

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 9/15/96 PM  
1 Corinthians 13:4-5 "The Picture of Love"

The atmosphere around the dinner table grew more tense as the conversation continued. Sam, a twenty-one year old college student, had just shared the following with his parents, "Mom and Dad, this has been the greatest summer of my life. God taught me so much through my short-term missions trip to Haiti. The biggest thing He did in my life was show me there is a world out there that needs Christ. I believe God wants me to invest my life making Him known to others."

His father interrupted, "So what are you saying, son? You *are* going back to the university this year, aren't you? You're still planning on pursuing a career in medicine, *aren't* you?"

Sam spoke slowly in response, "Mom and Dad, I'm not sure what to do. I'd like your input for sure, but I believe God wants me to be a missionary overseas, perhaps a medical missionary in a third world country. The need is so great."

Though it didn't surprise Sam's parents to hear of his proposal, it surely didn't sit too well. They'd had "big plans" for Sam every since he entered school and the guidance counselor told them, "Your son has excellent aptitude. He could really go places."

After what seemed like an eternity of silence, Sam's mother spoke, her voice full of emotion, almost exasperation, "Son, you just can't. You're our only son. We love you too much, and couldn't stand to see you go to some far corner of the world. Do you hear me? We *love* you. Don't you appreciate what we've done for you?"

End of conversation.

Sam's mother said she loved her son. May I ask you something? Did she love him with a biblical love? Granted, Sam's parents had strong feelings for their only child, but in this scenario did they exhibit the type of love that God endorses?

Another situation. A seventeen year old teen, Ron, and his girlfriend were driving to her house when he said this, "Listen, Jane, I've got a problem and you can help me. I'm having trouble in Government class, and if I don't pass tomorrow's test, I'll be ineligible for Friday's game."

Jane replied, "So how can I help you? Have you studied for the test?"

Ron's response, "There's no time to study. Besides, you've got Government first period, and I don't have it until last period. I want you to pass the answers to me at lunch."

Jane objected, "I couldn't do that. If anyone found out, I'd be in serious trouble."

To which Ron said rather curtly, "Listen, Jane, I can't believe you're being so stingy. I'd do it for you because I love you. If you loved me, you'd help me."

May I raise the same question posed earlier? Did Ron really *love* Jane with a *biblical* love? It's pretty obvious he did not, yet he said he loved her.

Frankly, we live in a society that has a distorted concept of love. Sadly, many Christians are in the dark when it comes to understanding the nature of true love.

That's why we began this mini-series last week entitled, "Learning to Love Biblically." In John 13:34-35, Jesus commanded and then commended love when He said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another as I have loved

you...By this will all men know that you are my disciples if you have love one to another."

Love is essential, but what is it? But what is biblical love? We find the answer in 1 Corinthians 13.

### Overview of 1 Corinthians 13:

Without going in to great detail, it would safe to say the Corinthian church had a problem (actually many). They had a skewed concept of spirituality. They believed a person was spiritual if he or she exercised spiritual gifts, especially the more spectacular gifts like tongues, prophecy, and miracle-working.

We have the same tendency today. We're prone to think a person is spiritual because he is super-involved using his gifts for God. Is he? Maybe. Maybe not.

The reason Paul addressed the subject of love in chapter 13 was to deal with this misunderstanding in the Corinthian church. Paul's teaching on spiritual gifts in chapters 12 & 14 sandwiches the "love chapter."

Last week, we took an overview of the chapter, and learned that structurally, there are three major sections in it: the first deals with the necessity of love (1-3), the second gives us a picture of love (4-7), and the final exalts the permanence of love (8-13).

Here's the outline from last time.

#### I. The Necessity of Love (1-3)

A. Without a life of love, spiritual gifts are useless (1-2).

1. If I exercise tongues without love, I'm just making noise (1).
2. If I exercise prophecy, knowledge, and faith without love, I am nothing (2).

B. Without a life of love, sacrifice profits me nothing (3).

1. If I give to the poor without love, I've given in vain.
2. If I give my life without love, I've given in vain.

C. To sum it up...

1. Without love, I am nothing.
2. Without love, I gain nothing.

We must have love then, if we are to be truly spiritual and if we're to please God. But what is biblical love? We find the answer in verses 4-7.

