

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 - “What Love Does and Does Not Do”

Introduction

Opening Prayer. Introduction. Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

If you have ever been to a wedding, there is a good shot that you have heard these verses read and talked about. And that is for good reason. These are truly beautiful verses. They give us a thorough portrait of what love is, and it is great to have a brand-new bride & groom and everyone at the wedding hear these words and be reminded of the powerful truth that it contains...

However, while there surely is a strong application of these verses to the marital relationship and they have their rightful place at a wedding, we must be reminded of the context of this passage. Chapters 12-14 are a section devoted specifically to the topic of spiritual gifts. But in the middle chapter of this three-chapter section, here in chapter 13, Paul dives into a discussion on love.

And Paul does this for a very specific purpose. The Corinthians had a wrong view of how the spiritual gifts were to be utilized. The Corinthians failed to utilize their gifts in love. Therefore, this entire chapter was meant to serve as a strong rebuke. As we saw last week, the Apostle proclaimed to this immature church that if they could possess all languages/knowledge/faith and give all they have away, but did not have love, then they were nothing in the sight of God. And the verses in front of us continue this rebuke that Paul is giving to the Corinthians.

In fact, I would argue that these descriptions of love found in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 are not random, but specifically chosen by Paul by the direction of the Holy Spirit b/c he had received report from Chloe's people and other sources that these were the things that the church was struggling with, in addition to the Spirit knowing that this is what the church of all the ages would need to hear as well. Andy Nasselli says the following about how these verses would have been received by the Corinthians: “When the Corinthians first heard these words, they would not have thought, ‘Aww, how sweet. What beautiful, inspiring words!’ They would have received Paul's words as a verbal spanking: ‘Ouch!’ The repentant might

pray, ‘God, forgive us for being so unloving. The way we are acting is ugly, but the way of love is beautiful.’ (“1 Corinthians” in ESV Expository Commentary, 343)

So, yes, this portrait of love found here is poetic and beautiful. But what really makes the radiance of these verses stand out is the black backdrop of the unloving condition of the Corinthian church. Any believer in Corinth that had a sensitive conscious would have been pricked with every description of love as it would’ve revealed just how unloving they had been acting...

Now, luckily, by God’s grace, I can say Cornerstone Community Church is not like Corinth Community Church. By God’s grace, I would say that we have a strong culture of love, care, and compassion. That was one of the first things that hit me about the people here when I first walked through those doors about six years ago. And I know that many of you have said the same thing and would feel the same way. However, even with that said, these verses confront us and any unloving ways we have in us as well. I know that has been true for myself. It has been quite convicting studying these verses all week. As I have sat with the text throughout the week, I have been confronted with the ways in which I fail to measure up to this beautiful portrait of love. The Spirit inspired Paul to write these words to simultaneously reveal the ugliness of our unlovingness and the loveliness of love in order to drive us to grow in these ways by God’s grace. This text is meant to challenge us just as it did the Corinthians.

That is the purpose of this text. **The main point of 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 is to describe what biblical love does and does not do so that we may learn to love others the way God does.** These verses describe what biblical love is. And perhaps somewhat surprisingly, the Spirit inspires Paul to do this by giving a list of 15 verbs. The action-oriented nature of all of these descriptions doesn’t always come across in our English Bibles, but in the Greek, each description of love is a verb/action. In today’s world, people tend to think of love merely in terms of emotions & feelings. Now, surely there is an emotional aspect to love. God has emotion, and as image-bearers, we too have emotions. That is good and right. And God does acts of love with perfect emotion behind them. But by having these lists

of verbs here, the Spirit is showing us how love is primarily demonstrated in action.

In fact, the way our passage is set up, love is known by what it does and what it does not do. So, this morning, we'll break our text into these two categories.

I. What Love Does Not Do (13:4b-6a)

II. What Love Does Do (13:4a, 6b-7)

And Spirit's purpose behind teaching us what love does and does not do is to challenge us to change so that when we interact with one another, we may love others the way God has so abundantly loved us. It is my prayer this morning that this text may convict us of any ways we fall short of this great calling of love and that we would be led to repentance of any unloving ways in which we have been living. Yet, it is also my prayer that in that conviction we would look to the only One who has perfectly loved at all points—the Lord Jesus Christ. And as we look to Him that we would be spurred on to pursue growth in these areas & be conformed to His image by His grace...

