

## The Love Chapter

### [1 Corinthians 13:1-13](#)

I think if anyone here has attended at least one wedding in his or her lifetime would have had a good chance of hearing today's scripture lesson from 1 Corinthians recited during that wedding. It is by far and away the most popular scripture read in Christian weddings – it is known as The Love Chapter. There are other popular wedding scriptures. Matthew 19:5 that talks of a man leaving his father and mother and a woman leaving her home and the two will be united as one. The gospel of John is full of scriptures concerning love. Yet it is interesting that in Paul's letter to the church at Corinth, he was not referring to a love between a man and a woman.

If we take a look at the church in Corinth perhaps we can gain some insights. The city of Corinth was a wealthy port city. As a result, a huge variety of people from all backgrounds and

nationalities were drawn to the city in search of wealth and riches and prosperity. Many remained the poor, faceless masses that never experienced those dreams of wealth. Yet the leaders of the church in Corinth were well off. They had leadership roles within their newly established church and seemed anxious to establish authority based on status.

Do we see this phenomenon today? Maybe. It could be easy for us to get caught in the trap of looking to those with status in society to appeal to their natural leadership abilities instead of seeking God in prayer and trusting God to reveal spiritual gifts in each person. You may recall that the passage just before today's scripture lesson talks about spiritual gifts and how the gifts that seem the least important are in fact the most highly exalted. Last week we talked about the body of Christ being compared to the human body, with each part working

together for the good of the whole, and how important it was for all the parts to work together in harmony with one another.

Apparently the church in Corinth had a problem with this concept. They seemed concerned with the leadership positions and not so much with the positions that were the honorable, yet behind-the-scenes jobs that needed done in order for the church to function as a healthy body of Christ. They needed to be reminded, as we do sometimes, to extend the love of God to all, not just the privileged.

Sometimes it is a bit disheartening to see and hear the numerous stories of churches that are driven apart because of the simple fact that members had forgotten how to love one another. The term used for love in Paul's famous chapter, is *agape* which is far beyond the physical love we are most familiar with. In any relationship there is an understanding of love that is

extended from both parties. Hence there is the popular reference to love in weddings with the use of this scripture. But the Greek term for that type of love is *eros* which depicts a physical love. This kind of love expects to be reciprocated. If someone extends a hand of love toward us, there is an expectation that that love will be returned.

But Paul is referring to *agape* love that can only stem from God. This kind of love is extended through God's hand of grace. There is no expectation of that love being reciprocated. God extends love to everyone who wishes to receive it. Paul states that he could be the most eloquent speaker with the most prosperous position in the church, but without that all-encompassing love from God, he is simply a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. He goes on to refer to some of the gifts of the spirit. Paul states that he could have the gift of leadership,

prophecy, poverty (giving all to the poor), or even the gift of faith; but without God's all-encompassing love, none of these gifts mean a thing. Without God's unconditional love for us, no jobs or functions we perform in God's name will mean anything.

When you read the rest of this chapter, you can probably see why this scripture is so popular at weddings. God's love is explained in great detail as a perfect model for us to follow in our relationships with one another. I have seen marriages fall apart when these basic principles are forgotten. Even for those who are not married, these basic principles hold for any relationships we have with others. Take a look at what Paul outlines love is and what love isn't. First the 'is' column:

- Love is patient – sometimes love doesn't follow our timetable does it? As a nation in general we tend to be impatient, but this simply doesn't work with true love – God's love. This type of patience is specific to people – Pastor John Lee describes this patience as a person who has been wronged by

someone and has the power to enact revenge but refuses to do it. This is a sign of strength.

- Love is kind – love finds a way to allow us to be kind to others even in difficult circumstances.
- Love always protects – love makes a way to secure the relationship and those in it. True love recognizes dangers from outside and seeks ways to preserve the relationship.
- Love always trusts – love sees the best in the relationship and maintains a measure of assurance that each party is honest and forthright with the other.
- Love always hopes – without love there is no hope.
- Love always perseveres – God continues to extend love to us even when we are reluctant to receive or acknowledge it.

Paul also includes a long list of things love is not:

- Love is not envious – it is not jealous.
- Love is not boastful – it doesn't puff itself up and seek importance. God's love is genuine – it doesn't need to boast.
- Love is not proud – much like being boastful, love doesn't need special recognition.

- Love is not rude – often I have seen those in relationships that tend to forget to extend common courtesies as we would to strangers. God’s love is always polite.
- Love is not self-seeking – God’s love is not extended for the purpose of seeing what God can get in return. It is unconditional.
- Love is not easily angered – This goes along with patience. God’s love is positive and supportive.
- Love keeps no record of wrongs – God is not keeping a scorecard of times when we fail. We are forgiven people.
- Love never fails – God’s love is always available for any who seek to accept it.

When we think of our relationships with one another, do these qualities of love shine out? None of us can measure up to God but we can use the model given for us to interact with one another in ways that others will recognize as coming from God.

I’d like to close with an illustration:

[Love from a Kid's Point of View, Citation: "What Is Love—  
From a Kid's Point of View," LightSinger, (accessed 3-14-02)]

What is love, from a kid's point of view?

"When my grandmother got arthritis, she couldn't bend over and paint her toenails anymore. So my grandfather does it for her all the time, even when his hands got arthritis too. That's love."

"When someone loves you, the way they say your name is different. You know that your name is safe in their mouth."

"Love is when someone hurts you, and you get so mad, but you don't yell at them because you know it would hurt their feelings."

"Love is when my mommy makes coffee for my daddy and she takes a sip before giving it to him, to make sure the taste is okay."

"Love is what's in the room with you at Christmas if you stop opening presents and listen."

"Love is like a little old woman and a little old man who are still friends even after they know each other so well."

"Love is when Mommy sees Daddy smelly and sweaty and still says he is handsomer than Robert Redford."

"Love is when your puppy licks your face even after you left him alone all day."

"You really shouldn't say 'I love you' unless you mean it. But if you mean it, you should say it a lot. People forget."

Let us remember always to share God's *agape* love with one another and with our neighbors both far and near. Faith, hope, and love – but the greatest of these is love. Amen.