

STRENGTH FOR THE STRESSES

“How Strength is Made Perfect in Weakness”

Study Number One – “Love Lost” – 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

We have called this first study “Love Absent.” And the reason is because the first three verses of 1 Corinthians 13 describe a pathetic person who does not have the manifestation of the Spirit of God’s production, called *agape* love, in his life.

Now when we read the writings of Jesus Christ and words which He said in the gospel, We see where He says, “By this shall all men know that you are My disciples (or you’re My followers).” (ref. John 13:35)

Jesus Christ is giving the world the right to judge us, as to whether we are valid Christians by this quality of love within our lives.

Edman, Dr. V. Raymond Edman, writing on 1 Corinthians 13, said:

(They Found the Secret by V. Raymond Edman)

The only way any church can get a blessing is to lay aside all difference, all criticism, all coldness and party feeling, and come to the Lord as one [person]; and when the church lives in

the power of the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians I am sure that many will be added daily to the flock of God...
pp. 84-85

Hannah Hurnard wrote a book called *Mountain of Spices*. In it she talks about love:

(Mountain of Spices by Hannah Hurnard)

When men love they fulfil the law of their being. When they break the Law of Love they disrupt and frustrate the very Law of Life. As long as they love they are healthy and happy and harmonious [individuals], but when they cease to love and begin to think envious, resentful, bitter, unforgiving and selfish thoughts, then they begin to destroy themselves, for every part of their being is [being destroyed and] poisoned by unloving thoughts.

(source unknown)

One of the greatest frustrations that men—businessmen—are facing is the frustration of getting along with people.

What's eating their insides out? Personnel problems—problems with people who can't see things their way.

And as Christians, the hardest thing they have—the toughest assignment—is getting along with people.

David Augsburger said:

(70 x 7: The Freedom of Forgiveness by David Augsburger)

I'll never forget a moment of tragedy in my life when I needed help and turned to an old friend to share a bit of my suffering. After three sentences, he interrupted to give me a flawlessly-worded lovely little speech. But the farther he went, the more distant [I] became. I wanted to reach out, [and] grasp [him by the] lapel and say, "Come back, I don't want your beautiful bouquet of worlds. I want you."

But who am I to criticize? How often I've given a friend a need the stone of eloquent comfort when he wanted the bread of human understanding. No matter how polished, perfect and multifaceted the stone, it offers no nourishment. [Because] You can't eat diamonds. Even if they are "forever."

Loving is listening. Caring is hearing.

Love is the opening of your life to another. Through sincere interest, simple attention, sensitive listening, compassionate understanding and honest sharing [we come to the point that we love].

p. 87

This is exactly what most of our children will tell us. They would tell us, "You say you love me by all of the material things you give me, but you've got to prove that you love me by spending time listening to what I've got to say."

And the secret to a relationship with a child which is meaningful, is a relationship whereby we manifest our love by spending time with an open ear to hear so that we can have a ministry in that life.

We so often pre-judge our children. And really they're entrenched in their bitterness and indifference. Not because of the fact that we haven't given them everything they want, but just by the very fact that we haven't given them the most precious thing we could give them, and that's some of our time and ourselves to hear them. To let them know that we really care. To let them know that we really appreciate them. This is something that means more to them than anything else.

First Corinthians 13 is the most majestic passage of scripture in the Bible naturally. It's going to be fun to study together. There've been many, many people who've written on it and a lot has been said about it.

Let's see what we can find in it for ourselves. This translation is from the original language.

We will begin with the last phrase in chapter 12. It's unfortunate that chapter divisions come. They're man-made and this one shouldn't have been here. This last phrase should have been in chapter 13.

