

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



## A. Great Commandment: Key to Great Commission

'A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this, all will know that you are My disciples if you have love for one another.' (John 13:34-35)

1. Francis Schaeffer said, 'The Lord has given the world a right to judge the church based on whether Christians love one another or not.' 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 Trinity expressed among His people.
2. The church's greatest challenge in the last days is keeping the fire of love. The Great Commandment is the key to the Great Commission. *'Many will be offended and will betray one another and will hate one another... because the lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold... 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)
3. Then what does agape love look like? It must be practical. Does it have a distinctive colour, taste, smell? 1 Cor 13:1-13 spells out how love behaves in a human relationship. The spectrum of love is broken down into 7 specific colours – seven negatives & seven positives.

Summary of the seven negative statements - what love is NOT: (i) Love does not envy; (ii) Love does not boast; (iii) Love is not proud; (iv) Love is not rude; (v) Love is not self-seeking; (vi) Love is not easily angered; (vii) Love keeps no record of wrongs = Love is totally secure.

## B. The Spectrum of Love – Seven Positive Statements

1. 'Love is patient' or 'Love suffers long' (NKJV)
  - a. *'To love is to be vulnerable.'* (C.S. Lewis). To love, you must open your heart to someone. To open your heart to someone means you give that person power to affect you deeply – to heal or to hurt. When our trust is betrayed our hearts experience pain. But if the fear of getting hurt dominates our hearts, we close off our hearts and we are unable to reach out in love. If our hearts are not strong, we are unable to love.
  - b. Love can take on suffering. It is not weak. It is strong. Love can absorb the failings of others without quickly assigning blame for the failure. *'And above all things have fervent love for one another, for Love will cover a multitude of sins.'* (1 Pet 4:8) *'Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all sins.'* (Prov 10:12)
2. Love is kind. These are the two opening statements on love: 'Love is patient' & 'Love is kind'
  - a. We are made in such a way that in the long run, our hearts respond to kindness. Not to mesmerizing gifts. How kindly has the Lord Jesus Christ dealt with you as a Christian? The kindness of Jesus!
  - b. How uninspiring to see a Christian who shows unkind, hard-lipped patience. E.g., A Christian was kept waiting in a department store. He became more and more irritated, and said to the assistant, 'How much longer do I have to wait to be served in this place?' The assistant apologised and explained the reason for the delay. The man said, 'Alright, I will put up with it, but don't expect me to enjoy it.'
  - c. The essence of kindness is *'treating the people as we would wish to be treated.'* Jesus has something to say about this (Luke 6:27-31), i.e., kindness in action. C.f. Gal 6:7-10 – The law of sowing and reaping works in a human relationship especially with kindness and judgmentalism. Although there is a time interval between sowing seeds and reaping fruit, eventually the kind of seed we sow will prevail in the harvest of the fruit whether it be kindness or judgment & criticism.

*'Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.'* (Matt 7:1-2)

*'For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.'*

*'For there will be no mercy for those who have shown no mercy, but if you have been merciful, then God's mercy toward you will win out over His judgment against you.'* (James 2:13 NLT)

- d. 'Patience & long-suffering' + 'kindness' = 'meekness'. This is an essential quality of a spiritual leader. Moses was meek, and Jesus was meek. *'Do not be overcome with evil. But overcome evil with good.'* (Rom 12:21) C.f. *'A violet leaves its perfume on the heel that crushes it.'*
3. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.
    - a. Love stands on the truth even when the truth is inconvenient. Commitment to truth and honesty is the foundation of intimacy in all relationships. When there is an unwillingness to be honest and truthful (actively rejoicing in the truth), that relationship can be ruled by manipulation.
    - b. It is surprisingly easy to rejoice in evil when other people's failures boost the sense of 'my rightness', i.e., self-righteousness. How do I know I am rejoicing with the truth? How do I know I am speaking the truth in love? (c.f. Eph 4:15) Are we rejoicing or grieving at someone's failure? In pointing out the wrong in others, do I become a more loving person or a more self-righteous person in the process? (Gal 6:1)

### C. Four 'Always' of Love

- (i) Love always protects (bears all things).
- (ii) Love always trusts (believes all things).
- (iii) Love always hopes (hopes all things).
- (iv) Love always perseveres (endures all things).

