

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 2/1/12 Wednesday Evening
1 Corinthians 13—part 2

Discuss: What is love?

1 Corinthians 13 is perhaps the best definition of love available.

The Context of 1 Corinthians 13

Why did Paul write 1 Corinthians 13? To address a very specific problem. 1 Corinthians 13 is sandwiched between two chapters which deal with the subject of spiritual gifts.

Specifically, the church had made a circus out of service. The members were competing for the showy, spiritual gifts. But there are no super gifts. Each is vital. And each can be abused, too, if the holder does not exercise it in love. That's where chapter 13 fits in.

Structurally, there are three major sections in the chapter, the first dealing with the necessity of love (1-3), the second which gives us a picture of love (4-7), and the final which exalts the permanence of love (8-13).

Review: 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.*

II. The Picture of Love (4-7)

A. Here's what love is (4a).

1. *Love is long-suffering. It is patient.*
2. *Love is kind.*

B. Here's what love is not (4b-6a).

1. *It doesn't envy.*
2. *It doesn't promote itself.*
3. *It's not proud.*
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.*

New Material...

C. Here's what love does (6b-7).

Love is action-based, not feeling-based. It's been well said, "One of the reasons we fail to love as we should is that we let our *feelings* get in the way." What does that mean?

Here are five actions of true love.

1. *It rejoices in the truth.*

Notice the connection between love and truth. Why is it vital to keep this connection in tact?

2. *It always protects.*

The focus again is outward. A self-centered person looks out for himself. A loving person is concerned about the well-being of the other person.

3. *It always trusts.*

It gives the benefit of the doubt. It believes when the evidence may seem otherwise. Why? Because people are trustworthy? Because we won't get burnt at times? No. When then? Because God was gracious to us and we want to treat others the way He treated us, *graciously*.

Please don't water this down. The common mindset says, "Well, I'll love you but you've got to earn my love." A spouse might say, "Well, after what he did I'm going to make him prove himself to me." That's not what love does.

Granted, a person who has violated trust must be willing to demonstrate trustworthiness which involves accountability and takes time. But the person who was violated also has a responsibility, and that is to *love* unconditionally, to act on the basis of trust not skepticism.

Note: Here's where a third party can be helpful, especially in the case of a marriage where trust has been violated. The person who broke the trust must submit himself to the third person for accountability which will help insure true repentance (see 2 Cor 7:11 for marks of true repentance).

4. *It always hopes.*

Q: Why do we have reason to hope? The basis of our hope is not the goodness or dependability of the other person. It's the goodness of God and the guarantee that He is at work.

5. *It always perseveres.*

Q: What does this word indicate about loving people? It's not always easy!

Observation: If we have a problem with love, it's easy for us to miss it.

Why? We all tend to "love" certain people.

E.g. "I don't struggle with loving people," one person says. The reason is because she has limited her circle of relationships so much she hardly knows anyone.

True love goes beyond a smile and a handshake on Sunday morning. If we are truly loving each other we will get involved in each others' lives. We'll take risks. We'll spend time together.

This may frighten you, but remember this. We don't do this in our own strength. What has God given us that makes love possible? (remember the context of 1 Corinthians 12-14) He has given us His Spirit ("The fruit of the Spirit is *love*" Gal 5:22) and spiritual gifts. The way we get involved in each others' lives will vary, but the involvement is not optional.

Do we believe that? If it's true, what difference should it make in the church?

III. The Permanence of Love (8-13).

This is *not* optional for the Christian! To underscore love's importance and permanence Paul concludes by addressing three issues.

A. Paul identifies the difference between love and spiritual gifts (8-10).

Read verses 8-10. What's the point?

1. *Love never fails.*
2. *Spiritual gifts have a temporal purpose.*

The gifts of prophecy, tongues, and knowledge are good gifts. But they have a temporal purpose. Paul anticipates a time when they will cease to operate. They won't exist in heaven. There's no need for them there. In my estimation these sign gifts have fulfilled their purpose and thus are no longer needed in this age either.

But the need for love never ends. Love is vital to the church in any culture in any age.

B. Paul illustrates the difference between love and spiritual gifts (11-12).

1. *Consider a child.* Read v 11.

When you see a child playing with play dough, you think, "That's great. He's learning to be creative and use His mind and fingers." But typically you don't see adults going to Wal Mart to buy play dough for themselves. And if you saw two adults playing with play dough you might think it strange. Why? Because play dough is bad. No. It's just not appropriate. Adults should move on to greater expressions of creativity and productivity.

So it is with gifts. I love to preach, but I won't be preaching forever. There will be no need for preaching in heaven. But there will be need for love.

2. *Consider a mirror.* Read v 12.

Q: When will "I know fully?" In the age to come, after Christ returns.

C. Paul insists on the enduring value of love (13).

Read v 13.

Here are three virtues that are the backbone of the Christian life. Faith—you can't become a Christian without it. Hope—it's what sustains us during this age of waiting.

But there will be no need for faith and hope in the age to come. Why not? We'll be with the One we cannot see right now, the One who is our hope.

There will be a need for love, however. Forever and ever we will love God and love each other in a perfect, sin-free environment.

Application: We never arrive when it comes to love. Each day brings new opportunities to reflect God's character with acts of love.

Discuss: What are some steps, in light of this study, you believe you can take to become a more loving person?

Prayer Time: Let's ask God to help us begin right now...