



Endless Love

INTRODUCTION

1 Corinthians 12:31b-13:13

A little girl was invited for dinner at the home of her first-grade friend. The vegetable was buttered broccoli and the mother asked if she liked it. "Oh, yes," the child replied politely, "I love it!"

But when the bowl of broccoli was passed, she declined to take any. The hostess said, "I thought you said you loved broccoli." The girl replied sweetly, "Oh, yes ma'am, I do, but not enough to eat it!"

Do you love your family? "Of course I do!" We all would say that! It's the only right answer. But what do you mean by love? So often we love our family like that little girl loved broccoli: We love in the abstract, but when it comes right down to it, we don't want to get too close. In the words of the Apostle John, we love in word, but not in deed and truth (1 John 3:18).

What does biblical love look like? We know that our relationships in the family need to be marked by love. Husbands, especially, are to love their wives. But, wives, too, must love their husbands. Parents and children, brothers and sisters, must love one another. But how do we know what such love looks like in everyday dress?

Paul's famous chapter on love, 1 Corinthians 13, tells us. The Corinthian church was emphasizing a good thing, spiritual gifts, to the neglect of the best. They were using their gifts apart from love. Paul makes the point that the use of their God-given gifts would amount to nothing if the Corinthians did not make love their priority.

Selfless love is the priority for every Christian.²⁵

BREAK THE ICE

In your opinion, what is the best love song of all time? Why?

²⁵ Cole, Steve. "Lesson 5: What Love Looks Like (1 Corinthians 13:4-7)." Bible.org, 1995. <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-5-what-love-looks-1-corinthians-134-7>.

READ IT

Read 1 Corinthians 12:31b-13:13

EXPLORE IT

1. What virtue is Paul extolling in chapter 13?
2. List the 5 things in verses 1-3 that we could do/have that are worthless without love.
3. What does love rejoice in?
4. What things will pass away when “the perfect comes”?
5. In verse 12, Paul compares the knowledge we have in this life to looking into a dimly lit _____?
6. What 3 virtues does Paul say will abide or remain?

APPLY IT

1 Corinthians 13 is one of the most well-known passages in the Bible. The “love” chapter. It is often quoted at weddings to describe what love is, but to only think of 1 Corinthians 13 in this context really limits our understanding. Chapter 13 falls within the latter half of 1 Corinthians where Paul has exhorted how church members are to interact as a church body, specifically within the chapters dealing with spiritual gifts.

It might first appear that an explanation of love in chapter 13 is out of place, since chapters 12 and 14 directly deal with spiritual gifts. Yet chapter 13 is a necessary link in Paul’s argument for how believers are to use spiritual gifts. Each instance of the word “love” in chapter 13 is the Greek word “agape.” “Agape” is selfless love, the kind of love that we see when looking to the cross. “The cross is the paradigm case of the act of will and stance which places welfare of others above the interests of the self.”

7. Why do good spiritual acts gain “nothing” for us if we do them without love?

9. Since “God is love” according to 1 John 4:16, this passage describes God’s character in a real sense. What do you see about God’s character that is surprising to you? What is reassuring?

35 of 38

It's both useful and important for us to recognize that in Greek—despite in English some of these words are here as adjectives—in Greek, all of these facets are in verbal form. Why is that important? Well, it's important because Paul's emphasis here is not so much upon what love is as it is upon what love does—that love behaves itself in a certain way, and that the fact that these facets are written as doing words is a reminder to us that if we merely read the Word, hear the Word, and do not put it into practice, then it is of no avail to us, and we're actually like the foolish man who built his house on the sand. So it's important to realize they are all in verbal form.

Now, in considering these characteristics, we need to keep in mind also that Paul is not writing as a technician. This is not a technical list, as it were. Nor is he writing as a theoretician. But he is writing, rather, as a practitioner. He realizes that what is necessary in Corinth is not simply instruction but transformation. It must be truth applied—not truth simply learned in the head but truth that is channeled through to the hands and the feet and so on.²⁷

10. Which of the characteristics of love mentioned in these verses (e.g., patience, kindness, not being envious) do you find most challenging to live out?

11. How can you practice loving others even when it's difficult or inconvenient?

12. Love “believes all things” or “always trusts.” But is it loving to trust a person who has repeatedly violated our trust? Where do you draw the line?

²⁷ <https://www.truthforlife.org/resources/sermon/characters-of-christian-love-pt-1/>

Humorist Sam Levenson says, “Love at first sight is easy to understand. It’s when two people have been looking at each other for years that it becomes a miracle” (*Reader’s Digest* [3/83]). But it’s not really a miracle; it’s the result of yielding to God, repeatedly confronting our selfishness and daily practicing biblical love in our homes.

An old legend says that in his old age the apostle John was so weak that he had to be carried into the church meetings. At the end of the meeting he would be helped to his feet to give a word of exhortation. He would invariably repeat, “Little children, love one another.”

The disciples grew weary of the same words every time. Finally they asked him why he said the same thing over and over. He replied, “Because it is the commandment of the Lord, and the observation of it alone is sufficient.”

Someone has said that if we discovered that we had only five minutes left to say all we wanted to say, every telephone booth would be occupied by people calling other people to stammer that they loved them. Selfless love is our priority. “Pursue love” (14:1).²⁸

13. What do you think Paul means by “when the perfect comes”? Why will prophecies, tongues, and knowledge pass away but love will endure?

14. In what ways does the concept of love’s endurance provide comfort or reassurance? How have you experienced enduring love in your life?

²⁸ <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-5-what-love-looks-1-corinthians-134-7>

15. Identify three ways in which expressed love is seen well in your church community and experience, and three ways in which it can improve?

16. How can you practically show love to your brothers and sisters in Christ this week?