

[United] True Love: so that all things matter

1 Corinthians 13

MPS: Christians honor Jesus and bless the world by living in His love.

OBJ: Every Christian should live God's love because of 5 Blessings.

INTRO In our series entitled UNITED: Together in the Gospel, a study of 1 Corinthians, we are laboring for one thing; to live as a people united in the gospel of Jesus Christ. **Unity fuels God's people for kingdom mission in the world.**

TRANS Today "True Love: so that all things matter" from 1 Corinthians 13.

Love is a word we all understand, yet great diversity remains with many definitions. Love has always had its problems of understanding. The New Testament uses several words for love, each denoting a different kind of love. The highest form of love is denoted by the word *agape*. Listen to what one commentator says of this word.

This Greek word was not in common use before the New Testament (it occurs twenty times in LXX and a few times in writings like *The Epistle to Aristeas*). But the Christians took it up and made it their characteristic word for love (it occurs 116 times in the New Testament, 75 being in Paul). Whereas the highest 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 on the cross. It is a love for the utterly unworthy, a love that proceeds from a God who is love. It is a love lavished on others without a thought whether they are worthy or not. It proceeds from the nature of the lover, not from any attractiveness in the beloved. The Christian who has experienced God's love for him while he was yet a sinner (Rom. 5:8) has been transformed by the experience. Now he sees people as those for whom Christ died, the objects of God's love, and therefore the objects of the love of God's people. In his measure he comes to practise the love that seeks nothing for itself, but only the good of the loved one. It is this love that the apostle unfolds.¹

We are dealing with divine love. Christians have life because of God's love to us in Jesus Christ. We live in a love the world does not know. When we live in God's love, we show this "unknown" love to the waiting and longing world. Christians don't define or think of love in the same way that the world does. **God provides a new definition for love.** We live in this new understanding of love. **The Christian life is re-defined by God's love.** Therefore, we don't default to worldly definitions or application in showing God's love.

Paul culminates his teaching on united living with a treatise on love. 1 Corinthians 13 provides the single, unifying principle for godly living, the principle of love. **Living in God's love means living for others.** Paul places his admonition on love right in the middle of his teaching and admonitions on spiritual gifts in the church. Nothing tempts Christians to focus on self, elevate one another and turn a spiritual ordinary into an 'elite' like spiritual gifts. **Love is the only thing that truly matures a Christian and guards against becoming a spiritual elite.**

TRANS I want to encourage each one of us in the spirit with which Paul writes, to live in God's love. **Five Blessings compel Christians to live in God's love.**

Blessing #1. Love adds value. .1-3

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ²And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. 1 Cor 13:1-3

¹ Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 7, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 174.

Paul crescendos his teaching with a strong declaration. Accelerated abilities absent of love only mean 'I'm an irritant'. **Have you ever heard a noisy gong or clanging cymbal?** **ILLUS** In 9th grade I returned to the band room at the end of a day of school. I found a poor soul who had fallen asleep in 6th period study hall. I didn't want him to miss the bus and have to walk home. So, I took the marching band cymbals, stood immediately in front of him and 'ever-so-gently' tried to smash them against one another. The cymbals didn't budge. But the student immediately went from 'dead asleep' to 'hotly angered'. Noisy gongs and clanging cymbals can only be described as irritating.

Heightened spiritual giftedness, ability or power absent of love means nothing. And, ultimate sacrifice absent of love holds no gain. Without love everything is nothing. Loveless-ness makes us worthless and useless.

Love makes all the difference. Love sometimes determines WHAT you do, but always and specifically determines HOW and WHY you do what you do. God commands us to love Him first NOT to provide something that He does not have, but to demonstrate the true source of all love. He alone gives meaning to all things. **Everything without love is nothing; and everything in love always matters.**

"God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him." **1 John 4:16b**

? **Do you want to add NOTHING to this world, or are you interested to bless everything with real value?**

When you love you add value and meaning to everything. Love means we bless everything with God's glory and Jesus' honor.

Blessing #1. Love adds value.

Blessing #2: Love labors for righteousness and truth. .4-6

*⁴Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. **1 Cor 13:4-6***

Paul explains how love adds value by providing a clear description. Patient and kindness should be sufficient to prove that 100% of people do not love on their own. Sure, some are kind, or have learned to be kind. And, a couple of you demonstrated patience, once. But spend a minute in the two-year-old room and experience that patience and kindness are not natural, human tendencies.