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

I will show you a still better (or super excellent way). If I am speaking with the tongues of men and of angels, but I'm not having love, (that is love produced by the Holy Spirit in the heart of the child of God) I have become a noisy brass gong, or a clashing cymbal. And if I am having the gift of prophecy and

know all the mysteries and all the knowledge, and if I am having all the faith so that I am able to remove mountains, but I am not having love, I am nothing. And if I give away all my possessions to feed the poor and if I give up my body in order that I may glory but I am not having love, it is profiting me nothing. Love is patient about everything, love is kind, is not filled with jealousy, love does not brag, is not conceited (or puffed up or puts on airs) does not behave itself disgracefully (or indecently), does not strive for one's own personal advantage, does not become irritated (or angry), does not take evil into account, does not rejoice over injustice, but rejoices in the truth. Keeps confidential (or covers) all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails; but if there are prophecies they shall cease; if there are tongues, they will come to an end; if there is knowledge, it shall be done away. For we are knowing in part and we are prophesying in part. But when that which is perfect comes, that which is partial will be done away. When I was a child I used to speak as a child, I used to think as a child, I used to make plans (or reason) as a child. When I became a man, I have put away the things of a child. For now we are seeing by means of a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I am knowing in part, but then I shall fully know, even as also I was known. But now there is remaining faith, hope, love; these three, but the greatest of these is love.

Now let's take just a moment of introduction.

The Apostle Paul is writing this letter to a problem-plagued, carnal group of little baby Christians. This church is so filled

with problems that we can trace through the letter the little phrase that he's constantly answering another problem.

He starts out in the first couple of chapters, and they have some problems with DIVISION, because the people are magnifying the minister instead of listening to the message. They were all split up into little cliques in the church.

And then after he gets through with that, he launches into CARNALITY or being baby Christians when we should have grown up in our Christian life.

And then after he lays that aside, he has to deal with the problem of IMMORALITY, because there's some immorality in the church. So he deals with that, then he puts that aside.

Then he talks about LAWSUITS.

Then about DIFFERENCES OF OPINION.

Then about MARRIAGE.

And then finally, after he gets through with that, he decides that the secret to the whole deal is to tell them how he lives a COMMITTED CHRISTIAN LIFE. He uses himself as an EXAMPLE.

And then finally he launches into this area of SPIRITUAL GIFTS.

Now when we become a Christian, we receive a spiritual gift. And the Corinthians had spiritual gifts, but they were having problems with the function of these spiritual gifts in the body of Christ, in the church. And so he has to write about spiritual gifts.

He writes about spiritual gifts in chapter 12. Then he writes about spiritual gifts in chapter 14.

Now it's quite obvious that after chapter 12 comes chapter 13. And before chapter 14, comes chapter 13. Now isn't that profound? But that's the way it is.

A lot of people think in their exposition that Paul is putting chapter 13 in the middle to tell us how we ought to exercise our spiritual gift. The only problem is, the original language doesn't sustain that.

Notice that we translated that last verse:

"I will show you a more super excellent way."

What he is doing here is showing us TWO WAYS OF LIFE. It is possible for us to be a Christian, and even be exercising our spiritual gift in the body of Christ, performing our service in the local church, doing our thing, and not have *agape* love.

He would say that if there is a choice between these two of exercising our spiritual gift or manifesting *agape* love, the *agape* love is superior over the spiritual gift. Now that doesn't

mean that the spiritual gift isn't important and we ought to find out what our gift is and get busy exercising it. But it does mean that it is possible to do all of this without love, else these first three verses which speak about love being absent, are being very meaningless.

So having said that, here is the OUTLINE for these thirteen verses that we're going to look at.

- I. verses 1-3—"LOVE LOST"
- II. verses 4-7—"LOVE IS..." and
- III. verses 8-13—"LOVE LASTS."

So we have:

LOVE LOST,
LOVE IS, and
LOVE LASTS.

Or:

verses 1-3—LOVE IS ABSENT,
verses 4-7—LOVE IS PRESENT, and
verses 8-13—LOVE GUARANTEE.

Or if we want to be homiletical:

the VALUE of love in verses 1-3,

the VIRTUE of love in verses 4-7, and

the VICTORY of love in verses 8-13.

So three outlines—at least they all accomplish the same objective.

Now if there are two ways of life for the Christian:

1. MAGNIFY our spiritual gifts or
2. make it our aim in life to LOVE.

Paul says that to make it in life, to love is the superior way, then we ought to take some serious consideration about what we're going to study.

