

1 Corinthians 13:4 What is Love? Pt 2

A sermon delivered at Calvary Chapel DC Metro
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We're continuing our look at the famous chapter on love in the Bible. 1 Corinthians 13 has been quoted and framed and printed in greeting cards since before there was ever a Hallmark store.

But if we can push back the tendency to hear like a romantic poem and see what it's really saying, hopefully we'll be challenged and encouraged. Challenged to grow and become more loving as we grade ourselves on this scale, but also encouraged as we remember that no matter how much we fail to love this way, this is how God always loves us. Remember, remember, remember church – 1 John 4:10 – we love BECAUSE He first loved us – first we receive and experience this love THEN we show it to others. If you ever find it hard to show love, take a step back and consider the love you are being shown.

Let's go back and read through the passage again so we have it fresh in our minds. We're going to consider two more aspects of love this morning, but first we'll talk about the fact that it never fails.

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.

4 Love suffers long *and* is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; 5 does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; 6 does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.
8 Love never fails.

"Love never fails" – that's a very dramatic statement. But what does it mean? Well, the word there means something like, "to fall away" – another Scripture (Isaiah 40:7-8) says "the grass withers and the flowers fall" – the same word used here to describe love is used to describe the flower that bursts forth, blooms beautifully, and then gets old and falls off the plant.

Now, I like to buy my wife flowers. I suspect most of you men do. But when I buy them, I want to them to last. I want to look good when I hand them to her, but I also want them to stay looking fresh and smelling fragrant for DAYS, hopefully a week or more, so every time she sees them I keep racking up the points.

But I've bought flowers before and had them wilt and die with two or three days - they were just old when I bought them. And when that happens, honestly, I'm like hey! I spent good money on these things, what's up!?! So, I try to be particular when I buy flowers – I look for a bunch that has some that are open right now, some that are just about to open and some that are going to open in a few days, so I prolong things as much as possible.

But you know what? Even the best bouquet will still only last so long. All flowers, no matter how beautiful, how fragrant, or how well chosen, will eventually fail – whether on the plant or in the vase – their season comes to an end.

But love is different, it's a flower perpetually in blossom. We will be loved and we will be loving for all of eternity. Love, unlike the flower, never fails. Or, some of your Bibles may say love never ends. That's not true of other things though:

But whether *there are* prophecies, they will fail; whether *there are* tongues, they will cease; whether *there is* knowledge, it will vanish away. 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.

This side of heaven, in this season, we need prophecies and tongues and gifts of knowledge and wisdom, they help us to know God; but as spectacular and miraculous as they are, they're limited, they don't give us all the answers or satisfy all our longings. A day is coming though, "when that which is perfect has come" – when we are with God and everything is exactly as it's supposed to be, and we won't need supernatural gifts, because we will be there with God face to face.

In order to really drive the point home Paul takes it up from a few more angles, he says:

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.

There were things I did growing up that I don't do today. Well, there are spiritual things we do here on earth that we won't do in heaven.

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.

We've got some questions down here that we don't have all the answers for. We understand a little bit about God and about the life after this one, but we don't have the full picture – it's fuzzy. But one day we will. And one of the things you can count on is that love will be just as important then and there as it is here and now.

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

So, you see the value and supreme importance of love. The whole point of this chapter is to say that spiritual gifts will one day pass away, they won't be necessary anymore, but we will always have love – and that's why we should value it more than anything else.

But, love is a big concept – and we have lots of ideas about what it is like, so God generously, and wisely, defines it for us here too.

Last week we spent our entire time together just considering the opening line: that love is patient, or that it suffers long. And we said that's kind of an odd way to start a description of love, but when you think about it, it's so appropriate, isn't it? If you're going to love someone you're going to have to go through some difficult times and not give up.

And then, on top of that, we saw that love is kind. Not just patient, but simultaneously kind. This morning we get to add two more ideas to that. So look back at verse four with me where we read, “[love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up;](#)”

That sounds like two separate ideas – envy and boasting, but they're not. They're actually closely related, and in different ways they both help us understand the opposite of love.

I'll show you what I mean. If you were to quiz most people about opposites what would they say? If you were to say hot, they would respond cold. If you were to say up, they would say down. If were to say open, they would say shut. If you said happy, they would say sad. And if you said love, they would say, hate.

But is that true? Is hate the opposite of love? I would say no. It would work, but it's really not the best match. No the opposite of love, is selfishness.

When you love someone your time, thoughts, and attention are focused on them. The opposite of that is to be self-absorbed – to spend your time, thoughts, and attention on your own personal desires.

It started all the way back in the Garden of Eden with the first sin. The serpent tempted Eve to think more of herself than about God and all He had done for her. God had created a perfect world, and had created her and Adam, and placed them in it, and He said, here you go, use it. Rule it. Explore it. And you can do pretty much anything you like, but don't eat from that one tree – the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

But then Satan came along and tempted her – he said, ‘you know God is just trying to keep something from you – something you ought to have. Go, check it out. You'll see.’ And she did. And Adam did too. They chose themselves over God and sin entered the world.

But pay attention here – they didn't hate God. They weren't filled with rage against Him, they didn't talk bad about Him. They didn't do it to be mean. They didn't go looking for Him and challenge Him to a fight. They just ignored God and did what they wanted. Hate isn't the opposite of love, selfishness is.

When Jesus came, and the religious leaders asked Him – what’s the greatest commandment? What did He say? He said, “It’s to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love your neighbor like yourself.” It’s to reverse the self-centeredness of sin.

Every waking moment there is a competition going on between me and God and everyone else in my life and I have to choose – who am I going to give my attention and focus too?

