

Title: Love Unleashed: Building the Bond of Love

Text: 1 Corinthians 13

What is Love?

A True Definition of Love

by Jack Wellman

Too many people believe and sometimes teach that love is a feeling or emotion. Yes, feelings and emotions are involved in love but the greatest part of love is action oriented. Love is a verb (what you do) more than a noun (a feeling). Many marriages, even among Christians, are failing because they value feelings over actions. I have counseled many couples who say that they don't feel the love that they once did for their mate. They fell "out of love" but there is really no falling out of or falling into love. We can fall out of bed or fall in the bathtub but typically we grow to love someone over time. This love for another grows from what we see them do for us and for others.

Now, imagine if Christ, just before the cross, went to the garden and thought; I hate this feeling, I don't feel like doing this, therefore I will base my decision upon what I feel. If that had happened, we'd all be hopelessly doomed to hell. The good news, of course, is that Jesus resisted and fought back His feelings and even though He prayed three times to have the cup removed, He was more interested in doing the will of the Father than what He felt like doing...thankfully.

Jesus displayed His love by willingly going to the cross and dying for sinners and those of us who were still His enemies and desperately wicked ([Rom 5:8, 10](#)). So we must preach that love is not dependent upon feelings and emotions because feelings are one of the shallowest and most unreliable of all human emotions. Instead, we must emphasize that love is a choice more than a feeling because feelings are subjective while love is objectively displayed in actions.

The bottom line is that love is what a person chooses to do, not what a person chooses to feel. God so loved the world because He felt like it? Yes, He does love us but that love required action and that included the supreme sacrifice of His only Son's life. That was the ultimate love in action. - <https://churchtechtoday.com/3-great-sermon-illustrations-on-gods-love/>

Today we will study [1 Corinthians 13](#) to understand love and then understand how to love one another.

Main Idea: Christian - You Must Choose to Love!

Unfortunately, 1 Corinthians 13 passage of Scripture is relegated to the "speaking in tongues" debate or "a wedding passage."

But when we understand what is actually happening here, we see this chapter sandwiched in between Paul's teaching on the spiritual gifts that God sovereignly gives to the members of his Church.

Unfortunately, the local church of Corinth was misunderstanding and misusing the gifts God graciously bestowed upon them. The gifts that were supposed to bring unity to the Body of Christ, were bringing disunity and discouragement. To be clear, the gifts were not bringing these negative results, but the misappropriation and misuse of them were.

Paul wants to correct this behavior by instructing them on how to view the spiritual gifts (chapter 12) and the attitude by which they are to administer these gifts (chapter 13).

Of course the underlying attitude Christians are to have in exercising their Spiritual Gifts is LOVE.

And so in this chapter, Paul lays out the careful argument of why a Christian must love. It is a choice! He has a three-fold argument.

First he talks about the necessity of Love.

Second he paints a portrait of Love, and...

Third he argues for the fact that love will always be around.

Let's take a look at His first argument...

1. The Necessity of Love (vs. 1-3)

1 Corinthians 13:1-3 ESV

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Paul starts his argument with a hypothetical question. *"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels..."*

He is not saying he can or that it is even possible. He is laying out an extreme argument here. In fact, if you read the rest of these verses, you will see he is using hyperbole (exaggerating for the sake of emphasis) to make his point.

What is Paul's point? "If I can do **ALL** these amazing things (Speak ALL languages, have **ALL** prophetic powers, understand all things, have **ALL** mountain moving faith, give away **ALL** that I own - even my body to be burned"), yet do them without the underpinning of sacrificial love - I AM NOTHING! Which is another way of saying I have no purpose and no significance.

Unfortunately, the people in the local church of Corinth all wanted to be **something** by exercising spectacular gifts like tongues, prophecy, wisdom, and knowledge because people without those gifts were so impressed with those with these gifts.

This is not love. It is self-obsession. It is self-focus. It is self-aggrandizement. But it is not love - at least in the biblical sense.

But we must acknowledge the necessity of biblical love. We must not only acknowledge it, but we must also pursue it. It is not an option for the genuine follower of Christ.

John 15:12 ESV

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

Christian, you and I have a biblical, God-directed mandate to love God and love others.

We must love the way Christ loves us.

How does Christ love us? Well, as an old song by Larnelle Harris puts it,

"He Loved Me with a Cross"

*He knew from the beginning
The price He'd have to pay
For my heart had gone so far beyond
What other loves forgave
I wasn't on that hillside
To see Him on the tree
But as my guilt was placed upon Him
I know that somehow He saw me*

*He loved me with a cross
He loved me with a cross
In answer to the call of love
He loved me with a cross*

It was necessary for my Jesus to climb that old rugged cross some 2000 years ago so I could have a right relationship with God and enjoy Him forever.

