



**The Defining Characteristic  
of the Believer**

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*Love: The Defining Characteristic of the Believer*

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## *The Bible's Love Chapter*

First Corinthians 13 has the unique distinction of being known as the Bible's Love Chapter. It illustrates God's love for us and the love He has produced in the hearts of His children. Without a doubt, the defining characteristic of God and His dealings with mankind is His love. The defining aspect of this love is the sacrifice of His Son to pay the penalty for our sin.

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life (John 3:16).

God's great love for us is the backdrop for His Son paying the penalty for our sins. One cannot begin to comprehend God's deep love for us, apart from understanding something of our sin as human beings. Our sin makes us guilty, personally and individually, before the holy, living God. "For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom. 5:6). Note the connection: Christ died for the ungodly.

"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). While we were sinners, Christ died for us, which shows His great love for us. "For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son" (Rom. 5:10). Note the repeated stress: "we were helpless" (v. 6); "we were sinners" (v. 8); and "we were enemies" (v. 10). These verses echo our sinful state, yet Christ died for us.

It's popular to talk about the love of God today. However, if we don't grasp our own hopeless, helpless condition, the fact that we were God's enemies, and that He sent His Son to earth to suffer and

die to pay the penalty for our sins, we have no concept of His love. It is heartbreaking when believers slide into complacency in service to God. Carelessly, we think that if we are doing the right things, that it's good enough. We must remember that the Lord judges the motives of the heart and He is concerned with why we are doing what we're doing. Is it out of love?

The love presented in 1 Corinthians 13 is characterized by sacrifice. It is a love that is exemplified in God Himself. This love flows through people who have a relationship with the living God. The demonstration of God's love is "in this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10). Do you see the concept? We were condemned sinners, enemies, we were perishing—but God sent His Son, His only begotten Son, His unique Son, His beloved Son, to die for us.

It is important to remember that God loved us first. We were helpless, we were enemies, we were sinners. Still, out of His deep love for us, God sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Propitiation means to appease wrath, to satisfy the demands of justice. Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, took our place on the cross and suffered the wrath of God. He did this because God is not only love, but He is holy and just. He did this to pay the penalty for our sins—so the demands of justice could be satisfied—and God could give us forgiveness through faith in Christ.

There are different words for love in Greek, but the love described in 1 Corinthians 13 is known as *agape* love. This word is used in various forms 320 times in the Bible. The key element in *agape* love is sacrifice, the willingness to give of ourselves for someone else. *Agape* love is not related to receiving something in return. *Agape* love is a self-sacrificing love, the kind required for God to crucify His Son on the cross to pay the penalty for our sin. This love knows no limit or end.

## ***God Is Love***

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love (1 John 4:7-8).

Love is not simply something God does. First John 4:7 tells us that "God is love." It is in His very being. Besides love, God is holy,

righteous, infinite, just, and eternal, among other attributes. These qualities flow out of His character.

By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him (1 John 4:9).

God showed His love to us in this way. He sent His only begotten Son, His unique Son, the one most precious to Him, as a sacrifice for our sins.

“The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love” (1 John 4:8). It is sad that among believers there are some who get angry with another believer and refuse to forgive. After mulling over their hurt or insulted feelings, they end up bitter and hateful toward their brother-in-Christ. While professing to love God, they say, “I don’t love him anymore.” This raises the serious question, “Did they ever truly know the love of God?” When we consider the forgiveness, which flows out of love—that the Father has shown us—how can we not forgive another through love?

### ***Born into God’s Family***

Jesus told Nicodemus, “You must be born again” (John 3:7). How does that happen? “For by grace you have been saved through faith” (Eph. 2:8). Through faith in Jesus’ death and resurrection, we are born into God’s family and become partakers of His divine nature. As His children, we manifest the character of God in our thoughts and actions. At the heart of our thoughts and actions is God’s love, flowing in and through us.

The Holy Spirit indwells those who are born into God’s family and we become the temple of the Holy Spirit. “By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit” (1 John 4:13). The very character and nature of God is produced in us, His children, through the work of the Holy Spirit. Peter tells us that because of God’s sacrifice of His Son on the cross and our faith in His Son and His finished work on the cross—which causes us to be born again—we have become partakers of the divine nature.

For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust (2 Pet. 1:4).

By faith we are now God's children. We partake of His character, and His character is love.

### ***Love One Another***

The apostle John said we are to love one another. "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 John 4:11). John was not talking about what the world calls love; He was talking about the love that is produced by God in the hearts of those who come to know Him.

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us (Eph. 5:1-2).

God demonstrated His love for us in the sacrifice of His Son. Now we are to become imitators of Him as His well-loved children and walk in His love. We are to walk in the same kind of love that Christ had for us when He offered Himself on the cross—His self-sacrificing love.

We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren (1 John 3:16).

God, the initiator, bestowed His love upon us. Now as the children of God we are to love one another.

### ***Fruit of the Spirit***

The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us (1 John 3:24).

This love that God has given us is not just something we do; it is who we are. It is the realm we live in. God is love and as His child, a partaker of His divine nature, we are to be love. That permeates all that we are and all that we do. The one who abides in love abides in God and God abides in Him.

By this, love is perfected in us that we may have confidence in the Day of Judgment because as He is, so also are we in the world. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love" (Gal. 5:22). Love is the first fruit of the Spirit mentioned. The Spirit of God produces love in us as we obey Him.



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 (1 John 4:16).

We are in the world, exercising the love of God, willing to sacrifice ourselves that the lost might hear the glorious gospel, willing to sacrifice ourselves for the spiritual maturing and welfare of other believers.

We love, because He first loved us. If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also (1 John 4:19-21).

God talked about us loving other believers in the same context He talked about us loving God and being known by God, because they are inseparable.

