

STRENGTH FOR THE STRESSES

“How Strength is Made Perfect in Weakness”

Study Number Two – “Love Is...” – 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

We’re going to be looking at the second in our series of lessons of the three lessons on this particular chapter.

It's unfortunate that there is a chapter division here. These are man-made and sometimes it's very unfortunate that they come where they do. We're looking at the last verse in chapter 12:

1 Corinthians 12:31

And yet I will show you a still better (or super-excellent way).

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

If I am speaking with the tongues of men and of angels, but I am 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 I know all the mysteries and all the knowledge, and if I'm having all the faith so that I'm 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, if I give up my body in order that I may glory but I am not having love, it is

profiting me nothing.

That's the section that we had in our last study. Now beginning with this fourth verse through verse seven is our current exposition:

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

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 disgracefully (or indecently), does not strive for one's own 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, and endures all things.

The next set of verses we'll be covering in our next study is:

1 Corinthians 13:8-13

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, and I used to think as a child, I used to make plans (or reason) as a child; When I became a man, I 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 also I was known. But now there is remaining faith, hope, love; these three, but the greatest of these is love.

Now we have outlined this thirteenth chapter in **THREE PARTS**:

1. We talked about the **CONSEQUENCES** when this *agape* love is absent.

There are **THREE THINGS** that happen when this love is absent:

1. from **OUR LIPS**,
2. from **OUR LIVES**, and
3. from **OUR LABOR**.

From our **LIPS** we become sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal. We're making a whole lot of noise.

When it's absent from the abilities or gifts in our **LIVES**, it profits us nothing—there are zeroes.

And when it is absent from our **LABORS** or actions—even if we would give our body to be burned or if we would give ourselves and all of our possessions away that we might glory, depending on how we translate that section, it will profit us nothing at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Absent from our LIVES, our LIPS, our LIVES, and our LABOR.

Our ARTICULATION, our ABILITIES, and our ACTIONS.

Our WORDS, our WITNESS, and our WORK.

Our EMOTIONS, our INTELLECT, and our WILL.

Now in seeing the passage as a whole, we looked at:

1. Love is Absent.
2. Love is Present.

And next we will look at:

3. Love Lasts—or Love's Guarantee.

The VALUE, the VIRTUE, and the VICTORY of love.

Now before we enter into the exposition of these verses—4 through 7—let's look at the biblical definition once more of *agape* love. *Agape* is the Greek word for love that is used here in this passage.

First of all, this love NEGATIVELY is free of any ill-will toward the object which is loved.

POSITIVELY it's constructively concerned for the best interest of the object.

This love is a decision of the will which leads to sacrifice on the part of the one who is doing the loving.

This love is not affected by the character of the object being loved. Remember we use the little phrase "love in spite of" rather than "love because of."

We say, "I love you because of...because of...because." That is with natural love.

But this Godlike *agape* that we're talking about here is "love in spite of."

Christian love is something without which everything else is nothing. In which would be totally sufficient if there was nothing else.

J. Hudson Taylor said:

The greatest missionary qualification for anyone who goes to the field with our mission is a deep love for Jesus Christ.
(source unknown)

Now how can love be known? The only way we can tell whether or not we are an *agape* lover is by the action which it prompts in our life as a person.

We can say we love because of what we've seen someone do. That's the only way we can tell. We can say, "You don't love, because I don't see" or "You do love, because we do see."

And so being aware of the fact that the only way this love will show itself, and for us to know, is by looking at some of the actions which this love prompts.

So we're going to move into the test tube and take an analysis of this kind of love.

We're going to look at the characteristics of this kind of love.

There are FIFTEEN CHARACTERISTICS of *agape* love and we have each one of them dissected from the original language.

We never go through a passage of scripture like this—which is one of the most majestic passages in the whole Bible—without being deeply exercised about our own concern.

All of the Corinthian failures that we read about in 1 Corinthians could have been solved if they would occupy themselves with the one ingredient that he talks about in the thirteen chapter—love.

