

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 1/25/12 Wednesday Evening
1 Corinthians 13

A real problem is staring us in the face. We are living in a culture in the 21st century that doesn't know what love is, let alone know how to love. What's even worse is that the culture's confusion has spilled into the church. What the church needs now is love. And what our families need now is love. The sad fact is many Christians simply don't know how to love biblically. Thankfully, we can learn to love.

1 Corinthians 13 can show us how...

The Context of 1 Corinthians 13

There are few texts in the Bible that have been abused as much as 1 Corinthians 13. It's been said that *a text without a context is a proof-text for a pretext.*

Discuss: What does that mean?

How often have you heard 1 Corinthians 13 wrenched from its context, in weddings and funerals? Is that why God gave us the "Love Chapter", so we could have sentimental sermons on Christian kindness?

Why did Paul write 1 Corinthians 13? To address a very specific problem. What was it? It's not hard to figure out. 1 Corinthians 13 is sandwiched between two chapters which deal with the subject of spiritual gifts.

The Corinthian church was a church with a lot of problems—but which church doesn't have problems?! Amongst the Corinthians' problems were these: There were schisms between brothers, immorality, lawsuits between members, abuses in the Communion service, and this one--abuse of spiritual gifts. Put simply--This was a church that needed to learn how to love!

Specifically, the church had made a circus out of service. The members were competing for the showy, spiritual gifts. In chapter 12, Paul reminded them, "But now has God set the members, every one of them, in the body, as it has pleased Him (12:18)." There are no super-saints. We need each other.

Furthermore, 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.

Overview of 1 Corinthians 13

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).

I. The Necessity of Love (1-3)

Why is love so important? Two reasons...

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

Read verses 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).*

Discuss: Why do you think Paul mentioned these gifts to the Corinthians? If he wrote a letter to WBC, he might mention different gifts.

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.*

Is it possible to give money to the poor without love? Yes. What are some possible motivations for doing so?

2. *If I give my life without love, I've given in vain.*

Q: What does Paul mean by “surrendering my body to the flames?”

This is staggering. It's possible to become a martyr and yet do so in vain. It's also possible to do lesser deeds of service in vain. If love is missing.

The problem of apathy is a big concern in the church—the lack of commitment. But here's another problem that's equally dangerous. It's the problem of the committed, the people who never miss a church service. We can do ministry for the wrong motive, and if we do it's a great big zero.

C. To sum it up...

1. *Without love, I am nothing.*

2. *Without love, I gain nothing.*

Discuss: Why did Paul tell us this?

II. The Picture of Love (4-7)

Paul lists many characteristics of true love in this section. He describes love from three perspectives...

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

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

Discuss: Why is patience vital in true love?

2. *Love is kind.*

It's so easy to deceive ourselves, “Well, I'm doing this because I *love* you!” the parent shouts to his child with hostility in his voice. Is it love when a parent acts in anger, completely out of control?

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

1. *It doesn't envy.*

It doesn't give out of a motivation to “get something in return.”

2. *It doesn't promote itself.*

It doesn't “boast.” The cocky athlete is a boaster, but there's more than one way to “boast.” A person can be meek and mild and yet be a boaster.

Discuss: How so? What are some ways we tend to promote ourselves?

3. *It's not proud.*

Proud people think the world revolves around them. When we exhibit true love, we don't.

4. *It's not rude.*

Discuss: What are some examples of “rude” behavior?

5. *It's not self-seeking.*

Love God. Love your neighbor. That's the fulfillment of the Law. It's also the twofold focus of the person who is exhibiting love.

6. *It's not easily angered.*

Anger itself isn't sin. But a person who is *easily* angered is lacking true love.
Discuss: What does a loving person do with his or her anger?

7. *It doesn't keep a record of wrongs.*

This is huge. We all experience wrong. People sin against us and we can't prevent it. But what will we *not* do if we are showing love? We won't keep a "black book" of the deeds.

Discuss: What will a loving person do with sins committed against him?

8. *It doesn't delight in evil.*

How do you respond when bad things happen to people who have mistreated you?

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

Love is action-based, not feeling-based. 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.

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?

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.*

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

1. *Consider a child.* Read v 11.
2. *Consider a mirror.* Read v 12.

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

Read v 13.

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...