# "LOVE: Our # 1 Pursuit"

**I CORINTHIANS 13**

10-22-2023

INTRODUCTION:

*** Biblical LOVE must be the supreme characteristic of our lives.**

*Why?*

*3 Reasons:*

**I. BIBLICAL LOVE IS AN <u>ESSENTIAL</u> VIRTUE (v. 1-3)**

A. Without love your <u>message</u> accomplishes nothing (v. 1)

B. Without love your <u>gifts</u> (abilities) reveal you to be nothing (v. 2)

C. Without love your <u>sacrifice</u> profits you nothing (v. 3)

**II. BIBLICAL LOVE IS AN <u>EXALTED</u> VIRTUE (v. 4-7)**

A. Biblical love is not <u>self-centered</u> (v. 4b-5a)

B. Biblical love does <u>not seek the harm of others</u> (v. 5b-6a)

C. Biblical love seeks <u>the well-being of others</u> (v. 4a, 7)

**III. BIBLICAL LOVE IS AN <u>ETERNAL</u> VIRTUE (v. 8-13)**

A. Love will outlast <u>gifts</u> (v. 8)

B. Love will outlast <u>present limitations</u> (v.9-12)

C. Love will outlast <u>some present spiritual virtues</u> (v.13)

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**II. BIBLICAL LOVE IS AN _____ VIRTUE (v. 4-7)**

A. Biblical love is not _____ (v. 4b-5a)

B. Biblical love does _____ (v. 5b-6a)

C. Biblical love seeks _____ (v. 4a, 7)

**III. BIBLICAL LOVE IS AN _____ VIRTUE (v. 8-13)**

A. Love will outlast _____ (v. 8)

B. Love will outlast _____ (v.9-12)

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# "THE SUPREMACY OF LOVE"

**I CORINTHIANS 13**

10-22-2023

INTRODUCTION:

What is the one thing (gift) that you feel you need in your life? If you could choose but one gift, what would it be?

Paul, writing to the church at Corinth, said, "*And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ."* (I Cor. 3:1)

They had the sign gifts of the Spirit, but not the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22).

*"Carnal"* = fleshly - living like *"natural men"* (I Cor. 2:14)

They were characterized by their envying, strife, and divisions in their church.

Paul wrote a letter of rebuke. The Corinthians needed to be corrected because of their:

1. Division (ch. 3)
2. Boastfulness (ch. 4)
3. Fornication (ch. 5)
4. Lawsuits (ch. 6)
5. Immorality (ch. 6)
6. Overindulgence and drunkenness at the Lord's Supper (ch. 11)

The thrust of Paul's message in chapters 12 - 14 is one continuous thought: Combatting the Corinthians' desire to uplift themselves.

They needed to learn the principle of unity (ch. 12), love (ch. 13), and building up others (ch. 14).

Their motives for seeking the spectacular, eye catching, miraculous sign gifts was totally self-centered.

Paul ended the last chapter by saying in effect: While you are seeking the best gifts for yourselves, I will show you the most excellent virtue you ought to seek after; I'll show you the supreme feature you need for life & ministry!

*** Biblical Love must be the supreme characteristic of your life.**

Why? 3 Reasons:

## I. BIBLICAL LOVE IS AN ESSENTIAL VIRTUE (v. 1-3)

Love is a vital ingredient (just as sugar is to cookies, butter to toast, gas to a car)

### A. Without love your message accomplishes nothing (v. 1)

(V. 1 is referring to one's speaking ability)

***"Tongues of men" -*** Various literal languages around the world

***"Of angels" -*** the language the angels speak in Heaven (no one has ever spoken in angelic language; Paul is speaking hypothetically here.)

***"Tongues" -*** a sign to unbelieving Jews that the gospel was now going to the people all over the world. To the Jew this was a sign of judgment--like the parables were. (I Cor.14:20-21)

If I knew Spanish and went to Spain to preach -- Without love, my message is worthless.

