

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 7-14-13 AM NOTES  
"THE PROMINENCE AND POWER OF LOVE"  
1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-7

#7 in Series, "Faith, Hope, Love: Three Distinctives of the Christian Life"

**1 Corinthians 13:13 (NKJV)** "And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these *is* love."

The basic problem with the church at Corinth was their self-centeredness.

**1 Corinthians 14:33 (NKJV)** "For God is not *the author* of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints."

**1 Corinthians 14:40 (NKJV)** "Let all things be done decently and in order."

**1 Corinthians 12:31b (NKJV)** "And yet I show you a more excellent way."

"This hymn of love is at once the most beautiful and the most humbling paragraph in Holy Writ." —Oswald Sanders

**1 John 4:8b (NKJV)** "...God is love."

**John 13:35 (NKJV)** "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

"When Christians differ, it is an opportunity to show the world how much we love each other. Differences are not the death of love; they are the opportunities for love." —Frances Schaeffer

*Phileo*—Brotherly love, friendship affection, natural affection.

*Agape*—God's love; the highest form of love.

**Colossians 3:14 (ESV)** "And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony."

**Romans 5:5b (ESV)** "...God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."

**Galatians 5:22-23a (NKJV)** "<sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control."

"Joy is love enjoying itself. Peace is love at rest. Patience is love that is willing to wait. Kindness is love's reaction to other people. Goodness is love making righteous decisions. Faithfulness is love keeping its word. Gentleness is love empathizing with others. Self-control is love resisting temptation." —Ray Steadman

**Zephaniah 3:17 (NKJV)** "The Lord your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet *you* with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing."

**1 Corinthians 16:14 (NKJV)** "Let all *that* you *do* be done with love."

I. The Prominence of Love (vv. 1-3)

A. Love Is Greater Than Eloquence (v. 1)

B. Love Is Greater Than Prophecy (v. 2a)

**Jeremiah 8:21 (NKJV)** “For the hurt of the daughter of my people I am hurt. I am mourning; Astonishment has taken hold of me.”

**Jeremiah 9:1 (NKJV)** “Oh, that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!”

C. Love Is Greater Than Knowledge (v. 2b)

**1 Corinthians 8:1b (ESV)** “Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that ‘all of us possess knowledge.’ This ‘knowledge’ puffs up, but love builds up.”

D. Love Is Greater Than the Gift of Faith (v. 2c)

**Galatians 5:6b (NIV)** “The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.”

E. Love Is Greater Than Benevolence (v. 3a)

F. Love Is Greater Than Martyrdom (v. 3b)

II. The Preparation to Love (vv. 4-7)

**Luke 9:23 (NKJV)** “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.”

**Galatians 2:20 (NKJV)** “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

**Romans 6:11 (NKJV)** “Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

“I used to ask God to help me. Then I asked if I might help Him. I ended up by asking Him to do His work through me.”

—Hudson Taylor

**1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (NKJV)** “<sup>4</sup> Love suffers long *and* is kind; Love does not envy; Love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; <sup>5</sup> does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; <sup>6</sup> does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; <sup>7</sup> bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

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#7 in Series, “Faith, Hope, Love: Three Distinctives of the Christian Life”

**1 Corinthians 13:13 (NKJV)** “And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these *is* love.”

One of the reasons that we normally are traveling verse by verse through a book of the Bible or a portion of a book is that it helps us keep each passage in its context. The context of 1 Corinthians 13 is interesting. Paul is giving Spirit inspired instruction to a troubled church. He deals with problem after problem. In chapter 12 the Spirit of God focuses in on the endowment, interrelatedness, and the “others focus” of spiritual gifts. The basic problem with the church at Corinth was their self-centeredness. The members at Corinth were approaching spiritual gifts with a very self centered focus. Having a spiritual gift doesn’t make a Christian spiritual. They were desiring the “showy” gifts and elevating themselves over others in the exercise of the gifts. In chapter 14 Paul deals with how the gifts are to be exercised – especially the gift of languages or tongues. Evidently the public services at Corinth were chaotic. In some of the gifts – especially tongues – they were even bringing in elements from the pagan religions around them. The members were selfishly interrupting one another and several were speaking at the same time. He tells them in **1 Corinthians 14:33 (NKJV)** “For God is not *the author* of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.” He tells them in **1 Corinthians 14:40 (NKJV)** “Let all things be done decently and in order.” Before Paul deals with the specific instructions of chapter 14, he says in the last verse of chapter 12: **1 Corinthians 12:31b (NKJV)** “...yet I show you a more excellent way.” Then in between chapters 12 and 14 the Spirit of God gives them the one word solution to the churches problems with spiritual gifts and most of the other problems in this messed up church – *agape* or in English, “love”. The answer to every relationship problem in the church is love.

