

24. What is your definition of "LOVE"?

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More songs, novels, and movies have been written and made about love than just about any other topic. It has inspired the world's best and worst poetries. It has set on fire and broken countless hearts throughout human history. However, the majority of their ideas of love pretty much stop at emotional level or below waist level. In other words, their idea of love is nothing more than temporary or pursuing sex.

Yet, to learn the true definition of love, we must turn to the Bible. In 1 Corinthians chapter 13, the apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, provides the world's most beautiful and precisely accurate definition of love. Through this chapter, we might get to see the love of God for us in His terms, not our own individual definition of love which comes very short of God's.

Paul started his message of love from the end of chapter 12. He finishes it with the this conclusion – the most important gift of all is LOVE. The two most important commands of God in the Bible are: "Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, mind, and strength and love your neighbors as yourself." In one word, it is "LOVE."

The ancient Corinthian church was very much a spiritually gifted church, yet it was called carnal by the founder of the church, the apostle Paul. At the end of chapter 12, he told us that he would show us a more excellent way than possessing all the spiritual gifts and exercise them without proper guidelines.

A. THE RESULT OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS WITHOUT LOVE

1 Corinthians 13:1-3 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.

"I LOVE YOU." Simple, single-syllable words, yet they cannot be improved upon. Nothing even comes close. And because we don't have any guarantee we'll have each other forever, it's a good idea to tell each other as often as possible.

The opening of the chapter talks about the result of spiritual gifts without love:

- 1) **Speaking tongue** – Without love, we become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal
- 2) **Gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and knowledge** – Without love, it is nothing
- 3) **The faith to remove mountains** – Without love, it is nothing.
- 4) **Charitable heart** – Without love, we just waste money.
- 5) **Willing to stand up for our belief** – Without love, we just sacrifice ourselves for nothing.

I am going to state an extremely important and profound fact that all of you should notice. Chapter 13 is located right between chapters 12 and 14.

Do you know the reason why God put this "Love Chapter" right smack dab in the middle of two chapters that deal with the gifts of the Spirit? You may have all the spiritual gifts the heaven can offer you, but if you don't have love in your heart, as

the Bible says, "You are NOTHING." In other words, if we miss having God's definition of love in our hearts, all the spiritual gifts and whatever we do are nothing more than a waste of time and effort.

The apostle John also echoes this in 1 John 4:

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

Now the apostle Paul explains the true definition of love. But he will revisit love with its attributes that are not temporary at the end of this chapter.

B. THE TRUE DEFINITION OF LOVE

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 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.

People, especially ladies love these verses. I noticed that many brides love to have them quoted in their weddings. It sounds nice and maybe, just maybe, by having the Bible verses quoted in their wedding ceremonies, they think that their marriage will last forever and everything goes the way the brides want. Newsflash! These verses are NOT a magic spell. You will have a rude awaking if you believe that magic spell concept.

Please notice, the definition of Love starts with "suffer long." In one word, "patience."

There are at least 4 Greek words for "love," not all of which are used in the New Testament:

1) EROS means physical love and does not occur in the entire Bible.

It suggested a physical sexual desire and not much else.

2) STORGOS means "family affection" and is translated "kindly affectionate."

It is the type of love one might have for a family or a spouse. It is a naturally occurring, the unforced type of love.

3) PHILOS means "brotherly love."

It is most often exhibited in a close friendship. Best friends will display this generous and affectionate love for each other as each seeks to make the other happy.

4) The highest form of love is AGAPE which is used here.

Because none of these words came close to describing the kind of love Paul wanted to communicate, he chose a relatively rare Greek word for his definitive passage on love. This word, "agape", describes a love that is based on the deliberate choice of the one who loves rather than the worthiness of the one who is loved. This kind of love goes against natural human inclination. It is a giving, selfless, and expect-nothing-in-return kind of love. Paul's description of love is short but full of power.

Love is more decision than emotion. Love is a series of the chosen actions with the commitment to obey what God did for us through His Son Jesus on the cross.

Before we go through each verse, I want you to do something for me.

I want you to replace the word "love" with your name and read it out loud:

(_____) suffers long and is kind; (_____) does not envy; (_____) does not parade itself, (_____) is not puffed up; (_____) does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, (_____) is not provoked, (_____) thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but (_____) rejoices in the truth; (_____) bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Does it make a sense to you? It is impossible, right? But this time, I want you to replace it with the name of "Jesus":

Jesus suffers long and is kind; Jesus does not envy; Jesus does not parade itself, Jesus is not puffed up; Jesus does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, Jesus is not provoked, Jesus thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but Jesus rejoices in the truth; Jesus bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Everything makes perfect sense, because Jesus is a personification of love.