#### II. The Picture of Love (4-7)

Here's the picture of true love (4-7), "Love suffers long, and is kind; love envies not; love vaunts not itself, is not puffed up, does not behave itself unseemly, seeks not its own, is not easily provoked, thinks no evil, rejoices not in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

It would be helpful to memorize this chapter, especially this description of love. One thing that's soon apparent is that instead of defining love, Paul describes it. He shifts from the first person pronoun in verses 1-3 ("Though I...") to the third person beginning in verse 4. We find the personification of love in living color. Here's what biblical love is looks like.

There are fourteen descriptions of true love given in verses 4-7, seven of them negative, and seven positive. Before us is a checklist of love's characteristics.

Remember, love is action, not mere feeling. What God gives us in 1 Corinthians 13 is a call to live a life of love. And He shows us how in specific terms. Love is not vague and sentimental, but firm and practical. It's visible. Our goal in the next two weeks is to move slowly and carefully through these fourteen characteristics, wringing out every ounce of application we possibly can so that we might become even more a people of love.

In his description of love, the apostle examines love from three perspectives. First, he tells us what love is; second, what love is not; and finally, what love does.

**A. Here's what love is (4a).** In the following list, we see Christ, which ought not surprise us since God is love (1 John 4:8). We also see many parallels with the list of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5, again not surprising, since a life of love is not possible without the presence of the Holy Spirit.

*1. Love is long-suffering.* Your translation may use the word "patient." The first mark of biblical love is the ability to persevere and be patient, especially when wronged.

I must point out an important grammatical point here. This verb, as well as those that follow, is in the present tense. Not, "love suffered long," but "love suffers long." That is, it is a continuous pattern, a lifestyle. To say, "Well, I did that once 4 years ago," doesn't cut it with love. Biblical love is constantly long-suffering.

May I be candid? If we are serious about learning to love, then we must be serious about being willing to suffer. Why? Because our obligation to love is not limited to people in our comfort zone, those friends we find it easy to like. It includes those who are obnoxious to us, who may even hurt us.

Biblical love is patient (*makrothumia*). Patience is the ability to be wronged and not retaliate (B.K.C.). Remember that the Corinthian church had plenty of members who had been wronged. Some had been taken to the civil court in lawsuits by fellow Christians (ch 6). Others had been ignored in the Communion service because of their economic status (ch 11). To them, Paul issues this reminder, "Love is long-suffering."

To love is to do what Jesus did. When hurt, he didn't retaliate. He forgave and kept giving. To love is to make a decision that I will do right towards you. Period. No strings attached, no conditions. Even if you don't do right by me.

This certainly hits us right where we live, doesn't it? If your spouse snaps at you, do you have a right to snap back? If your boss slights you, do you have a right to belittle him behind his back? Not if you want to please God and exhibit biblical love. Love is long-suffering.

I've read (Barclay, 120) that no one treated Abraham Lincoln with more contempt than did Stanton. He called him "a low cunning clown," he nicknamed him "the original gorilla," and said that Du Chaillu was a fool to wander about Africa trying to capture a gorilla when he could have found one so easily in Springfield, Illinois. Lincoln said nothing. He made Stanton his war minister because he said he was the best man for the job. He treated him with kindness regardless of what he got in return.

As Barclay tells the story, "The years wore on. The night came when the assassin's bullet murdered Lincoln in the theatre. In the little room to which the President's body was taken stood that same Stanton, and, looking down on Lincoln's silent face, he said through his tears, 'There lies the greatest ruler of men the world has ever seen.' The patience of love had conquered in the end."

Proverbs 19:11 states, "A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense." How often did Jesus say we are to forgive our offenders? Till 7 times? No, till seventy times seven, for love is long-suffering.

2. *Love is kind.* Kindness goes hand in hand with long-suffering. To be a loving person means not only do we not retaliate when wronged, but we are quick to repay the one who hurt us with kindness.

To say love is long-suffering is not to take a stoic approach to life. It's not the "I'm going to do what's right even if it kills me!" approach. No, love is kind. It's pleasant to be around.

A person can be very religious, but not kind. There was no more religious a man than Philip the Second of Spain. He founded the Spanish Inquisition and thought he was serving God by massacring those who thought differently from him (Barclay, 120). Truth without love is brutality. A lot of church members today, had they been there then, would have sided with the religious rulers and not with Jesus if they had to deal with the woman taken in adultery.

