



On April 6, 2000, Ricky and Toni Sexton were taken hostage inside their Wytheville, Virginia, home by a fugitive couple on a crime spree. Toni had taken her poodle outside when Dennis Lewis, 37, and Angela Tanner, 20, roared into her driveway, pointed pistols at her, and yelled at her to get back inside the house.

Inside the house, the Sextons turned their hostage experience into an opportunity to demonstrate Christian love. The Sextons listened to their captors' troubles, fed them, showed them gospel videos, read to them from the Bible, and prayed and cried with them.

During negotiations with the police, Ricky Sexton refused his own release when Lewis and Tanner suggested that they might end the standoff by committing suicide. The standoff had an unusual ending. Before surrendering to the police, Angela Tanner left \$135 and a note for the Sextons that read: *"Thank you for your hospitality. We really appreciate it. I hope he gets better. Wish all luck & love. Please accept this. It really is all we have to offer. Love, Angela and Dennis."* (Citation: Gary Yates, Roanoke, Virginia; source: *The Roanoke Times* (4-8-00), p.A-1)

Genuine love has a power to overcome the greatest obstacles!

But what is it? The world is very confused about love: Everyone is searching for it but few actually know what it is. A quick scan of the famous *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations* reveals that poets, writers and authors have used the word "love in over 1300 different ways!

Think of how we use this word:

- "I love you!"
- "I love my jeans!"
- "I love my dog!"
- "I love reading."
- "I love my kids."
- "I love music."
- "I love your hair!"

- "I love chocolate"
- "I love horses."
- "I love my husband"
- "I love my iPhone..."

What in the world are we talking about?

Well let's be clear on what we are NOT talking about! We are not talking about what the world refers to as "love". The world markets a selfish version of love that says, "I love you because you give me pleasure, stop giving me pleasure and I will stop loving you." To the world, love is generally thought of as something you get. There was a Greek word used in the day of the New Testament that had such a negative connotation that it did not even make it into Scripture. That is 'eros' from which we get the world erotic.

We are also NOT talking about 'storge' the love that we have for our family - the kind of love a parent has for a child.

There is a famous city in the USA named after another kind of love that we are also NOT talking about! Philadelphia is known as 'the city of brotherly love'. The Greek word 'phileo' refers to the love shared between good friends.

We are trying to get a handle on a different kind of love. A love that supersedes sexual love, familial love and friendship love. In fact the love we are looking at today makes all of these others work as God intends. The love being discussed in our text in 1 Corinthians 13 is 'agapeo' and it refers to God's love. This is a love that moves us to respond to someone's needs without any expectation at all that we will receive anything in return.

A world without love is a messy place: Our world is a mess because it does not know what real love. A Christian who has received God's love and forgiveness are supposed to live in that love and live out that love in their relationships. Yet sometimes its not that way is it?

Love can grow cold because of the influence of sin and evil around us. Jesus said, "*And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.*" (Matthew 24:12)

This had happened at Corinth. Instead of being God's salt in Corinth, these Christians were being flavored by the culture around them. Instead of penetrating Corinth with a spirit of godliness, Corinth's spirit of godlessness was penetrating the Church.

They were infected by materialism, pride, antagonism, selfishness, compromise, indulgence, hatred, sexual immorality, jealousy, and virtually every other sin imaginable.

Of all their failures, their greatest failure was a failure to love. Just as love covers a multitude of sins, the lack of love causes a multitude of sins and that is what was happening in Corinth! So Paul tackles this issue of love and sets the record straight.

LIFE WITHOUT LOVE IS NOT REALLY LIVING (13:1-3)

Paul begins by pointing out that spiritual gifts, achievements and great acts of sacrifice are no substitute for love.

Eloquence without love is nothing more than a distracting nuisance. It is said that Adolph Hitler moved a nation by eloquence and amazing rhetoric, resulting in the death of 6 million Jews during WWII.

"but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head" Ephesians 4:15

Great prophetic ability without love is nothing... and it is with wisdom and faith. Without love as the foundation for the exercise of these spiritual gifts they are nothing! Without the love of God we minister the powerlessness of a dead faith to a dying world.

Amazing acts of benevolence without love when totaled up equal zero! We might throw a little money at the less fortunate now and then, but if that is not motivated by love it is a waste.

Even martyrdom has no value if it does not flow from love. We live in a world where nearly every week we hear of a suicide bomber martyring themselves for a religious cause! Paul is saying its all nothing! There is not profit, no usefulness.

LET'S GET CLEAR ABOUT HOW LOVE BEHAVES (4-8)

The problem in Corinth was not that the church lacked spiritual gifts, they had them all! The problem was that the exercise of their gifts were not springing from love! Paul does not define love for the Corinthians, instead he shows them how true love behaves.

