the church.

Love was a diminishing quality inside the church at Corinth. It was plagued with bitterness, rivalry, arrogance and condescension, and strife. The Christians needed to understand that their incredible blessings and gifts by God could become a source of division and strife if misused in an atmosphere void of love.

The Bigger Picture

Love is produced within us through our surrender to the Spirit. As we work to empty ourselves of our self, the Spirit through His ongoing work of transformation adds love to our life. It is as absolute necessity that we surrender to the Spirit's work. We must not diminish or downplay any teaching on love. It is an essential. It is a basic matter of Christian doctrine. Nothing substitutes for love.

The Text

NLT

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (NLT)

⁴ Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud ⁵ or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. ⁶ It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. ⁷ Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

CSB

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (CSB)

⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. Love does not envy, is not boastful, is not arrogant, ⁵ is not rude, is not self-seeking, is not irritable, and does not keep a record of wrongs. ⁶ Love finds no joy in unrighteousness but rejoices in the truth. ⁷ It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Explore the Text

1. What is patience? How would you define it as it works inside the context of brotherhood relationships?
2. How is kindness connected to patience?
3. Can love thrive inside an atmosphere of jealousy? Explain. What can prompt our envy and jealousy?
4. What does it mean to “brag?” How can this damage relationships?
5. How do arrogance and rudeness go together? How can we avoid these things?
6. Why do you think love will have difficulty flourishing in a self-seeking environment?
7. Why must we avoid being “irritable?” What can we do to eliminate defensiveness in our relationships?
8. How does keeping a record of wrongs lead to unhappiness and strained relationships?
9. Why should we never take satisfaction from someone else’s sin?

10. As you read 13.7, what enters your mind as you think of the type of spirit that underlies our relationships with brethren, our spouse, or other people in general? What are some things you can do to reorient your perspective around the things listed in this verse?

About the Text

These verses are one of the most beautiful illustrations of love ever given. This is love personified. Here in defining love, he does so by describing what *love does*. We may not see it in English, but there are 16 verbs used in verses 4-7. Of course, the immediate context revolves around the Corinthian problem of division and strife inside the local church. Love isn't merely a profession; it is bound up in decisive action and attitudes. John said it this way:

Little children, let us not love in word or speech, but in action and in truth, 1 John 3.18

It has been said that on our best days we wish to give this love and on our worst days we long to receive this love.⁹ Certainly we are captivated by the beauty of the love described in this passage. But, it feels as if it is just beyond our reach. So many relationships are characterized by a lack of love. We see strife, envy, people keeping records of wrongs suffered, rudeness, and actually rooting for the failure of others. Despite these things, we keep reaching forward. We keep striving for it by allowing it to impact how we communicate, think, and react. The descriptions of love in 13.4-7 draw us outside of ourselves and fill up our life with joy only God can provide. Love generates hope in hopelessness. It brings life back to lifeless situations.

I. 13.4-7: The Marks of Love

A. 1 Corinthians 13.4:

- i. Patience with reference to people. "Long-tempered," "Slow to anger," "to suffer long." In relationships, patient love wins out.
- ii. Kindness is the natural result of patience. Kindness is the practice of good will. It is gracious, serving, and generous. It is the opposite of being selfish, jealous, spiteful, and proud.
- iii. Love is void of jealousy, boasting, and arrogance.
 1. Jealousy is an unhealthy desire for what someone else has. It also devolves further when it desires evil for them. This can become very destructive. Jealously puts others down.
 2. To be *boastful* means to talk conceitedly to brag. Bragging builds up oneself. As much as we may detest bragging in others, we are so inclined to brag ourselves.¹⁰ Love is never proud.
 3. *Arrogance* means that you think you have arrived. "big-headed"

B. 1 Corinthians 13.5:

⁹ Um, p. 232.

¹⁰ MacArthur, p. 341.

