



Love Defined

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

December 4, 2001

Pastor Nick Shaffer

Over the last several weeks, as we have been in the Word together on Sunday mornings, we have been seeing a pattern established. I don't know if you have noticed it, so let me explain what I mean. First we were considering the truth of God's steadfast and unfailing love for His people, for us, for West Salem Baptist Church...and then we looked specifically at how this love has been demonstrated toward us in Christ by His substitutionary sacrifice and atonement through which we become the recipients of God's blessing and favor and expressions of His love and intimacy with us. Then we looked at the greatest commandment that we love God and we looked at that love in a general sense before specifically seeing the way in the which our love for God is to be expressed – with all of our heart, all of our soul, all of our mind, and all of our strength. Then last week we looked at the second commandment that we love our neighbor as ourselves, considering this commandment in an overall sense. And now, this morning, we are going to specifically look at the nature of love, what divine love looks like, expressed horizontally, expressed toward other people. We are going to look to the Word of God to give definition to divine love in 1 Corinthians 13. Turn there with me...

Now as we look at this text this morning and give some biblical definition to what it means to love someone I want to make a few foundational statements.

Foundational Statements:

1) The call to love others presupposes a purposeful, active, and personal commitment to invest in and to cultivate a deep relationship with other people. The calling to love others cannot be seen merely in terms of the "church" as if the church were some big, faceless organization. (the church isn't loving...) The church is made up of people, people who are called to love their neighbor as themselves. This is not a "church" issue before it is a personal commandment to be obeyed joyfully.

2) The call to love others requires a commitment and determination to act in loving ways toward our neighbors regardless of “if they deserve it or not” and also regardless of how they respond. If we are going to love our neighbor in our homes and in the church, the motivation for that love cannot be the response that we receive from those whom we love, but rather the undeserved love that we have received from Christ Himself.

3) The intention of Christ’s call to love your neighbor as yourself and of the application of that calling in the sermon today is not to give to us a matrix or a grid by which we can evaluate everyone else and uncover the ways in which we are not being loved – that is a sinful and selfish response to these words. Rather than being a scorecard to determine if you are being loved as you should be, these words are meant to shape the way that we express love to our neighbors, specifically today as we consider love in the family of God, in the church and in Christian, covenant homes.

4) The commandment to love one another is vitally important. When Jesus was speaking with His disciples in the Upper Room, before He went to the cross, He said these words to them: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34–35, ESV) We are to love one another as Christ loved us. The backdrop of this command is the cross. The commandment to love the brothers and sisters was new in this respect -- Jesus gave a new depth of meaning to the word love that had never been seen before on this earth when he went to the cross in our place.

Don’t miss the vital and central nature of love in the body of Christ – wherever that body of Christ is reflected – the church, individual relationships, or at home, we must be obvious and earnest in our love because it is the mark by which the world will know that we are His followers.

What is this love that we’re talking about? Again, this word for love is agape. It refers to the kind of love that is intensely committed to one’s spiritual best. It is a kind of love that is not simply sentimental or emotional, but an act of the will. It’s not only a feeling, but it’s a willingness to sacrifice for the betterment of someone else. It is a self-giving love that demands something of us, a love that more concerned with pouring itself out than receiving. It is the joyful and willing desire to put the welfare of others above our own. It leaves no place for self-glorifying, self-centeredness, vanity, and self-seeking. It is a real, vibrant, durable, unrelenting

and active love that seeks to serve people and draw people to God in Christ. Loving God and loving our neighbor as ourselves is the measure of our lives, the be-all and end-all of what it means to be a Christian, the very definition of what it means to be the people of God.

Now, as we consider what this text has to say to us, let me just let you in on a little secret. Though we love to hear this beautiful description of love in this passage, we need to understand that this treatise on love comes as a rebuke to the church at Corinth. It is very doubtful that anyone in the congregation was listening to these words thinking, "This would be lovely to have read at my wedding." And the reason that they would not be thinking that is because the original point of these words was actually to serve as a rebuke of the Corinthian congregation. The Corinthian church was a church that was lacking in their practice of love.

