

Monday, March 19, 2012 – What is Love?

**Matthew 22:37; 39 - Jesus said to him, 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind; And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'**

In one form or another, the word “love” occurs approximately 250 times in the OT and 250 times in the NT. Love isn't that fuzzyheaded feeling that comes when boy meets girl at summer camp; that's infatuation. It's not a hormonal rush that makes a person crave the body of the opposite sex; that's lust. Real love is not physical and it is not sentimental. It is not imaginary and it is not exaggerated. It's not some lofty, idealistic super-spiritual abstract quality that makes you want to do good things for other person; that's good will.

Real "love" is not an idea, not a feeling, not even a motivating factor for behavior; it is behavior. It is a determined commitment of your will to actively demonstrate real love to the person whom you claim you love in a way that proves that you love that person more than you love yourself. It is the willing, joyful desire to put the needs of others above that of your own, the supreme example of which is God's love for us. Love is shown in its purest form in the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. God demonstrated His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners (enemies of God), Christ died for us. That death provides an opportunity for salvation to those who will love and obey God as much as he loved us.

What about love between Christians? Sometimes it can be the most unchristian of all relationships.

Christian love regularly gives indisputable evidence of its genuineness through the selfless, sacrificial actions that you do for those people you say you love in a way that makes a difference each and every day of your life. If applied, the words of **1 Corinthians 13** could revolutionize society, putting an end to divorce, spousal abuse, child abuse, neglect, misguided priorities, and unchristian attitudes toward others.

Consider the following passages:

**Eph. 5:25 – Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it**

**1 Pet. 1:22 - Seeing ye have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth unto unfeigned love of the brethren, love one another from the heart fervently**

**John 13:34, 35 - A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; even as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.**

1 Corinthians 13 is truly one of "The Great Chapters of the Bible." So, to help us better understand and invite its principles into our lives, let's watch it unfold with the importance of love (vs. 1-3), the identity of love (vs. 4-8a), and the incessant durability of love (vs. 8b-13). If applied, the words of 1 Corinthians 13 could also help us prevent the cynicism and suspicion that contribute to extremism, politics, and brotherhood division. And, if applied, the words of 1 Corinthians 13 could even help us be more attractive to those outside the church and more effective in our efforts to reach them.

### **The Importance of Love (vs. 1-3)**

As the chapter begins, we learn that love is more important than anything we say (v. 1), anything we have (v. 2), or anything we do (v. 3). Such is true because love seasons what we say.

**Col. 4:6 - Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer each one**

Love governs the use of what we have.

**John 3:16-18 - By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.**

Love motivates us to do what we should do.

**1 John 5:3 - For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome**

### **The Identity of Love (vs. 4-8a)**

Beginning in verse 4, study will reveal seven positive qualities and nine negative qualities of love. So what do we learn from these verses about Christian love?

(1) Love helps us live in peace with others. "Love suffereth long [macrothumia, from macro, "long" and thumia, "to be fierce or angry," thus, "long in coming to anger"], and is kind; love envieth not [zeloo, "does not boil" or "is not zealous"]. Instead of aggressively and impetuously seeking revenge, love responds to the harm caused by others with kindness.

**Romans 12:10; 17-21 - Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men...If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.**

(2) Love helps us keep ourselves in check. "Love...vaunteth not itself ["will not 'play the braggart' or 'play the toad'"]: is not puffed up ["inflated"]. Love will not ambitiously direct attention to self out of some kind of inflated ego. We are NOT in competition with each other! Love desires the best for all and does NOT relish in perceived failure.

**Phil. 2:2-4 - fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.**

(3) Love, simply put, helps us be better people. "Love...doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own." Love is the chisel that crafts gentlemen and ladies out of the most rugged and unrefined. It is able to do so because love chips away self-centeredness.

**Gal. 5:13-15,26 - For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!**

(4) Love helps us control our feelings. "**Love...is not provoked** ["sharpened or stirred to anger"]," **taketh into account of** ["does not calculate"] **evil**. Love clips away the barbs of "irritation and [the] sharpness of spirit" that prohibit a pleasant nature. That being true, there is not the tendency to act like an accountant and record the mistakes of those loved.

(5) Love helps deepen our Bible-based convictions. “**Love...rejoiceth not in unrighteousness, but rejoiceth with the truth.**” The psalmist wrote, “All thy commandments are righteousness” (**Ps. 119:172**). In keeping with the same thought, Jesus said, “Thy word is truth” (**John 17:17**). So, with love, one cherishes the will of God and is disturbed by anything less.