Love is kind. What is the opposite of a kind person? One who is unkind, harsh, unpleasant, bitter, and sour.

Would you consider a question? Are you a refreshing person to be around? Have you ever noticed there are two very different types of relationships? There are replenishing relationships and there are draining relationships. There are people who charge your battery and there are people that drain it. Kind people will charge your battery. God calls us to be "battery chargers."

Are you a person who wrings your hands wondering, "Why don't people seem to like me? Why does it seem like I hardly ever get invited over for dinner?"? Consider two issues. Proverbs says, "A person with friends must show himself friendly." *You* do the inviting! *You* put out your hand first for the handshake. *You* get up out of your seat to greet the people in the pews around you. You make the decision to be a battery charger!

Then be honest about a second issue. If people shy away from you, ask yourself this question. Am I a kind person, or am I an unpleasant, negative, sour person? As we grow older, we seldom stay as we are. We tend to become either better or bitter.

Please realize that God is not dangling the list of 1 Corinthians 13 before us and saying, "Hah! Do this and earn my favor!" The truth is we can't be long-suffering and kind without the Spirit's enablement. "For the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness [from same Greek word translated "kind" in 1 Cor 13; *chrastotes*], etc. (Gal 5:22-23)." The Spirit alone can produce these characteristics in us, and He will as we cooperate with Him. But if there's no evidence of love in me--namely, behavior that is long-suffering and kind--then I've got a glaring problem, namely, I don't have the Spirit.

So here's what love is. Love is long-suffering and kind. Next we learn...

**B. Here's what love is *not* (4b-6a).** Sometimes, in order to understand something, it's helpful to identify what it is *not*. For instance, I had a basketball coach in the 8th grade that taught me how to shoot a jumpshot correctly. I had developed a bad habit of throwing off my shot with my left hand, so he taught me how using the following method: "Not like this, but like this. Don't shoot like this (the way you've been doing it), but like this (the way I'm showing you)."

That's what Paul does to teach us how to love. He says, "Not like this (eight negatives in verses 4-6), but like this (five positives in verses 6-7)." Here's what love is *not*, or more technically, what love doesn't *do*, for each of the eight deal with behavior.

1. *It doesn't envy.* "Love envieth not (4)," as the KJV puts it. The term (*zaloō*) means to be jealous. It's been said there are two classes of people in the world--"those who are millionaires and those who would like to be" (Barclay, 120).

This list of love's characteristics is by no mean abstract for Paul. He didn't pick them out of a hat. Rather he was addressing the Corinthians right where they lived. Frankly, they had a problem with envy. Back in 3:3, he rebuked them, "For you are yet carnal; for whereas there is among you *envying* and strife, and divisions..." The problem was the Corinthians were divided over their favorite Bible teachers.

What's wrong with that? True love does not allow me to be in rivalry or competition with my fellow believers. It doesn't envy. It's content.

The Corinthians were not content. In the area of spiritual gifts, they wanted the "showy" gifts, so Paul told them in 14:1, "Follow after love."

Allow me to probe again. Do you have to have the limelight in ministry? Have you ever thought, "I deserve to have a bigger Sunday School class, like John does. I'm a better teacher than he is. I wish I had his class."

It doesn't have to be a church-related ministry, either. How do you react when you find out someone else's child made the Honor Society and yours didn't? What do you think when you learn that someone else got the raise you thought should have been yours?

Love doesn't envy. The second negative is related.

2. *It doesn't promote itself.* My, is this an unpopular piece of counsel in our blow-your-own-horn society! Love doesn't vaunt itself (KJV). It doesn't boast (NIV). It doesn't brag (NASB). Paul uses a rare word here (*perpereuetai*; the first time this Greek word appears in Greek literature is here), which literally means "to behave as a braggart," or "be a windbag." A person who constantly calls attention to himself or herself is not exhibiting love.

What do you like to talk about when you're with other people? When was the last time you had a conversation with someone who loved to talk about himself? Was it refreshing? After awhile, you were looking for a polite way to get out of the room! It's not possible to love and boast at the same time (Fee, p. 638). In fact, true love is more impressed with its own unworthiness than its own merit.

