

## Without the Exercise of Christ's Love, We Are Nothing

1 Corinthians 13:4-7; Romans 5:8

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Christ's love was not/is not passive or inactive. Christ's is not like a trophy on a shelf that does not move, but is rather the exercise and hard work that wins that trophy (Romans 5:8). He loved us from all eternity and gave Himself for us. It is this very love of Christ that has been supernaturally implanted in our souls by the Holy Spirit at our regeneration. Just as faith without works is a dead faith (James 2:26), so love without works is a dead love (1 Thessalonians 1:3).

Christ's love in you is of divine origin (1 John 4:7). It is the spiritual DNA of Jesus that is implanted in every true Christian (Romans 5:5). Christ's love in you is not a mere feeling. It is much more than that. It is giving and doing what is good for others even when we have been mistreated, despised, and hated (Galatians 2:20). It is the fulfilling of the law (Romans 13:10). Christ's love in our speech and conduct is so important that the Apostle Paul says without it we are nothing. Nothing! We may have read/heard this many times, but its importance bears repeating.

The main points from our text are these: (1) What Christ's Love Does (1 Corinthians 13:4a)? (2) What Christ's Love Does Not Do (1 Corinthians 13:4b-6)? (3) What Christ's Love Overcomes (1 Corinthians 13:7)?

### I. What Christ's Love Does (1 Corinthians 13:4a)?

#### A. Why did Paul include this chapter on love in 1 Corinthians?

1. Contention, jealousy, rivalry, and division were rampant within the Church of Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:10).
2. There were personality cults (Paul, Apollos, Peter—1 Corinthians 3).
3. There was libertinism (a false "freedom" to commit immorality and to tolerate it in the church—1 Corinthians 5).
4. There was a profaning of the Lord's Supper (the rich eating—the poor not eating at the love feast and drunkenness at the Lord's Supper—1 Corinthians 11).
5. There was a self-centered use of spiritual gifts (exercising gifts in order to exalt one's self rather than to edify one another—1 Corinthians 12,14).

B. Although the Apostle Paul corrects the errors that brought division within the Church of Corinth, he realizes that all of the pure doctrine in Scripture will be fruitless in bringing the church together if one thing is missing: Christ's love actively working in their lives (1 Corinthians 12:31). It is Christ's love that take us from being self-centered (in seeking our own desires/ambitions) to being Christ-centered (in seeking the peace, purity and unity of Christ's Church).

C. Paul begins his inspired words by making clear that Christ's love ("charity"=*agape*) is absolutely necessary to be exercised by those who are true Christians (1 Corinthians 13:1-3). These verses reveal how far one who professes Christ may go in religion, and yet be nothing.

1. Name whatever you consider to be the greatest spiritual gift that God gives to any person, and Paul says it is nothing without Christ's love and is worse than nothing, because it is just a bunch of noise without Christ's love (whether it be speaking in languages never learned, whether prophesying and giving God's revelation, whether knowledge of all the doctrines of Scripture, whether having faith to move mountains, whether giving all one has to feed the poor and needy, or whether laying down one's life for what one believes). Gifts are important. The truth is necessary. But the gifts and the truth we profess are nothing

without the activity of Christ's love in our life for God and our neighbor.

2. Love for Christ and for our neighbor is the incense that must be mixed with our doctrine, worship, and obedience to be found pleasing in His sight (Ephesians 5:2). Without Christ's love we merely have a name that we are alive, regardless of what we profess to believe.

D. We now come to the first main point: **What Christ's Love Does (1 Corinthians 13:4a)?** Paul states there are two positive actions of Christ's love (charity=*agape*) toward our neighbor (home, work, church).

1. **Christ's love (charity) suffereth long.** It is long (not short) in forbearing with the weaknesses and sins of others. It endures long with the personal injuries inflicted by others. Christ's love is patient in face of provocations, and does not yield to bitterness/personal attacks/criticism, nor seeks personal revenge for wrongs suffered from others (it prays, not curses). Jesus was longsuffering in restraining His just wrath against us for our active rebellion against Him. His love compels us to do likewise.

2. **Christ's love (charity) is kind.** It is good and gracious to others (even to the undeserving and wicked in sending them rain and sunshine). It flees not from those in need, but is active as was the good Samaritan. Jesus was not only longsuffering (that by itself would have not saved us from our sin), but He was kind to us in coming as the God-Man to love His enemies and to pay our infinite debt of sin (Titus 3:4-5).

## II. **What Christian Love Does Not Do (1 Corinthians 13:4-6)?**

A. Just as Christ's love (charity) is active in practicing longsuffering and kindness, so Christ's love is active in NOT practicing the works of the flesh. These are the very sins that were leading to the conflicts, rivalries, and divisions among the Corinthian Christians (and will do so among us).

B. The biblical remedy to these destructive sins is Christ's love.

1. **Christ's love (charity) envieth not.** Envy looks at the gifts and graces of others, and despises others for the blessings they have. Envy does not want the gifts that others have (that's coveting), but rather envy despises others because it feels inferior to others. It wants to feel superior (not equal) and so it seeks to tear others to pieces because of their successes/promotions. From envy proceed rivalries and putting others down to make oneself look good. However, Christ's love is so concerned with serving others, there is no place to envy the blessings of others. Christ's love rejoices in the promotion and success of others.