## ***Spiritual Gifts***

Spiritual gifts are present today, but the revelatory gifts (prophecy, knowledge, and tongues) have ceased since we have the completed Word of God. The gifts we exercise now are to flow out of love. If we are functioning in love, we will exercise our gifts because love means doing what is best for the other person. The Spirit has gifted each of us to function that way.

Our first concern is to demonstrate love. We need to be thinking about how we can serve and help others in the body. As we manifest God's love, our spiritual gifts become effective in building up the church body.

Note that the first three verses of 1 Corinthians 13 begin with a condition—if this happens. That condition is qualified in each verse with: "but do not have love," which results in variations of "I am nothing."

If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal (1 Cor. 13:1).

If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing (1 Cor. 13:2).

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, it profits me nothing (1 Cor. 13:3).

In each of these verses, Paul used hyperbole—extreme claims in his examples of giftedness. Using himself as the example, Paul showed that the issue is not his gift or how great his gift is. The issue is love and how great his love is. Note that Paul did not separate the person from the gift.

Without love, there is no spiritual significance or benefit. The point of all three verses is that no matter how great the spiritual gift, without love, he is nothing. Some may say, “I don’t think anyone is ever nothing.” Then, read the Bible because God says without love, we are nothing. It’s the love that Christ has produced in our lives that brings God glory. Without love I am nothing. I have no value, I am worthless, I contribute nothing to the body of Christ, and I contribute nothing to bringing glory to the living God.

## ***Love Is Patient***

The first description of love is: “love is patient” (1 Cor. 13:4). The King James Version uses the word “longsuffering” instead of patient. That’s a good translation of the Greek word. Longsuffering is a compound word. We use the word “short-tempered,” but we don’t use the word, “long-tempered.” But that is how this word would be literally translated. It’s the word “wrath” (anger) with the word “long” on the front: long-angered, long-tempered. It’s a word that is always used in the New Testament in the context of being “long-tempered” with people, not circumstances. Other words are used for patience with circumstances. Long-tempered is used in the context of people getting on our nerves, provoking us, antagonizing us, and yet we are long-tempered. We don’t lose it with them. Love is long-tempered. Love puts up with a lot.

Think of our physical families. Parents love their children. Does that characterize you? We want to be long-tempered with them. There is something wrong with a parent who is always flying off the handle. If we love them, we will want to bring them along, be patient with them, be long-tempered. Even when discipline, rebuke, and correction are taking place, it should not be in the context of, “I just lost my temper.” If I’m demonstrating love toward them, I will be patient, long-tempered.



Incidentally, this is one of the fruits of the Spirit. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law” (Gal. 5:22-23).

This is what the Spirit produces in the life. We sometimes think, *I can't help it; it's in my genes. Dad was short-tempered. My grandfather was short-tempered.* I don't argue with that. Take it all the way back to Adam. It is in our genes to be short-tempered. But we're talking about people who have become partakers of the divine nature. If my excuse is that I can't help it, I need to evaluate myself. Am I really a child of God? Remember, the one born of God practices righteousness and manifests His character. One of those areas would be being long-tempered. As you might expect, this is a characteristic of God.

There are certain people who drive us crazy. We pat ourselves on the back because we only have four or five of them. Then I read 1 Thessalonians 5:14, “be patient [long-tempered] with everyone.” That's a convicting verse. It doesn't say, be long-tempered most of the time, or to be long-tempered with most people. We are to be long-tempered with everyone.

It is easy to be long-tempered with people who don't get on our nerves. But, we have the opportunity to manifest God's character with the people who irritate us every time they open their mouths. The Lord brings those people into our lives so we can learn to be long-tempered.

Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? (Rom. 2:4).

Keep in mind, the next word in our list in 1 Corinthians 13 is kindness. We must not think lightly of God's patience, as the kindness of God leads to repentance. God is long-tempered and desires to give people an opportunity to respond to His kindness and His invitation.

We all get frustrated; we see people who are flagrant in their sin. They think nothing of mocking God. Why doesn't God do something? Because He is long-tempered. He is demonstrating His love toward them, giving them opportunity to believe in His Son and escape the wrath to come. Being long-tempered does not mean He will never display His wrath. The Day of Judgment will come. Why does God

put up with sinners for so long? Why did He put up with us for so long? Because He is long-tempered.

The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9).

Why hasn't God destroyed this sin-cursed world? Why hasn't He destroyed His enemies and established His kingdom for those who have believed? Because God is more loving than you or me. He is long-tempered, He doesn't want anyone to perish. We have family members who aren't saved. Aren't you glad God has given them another day to repent? We love them, we want them to be saved. God is long-tempered in dealing with sinful people.

This time that the Lord has given us is a wonderful time. God is being long-tempered, long-wrathed in the sense of delaying His wrath, to give time for repentance. When we manifest long-temperedness, we are manifesting a characteristic of God. We are His children.

If we stopped at "love is patient" (1 Cor. 13:4), we'd think love is passive. If we didn't lose our tempers, we did what we needed to do in love. But the next characteristic shows that it is not enough to not do the wrong thing; we must do the right thing. Love is kind.

## ***Love Is Kind***

With "Love is kind" (v. 4), we learn that love actively treats that irritating person with kindness. The root for this word that is translated "kind" is "to be useful." When you're being kind, you're making yourself useful to someone else, you're doing what is beneficial and helpful to them. It's connected with patience, but it's more than simply not losing your temper with them.

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you (Eph. 4:31-32).

We see the contrast: bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, and malice are to be put away. Instead, we are to be kind, tender-hearted, forgiving, helpful, thoughtful, and useful to that difficult person.

Consider how God dealt with us. While I was a vile sinner, shaking my fist in the face of God, denying His handiwork in the world, and pursuing sin, He forgave me. He was kind to me.

so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:7).