Chapter 13 of 1 Corinthians is often called a hymn. Oswald Sanders says this about it (and oh, how I agree with him). “This hymn of love is at once the most beautiful and the most humbling paragraph in Holy Writ.” [Oswald Sanders, *Light on Life’s Problems*, page 80]. What we have in these verses is Paul painting a portrait of love and Jesus is sitting as the model. Try substituting the name of Jesus everywhere you see the word love. For example, **1 Corinthians 13:4 (NKJV)** Jesus suffers long *and* is kind; Jesus does not envy; Jesus does not parade Himself, is not puffed up”. It fits all the way through the chapter. One of the godliest men who ever lived was the South African Dutch Reformed Pastor, Andrew Murray. It was said of Andrew Murray that he read this chapter every day on his knees.

In the theme verse for this series (1 Corinthians 13:13) we are told that love is greater than both faith and hope. That truth in no way minimizes the importance of faith and hope. However, nowhere in the Scripture are we told that “God is faith” or that “God is hope”. We are however told in **1 John 4:8 (NKJV)** “...God is love.” It is the love between believers that God has chosen to be the primary evidence that we are Christ’s disciples. **John 13:35 (NKJV)** “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” This evidencing love does not require that we agree on everything. Frances Schaeffer said, “**When Christians differ, it is an opportunity to show the world how much we love each other. Differences are not the death of love; they are the opportunities for love.**” In no world religion is love elevated as the primary virtue as it is in Christianity.

Before we dig into this text, allow me to give some explanatory words about love – the kind of love spoken of in this chapter. Next to “hope”, “Love” may be the most misunderstood word in the Bible. Just as with hope, the problem is that we tend to take the world’s definition of love and apply it to love that is commanded in the Scriptures. In the everyday use of the word “love” in our culture, we mean something that we enjoy or have affection for. We say, “I just love ice cream”, and in the same conversation say “I so dearly love my children”. When it comes to that special relationship between two people when “the sparks fly” and emotion runs deep, we have a special category of love that we refer to where love means

something that happens to you that you can't control – you can't stop or start it. Many marriages end because one spouse says, "I fell out of love with my husband / wife and I have fallen in love with someone I work with". This makes love something like catching the flu. You can't help it; you just caught it. Also, analyze that terminology of "falling in love". A fall is not something that you plan. It is something totally unexpected. I remember falling on my first real date! I finally got enough courage to ask a girl to the High School basketball game and going to the gym I stepped on a patch of ice on the sidewalk and went "splat" on the concrete. That was the end of that relationship. Yet we speak of "Falling in love". Popular songs don't really get us any closer to the biblical meaning of love. In my day it was the Righteous Brothers singing "You've lost that loving feeling and its gone, gone, gone." Today it hasn't changed much. Often today when someone says "I love you", they mean, "I love me and I want you". One Pastor told of a young woman who came to him in a desperate condition and said, "There is a man who says that he loves me so much he will kill himself if I don't marry him. What should I do?" The Pastor said, "Do nothing. That man doesn't love you; he loves himself. Such a threat isn't love; it is pure selfishness." That was a good answer. So what is this love in 1 Corinthians that is supposed to characterize the relationships in the body of Christ? Is this love affection? Is it a decision only? Is it something that you can't control? Is "falling out" of it reason to end a marriage?