If I knew Japanese and went to Japan to preach -- Without love, my message is worthless.

* I may know the language better than any in that country . . .

* I may have articulate excellence and have a very polished message . . .
(EX: Apollos - Acts 18:24; I Cor. 1:12) (SEE: I Cor. 2:1-5 - Paul's message)

* I may know what I am talking about (speaking the truth) --God's Word which is dear to my heart--and yet say it without love.

* Our preaching, teaching, witnessing must have love.
Many times we do it out of duty, or burden for mankind as a whole (Someone said, "I love mankind, it's people I can't stand.")

***"Love" -*** Shows to the world our distinctiveness/difference (Jn. 13:34-35 - *"New commandment. . . By this shall all men know.")*

***"sounding brass"*** - like the ringing, echoing, or roaring of a gong.
***"tinkling cymbal"*** - like the high pitch, loud, clashing sound of a cymbal.

Our message is repulsive without love, cold, abrasive (v. 2b)

Win the lost with love, restore a brother with love, put yourself in their shoes and sympathize. . .

**B. Without love your <u>gifts</u> (abilities) reveal you to be nothing (v. 2)**

(V. 2 is a reference to <u>knowing ability</u>)

The Corinthians boasted over their gifts. And coveted the attention-getting gifts.

NOTE: Paul's use of the superlative ***"All"***.

Note: Some people perhaps could have understood all mysteries (though doubtful), but to also have all knowledge and all faith and then to have it labeled as nothing is really amazing.

--Though we may know the Bible inside out, without love we are nothing.

--We may know all doctrine, all theology, all hermeneutical principles of interpretation, but without love we are nothing.

--We may have unshakable, confident, circumstance-changing faith, but without love we are nothing.

(And we need all of the above - EX: of Ephesus - Rev. 2:2-4)

People don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care!

God is more interested in what we <u>are</u> than what we <u>do</u>.

**C. Without love your <u>sacrifice</u> profits you nothing (v. 3)**

(V. 3 is referring to our <u>giving ability</u>)

1) The voluntary sacrifice of <u>possessions</u> is worthless (v. 3a)

***"bestow all my goods to feed"*** - to divide all one property or possessions up into fragments and dole it all out to the poor so that you have nothing left over; not even a crumb.

This verse is showing that it is possible to have the <u>fruit</u> of love and <u>not</u> love itself.

"The works of love are often imitated by those who have <u>no</u> love and yet desire to enjoy the praise of love." (Lenski)

Giving is a fruit of love, but it is not love itself.

Lk. 10:38-42 - Mary & Martha

This does not mean we are not to sacrifice - I Jn. 3:16-18)

If I gave everything so that I might give to those who had nothing, yet did not have love as my motive, I will not be rewarded by God.

Examine your motive!

EX: Motive of the woman who anointed Jesus' feet was sincere

2) The sacrifice of our life is worthless (v. 3b)

Paul is picturing an act of supreme self-sacrifice which is made with a pretense of love for others.

--A martyr for a worthy cause, a voluntary giving, yet without love, it profits me nothing.

--If you died for your beliefs, yet without love, it would profit you nothing.

--If you died for someone else, yet without love, it would profit you nothing.

(And God knows whether or not you have love.)

Let love be your motive!

God will *"judge the secrets of men."*

Without love, our message does nothing - I do nothing
our abilities are nothing - I am nothing
our sacrifice gains nothing - I will be rewarded nothing

**II. BIBLICAL LOVE IS AN EXALTED VIRTUE (v. 4-7)**

Note: Paul does not characterize love in its greatest works--sacrifices, martyrdoms, and triumphs--he goes to the ordinary circumstances of life and shows a picture of love.

Instead of attempting a definition of love, Paul gives us a rich description. Placing before our eyes what love does and what love does not do. Take a look at the symptoms of true love.