So, first, we will look at What Love Does Not Do. For the time being, we are going to skip over “love is patient & love it kind” for now and begin in verse 4 with the third description of love. We'll start by reading these actions that love does not do, starting in verse 4. “13:4b-6a.”

I. What Love Does Not Do (13:4b-6a)

So, here in these verses, we have eight actions that love does not do. Again, each of these descriptions are verbs in the Greek. They are actions. But specifically, this section are the negatives, meaning these are the actions that love doesn't do. Those things that are uncharacteristic of love.

And the first one is that **love “is not jealous.”** Agape love does not act in ungodly jealousy. This word, translated “jealous,” can have a positive or negative connotation depending on the context. Positively, this word could be used to mean “zeal” for good things. However, obviously, that is not the case here. It is being used in a negative sense. By saying “love is not jealous,” what is being communicated is that love does not envy. In fact, almost all English Bibles

translate this word as “envy.” This same Greek word is used in Acts 7:9 to describe how Joseph’s brothers in Genesis looked upon the favor Joseph received, and they burned with envy.

Envy is the idea of being angry over what somebody else has. It is not just seeing what somebody else has and wanting it, but seeing it, wanting it, and being angry that they have and you don’t. If you love someone else, you should not see something good that they have and get mad that you do not have it. That is a visible demonstration of a lack of love for another. B/c what it really shows it that you are unhappy that they have something good. And that is really a form a hatred... True love does not do that. True love does not envy...

Next, v.4 says that **“love does not brag and is not arrogant.”** True agape love does not brag and boast about oneself. It doesn’t parade itself around and go tell everyone how great they. It doesn’t draw attention to itself. And it is also not arrogant. This word literally means to “inflate” or “blow/puff up.” You can think of this word like when a balloon is being inflated. To be arrogant is to have a puffed-up view of oneself. If someone is arrogant, they will speak many braggadocious words that are meant to inflate their appearance. It’s all about increasing themselves! Q: These actions of bragging and arrogance are demonstrations of what? A: Pride. These actions are demonstrations of pride, not love. These actions are demonstrations of love for self, not others, which is a twisted/sinful/corrupt form of love, which really is not love at all. True, biblical, agape love does not brag or act arrogantly...

The next description of what love does not do comes in v. 5. It says that love **“does not act unbecomingly.”** This word “unbecomingly” speaks to that which is inappropriate, indecent, unfitting, and ill-mannered. Maybe this is something that you haven’t thought of before, but a lack of etiquette and manners is actually a sign of a lack of love for others. The Bible here is teaching us that to act inappropriately and indecently is not to love others. Meaning that a way to love and care for other people is to have manners.

Here is a practical example. Q: Ladies, when you are invited & go to a wedding, what is the one color dress that you don’t wear? A: White. Why? It is the bride’s

big day, and to wear white would draw attention to yourself, so out of love for the bride, you don't do that. It would be unloving to do. That is kind of the idea here in v.5.

So, when it comes to our interactions with one another, we must avoid all rudeness. And there are many people who attempt to just write this off by saying that they are a "straight shooter" or they just "tell it how it is," when in reality, they are just rude. And the Bible says that isn't loving. We all have areas in which our natural personalities need sanctification, so we cannot hide behind saying that is just our personality. We must not be rude or inappropriate. Instead, we must seek to be polite and well-mannered in our actions.

And this really just shows you that love can work itself in so many practical little ways... From children saying yes/no, sirs/ma'ams. To husbands opening doors for their wives. To siblings saying "yes, please/no, thank you. To fellow church members, not using sharp and rude words with one another, but instead using polite and gracious words with one another. And everything in between... This is not to create a legalistic list, but rather just to point out that intentionally doing acts of decency and politeness are biblical examples of love

Next, Paul writes that **love "does not seek its own."** Or to put it in other words, love is not selfishness. To be selfish means that you are entirely concerned about yourself and do not give any consideration to others. To be selfish is not to do all things for God, but to do all things for you. The Apostle states in plain terms that selfishness and biblical love are mutually exclusive. It is impossible to be entirely preoccupied with self, and love others. The two will never fit. You have to choose which one you are going to pick. Are you going to love God/others or yourself? Will you follow the path of self or follow the path of love?

