



What is Love?

1 Cor. 13:1-7

NKJ 1 Corinthians 13:1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.

2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.

4 Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up;

5 does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil;

6 does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth;

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

I was doing a search the on the internet the other day for an article I had read some time ago about the church growth movement, and specifically the market driven nature of it, and how the church is remolded and sold to the world as something different and new and improved. *Definitely not your grandparent's church.* And so I was looking for keywords from the article: "exciting" and "Dynamic" and "worship." But the problem was I couldn't find the article because I kept hitting actual church web pages rather than the article itself. For instance, these are actual quotes from church advertising:

"We have a dynamic Senior Pastor who has an extraordinary gift for preaching and leading worship. Our staff teams with hundreds of volunteers to create and sustain robust ministries. We are blessed with members who have amazing musical talents."

I was also amazed that once some churches hit on a word like "dynamic" suddenly everything they did became well... dynamic. For instance, these are all from the same church website:

8:00 AM Traditional Worship in the Chapel An early-morning worship opportunity featuring a traditional service with congregational singing and Bible-based, dynamic ministry. Special music is provided by the Sunrise Singers.

8:30 AM Contemporary Worship in the Sanctuary

An exciting service of worship and praise featuring dynamic ministry and music led by the Praise Team and God's House Band.

You have the same thing at 9:45 AM and then "Traditional Worship in the Sanctuary

A traditional worship opportunity featuring congregational hymn singing and dynamic Bible-based ministry. Special music is provided by the Chancel Choir."

I was curious as to why the 8:30 service was dynamic, but not Bible based. But I digress, the point was you had all of these churches advertising themselves as dynamic, exciting, amazing, extraordinary, powerful, new and improved. Those are supposed to be the things that people want in a modern church – power, excitement, professionalism, DYNAMISM, zing.

Unfortunately, those were the same things that the Corinthians had been looking for in their own church. As we began the Epistle we read how they thought that Paul was a shabby preacher, a man who didn't appeal to the spirit of the age, he wasn't a powerful preacher according to the Corinthians. He didn't come with in his own words "excellence of speech" or persuasive words of human wisdom. We also learned that the Corinthians were crazy about the sign gifts, they wanted worship services that were full of exciting and amazing displays, and in particular they wanted to see these sign gifts whenever they met and to personally experience them. I'm sure they wanted to be a dynamic church as well.

Now please don't mishear me, we shouldn't want to have worship services that are the opposite of dynamic and exciting. I am not saying that churches should be about a quest to be the most boring and lifeless and uninspiring place on the planet and our advertising shouldn't be "***If you aren't asleep by the end of the sermon we'll refund your tithe***" But what I am saying is that Paul was trying to tell them and us that power and zeal and dynamism by themselves are useless.

But Paul is trying to tell them that these gifts and power and excitement are not the heart of the church, they are not of central importance and the quest for them over everything else was part of their problem. He has already told them that their desire for men who preach like the Greek orators and who impress people with the complexity of their reasoning, and their use of mystery and allegory, and philosophy, are wrong headed.

Incidentally Paul was very right to warn them against that tendency. Unfortunately after the Apostolic age, that kind of obtuse preaching thrived in the church. Some of the worst sermons in history were produced in that age, they are literally so wildly allegorical as to be of no practical use to the Christian. The one thing they almost never do is actually exposit scripture but instead give everything a mystical allegorical meaning so that the scriptures become a jumping off point into a fantasy land.

Paul is even going to tell them in this very chapter that the gifts they are so impressed by and seek so fervently are going to go away. What then is at the heart of the church, or at least should be is love, he says this is indispensable and profoundly lacking in their church. Its lack meant that they had no real communion with one another, none of the deep love that makes Christians brothers and sisters and instead they manifested a cliquishness and selfish individualism that was as removed from true Christian love as could be.

As a result, it didn't matter how powerful their "ministries" were they lacked that which was most necessary. In fact they would have been better off without the power and the dynamism if they only had the love. As Proverbs 15:17 puts it: **Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, Than a fatted calf with hatred.**

So he tells them, what they need is love – *agape* - and then he goes on to tell them what this love truly is, and brothers and sisters as we learn what Love really is let us not think that is dispensable amongst Christians that if you have knowledge, eloquence, gifts, etc. you can get by without love. No if we have the greatest gifts but don't have love we cannot even lay claim to being Christians!

1 John 4:7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

8 He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

And

1 John 4:20 If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?

21 And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.

v. 4 Love suffers long – Long suffering and patient. In this we emulate God who is supremely long suffering, especially with his people. Ancient Israel, even the Canaanites, he did not judge immediately. And how patient His love causes him to be with us. So we will be with others, we won't immediately blow up. We will forgive and that not seven times, but seventy times seven.

Love is Kind: Gentle and good even to those who illtreat us. It does not repay evil for evil but give evil for good.

Love does not envy: On the contrary it is happy when *others prosper and are advanced. It desires good for all.*

Love does not parade itself: It is not a braggard. The word there means wind-bag. Rather in true love we become small and build others up rather than puffing ourselves up. It is not proud and boastful. How opposite this is to the spirit of the age!

Love does not behave rudely: It is not unseemly, full of disgraceful conduct. But rather is well mannered, considerate.

Love does not seek its own: It is not self-seeking, as Barrett puts it Love not merely does not seek that which does not belong to it, it is prepared to give up for the sake of other even what it is entitled to.

Love is not provoked: It is not aggrieved by injuries able to bear an offense and forgive
Love thinks no evil; Love is always read to think the best of others, to clear their account, to say PAID IN FULL Over the sins of a brother.

Love does not rejoice in iniquity: The world rejoices in iniquity and misfortune, supermarket tabloids and the daily news, disasters, and so on. Loves to dwell on evil. True love does not.

Love rejoices in the truth; No false love that compromises truth, no peace when there is no peace. There is no love where truth is denied. Christ is truth therefore Christian love must be truthful.

Love bears all things, Proverbs 10:12 Hatred stirs up strife, But **love covers** all sins.
Passes over.

Love believes all things, Not that which is false, it is not credulity, but a willingness to believe the best of others.

Love hopes all things: goes on when all seems lost. Refuses to take failure as final. PERSEVERING – story of my courtship.

Love endures all things – Goes on even in persecution. “IT is the endurance of a the soldier who in the thick of battle is undismayed, but continues to lay about Him lustily. Love is not overwhelmed, but manfully plays its part whatever the difficulties”

Love is of course manifested best and most perfectly in Christs love to us:

1 John 4:7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

8 He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

9 In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.

10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

12 No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us.

“It is a new word for a new idea. Whereas the best concept of love before the New Testament was that of a love for the best one knows, the Christians thought of love as that quality we see displayed in the cross. It is love for the utterly unworthy, a love which proceeds from a God who is love. It is a love lavished upon others without a thought of whether they are worthy to receive it or not. It proceeds rather from the nature of the lover, that from any merit of the beloved. The Christian who has experienced God’s love to him while he was yet a sinner has been transformed by the experience. Now he sees men in a measure as God sees them. He sees them as the objects of God’s love, as those for whom Christ died. Accordingly his attitude towards them is one of love, of self-giving agape. He comes to practice the love which seeks nothing for itself, but only the good of the loved one.” - Leon Morris

We should teach our children this love, exercise it and have it towards God.

We will not be Christians, we will not be a church unless we have and practice this love.