All of the problems that they were having could be attributed to a lack of that. So that's how significant the subject is that we speak about in this.

v. 4 Love is patient about everything, love is kind, love is not filled with jealousy; love does not brag, love is not conceited (puffed up or putting on airs),

“Love is patient about everything, love is kind, love is not filled with jealousy; love does not brag, love is not conceited (puffed up or putting on airs),”

1. “Love is patient about everything,”

This Greek word conveys the thought that love is willing to put up with waiting. This love is willing to put up with pain and trouble. This love is willing to endure calmly without complaining.

How many husbands have said, “Oh I wish she’d hurry up so we could be on time just once!” That’s the complete opposite of *agape* love.

The thought behind this Greek word is the thought of being willing to yield our rights for the benefit of somebody else. It’s yielding our rights in people’s relationships.

So what if they don’t appreciate us. So what if we’re being used. So what if we’re being walked on. We’re only looking at it from a human point of view. We need to get it from a divine perspective. This is God’s plan for our life and He deemed this experience necessary for us to be a better person. So we love with patience in all things.

It's interesting that this word is the same word that's used about God in 2 Peter 3:

2 Peter 3:9

The Lord is not slow about His promises, as some men count slowness, but is patient toward us, not wishing for any to perish but that all should come to repentance.

His patience in waiting to come again is a manifestation of His love, lest there be those who don't have the privilege of coming to know Christ as Savior.

And then he uses the same word in chapter 3:

2 Peter 3:15

And regard the patience of our Lord to be your salvation...

It's interesting that this word is a word which is also used in the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5.

What are the nine manifestations of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22?

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness...

1. "love is patient,"

That word “long-suffering” is the same word here. It’s patience.

2. “love is kind,”

This word conveys the thought of being loving and merciful. Being generous, being sympathetic, being considerate in our attitude toward others.

It is the quality of God also in Titus 3:

Titus 3:4

But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared...

Paul uses the same word for “kindness” when he talks about the Lord in Romans 2:

Romans 2:4

Or do you think lightly of the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, [there’s patience again, the same word] not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance.

We can see it beautifully in the life of Christ when we see Him in John 8 with the woman caught in adultery.

The religious leaders are just willing to live by the Law—

mash her right here. She needs to die. And how tenderly and kindly the Lord deals with her and sends her on her way with the statement, “Go and sin no more.”

This is kindness.

Moving about among Christian people, some of the sweetest people in the world have such a bad, critical attitude. They can cut with their criticism which is just the opposite of their kindness. And the word here conveys the thought of kindness through-and-through, even to the point of loyalty, which is also manifested in love.

It was Henry Drummond in his sermon, “The Greatest of These,” who said about kindness:

I will pass through the world but once. Any good thing therefore that I can do or any kindness that I can show to any human being, let me do it now. Let me not defer it or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again.
(source unknown)

Thirdly, the apostle turns from the POSITIVE to the NEGATIVE, which he’ll want to do and then he’ll come back to the POSITIVE AGAIN now. “Love is patient, love is kind”:

3. “love is not filled with jealousy;”

This is a work of the FLESH in Galatians 5. A manifestation of the OLD NATURE WITHIN.

The word “jealousy” is a little bit different and conveys a different meaning than this word “jealousy.”

This word “jealousy” here is a “meanness of soul.” It’s not so much wanting for itself what somebody else has, but it’s grudging the fact that somebody else possesses an advantage. It’s just plum meanness.

“He’s got a better spiritual gift than I do and I don’t like it,” and so we’re mean. Not that we want it particularly for ourselves. But just the fact that they have it and they’re using it just aggravates us. And that is “jealousy.”

Another word that conveys this in the English language is the word “envy.”

It’s a closeness in which we have to be watchful, we have to be suspicious, we have to be possessive, we have to be fearful of some rival who’ll come along and be more appreciated than we are. We’re going to be grudging. We have to be resentful. And we’re sure not going to watch anybody intruding upon our rights.

The direct OPPOSITE of this is the characteristic of love.

Love, instead of that, is congenial. Love is unthreatened by superior gifts in its presence. Love is open. Love is appreciative. And so love “is not filled with jealousy.”

4. “love does not brag,”

The word “brag” means to “praise one’s self,” “show off,” “exaggerate.” This is the only place this word occurs in the whole New Testament.

It’s the word that was used in the Greek language for “windbag.”

There’s a self-effacing quality about this kind of love. The real lover can never get over the wonder that he is loved. He’s a person who is totally unselfish in his life.