(6) Love helps us feel for and reach out to others. “**Love...beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.**” What a quartet! First, love will “bear” [stego, “protect, hide, conceal, or cover with silence”]; the mistakes of another

**1 Peter 4:8 – And above all things have fervent love for one another, for "love will cover a multitude of sins.**

Second, love will graciously “believe” the best in others and keep one from becoming an impetuous, professional critic (**Matt. 7:1-5**).

Third, love will generously “hope” for the best and will refuse to make any premature conclusions about others (**John 7:24**).

Finally, love will “endure” [hupomeno, from hupo, “under” and meno, “to remain,” thus, “to remain under”] whatever it receives and proactively reshape it into something beautiful (**2 Tim. 2:10**).

### **The Never-Ending Durability of Love (vs. 8-13)**

As the chapter comes to a close, Paul underscores the greatness of love.

First, in pointing to the greatness of love, Paul made a prediction about the miraculous gifts of first century times. “Love never faileth: but...prophecies, they shall be done away...tongues, they shall cease... [and] knowledge, it shall be done away. For we know in part, and we prophecy in part; but when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away.” Love never “faileth” [ekpiptie, from ek, “out of” or “away” and pipto, “to fail”]. A man might “fall out of” sight in quicksand (**Acts 27:17**). A ship might “fall” onto rocks and be destroyed (**Acts 27:29**). A Christian might “fall away” from the grace of God (**Gal. 5:4; 1 Pet. 3:17**). A flower will always fade and “fall” victim to the cycle of nature (**James 1:11; 1 Pet. 1:24**). But true love will never “fall out of” the heart or “fall away from” its place of prominence in the life of a Christian.

To emphasize this principle, Paul contrasts love to the charismatic gifts of “prophecy,

tongue-speaking, and knowledge.” These were to either “be done away” or “cease” with the coming of “that which is perfect” [teleios, “that which is complete”]. Interpretations vary on the identity of “that which is perfect.”

The key to identifying the “perfect” most surely rests in the passage itself; yea, in the specific terminology of Paul’s contrast. Look carefully. He spoke of “prophecy” and “knowledge” as “parts,” [meros, “portions”] of something whole or “complete.” **So let’s ask: What is the completed form of miraculous “prophecy” and miraculous “knowledge“?** Is it not the word of God? Scripture? The “perfect law of liberty”? **(James 1:25).**

But, watch. Even when the miraculous came to an end with the completed revelation of God’s will, even then love was to continue! It existed in the days of the miraculous and it was to exist beyond the days of the miraculous. “Love never faileth.” That was the point Paul was giving emphasis to. In trying to correctly interpret segments of this passage, let’s not miss its overall emphasis! Love is something that never fails and is, by implication, something that we should constantly nurture.

Second, in pointing to the greatness of love, Paul employed two illustrations. “When I was a child, I spake as a child, I felt as a child, I thought as a child; now that I am become a man, I have put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, darkly; but then face to face.” The days of the miraculous gifts and revelation-given-in-parts were described as the days of “a child”; whereas, the days of completed revelation were likened to adulthood or one’s becoming “a man.” Too, the days of the miraculous and revelation-given-in-parts were compared to seeing the obscure image of God’s will in “a mirror”; whereas, the days of completed revelation were spoken of as one’s seeing the will of God “face to face.”

But, again, love was to exist in both settings of time. It existed in the days when bits and pieces of God’s will were being made known through “the holy apostles and prophets” **(Eph. 3:3-5)**, and it was to continue even after those days.

Finally, in pointing to the greatness of love, Paul made a comparison. **“But now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; and the greatest of these is love.”** What a statement! With “faith” we look upward to God and are submissively molded by his precepts. With “hope” we look onward to God and are encouraged by his promises! “Faith” motivates. “Hope” anticipates! But “love” is greater than both are.

In one form or another, the word “love” occurs over 500 times in the scriptures. Its importance must be recognized, its identity epitomized, and its greatness repeatedly

emphasized (**John 13:34, 35**). That is why 1 Corinthians 13 is among “The Great Chapters of the Bible”.

### **1 John 4:8 - God is love**

Our love is a manifestation of the love of God in our hearts. We become a reflection of God as we exhibit the characteristics of love. One cannot please God without love.