1 John 4:10 ESV

In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

And too, as His follower, it is NECESSARY for me to love others as He loves me.

1 John 4:20 ESV

If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.

It is necessary that you are loved by God to be redeemed. And it is necessary for the redeemed to love like God.

Said another way, if you are redeemed by God, you will love like God!

Do you want to know if you are a true follower of Jesus? How well do you love others - especially those who irritate you?

And not just any kind of love but a God-focused, others-saturated self-sacrificial love.

This kind of love can only originate from God Himself.

If you don't have this kind of love, Paul says that no matter what good, godly, or even supernatural things you do in this life, you are NOTHING.

This is a powerful argument for the significance of **love**. Life and the actions we perform are meaningless apart from **love**.

God's love is personal. He knows each of us individually and loves us personally. His is a mighty love that has no beginning and no end. It is this experiencing of God's love that distinguishes Christianity from all other religions. Why does God love us? It is because of who He is: "God is love." - Got Questions

Because God loved us first, we must love.

Faith like light, should always be simple, and unbending; while love, like warmth, should beam forth on every side, and bend to every necessity of our brethren.

Martin Luther

How well do you love?

Is your love for other self-sacrificial? Is it for all in the church or those you are most comfortable with? Is your love like the love of Christ?

How well do you love?

Review - Christian - You Must Choose to Love!

- The Necessity of Love

2. The Portrait of Love (vs. 4-7)

Have you ever wondered what love looks like? I mean, we have Hallmark movies for that, right?

Not so much!

God has painted a beautiful picture of love in [1 Corinthians 13:4-7](#). Take a look with me...

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 ESV

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Now, don't forget the context in which this portrait is being painted. This local church was a mess and full of divisions. Their priorities were more focused on self-exultation rather than humble service to one another.

And when you think through this list carefully while applying it to yourself specifically, this list can get **beautifully convicting**.

Does the average Christian exude love?

Is the average follower of Christ...

Patient - to demonstrate patience despite difficulties—‘to be patient, to remain patient, to wait patiently.’

Kind - to provide something beneficial for someone as an act of kindness.

Not envious - to experience strong envy and resentment against someone

Boastful - to praise oneself excessively.

Arrogant - to cause someone to be proud, arrogant, or haughty—‘to make proud, to make arrogant, to make haughty

Rude - to act in defiance of social and moral standards, with resulting disgrace, embarrassment, and shame—‘to act shamefully, indecent behavior, shameful deed.’

Insist on their own way - Demand things to be the way they want them.

Irritable - to be provoked or upset at someone or something involving severe emotional concern

Resentful - to keep a mental record of events for the sake of some future action

Celebrate wrong - Have great joy in an activity which is unjust—‘unjust deed, unrighteousness, doing what is unjust

Celebrate truth - Have great joy in the content of that which is true and thus in accordance with what actually happened

Bear all - Puts up with

Believe all - has faith

Hope in all - to look forward with confident expectation.

Endure in all - to continue to bear up despite difficulty and suffering—‘to endure, to bear up, to demonstrate endurance, to put up with.’

Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996).

This is what Paul wanted those who called themselves Christians in Corinth to look like. This is the character of Christ, and it must be the growing character of all followers of Christ.

After all...

John 13:35 ESV

By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

“If there is anything a Christian must learn in this life, is how to love.” - Unknown

And each word in this list from Paul is action-oriented.

Patience is an action. Kindness is an action, not envying or boasting are actions. Not behaving arrogantly or rudely is an action. Not insisting in having everything my way is an action. You get the idea!

LOVE is an ACTION.

When I think about the portrait of love that Paul paints, do you know who it really looks like?

It is a portrait of Jesus Christ in action!

And as Jesus lives in and through you, his loving character will be beautifully visible as well.

So, let me ask you this morning. How do people view the portrait of your life? Is it a portrait of loving as described in this passage, or is it more of a selfish portrait that exalts you above all else?

Your portrait reveals who you love most. What do you see?

Review - Christian - You Must Choose to Love!

- The Necessity of Love
- The Portrait of Love

3. The Timelessness of Love (vs. 8-13)

1 Corinthians 13:8–13 ESV

Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Out of all the gifts that God has given to His people, there is one that will NEVER go away. And that gift is LOVE!

Remember, the people of this church were elevating the spectacular “sign gifts” because those gifts would elevate the individual. What I mean by this is those very public, supernatural gifts would be very cool, and everyone would want to participate in them, thus causing envy and superiority.

Paul points out that those gifts are temporary but LOVE was here to stay. Look again at...

1 Corinthians 13:8 ESV

Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.

Now, first of all, there is a lot of scholarly opinion on this passage. But I'm going to tell you what I think this means.

Love will always be, but the language gifts, prophecy, tongues, and knowledge will pass away and cease. This is not controversial; everyone agrees that this will happen.

The question is when will these gifts pass away?

