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Is It Love?

1 John 4:16: (NASB) *We have come to know and have believed the love, which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.*



God is love! We as Christians love to bask in the magnitude of this statement as it gives us comfort and confidence that our faith is in a Being who possesses understanding, compassion and wisdom. God is love! That statement just makes us feel good! So, was that the reason John wrote it - to make us feel good? Or did he write it to help us not only unlock the depths of God's character but to also unlock the potential depths of our own characters? This is love as you have never thought of it before!

Love is variously defined in Scripture ranging from family affection to brotherly bonding to philanthropic activity to benevolence. The first levels are the most "attached" kind of love, meaning real "back and forth" and very much on an earthly human relationship level. Once you get to philanthropy, you begin to rise above the idea of give and take to just giving. Benevolence rises to the heights of giving in a way that cannot be reciprocated and does not seek or need reciprocation. It is this kind of love that describes God's love and this program will focus mainly on this kind of love.

Love: Strongs #25 agapao (ag-ap-ah'-o); to love (in a social or moral sense)

Love: Strongs #26 agape (ag-ah'-pay); love, i.e. affection or benevolence

Here is a description of the power of this benevolent love: 1 John 4:14-21: Quite simply, the world needed saving so the Son was sent. God's love is evident because His plan through Jesus is to save the world from sin and death. To those who grasp His plan, it should be obvious that God IS love. We should want to abide in the love of our Creator so that His character can transfer to and abide in us.

On a personal level, what is it you believe is God's plan for all the world of mankind? Can you look at that plan and see that God really is love? Sometimes we believe things about God that should not be attributed to Him and His character, which takes away from the idea of a truly benevolent God. His benevolence works through His justice, wisdom and power. How does our character fit into becoming like God's?

Perfected with us - is anything really ever perfected in us as imperfect human beings? The word also can be translated *complete*. God's love can be *complete* in us.

As He is - as God is complete in His love and is confident in the work of the Day of Judgment

Don't just talk your conviction...LIVE your conviction! When we have doctrinal differences with our brother, we must apply God's love to our Christianity. How do we stand for what we believe in? More on this soon.

So far we have seen an example of God's love. How do we learn to live that kind of love?

Fortunately we have the answer meticulously laid out for us in Scripture in 1 Corinthians 13. Let us first establish the context of this chapter, frequently called "the Love Chapter" and read at weddings. But it is much broader than just for a husband and wife and covers every aspect of our lives.

1 Corinthians was written to a church whose priorities were inside out and backwards. They closed their eyes to dark moral sin, while engaging in a sectarian brand of Christianity that welcomed no church discipline, a minimizing of the power of fellowship to solve issues, abuses of the Lord's supper, spiritual pride, misuse of the gifts and neglect of things most important. Paul wrote to them to straighten them out. He was very firm in his instructions and rebuking.

After going through all of these issues, Paul begins defining God's love in a practical way for us to learn and apply it. He starts by identifying how the three public parts of our Christianity NEED the kind of love God has to be our foundation: What we say, what we know and what we do.

What we say: 1 Corinthians 13:1: People acting like noisy gongs draw a lot of attention to themselves and confuse you to prevent you from focusing on the most important thing. What we say is important. It needs to be focused on higher things and not just "look at me" kind of things.



Ephesians 4:13-16: Replace the noise with maturity! To be mature in Christ means to grow up and focus on what brings growth and not what brings attention to us. We are supposed to be helping each other to become more Christ-like. This was one of the problems in Corinth. They were using the gifts of the Spirit to draw attention to themselves. They made a lot of noise but did not have a lot of growth. **How do we mature?** The key is to be a small part of the whole! What we say must be the right things for the right reasons - for the body and not just ME.

What we know: 1 Corinthians 13:2: One of the gifts was miraculous knowledge - to know things without studying them. To have even that - but without having benevolent love - would be nothing. 1 Corinthians 8:1-3: One of the debated issues in the early church was whether or not to eat meat that had previously been offered to idols. The Apostle Paul said eating the meat was not a sin - it was just meat. But if doing so hurt your brother, it is not correct to do. Be sensitive to the needs and concerns of others.