There were divisions in the church because of a lack of love. There was spiritual pride in the church because of a lack of love. There was a pecking order in the church, spiritual-haves and have-nots because of a lack of love. There was sin and open immorality that went undealt with because of a lack of love. There were lawsuits among Christians because of a lack of love. There was deep sin in marriages because of a lack of love. There was misuse of spiritual gifts, disdain for the Lord's table, confusion in worship, an unwillingness to submit to God's Word, lawlessness and licentiousness – all of it because of a lack of love. When we come to chapter 13, we come to the heart issue in the church at Corinth. It is as if Paul is saying – "The way that you are living with one another is not governed by love. That is the heart of the problem. What you are doing is no love – this is love..." Paul is looking at the Corinthian church, at the sin that is prevalent in it and he sees the root as a lack of love and so for that reason, he writes calling them to true biblical love for one another. So let's look at this text and let's start by seeing

1) The Pre-eminence of Love (v. 1-3) Look at this again, starting in verse 1: (1 Corinthians 13:1–3, ESV) Paul is sort of describing himself as the picture the perfect Christian, the super-Christian, the kind of Christian that the Corinthians saw themselves as being. Paul is using hyperbole, deliberate exaggeration and overstatement, to describe the character of the super-Christian and it seems fantastic -- he speaks all the languages on earth, with perfect eloquence, with the power and authority of an angel and yet without love it's just noise. He has an understanding of all the prophecies and doctrines of the doctrines of Christianity, and miraculous faith, and yet without love it counts for nothing, and makes him nothing. He gives away everything that has to the poor and needy, and even desires to be burned at the stake for the sake of the gospel and without love it is all worth nothing.

Nothing is a substitute for love, nothing. Not right theology, not right opinions, not spiritual giftedness, not the ability to preach, not knowledge, not miraculous ability, not faith or claims of faith, not religious works, not reading the right books or blogs or listening to the right preachers, not good worship music or good programs, not the appearance of righteousness. Nothing is a substitute for love. There is no substitute for love as a defining characteristic of your life. You can't put something in the place of love for God and love for the brethren—in this case specifically -- and think everything is alright. Love, as Paul defined it, has to be the context in which all other things are said and done for them to matter at all before the face of God. Then Paul tells us how we are to love one another in the family of God. This has application in our marriages, in our Christian covenant homes, and specifically here, in the church. So how do we act in a manner that loves? How do we love one another? Paul uses a series of statements regarding what love is and does and what love is not and does not in order to explain the character of real love. Look how Paul describes

2) The Character of Love (v. 4-7) Let's read this description of love altogether and then we can take apart phrase. (1 Corinthians 13:4–8, ESV) How do understand all of this?

Love is patient and kind...When we say that love is patient, the word there is a word that means to be long suffering. Real love puts up with other people. It puts up with being inconvenienced or even being mistreated without seeking retribution or seeking to get even. If you're patient, you're slow to anger, you endure personal wrongs, you bear with others' imperfections, faults, and differences. Love is thick skinned and grace extending. Patience gives imperfect people room to grow in Christ. Love means dealing with people. It doesn't write people off immediately.

That love is kind means love is to be gracious and helpful, to work and to give sacrificially of physical means, or of your time and attention, to bless other people and to be of service to them. Love looks for ways to help. It looks for ways to bless others and invest in them with a lasting and eternal focus. The great example of course is God in Christ. Someone who is loving looks for ways to lay down his life to serve other people: (Titus 3:4–7, ESV)

Real, earnest love makes us kind to one another's imperfections, gracious to one another and thankful for the fruit of the Spirit in each other – valuing the evidences of grace in the one we love far above their immaturity and need for sanctification.