Frankly, as Christians, our pursuit must not be to promote ourselves, but to what? Promote Christ!

3. *It's not proud.* Or as the KJV states, "is not puffed up." The verb appears only seven times in the New Testament, and six of those are in this letter (4:6, 18, 19; 5:2; 8:1)! Paul was writing to a group of people that had a problem with pride.

The apostle used an interesting, vivid word here--*phusiao*. It seems to be a case of onomatopoeia, where a word is coined that imitates a sound. *Phusiao* means what it sounds like, "to puff or blow up." The word sounds like a person perching his lips to blow up a balloon--phooooos!

A person of love is not a windbag. She doesn't delight in talking about herself. He doesn't live a self-focused life. When love is in, pride is out.

Pride is a subtle vice that we are more prone to tolerate than eliminate. In our society, pride is rewarded. Professional athletes make millions in commercials promoting the philosophy, "This is my planet."

And what about us? We may never verbalize those words, but we're guilty of the same attitude any time we allow arrogance a foothold. Let's bring it down to where we live.

When we have a church fellowship meal, are you a person who jumps in the front of the line, or do you defer to others? When you pull in the church parking lot, do you search for the choice parking spot, or do you choose to walk a little further out of respect for the elderly and interest in the visitors? Pride shows up in lots of *little* ways.

Lest you think, "Well, I've got just as much right as anybody else to eat first and park in the best spots," may I invite you to consider a question. *What would Jesus do?* Would He insist on His rights?

Do you remember what Jesus said about the successful businessman who prospered and decided to tear down his barns and build bigger ones? He called him a "fool" (Luke 12:20). The man wasn't a fool because he lacked knowledge, or business savvy, or job skills--in fact, in our day he'd be a "Fortune 500" candidate for sure. Why did Jesus call him a fool? Because he lived with the wrong orientation in life. His life revolved around himself.

True love is not proud and self-centered. A really great person never thinks of his own importance. Take William Carey, for instance (Barclay, 121). He began his life as a cobbler, and turned out to be one of the greatest missionaries and linguists the world has ever seen. He translated at least part of the Bible into no fewer than 34 Indian languages.

When Carey came to India, he was mistreated and scorned. At a dinner party, a snob tried to humiliate Carey by saying the following so that all could hear, "I suppose, Mr. Carey, you once worked as a shoe-maker." Carey answered, "No, your lordship, not a shoe-maker, only a cobbler." He didn't even claim to make shoes--only to mend them.

Application: Are you a loving person according to God's definition? We have more to see in Paul's picture of love, but we've seen enough to stop and take inventory. Love is long-suffering and kind. Love doesn't envy, promote itself, or live a life that revolves around pleasing *me*. May the Lord help us to follow in our Savior's steps.

Next Time: We'll pick it up and continue in verse 5 looking at what love is not.

4. *It's not rude.*
5. *It's not self-seeking.*
6. *It's not easily angered.*
7. *It doesn't keep a record of wrongs.*
8. *It doesn't delight in evil.*

Response: Let's take time to reflect on this biblical picture of love in this time of response. We must not under-estimate the importance of love, as the following song reminds us.

*Hymn of Response: #284 "They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love"*

Let's take time to reflect on our lives. In light of what God has taught us from His Word tonight, what changes need to be made for you to become a more loving person?

Love is long-suffering. Are you? Have you been short-tempered with someone this week? Perhaps your spouse or children? Are you smoldering because you've been wronged by someone? Maybe a boss or a neighbor. Turn that over to the Lord now.

Love is kind. Are you? Are you a pleasant person to be around? If not, ask God to begin to change you, for His glory.

Love doesn't envy. Do you?

Love doesn't promote itself. Has that been the pattern of your life? Do you need to choose tonight to start talking less about yourself and more about Christ?

Love isn't proud. Are you? Have you been treating people around you poorly because your perspective has been self-focused?

To be very practical, have you recently told your family members that you love them?

*Time for Reflection and Prayer*

Let's continue to reflect on God's Word as we listen...

*Ministry in Music: Jennifer Dalton*

It's a beautiful thing to belong to a community of loving people. I thank God for each of you and for what He is doing in our midst. Let's sing...

*Closing Hymn: #286 "Blest Be the Tie That Binds"*