

STUDY ON THE BOOK OF CORINTHIANS

First Corinthians – Chapter 13

Chapter 13

LOVE!

“He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.” (1 John 4:8)

Before we delve into Paul’s letter in this chapter, it is important to understand love and especially who is love? God is Love! God is love and has demonstrated that love in everything that he does. Paul compares faith, hope, and love, and concludes that *“the greatest of these is love” (v13)*.

Agape (Love), the love theme of the Bible, can only be defined by the nature of God. John affirms that *“God is love”*. God does not merely love; he is love. Everything that God does flows from his love.

The 4 Types of Love:

- **EROS:** this Greek word was not used in the New Testament. It refers to sexual, erotic love or desire.
- **STORGE:** This is the type of love signifying the natural affection between kinfolk. This word appears only occasionally in the New Testament and only in compound form.
- **PHILEO:** *“to have ardent affection and feeling”—a type of impulsive love”* Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance defines *phileo* as, *“to be a friend to...fond of an individual or object; having affection for (as denoting attachment); a matter of sentiment or feeling”*. (John 21:15-16)
- **AGAPE:** Agapao (verb) is a special word representing the divine love of God toward His Son, human beings in general and believers. It is also used to depict the outwardly focused love God expects believers to have for one another. This special type of Christian love, *“whether exercised toward the brethren, or toward men generally, is not an impulse from the feelings, it does not always run with the natural inclinations, nor does it spend itself only upon those for whom some affinity is discovered”* (*Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, “Love”).

Reflecting the fact that human marriage is modelled after the divine relationship between Christ and the Church, husbands are told to love their wives with this kind of outgoing, selfless love (Ephesians 5:25-32). It is also important to note that human marriage would require more than Agape love, it would also need the Storge, Phileo and Eros love.

Greatest Gift Is Based On Love!

“But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.” (1 Corinthians 12:31)

“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, 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, but have not love, it profits me nothing.” (vv1-3)

Paul encouraged all believers to desire the best gifts after listing the various gifts of the Holy Spirit and immediately, he followed up his advice with his recommendation. His recommendation was this: Irrespective of what gift you possess, it must be based on the foundation of love.

His introduction to Chapter 13 was profound:

- *“If I were to speak with eloquence in earth’s many languages, and in the heavenly tongues of angels, yet I didn’t express myself with love, my words would be reduced to the hollow sound of nothing more than a clanging cymbal.” (v1 TPT).* However strong over vocal gifts might be, it is not expressed in love, then it is just noise.
- *“And if I were to have the gift of prophecy with a profound understanding of God’s hidden secrets, and if I possessed unending supernatural knowledge, and if I had the greatest gift of faith that could move mountains, but have never learned to love, then I am nothing” (v2 TPT).* However great my revelation and power gifts might be, if it is not manifesting in love then, I am nothing!
- *“And if I were to be so generous as to give away everything I owned to feed the poor, and to offer my body to be burned as a martyr, without the pure motive of love, I would gain nothing of value.” (v3 TPT).* No matter my charitable works, if it is not motivated by love then, it has no eternal value.

To emphasise the point here: Every manifestation of any gift must be led by love and delivered in love.

The Characteristics That Is Not Love:

- **Love does not envy:**

The word means to eagerly desire, and it is used both positively and negatively in the Bible. Jealousy in the negative sense is related to greed and selfishness. The jealous person wants what others have; he wants things for himself. He must have all the attention. Anyone walking in love will not envy or be jealous of others.

- **Love does not parade itself:**
- **Love is not puffed up:**

These ugly twins are related (parading one-self and being puffed up). They both stem from selfishness and are the flip side of jealousy. “Jealousy is wanting what someone else has. Bragging is trying to make others jealous of what we have. Jealousy puts others down; bragging builds us up”. Bragging is an outward manifestation of pride.

- **Love does not behave rudely:**

Love does not needlessly offend or behave rudely. Love has good manners. It is courteous, polite, sensitive to the feelings of others and always uses tact. The reason we are not courteous, of course, is that we are thinking only of ourselves and not of others.