**A. Biblical love is not <u>self-centered</u> (v. 4b-5a)**

***"Envieth not" -*** not jealous ("envy" - from "zeal")

EX: Acts 17:1-5 - Unbelieving Jews in Thessalonica *"moved with envy."*

To resent others' prosperity.

*Don't be jealous of others' ability. . .
*Don't be jealous of others' success. . .
*Don't be jealous of others' possessions . . .
*Rather, praise God for it!

Don't try to belittle others, so as to raise up yourself!

"Love looks through a telescope - <u>envy</u> through a microscope."

*Those who have Agape Love do not resent the prosperity of others!*

***"Vaunteth not itself" -*** lit. does not parade itself (it is not boastful, does not brag).

Behind boastful bragging, there lies conceit, an over-estimation of one's own importance, abilities or achievements.

Paul goes from envy, to boasting, and from boasting to puffing oneself up -- a natural sequence of lovelessness.

*Those who have Agape Love refrain from rehearsing all of their good traits and promoting self.*

***"Is not puffed up" -*** to be arrogant

Jesus said, "*He that exalteth himself shall be abased; he that humbleth*

*himself shall be exalted."*

Cp. II Cor. 12:20 - *"puffed up"* = swelling

*Those who have Agape Love do not stubbornly insist that their way is best; nor does it look down the nose at others!*

***"Doth not behave itself unseemly" =*** to act unbecoming, rude.

After pride puffs up the heart, tactlessness, disrespect, dishonor and inconsideration in conduct naturally follow.

The concept of *"unseemly behavior"* is translated elsewhere in the New Testament as shame, nakedness, indecency, and is applied to illicit sexual lifestyles (EX: Rom. 1:27 - Homosexuality = *"men with men working that which is unseemly")*

Love never sins.

Love does not shame the testimony of Christ.

*Those who have Agape Love are considerate and courteous, not sarcastic and rude!*

***"Seeketh not her own" -*** *Seek* = to covet earnestly, strive

I Cor. 10:24 - *"Let not man seek his own, but every man another's welfare."*
II Cor. 12:14 - *"I seek not yours but you."*
Phil. 2:21 - *"For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's."*

Love does not seek one's own pleasure, profit, honor, etc.

Does not seek the love of others. "There is more pleasure in loving than in being loved."

True love is always unselfish. How easily said, how hard to attain!

*Those who have Agape Love seek the other person's best interest!*

**B. Biblical love does not seek the harm of others (v. 5b-6a)**
(the downfall of others)

Rom. 13:10 - *"Love worketh no ill to his neighbor."*

***"Is not easily provoked" -*** angered, stirred up

Irritated - to the point of a sharp disagreement (EX: Acts 15:39)

Love is not embittered or enraged by abuse, wrong insult, or injury.

"Man is like a piece of steel - he's no good when he loses his temper."

EX: *"When Christ was reviled, He reviled not again."*

EX: Mt. 5:44 - *"Love your enemies..."*

*Those who have Agape Love control their anger even when pushed to the limit!*

***"Thinketh no evil" -*** Keeps no account book (record) of the wrongs of others. It forgives and forgets (70 x 70).

*Love does not count something against someone.

*Love does not keep a record of wrongs.

Same word used of God: *"He does not impute to us our guilt"*

Rom. 4:8 - *"Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will <u>not impute</u> sin."*

II Cor. 5:19 - *"God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, <u>not imputing</u> their trespasses unto them..."*

*Those who have Agape Love forgive the wrongs committed against them and do not keep score, nor store up memories of past wrongs and then drag them out to win a point at some future time.* (Richard Strauss)

***"Rejoiceth not in iniquity"*** - No pleasure in sin whatsoever.

--Does not rejoice over sin in out own life (EX: past sin, before salvation)

--Verse is more specifically referring to sin in the lives of others. Does not

find joy in some juicy tid bit about someone else.

We should be grieved, our hearts should be broken!