And I think that you can see that there is a strong connection between all of these characteristics. There is an idol of the heart behind all of these. And that idol is the self. The Corinthians had pleased self on the throne of their heart. And the same can be true of us... We will have the flesh & remaining sin within us, which only cares about self. So, if love does not do these things (envy, brag/arrogant, rude, seek its own), then the idol of self is going to have to be dethroned. We are going

to have to stop worshipping ourselves (our likes, desires, wants) and start worshipping God. And a primary way that our vertical worship of God is worked out horizontally is by loving us. We need to worship God and not self, and only then will we be able to love others and not self...

But the description of what love does not do doesn't end there. Next on the list in v.5 is that **love “is not provoked.”** Love does not get easily angered. It is not irritable, annoyed, or upset. This matches with James 1:19, which says we are to be “slow to anger.” Somebody who is easily provoked or irritated/upset has a short fuse. They are not slow to get provoked or get angry; they are quick to get angry. And what we see here is not love does not do that. Love does not blow up over perceived offenses.

Now, in personal relationships, there are going to be times when you feel like you have been wronged by somebody else. You may have legitimately been sinned against, or perhaps you just didn't like something that somebody did. But in either case, you do not have the excuse to blow up. Whether something small or large was done against you, you are not to snap back and instantly respond with anger. If we are to love others, we cannot be short-fused and get easily provoked, but instead need to be long-fused and never respond sinfully to perceived offenses...

Next, v.5 states (at least in the NASB) that **love “does not take into account a wrong suffered.”** Different versions translate this slightly differently. Some translate it as love “thinks no evil” or “is not resentful.” Most literally, this phrase means “love does not reckon the evil.” It seems best to view this as saying love does not reckon or take account of the evils that are done to us. So, I think the NASB is a good translation of this phrase when it writes love “does not take into account a wrong suffered.” Love does keep records of wrong.

This phrase actually comes from the world of accounting and bookkeeping. To “reckon” something was to write it down in a ledger. It was to log it in the books, so to speak. And while accounts and bookkeepers need to do that regarding finances, that cannot happen in interpersonal relationships. When it comes to relationships, love demands that we not keep records of wrongs. When somebody wrongs you, either in a real or perceived way, you cannot take out your

metaphorical pen & paper and put it on the books to forever remain there & to forever remember what that person did. Love doesn't do that. Instead, love forgives. And a critical part of true forgiveness is letting the offense go. You don't keep dwelling on it. You don't forever file that offense away so it is ready for later reference during the next conflict. No, love does not take into account a wrong suffered...

And now, in v.6, we come to the final thing that love does not do. The Apostle writes that **love “does not rejoice in unrighteousness.”** This idea here is that love does not come along and celebrate that which is sinful and wicked. And this flies in the face of what the culture thinks today. People will say that in the name of love, Christians need to accept all lifestyles that people may live. They proclaim that loving others means that we need to give approval to the things that they do. But biblically speaking, that is just not the case. Very clearly here, God's people are being told that true love does not celebrate that which is sinful. Romans 12:9 says, “*Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good.*” So, agape love does not condone licentious living in the name of love....

So, these are the things that love does not do. Love does not: envy, brag or act arrogantly, act rudely, get easily provoked, keep records of wrongs, and celebrate sin. These actions are not loving...

So, that should lead us to ask, what does love do then? What does love look like? And that is what we will examine next. We'll now grow through these verses and look at the positive aspects of love. The actions that love does do... These state: “13:4a, 6b-7.”

II. What Love Does Do (13:4a, 6b-7)

Let us begin to go through these positive actions of love, starting in v. 4... And these first two go together. Paul writes that “love is patient, love is kind.”

The first defining action of **love** is that it **is patient**. It does acts of patience. Another way of saying this is that love is forbearing and long-suffering. This is the opposite of being easily provoked. Agape love isn't short-fused & short-tempered

but long-fused & long-tempered. When someone wrongs you, love says that you don't quickly blow up at them and/or completely write them off & cut them off, but you patiently continue on with them in grace. You patiently forbear with them.