We are given the tools to be loving, but do we use them? 1 Corinthians 13:3: *And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have **love <26>**, it profits me nothing.*

What we do: Matthew 6:1-2: The doing of righteous acts is meaningless before God if they are not driven by God's love in us! We are not supposed to do them to be noticed by others.

1 Corinthians 13:4: (NASB) ***love <26>** is patient, **love <26>** is kind and is not jealous; **love <26>** does not brag and is not arrogant...*

The list of what love IS aptly begins with patience. God's patience is eternal and we are called to live patiently as well.

love is patient - to be of long spirit; to not lose heart

Ephesians 4:1-3: To not lose heart is to be focused on the big picture - the long term. Godly Christian love is bound to and built upon such thinking. That is part of the secret to getting through fear and anxiety. How patient God must be to give us this experience of the permission of evil over these last thousands of years!

love is kind - to show one's self to be mild

Ephesians 4:31-32: With a foundation of patience, kindness towards others and ourselves becomes attainable and the highest example of this kind demeanor paves our way.

love is not jealous - to be heated or boil - can be in a good or bad sense

Philippians 1:15-17: Jealousy can more easily be identified and defeated when we approach life with patience and kindness. Then we can more easily notice jealousy rear its ugly and ungodly head. Now that we know the basis of what love *is*, we can expand to include what love *does* and *does not* do.

love does not brag - to extol one's self excessively

Galatians 5:24-26: Jealousy is an identifier that we are longing for attention. Let our boasting be of Christ only, for that will diffuse the rivalries that can easily replace the unity of Christian love. If we have godly love, we should not be bragging about anything. We are to be selfless. It is not about me, it is about Christ in me.

love is not arrogant - to inflate, puff up, make proud

1 Corinthians 8:1-3: Bragging can lead to arrogance. Arrogance is a deep issue - we need all of the previous elements of love to combat it. It is especially important for Christian leaders to be on alert for this. We can hold knowledge over someone's head and feel superior. Yes, we are supposed to learn God's truth but we are not supposed to bask in the glory of our knowing. What in our daily lives can get in the way of expressing God's love? The things love is NOT - jealousy, bragging, arrogance.

Godly love must be foundational to every aspect of our Christian life - it must drive what we say, know and do. To use godly love as a foundation, we need to know what it does. Here is what we know so far: 1 Corinthians 13:4: (NASB) ***love <26>** is patient, **love <26>** is kind and is not jealous; **love <26>** does not brag and is not arrogant,*



God's love is patient. He ABSOLUTELY has a plan that will allow sin to reign for a comparatively short time after which He will cut it off forever. God is allowing these things for the eternal benefit of all mankind. What happened in Oregon is hideous and one of many horrible things happening in the world. God's loving plan is working itself out. Sin can be likened to an infection given antibiotics. The remedy is not instantaneous but it IS working to eradicate the disease. God's love needs to live in our lives.

Now onto further descriptions: 1 Corinthians 13:5: (NASB) ⁵*does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered,*

love does not act unbecomingly - do not act in a way that does not clearly reflect who you are

If you claim to be a Christian - a footstep follower of Jesus - do you act in a way that matches your proclamation? Are you a follower in name only? God's love does not act in a way that is not genuine.

James 1:14-17: God's own example is one of steady character! We must ask: Does *my* character reflect the steadiness of God?

love does not seek its own - is not after its own self interests or desires

Humility must drive this type of Christian love.

James 4:1-3: How willing am I to be a lesser member of the body for the sake of the whole body? How am I living the cause of Christ?

love is not provoked - stimulated or spurred to (a negative) anger

Ephesians 4:25-27: It is far easier to remain unprovoked if we are not all about our own agenda! We need to be flexible to have God's will work in our lives. What is HIS will? What is the best approach? If we have benevolent love that does not anger, it helps us get to the core of the matter.

love does not take into account a wrong suffered - do not keep score!

Matthew 5:10-13: How often has God been wronged by those who love Him? It is for us to learn how to always keep our perspective focused on the greater mission while we deal with our everyday life.

