

What is Love?

I Corinthians 13:1-8, 13

This is one of the most familiar passages in all of Scripture. It is the most prominent discourse on love. Valentine's Day is near and many are thinking of love at this time of year. Sadly in our day, many have a distorted view of love. Their view is anything but biblical.

Of all of Paul's writings, this chapter is believed by many to be the greatest, from a literary standpoint. It is commonly known as the Hymn of love. It is interesting to note that this passage is nestled in the center of Paul's great discourse on spiritual gifts. He certainly sensed the urgency and need for love among God's people. Without love, the presence of the most prominent spiritual gifts would be of little influence.

One of the simplest and yet profound descriptions of God is love. [1 Jn. 4:16 – And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.](#) In our text, the word [charity](#) is translated from the Greek word *agape*. This is God's love. It isn't sensual love or even brotherly love; it is love as God loves.

This morning as we look forward to Valentine's Day, I want to examine this passage and seek to uncover the great truths concerning love as we think on the question: [What is Love?](#)

I. The Preeminence of Love (1-3) – The first of these verses describe the preeminence of love to other emotions. It is superior and ought to be evident and abundant in our lives.

A. Love is Superior to Communication (1) – Paul reveals that he could have the oratory of the greatest of men and even angels, and if he had no love, his words would just be a sounding brass or tinkling cymbal. In essence they would be empty and void of anything.

- It is easy to say I love you, but it is quite another matter to genuinely show that love. I tell my wife I love her every day, but if I never showed that love, she would eventually begin to question my love. Real love is not just empty words and vain talk. When it comes to love, actions speak much louder than words.

B. Love is Superior to Comprehension (2a) – No doubt Paul was a man who had a deep understanding of the truths of God. On a spiritual level he was superior to the average Christian, yet he realized that all of the knowledge that a man could obtain would be of little value without love. If he never expressed love to humanity, how could he possibly share the truths of the gospel?

- Knowledge and understanding are wonderful. We need to grow spiritually and intellectually in the things of God, but love is more needful. We could possess the wisdom of

Solomon and yet if we lacked love it would all be vanity. People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. I had rather have a heart of love than a head of knowledge.

C. Love is Superior to Capability (2b) – Paul knew that even if he possessed great faith without love it would profit nothing. He could possess the ability to accomplish things that others could only dream of, but if he lacked love, he lacked what he needed most.

- It is wonderful to possess great ability, but that can never replace love. If we had faith to move mountains, and yet had no love in our hearts, what benefit would our faith be? I had rather be surrounded by those who possessed God's love than those with all the ability in the world.

D. Love is Superior to Conscience (3) – Paul declares that all of the kindness in the world is of little value if it is not presented in love. He realized that he could give all that he owned to the poor and even offer himself for them, but if he didn't love them, what good would it be.

- I am convinced that many need to learn this great truth. Simply putting money in the plate or donating to a good cause does not compare to real love. Often we give because we know it is expected. We could sell all that we have and give it to the poor, but if we didn't love them it would be in vain. Real love is offered because there is an inward desire to share it.

I. The Preeminence of Love (1-3)

II. The Presence of Love (4-8)

A. Love's Character (4-6) – These verses describe the heart of love.

1. Suffereth Long (4) – *Patient endurance under provocation; literally long-tempered.* Love is not impatient or one that seeks "pay back." Stephen is a great example.

2. Is Kind (4) – This speaks of goodness that goes forth in order to benefit others. It is respectful of others and always considerate of their needs.

3. Envieth Not (4) – Love is not envious or jealous of the talents or blessings of others. Love rejoices in their prosperity.

4. Vaunteth not Itself (4) – This means “*does not make a parade; it does not brag or boast.*” It does not seek to be the center of attention. Love allows others to enjoy their moments of success, but refrains from bragging itself.

5. Is not Puffed Up (4) – Love is not arrogant or proud. In fact, it stands in humility, realizing that all we possess comes from the good hand of God. Real love seeks not its own praise.

6. Doth not Behave Itself Unseemly (5) – Love is never rude. It always seeks to treat others with compassion and humility. Love keeps our emotions in check. It allows us to be consistent in our witness and labor for the Lord among others. Real love allows us to be a light for the Lord.

7. Seeketh not Her Own (5) – It is never selfish or self-centered. God’s love is not one that seeks only its well being. It is genuinely concerned with the needs and desires of other. Love allows us to place others’ needs ahead of our own.

8. Is not Easily Provoked (5) – Love is willing to yield to the wants of others. It is submissive and kind. Love does not keep a record of past wrongs, but rather overlooks and forgives. It is not adamant that it be served and promoted.

9. Thinketh no Evil (5) – “*takes no worthless inventory.*” Love responds in a godly way. It does not dwell on the past or injustices that have come its way; love that is not persuaded or motivated by the actions of others. It always looks for good in a situation, rather than being negative and seeking fault or blame. It is not quick to jump to conclusions or embrace rumors.

10. Rejoices in Truth (6) – [Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth](#); Love refuses to rejoice in the sin, iniquities, or failures of others. Love looks beyond the failure and seeks the Lord. Love does rejoice and embrace the truths of God. Love rejoices when truth is proclaimed and upheld, even in instances when truth hurts. God’s love will allow us to embrace His truth in a way that will transform our lives.

B. Love's Consistency (7-8) –

1. Beareth all Things (7) – This literally means “*to cover.*” Love is consistent in that it isn’t affected or dictated by circumstances. Love is not swayed or changed by the actions or failure of others. Love remains even if it must overlook the failures.

2. Believeth all Things (7) – Love seeks to look at every situation in the best possible light. It does not seek to undermine, but to uplift and encourage. Love seeks good in every situation. It determines to trust, believe, and remain confident.

3. Hopeth all Things (7) – Love never loses hope. It never resigns to defeat or failure. Love expects the best possible outcome in all situations.

4. Endureth all Things (7) – Military term, “*does not give up the fort; it stands its ground, never abandoning its post.*” Love is not fickle or passing; it is not here one moment and gone the next. Love refuses to allow difficulties and strife to overcome it. Love refuses to cease for any reason!

5. Never Fails (8) – *Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.* When all else has failed, real love will remain. We have all experienced the introduction of new found technologies. Mankind continues to gain knowledge and wisdom, making great strides in the advancement of humanity.

- But, the one constant in much of the world is change. Technologies get outdated, new discoveries are made, people live and die, and yet love remains. Paul spoke of love in his day. I’m sure that it would have been hard for him to imagine the world in which we live today. Much has come and gone since Paul penned the letter, but love remains. It will never fail.

I. The Preeminence of Love (1-3)

II. The Presence of Love (4-8)

III. The Priority of Love (13) – *And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.* Paul closes with an exhortation to all believers. There is much that we have been given in the Lord. He has blessed us all with individual gifts and abilities. All believers have a measure of faith and hope in the Lord. I rejoice in these, but Paul declares that the greatest of all is love.

- I think you would have to agree that we need more godly love in our day. We need to love as God loves. We need the love described in the verses we've discussed.

Is your love what it ought to be? Do you love others as Jesus does? Do we have a genuine concern for the well being and salvation of those around us?

If you need your love to increase, why not come and seek the Lord today. It is impossible to love as God loves when we are not in fellowship with Him.