Related to this, v.4 says that **love is** also **kind**. Love does kind acts. Kindness is goodwill in action. Again, the meaning of this word may actually have a different definition than we may think of at first thought. This word "kindness" literally means to "be obliging, willing to help or assist" (Zodhiates). Again, this description, like all 15 of them in vs.4-7, is a verb. It is an action. Kindness, like the rest of these depictions of love, is not just feelings & emotions. Kindness is the action of reaching out in goodness to others. It is to do well. It is to help those around you. It is to do acts of mercy and compassion. It is to actively seek out and do good to others. As Paul said in 8:1, it is a love that edifies.

Now, I think there is much to learn from this pair: patience & kindness. These are two sides of the same coin when it comes to interacting with others. As we are in relationships with others, love demands that we be long-suffering with them. We are all sinners. And sinners sin. So, get ready to put this into practice and absorb the wrongs done to you with gracious patience. You are long-suffering with all the wrongs & difficulties of interpersonal relationships. And additionally, you respond to those wrongs not with acts of short-tempered anger and irritation, but you respond with kindness. You don't return evil with evil, but you return evil with good. In the words of Romans 12:21, you do not allow yourself to be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. It is your Christian duty to have victory in that situation, and you do that by overcoming the evil done to you with good.

For example, imagine that somebody (spouse, friend, church member) does something rude & unkind to you. How often do we respond in like manner? We return insult with insult. Let me ask you something: How does that go for you? Probably not good! It just leads to a downward spiral! The only way out of that downward spiral is for somebody to respond to the other with patience and kindness. It is a general principle of wisdom & truth, according to Proverbs 15:1, that "a gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." So if you want the situation to get worse, respond with an impatient, unkind, & harsh word.

But if you want to honor the Lord, truly love the other person, and start to turn things in the right direction, you need to heed what 1 Corinthians 13:4 is telling us and respond to others with patience and kindness...

And you know what? If we do this, we will be following in the way of our God. Romans 2:4 says, “Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?” The same words are used in Romans 2:4 as 1 Corinthians 13:4. God is patient and kind to sinners. And this is to move them to repentance. So, when we are patient & kind to others, we are reflecting God & we may be used to lead others to repentance of their wrongs as well...

Well, if you would, please go ahead and jump down to v.6 with me. We will finish out the rest of this verse from earlier. The second half of v.6 reads that **love “rejoices with the truth.”** Love does not rejoice with or come alongside unrighteousness and celebrate it. No, love rejoices in and celebrates the truth. Love loves truth. And as we say, that’s Truth with a capital T. It’s God’s truth, which is the only true truth. When we see someone walking in falsehood & lies, we don’t come alongside that and start celebrating it. Rather, we get excited and rejoice with others when we see them walking in the truth.

For example, as I’ve mentioned before, it was my JC football coach who led me to Christ and discipled me earlier on in my walk. And when I had turned to the Lord and started walking in His ways, my coach shared with me how his wife was moved to tears to see that happen. She was rejoicing, to the point of crying tears of joy, to see another person walking in the truth. That is a great picture of what this reality looks like.

We should celebrate what God is doing in others' lives when we see them living righteously. When you see people here at church or at home following Christ in all the little things of life, love responds to that with rejoicing. We say: “Brother/sister, I am so happy to see what God is doing in your life. I am overjoyed to see you being faithful.” Love rejoices in the truth...

And with that we come now to v.7 and we have a grouping of four actions that love does. Scripture says that “13:7.” The point that these verses is to get across is that love has no limits. One commentator writes that 13:7 explains that “Love never tires of support, never loses faith, never exhausts hope, never gives up.” (Quoted in David Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 619). And this verse, while very simple, is laid out in a beautiful way and even somewhat poetic. This verse contains four positive actions of love, and I think it is structured to have the outside aspects match & the middle aspects match. Meaning, bearing is very similar to enduring & believing is very similar to hoping.

So, first, we can consider how **love “bears all things & endures all things.”** The word “bear” means that love puts up with stuff. Paul uses this same Greek word in 9:12 when he wrote that he and Barnabas were willing to “[bear] all things so that [they would] cause no hindrance to the gospel.” The idea of bearing is that it is willing to put up with anything. And the word “endure” is very similar. Conceptually, it speaks to being able to remain under something. There is a load and you are able to remain under it. It means to preserve, sustain, and bear up underneath (Zodhiates).