Scripture is clear that our salvation is by God's grace alone. Not only will we be in God's presence for all eternity, but we will be trophies of God's kindness. Throughout the ages, we will display the magnificence of God's grace poured out on us in kindness.

How could we be so small as to withhold our kindness from those who irritate us? Why would we think that we are excused from having to love and show kindness to them? It's easy to be thoughtful and kind to those who don't bother us, but unlovable people should be given our love too because we have received God's love. When we show kindness to those who irritate us, we are demonstrating our Father's character.

## ***Love Is Not Jealous***

After showing us that love is patient and kind, Paul further described love by what it is not: "love . . . is not jealous" (1 Cor. 13:4).

This word translated "jealous" has in its root meaning, "to boil, to be zealous." It can be used in a positive sense or a negative sense. "But earnestly desire the greater gifts" (1 Cor. 12:31). "Earnestly desire" is a translation of this same word, "to boil, to be zealous." First Corinthians Chapter 14 opens with: "Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts" (v. 1). Earnestly desire, boil for, and be zealous each denote a positive sense. However, jealous is also used in the negative sense in the New Testament.

For example: jealous envy, when someone else gets the honor or the recognition that I think I deserved. Jealous envy is not just for possessions. I could be guilty of jealous envy if I wanted the promotion at work and someone else got it. But love is not envious, not jealous. Love is happy when someone else is honored. Love delights in someone else doing well. Love is never unhappy with the success or good things that come to others.

Paul wrote to the Corinthian church:

for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? (1 Cor. 3:3).

The Corinthians were walking like mere men, as if they did not have the Holy Spirit indwelling them. There was jealousy and strife among them. Different factions in the church at Corinth is the context for the following: “For when one says, ‘I am of Paul,’ and another, ‘I am of Apollos,’ are you not mere men?” (1 Cor. 3:4). The Corinthians were not united. There was jealousy and envy among competing groups. It’s sad when siblings are jealous of one another and try to put a brother or a sister down to make themselves look better. That’s not the way families ought to treat one another. Well, we are the family of God! There is no place for jealousy and envy here.

### ***Love Does Not Brag***

“Love does not brag” (1 Cor. 13:4). There is a self-effacing quality about love. Love doesn’t brag; love doesn’t promote itself; love doesn’t draw attention to itself; and love doesn’t seek honor or recognition for itself. We all know someone who brags and craves attention: “Look at me, see what I accomplished, or what I’ve done.” Our sinful nature thinks too much of ourselves, because we all want honor. And yet by its very nature, love seeks to honor others. Proverbs 27:2 says, “Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; A stranger, and not your own lips.” We are not to brag about our accomplishments, possessions, or influence. They are nothing to boast about.

Thus says the Lord, “Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,” declares the Lord (Jer. 9:23-24).

We are not to boast about ourselves. Instead, we are to boast about knowing the living God; His grace has been bestowed upon us; He is a God of lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness. It’s not about me. It’s all about Him. It is contrary to the character of those who have been born into God’s family to be self-focused and braggarts. Paul put it this way:

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves (Phil. 2:3).

With a humble spirit, I delight in giving God praise for others. I can thank God for the way He has blessed and gifted them. I'm thankful that I am able to serve with them and have fellowship with them.

## ***Love Is Not Arrogant***

Love . . . is not arrogant (1 Cor. 13:4). As you would expect, some of love's characteristics overlap. Where does arrogance come from? Exaggerated thoughts of one's self-importance. Arrogant means to be bloated or inflated. It describes a person who is puffed up with their own view of themselves. The arrogant person is filled with air, trying to make himself look big and important.

For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith (Rom. 12:3).

Arrogance was a problem in the Corinthian church. This word is used seven times in the New Testament, six of them are found in 1 Corinthians. This church had problems with self-importance. That's why they had conflicts in the exercising of the gifts. Everyone thought they should have the stage, be up front, and receive recognition.

Love isn't occupied with itself. We must be careful. Our flesh wants people to know how great we are, but we don't want to be so crass as to openly declare our wonderfulness. In ingenious ways, a little bragging and arrogance work together. By cleverly sharing the wonderful things we do, and how they impact the ministry, we let everyone know how amazing we are.

Isn't it good enough to know that God is graciously using us and permitting us to serve Him? After all, nothing ever goes unnoticed by Him.

## ***Love Does Not Act Unbecomingly***

Love does not do what is improper or unacceptable. Love “. . . does not act unbecomingly” (1 Cor. 13:5). The Greek word used here signifies improper form or order. It is unbecoming, unfitting, or ill-mannered. It's the contrast between courtesy, good taste, good manners, and propriety.

Scripture shows that we cannot judge another's heart. When it comes to acting unbecomingly, we may say, “You don't know what's in my heart, so what I do is none of your business.” We think it's okay to be rude or disregard polite manners. *I can dress like I want! I can preach in a torn T-shirt and an old ball cap. After all, it's the Word of God that matters, not externals like clothing.* While that's true, it does not mean that dressing that way is the proper thing to do. That also doesn't mean that you must wear a tie to be proper. Some of this depends on where we are. Certain manners are required in different societies or places. I must be sensitive to where I am.

God's children are to be sensitive to proper social relationships, public decency, social convention, politeness, tact, and proper conduct in dress, speech, and action. We need to show good manners. It's a sad fact that the Corinthian church was not characterized as loving.

Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper, for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk (1 Cor. 11:20-21).

When they got together for the Lord's Supper, the Corinthians exhibited bad manners and thoughtlessness. You would think they would say, “Can I share what I have with you?” Like the Corinthians, we too get comfortable putting ourselves first and thinking we can do what we want to do.

## ***Love Does Not Seek Its Own***

Love is concerned about what would be pleasing to the other person. Love “. . . does not seek its own” (1 Cor. 13:5). What would be good for the other person is the heart of the matter. Therefore, love is not centered on self. It's not all about me. Our sin nature is focused on what I want, but that's not biblical love.

