

# Love is as Love Does

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## **Text:**

I Corinthians 13

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient and kind.

Love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;

It does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love. (ESV).

## **Introduction:**

We are taking a long and careful look at one of the best-known and best-loved chapters in the Bible. We saw in our first study that the very fact that it is so well-known might keep us from giving it due attention. Sometimes familiar things have simply always been there without receiving the attention they merit. Things come into our possession sometimes in odd and incidental ways, and we do not always really take possession of what we own. For many of us the Bible has been a familiar companion for as long as we can remember, but that never means that it has nothing new for us. Even the most familiar passage can still bring new light when properly studied and meditated upon.

We also noted that contrary to common opinion this chapter is not a “love poem”. Even though it has a certain poetic cadence and its language is somewhat exalted, its aim is not poetic. Its primary aim is to define for us as precisely as possible the more excellent way of love. Paul is not trying to give us a good feeling about love, but he is seeking to give a clear image of what loving behavior looks like by which we may examine our own behavior.

Finally, we saw that we must understand the chapter’s key word as its author understands it. We saw that for Paul love is first a divine gift and secondly a behavior. It is on this second quality of love that I now want to expand.

The chapter divides clearly into three distinct paragraphs. The first (verses 1-3) is characterized by the threefold repetition of the phrase “and have not love”. Its point is that all that is not done from love is ultimately not done for God, and hence, of no eternal value. By referring to the exercise of spiritual gifts in the first two verses, he goes to the heart of what he is trying to teach the Corinthians. They put great stock in the exercise of spiritual gifts, but Paul says that it doesn’t matter how many gifts we have or how fervently we exercise them, if we do it without love, we do it in vain. The second (verses 4-7) paragraph describes how love behaves. It reacts to the “and have not love” in the first paragraph. To “not have love” is to not act in a loving way. In this paragraph love is described by a series of fifteen verbs. Here we see love portrayed both negatively and positively, as we are told what it does and doesn’t do. The final paragraph (verses 8-13) develops the theme expressed in its first line: “love never fails.” Spiritual gifts are temporary, but love will endure for all eternity. To help us remember we may organize the three into a simple outline:

- I. The Prerequisite of Love
- II. The Portrait of Love
- III. The Permanence of Love

I want us to focus for the moment on the portrait of love. Let us do that by looking carefully at each of the fifteen behaviors that describe love. This may seem laborious, but I think that if we pursue it attentively we will reap a rich harvest.

Again, as the chapter itself, the portrait may be divided into parts. The first two qualities, patience and kindness represent respectively love’s necessary passive and active responses to others. These are followed by seven things that love does not do. We then have a corresponding pair: “love does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth, and the list closes with four things that love always does. Again we can give a simple outline to help us remember:

- I. Two Essential Qualities of Love
- II. Seven Things Love Doesn’t Do

- III. Love's Joy
- IV. Four Things Love Always Does

### The Essential Qualities of Love:

By putting “suffers long and is kind” at the beginning Paul indicates that these are the two essential qualities of love. One is passive, the other is active. They are both attributed to God. In fact, Paul puts the two together as qualities of God in Romans 2:4 where in speaking of the judgment of God asks the question: “Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?” In the Old Testament God's loving kindness is one of his most outstanding attributes. The Psalmist declares that God's loving kindness is “better than life” (Psalm 63:2), and Jeremiah says: “The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, *saying*, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee” (Jeremiah 31:3). As God demonstrates his loving kindness towards us by his providential care, so we demonstrate our love for one another by acts of kindness.

If God is kind, he is also patient, even when his kindness is spurned and rejected. It is for this reason that we are still here. It is for this that his judgment has not already fallen on us. In patience he withholds his judgment and extends his kindness giving us opportunity to find repentance and salvation. In Exodus 34 when God revealed himself to Moses on Mt. Sinai and gave him the tablets of the Ten Commandments, this is what he said to him: “ The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear *the guilty*; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth *generation*” (Exodus 34:6-7). When Paul spoke of love being longsuffering, he spoke from personal experience. He writes in 1Ti 1:15-16: “This *is* a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.”

We might add at this point that Paul having experienced the longsuffering patience and kindness of God had learned how to return them to others. There is no greater demonstration of this fact than his relationship with the Corinthian Church. Their multiple failures and infractions would have been sufficient to make a lesser person wash his hands of them and leave them to their folly, but Paul with the patience and kindness of Christ continues to woo them, teach them, and nurture them as a mother would continue to care for a rebellious child.

The Corinthians needed to look no further than the author of the letter to find a crystal clear illustration of this all-important sentence: “Love is patient and kind.”

### **Conclusion:**

So love is as love does. It is not a feeling but a behavior, a way of acting. It begins by always acting with patience and kindness. As we have already remarked it acts like Christ. Last time, I pointed out that you would do no violence to these verses by reading “Christ” in the place of “love”. Today I want to suggest another way of reading them. I think if we are to get the full impact of the message we must read them this way. This was the intention of the Apostle in writing them. Instead of reading love, read your name. This will turn the portrait of love into a test of love. It is easy to say “I love”, but to follow the most excellent way we must love as Christ loved. We must be able to legitimately put our own name before each of these fifteen qualifiers. Do the test. See how you score.