5. “love is not conceited (or puffed up or puts on airs),”

This word is “arrogant,” “presumptuous,” “over-bearing,” “too proud,” “exaggerated opinion of one’s ability, importance and self-esteem.”

This kind of thought is, “Nobody can replace me so I’ll have to do it myself. No one can do it nearly as well as I can do so I cannot trust this responsibility to somebody else. I’ll just have to wear myself out doing it.”

This is Colossians 2:18, which is an interesting phrase: “inflated without a cause by his fleshly mind.”

It’s having this exaggerated opinion of our abilities.

v. 5 love does not behave disgracefully (indecently),

love does not strive for one's own advantage, love does not become irritated (or angry), love does not take evil into account,"

"love does not behave disgracefully (indecently), love does not strive for one's own advantage, love does not become irritated (or angry), love does not take evil into account,"

6. "love does not behave itself disgracefully (or indecently),"

This refers to morality here. "Love does not behave itself dishonorably." This same word is used back in 1 Corinthians 7, when he's talking about marriage:

1 Corinthians 7:36

If you are finding that you are behaving yourself dishonorably toward your maiden (or the girl that you're going with) then you better marry.

He's saying it is possible in relationships to let *eros* get in the way. That's the erotic, physical, fleshly kind of love that conveys the word love to so many people today.

This is not *agape* love. *Agape* love, in a relationship with the opposite sex, behaves itself in a respectful, honorable fashion.

7. "love does not strive for one's own advantage,"

Here we have the conflict between RIGHTS and DUTIES.

The conflict between PRIVILEGE and RESPONSIBILITY.

Life owes us a living vs. we owe life something.

“love does not strive for its own advantage,”

We think of Philippians 2:21 where Paul is describing Timothy:

“They all seek after their own interests and not those of Jesus Christ.” (see Philippians 2:21-22) “But Timothy’s different. He loves you. He’s got a genuine interest in you as a person.”

That’s a manifestation of *agape* love.

8. “love does not become irritated (or angry),”

This word conveys the thought of “urging one on to wrath.” It’s the spirit provoked within him as the Lord often wants to do.

Oftentimes the reason we become irritated is because of the selfish demands of immaturity. The demands of people upon us which serves as a source of irritation. And why are we irritated? Because we’re still standing on our rights.

They just don’t appreciate us and they’d ask us kindly. Or children asking foolish questions that seem almost ridiculous and finally we get irritated.

This kind of love never becomes exasperated. This love does not come to the point of being irritated or angry.

Now this word “irritation,” is an irritation which is conveyed like a mosquito bite or a chigger—probably better because we can’t scratch it. And one of the greatest sources of irritation is to be out jogging and have a sweaty t-shirt on and have a horsefly land right between your two shoulder blades and you can’t reach him. That serves as a tremendous source of irritation.

And you almost lose your cool at that particular point. And yet to do that is the sign of defeat. This love is never able to reach the point of irritation, simply because this love has learned to die to its rights. To find that it is the plan of God for him or her to be spent in the life of another.

9. “love does not take evil into account,”

It does not store up in the memory any wrong it has received.

This is an interesting word. This is the word that is used by the accountant. When we enter an item on a ledger it’s put there for the IRS. People sometimes have a lot of problems because when something’s done wrong to them, they put it on a ledger in the book. And not only do they leave it in the book, but a lot of times they open the book and they ponder and think about it and serve a little juice to their ulcers while they’re working it over in their mind because of the wrong that’s been done to them.

They ponder and think about it and they go back over it. And out of this comes a spirit of bitterness. And this increases to the breaking of a relationship. This comes to a point where actually the person is looking for retaliation and planning and plotting for the hope of getting even.

This kind of love “does not take evil into account.”

This is love which has learned the great lesson of FORGETTING. It does not reckon, it does not calculate, it does not store up to ponder and think about it later. It is the expression of Jesus on the cross when they’re putting the nails in His hands and His feet. “Father, forgive them for they don’t know what they’re doing.” (ref. Luke 23:34)

And one of the greatest tributes to Abraham Lincoln was the tribute in a statement which he made, “I never remember an offense. But I never forget a kindness.”