He lists 15 descriptions of how love behaves:

1 Love suffers long (4). Love is very slow to lose patience. It is not easily irritated, angry, and does not have a quick temper.

2 Love is kind (4). Love does not withhold good when it has the power to do it. (Lk 6:27-35, Eph. 4:32). As a young teenager, my mother was working a minimum wage job, my dad was in and out of jail and the mental hospital. Some person unknown to me till this day went and paid my school fees so that I could attend a Christian School. That is the kindness of love!

3 Love does not envy (4). Envy is the uneasiness of mind caused by the consideration of a good we desire, but someone else has. If you have heard the fairy tale of Snow White you remember the queen would ask her magic mirror everyday, "*Mirror, mirror on the wall, whose the fairest of them all?*" "*You are most fair beautiful queen.*" One day when the step-daughter, Snow White was grown, the mirror replied, "*O lady queen thou still art fair, but none to Snow White can compare.*" Queen sought to kill Snow White. That is how envy responds... and love does not envy!

4 Love does not parade itself (4). It does not seek to make an impression or create an image for personal gain. We live in the day of PR agents and selfies on Facebook! Love doesn't try to create an image.

5 Love is not puffed up (4). That simply means that love is not self-centered. It does not expect life to revolve around itself. (Gal. 5:13)

6 Love is not rude (5). Love has good manners and is respectful of others. Love shows this respect regardless of the differences that we have with other people. They may not be from our culture or speak our language, or have the same understandings or values that we have, but love shows them respect! Parents we are to teach our children to be respectful of all. How do your children speak to the hired help? Love is never rude!

7 Love does not seek its own (5) Love does not pursue selfish advantage over the other. A mother was preparing pancakes for her sons, Kevin, 5, Ryan, 3. The boys began to argue over who would get the first pancake. Their mother saw the opportunity for a moral lesson. "If Jesus were sitting here, He would say, 'Let my brother have the first pancake. I can wait.' Kevin turned to his younger brother and said, "Ryan, you be Jesus!" And it's not just Kevin... we talk about this being a "dog-eat-dog world!" In business we are not to seek selfish advantage over others. If our product is for their benefit then by all means convince them to buy and use it, but love never misrepresents the benefits in order to gain advantage over someone. Pay a fair price for a product or service. How can we pay our hired help below standard wages and say that we love?

8 Love is not easily provoked (5). It is not easily angered, touchy. John Wesley said that being provoked is “The very first rising of disgust at those who injure you.” Love doesn't get provoked easily!

9 Love thinks no evil (5). Love does not keep account of past wrongs. It does not review wrongs which have been forgiven. Love does not jump to negative conclusions about others, it chooses rather to believe the best until proven otherwise.

10 Love does not rejoice in iniquity (6). Love doesn't compare itself with others in order to justify itself. It doesn't say, “everyone's doing it.” (Mt 7:13-14)

11 Love rejoices in the truth (6) Love is glad when truth prevails.

12 Love bears all things (7). It knows no limit to its forbearance. It has the ability to live with the inconsistencies of others.

13 Love believes all things (7). It knows no end to its trust in God toward the other person.

14 Love hopes all things (7). It has perfect confidence that God is responsible and in control of the actions of the other.

15 Love endures all things (7). Love has unlimited endurance. It is able to endure all obstacles and love in the face of unreturned love.

THE SUPREME QUALITY OF LOVE IS THAT IT NEVER FAILS (8-12)

Why does love never fail?

Because God never fails - in all of His attributes he is perfect, unfailingly consistent!

Because Christ never fails. Those who He loved, He loved to the end, to death (Jn 13:1, Eph. 3:17-18)

Because the Spirit never fails:

Romans 5:5 “Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”

God's love won't cave in when unexpected storms come (Mt. 7:27-28). Human love reacts to the situation, God's love is built upon the rock, it won't fall. Marriages are failing because they are built upon the world's kind of love.

THIS LOVE IS GREATER THAN EVERYTHING ELSE (13)

Because this love is what God is!

1 John 4:7,8. “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.”

Because love enables us to keep all the rest of God's commandments.

“Jesus said to him,” “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” “This is the first and great commandment. “And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ “On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”” Matthew 22:37-40.

Because love is what identifies us as Christians to a watching world.

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.” “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” John 13:34-35.

How can this love be active in your life?

1 Receive God’s love and forgiveness. Love is impossible apart from the indwelling Holy Spirit of God. Have you received Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior by repenting of your sin and believing in Him?

2 Recognize your lack of love as sin. ““Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. *“Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.” Revelation 2:4,5.*

3 Choose to obey God’s command to love. Love is a constant choice to obey and serve! For that we need God's Spirit empowering us from within! Daily walking in close fellowship with God so that His unlimited and everlasting love flows through us to everyone we come in contact with.