1 Corinthians 13:6-7: (NASB) ⁶*does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth;* ⁷*bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*

love does not rejoice in unrighteousness

Philippians 3:18-19: Unfortunately we see many Christian leaders who fall into this category: It is about the money, the lifestyle, getting and not giving.

Our response to unrighteousness should be one of deep and godly sorrow.

love rejoices with the truth

1 Thessalonians 3:6-8: It is great to "feel" Christian and attend Christian events. But make sure these things are all based on Christian truth from God's word. Godly love truly draws its strength from truth - not from emotion or circumstances - but from truth! Our emotions should be funneled through selflessness. Because of this aspect of love, rejoicing in truth, the next several aspects are possible.

love bears all things - to thatch (like a thatched roof), cover protect or preserve

Love protects those we love. It seeks for their preservation. Romans 15:1-2: Godly love based in truth bears up under the pressure of all things. **LOVE IS STRONG!**

love believes all things - but does NOT mean love is gullible

Habakkuk 3:17-18: Here is a scriptural example of everything falling apart - this can happen in our lives. God's love can carry us through even under the worst of circumstances. We then want to reflect God's love to help carry others. Fiery trials are difficult. In Scripture, fire destroys but it also purifies. Love never gives up on its godly and truth-driven vision of the future. **LOVE IS FOCUSED!**

love hopes all things



Romans 8:24-25: Love based in truth exudes hope even when you cannot recognize the "why" of hope. **LOVE IS ENCOURAGING!**

God's love plants a greater hope in us. Can we take our experiences and project out that greater hope to others by reaching a hand of encouragement to them?

love endures all things

1 Peter 2:23-24: This is an enormous expression of God's love through Christ. Now we need to redirect that to others. Love based in truth endures those things, which would otherwise seem impossible. **LOVE IS RESILIENT!**

Our love for one another should also be strong, encouraging, focused and resilient because that is God's love IN us and THROUGH us!

One simple phrase encapsulates all of what has gone before: 1 Corinthians 13:8: (NASB) *Love never fails*. Because this love is founded in the very nature of God Himself, it truly is impossible for it to fail.

Lamentations 3:22-23: When the sun comes up in the morning, we have the new compassions of God rising with that sun. When you get up in the morning, God's compassions are already in place - sometimes they are hidden behind a hard experience and we need to look for them.

Our task is to take this love - the very core of God Himself - and learn to apply it to our little lives. We are just dust...but we are beloved dust in the eyes of God. How thankful we should be! This can transform our daily existence!

The specific challenge faced by the Corinthian church was that of misplaced priorities. The Apostle Paul's lesson on the core value of love was placed in 1 Corinthians to help them make a paradigm shift.

They were so focused on the miraculous gifts they had lost sight of what was important:

1 Corinthians 13:8-9: The gifts of the Holy Spirit (the miraculous ability to prophesy, speak in other languages without having studied that language and having instant knowledge) were temporary. They were to be used as tools to spread the Gospel and would become obsolete after fulfilling their purpose. But godly love, the Apostle tells us, never fails, quits or gets old...it is everlasting!

1 Corinthians 13:10: (NASB) *but when the perfect (complete) comes, the partial will be done away*. The Apostle told the Corinthians there would be a change. When something *complete* (and we believe that was the New Testament in a written form) would be put in place, the gifts of the Spirit - would then be retired. They were used as a temporary bridge for preaching the Gospel and would no longer be necessary once the physical written history of the New Testament was available to share.

1 Corinthians 13:11-12: The Apostle is saying, "Grow up!" There is much more at stake than showing what you can do - at stake is the maturity of the body of Christ.

And now the magnificent conclusion!

1 Corinthians 13:13: (NASB) *But now faith, hope, love <26>, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love <26>*.

Why is love the greatest? Faith is something we have *towards* God, hope is something we have *from* God, but love is something we have that IS God! It ties the others together.

Romans 8:37-39: (NASB) ³⁷*But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.* ³⁸*For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,* ³⁹*nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

**So, is it love?
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions...
Think about it...!**