**THE ALL-IMPORTANCE OF LOVE**

First Corinthians Chapter 13, known as the “Love Chapter.” This chapter is a breath of fresh air, a dramatic change from the rest of the book. First Corinthians is often so heavy-handed, intense and problem-oriented. The Corinthian church as you know had all sorts of issues and Paul deals with them in this letter. Chapter after chapter Paul comes down hard on them and he admonishes them for their selfishness, carnality (acting like the world), arrogance, divisiveness, quarreling, sexual immorality, disregard for others, and even idolatry. One of their big issues was their lack of love. And 1 Corinthians Ch 13 addresses that. It is beautifully written. This chapter is often broken out and studied by itself with little regard for its context. But the context is significant. Notice that Ch 13 comes in the middle of Paul’s discourse on spiritual gifts. In Ch 12 Paul explains what the various gifts are and how they are to be used together within the church body. In Chapter 14 Paul discusses the proper application of the various spiritual gifts. Sandwiched in between is Chapter 13, which talks about love. At the end of Chapter 12 Paul says, “I will show you a still more excellent way.” He then proceeds to emphasize the all-importance of LOVE when it comes to exercising our spiritual gifts. So keep that in mind as we go thru this Chapter.

What is “love” as Paul uses it here in this chapter? The Greek word is agape (AW-guh-pay). This kind of love is self-sacrifice for someone else, selflessness. It’s the love God has for us. This love is not a feeling or an emotion, but an act of the will.

The title for this lesson is the all-importance of love. Paul puts a lot of emphasis on this in the context of the body of Christ. Why is love so important? Well, for starters, Jesus said it was.

READ John 13:34-35

In v 34 Jesus commands us to love one another, our fellow Christians. Then in v 35 He tells us that our love for one another is the evidence to the world, it is our testimony, that we are, in fact, Christians, followers of Jesus Christ.

Then over in First John we read these verses which further underscore what Jesus taught about the importance of love…

READ 1 John 3:16-23

And herein lies the problem with the believers at Corinth. You see, they had the right doctrine (they are commended for this in 1 Cor 11:2). They had all the spiritual gifts (in 1 Cor 1:7 Paul says they are not lacking in any gift). What they didn’t have was LOVE. The Corinthians Christians were not living in the Spirit, but everybody was looking out for himself or herself – doing their own thing. So with that bit of background, let’s get into this great chapter and unpack its truths…

READ 1 Corinthians 13:1

The word, “tongues” translates “languages” (Greek word Glossa). “Tongues of men” indicates intelligent normal human languages and is a reference to the spiritual gift of speaking in tongues. “Tongues of angels” (angel talk) is a little harder to define. What kind of language do angels have? Well, since they are ministering spirits that operate in the spiritual realm, there is no way for us to know. In fact, every time an angel communicates with men in scripture, they speak in human language. Paul is speaking in extremes here. What he’s saying is, “Even if I could speak angel talk (and I can’t), it wouldn’t mean a thing without love. It would be just noise! When we operate our spiritual gifts in the flesh (without love) it’s merely a noisy racket, like the banging of cymbals together which was common at the pagan rituals of their day.

READ 1 Corinthians 13:2

Prophecy is hailed as the greatest of the spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 14:1. What a great privilege to be able to proclaim the truth of the Word of God to His people! However when we do this we must speak the truth in love (Eph 4:15).

Balaam is a good O.T. example of someone who had the gift of prophecy but did not love the people and, as it turned out, he amounted to nothing. Matthew 7:21-23 describes individuals that prophesied, but they were counterfeit prophets. They didn’t love the Lord Jesus at all. On the other hand there is the godly example of Jeremiah – there was a prophet who did proclaim God’s Word to the people in love; so much so that he is called the weeping prophet. He was weeping for those non-repentant people of Judah whom he loved deeply.