2. **Christ's love (charity) vaunteth not itself.** It does not boast about its own gifts, graces, or accomplishments. Christ's love in us waits to be praised by others, rather than praising ourselves (Proverbs 27:2). It's been said, "It ain't boasting if it's the truth." Wrong! It is boasting, even when (and especially when) it is the truth. Otherwise, it's not boasting, it's lying. In an argument with our spouse, how often do we trumpet forth and itemize our own praises and all our accomplishments (1 Corinthians 1:31)? That's not Christ's love, that's conceit.

3. **Christ's love (charity) is not puffed up.** This sinful work of the flesh is similar to the preceding one, but not the same. Vaunting is verbally boasting and praising oneself, whereas being puffed up is that pride, arrogance, and superiority that is captured in attitudes, looks, and gestures (even when not verbally praising oneself). We may not praise ourselves, but may remove ourselves from others (who have not reached our height of knowledge or degree of financial security). Jesus, the Son of God, came to serve, not to be served (Philippians 2:5-8).

4. **Christ's love (charity) does not behave itself unseemly.** It does not act in a shameful way or humiliate others by belittling them in word or deed (the rich humiliated the poor, 1 Corinthians 11:22). Jesus rebuked self-righteous hypocrites, but His love reached down to lift up unworthy sinners by His grace. We behave unseemly when we engage in angry outbursts, threats, name-calling, foul speech, or slamming doors.

5. **Christ's love (charity) seeketh not its own.** It is not self-centered (as is this sinful age). How often do conversations with others become conversations about ourselves? Christ's love realizes that the world does not revolve around me—our world revolves around Christ, love for Christ, His gospel, His commandments, and love for one's neighbor. Christ's love is more interested in knowing what others are facing (listening), than in making known what we are facing (not that there is not a time and place for that as well, Galatians 6:2). Christ's love denies itself (denies its rights) to serve and give to others (the gospel).

6. **Christ's love (charity) is not easily provoked.** An offensive word, a disrespectful attitude, or a direct attack will not immediately receive angry retaliation. Christ's love is "swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath" (James 1:19). If you know you have a potentially volcanic anger with someone pray that God will guard and melt your heart; for an explosive temper will lead to violence. Which is the mighty man: the one who is easily provoked or the one who controls his anger (Proverbs 16:32)? If we are exercising a righteous anger, it will not be vindictive, but will speak the truth in love to that person.

7. **Christ's love (charity) thinketh no evil.** It does not reckon or take account of wrongs suffered, i.e. it doesn't keep a mental ledger. We cannot wear our feelings on our sleeves, so that anyone who brushes up against us hurts our feelings and causes great offense. When you are personally offended by others, does it control your life? Do the personal offenses of others become your misery instead of their misery? Christ's love does not live in bitterness or resentment (that is misery). Even when there is no repentance on the part of the offender, Christ's love always stands ready to forgive (Psalm 86:5), and it covers a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8). Are you keeping records of the personal wrongs committed against you, harboring that offense in your heart, repeating that offense in your mind and memory? That is not Christ's love—that is sin and is a sure path to misery. Seek His forgiveness, and realize that God's mercy was extended to you for even worse offenses committed against Him.

8. **Christ's love (charity) rejoiceth not in iniquity.** It is a holy love. Christ's love does not rejoice in sin, in the breaking of God's Law (whether in our lives or in the lives of others). Christ's love does not approve of what is immoral or profane in videos, films, songs, books, magazines, or web sites (Psalm 101:3; Romans 1:32). Christ's love burns within one's heart that Jesus, His gospel, and His commandments would be exalted and that sin (in all of its forms) would be destroyed (beginning in our own lives, our own families, our own church, and our own nation).

9. **Christ's love (charity) rejoiceth in the truth.** To the contrary, His love rejoices and delights in God's truth. Christ's love rejoices whenever God's truth in doctrine, worship, government, and when God's commandments are loved/obeyed. His love, therefore, does not rejoice in the tyranny of civil rulers that persecute the righteous for standing for His truth and reward the wicked; nor does Christ's love rejoice in the broad path of churches today that tolerate and promote a big tent agenda of gathering as many people into one church under the banner of "love" (while despising the truth that is found in Scripture and summarized in faithful Confessions, etc., Proverbs 23:23).

### III. **What Christian Love Overcomes (1 Corinthians 13:7)?**

A. Christ's love overcomes the greatest obstacles that others may cast in its way. For it is His victorious love that overcame all enemies in order to redeem fallen, unworthy, ungodly sinners like you and me.

1. **Christ's love (charity) beareth all things.** It can face any and all obstacles, hardships, enemies for the sake of the one loved.

2. **Christ's love (charity) believeth all things.** It presumes that one is innocent until proven guilty by sufficient evidence. It is not gullible to believe everything, but Christ's love does not hastily rush to judgment before hearing the testimony of two or three credible witnesses (it treats adversaries the same way as friends).

3. **Christ's love (charity) hopeth all things.** It looks with confidence in God that He is able to bring forth fruit in the lives of those for whom we pray to be saved by His amazing grace (or reconciled to us).

4. **Christ's love (charity) endureth all things.** It perseveres in doing what is good and right, even when it is not easy, comfortable, or pleasant, because it is not our love, but Christ's love in us. Dear ones, you can never be separated from Christ's love—it is as unchangeable as He is (Romans 8:35-39). Don't allow the thoughts or words of doubt to dwell within you: "I cannot love that person!" It is not your love that dwells within you, but Christ's love (Philippians 2:13). Don't be led by your feelings, but by God's Word. Do what is good and right even when your feelings lag behind. You can show love to those who become your enemies rather than hating them in your heart, or being bitter, or retaliating against them. You and I have no excuse, for it is Christ's love (not our own) that works within us (Philippians 4:13).

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