All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify. Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor (1 Cor. 10:23-24).

*Agape* love does not seek my benefit, my profit, my likes. *Agape* love pursues what is good for the other person.

just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but the profit of the many, so that they may be saved (1 Cor. 10:33).

I do what is effective in reaching the lost with the message of Christ. We are selfish people by birth because we are born sinners. The new birth sets us free; but the old self constantly wants to put itself to the fore.

Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification. For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me" (Rom. 15:2-3).

We're not talking about being people-pleasers in the negative sense. We're talking about doing what is beneficial, helpful, and good for the spiritual development of others. Each of us is to do what is best for our neighbor, for his good, and for his edification. What is the pattern to be followed? Even Christ did not please Himself. Who did He die for? Whose sin did He bear on the cross? Why did He suffer? He took my sins on Himself and paid the penalty that was due to me.

Christ is to be our example as we focus on doing good for others. For those who don't know the wondrous grace of God in Christ Jesus, that statement would have no impact. But, we're talking about the redeemed. This is what Christ did. He demonstrated total self-sacrifice. How can I do otherwise?

Think about marriage. If we were never occupied with ourselves, our interests, our likes, our feelings, but always with those of our partner, that would remove most of the difficulty in a marriage. Think about the past week, how many times have we been upset with our spouse, someone from work, or someone at church? Did it come about because we were thinking about their good? Or were we thinking about ourselves, what we like, what we feel like, what we want to do? All that focus on me, creates tension. If I'm thinking about my wife and she's thinking about me, that doesn't leave much room for conflict. Love does not seek its own.



## ***Love Is Not Provoked***

Love “. . . is not provoked” (1 Cor. 13:5). The word provoked carries the idea of being goaded by someone doing or saying something or being jabbed with something pointed. Either way, it can irritate us. We may also take offense when we think someone hasn’t treated us right or if someone does or says something we find insulting. It has been said that being provoked is a cross between irritation and anger.

A spouse or someone we’ve known a long time may annoy us because we expect them to know what we’re thinking. They do something and it grates on us. “I told them before I don’t like that.” We feel like we’ve been provoked, and we justify why we’re upset. “It’s not my fault. If they hadn’t irritated me, I wouldn’t have gotten upset. If they had done what pleased me, I wouldn’t have been provoked.”

However, *agape* love is not provoked; it does not experience animosity from jabbing or goading. Those pokes and stings don’t bring out an irritated response if we have biblical love.

The word, provoke, is also used in a good sense: and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds (Heb. 10:24). We are encouraged to do those things that will provoke people on to love.

Jesus was provoked to anger when He drove the moneychangers out of the temple with a whip.

Then they came to Jerusalem. And He entered the temple and began to drive out those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves; and He would not permit anyone to carry merchandise through the temple. And He began to teach and say to them, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations’? But you have made it a robbers’ den.” The chief priests and the scribes heard this, and began seeking how to destroy Him; for they were afraid of Him, for the whole crowd was astonished at His teaching (Mark 11:15-18).

Jesus’ anger was a righteous anger. We are to be angry and not sin. Christ became angry over sin, over things that were an affront

to God, like rejection of God's Word, and the religious leaders who corrupted God's Word. He dealt with them harshly. Yet, He never responded to personal provocation.

### ***Love Does Not Take into Account a Wrong Suffered***

Love “. . . does not take into account a wrong suffered” (1 Cor. 13:5). Peter instructed servants how to conduct themselves. Keep in mind that these servants were slaves, and they could have some harsh masters.

    Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God (1 Pet. 2:18-20).

    Like the slaves that Peter wrote to, we too are concerned about being treated fairly. When someone does something wrong or mean to us, we shout, “Unfair!” But, Peter wrote, “what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience?” We are getting what we deserve. What pleases God is when we have done what is right, and we are mistreated for it, yet we respond properly. This finds favor with God.

    Our goal is to be pleasing to Him. This is an occasion for us to demonstrate the love of God and Christ is the perfect example.

    For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed (1 Pet. 2:21-24).

    Christ suffered for us, giving us an example to follow in His steps. We don't pattern our lives after Christ to be saved, but as God's children we desire to display the character of Christ in all that we do.

The Son of God, who never committed one sin, never had one sinful thought in His life, did not lash back when men were reviling Him, spitting on Him, and mistreating Him. He didn't defend Himself. Scripture is clear that He bore our sins in His body on the tree.

Another aspect of not considering a wrong suffered, is love is not touchy. It's not ready to take offense. People think they're justified, have good reason to be upset, and want to come in for marriage counseling. They want to tell me everything their spouse has done wrong. They think they are exempt from showing love because they were right, and their spouse was wrong. If they can show that the spouse was wrong more often than they were, they're the winner, right? Wrong. How will this relationship flourish if wrongs are not forgiven, and instead are considered and recorded? Love does not keep a record of wrongs suffered.

The Greek word, *logizomai*, is an accounting word. It means to take into account. It's a word we'd use to make a ledger, to write down accounts, to keep a record. *Agape* love doesn't enter wrongs that have been suffered into a ledger. Why would we keep a record of the wrongs that have been done to us? Are we looking to get even? Are we waiting for them to crawl back and admit that we were right? If we're honest, we have all made a point of remembering wrongs done to us.

Many people brood over wrongs done to them until it is impossible to forget them. That's not love; love keeps no records. We all become experts at what someone else ought to do and how they could be more loving. But the challenge is to look at ourselves and see if this is what we are doing. We must not keep records. Some people say that they forgave but can't forget. That is a lie. We must forgive and quickly put the offense away; not think about it. When we refuse to mull it over, we can forget.

The context of Isaiah 1 is the rebellion of God's people. They abandoned the Lord, they despised the holy one of Israel, and they turned away from Him. This is the character of God's people. Yet, God said He will forgive their sins.