- **Love does not seek its own:**

It is not selfish, does not demand its rights. Alan Redpath said, “The secret of every discord in Christian homes, communities and churches is that we seek our own way and our own glory.” Selfishness is the root problem of the human race; it is the antithesis of love, which is self-sacrificing.

- **Love is not provoked:**

The Greek word means to sharpen, stimulate, rouse to anger. Phillips paraphrases, “It is not touchy.” Love does not have a hair-trigger temper. Some people make everyone around them walk on eggshells. They’re easily offended. One little thing that doesn’t go their way and “KABOOM!” They use their temper to intimidate and to punish.

- **Love thinks no evil:**

This is an accounting word, used of numerical calculation. It is used of God not imputing our guilt to us, but instead imputing the righteousness of Christ to our account (Rom. 4:6-8). Love do not keep a tally of wrongs and bear a grudge until everyone is paid for. It doesn't try to gain the upper hand by reminding the other person of past wrongs. Love forgives.

- **Love does not rejoice in iniquity**

Moffatt puts it, "Love is never glad when others go wrong." If someone you do not like falls into sin, you don't gloat; you grieve, because God is grieved over sin. If they repent, you rejoice.

Love Characteristics

- **Love suffers long:**

The Greek word comes from two words meaning, "long-tempered." If you're patient, you're slow to anger, you endure personal wrongs without retaliating. You bear with others' imperfections, faults, and differences. You give them time to change, room to make mistakes without coming down hard on them.

- **Love is kind:**

Kindness is patience in action. The Greek word comes from a word meaning "useful." A kind person is disposed to be helpful. He seeks out needs and looks for opportunities to meet those needs without repayment. He is tender and forgiving when wronged.

- **Love rejoices in the truth:**

To rejoice in the truth means to be glad about behaviour in accordance with the truth of God's Word. Love will sensitively confront and correct precisely because it cares deeply and knows that sin destroys. Love rejoices with the truth. Love gets excited when it hears of spiritual victories. Love encourages by expressing joy over little evidences of growth.

- **Love bears all things:**

The word can mean either to bear up under or to protect by covering. Love do not broadcast the problems of others. Love do not run-down others with jokes, sarcasm, or put-downs. Love defends the character of the other person as much as possible within the limits of truth. Love would not lie about weaknesses, but neither will it deliberately expose and emphasize them. Love protects.

- **Love believes all things:**

This does not mean gullibility; it does mean that love is not suspicious and doubting of the other person's character and motives without good reason, even if his actions offended you. If trust has been broken, then it needs to be earned again, step by step. But love believes the other person is innocent until proven guilty, not guilty until proven innocent. If there is a problem, love doesn't jump immediately to blame the other person.

- **Love hopes all things:**

It is not pessimistic. It does not expect the one loved to fail, but to succeed. Love refuses to take failure as final. It exudes a godly optimism which says, "I know you can do it, because God in you is able!"

- **Love endures all things.**

The word “endures” is a military word meaning to sustain the assault of an enemy. It has the idea of holding up under trial, of perseverance despite difficulties. It means that love hangs in there. It is not just a passive, stoic attitude. It is a positive, triumphant spirit that sticks it out.

Paul concludes the list of what love is and what love is not by making a clear declaration:

LOVE NEVER FAILS!

Fail in this statement should be read from the sense of cessation. Love will never come to an end.

“But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away.” (v8)

But Love will never fail... prophecies, tongues, knowledge... it will vanish away.

“For we know in part, and we prophesy in part [for our knowledge is fragmentary and incomplete]. But when that which is complete and perfect comes, that which is incomplete and partial will pass-away” (vv9-10)

Anything Done Without Love Is Childish!

“When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things.” (v11 AMP)

A Time of Perfection Is Coming!

“For now [in this time of imperfection] we see in a mirror dimly [a blurred reflection, a riddle, an enigma], but then [when the time of perfection comes, we will see reality] face to face. Now I know in part [just in fragments], but then I will know fully, just as I have been fully known [by God].” (v12 AMP)

3 Greatest Graces!

“And now there remain: faith [abiding trust in God and His promises], hope [confident expectation of eternal salvation], love [unselfish love for others growing out of God’s love for me], these three [the choicest graces]; but the greatest of these is love.” (v13 AMP)