“Mysteries” are divine truths which were once hidden and later, in the N.T. times were revealed by Jesus or the apostles, or in the case of Revelation will one day be revealed. These are God’s hidden mysteries that relate to His wonderful plan of redemption. But even if we knew all of God’s mysteries (and we don’t) and had not love, we would be nothing!

“Knowledge” is intellectual achievement. Earlier in this letter (8:1) Paul established that love is superior to knowledge. He said, “Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies.” Knowledge is important. Paul’s prayer for the Philippians was that their love abound more and more with knowledge (see Philippians 1:9). But without love it’s meaningless.

“Faith” refers to the gift of faith, expressed in prayer and which releases God’s power. This is the kind of faith that can move mountains, which Jesus talks about in Matthew 17:20. It is the ability to believe God to do things that most people can’t even imagine. If we have great faith like that but lack love, we are a big zero for the kingdom of God!

Hard truths from Paul. Convicting words.

READ 1 Corinthians 13:3

Remember how we defined love earlier? Love is self-sacrifice, but not all self-sacrifice is love. Fear, recognition and self-righteousness are other possible motivations why some people might give away all they have. However, the only motivation for giving should be love. Even martyrdom, the ultimate act of self-sacrifice without love profits nothing (ie, terrorists). Even if I burn my body, dying for the cause of Christ it doesn’t matter if my motivation is not love. I can’t help but think about our Lord’s indictment of the church at Ephesus in Revelation 2:2-4. They were a lot like the church at Corinth. They had a lot going for them, but Jesus rebukes them by saying, “I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.” Their problem, and it was a big one, is that they lacked love.

READ 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Here the Apostle Paul eloquently breaks down love into its many different qualities. I like the way John McArthur put it as he commented on these verses. He says, “it’s as if the great light of God’s love hit the prism of scripture and shattered it into its component parts and you see all the colors of love.”

The qualities of love in these verses describe the perfect character of Jesus Christ. You see all these qualities as you read the Gospel accounts. However, these qualities did not describe the church at Corinth – they were not patient. They were anything but kind. They were envious or jealous. They were arrogant, rude, and self-serving. In short, they lacked love. Let’s explore briefly Paul’s list of the qualities of love.

Love is “patient” – the ability to be wronged again and again without even thinking about retaliation or being bitter or angry. Biblical examples include God’s patience with Israel, Jesus on the cross, and Stephen being stoned. Love forgives 70 times 7 when it is wronged. It forgives time after time after time.

Love is “kind” – the act of doing anything that will be of use or benefit others (even my enemies). When Jesus said to “love your enemies,” He meant to do kind deeds for them. Are you kind? Do you go the extra mile for others?

Love does not “envy” – Solomon refers to envy or jealousy as being “rottenous of the bones” (Proverbs 14:30). Envy says, “I want what you have” or even worse than that, “I wish you didn’t have it.” It’s not easy to rejoice over somebody who does something better or has something better than you. The problem with the Corinthians is that they were envious of certain gifts. They were jealous of each other (1 Cor 3:3). Why did Cain kill Abel? Envy, jealousy. Why did Joseph’s brothers sell him into slavery? Same thing. James 3:14-16 says that every evil thing comes from jealousy. Envy, jealousy, they are the opposite of love. 1 Samuel 20:17 – Jonathan loved David. He wasn’t jealous of David like his father Saul was. A loving person rejoices in the success and the gifts of others!

Love does not “boast” – this is the verbalizing of pride. Boasting is vying for attention. It’s a sin because it causes someone else to be envious or jealous, thereby causing your brother to stumble. People like to talk about themselves, don’t they? We need to talk less about ourselves and more about Jesus Christ who gave us everything we have including our talents and abilities.

Love is not “arrogant” – The Corinthians were arrogant (4:6-7, 5:2). They thought higher of themselves than they should have. They thought they had all the answers and had arrived spiritually. Arrogance says, “I want everybody to know all about me” while love says, “I wish I could know more about you.” What’s the old expression? “Empty trucks make the most noise.” Love is not big-headed, it’s big-hearted.