Let's go over these verses more in depth:

1) Love suffers long and is kind.

Our modern "throw-away disposable" society encourages us to get rid of people in our lives who are difficult to get along with, whether they are spouses, friends, family, or acquaintances. Yet this attitude runs in complete contrast to the love described here in the Bible. True love endures people who are easier to give up on.

2) Love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own.

If our love is directed toward others, we will rejoice in the blessings they receive rather than desiring those blessings for ourselves. Fundamentally, the selfless love that God calls us to have does not involve pride or glory. If we truly love others, we will set aside our own plans, agendas, and entitlements for the good of others.

1 Corinthians 8:1b Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.

3) Love is not provoked, thinks no evil.

That is, love is not easily angered or overly sensitive. When we truly love others, we are careful not to be touchy concerning other people's words or actions towards us.

4) Love does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth.

The godly love described in this chapter has nothing to do with evil, but has everything to do with what is right and true. This does not mean that love is blind or naive. When we love, we may recognize problems and failures in people, but we do not lose faith in the possibilities of what people might become. Love never gives up, knowing that God can change lives for the better.

5) Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love accepts any hardship or rejection, and continues to build up and encourage without diminishing. The love described by Paul in this "love chapter" means determining what is best for another person and then doing it. This is the kind of love that God shows to us.

Now we learned the true definition of love, folks. Compare your idea of love to this and see how yours stacks up. Before you demand unconditional love from your spouse, your fiancé, or others, you OUGHT to love them with this love first. See how they react. Our Lord God did it for us while we were still sinners, Amen?

To love and to be loved is the bedrock of our existence. But love must also flex and adapt. Rigid love is not true love. It is veiled manipulation, a conditional time bomb that explodes when frustrated. Genuine love willingly waits! It isn't pushy or demanding. While it has its limits, its boundaries are far-reaching. It neither clutches nor clings. Real love is not short-sighted, selfish, or insensitive. It detects needs and does what is best for the other person without being told.

C. THE ETERNAL ENDURANCE OF LOVE

1 Corinthians 13:8-13 Love never fails. 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. 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. 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. 13 And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

First, we see a distinctive comparison between love and other spiritual gifts. Not that those spiritual gifts are good enough, but Paul who was inspired by the Holy Spirit teaches us that love is the better choice than any other spiritual gifts.

However, the spiritual gifts some people are excited and proud of are temporarily available on earth until the second coming of Christ or until we get to heaven.

1 John 3:2 Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

So, what kind of language are we going to speak in heaven? My native language, Swedish.

This speaks again to the perfect fellowship with God that we will have one day. Today, when we look in a good mirror, the image is clear. But in the ancient world, mirrors were made out of polished metal, and the image was always unclear and somewhat distorted. We see Jesus now only in a dim, unclear way, but one day we will see Him with perfect clarity.

Paul says, "when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away." But what is "that which is perfect"? Though some Bible scholars, especially from the main denominations, believe that the miraculous gifts ceased with the apostles and it refers to the completion of the New Testament. They are contextually wrong. Virtually all commentators agree "that which is perfect" is fulfilled when we are in the eternal presence of the Perfect One – Jesus, when we are with the Lord forever, either through the return of Christ or death to the eternal.

The ancient Greek word for "perfect" is "telos." Considering the way the NT uses "telos" in other passages, it certainly seems to speak about the coming of Jesus: 1 Corinthians 1:8, 15:24, James 5:11, Revelation 20:5, 20:7, 21:6, and 22:13.

In other words, they cannot use this passage to justify the doctrine of strict dispensationalism that argues some spiritual gifts are not available after the first century church era.

In v13, Paul declares that love is greater than all other virtues. Why? Because "faith without love is cold, and hope without love is grim. Love is the fire which kindles

faith and love is the light which turns hope into certainty. Also, when faith and hope become visible, faith will be replaced by sight, and hope replaced by possession of reality. Only love will remain. Because God Himself is love.

1 John 4:16 And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.

D. APPLICATIONS

1) Love is more decision than emotion. Love is a series of the chosen actions with the commitment to obey what God did for us through His Son Jesus on the cross.

2) True love endures people who are easier to give up on.

3) Love accepts any hardship or rejection, and continues to build up and encourage without diminishing.