

What Love Does

Introduction. The apostle Paul knew the Corinthian church well. He laid the foundation of Christ Jesus there. He knew the terrible influence their culture had upon them. He saw the awful effects of the wisdom which does not descend from above but is earthly, sensual and devilish. The church at Corinth was a place where envy and self-seeking existed, thus confusion and every evil thing were to be found there (James 3:14-16): divisions, carnality, lawsuits, problems in marriages, uncaring attitudes, false doctrines, abuses of the Lord's Supper and even misuses of spiritual gifts. To these brethren he said, "Let all your things be done with charity" (1 Corinthians 16:14). Could there be hope for us?

I. ***The Importance And Definition Of Love***

- A. One does not have to work hard in examining the New Testament to find the importance of love (Matthew 22:36-40; Romans 13:8-10; 1 Corinthians 13:13; 1 Peter 4:8; 1 John 4:8,16).
- B. There is nothing greater for us to understand and incorporate love into our lives. Love must provide the energy, motivation and atmosphere for all we do. The Christians in Corinth were endowed with spiritual gifts, but gifts exercised without love add up to nothing. Benevolent deeds and even martyrdom profit us nothing without love (1 Corinthians 13:1-3). A loveless person is himself of no value (I am nothing), he produces nothing of value (sounding brass) and he receives nothing of value (it profiteth me nothing).
- C. Many poems, songs and even books have been written about love and what it means, but love is from God; clearly He can tell us the true essence of love. Technically, God never defines love. The most complete description of love is found in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. But even here God does not define love in terms of abstractions, attitudes, feelings or ideology; He only describes love in action (1 John 4:9; John 3:16).
- D. Love always manifests itself in action. When you read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, it is as if God takes the light of love into the prism of His word and breaks it into its component parts. Please note that we see nothing abstract here, only behavior. It is not obvious in English, but in Greek all fifteen properties of love are in verb form. If love were a person, this is what it would do. Love is the greatest attribute and thus deserves our careful attention. We see our Lord Jesus Christ in this portrait of love.

II. ***The Properties Of Love And Practical Applications***

- A. Love suffereth long.
 1. The word here means "long temper." Vine defines it as "The quality

of self-restraint in the face of provocation which does not hastily retaliate or promptly punish." This term describes patience with people, the ability to be wronged and wronged again, to have the power to retaliate, but never consider retaliation as an option. How different is this virtue from worldly wisdom!

2. To the Greeks it was a virtue to refuse to tolerate any insult or injury, to be ready to strike back at the least provocation. We see the same worldly philosophy in many of our heroes of the movies and television. Tell someone off, put him in his place, stand up for your rights!

B. Love is kind.

1. Kindness could well be thought of as the complement of patience. Patience endures the injuries of others, kindness pays them back only with good deeds. Patience says, "I will take anything even from my enemies." Kindness says, "I will give anything, even to my enemies, to meet their needs."
2. The expression in the original language literally means to show oneself "useful." The idea then is not an abstract quality, not even a sweet attitude, but the carrying out of useful deeds to help someone else. Love gives itself to help others (Titus 3:4-5).

C. Love envieth not.

1. Envy is closely related to jealousy. Jealousy wants what another has. Envy wishes the other did not have it either. The Greek word *zelos* comes from a root word which means "to boil." Thus one who envies is seething over someone else's success. The wise man of old called it "rotteness of the bones" (Proverbs 14:30).
2. The church at Corinth was infected with this disease (1 Corinthians 3:3), which James tells us indicates the presence of every evil thing (James 3:14-16). Other scriptures confirm how many evil things are connected with envy -- the first sin (Genesis 3:5-6); Cain's killing of Abel (Genesis 4:1-8); the mistreatment of Joseph by his brothers (Genesis 37); the elder brother's bad attitude (Luke 15:11-32); the chief priests and elders' murderous mistreatment of Jesus (Matthew 27:18).

D. Love vaunteth not itself and is not puffed up.

1. The first of these expressions represents the speech or action of pride while the second represents the attitude of pride. The root word for the first expression means "wind-bag," while the root word for the second means "bellows." Behind the "windy" display of boasting is the prideful, inflated view of oneself, much like the blacksmith's bellows when they are full.
2. Conceit says, "I am better than you." Love says the opposite. The braggart wants others to feel he is superior; love esteems others

better than himself (Philippians 2:3). The church at Corinth suffered with this problem as well. Members were puffed up one against another (4:6); boasting of one teacher over another (3:1-7); puffed up in their knowledge instead of considering the weaker brother (8:1); and vying over spiritual gifts (14: 1-40).

3. Two examples from scripture will help us see how love behaves. When John the Baptist learned that Jesus was drawing away his followers, he first said that we receive nothing except what we have been given from heaven. Then he said of Jesus, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). John's role as the one who prepared the way for the Messiah was a vital role. His popularity had soared, but he did not lose sight of his lowly position before God.

