

# Call to Love (1 Corinthians 13:1-13)



## A. Call to Love One Another

1. From the Great Commandment (Mark 12:29-31; Matt 22:37-40 c.f. Deut. 6:4-9) we have talked about four main ways our hearts experience the love of God: (a) God loves me [inflow]; (b) I love God [outflow]; (c) I love myself [inflow] (d) I love my neighbour [outflow]. We will now look at loving others with God's love.
2. 1 John 4:7-8 – *'Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.'* The first thing we need to take note of in looking at God's command for us to love one another is that it takes our decision, i.e., 'let us'. This agape love comes from God and not from us. But we must decide to release God's supernatural love that we have received from Him through the new birth. In fact, walking in love is proof that one is born of God. Apostle John is saying many people may be saved, but they do not know God. How do we know that? Because they do not love. God is love. The evidence of knowing God is not having accurate theology or amazing spiritual gifts, but walking in His love. Those who know God demonstrate this kind of love – agape love. Then what does this love look like? It must be practical. It has a distinctive colour, taste, and aroma.
3. FOUR New Testament Words for Love: [eros, storge, philia, agape]
  - i. Eros (erotic) - 'I love you because you make me happy', i.e. You can give me something I want. It is self-centred, it desires to possess, so it tries to control. It always ends up taking more than giving. It is not a secure basis for a permanent relationship.
  - ii. Storge (affection) - it is used twice in the New Testament as adjectives (c.f. Rom 1:31; 2 Tim 3:3), i.e., 'without natural affection.' It is a natural bond of love that holds families, friends, and the community together. When this kind of love is not shown it is considered unnatural. E.g., a father who doesn't love his child is unnatural.
  - iii. Philia (friendship) – deep love between friends is a beautiful thing. E.g., David and Jonathan.
  - iv. Agape (Godkind of love) – the highest, purest form of love. It is self-giving and unconditional and expects nothing in return. You don't give in order to get something in return. You give for the good of the other. It has no strings attached. To love somebody this way will cost you something, but you gladly bear the cost. There is in the human soul a shadow of this kind of love - parental love. However, left to our own we are unable to produce and maintain this kind of love for one another. This agape love comes directly from God. The only source of this kind of love is God.

## B. The Supremacy of Love (1 Cor 13:1-3)

1. Love in the context of the spiritual gifts. Paul is not telling us to choose love over spiritual gifts. We need both. *'Pursue love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts.'* (1 Cor 14:1) We are to earnestly desire spiritual gifts so that we can express the love of God toward one another by using the gifts we have received. Our aim is love. Spiritual gifts are the means of expressing that love.
  - i. Paul lists FOUR spiritual gifts with, *'If I have...'* This is for self-inspection, not of others.
    - (a) 'Tongues of men (7000 known languages) and the angels'; (b) 'prophecy'; (c) 'gifts of knowledge and understanding'; and (d) faith to move the mountains.They represent the fullness of gifts - vocal, revelatory and power gifts. They are nothing but a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal *if I don't have love*. Gong or cymbal can only produce one note loudly. It produces no melody, no message, no music. The one note it produces is ME – 'look at me', 'love me', 'serve me', 'affirm me', 'encourage me'. It is noisy, repetitive, irritating. We are better off without it.
  - ii. Paul talks of renouncing two very big things - all your possession and then your own life - lit. to give away a portion at a time until all is gone. Surely that is a great act of love! No, it can be a grand gesture or a grand display without love. It is even possible to give our body to be burned without love. E.g.,

suicide bombers who blow themselves up for a religious cause, but without love. The essence of Christian martyrdom is not bravado, but love.

## 2. Love is the Great Cancelling Line.

- i. *'I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.'* – frustrating and irritating presence in the world.  
*'I am nothing'* – powerful supernatural ministry exploits without love will make you nothing. God is not interested in what you can do, but in who you are. It is love that defines who you are. You are either a loving person or a self-centred person. 'Who you are' is what God is looking for because God is love.  
*'I gain nothing'* – After giving away all your wealth, even your own life, you gain nothing from it though the recipient may have gained something. This is the great cancelling line, like multiplying any number by zero is zero, big or small. If you have no love, the end result is always zero.
- ii. Selwyn Hughes - *'What would happen, I wonder, if every Christian community (especially those where the charismatic gifts are in evidence) were to stop and examine how much of their ministry was motivated by love? Assuming that the self-examination was real and honest, I think I know what would happen. Firstly, we would be shocked to discover how much of what we describe as a ministry is really manipulation – a veiled attempt to draw attention to ourselves. The second is that the Spirit would come to our aid in a way that would produce even greater power than we are presently seeing.'*
- iii. How about loving God in a self-serving way? Selwyn Hughes - *'How much of our modern-day church life is built around 'Eros' rather than 'Agape'?' 'If we go to church, pray, tithe, attend to our Christian duties in order to put God under an obligation to us – to shield us from harm, ward off sickness, provide us with plenty of material goods – then that is Eros.'* We can love God this way too – by making him serve our end. It looks and sounds religious, but it is pure egocentricity.