In the Greek language, there are four words that are translated "love", but really that are primarily two words for love used in the Scripture. The word *phileo* is often used in the New Testament, and it is a good word. It literally means "brotherly love". The city of Philadelphia gets its name from this Greek word. Philadelphia is called the city of brotherly love. This word came to mean friendship love, natural affection. This describes love with someone you enjoy being with because you get along well and on most issues you see things the same way. I have one of those friends who I have known and been friends with since 1974. We went to the same church in Nashville and became visitation partners in going out sharing the Gospel together on Tuesday nights. We were called to vocational ministry about the same time, went to seminary together and pastored in Ohio together for several years. We still talk often on the phone. Over the years we have wept together and often laughed together. When we get together, our wives laugh at us and say, "You two are just alike". My affection for John is *Phileo* love and there is nothing wrong with that. That is not the Greek word that is translated "love" in 1 Corinthians 13. The word used in this passage and in John 13:35 and in 1 John 4:8, and in many other places that we see "love" in the New Testament is *agape* or one of its forms. Though it was rare in ancient Greek literature, *agape* is the most commonly used word for love in the New Testament. This *agape* love is God's love. It is the highest form of love. This *agape* love is not so much a character trait as it is an inner disposition in a Christian that results in the character traits that we see in 1 Corinthians 13. **Colossians 3:14 (ESV)** "And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony." Here is a critical question: Does *agape* love, God's love, involve our affections or is it a decision that we make? The answer is "yes". It certainly involves a decision on our part, but it is not without affection. The affection will grow as we choose to love another person with this God type love. I used to say, "You can love someone even when you don't like them – it is a choice." I do believe that is technically true, but I try not to emphasize that anymore because even if we don't especially like the other believer that we are commanded to love, we will begin to have affection for them as we continue to love them even if they do not change. This *agape* love is God's **kind** of love, but it is more than that. It is **God's love** that is produced in us by the Holy Spirit. **Romans 5:5b (ESV)** "...God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." This verse is speaking of the fruit of the Spirit that we read about in **Galatians 5:22-23a (NKJV)** "<sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control." While we see 9 characteristics of the one fruit of the Spirit, really, the 8 that follow love are contained in love. Ray Steadman relates the 8 qualities following love to love. "Joy is love enjoying itself. Peace is love at rest. Patience is love that is willing to wait. Kindness is love's reaction to other people. Goodness is love making righteous decisions. Faithfulness is love keeping its word. Gentleness is love empathizing with others. Self control is love resisting temptation." [Ray Steadman, *Letters to a Troubled Church*, page 184]. It is this love that is poured into our hearts by the

Holy Spirit. That is more than a cold decision. Sometimes we have been so wounded by another Christian that in the beginning we grit our teeth and choose to love them by being kind, praying for them and seeking to meet their real needs, but as we continue loving them and praying for them we begin to develop affection for them. If it is God's love in us loving them, the question is, "How does God love us?" Does He just love us because that's a part of His job description, but He would really rather just zap us? No, listen to how God describes His children in **Zephaniah 3:17 (NKJV)** "The Lord your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet *you* with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing."

In this message we are not going to define the love that we will focus on in 1 Corinthians 13. One reason is that the Bible doesn't define this God kind of love. Even in "the love chapter" love is not defined. One reason it is not defined is that no definition can do it justice. Let me illustrate. The dictionary defines sunset this way: "The daily disappearance of the sun behind the western horizon". Does that do justice to a sunset? That's why I am not going to define love. I am simply going to lay out for you the description that the Bible gives of love.

You need to listen carefully to these messages on love. Remember that the Scriptures say that of the three things that remain (faith, hope, and love) the greatest is love. Here is another reason to listen carefully and to apply what you hear. **1 Corinthians 16:14 (NKJV)** is a command to every Christian with no exceptions. "Let all *that you do* be done with love."

## I. The Prominence of Love (V1-3)

To introduce this chapter, Paul contrasts love with several things that were highly valued in that culture and thus in the church at Corinth.

### A. Love Is Greater Than Eloquence (V1)

The ancient Greeks admired oratory that could hold an audience spellbound. The word "tongues" is better translated "languages". Do angels have a special language? There is nothing in Scripture to indicate that they do. In the many examples of angels who spoke to men, they spoke in the language of the person hearing the message. The point of this verse is that Paul is picking the extreme to show love's superiority over the best that eloquence has to offer. Whether it is an eloquent human being or an eloquent angel, without love they would be like a noisy gong (NASB) or a clanging cymbal. My Father in law used to say, "They're just making a racket".

### B. Love Is Greater Than Prophecy (V2a)

In chapter 14 Paul says that the spiritual gift of prophecy (proclaiming the Word of God) was the greatest gift for the church. He was not elevating the persons with this gift, but was emphasizing the importance of the proclamation of God's Word. Even the important gift of prophecy must be administered with love. This is a good word for those who preach and teach God's word. Do you really love the people that you are proclaiming the truth to? A great Scriptural example is the prophet Jeremiah. He powerfully and without compromise or holding back proclaimed the truth that God gave him. But Jeremiah was not a coldly detached prophet. He was known as the weeping prophet. His love for the people of Judah was so strong that he could not hold back the tears. **Jeremiah 8:21 (NKJV)** "For the hurt of the daughter of my people I am hurt. I am mourning; astonishment has taken hold of me." **Jeremiah 9:1 (NKJV)** "Oh, that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!"

Eloquence without love is just a racket; prophecy without love is ineffective.