So, to love, you take these words & you apply them to everything! Love bears & endures all things. Love just keeps on loving. It keeps on keeping on. There is no limit to love. Love keeps on loving always until the very end. Love bears and endures all things...

And lastly, we come to the final two descriptions of love that we will look at this morning. They serve as the center & core of this final verse today. God tells us that **love “believes all things & hopes all things.”** Again, both of these descriptions are very similar. What Paul means that love “believes all things” is that love is not cynical. Love chooses to believe the best. When you see or hear someone do something, you don’t put the worst possible spin on it. Instead, you believe the best about that individual.

This does not mean that this verse teaches us to be gullible and naive. No, Scripture tells us to be wise and discerning. So, this isn’t saying that even when there is rock-solid evidence to the contrary of what someone is saying, that you just

believe them entirely b/c they told you to believe them. Nor is this to say that trust can't be broken. It can be. But this verse is teaching us something very important. It is teaching us that we are to "believe the best about others rather than being sinfully cynical." (Andy Naselli, "1 Corinthians," in ESV Expository Commentary, 346)

So, when your spouse, friend, or fellow church member does something that you are unsure about, you don't instantly think the worst about it. You don't instantly assume that they did that action for the worst possible reason. Without evidence to the contrary, you believe the best. You say, I trust that person, so I am going to assume that they had a good reason for doing that or at least that they didn't mean harm by that. Furthermore, believing the best means that we don't assume negative motives in people. If you talk to that person who did something wrong against you and they say that it wasn't intentional, then love would say that you believe them. This is what Scripture is teaching us here. Love seeks to believe the best instead of the worst.

And, finally, going along with this, we learn from this verse that **love "hopes all things."** Now, biblical hope is not just wishful thinking. It's not just wishing for the best. John Piper defines biblical hope this way: "Biblical hope is *a confident expectation and desire for something good in the future.*" Biblical hope is a confident expectation that God will bring about His good & perfect plans in all things. B/c of this, we can look to the future with a realistic optimism. Yes, things are hard. Things go wrong. But God is in control. So, amid all of our potential interpersonal difficulties, we can keep enduring b/c we have this confident expectation in the promises of God and in the fact that He is bringing about His perfect plans in all things. So, with one another, we keep on hoping. We keep on trusting. We keep on loving one another b/c, ultimately, hope looks to God. Love hopes all things...

John MacArthur summarizes these four "all things" statements really beautifully I think when he writes, "Love bears what otherwise is unbearable; it believes what otherwise is unbelievable; it hopes in what otherwise is hopeless; and it endures when anything less than love would give up." (John MacArthur Jr., 1 Corinthians, 355)

So, brothers & sisters, this is the portrait of love. This is love in action. This is what love does and does not do...

Conclusion

But, with all this said, I say a couple things in closing.

I want you to know that the only way that you truly live out these actions is if you have been born of God. 1 John 4:7-11 was our Scripture reading this morning. And in that passage, we saw that those who love the brethren have been born of the Lord and those who have no fruit in this area have not been born of God.

Therefore, you first need to come and receive the love of Christ as demonstrated in the gospel. You need to repent of your sins and turn to Christ in faith for salvation.

However, for those of us who have come to Christ, I am sure that you all recognize that we need growth in this area. None of us has arrived. Therefore, we should ask, how can we grow in this area?

Well, we grow in this area in the same way that we grow in all areas. We have to put off sin, be renewed in the spirit of our mind, and put on righteousness. So, as we think of this sanctification process in relation to our topic this morning, I want us to think of 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 and 1 John 4:7-11. First, we must resolve to put off all things that love does not do that were listed in our passage this morning. Next, we must be renewed in the Spirit of our mind by meditating on the truth of 1 John 4:9-11: that God loved us enough to send His son to be the propitiation for our sins. We must be renewed as we meditate on Christ's love shown to us in the gospel. And then, we must resolve to put on and do all the things that love has been said to do in this morning's text.

That is the way, by God's grace, that we will learn to do the things that love does.