## C. The Spectrum of Love (1 Cor 13:4-7) – Seven Negatives

In 1 Cor 13 Paul analyses how love behaves. It is like the colours of the rainbow. Fourteen characteristics are listed on what love looks like. Seven positive, seven negative. Put them together, and we will see the full spectrum of how love behaves in a relationship.

1. Love does not envy (it is not jealous) – If you envy someone, it is because you think he/she is above you and better than you. Jealousy arises out of a deep sense of inferiority and insecurity.
2. Love does not boast (it does not brag) – Why do people have such a need to boast? Again, it comes out of a sense of inferiority. We boast to cover it up. Both envy and boastfulness come out of the same sense of inferiority and worthlessness. Inferiority complex keeps you down in the dumps, and superiority complex puffs you up for a short time only to bring you down the same way. Superiority complex is an attempt to lift oneself out of inferiority by a loud assertion of one's superiority – that's boastfulness. But it soon gives way and leaves you even deeper down in the dumps. Divine love – agape love will not lift you up to false heights nor plunge you into the depths of despair. It is neither up nor down – it is even.  
*'Only those beneath me can envy or hate me. I have never been envied or hated. I am above no one. Only those above me can belittle me. I have never been belittled. I am below no one.'*
3. Love is not proud (it is not arrogant) – Boastfulness is outward and verbal. Arrogance is inward and comes across, not so much in our words as in our attitude. 'Classy people' usually are not very boastful, they know it is repulsive. But they can be arrogant. Spiritual gifts too can inflate us so quickly.
4. Love is not rude (really good manners are love expressing itself) – The key to true humility is understanding of our 'greatness in God'. Note Jesus' humility (John 13:3-5). True humility flows out of a consciousness of greatness. *'You will never know greatness until you know humility, and you will never know humility until you know greatness – the greatness of who you are in God.'* The only people who can afford to be humble are those who know their greatness in God. It doesn't demean them to be humble.

5. Love is not self-seeking – This is central to agape love, which differentiates agape from every other thing labelled ‘love’. *‘It doesn’t insist on its way’ (Amplified)*. It is willing to see from another person’s perspective. It lets go of control. Love is willing to lay down my own agenda. Love is not dictated by what I want, what I think, what I feel. Its motivation is not getting the other person to do what I want, but seeking what is good for the other person. When there is a conflict between the two, the love sees from the other person’s perspective, and love lays down its own agenda. The good of the other person takes precedence over what I want.
6. Love is not easily angered (or easily provoked) – We need to know that when we are provoked easily, it is a sign of lack of love. Love is not ‘touchy’ or ‘irritable’. Love doesn’t have ‘buttons’ that can be pressed. Love is even-tempered. When you are near somebody who loves you, you are at ease because you don’t feel like you are walking on thin ice. Love does something in your personality that knocks off rough edges.
7. Love keeps no record of wrongs (It does not consider the wrongs suffered) – Love keeps no bad books. How dangerous it is to keep a record of wrongs others have done to me. Love burns it up and lets it go.

**Summary** - Love is not insecure. Love is totally secure! Where does this security come from? Being rooted and grounded in God’s love. Out of this security, God’s love can flow out toward others in our relationships.

#### D. Great Command is the key to Great Commission

1. Jesus’ new commandment (John 13:34-35). *‘The Lord has given the world a right to judge the church based on whether Christians love one another or not.’ (Francis Schaeffer)*. This is confirmed by Jesus’ prayer (John 17:20-23). The final witness of the church to the world is the unity of love within the Triune God expressed among believers.
2. The end-time church’s greatest challenge is keeping the fire of love. The Great Commandment is the key to the Great Commission. *‘...then many will be offended and will betray one another and will hate one another...and because the lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold...and this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.’ (Matt 24:9-14)*.

Agape must start at home and flow out into the church and community.