"Come now, and let us reason together," says the Lord, "though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool" (Is. 1:18).

Their sins will be washed away.

I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake, and I will not remember your sins (Is. 43:25).

God wipes out our sins for His own sake and He will not remember them. And I'm keeping a record? Jeremiah continued this theme in the context of the New Covenant. God will forgive and forget their iniquity: "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more" (Jer. 31:34). God will forgive and forget. He will not bring it back to mind. It's as though it never happened.

Peter asked Jesus, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" (Matt. 18:21). Peter was being generous. He thought, "if my brother sins against me and does the same thing seven times and I forgive him, isn't that pretty good?"

"Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven' " (Matt. 18:22). Jesus then gave an example to show the overwhelming debt that a slave was forgiven, who then in turn would not forgive the pittance that was owed to him. The example of the unforgiving slave ended with a summary: "My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart" (Matt. 18:35).

This does not mean that we can lose our salvation if we don't forgive. Lack of forgiveness is a mark of an unregenerate, unredeemed, and unforgiven person. There is no other explanation of this account by Christ. If you're not forgiving, you will not be forgiven. I know what sin is and know what it is to be a hell-bound sinner. Yet, Christ took my sins on Himself and God wiped my slate clean. How can I, who has been forgiven so much, not forgive another?

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you (Eph. 4:31-32).

I'm to forgive others as God has forgiven me. I can do this by the grace and power that I have in Him.

## ***Love Does Not Rejoice in Unrighteousness***

Two characteristics are placed in contrast to one another. Note the conjunction, “but,” in the middle. Love “. . . does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth” (1 Cor. 13:6).

A fair test of a man’s character is what he rejoices in. To be glad when evil prevails, or to rejoice in the misfortunes of others is indicative of great moral degradation. There is something about us as fallen beings. We take a certain delight, a certain joy in hearing the bad, or in giving a little gossip. All we need is a little whiff that a public figure may be guilty of something scandalous and it takes over the news. And they get a whole week of shows out of it. You know why they do that? People watch. If there is something dirty there, we want to know about it. And we’re ready to pounce.

We must not forget that believers are fallen beings too. By God’s grace we have been cleansed from our sin and made new in Christ, but those old tendencies are still there, looking for opportunities to assert themselves. Years ago, we had a President who got into some difficulties. It was tragic the way many professing believers pounced on him, wanting to discredit him. And they did it with glee. We are not told it’s okay to rejoice over unrighteousness if we disagree with someone’s politics. True love never rejoices over failures, over sin, or over unrighteousness.

Does God ever rejoice when someone sins? No. It would be blasphemy to say that God finds joy in the sin of people. And yet if we’re honest, all of us can get caught up in that, especially if we hear something about someone who has mistreated us. We must be careful when we hear news that casts a dark cloud on someone who has wronged us. Are we joyful over the news? Even if we don’t express it, are we gloating? Are we happy because now everyone will know? Are we pleased that they have sinned? Are we happy that we are vindicated? Love does not rejoice in the wrongs, failures, or sins of others.

Job wasn’t perfect, but God said he was the most righteous man on earth. As Job’s three friends attacked his character, Job vindicated himself, declared his integrity.

Have I rejoiced at the extinction of my enemy, or exulted when evil befell him? No, I have not allowed my mouth to sin by asking for his life in a curse (Job. 31:29-30).

Job never rejoiced when something bad happened to his enemies. Love is never happy when bad things happen to someone else, not even when it happens to an enemy. Love never rejoices over iniquity, over unrighteousness, or sin.

### ***Love Rejoices in Truth***

Love doesn't rejoice over wrongs, ". . . but rejoices with the truth" (1 Cor. 13:6).

I was very glad to find some of your children walking in truth, just as we have received commandment to do from the Father (2 John 1:4).

John wrote, "I was very glad." That expression literally means, "I rejoice greatly." John rejoiced greatly to find children walking in the truth, because love always rejoices with the truth.

When people walk according to God's Word, that gives us joy. There is no jealousy in love, and love is not self-seeking. Love doesn't rejoice over unrighteousness; it rejoices with the truth.

For I was very glad when brethren came and testified to your truth, that is, how you are walking in truth. I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth (3 John 1:3-4).

There is our expression again. "I rejoiced greatly" when I heard how you were walking in truth. Love rejoices with the truth. What a joy it is when people believe the truth, obey the truth, walk in the truth. It's all about truth.

### ***Love Bears All Things***

Love ". . . bears all things" (1 Cor. 13:7) means that love puts up with anything, everything, any insult, any injury, any disappointment, any pain.

We would rather have this verse say that love "puts up with a lot." That way we could say we've already fulfilled it. But God said, "Love bears all things." That means we are to bear all things with our spouse, family, friends, co-workers, church, etc. What do we have to bear? All things or everything.

## ***Love Believes All Things***

Love “. . . believes all things” (1 Cor. 13:7). That doesn’t mean that love is blind and totally gullible. In this context, it means that love is trusting, it is not suspicious. Love is alien to the spirit of the cynic, the pessimist, the anonymous slanderer, and the secret detractor.

Love takes the best and kindest view of all people in all circumstances, if it is possible. Love is not suspicious or distrustful. Love believes the best about people. This is to be our character in dealing with others. I want to trust them, believe them. We should not think, “well they said this, but I know in their heart they didn’t mean it.” Well how do you know? When is the last time you looked into someone’s heart? Are you God? Can you see what is going on in their mind too? Do you know the motives of their heart? God says no one does.

Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things (Phil. 4:8).

God tells us what kinds of things to dwell on. We are to believe all things, a good reputation, anything worthy of excellence, and worthy of praise. Love believes all things unless it is obviously a lie. However, we are not to run around raising questions about people, casting doubt on their character. A characteristic of love is to give people the benefit of the doubt. We are to do it in all our relationships because love believes all things.

