

**Text:** 1 Corinthians 13:1-7

**Title:** The Love Chapter—and Way More

**Truth:** True love toward others has concrete characteristics.

**Date/Location:** January 24, 2021 at FBC

## Introduction

Chapter 13 sits between chapters 12 and 14 which are both clearly about spiritual gifts. It must not be missed that chapter 13 is as well—about the excellent way to use the gifts of God’s Spirit (this message primarily), and the abiding nature of love as over against the temporary gifts (next message on 13:8-13).

### I. The Absence of Love, v. 1-3

A. Verses 1-3 together make one main point: even if you do all kinds of religious works, they will amount to absolutely nothing if they are not done in and with love. Love is that interest in others that cherishes them, that has sympathetic concern and affection for them, and is desirous of their true well-being. Love toward God seeks to honor and obey Him.

B. Ponder the verses:

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels		I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.
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.
And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned		It profits me nothing.

C. Think of the various acts in the left column. Included are things like speaking with all kinds of languages, even angelic ones, and being a powerful proclaimer of God’s truth and knowing all revelation and having the gift of perfect faith to be able to have God move even large masses of earth, and giving everything to the poor, and submitting to becoming a martyr for God. These are tremendous things. Today, only the last two items are even possible, but hypothetically we can imagine them all.

- D. There are several implications of this basic proposition that we can explore. One is that good works can only be truly good if they are done in love. We can piece together from other Scriptures that it was God who loved us first and Who has therefore shown us what love is and how to love (1 John 4:19). He has poured out that love into our hearts (Romans 5:5) so we can exercise it toward God and toward others. Therefore, good works are those done not only in faith (Rom. 14:23) and obedience to God, but also out of love for God and in love toward others. Many a “good” work has been spoiled by lack of love.
- E. Another deeper way we can think about the verses is to look at the right column. They are saying similar things, but not precisely the same things.
1. A person who exercises tremendous religious gifts but does not have love for the people to whom he ministers becomes almost like an annoyance to others. His speaking is kind of loud and grates on the nerves after a short while. It is not entertaining or helpful.
  2. A person who uses other excellent gifts but does not have love for God or his church family is himself nothing. Not only will he not truly profit others, but he will also not please God properly, and he himself will be evaluated as a zero.
  3. Finally, a person who gives everything, even to the point of martyrdom, will not receive any “profit”—which I take as eternal reward—for his deeds.
- In sum, the no-love effect on others, self, and in eternity is a nil, a zero.
- F. Stop to think if you really exercise love toward your fellow Christians. I am talking to myself here as well. An occasional moment of prayer or pity for someone is nothing more than the world does on a human level. Curiously asking what is going on with someone for sake not of them but of your desire for knowledge is not love. Do you really have *love* for your brothers and sisters?
- G. All this answers the need of the Corinthian church. They had divisions, inferiority complexes about what gifts they did not have, superiority complexes about what gifts they had and what people they claimed they did not need, and all kinds of other problems that we have looked at in chapters 5 through 11. Love is the more excellent way of 12:31—not exercising gifts for their self-promotion value or even what they could accomplish in deeds.

## II. The Definition of Love, v. 4-7

We have given a brief definition of love, but the next four verses define love with 15 qualities. Love is one of those things that you might feel like, “I can’t define it, but I know it when I feel it.” Of course, that feeling, in the days of youth, is likely some species of infatuation that has not deepened to even real human love, much less love in the Christian dimension. Love is far more than a “feeling.” It is a character trait. It is part of the fruit created in the life of a believer by the Spirit of God (Gal. 5:22, Eph. 5:2).

I have patterned the initial phrasing of these qualities after the highest quality English translations of the Bible to give you more of an idea what is meant by some of the characteristics. What follows are definitions drawn from the Greek dictionary (BDAG).

- A. Suffers long, patient. It remains tranquil while waiting and bears up under provocation without complaint.
- B. Is Kind. It is merciful. The word is used only here in the New Testament.
- C. Does not envy, is not jealous. No negative feelings over another’s success.
- D. Does not parade itself, does not boast or brag. Love does not heap praise upon one’s self.
- E. Is not puffed up, is not proud or arrogant. Love does not think of oneself more highly than others. It does not have an exaggerated self-view.
- F. Does not behave rudely, improperly or dishonorably toward others. It is not given to disgraceful, indecent behavior.
- G. Does not seek its own, is not selfish.
- H. Is not provoked, irritable, or easily angered. Keeps the temp down.
- I. Thinks no evil, keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not let your mind dwell on bad things. This is a great reminder to clear out bad thoughts.
- J. Does not rejoice in iniquity, takes no delight in evil or wrongdoing or injustice.
- K. Does rejoice in truth. Opposite of the above.
- L. Bears all things, protects. Keep confidential or endure difficulties.
- M. Believes all things, trusts. Paul is not affirming gullibility.
- N. Hopes all things. Forward looking to good things to come.
- O. Endures all things, perseveres. Holds out persistently.

### III. The Application of Love

- A. God is love. He is all the above in some form or fashion. Christ was the exemplification of God's love in human flesh. The Spirit of God pours out that love into the hearts of all believers.
- B. I indicated that love is not a feeling. But let us imagine for a moment that you ask yourself this question when you are considering your own ways: "Do I *feel* patient, kind, jealous, proud...right now?" That diagnostic may be helpful in determining if you are acting out of love or the opposite of love. The opposite of love, of course, is selfishness. Do you see how the *self* is at the center of all the negative characteristics in verses 4-7?
- C. Think of those traits above with respect to your love for God. Some of them may seem a bit inapplicable—like how are you envious of God? But maybe you are selfish and rude toward God and think that God has done you wrong and you do not endure when trials come. Do you rejoice in God's truth or boast about your own self? Do you hope in God and believe in Him or take joy in evil things?
- D. Think of the above characteristics with respect to your spouse.
- E. Think of the above qualities of love with respect to your parents.
- F. How about these traits of love with regard to your church family?
- G. Love is giving, but it can stray if it is not constrained by truth and holiness. You can be patient with someone's sin, but you must call them to repent. Love protects others but it does not enable them to do self-destructive things. Love keeps no record of wrongs but does not allow someone to continue going down a wrong path.

### Conclusion

It must be emphasized that the apostle Paul is telling us that love is the best way to exercise all spiritual gifts. Love is the preventative for the ills that the Corinthian church was experiencing. It prevents Christians, missionaries, pastors, deacons, Sunday school teachers, and all church members from acting out in ways that are dishonoring to God and upsetting to others. It prevents us from becoming angry when someone does fall short of love and wrongs us in some way. It prevents church factions and splits. Love promotes holiness and growth of the church. Love prevents you from being a noisy annoyance and prevents you from amounting to nothing and receiving no reward from God at the judgment seat of Christ.

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