Love is not “rude” – Poor manners or rudeness says, “I don’t care what affects you because I don’t care about you.” Love says, “I want to do whatever will make you happy.” If you love someone you’ll be considerate of him or her. Remember how the Corinthians behaved at the love feasts? Love does not behave rudely, gracelessly.

Love “does not insist on its own way” – it is not selfish. Love isn’t interested in itself but in other people. Love is selflessness. Instead of using their spiritual gifts to build up the church, the Corinthian believers were building themselves up.

Love “is not irritable or resentful” – It doesn’t get easily upset, mad at other people as it relates to itself. Selfish anger says, “I matter so much that if you don’t do things my way I’m going to let you have it.” On the other hand, that which angers God (“righteous indignation”) is sin. Love does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but with the truth.

Love “bears all things.” Love bears,” it covers with silence or suppresses. Love will do everything it can to cover up and suppress the sin of another person – to cover over the ugliness in someone else’s life. Depravity is always looking for the skeleton in someone else’s closet in order to make themselves look better. Kids like to tell on each other (tattling). Love throws a blanket over someone else’s faults. As 1 Peter 4:8 says, “Love covers a multitude of sins.”

Love “believes all things.” Love believes the best of someone – is not suspicious and cynical.

Love “hopes all things.” Love is hopelessly optimistic. Love refuses to take failure as final. When all your faith gets fogged in, love still hangs onto hope. Love doesn’t bail out.

Love “endures all things.” Love stands against incredible opposition and keeps right on loving. Stephen, while being stoned to death, proclaimed, “Father, lay not this charge to their hands.” Jesus, hanging on a cross said, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they are doing.” Love is never overwhelmed. It will die caring.

READ 1 Corinthians 13:8-10

Love will outlast any spiritual gift. What is the one thing that we will be able to do in heaven that we can do on earth? LOVE. Preaching will stop, speaking in tongues will stop and learning new truth will stop. But love will continue on for eternity.

V 10 “When the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.” Spiritual gifts will be done away with when we are made perfect and complete and standing in the presence of God. They’re intended for use here on earth to build up the body of Christ. But when Jesus comes back they will end.

READ 1 Corinthians 13:11-12

The limited understanding of spiritual matters that we have on earth will give way to a fuller understanding when we’re with the Lord. Paul compares our understanding in the here and now to that the mind of a child. VERY limited. He uses the analogy of looking through a dim mirror, which in his day was nothing more than polished glass – this to illustrate the way we view spiritual things. Just as a man has more understanding than a child and just as looking at something face-to-face gives one a clearer view than looking at a reflection, so will we be able to see and understand things better when we get to heaven.

READ 1 Corinthians 13:13

In regards to spiritual matters, we walk by faith and not by sight. So for now faith is important. But one day we are with our Lord and will see Him, then faith will not be necessary. Now we hope for the day that we will get to be in the presence of our Lord. We anticipate it somewhere in the future, but just don’t know when. One day when we are in glory, we will have no more need of hope.

Application: Because love will outlast everything else we experience on earth – including faith and hope – we need to cultivate love. How do we do this? We acknowledging that love is a command (Romans 13:8-10); we acknowledge that we have the power to love (Romans 5:5); we acknowledge that it is normal to love (1 John 4:7-10); we acknowledge that love is the Spirit’s work (Gal 5:22); and then finally, we practice love!

Paul tells the Corinthians and by application he tells us: “The only thing that’s going to unite your whole church together is love. The only way the spiritual gifts are going to operate the way God intended is love. The only way you’re going to get out of this envy and jealousy on the one hand and pride and boasting on the other hand is love. Love is the key to the unity that will paint the portrait of Christ so that the world can see what He really looks like.

Jesus told His disciples (John 13:35), “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” So, let’s sing “They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love”