Because:
Sin hurts the one who committed it.
Sin calls for the chastisement of God upon the wrong doer.
Sin grieves God's heart - He is displeased.

*Those with Agape Love do not take sweet pleasure in the troubles, misfortunes, or failures of even their enemies who fall into sin's snare.*

**On the contrary, ***"Love rejoices in the truth."***

Love seeks to correct a brother.

Love gladly finds pleasure when unrighteousness has been delivered out of a person, and he is living right with God.

*Those who have Apape Love praise God when their enemy comes to find the truth of God's grace & love.*

**C. Biblical love seeks the well-being of others (v. 4a, 7)**
(is patiently supportive)

***"Suffereth long"*** - patient

ILLUS: Christ's patience with proud, selfish, quibbling disciples (*"He loved them to the end"*)

Word used of God - *"...longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish..."*

When among those who are hating us and seeking to do us wrong, we don't allow resentment and retaliation although they deserve it.

"Those who deserve love the least, need it the most!"

*Those who have Agape Love have an extra level of tolerance toward those who are stupid, careless and inconsiderate.*

***"And is kind" -*** useful, helpful, friendly

A mark of Christ's ministry on earth (EX: woman at the well; adulterous woman).

Kindness - despite the surroundings (especially when life is distressing and

hard).

ILLUS: of a rich man about to commit suicide when a little, thin, hungry boy pulled on his coat and asked for help (Knight, p. 215).

*Those who have Apape Love are sensitive to the needs of others; Always seeking a way to serve.*

***"Beareth all things" -*** supportive, protective

Derived from a word that means "to protect, to cover, to put a roof over, to throw a cloak of silence over what is displeasing in another person."

You go to that person -- not broadcast it to the world. Love never gossips.

I Peter 4:8 - *"And above all these things, have fervent charity among yourselves; for charity shall* (imperative) *cover* [not the same word as "beareth" but similar idea] *the multitude of sins."*

*Those who have Agape Love put a lid on gossip and do not broadcast confidentialities.*

***"Believeth all things" -*** trusts; (this does not mean that love is gullible, but that it won't become a skeptic even after getting burned in the past)

Refuse to believe suspicions of doubt.

The flesh is ready to believe all things about a brother and a fellow man in an evil sense. Love does the opposite.

Love places confidence in, it relies upon.

While love *"beareth all things"* in that it refuses to immediately believe all that is worst in a person, it secondly *"believeth all things"* - all that is best in a person.

*Those who have Agape Love do not torment others with groundless suspicions but treat them with trust (ultimately trusting God).*

***"Hopeth all things" -*** to trust with confidence.
We expect what is best in another person.

Hope knows no pessimism.
Paul said, *"I am confident that He which hath begun a good work in you..."*
The basis of this confidence is not in the person's natural abilities, but in the grace of Christ.

*Those who have Agape Love do not lose all confidence in a person and sink into discouragement, despondency and despair.*

***"Endureth all things" -*** Brave perseverance.
To remain under; to maintain control under pain, pressure, and injury.
**Opposite of fleeing away and quitting!
When we love our children, we don't quit! Our mate, etc.

*Those who have Agape Love do not allow problematic people to rob them of their joy nor will power to go on.*

Love as used in other passages:
WHO are we to love?
--Those that labor in the ministry (I Th. 5:13)
--Wives (Eph. 5:25)
--Husbands and children (Ti. 2:4)
--One another in church (Heb. 10:24 - We are to *"provoke one another unto love"*)
--All the saints (Col. 1:4)

WHAT are we NOT to love?
--Our own selves (in a selfish sense; II Tim. 3:2; Rev. 12:11; Jn. 12:25)
--Worldly pleasures (II Tim. 3:4)
--Money (I Tim. 6:10)
--This world system (I Jn. 2:15)
--Having the pre-eminence