Patience means "the bearing of provocation, annoyance, misfortune, or pain," **How are you doing? Are you convinced you're not a patient person yet?** Okay, let me finish the definition; "without complaint, loss of temper, irritation, or the like." (Dictionary.com) [And there you have it; people are not naturally patient.] **Patience means we defer to another in every realm to encourage and produce good in them.**

Kind means to regard the other with a response of consideration, gentleness and sympathy. God intends that His kindness will lead us to repentance.(Rom 2:4) Christians can put on kindness as a result of being God's children.(Col 3:12) **Love that acts in kindness seeks to produce a favorable response from a person, even though it may be counter to their natural tendency.** That's valuable!

Paul clarifies love by adding what it is not. Love does not envy, boast, arrogant, rude, demanding, irritable, or resentful. These qualities show us that love is not self-seeking, -serving, -preferring, -desiring, -exalting, -thinking, -considering, -demanding, -emoting, or -defending. **Love never serves or places "self" first.**

TRANS It's hard to imagine that anyone would claim that they love because of themselves after reading these lists. But there is one other distinguishing characteristic Paul provides of real love.

Love “does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth”. The word for “wrongdoing” (GR: *adikia*) means unrighteous and injustice. Love finds no joy in doing wrong, in immorality, or injustice, or in a blatant disregard for what is unrighteous. Instead, love rejoices and congratulates in righteousness and truth. Love celebrates with and rejoices in righteous, justice and truth, and the person who entertains things.

Maybe you’ve heard it said: “you become what you celebrate”. When you celebrate something, or draw joy from it, and that means you assign value to it. It is important to understand what love celebrates because celebrating and rejoicing in that which love does not becomes the most unloving thing we can do. When we love things that are unrighteous, unjust or immoral, we lie about God and bear false testimony of Him in the world. [Christians intentionally love those things that honor God to assign value to them and bear testimony that God is love.](#)

A right definition of love demands that we put this in context. Love is an emotion, and even more a deep affection. But it is much more. Love is not a concept relative to any standard, but extends from the One who is Love, God. Love that denies or denigrates God’s holy nature is not love. Love NEVER means accepting truth as relative or sin as acceptable, unrighteousness as okay or injustice as tolerable. Loving a person in their sin, as Jesus does, NEVER means dismissing or denying their sin. Anything that ignores, denies, dismisses or condones sin is the opposite of love. [Love responds to sinners with patience and kindness while acknowledging their sin, to encourage God’s righteousness in them.](#)

Love helps in any way possible to produce righteousness. God loved Adam and Eve when He found them naked and ashamed in the garden. He helped them confess their sin (unbelief), pronounced condemnation through sin’s curse (cursed sin), led them to accept sin’s consequences (kick them out of the garden), promised to crush Satan’s power and bring victory, and commanded them to follow Him by faith.

God shows how we can lovingly help people out of sin. First, we **confess** sin to **celebrate** and rejoice in God’s truth. When you celebrate what God’s Word says, you aspire to live in light of its truth. Second, we recognize sin’s **condemnation** upon us. Third, we accept the **consequences** of our sin. Not all sin has equal, or even identifiable, consequences. But we never deny that sin always has consequences. And accepting sin’s consequences means taking personal responsibility to “own” our sin as “mine”. Fourth, we repent to trust God’s provision in Jesus Christ through the gospel to **crush** Satan’s power in our life. Fifth, we walk by faith in God’s **commands** to follow Jesus as Lord. This is how we labor for righteousness and justice, a true labor of love. Any other response to people in sin only provides false promise and hope. [Love always labors for righteousness and truth.](#)

Blessing #2: Love labors for righteousness and truth.

TRANS Next Paul explains love by showing what it does.