The key to our mental health and our ability to be buoyant, to be open, to be dynamic in our relationships with people is to never stoop to put items in the ledger. Because invariably when we start living on this kind of a plane, we are a person who begins with our human mind—after we begin thinking like that—to assume things that aren’t even true.

Because of the security we find with relationships to people, we can be thinking something and then we see them the very next time and we’re totally unnerved by the fact that what we

were thinking about was totally wrong. That they deeply love. If they're interested in us, they're concerned about us.

And we must take a lesson from this. Christian love doesn't "take evil into account."

This is the word that is used in 2 Corinthians 5:19:

2 Corinthians 5:19

God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, not counting, not reckoning their sins unto them.

He did not put our sins in a ledger book to nail us later. He died upon the cross for those things in that ledger book. And now it is as though they had never been.

v. 6 love does not rejoice over injustice, but rejoices in the truth;

"love does not rejoice over injustice, but rejoices in the truth;"

10. "love does not rejoice over injustice,"

Joe Bayly says:

"We are like David. Slings we have a plenty. But we use them on our own fellow soldiers, not against opposing giants. The brethren are bruised and the giants go unmolested."
(source unknown)

That is a graphic illustration of what we're talking about here. We have a tendency among ourselves to put items in the ledger book and we're looking forward to clobbering back and forth, and the giants out there that need to be touched, go unmolested.

"love does not rejoice over injustice,"

We're talking here about the little phrase, "takes no pleasure in wickedness."

It's a queer trait of human nature that oftentimes we prefer to hear the misfortunes rather than the good fortunes of others.

In other words, it's easier for us to weep with those who weep than to rejoice with those who rejoice. Because people become competitors to our cause, we would rather hear of their bad times and their misfortunes, rather than rejoice with them in the good success that the Lord has prospered upon them. Right?

This kind of love does not stoop to that. It does not rejoice in this.

Oftentimes we're more interested in hearing spicy little stories to someone's discredit or failure, than we are to stories to someone's praise. Christian love does not find human malice in its context, which delights in the ill-fortune of others. And yet this is so often prevalent among good Christian people.

11. “love rejoices in the truth;”

In other words, Christian love has no desire to veil the truth. There’s nothing to conceal, so this kind of love delights when truth prevails.

v. 7 love keeps confidential (covers) all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

“love keeps confidential (covers) all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things”

12. “love keeps confidential (or covers) all things.”

It throws a cloak of silence over that which is displeasing in another person.

Someone described this as, “lover never springs a leak.” It surrenders one’s rights in a relationship, even though they’ve been offended so there will be no hindrance to the gospel.

Ever gone through an experience like that? Been totally devastated and if we gave the information it could vindicate us as a person? But rather than bring a hindrance to the gospel, we swallowed it, covered it up with *agape* love?

This is putting ourselves into a place of blessing because Peter says in 2 Peter 2:20, “What glory is it if you buffet it for your fault, you take it patiently. But if you do well and suffer for it,

you take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.”

This kind of love has the ability to cover things which could produce a tremendous hindrance if they were known.

13. “love believes all things,”

Now in relationship to God and His Word, he “believes all things.”

And in relation to his fellow man, he’s always believing the best about other people.

Now don’t think that this “love believes all things” means that love is gullible or love jumps off in blind faith. That’s not the picture here.

It is just the fact that love is not suspicious, love is not a snooper. Love has confidence in the other person. That’s what is meant by “believes all things.”

14. “love hopes all things,”

Love never ceases to hope, no matter how bleak the present might be. Our love for the Lord keeps us looking up in these difficult days, knowing that He’s going to come to us in His own good time. It’s that hope.

And then finally:

15. “love endures all things”

These three things are right together:

“believes,”

“hopes,” and

“endures.”

What does the word “endure” mean?

The word “endure” means constant, courageous, even in the midst of failure and under trial. This love doesn’t fall apart under difficulty.

It conquers and transmutes difficulty in the victory. This love stands one’s ground. It endures in trouble and in affliction.

Now putting these three words together, let me do it this way—here’s kind of a summary statement of these last three:

“believes,”

“hopes,” and

“endures.”

When love has no evidence, it believes the best. When the evidence is adverse, it hopes for the best. And when hopes are

repeatedly disappointed, it still courageously waits and endures.