Paul answers this question for us...

1 Corinthians 13:9–10 ESV

For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.

The partial things will pass away WHEN the perfect comes.

Well, that's not very helpful! What or when is the "Perfect?"

perfect = τέλειον - pertaining to that which is fully accomplished or finished—'complete, finished (mature).

Now, I could spend a lot of time teaching you why I believe what I believe, but suffice to say, the supernatural language gifts of prophecy, tongues, and knowledge were no longer necessary when God gave us the completed New Testament Canon of Scriptures.

Remember, moving from the Old Testament to the New Testament age was a tremendous shift in thinking. When the church was born and God poured out His Spirit in a specific way. This was a fulfillment of God's prophecy...

Joel 2:27–29 ESV

You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the LORD your God and there is none else. And my people shall never again be put to shame. "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit.

And God, fulfilling the prophecy of Joel, and thus transitioning to the age of Grace (in the book of Acts), used the spectacular spiritual gifts to fill a void until the total canon of Scripture was complete.

But let's not get lost in the theological weeds here, as much as I would love to.

Instead, I want you to remember the main thing Paul drives at in this passage. He is addressing their heart.

As important as these gifts were to the newborn church and her maturation, they paled in comparison to the grand and glorious act of loving one another like Christ has loved us.

Paul says, in verse 11 that he used to be a child and he acted accordingly.

1 Corinthians 13:11 ESV

When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways.

The church, in the time of Acts was a child, but now she was maturing, and she needs to stop acting like a child and instead needs to grow up!

1 Corinthians 13:12 ESV

For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

"For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face." In the ancient world, mirrors were made of polished metal and offered only a dim and imperfect reflection. This metaphor underscores the incomplete and indirect nature of spiritual knowledge and revelation at the time of Paul's writing. The phrase "face to face," however, evokes an image of direct and unobstructed vision, suggesting a complete and perfect understanding. When arguing for the completed canon as the "perfect," this transition from indirect to direct vision can symbolize moving from the era of partial revelation (through prophecies and various spiritual gifts) to the era of complete revelation through the Scriptures.

"Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known." This part emphasizes the transition from partial knowledge to full understanding. The argument here is that the completion of the biblical canon provides a full, coherent revelation of God's character, will, and redemptive plan for humanity, akin to the comprehensive knowledge God has of us.

Admittedly, this will be fully realized when we literally see Christ face to face. But until then, we can taste and see that God is good by feasting on the bread of life.

Matthew 4:4 ESV

But he answered, "It is written, " 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.' "

The church in Corinth should not have been focused on the gifts as much as they should focus on their love, support, and encouragement of one another.

Love is never going away, so we might as well get good at it.

1 Corinthians 13:13 ESV

So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Why is love the greatest?

Because, friends. When we get to our final destination, we will no longer need faith because it will be sight.

We will no longer need hope because all our hopes will be fulfilled.

The only thing we will have left of this triad is LOVE. This is why Paul can say so confidently that the greatest of these is love.

And we will love God and one another for all eternity!

Paul wants the church at Corinth to not just have a head-knowledge of love, but that love permeates everything they do.

Love is all-inclusive. When you love, every part of you is involved. You cannot love in sections of your personality; love is always totalitarian in its demands and responses.

The Final Perseverance of the Saints, 185

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones

In your life, do you act as if biblical love is the GREATEST?

I don't think I do. I think knowledge, or work, or the Spiritual disciplines are the most important because I perceive that these actions are the most important to get me to grow in Christlikeness.

Paul, on the other hand, says the most important action we can be involved in is love. The greatest of these is love.

Wow!

Everything we do and everything we think and even say must be rooted in biblical love.

How well do you love? Is biblical love the greatest of these in your life?

Review - Christian - You Must Choose to Love!

- The Necessity of Love
- The Portrait of Love
- The Timelessness of Love

Conclusion

How can we love well in this church?

First of all, realize that it's easy to choose to love when you realize how God chooses to love you.

Secondly, what if God gave us a venue by which we could effectively and INTENTIONALLY love one another here at church?

He has! Praise the Lord. This is why God brought Pastor Larry here. He is going to help organize this body to love one another tangibly, purposefully, and intentionally.

How? How best is this accomplished?

Come back next week, and we will give you an idea of how this will best be accomplished.

Connection Group Reflection Questions

1. What did we learn about God from the text or Sunday's message?
2. What did we learn about the importance of biblical love from the text or Sunday's message?
3. What can you do to improve in the area loving others?
4. What does God desire from us at ABC, or you personally as an individual in the area of biblical love?
5. If you or we as a church were to practically apply what we learned from this passage or message, what would that look like? What changes will we or you make this week?
6. Summarize what you learned in one sentence, and how does God want you to respond in obedience?
7. This week, who would benefit from this truth, and who will you share it with?