

What is Love?

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Today, during our summer of love, we are finally going to look at the love chapter. So, open your Bibles up to 1 Corinthians 13. As you are turning there, I'm sure you know that this chapter is about love. That is about all most people know, but that is only part of the story.

The Greek language has several words for love, where in English all we have is the one word, love.

One of those words is the word eros, which does not appear in the New Testament and has the concept of an intense physical desire. This is the self-centered element of love.

The second word is philos which is used sparingly in the New Testament, and it holds the concept of brotherly love.

The third word is agape. This word is seldomly used by the Greeks but heavily used in the New Testament. This word is best defined as sacrificial love such as God's act of sending Jesus.

Now let's look at the context of 1 Corinthians 13.

You see, before chapter 13 is chapter 12 and after chapter 13 is chapter 14 and those 3 chapters are one lesson Paul is teaching us.

This one section is one in which Paul is teaching the church about the problem of spiritual gifts in the church. 1 Corinthians 12-14.

In chapter 12 Paul talks about the gifts which have been given to every person who has received Jesus as personal savior. He, in a nutshell, is saying that everyone has gifts given to them to use for the edification of the body. That every person has received a different set of gifts. There is no gift that we all have. God determines which gifts each of us receive.

You see, in Corinth they were fighting over which gift was best. They were ignoring the gifts they had desiring different gifts and quite frankly, they were making a mess of it.

Paul wraps up chapter 12 by discouraging this desire for various gifts by encouraging them to desire the best gift, then Paul shows them what that is in chapter 13.

Now that I have you ready to look at that best gift, let's take just another moment to understand the context of this chapter by looking at the next chapter, chapter 14.

In chapter 14 Paul teaches the church in Corinth the proper use of spiritual gifts. In this chapter Paul compares gifts and their value to the body, teaches us that what edifies the whole body is better than what edifies the individual and that God is a god of order...God bless the administrators!

That is the context of the love chapter, so let's dive into 1 Corinthians 13!

Since the topic of this section of Paul's letter is spiritual gifts, it only makes sense as we try to understand chapter 13 that we frame it as:

Using the gifts 13:1-13

- I. The necessity of love in the use of gifts 13:1-3
 - A. The need for love with the gift of tongues 13:1

1 Corinthians 13:1, "If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal."

This is simple, you have to have love when you use your gifts.

B. Love of superior gifts 13:2

1 Corinthians 13:2, "If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing."

It doesn't matter how skilled someone is, it matters how much they love. How many well-known pastors with incredible speaking skills have fallen because of sin? Their love went towards something other than Jesus...they lost everything despite their giftedness.

C. Love of giving 13:3

1 Corinthians 13:3, "If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing."

Did you see that? You can give all you have, all of it. You can sacrifice your body, and it will mean nothing, it will gain you nothing if you don't do it in love.

The very nature of God is love, so how can we assume that anything done outside of love would benefit us in anyway?

Since God is love Paul now turns to:

II. The Characteristics of Love 13:4-7

Paul lists 15 characteristics of love which also become a great model for prayer, meditation and study.

A. The negative characteristics of love 13:4-6a

1 Corinthians 13:4-6a, “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6 Love does not delight in evil”

We have all known people who are impatient, mean, envious, dishonoring, self-seeking, angry, haven’t we? We may even have seen some of that in ourselves.

That isn’t love, by definition. Those qualities take work on our part in partnership with the Holy Spirit working in our lives. But it doesn’t stop there:

B. The positive characteristics of love 13:6b-7

1 Corinthians 13:6b-7, “but rejoices with the truth. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.”

When is the last time you witnessed rejoicing in truth outside of our worship time? The world tries to make truth subjective, when we know that Jesus is truth!

Love always protects, trusts, hopes and perseveres. If we just applied that to our marriages how different would our marriages be?

OK, we are flying through this, but I simply want to get you thinking in a different way about love. Notice we haven’t seen anything about gushy feelings yet, have we?

III. The Superiority of Love 13:8-13

A. Love of passing things 13:8-12

1 Corinthians 13:8-12, “Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. 11 When I was a

child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. 12 For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.”

Remember that the context of this passage is dealing with the issue of gifts in the church and the Corinthians were getting all off center by claiming their gift was the best gift or telling people that they needed a specific gift.

The Corinthians were making their focus the gifts that were given to serve one another, not the God who gave those gifts.

B. The superiority of love 13:13

1 Corinthians 13:13, “And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”

Of the things that remain forever, faith, hope and love, love is the greatest.

How did God show His love?

By sending Jesus, an immeasurable gift of love and sacrifice.

Prophecy will cease, tongues will cease, all the things the Corinthians were placing their value in would one day simply fade away and the one thing that they should have been focused on will be all that remains...love.