- i. Love is not rude. This is “unbecoming behavior.” Using “poor manners.” The feelings and sensibilities of others are not taken into consideration. It is to be overbearing and crude. It is shameful behavior where one moves in defiance of social or moral standards.
 - ii. Love is not self-seeking. It is the opposite of selfishness.
 - iii. Love is not easily angered and does not keep a tally sheet of wrongs suffered.
 - iv. *Irritable* describes a person who is easy to be aroused to anger, often demonstrated by a sudden outburst of emotion or action. Love seeks not to be provoked. It resists becoming irritated, upset, or angered by things said or done by someone else.
 - v. *Keeping a record of wrongs* leads to miserableness. Holding on to things is the opposite of forgiveness.
- C. 1 Corinthians 13:6:
- i. Love does not rejoice in unrighteousness ... but rejoices in the truth.
 - ii. It does not rejoice over evil. It does not gossip about the failings of others. It is not happy when someone else falls. Love looks for mercy and justice ... even those who may be counted as enemies.
- D. 1 Corinthians 13:7:
- i. Love bears, believes, hopes, and endures all things. It holds fast to those it loves.
 - ii. Love is tenacious in the present and propelled by confidence in the future. This enables a person to live through every circumstance and pour oneself out on behalf of others.

Reaction

1. Why do selfishness and patience not mix? What are some examples where you have had to develop the trait of being “long-tempered” with your brothers and sisters? How did your loving patience pay off?
2. What is so dangerous about jealousy? How can we fight back against its encroachment in the church?
3. Is arrogance and self-promotion a problem in society? Explain. What are you doing to make sure you are not being overly influenced by the world in this area?
4. How can we become less “irritable?” Why is this so detrimental to the practice of love?

5. Why is gossip such a serious sin? How do we often justify our participation in it? How can we more effectively combat gossip in the church?

6. How has your love for another brother or sister gotten you through what otherwise would have been an unbearable situation?

7. Why is cynicism so deadly to the life of a church? How can love defeat it?

For Today's Christian

We must love one another earnestly. One of the primary teachings of 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 is that love keeps on and on. It never gives up ... even in the most difficult of circumstances. Peter speaks of this kind of love in 1 Peter 4:8. He says, *above all, maintain constant love for one another.* This is of supreme importance. When he says to "maintain constant love," he is speaking with intensity. In fact, he used a verb that means to "stretch out; extended; as a rope at full tension." This is a sacrificial love. It is practiced despite there may be an absence of sentimental warmth. It is love despite insult, injury, and misunderstanding. *Love covers a multitude of sins.* It should come to characterize all our interpersonal relationships. All of the characteristics mentioned in 1 Corinthians 13:7 should be viewed in conjunction with Peter's writing in 1 Peter 4:8.

Kindness is a much-needed virtue in our family, church, and community. While our world pays lip service to kindness through public service announcements and billboard campaigns, society glorifies vengeance, pay back, rudeness, and retribution. We see it in the movies. It is glorified by the politicians. It is being indoctrinated in our young people in our public schools and state universities. It is seen in the church through religious legalism which leads to arrogance and the trampling of others. All of this stands in contrast to Jesus who came to give rest, Matthew 11:28-30. Everything in the ministry of Jesus shows His deep concern for people. He constantly moved with kindness. No person who needed help was cut off. God could have had Jesus reveal His supernatural ability in all sorts of ways. Why did He choose healing? Not only did it reveal His power, but it also demonstrated *compassion* and *kindness*. It was a direct reflection of His love. May we come to practice this more effectively in our marriage, family, and church!

Everyone longs for love. Once you've experienced the beauty of what love is, you want it more and more. Especially if you've dealt with the real pain that comes in the absence of real love. I once read that

the best players in baseball typically are only successful in hitting the ball three out of every ten times. Ted Williams, the legendary hitter for the Boston Red Sox, only hit the ball 34% of the time. But yet he was obsessed with the game of baseball and lost sleep over the pitcher he would face in the next game. The joy he experienced of playing the game – hitting the ball 34% of the time – kept him coming back. We may not always get things right in our relationships . . . most of the time we strike out. But the experience and joy keep us reaching for it. Therefore, love should shape what we say, how we think, and what we do. Who will you encounter tomorrow? How can we show them the love they need? And what comes from it all? The way to be loved is to love. We will never know compassion or gentleness or patience if we do not love. We will never experience forgiveness until we learn to bear with others and forgive. As Paul says in Colossians 3.14: *above all, put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.*

Journal

To you want is most challenging about Paul's description of love in 1 Corinthians 13.4-7? What are some things you can do to begin more effectively practicing the positives mentioned in the passage? How can you better avoid the negatives Paul brings up?

For Further Study

Read Romans 13.8-10. How is love the fulfilment of the law?