## ***Love Hopes All Things***

Love “. . . hopes all things” (1 Cor. 13:7). Love puts things in proper context as far as the future is concerned. “Believes all things” and “hopes all things” are closely connected. Love looks for the best in people who have disappointed us. It is not a blind hopefulness, but a recognition that failure is never final if God’s grace is active in a life.

Now, put hope in the context of the unbeliever. We are going to love that one who is our enemy, the one who has opposed us, made life difficult for us. Our hope is that they would experience the wonder of God’s saving grace and become new creatures in Christ before their life comes to an end.



If there is breath, there is opportunity for them to turn from their sin and believe in the Savior, and that's our hope for them. The pain they've caused us and the trials they've brought into our life doesn't change our hope.

From the Roman prison, Paul wrote to the church at Philippi. He told the Philippians to not be upset about his imprisonment; it was working out for good. Even people from the emperor's household were hearing the gospel. In love, Paul hoped all things. He hoped that this would be an occasion for those who mistreated him to get saved.

### ***Love Endures All Things***

Earlier in his letter to the Corinthians, Paul wrote about his right to be supported in the ministry. Those who benefitted from his teaching should provide for his material needs.

If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? If others share the right over you, do we not more? Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but we endure all things so that we will cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ (1 Cor. 9:11-12).

Although Paul had the right to be financially supported, he did not use this right, lest it be a hindrance to the gospel. He was willing to endure not being supported for their good, because love "endures all things" (1 Cor. 13:7).

There is an overlap between "endures" and "bears" all things. Although they are slightly different, they have a close affinity with each other. "Bears" refers to putting up with difficulties, dealing with problems that come into life, and swallowing disappointments. "Endures" has a positive, aggressive quality about it. It means to live under something; like living under pressure, a trial, or hardship.

Endurance is strong and tenacious; it lasts, it holds out. It has a persevering quality, it won't quit, even though it seems the opposition is overwhelming, or the difficulties are insurmountable. This is not a positive thinking kind of thing; it is the willingness to stick with it and keep at it. To endure means to press on, even when confronted with terrible difficulties.

Like Paul, we endure all things so we will not hinder the gospel of Christ. We're willing to go through hardship. Paul came to a new city and found a job. He did whatever was available to support himself, to provide for his needs, so he could preach the Word. Love endures all things for others' benefit; to remove any obstacles that might keep others from hearing the gospel and believing it. Endurance decides what is best for the other person and does it.

When marriages break up, they say they don't love each other anymore. That is not biblical love, because biblical love endures. It keeps at it. We get into trouble because we're willing to go so far, and then we expect something in return. We're not willing to follow through on biblical love.

Life gets simplified when we do things God's way. I must bear, believe, hope, and endure all things. Suddenly, my life is simpler. I don't have to contemplate alternatives; I stick with it.

Consider the love God has for us. What were we like when He called us? What did God sacrifice for us? God says that is to be our pattern. None of us have sacrificed our lives, we are still breathing. This is a matter of doing what God says or not. Some say they can't do what God says. Then they need to be born again. If they are born again, they can do what God says. If we are a child of God, we can do His will because the Spirit of God who dwells in us is our source of power and enablement. Love is a fruit of the Spirit.

## ***Love Never Fails***

"Love never fails" (1 Cor. 13:8). The word translated, "fails," literally means, "to fall." Love never falls. This verb is used in a variety of contexts. We talk about people falling from grace. For example: He had an exalted position in a company, then he had a great fall, and he lost his position.

It has been said that love never falls apart, and thus never comes to an end. Love is durable. It endures all things, so we can say love never fails. Genuine biblical love never stops. If we demonstrated true, biblical love, this would resolve most of the problems and conflicts we get into. *Agape* love never stops, never quits, never falls apart. When I think I cannot love anymore, I must realize something is wrong with me, not the other person.

Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away (1 Cor. 13:8).

Note the contrast in this verse. “Love never fails; but. . .” and then three “if” statements—if prophecy, if tongues, if knowledge, and then the ending of these gifts. These gifts are not permanent. They are not like love, which never fails. There will come a time when these gifts do not exist.

God will bring the gifts of prophecy and knowledge to an end; they will be rendered inoperative. The word translated “done away,” means “to abolish.” Prophecy and knowledge involved direct revelation, supernatural knowledge, and insight from God, which is why they are known as revelatory gifts.

The gift of tongues will cease. Paul used a milder word, which is translated “cease,” revealing that tongues will “die out.” Tongues involved receiving revelation from God and sharing it in a language one had not learned, so it is known as a revelatory gift.

The gifts of prophecy, tongues, and wisdom were vital before the completion of the New Testament. The church at Corinth would have had these gifts because they could not turn to a New Testament and find out what God’s plan and will for the church was, or how to function in certain situations.

Unfortunately, the Corinthian church had gotten caught up in how important they were with their gifts. Each individual thought, “I have such a wonderful gift. I ought to be honored. I ought to get recognition.” They didn’t realize that their gift, and contribution to the body was of no value if it was not exercised in love.

### ***Know in Part & Prophecy in Part***

For we know in part and we prophesy in part (1 Cor. 13:9).

People with the gift of prophecy or knowledge received pieces of revelation. No individual with one of these gifts received all the revelation God gave. If a prophet in the Corinthian church received a revelation from God regarding a situation in the church at Corinth, that revelation was not necessarily given to the church at Thessalonica. If a prophet in Thessalonica received a revelation, the New Testament writers didn’t necessarily receive that revelation.

Although the Apostle John received revelation from God, he didn't write the Gospel of John, the epistles of John, or the Book of Revelation until long after the Apostle Paul was dead. The Apostle Paul never got to read John's writings, so he never saw the complete revealing of God's plan.