Love does not envy or boast...Those who love are not marked by envy. Envy is a terrible sin. It is a desire to have what others have, to be jealous of the ways that God has blessed somebody and not you, the ways in which someone has been praised and not you, the friendships that someone enjoys and not you. Envy kills love in that rather than rejoicing with someone, you start to secretly resent them and resent God's grace to him or her and for the way in which He has blessed them. Envy kills love because it messes up our ability to rightly perceive reality. We begin to think in finite terms regarding God's blessing and kindness. We begin to think of God's blessing as a great big pie. Anything that anyone else has that we do not have – anything – a certain job, a possession, some honor, a relationship, some friendship, some position of leadership, some physical blessing, a spiritual gift – we see that thing they have as being taken from us, as being a piece of the pie that we cannot have. Jealousy is in reality a manifestation of selfishness. It causes us to misjudge the sincerity of others and nitpick all they do. It causes us to suspect people's motives, to neglect to give them credit, or to see their good deeds as an effort to show us up. It is a terrible sin that wars against love. But love is different. Love causes us to seek the welfare of another, to rejoice in their success, to be happy for them and to support them and encourage them without any thought to ourselves. When love sees someone who is blessed, successful, honored, talented, gifted, etc; real love responds in joy for them and in thanksgiving to God for His grace.

Love doesn't boast. The original words literally mean "to put oneself forward" and "to inflate oneself." It is the other side of the coin of envy. Someone who boasts desires to make others jealous of him or her. If you love others then you have no desire to crowd others out and draw all the attention to yourself. Some people are always putting themselves forward, showcasing themselves, demonstrating their knowledge or ability or looks or possessions and trying to make everyone impressed with them. They just make themselves the center of everything. There is a more subtle and reverse way of drawing attention to yourself as well. It is being an attention magnet by acting as if "no one ever suffered like you" or "had it as bad as you" or "no one has ever sinned or been sinned against like you". But love is not like that, not big-headed but big-hearted. The more loving you become, the less boasting you feel the need to do, the less you need to be center of attention, because you are secure and growing more mature in Christ.

Love is not arrogant or rude...Those who love are not known for arrogance. They are not self-important nor do they think that they have arrived spiritually. They do not grasp for power or prominence, seeking to lord it over others. Rather they are humble and they clothe themselves “with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”” (1 Peter 5:5, ESV) They fulfill the words of Paul (Philippians 2:3–4, ESV) Humility is the attitude, the inclination and tendency of our hearts to put others before ourselves, to seek to serve others selflessly without acclaim, to think of the needs of others above our own, to honor one another in words and deeds without looking for benefit for ourselves, to lovingly and graciously serve others, to deal with one another in grace and making little of oneself. Love is humble not arrogant.

Neither is love rude. Love is not obnoxious and disrespectful or purposefully offensive. Love doesn't think the world revolves around him or his feelings or his desires. Some people wear that fact that they are blunt as a badge of honor. But that is not the way of love. Paul writes (Colossians 4:6, ESV) Not only is that to be true of our speech, but of our lives in general.

Love does not insist on its own way...That is, loving people are not self-centered, rather they are others focused. Love is not enamored with self-gain, self-justification, or self-worth. A self-absorbed narcissistic person cannot act in love. Love is not possessive, demanding, stubborn, or dominating. It does not use other people to its own advantage but true love lays his life down for other people. Christ is our perfect model in this. (Mark 10:45, ESV) Jesus Christ was and is the perfect incarnation of self-giving love.

Love is not irritable or resentful...Loving people are not irritable; they are not easily provoked and moved to anger. Love does not “blow up” and “go off”. Love doesn't walk around with a chip on its shoulder, looking for any kind of offense so it can vent all its frustration and anger. Love is not touchy. Do you know people who are so quick to take offense that you have to handle them with kid gloves? That is not the way of love.