All too often, I win. I think too little of myself and what I have and therefore I envy you, or I think too much of myself and I boast.

Let’s talk about envy first. Envy occurs when I see what you have and I want it. I think ‘if only I could have what you have or do what you do, then I would be content.’ And that’s not true. It’s just not. You don’t find happiness by following envy, you find fights, broken relationships, frustrations.

How many of you have ever lost a friendship over envy? Most of us have.

And it can easily go farther than that. Turn with me in your Bibles to James 4 and look at what we learn about envy:

1 Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask.

That’s not to say we can just ask God for whatever we want. So it goes on:

3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.

We pray selfishly at times. Once again, thinking too much of my self and my desires, which is the opposite of love.

4 Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. 5 Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, “The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously”? 6 But He gives more grace. Therefore He says:

*“God resists the proud,
But gives grace to the humble.”*

Bottom line – the Scriptures are telling us we need to be content in God and not go lusting after, or envying, everything else that we see. And let me make the connection for you – why does He call us adulterers and adulteresses here?

Well, remember that Jesus said if you look on a woman to lust after her, it's like you've committed adultery with her. All you lacked was the time and opportunity to get away with it. You've already agreed in your mind that you'd like to, you just want to avoid any of the consequences.

Well, now we're taking the same idea and applying it to the rest of life, not just sexual relationships. When we go envying what other people have, we're basically saying that God isn't doing enough for us. Our hearts are wandering away from Him, just like the heart of an adulterous spouse wanders from it's true love.

But, as we've read in 1 Corinthians 13 – love doesn't envy. It doesn't think it needs something else to be content, it's content where it is with what it has.

Love doesn't think too little of itself, but it also doesn't think too much of itself.

Remember, 4 “Love suffers long *and* is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up;”

In other words, love is centered on others, not me. That's really the best way I can say it. It doesn't need to be the hero or the champion; it's OK with being itself.

Will Rogers was one of the best-known celebrities in America in the 1920s and 30's. I came across a quote of his once that I've kept for years. He said, “We can't all be heroes, some one has to stand on the curb and clap as they go by.”

That's the idea – to be able to say, “I don't need to be the one everyone is clapping for, I'm content to do the clapping. I don't need to parade myself or be puffed up.”

But that's a challenge for us, isn't it? Because there are a lot of us who really want to know we've done a good job. We want someone to tell us we're OK, or that we're doing it right. And if we don't hear it, we'll go looking for it - slipping things into conversation and searching for confirmation in response. Or we become that person that only ever wants to talk about their selves. That's not love, it's self-centered.

Think about something with me – how do you think Jesus introduced Himself to people? What do you think would have been on his business card or signature line? He was the Savior of the World, and yet He said He had no place to lay His head, no place to call home.

Isaiah 53 prophesying in advance of what Jesus would be like, says:

*Vs 2: He has no form or comeliness;
And when we see Him,
There is no beauty that we should desire Him.
3 He is despised and rejected by men,
A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.*

And we hid, as it were, *our* faces from Him;
He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

...7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted,
Yet He opened not His mouth;
He was led as a lamb to the slaughter,
And as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
So He opened not His mouth.

Jesus had everything in the world to boast about, but He didn't. He didn't need to. He knew Who He was and that was enough, He didn't go and put Himself on parade.

So what about us? How are you doing? 'Cause I know I'm failing pretty miserably.

But now that we understand it a little more – now that we've taken a few minutes to really focus on it all, consider your life. Are you prone to think too little of yourself and think you need more? Or, are you prone to think too much of yourself and think people need to take notice? Do you complain about what you need? Or, do you get frustrated that people don't notice?

Folks, we're all guilty of one or the other. If you were perfect, God wouldn't have to tell us these things. But He does, because we're not.

It's OK to recognize your tendency because then you can fight against it. And truthfully, we're all probably a little of both – there are times we feel like we need more and times we need people to appreciate what we have. But it doesn't matter which pit you're in, the way out is to focus God and to focus on others – to get our eyes, our thoughts, off ourselves and to be occupied with the needs, accomplishments, and struggles of others.

I like the sense of balance that we find in Proverbs – can you turn there with me? This is one of those Scriptures that you want to have marked so you can find it again.

In Proverbs Chapter 30 we find the wisdom of a man named Agur. He asks God for two things starting in verse 7:

7 Two *things* I request of You
(Deprive me not before I die):
8 Remove falsehood and lies far from me;
Give me neither poverty nor riches—
Feed me with the food allotted to me;
9 Lest I be full and deny *You*,
And say, "Who is the LORD?"
Or lest I be poor and steal,
And profane the name of my God.

That's the kind of balance that enables us to love. We have just enough, but not too much, and we're able to think about others instead of focusing on ourselves. No envy. No boasting.

How do we get there? The answer is: by focusing on all that we have from God and considering His simple mercies toward us each day: "Two things I request *of You*." Folks, our lives are full of heartache and hardships – I'm not going to deny that. But it doesn't change the fact that God is still good.

We sing the song based on the experiences of Job:

"Blessed be Your name, in the land that is plentiful,
Where the streams of abundance flow, blessed be Your name.

Blessed be your name when I'm found in the desert place,
When I walk through the wilderness, blessed be Your name."

You give and take away,
You give and take away,
My heart will choose to say,
Lord blessed be your name.

Blessed be the name of the Lord when I'm fat and full and my cup is running over, when
I've got an armload of things to boast about,

And blessed be the name of the Lord when my envy feels so justifiable because I have
nothing and everyone else has it so good.

Blessed be the name of the Lord.

That's love – it's a focus on Him instead of me, which also leads me to love others.

And that's the goal my friends.

Let's pray.