Blessing #3. Love sustains with eternal strength. .7-10

⁷Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. ⁸Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. **1 Cor 13:7-10**

Biblically, love really is a verb. Love “*bears all things*” means to endure something unpleasant or difficult, either personally or on behalf of someone else. Included in this word is the meaning to “put a roof on” or “keep confidential”. Isaiah records, *He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.* **Isa 53:7**
Jesus kept his mouth shut when he bore the punishment for our sin and guilt, because He knew we were without excuse. (Romans 1:20) This is love’s “bearing” power. [God empowers us to love others by bearing with them in their sin without constantly pointing it out to continually condemn them in sin.](#)

Love “*believes all things*” means a strong confidence and reliance on someone. When we love a person to labor for righteousness and truth in their life, we hold to God’s will for their life according to His Word as the highest good for that

person. And, we also believe in that person, not ignoring their sin but laboring for what God wants as more powerful than what sin has done. Paul says Jesus died for us while we were still sinners (Rom 5:8), God's enemy.

but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Rom 5:8

God doesn't expect us to clean up before we come to Him. He doesn't even expect a person to like Him or desire Him first. But **God commands Christians to believe Him in all things as a testimony and demonstration of the way He loved us.**

Love "*hopes all things*" means we remain confidently expectant of a bright future under King Jesus. Regardless of how much unrighteousness and immorality may seem to exist, or how much victory evil may seem to achieve, King Jesus will return and it will be His feet that rests on His enemies as a footstool (Psa 110:1; Luke 20:43), for the Father will subject everything under King Jesus' feet. (Psa 8:6; 1 Cor 15:27; Eph 1:27) **Love holds out hope eternal because King Jesus' reign is everlasting.**

Love "*endures all things*" means we remain with courage to face the demand that beckons for our love. Loves enduring strength matters most in the ordinary of every day, in the importance of special times, and in the urgent of life's crises. The point is not to consider a person or situation and ask oneself, "**can I do this?**" **Rather, the key to love is this: love sustains the one giving it, and the one receiving it. Love outlasts everything.**

"All things" doesn't commend gullibility, but declares the unlimited power of God's love. There is no weight love cannot bear, no situation or that can steal faith, no darkness that can cover hope, and no distance that will extend beyond love's persevering endurance. Love holds people as most valued when situations and circumstances are shaky, shifting, stinging, uncertain or crumbling. **Love's "all things" calls Christians to never give up because Christ is sufficient to hold us.**

ILLUS Our pastor in seminary told this story of marriage counseling. A man and his wife stood at brink of divorce, but tried counseling as a last-ditch effort. They both believed that divorce was sin and wrong, but they couldn't see how their marriage would ever survive. The pastor asked both if there was any hope left for their marriage, any love left for each other. They both respond, "No. None." The pastor, unsure how to proceed, told them for the next month to ask God to love the other person through you, because you have no love for them. **Love puts faith and hope into action to make it real.**

All will pass away, even the good things of this life. But, love never ends. When we love, we bring eternity into the here and now and God's glory into life.

Blessing #3. Love sustains with eternal strength.

Blessing #4. Love matures. .11-13

¹¹When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. ¹²For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. 1 Cor 13:11-12

Maturity is the ability to do good deeds in love. The absence of love is immaturity, an adult refusing to grow up and continuing in folly. (Proverbs 22:15) Nothing matures us like knowing what to do, but giving the thought, consideration and energy to do it in a way that resonates love to people all around. The pivotal moment for maturity is when we make the choice to give up our childish ways, in order to pursue godliness. **Love matures us to give and serve others in a way that is best for them, not just preferential for us.**

And, maturity understands that love doesn't always make sense to us. A God-centered understanding of love enables us to release our demand for perfect understanding of everything else. It doesn't mean we stop seeking understanding. It does mean we stop demanding it from God first, and instead trust Him in all things. Love trusts that God sees and knows, and therefore provides perfect wisdom for all when we choose to love. **Love is the only way we must do all that we do.**

Learning to love prioritizes others by choosing to serve them, and in the way we serve. But love holds its greatest effect in what it produces in us when we surrender to love others in Jesus' name. [Love's greatest work lies in our internal transformation that God produces within when we love through our external actions.](#)

Blessing #4. Love matures.

Blessing #5: Love is the greatest way to live. .13

¹³So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love. 1 Cor 13:13

Faith and hope are great. But love remains as the greatest. Nothing is close or comparable to love. [There is no greater life than one that lives in to live out God's unfailing, unending love.](#)

? Which way are you walking daily in?

Blessing #5: Love is the greatest way to live.