Now these are the characteristics of *agape* love in these verses. Now let's go through a spiritual exercise by using our own name:

_____ is patient about everything. _____ is kind. _____ is not filled with jealousy. _____ does not brag. _____ is not conceited (puffed up or puts on airs). _____ does not behave disgracefully. _____ does not strive for his own advantage. _____ does not become irritated. _____ does not take evil into account. _____ does not rejoice over injustice, but rejoices in the truth. _____ keeps confidential all things. _____ believes all things, he hopes all things, and he endures all things.

Sometimes we talk about an awfully good ballgame of love, and yet we act it out in indifference in our relationships to others.

Howard Hendricks in his book, *Don't Fake It...Say It with Love*, described this:

(Don't Fake It...Say It with Love by Howard Hendricks)

We're a lot like the fourth grade class that sent a card to their teacher who was at home recovering from surgery. The card read: "Your fourth grade class wishes you a speedy recovery—by a vote of 15 to 14."

(source unknown)

All fifteen of these characteristics are a manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. If we are finding ourselves deficient in this kind of love, then it is a spiritual problem—we must assume.

It is the promise of the Spirit to produce. And He can't produce without possession. So how do we solve our dilemma? The solution is in the THREE S's:

1. A fresh SUBMISSION to the Spirit's control in our lives.
2. An absolute and total SURRENDER of my rights.
3. A willingness to SPEND MYSELF for other people.

That's the secret of beginning to realize *agape* love in our lives.

1. As we SUBMIT completely to the Holy Spirit, agonizing over the fact that we see so much absent of what has been described. Asking Him to produce this quality of love, which He has promised to produce, if He has possession in our life.
2. Owning up to His lordship, we realize that we must SURRENDER our rights, even in our relationships with other people.
3. We begin to manifest this love and discover what it's all about when we start getting involved in people's lives around

us—we SPEND OURSELVES for people.

The Word doesn't say wait for somebody to come and love us. The Word says, we shall love.

So as the Holy Spirit takes control of us, we surrender our rights so we're not offended by what people do to us. We're ready to move out and watch the Holy Spirit manifest this *agape* love as we're being spent in the lives of other people.

Remember as we concluded our last message, we look at the church at Ephesus. The Lord said, "I have somewhat against you because you have left your first love"—your *agape* love.

We see Peter's confrontation with the Lord on the shore. He had to say honestly, "I just love You with human affection. It's totally impossible for me to manifest this *agape* love that You're talking about."

And yet it's beautiful at the moment of his failure. The Spirit of God produces in that man, a quality where in the book of Acts the whole last half of his life is totally different than the first half. Because it has penetrated and it exudes the kind of love we've talked about.

So if we feel futile, if we feel like a failure, this is the point where the Lord is really ready to pick us up and make us a channel of this kind of love.

Let's ask God to produce and begin to produce, and find a

clean, clear channel in which He can produce this kind of love.

Father, we have a desire for Your Spirit to manifest this love in us. And Lord, teach us how to surrender our rights and how to yield to the Holy Spirit. How to come to a point where we're motivated by this love and we'll move out and be spent in the lives of others. Father, if there's someone who's yet to make that exciting, thrilling discovery of finding out about this love by receiving Jesus Christ, may they not be so concerned about the fact that they need to be loving, that they need to be receiving right now. They need to accept Christ as their own Savior. As a result, they'll be motivated by the love which comes as the Spirit of God comes to dwell within. We love You our Father, and thank You for the privilege of studying Your Word together. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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STRENGTH FOR THE STRESSES

“How Strength is Made Perfect in Weakness”

Study Number Two – “Love Is” – 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Notes

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v. 7 love keeps confidential (covers) all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

LESSONS FROM THE PASSAGE:

LESSON #1: We realize *agape* love in our lives through a fresh submission to the Spirit's control.

LESSON #2: We realize *agape* love in our lives through an absolute and total surrender of our rights.

LESSON #3: We realize *agape* love in our lives through a willingness to spend ourselves for other people.

LESSON #4: The Word doesn't say wait for somebody to come and love us. The Word says, we shall love.

LESSON #5: If we feel futile, if we feel like a failure, this is the point where the lord is really ready to pick us up and make us a channel of His love.