Paul received part of God's revelation, John received part of God's revelation, Jude received part of God's revelation, and Peter received part of God's revelation. The different individuals, who were the writers of Scripture, each received pieces of revelation from God. That's the point of verse 9, "we know in part and we prophesy in part." In the early days of the church, no one had all the revelation that God was going to give. Paul wrote about some things that were hard to understand. Later Peter would write:

Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand (2 Pet. 3:15-16).

Peter didn't have all the revelation that God provided. When he read what Paul had received, some of it was difficult to understand. It was difficult because God's revelation was given in different pieces to different individuals. The revelation from God had not been brought together as the New Testament at that point in time.

### ***When the Perfect Comes***

but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away (1 Cor. 13:10).

There are differences in how this verse is viewed. The English word, "perfect," is translated from the Greek word, *telios*. It means something has no imperfections, flaws, and is complete. Some take it to refer to Christ, e.g., "when the perfect Man comes." However, *telios* is neuter and does not refer to a man. If it were masculine, it could be translated that way. Since its neuter, the proper translation is: "when the perfect thing comes." The word, "perfect" refers to the finished, complete revelation, in contrast to the partial, incomplete revelation.

The thing that is perfect or complete is our New Testament. Various individuals received pieces of revelation during Paul's day. Paul received pieces of revelation too. Pieces of revelation were given to Peter and he wrote First and Second Peter. Pieces were given to

John and he wrote the Book of Revelation, the Gospel of John, and the epistles of John. Pieces were given to Luke and he wrote his Gospel and the Book of Acts.

When the completed comes, then the partial will be done away with. The contrast is between the partial and the complete. Once you have the completed New Testament, there is no need for more revelation.

John wrote the Book of Revelation about 95 A.D., making it the last book written, as well as the last book of the New Testament. God was done speaking. Everything necessary for us to know has been revealed. Jesus closes this final revelation.

I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book (Rev. 22:18-19).

There is nothing else to be added to prophecy with the closing of the Book of Revelation. You can't add anything, you can't take anything away, and if you do, you come under the condemnation of God. Do you see the finality of the Scriptures?

### *When I was a Child*

We know from verse 8, that a time will come when gifts that involve direct revelation from God will end. Paul used an illustration to demonstrate this point.

When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things (1 Cor. 13:11).

Using himself as an example, Paul explained that as a child, he had thought, reasoned, and spoke as a child. Then, with growth, maturity, and time he became a man and was done with childish things. The verb translated "did away" means "to abolish." They were no longer necessary because he had become a man.

The contrast is clear. Scripture was being given during the early development of the church. It was a time of childhood in the church's

life. When the completed revelation came, the revelatory gifts were abolished. Like a child becoming an adult, the childish things are gone.

### ***Incomplete to Complete Revelation***

Paul used another analogy to compare incomplete revelation from God with complete revelation from God. This is a comparison of the old covenant (the Mosaic Law), and the new covenant (revelation given with the coming of Christ). Also, the word translated, “child,” is the same word we have in 1 Corinthians 13.

Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father. So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world (Gal. 4:1-3).

A Jew, Paul wrote in the context of Jewish issues.

But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons (Gal. 4:4-5).

When that child was formally placed as a son, he entered his adult phase of life, and put childish things behind him. As an adult, he could not go back to elementary things, like the ABCs.

But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again? (Gal. 4:9).

Paul compared the time when revelation wasn't complete, to the time when it is. The Mosaic Law wasn't all God would reveal. With the coming of the new covenant—the revelation of Jesus Christ and His finished work on the cross—the child entered adulthood. No adult would want to return to his childhood lessons. Likewise, believers would not want to go back to the Law, the incomplete Scriptures.

The Law prepared people. It was like the schoolmaster, preparing students for the coming of Christ. The early period after Christ had come, suffered, died, and arose from the dead was the childhood

state. When the revelation was fully given, the Scripture was complete. Continued revelation was no longer needed. The inferior was replaced by the superior. The incomplete was replaced by the complete.

### *See in a Mirror Dimly*

For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known (1 Cor. 13:12).

Today we have mirrors that are so clear we can see more than we want to see. I have a mirror that magnifies five times. Why do I want to see my imperfections five times greater than they are? However, in biblical times the mirrors did not reflect the clear, sharp image that we have in our modern mirrors.

Corinth was famous for its polished metal mirrors. In biblical times, those who saw what you looked like were those who looked at you face to face. That is the contrast Paul made here.

The Greek word translated “dimly,” is transliterated to the English word “enigma.” It means a puzzle, or something that is not clear.

The partial revelation was like looking into a polished metal mirror. That would be true of Paul; he didn’t get a chance to read the Book of Revelation. Paul had great revelation from God, but it wasn’t complete; it was like looking into a polished metal mirror.

Peter wrote that God had revealed things to Paul that were hard to understand.

as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand (2 Pet. 3:16).

Peter also received direct revelation from God. He wrote two books of our New Testament, and yet he had trouble understanding some of the revelation Paul had received. The reason was because the revelation came in pieces. It was like putting a puzzle together. With a puzzle, we lay it out and start to fit the pieces together. As we get more pieces together, more of the picture comes together, but some pieces are hard to figure out. We know it fits somewhere, but where?

Peter said that was true of the Old Testament prophets. They couldn’t understand how the glory of Christ and the sufferings of



Christ could go together. How could He rule and reign in glory, and then suffer and die? They didn't have complete revelation.

Until the New Testament was complete, no one had the completed picture. Each one saw in a mirror dimly, not clearly. Paul goes on to say, "but then face to face." "Then" refers to when the complete comes; when the partial is done away.

now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known (1 Cor. 13:12).

Paul's point was that when we look in a mirror, we see dimly, but when someone else looks at our face, they see us as we are. With the complete revelation, we know fully, just as we are known. We see clearly, just as others see us clearly. It takes the completed revelation to give the clear, complete picture.