HOW are we to love?
--Without hypocrisy (Rom. 12:9)
--As you would a brother (Rom. 12:10)
--Not pretended (II Cor. 6:6)
--Sincerely (II Cor. 8:8)
--With service (Gal. 5:13)
--With forbearance (Eph. 4:12)
--With truth (Eph. 4:15)
--With a lifestyle (*"walk in love"* - Eph. 5:2)
--Even when we are not loved (II Cor. 12:15)
--With labor (I Thes. 1:3)
--As you already naturally love yourself (Ja. 2:8)
--With deeds and truth (I Jn. 3:18)
--At all times (Prov. 17:17)

"For me to love the world is no chore!
My only real problem is my neighbor next door."

## III. BIBLICAL LOVE IS AN ETERNAL VIRTUE (v. 8-13)

The permanence of love. ...Where are your investments? What do you take stock in?

***"Love never fails" -*** lit. never falls down, never becomes invalid, never comes to

an end.

There are many things in life that end! They are temporary.

Paul now deals with the permanence of love; Love will never be a bad investment; it will never go "out of style" with God; it will always bring spiritual revenue (eternal dividends).

**A. Love will outlast <u>gifts</u> (v. 8)**

a. Love will supersede prophesies

***"Prophecy" -*** to foretell and forth-tell (the ability to speak)

***"Shall fail" -*** to be done away with (passive)

b. Love will supersede tongues

***"Tongues" -*** a <u>sign gift</u> of speaking known languages

***"Shall cease" -*** shall stop on its own (when God's purpose was fulfilled - I Cor. 14:22)

c. Love will supersede knowledge

***"Knowledge" -*** a deep, enlarged understanding of spiritual truths (which is still limited compared to what we will know in Heaven).

***"Shall vanish away" -*** to be done away with (passive)

**B. Love will outlast <u>present limitations</u> (v.9-12)**

Note: Tongues is not mentioned.

a. Presently we have limited knowledge

We know only a part--a portion--of all there is to know about God.

b. Presently we have limited ability to express spiritual truths

We are restricted:

--Because God only revealed to us what He wanted us to know.

--Because our sinful, depraved minds cannot contain all there is to know; therefore, we can't proclaim it all.

*When will those limitations end? ***"When that which is perfect has come."***

***"That which is perfect"* =** To reach the goal, to bring to the end, to reach the place of total completeness and maturity --

> Context demonstrates: When we are transformed when we see Christ face to face in Heaven.

SEE: Rev. 21:1-6a

No more need for preaching/prophesying (Jer. 31:34)

No more need for our partial knowledge.

ILLUS: Paul's replacement of his immature abilities (compares manhood with infancy -- a drastic difference) --

> ***"Spake" -*** alludes to prophecy
> ***"Understood" -*** alludes to knowledge
> ***"Thought" -*** alludes to knowledge

Nothing is wrong with childish things when you are a child. What is wrong with toys, rattles, & play pens? Nothing, when you are a child.

***"Glass" -*** mirror (back then, polished brass or metal) - a dim reflection

Paul contrasts between the incomplete knowledge gained by seeing a reflection of an object and by seeing the object itself.

We will go from <u>present</u> limited sight to <u>future</u> personal sight (I Jn . 3:2).

We will go from <u>present</u> limited knowledge to <u>future</u> perfect

knowledge.

**C. Love will outlast <u>some present spiritual virtues</u> (v.13)**

In our spiritual investment startegy we need to invest in 3 spiritual stocks, but especially in the matter of love.

1) In Heaven, **faith** will be replaced by <u>sight</u>

2) In Heaven, **hope** will be replaced by <u>reality</u>

3) But **love** (as demonstrated at Calvary) will continue forever.

CONCLUSION:

Biblical love must be the supreme characteristic in your life!

Why?

Because of the <u>necessity</u> of love,

Because of the <u>characteristics</u> of love,

Because of the <u>duration</u> of love.

Is love in your spiritual portfolio?