Neither does love keep score. The word translated as resentful is the word *logizomai* which is a bookkeeping term that means to keep a record or to keep an account. In this case it is the idea of keep a mental record of events for the sake of some future use. It is the idea of holding a grudge or keeping track of transgressions for the expressed purpose of bringing them all up

again and extracting every bit of judgment, every last drop of contrition and guilt possible. This is the opposite of love. If you love others you're going to be forgiving of others. The heart of love is always ready to (Colossians 3:12–14, ESV) If God so permanently and completely erases our record of transgressions against Him, should we not be willing and eager to do the same for our brothers and sisters in Christ?

Love does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth...Paul wants to make sure we have the right idea about love and that it does not turn into sloppy sentimentality or flabby tolerance of all things and so he tells us that love is inseparably tied to righteousness and truth. Real love can never and will never rejoice in wrongdoing, in sin or in falsehood. It can't. It cannot, it will not, it does not and never can – no matter how hard it is – real love cannot condone sin. Sin kills souls. Sin brings death and for that reason we can never rejoice in sin. It cannot rejoice in sin because of the offense sin is to God and because of the severe damage sin does to the human soul, to families, to lives, to relationships, to churches, to all of it. It will not ignore or condone sin because to do so is not love, but the worst kind of hate. It cannot rejoice in false teaching because it leads souls astray into sin or everlasting condemnation. To love someone requires confronting wrong doctrine, wrong beliefs, wrong attitudes and also confronting and dealing with evident sin. Fervent love grieves over sin and rejoices over virtue.

But doesn't the Apostle Peter say, "Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins." (1 Peter 4:8, ESV) Many times people will quote this text in order to avoid dealing with sin. But what does this text mean? The idea is this. Love extends grace and does not seek retribution for every perceived slight. It covers a multitude of sins by not dwelling upon them, nor seeking offense, nor taking every opportunity to criticize or extract a pound of flesh when someone fails. But the truth that love covers sin does not mean that love condones sin Paul is really helpful here: And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. (1Th 5:14) The idle ("out of ranks, out of step with everyone else") need to be admonished. Their sin needs confrontation, not covering. But the fainthearted and weak in the faith need encouragement and gentle instruction. Cover their sin. Some offenses are too inconsequential and insignificant to confront; cover them. But if sin is blatant, if it is bringing obvious reproach upon Christ, if it is directly and obviously opposed to the Word of God, if it is stirring up division in the body of Christ, and if it is causing a barrier to godly relationship, then it needs to be confronted. True love confronts sin that needs confronting. Love does not and cannot rejoice at wrongdoing, but it rejoices with the truth.

Real love rejoices in the truth of confession and repentance, in submission to the truth of God's Word, in submission to proper authority, in rightly ordered homes and churches, in righteousness and love in the fellowship of God's people. This is the truth that love rejoices in.

Love bears all things...Bears all things is literally "covers everything." Love does not take delight in some of the misdeeds of others. Not that it will not do something about it sin, but it does not spread it about for others to hear.

Love believes all things...Love is always ready to start over. Love is always ready to receive the repentant and longs to trust and fellowship with someone anew and afresh. Love looks for and yearns for the opportunity to walk with someone who has repented once again. Love longs to trust.

Love hopes all things...No person is ever regarded as totally hopeless. Real love is not pessimistic. Love holds out hope that God can and will move in the life of people we love for their good but ultimately for God's glory. Love never gives up hope. Hoping for change, hoping for good things to happen to a person does not mean that you believe it will happen apart from the ministry of the Word of God and His gracious intervention.

Love endures all things...Love never quits; it never gives up on anyone. The word for "endures" is a word that means to sustain the assault of the enemy. Love doesn't bail out. There is an epidemic in our society and even in our churches of bailing out of tough situations. People bail on church, bail on marriages, bail on friendships, bail on commitments, but not love. Love sticks.