E. Love does not behave itself unseemly.

1. The root word for this expression in the original language carry the idea of being shapeless or unformed. Thus the verb came to mean "to behave in an unbecoming manner or rudely." At first glance this property seems too insignificant to be connected with a description of the great concept of divine love. But careful thought reveals the beauty and necessity of this part of the spectrum of love.
2. Rudeness or poor manners says, "I don't love you because I don't care what affects you. I will do what I like whether you like it or not!" It is easy to see how an inflated view of our own importance would lead us to be rude to others and contemptuous of their feelings. Love saves us from rudeness because it is always concerned over how it affects someone else.

F. Love seeketh not her own.

1. Our world would teach us otherwise with its emphasis on personal rights, self-centeredness and self-indulgence. Christians may easily be influenced to focus more on ourselves than we would normally anyway. The world does not equip us to think like slaves, but Romans 6:16-22 teach us that we are slaves to God and righteousness. Paul said he was no longer living, but Christ was living in him (Galatians 2:20).
2. It takes a genuine renewing of our minds to fulfill this property of love (Romans 12:1-2). We are to have a mind like Christ's who left equality with God to become a servant even to the death of the cross (Philippians 2:5-8); a mind like Paul's who, though he were free from all, made himself a servant to all that by all means he might save some (1 Corinthians 9:19-23); a mind like Timothy's who sincerely cared for the welfare of others (Philippians 2:19-24).

G. Love is not easily provoked.

1. The word here means primarily "to sharpen, to stimulate or to stir up." It came to be used metaphorically of rousing or provoking an-

- ger. While there is no word in the original representing the word "easily," there is a connotation of a sudden outburst of anger; anger that arises too readily.
2. Love does not readily become upset or irritated. It is never ready to fight (James 1:19-20). The dangerous emotion of anger is controlled and directed only toward things which are offensive to God -- Paul was provoked at the idolatry in Athens (Acts 17:16).
- H. Love thinketh no evil.
1. This word was used of the keeping of an inventory by a bookkeeper. Essential items were recorded in the bookkeeper's ledger so as to not be forgotten. Love does not keep an account of evil done to it. When God forgives us through the sacrifice of Christ and our obedience through faith, He keeps no books on our sin, He harbors no resentment because of our offenses.
 2. Husbands and wives or brethren in the Lord sometimes drag up past mistakes which we store in our hearts, ready to spew them out at strategic moments. Love makes no memories of evil; it forgets quickly.
- I. Love rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth.
1. Love takes no pleasure in sin but only with truth as it is taught and lived. Love cannot rejoice with error and false teaching. The slightest compromise with iniquity takes the joy out of love.
 2. Some people rejoice in their own sin. We see it in men and women as they brag about their sexual exploits. Some rejoice in the sins of others as in Romans 1:32. Some rejoice when others sin because it makes them feel holier. Some even wish for others to sin so it will hurt them. But love does not rejoice when a man is lost in sin. Love knows that his end is destruction. How can anyone rejoice in that?
 3. John says, "And this is love, that we walk according after His commandments ..." (2 John 6). Love would never say, "I don't want to make an issue out of what he believes, I just want to love him." The ecumenical spirit of compromising with error is not love as God describes it. What if someone transgresses and does not abide in the teaching of Christ? Listen to love's response (2 John 10-11; 2 Thessalonians 3:5-6).
- J. Love beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.
1. These four properties of love are clearly statements of exaggeration or hyperbole. They do not mean all things in a universal sense. Love must make some discrimination as to whether they are of God. For example, love does not believe every spirit, some spirits are of Satan (1 John 4:1-3). They must mean all things that fall

- within the limits of proper biblical boundaries.
2. The word translated "bear" means "to protect or preserve by covering." Out of regard and honest concern for the value of another person, love will do everything it can to cover up the sin of that person. Love will warn, rebuke and discipline as needed, but it will protect as much as possible. Love does not ignore sin, but it believes in people.
 3. What happens when you have covered sin in love, believed the best and it does not turn out the way you believed it would? The wayward child, the stubborn husband, the disciplined member do not repent and turn. Love hangs on to hope, refusing to accept failure as final.
 4. When love has borne, believed and hoped all things and is disappointed, it endures anyway. The word for "endureth" is a military term that has to do with being positioned in battle against incredible opposition. Love cares too much to give up.

Conclusion. Paul himself had partaken of this divine love. He knew his own sinfulness and weakness (1 Timothy 1:12-15), but he also knew the tremendous power that works in a Christian who is "rooted and grounded in love" and who has come "to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge" and who is "filled with all the fulness of God." God is able to do "exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think ..." (Ephesians 3:17-21).

If there was hope for the Corinthians to do all things in love, there is hope for us. We can learn to be more like God in this respect. Let us start today in our homes, congregations and lives to do what love does. Then will come to pass what Christ called for so long ago: "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35).