This is the most important thing. The aim of our life ought to be the expression of God's kind of love through us as individuals.

Notice in 1 Corinthians 14:1 he says, "Pursue (or desire) spiritual gifts, but pursue after love."

We would think that the Apostle Paul would pick an area of

his life where he's the strongest to admonish the Christians? Isn't that our human nature? When we are together in a group of Christians and we're talking about what we ought to do and how we ought to? The person who finds it very easy to witness says, "Well you ought to just witness to everybody because you're going to find super excitement about your witness for Jesus!"

And then here's the little person over here, he just never gets out. He's Charlie Bookworm, so to speak. He can read 76 hours a day and he's got a fabulous knowledge of the scriptures. And so he says, "Oh, if you want real meaning in life, you ought to have a knowledge of the scriptures. This is the most important."

And here's the missionary home on furlough and he says, "Oh the most important thing is to serve the Lord on a foreign field! That's the most important thing." Or "It's so wonderful to live by faith. I wish you dear people could have the same experience that I do of walking with God by faith."

Now the Apostle Paul happens to be the apostle of faith. And we would think that he'd pick one of his strong areas when he admonished the Corinthians. But the ultimate importance of this is that it is not his faith, it's not his preaching, it's not his knowledge of the Word, it's not his commitment or his service or his witnessing. The aim of an effective Christian is to allow God's love—this kind of love here—flow through his life.

Now this agrees with all the other writers. Peter says in 1

Peter 4:8, “Make love constant. Bring love in your life to the stretching point.” In fact, let love be the dominant theme.

John the apostle of love in 1 John 4 says, “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.” (ref. 1 John 4:7)

Now we have one problem before we get into these three verses. And that problem is, we might be saying, “Well, I love everybody.” And the reason we may have a little bit of a problem with that is simply because our definition of love might conform to the society that’s around us. Everybody’s talking about love, but very few are doing it—in the biblical sense of the word, that is.

So in order for us to understand the word “love,” we need a Greek lesson.

The Greeks had three words which conveyed love. And understanding these three words will help us see the word that’s in this passage over and over again.

1. The first Greek word is the Greek word *Eros*.

This kind of love is based on the physical. It is a lustful passion. It is really when a guy is honest and he says “I love you,” he’s saying, “I love me and I want to use you. I want to gain experience at your expense.” He really has not learned what it is to have human love like it’s supposed to be.

The woman at the well is a good illustration. She meets the Lord, and the Lord says, “Go call your husband.” And she says, “Well, I don’t have one.” In other words, “I’m still available.”

The Lord really nailed her to the wall with His ability to see right through her. He said, “Well, you’re sure right. You don’t have a husband. You’ve had five of them. And the guy you’re living with now is not your husband.”

That is living on the basis of erotic love. And this is the garbage that we see as the emphasis of love today. This is the emphasis on the college campus.

2. Then there is another kind of love which is so beautiful and refreshing when we see it in action. And this is *phileo* love .

This is human affection. This is love between two people who care for one another and have the best interest of the other at stake. This is love not saying, “what can you give me?” but “what can I give you?”

“What contribution can I make to your life because I have your best interests?” Human affection.

Now the best biblical illustration of this kind of a love, *phileo* love, is seen in the book of Genesis between Jacob and Rachel. Jacob went to Laban’s house and he met this sweet girl by the name of Rachel and immediately, out of deep desire for her as

a person—it was kind of love at first sight—he checked in with the father-in-law to find out that he was going to have to work seven years for her.

We read in Genesis 29, beginning at verse 20: “So Jacob spent the next seven years working to pay for Rachel. But they seemed to him but a few days, because he was so much in love.”

He was giving of himself for seven years because of his love for this woman. Now Laban tricked him, of course, and he ended up with Leah so he had to work seven more years. So altogether it involved fourteen years of his life because of his love for Rachel. Now that is human love. It is a giving kind of love on the part of the one who is loving.

3. Now the other word that occurs here is the Greek *agape* or *agapao*. *Agapao* or *agapos*, *agapa* love—it is an *agape* type of love.

