

**EXPOSITION OF I CORINTHIANS
(Part 1)**

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Message #57

I Corinthians 13:4-7

There is a subject that is perhaps THE greatest theme of songs, movies and books. One song says it makes the world go around. One movie says it is the key to a wonderful life. It is the subject of love.

In Greek literature, which intrigued the Corinthians, there were at least five nouns used for love:

Philia – the friendship love, a tender affection for someone.

Storge – the family love, a natural affection for kindred.

Eros – the erotic love, a sensual affection for anyone.

Epithumia – the evil love, a passionate affection for things forbidden.

Agape – the godly love, a high esteem for another that chooses to put another's welfare ahead of one's own.

In Corinth, the eros love of the Greek culture was the antithesis of the agape love of God.

When Paul wrote this section, he was writing to challenge the Corinthian church to develop in godly, agape love. When Jesus Christ had been on earth, He had personally demanded that His people love at this level (Matt. 22:37-39; Mark 12:29-31). In fact, it is this very type of love for others that proves we love God (I John 2:7-11; 3:16, 23; 4:7, 11-12, 21).

BELIEVER'S IN GOD'S CHURCH ARE TO CONTINUALLY DEMONSTRATE GOD'S SUPERIOR LEVEL OF AGAPE LOVE BY DEMONSTRATING THE QUALITIES OF GOD'S AGAPE LOVE.

The love described in these verses gives the highest value and meaning to both the individual and the church. The church that achieves superiority in the sight of God is not necessarily one of great accomplishment, great emotion or great size; it is one that demonstrates agape love. This is the "more excellent way," the profitable and valuable way for God's church.

Point #1 - All of the verbs in **verses 4-7** are indicative. What this means is that agape love is more factual than emotional. God's highest level of love IS NOT irrationally emotional; it IS Biblically factual.

Point #2 - All of the verbs in **verses 4-7** are present tense. What this means is that this is the way that God's people are to continually and habitually love. This level of love is to be the habit of our lives.

Point #3 – All uses of the word "love" contain an article, literally "the love." What this means is that we must specifically identify this type of love and apply it to our lives. We must love on God's specific terms, not ours.

There are 15 qualities which comprise God's concept of love. Seven of the qualities are positive, what love is and eight of the qualities are negative, what love is not.

POSITIVE QUALITY #1 – Love is patient. **13:4a**

This word literally means agape love is long-suffering and patient when facing troubles and difficulties (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 276).

Agape love is continually very patient with people. Dr. Vine says this was a quality of self-restraint in the face of provoking circumstances. Dr. David Lowery says this was the capacity to not retaliate when wronged.

It is not easy to patiently forbear and persevere when experiencing troubles and difficulties.

POSITIVE QUALITY #2 – Love is kind. **13:4b**

Agape love is continually kind, gracious and pleasant to people. Origen, the Alexandrian theologian, who lived a couple hundred years after Christ, who wrote a commentary on just about every book of the Bible, said this agape love "is sweet to all."

It is this kindness that is tender-hearted and forgiving (Eph. 4:32). These were not just idle words from the Apostle Paul for he himself demonstrated a kindness even when suffering the worst possible hardships (II Cor. 6:3-6).

This is a hard, calloused world. It can be cruel and sharp. The believer that is pleasant and gracious and kind to people is one who will make a great statement for the glory of God. We need to be kind to each other in the church, in the home, in the school and on the job. In fact, one of the major causes of a low self-esteem is due to a lack of kindness and love.

NEGATIVE QUALITY #3 – Love is not jealous. **13:4c**

Agape love is not continually jealous or envious of others. It does not envy another's accomplishments, successes, gifts, abilities, looks or possessions. It does not burn with envy or eagerly desire what another has.

The distinction between envy and jealousy is not an easy one to make, but Dr. Vine says there is a distinction. He says that envy desires to deprive another of what he has whereas jealousy desires to have the same things another has (W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, p. 37).

Biblical love does not envy others. It is not jealous. Envy and jealousy are never the work of the Holy Spirit; they are always the work of the old fleshly sin nature (Gal. 5:20-21). Jealousy and envy will kill a spiritual life. It will destroy others and it will destroy you.

NEGATIVE QUALITY #4 – Love does not brag. **13:4d**

Agape love does not continually boast. Agape love is not a vainglorious braggart.

Boasting was a terrible problem in the Corinthian church because practically everyone was vying for public attention. Every person wanted the most glamorous gift. Every person loved to elevate himself. It was Pascal, the French philosopher, who once said, “If you want men to speak well of you, then never speak well of yourself.” And I like what Dr. John MacArthur said, “It is ironic that, as much as most of us dislike bragging in others, we are so inclined to brag ourselves.”

NEGATIVE QUALITY #5 – Love is not arrogant. **13:4e**

Agape love is not continually inflated. It does not continually inflate itself. This word is used by Paul seven times in his writings and six of those seven times occur in I Corinthians (4:6, 18, 19; 5:2; 8:1; 13:4). This immediately tells us that self-inflation and arrogance were real problems in Corinth. This particular Greek word was used in the concept of inflating a bellows.

The truth is those who exalt themselves will be humbled by God (i.e. Matt. 23:12).

If you never tell others in the church “you love them,” they will doubt they are worth loving.

If you never tell others in the church “you are glad they are here,” they will doubt they belong.

If you never tell others in the church “you have done a good job,” they will doubt their capability.

If you never tell others in the church “we need you,” they will doubt their value.

If you never tell others in the church “I forgive you,” they will doubt their acceptance.

If you never tell others in the church “hello,” they will doubt their existence.

If you never tell others in the church “you are God’s child forever,” they will doubt their eternity.

God loves us at the agape love level. He has patiently put up with our sin and our rebellion. He loves you and sent His Son for you. He wants you to come into His family. Will you come into His family today? Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved and you will begin to experience the love of God.