Paul didn't have it all. Peter didn't have it all. John didn't have it all. By the gracious direction of the Spirit, though, He guided all these pieces of revelation together, so the revelation became complete.

## ***Face to Face***

Seeing face to face means having clarity. The polished metal mirror caused distortion, but the person who looks at my face sees it just as it is.

But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does (James 1:25).

James referred to the New Testament as the perfect law, the law of liberty. In contrast to the old covenant under Moses, the new covenant contains the revelation of Jesus Christ and His finished work, making it a complete revelation.

"Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD,

“I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people (Jer. 31:31-33).

Moses received the law, which was inscribed on stone tablets. But all the law could ever do was condemn us for our sin. Now, with the new covenant we learn of the finished work of Christ. It brings life and the Spirit writes it on our hearts.

but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:16-18).

Whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil that keeps us from seeing and understanding truth is removed. The Word of God is again pictured as a mirror. It was not completely visible before because of the veil over our eyes. Then the veil was removed, and we saw the glory of the Lord.

## ***We Are Finite Beings***

. . . but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known (v. 12).

The partial revelation of the Scriptures could never provide the full knowledge that we have with the completed revelation. With the completed revelation, we have everything God intends us to know for life and godliness.

Although we have everything God intends for us to know, we do not know everything God knows. We will not know everything there is to know in eternity either, because we will never be God. We will always be finite. And God will always be infinite. Only God knows everything there is to know. That’s why we will never finish learning throughout all eternity. In 100 trillion years, we won’t have exhausted the knowledge of the infinite God.

Paul’s point is the contrast between the partial revelation (that’s given through prophecy, knowledge, and tongues), and the completed revelation (that provides everything God intends for us to know). With the completed Scriptures, we have clarity.

The writings under the direction of the Spirit were brought together as the Old Testament, and later the New Testament writings were pulled together. We have a completed revelation. Where do I go for knowledge about God, or living a life of godliness? I go to the Bible. It's a complete revelation of everything God wants us to know.

### ***The Greatest of These***

“But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor. 13:13).

John completed the last book of our New Testament about 95 A.D. Now, some 2,000 years later, we no longer have the gifts of prophecy, knowledge, or tongues. But faith, love, and hope continue. And out of these three, the greatest is love.

Why is love greater than faith and hope? According to verse 7, love “bears all things, believes all things.” God is love, and love comes from God’s very character. Faith and hope flow out of love. So, love supersedes faith and hope.

### ***New Commandment***

The evening before His crucifixion, Jesus had supper with His disciples. In anticipation of His betrayal and death on the cross, Jesus said:

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another (John 13:34).

On the brink of sacrificing Himself to pay the penalty for our sins, Jesus gave us a new commandment—to love one another like Jesus loved us. This self-sacrificing love is to become the characteristic of our lives. As partakers of the divine nature, we have the love of God produced in us and it flows through our actions. Love becomes the defining characteristic of believers in our relationships with one another. “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). Our love for one another is what identifies us as Christ’s disciples.

“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (John 14:15). Our obedience flows out of our love for God. “He who has My

commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me” (John 14:21). If a person says, “I love God,” but does not obey His Word, he is a liar. He does not love God. Worldly wisdom would claim that is a terrible thing to say. “You can’t judge him,” they insist. No, I can’t judge him, but God can. He is the judge of all, and He says that the one who keeps His commandments is the one who loves Him.

If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words (John 14:23-24).

God’s love is produced in and through us. We are to love one another just as God has loved us, and this is in the context of His sacrifice. Self-sacrificing love knows no limits and gives even to the point of death for the good of another. The Holy Spirit lives in those who love God. “Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). Self-sacrificing love doesn’t care what I get back. It doesn’t matter what benefit there is or isn’t to me. It doesn’t matter what it costs me. That doesn’t enter my mind. That’s the love John talked about.

### *Without Love*

We must not be deluded, love is crucial. I can prepare a sermon, teach the Word of God, and yet it will be of no value if done without love. It profits me nothing. That doesn’t mean that God might not use it in a life, but I will not benefit from doing it. The studying and teaching profit me nothing because I didn’t do it out of love.

If I didn’t do it out of love, I am nothing. God views me as worthless. He may have used His Word, but remember, He once used Balaam’s donkey to speak for Him. The donkey was still a donkey, but God used him. That ought to tell us something. Am I doing it out of love? There is only one way to do it right and a multitude of ways to do it wrong. The only right way is to do it out of love, but that’s the way I must do everything in my life. My spiritual gift will be worthless, and I will be worthless, if it’s not done in love.

## ***Mercy Flows Out of Love***

Scripture clearly shows that each one of us was dead in our sins. “And you were dead in your trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1). Not only were we dead in our sins, but we were under the authority and control of the devil.

you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience (Eph. 2:2).

We indulged ourselves with the desires of our minds and bodies. Like the rest of the world, we were destined for God’s fury.

Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest (Eph. 2:3).

Even when we were dead in our sins; even when we were children of the devil; and even when we were sinners under the wrath of God; He had His Son die for us that we might be identified with Him in His death, burial, and resurrection. God’s mercy flows out of His love. He is rich in mercy because of His great love for us.

But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (Eph. 2:4-5).

Throughout this look at 1 Corinthians 13, we have been reminded of God’s deep love for us. His love is beyond measure, an endless love, a complete love, a love that has dealt with us in mercy, grace, and kindness. We continually provoke Him, and yet He responds in kindness and love.

Our Savior walked this earth and suffered ridicule, scorn, and pain to bear our sin, and yet He did not respond in anger and hatred. Is God’s love for us reflected in our love for one another? May we be honest before the Lord as we examine ourselves and be quick to recognize and correct any unloving thoughts and actions. As God’s children, may we be committed to grow and manifest more beautifully the love He has placed within us.