If we practice love like this, though offences and trials and difficulties will come, and they will, we are not going to be trapped by them and see our love for each other grow cold. If we practice love like this, God's love, shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, God's presence will be manifest in this church and Satan and his attempts at disunity and division are going to be defeated at every turn. It is not easy. It is going to call for a continual dying to our rights, to our self centeredness, self-sacrifice. But this way is the excellent way.

If we rephrased this passage in terms of positive actions concerning love we might come up with a list like this: "I am patient with you because I love you and want to forgive you and I am

willing to labor with your for your good. I am kind to you because I love you and want to help you. I do not envy your possessions or your gifts or you because I love you and want you to enjoy God's best and I am thankful when God blesses you abundantly. I do not boast about my attainments because I love you and am not seeking to magnify myself above you. I am not arrogant because I love you and want to esteem you before myself. I am not rude because I love you and care about your feelings and I do not want to needlessly injure you. I will not be continually questioning your motives because I love you and I want to believe the best about you. I am not self-seeking because I love you and want to meet your needs. You do not easily anger me because I love you and want to overlook your offenses. I do not keep a record of your wrongs because I love you, and I long to forgive you as God in Christ forgave me.. Because I cannot rejoice in wrongdoing, I will confront you when you are sinning. I will rebuke you gently or roughly when I have to, reasoning with you from the Scriptures because I love you and I want you to be holy before God so that He may bless you. I will not act as if everything is ok when you are engaging in sin but I will gladly embrace you when you repent and seek to honor Christ. Because I love you I will hope for you and I will pray for you and I will never give up on hope that God will work in your for your good and His glory." This is what love looks like. This is the kind of love that we care called to in the Body of Christ. Last, Paul points us to

3) The Permanence of Love (v. 8-13) Listen to these words: (1 Corinthians 13:8–10, ESV) The Corinthian church was excited about speaking in different languages and jazzed about spiritual knowledge and prophetic preaching – but none of those things is permanent. They are made necessary by the fact that Christ and our eternal joy with Him in heaven – the “perfect thing” that is yet to come. But when Christ comes, there will be no need for speaking in tongues for the nations will be gathered in, no need for words of knowledge for knowledge will be complete and no need for prophetic preaching for Christ will be fully revealed from heaven. All those things will pass away, but love will remain. Love will be the very foundation and the environment of eternity. Love is permanent. Paul illustrates his point by saying: (1 Corinthians 13:11–12, ESV)

“So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.” (1 Corinthians 13:13, ESV) How can Paul say this? Faith in the Word of God and hope in the promises of God are things we have in this life as we wait for eternity. But we won't be trusting and hoping once we're in heaven; we'll be experiencing the full glory of basking in God's love forever. And that's why love was the greatest trait Paul mentions here.

This is the love that we are called to. Love that we must pursue first in our homes, in our marriages and in our relationship to our children. Most of our marriage issues – no, all of them – could be solved if we would actually love one another in the way that 1 Corinthians 13 prescribes. Our parenting with our children, the relationships to our kids to one another needs to be governed by these words applied and adhered to. The way that we relate to the body of Christ – context of small groups -- the body as a whole. Our friendships, our acquaintances....

If you were to insert your name in place of the word love in these verses, how truthful would the statements be? Now, go back through these verses and everywhere you find the word “love” substitute the name “Christ” Are they true? Yes. What’s the point? The kind of love being described is beyond our human reach. It is absolutely impossible unless we abide in Christ and ask Him to live His supernatural love in and through us. It’s not possible for us to love each other like this if we’ve never trusted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. We have to love God properly before we can love others.

Before we can ever love like Jesus we need to be faithfully walking with and loving Jesus. Before we can ever walk with Jesus, we have to know that we belong to Jesus...

© West Salem Baptist Church, 2011

Permissions: You are free to reproduce and distribute this material but you may not alter its contents in any way or charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. If you are posting online, a link back to this original document is preferred. Anything beyond these guidelines will require prior approval by West Salem Baptist Church.