This is a love which involves a decision of the will which leads to sacrifice on the part of the one doing the loving, or the object which is loved.

It is the act of God, because of His love for us, that He moves into a plan that involves the sacrifice of His love because we are the recipient of that kind of love.

This love conveys the attitude of God the Father toward the whole world. It is the attitude of God the Father toward both

Christians and non-Christians. Because it says in John 3:16, “God so *agapaod* the world”—everybody in it.

This is the kind of love which God has for Christians, as well those who are not Christians. This kind of love is the love which expresses the essential nature of God toward us. This love is God manifesting His presence to the world.

First John 4:20 says, “If someone says I love God and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.”

Now this kind of love proceeds rather from the nature of the lover, than from any merit in the beloved. This kind of love is love in spite of, rather than love because of.

We might say, “I love you because of your beautiful hair,” or “I love you because of your beautiful face,” or “I love you because you’re you”—that covers everything.

This kind of love is a love in spite of. This kind of love actually has a negative and a positive side to it.

NEGATIVELY, this kind of love is totally free of any ill-will toward the object loved. This kind of love, not only negatively, is free of any ill-will, but is POSITIVELY involved in a constructive way, concerned for the interests of the one which is loved.

This is why Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount, “love your enemies.” This is the word He uses.

Agapa or *agapao*—love your enemies. How can we do that? As a Christian, we can be totally free of any ill-will toward those who hate us. And besides that, we can be constructively praying for their best interests as a Christian.

We cannot *phileo* our enemies. That is to have human affection for them and really be excited about being with them, and enjoying it because we’re going to get our head lopped off because of their lack of desire to love us. But we certainly can *agapao* our enemy.

And this is what God expects of us. That no matter what people do to us, we are free of ill-will toward them because of what they’ve done. And secondly, not only that, but we’re bearing witness by a constructive involvement in their best interests.

This is the reason why so many people come to know Jesus Christ when they see this kind of love in people.

There’s a story about a private one night who knelt beside his bed to pray and a sergeant hit him in the back of the head with a muddy boot and a burst of profanity before he went to bed, making fun of him while he was praying. The sergeant, with utter and complete amazement, woke the next morning to find that both of his muddy boots were shined and sitting beside his bed. That man responded favorably to the Christian

message, because the private was not affected by the ill-will of the sergeant.

Now one of the best ways that we can define this kind of love is to use a little play on words in a passage of scripture. John 21 is the best passage to describe it.

In John 21, Peter just blew it badly. He denied the Lord three times and he's feeling terrible about it. In fact, he's accepted the total responsibility for the cross. It's all his fault, because he denied the Lord in front of the little girl, and in a group of other guys. And so he feels terrible about it. He feels like a real failure.

Christ in His resurrected body, there on the shore that morning, and Peter had an encounter after they'd been fishing all night. It was really an emotional scene. And this is what Jesus says in John 21:

“Simon, son of Jonah, do you *agapao* me more than these?”

“Yes, Lord, you know I *phileo* you.”—“I don't have divine love for you, I have human affection.”

Peter, for the first time in his life, is really honest. He says, “I couldn't have divine love for you. I blew it so badly back there, it's impossible for me to be honest with You. I failed You when I should have been loving You! And this kind of love is not possible for me right now.”

Then He continues:

“Simon, son of Jonah, do you *agapao* me?”

“Yes, Lord, You know I *phileo* you.”

And then notice it says in the passage that “he was grieved because the Lord said to him a third time...”

Some people look at that word “grieved” as meaning, “Good grief, he repeated the same thing a third time.” Peter was grieved and cut in his heart by the lack of capacity to manifest this love, because the Lord stooped down and used His word.

He said the third time:

“Peter, do you *phileo* me?”

Peter, with a broken heart and tears in his eyes says, “Lord, You know all things. I *phileo* You.”—“I only have the capacity for human affection for You.”

In that broken heart and in that broken state, at that point Peter was a candidate for *agapao* love. Because when the Holy Spirit came upon him in Acts 2, we see nothing but a story of *agapao* love.