### C. Love Is Greater Than Knowledge (V2b)

"Mysteries" were things that were unknown unless God revealed them. Paul is going to the extreme to make a point. He is saying that even if you could know all mysteries that mankind can't figure out and that only God can reveal, without love it would be nothing. If you could know the details of God's plan for the ages, all the mysteries of science, math, astronomy, and the arts, it is nothing without love. Paul told us earlier the result of knowledge without love in **1 Corinthians 8:1b (ESV)** "...This 'knowledge' puffs up, but love builds up."

#### D. Love Is Greater Than the Gift of Faith (V2c)

I believe that in the context, Paul is not talking about the grace of faith that God gives to save; this is talking about the gift of faith (12:9) that the Holy Spirit distributes to some in the body of Christ to believe God to do amazingly great things. As wonderful as the gift of faith is, without love the possessor of this gift is nothing. **Galatians 5:6b (NIV)** “The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.”

#### E. Love Is Greater Than Benevolence (V3a)

Love involves self-sacrifice, but not all self-sacrifice is love. This description in verse 3 certainly sounds like a commendable act, but the question is, “Is it being done in love?” Some people make great sacrifices to earn God’s favor; some give to do penance for some evil deed and to perhaps salve their guilty conscience; some do it to make themselves look better than others, for recognition, for political gain, or praise from others. There is no love in any of those motives. God views these loveless sacrifices for the poor as nothing.

#### F. Love Is Greater Than Martyrdom (V3b)

Surely martyrdom is the pinnacle of human sacrifice. Even martyrdom can be done without love. When Paul was in Athens, he likely saw the tomb of an Indian Hindu ascetic that had this inscription: “Zarmanochegas, the Indian from Bargaosa, according to the ancient customs of India, made himself immortal, and lies here.” How did he make himself immortal? It was by burning himself publically in the streets of Athens. Perhaps this was the case Paul had in mind or one like it. Some seek martyrdom for self glory and to be immortal, but they are not motivated by love. God says that it all amounts to nothing. Contrast this example with Stephen, the first Christian martyr whose heart was filled with love for the Lord and even died praying for the ones who stoned him.

### II. The Power to Love (V4-7)

In this passage, we see the amazing description of love. These perfections are all verbal forms in the Greek even though some come out as adjectives in most English translations. The focus is on what love does and does not do. *Agape* is not an abstract concept; it involves action. It is often propelled by affections and at other times it is not, but still in the power of the Holy Spirit it acts in obedience or refrains from acting in a sinful way. In the next message, we will look at these perfections of love one by one. You are going to see how impossible they are in your own strength. I remind you that this is God’s love produced in you and propelled to others through the Holy Spirit. It is only when He is allowed to fill you and as you walk in total dependence on Him as you go through life that these qualities of love characterize your life. These are not natural actions! If you want to see the fleshly counterpart to these characteristics that dominate the life of a disobedient headed for discipline from God carnal Christian, just read the opposite of these qualities. “The self empowered self centered carnal life is impatient and unkind. It envies, parades itself before others to look good and is puffed up with its own sense of importance. It is rude, seeks its own, is easily provoked and always remembers wrongs done against it” etc. I think you get the point. In order to love like this passage describes, we need more than self discipline. There must be a death. **Luke 9:23 (NKJV)** “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.” As we deny self, we are saying that we are dying to our ambitions, our goals, our dreams, our rights – the right to a comfortable life, the right to choose what we will do with our life, the right to go where we want to go and do what we want to do, the right to success, acclaim and honor in the world. This is a total surrender to Him. Once we have denied ourselves, we are ready to apply the cross. To take up our cross is to die. The cross in Jesus’ day had only one purpose – death! For a person who has savingly believed in Christ we have already died on that cross. Our task now is to daily reckon by faith on what happened there. **Galatians 2:20 (NKJV)** “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” In this verse we find what we need to live the Christian life – a life of love that is unexplainable by those in the world. **Romans 6:11 (NKJV)** “Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our

Lord.” To reckon is to count something as true by faith. The old me that was enslaved to sin has been crucified with Christ. The life that I live in this body I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me. The Christian life is Christ living His life through me. Only Jesus can love like this description in 1 Corinthians 13. I cannot do it! Only Christ can.

#### CONCLUSION

Hudson Taylor, the pioneer missionary to inland China in the 1800’s said: “I used to ask God to help me. Then I asked if I might help Him. I ended up by asking Him to do His work through me.” Would like to have your life described by 1 Corinthians 13:4-7? Read it substituting you name for love. **1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (NKJV)** <sup>4</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ suffers long *and* is kind; \_\_\_\_\_ does not envy; \_\_\_\_\_ does not parade itself, is not puffed up; <sup>5</sup> does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; <sup>6</sup> does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; <sup>7</sup> bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” Christ in you makes this possible.