Everywhere he goes and every life he touches, God blesses him. Scores come to Christ because this dumb old fisherman, who was such a hard-hearted, selfish, egotistical, proud,

phony prevaricator, had come to a confrontation with Jesus Christ and realized he was totally incapable of the kind of love we're talking about here.

In verse 1 we find this kind of love absent in our articulation.

v. 1 If I am speaking with the tongues of men and of angels, but I am not having love, I have become a noisy brass gong or a clashing cymbal.

“If I am speaking with the tongues of men and of angels, but I am not having love, I have become a noisy brass gong or a clashing cymbal.”

This is love which is absent from our lips.

Agapao must be the power behind the tongue.

It is not the extent of our vocabulary that reveals the depth of our heart. Out of the depth of our heart come words which we speak.

Oratory can command admiration and attention, as people have facility with words. But it is love which reaches the heart.

This is why the Lord says, “Thou shall love the Lord thy God with all thy heart.” (ref. Matthew 22:37)

The best speech on earth and heaven, without love is but a

noise.

So what he's saying in verse 1, it is not **DICTION** but **DEPTH OF HEART** that determines one's words.

Now verse 2. This is love absent from our **ABILITIES**. We have:

1. love absent from our **ARTICULATION**—from our lips, and then
2. love absent from our **ABILITIES**.

v. 2 And if I am having the gift of prophecy and know all the mysteries and all the knowledge, and if I am having all the faith so that I am able to remove mountains but I am not having love, I am nothing.

“And if I am having the gift of prophecy and know all the mysteries and all the knowledge, and if I am having all the faith so that I am able to remove mountains but I am not having love, I am nothing.”

This is this kind of love absent from our life. Whereas in the first verse it would be love absent from **EMOTIONS**, now it is love absent from **INTELLECT** here in verse 2.

Exercising our gifts without love is the picture here.

Francis Schaeffer says this:

(The Church at the End of the 20th Century by Francis A. Schaeffer)

We must ask, “Do I fight merely for doctrinal faithfulness?” This is like the wife who never sleeps with anybody else, but never shows love to her own husband. Is this a sufficient relationship in marriage? No, ten thousand times no. Yet if I am a Christian who speaks and acts for doctrinal faithfulness but do not show love to my divine bridegroom, I am in the same place as such a wife. What God wants from us is not only doctrinal faithfulness, but our love day by day. Not in theory, mind you, but [also] in practice.
p. 129

Love absent from our WORTH and from our WITNESS, as well as love absent from our WORDS.

Then thirdly in verse 3 it is:

3. love absent from our ACTIONS.

v. 3 And if I give away all my possessions to feed the poor and if I give up my body in order that I may glory but I am not having love, it is profiting me nothing.

“And if I give away all my possessions to feed the poor and if I give up my body in order that I may glory but I am not having love, it is profiting me nothing.”

This is love absent from our LABOR.

1. Verse 1 is love absent from our EMOTIONS.
2. Verse 2 is love absent from our INTELLECT.
3. And verse 3 is love absent from our WILL.

We're making decisions with our will to do some fabulous things, like give away all our possessions and to give up the right to our body. But we can do that without this *agapao* kind of love.

Now in the King James and a few other versions we have the word "to be burned"—"I give up my body to be burned."

This is a very similar Greek word to the Greek which is used for "glory."

We could also say that a person could give up his body to be burned as a martyr, and try to get glory from that. And he can do all that without love.

Love absent from our WORKS.

It is profiting us, how much? NOTHING.

Remember Martha? She's a fabulous illustration of this. Love is absent from her work. She'd been hustling around the

kitchen. She's working like a trooper to get dinner ready for Jesus and Lazarus and Mary. And Mary's supposed to be helping her, but Mary's sitting in there listening to Jesus talk.

Martha is serving without *agapao* love, because pretty soon she bursts in on the interview and she says, "Well, don't you care that I'm out here sweating and slaving, cooking pies and getting dinner ready and Mary's sitting in here doing nothing?"

The Lord says, "Martha, Martha, you're cumbered about by much serving. Mary hath chosen that better part." (ref. Luke 10:41-42)

Oftentimes we see people who are so frustrated under the pressure of trying to keep schedules of religious activity. They don't have any *agapao* kind of love. They're busy running to the next meeting or the next appointment. They don't have time to show any love, spending time with others.

It is so easy to get so involved in a schedule but we fail to meet the needs of people.

We each need to realize that we can get so busily engaged in activity, which is a well-meaning activity, and if it's without *agapao* love, it is profiting us nothing. In other words he's saying, when we get to the Judgment Seat of Christ, that kind of service without *agapao* love is going to be wood, hay and stubble. It's going to go, "Poof!"

It doesn't affect our salvation and our relationship to Christ, but there's no reward on the basis of that kind of tongue hanging out type of service that's rendered without love.

Notice that there are three little stanzas in these first three verses. He's saying:

Love absent from our LIPS.

Love absent from our LIFE.

Love absent from our LABOR.

What happens when love is absent from our LIPS? It makes a lot of noise. Our tongue makes a lot of racket. We're like a clashing cymbal or noisy gong, but we're not saying anything that's very meaningful.

Love absent from our LIFE—We are a zero. We are nothing.

Love absent from our LABOR—We have no gain at the Judgement Seat of Christ.

Do our WORDS, our WITNESS and our WORKS condemn us before the Lord because there is an absence of this kind of love in our lives produced by the Holy Spirit?

Listen to this message to the church at Ephesus.

Revelation 2:2-4

I write to inform you of a message from him who walks among the churches and holds their leaders in his right hand. He says to you, “I know how many good things you are doing. I have watched your hard work and your patience; I know you don’t tolerate sin among your members, and you have carefully examined the claims of those who say they are apostles but aren’t. You have found out they lie. You have patiently suffered for me without quitting. Yet there is one thing wrong; you don’t have love. You don’t love me as at the first. You have left your *agapao* love.

And it is possible to articulate. It’s possible to exercise by abilities and it’s possible to move into action. It’s possible to have love absent from our emotions, our intellect and our will and still to be a Christian.

In this passage we have a solemn picture of BUSYNESS. Patience, discernment, toil, and endurance, but absolutely without the one thing that matters most and that’s *agapao* love. And this is about as serious as a skydiver jumping out of an airplane without his parachute. He just forgot the most important piece of equipment.

Let us pray the prayer of Bertrand Russell:

(Impact of Science by Bertrand Russell)

Lord Crucified, give me a love like Thine,
Help me to win the dying souls of men.

Lord, keep my heart in closest touch with Thine
And give me love, pure Calvary love,
To bring the lost to Thee.
(source unknown)

Here are the lessons from our passage:

LESSON #1: What happens when love is absent from my lips?
I'm not saying anything that's very meaningful.

LESSON #2: When love is absent from my life, I am nothing.

LESSON #3: When love is absent from my labor, I have no
gain at the Judgement Seat of Christ.

LESSON #4: Do our WORDS, our WITNESS and our WORKS
condemn us before the Lord because there is an absence of
agapao love in our lives produced by the Holy Spirit?

Let's pray together.

Our heavenly Father, we do not know where everyone is with
regard to Your love gift of Jesus Christ. And if there is
someone who does not know Jesus Christ, they've not accepted
Him as their own Savior, we would pray that they might
respond to this love and receive Christ as their very own. And
then Father we pray for those who know You and love You
and desire to live for You, that they might be challenged with
the thoughts from 1 Corinthians 13 in a new way. And that
they might be deeply desirous that this kind of love that we've

talked about will begin to manifest itself in their relationships in their home and in their relationships with others, and in their relationships to those who do not know Jesus Christ as Savior. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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v. 3 And if I give away all my possessions to feed the poor and if I give up my body in order that I may glory but I am not having love, it is profiting me nothing.

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LESSON #4: Do our WORDS, our WITNESS and our WORKS condemn us before the Lord because there is an absence of *agapao* love in our lives produced by the Holy Spirit?