Conclusion: Love is not weak. It is infinitely strong! Love never gives up.

### D. 4 & 5 Love 'bears all things' and 'endures all things' [Love always protects & always perseveres]

1. The first and the last are similar - bearing & enduring (or protecting & persevering). The bearing has to do with behaviour. Enduring has to do with the inner attitude that underlies the behaviour. When love bears and endures, it is not gritting your teeth kind of bearing because you have no other choice. Love bears and endures with a smile because it does so with hope and faith (trusting & hoping) in your mind and heart.
2. 'Bearing and enduring' has a pulse at the centre, which beats alternatively 'faith and hope'. Faith & hope are the heartbeats of bearing and enduring. When the heartbeat of 'faith and hope' stops beating, then the 'bearing and enduring' will fail. The agape (love of God) will always have in its centre faith and hope - not in the circumstances you find yourself in, nor in the people you are with - but in God who is sovereign overall.

We can persevere with 'gritted teeth' and willpower, and face life's problems with grim determination - *'Nothing will get me down!'* But this kind of attitude produces brittleness in a personality. And brittle things easily break.

3. A person in whom agape love flows in and through does not break. They bend and then they rise again. Mark 6:4-6ff, *'A prophet is not without honour except in his own country.'* Jesus' plan to bless his hometown seemed thwarted by the people's unbelief and rejection, but the refusal led Jesus in another direction and the divine power, healing and blessing spilled over other regions of Israel, eventually sending forth the twelve disciples.

Love is so **creative** that it can salvage from the worst situation something positive and good. When God's agape flows in us and through us, we always have positive faith and hope in our hearts that everything, no matter how hurtful or evil, will work ultimately for our good. Do you have this flexibility in your spirit? Do you believe God can bring out something good and positive out of what is sad and hurtful? This creativity and flexibility in your spirit will turn the biggest 'setbacks' into the greatest 'springboards.'

### E. 6 & 7 Love 'believes all things' & 'hopes all things' [Love always trusts and hopes]

1. Love believes all things [Love always trusts]. *'Love is bringing about the highest good in the life of another person.'* (Charles Finny) How? Love has a double vision. It sees things not merely as they are now, but as they can be. Simon Peter (Matt 16:17) - 'Simon' means 'reed' but Jesus said, 'You are Peter,' - 'rock/stone'.

In this unstable, ambitious, impulsive man, Jesus saw a stable, loyal, dependable spiritual leader. This is how agape sees. *We need to see each other through Jesus' eyes. Love has a vision. Jesus has a 'vision of a glorious bride, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.'* (Eph 5:25-27)

2. Love hopes all things [Love always hopes]

- a. Often, we think hope is believing in something that isn't true – an illusion that will end up in bitter disappointment - '*hopium*'. 'Hope is the most hopeless thing of all.' Biblical hope is vastly different. '*This hope, we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.*' (Heb 6:19-20) Optimism (worldly hope) drops its anchor into the depths of trouble but cannot find the bottom. Hope drops its anchor into the depths of trouble and finds eternity.
- b. There are two foundations of Christian hope: (i) Indestructibility of truth: 'In the end, nothing that is right can come out wrong, and nothing that is wrong can come out right.' (ii) Permanence of God's throne: God is on the throne, and He does not work our way. We cannot understand why He allows us to go through many strange and difficult experiences, and we may feel like God seems to be uncaring at times, He will never forsake us or leave us. So, when all the worldly hopes die, we can continue to hope.
- c. Agape love in us strengthens and fortifies us to carry on right to the very end – through everything God allows to come our way. God's love would never let us go through something unless there is a holy purpose in it. Convinced of this, we can face anything. 'Losing purpose and meaning in suffering is perhaps the most devastating crisis we can experience.'

F. Summary Statement on Love: 'Love never fails.'

1. Love never fails. Love is totally secure. Love is infinitely strong. You may not succeed in a situation where you have expressed agape love. But you have not failed because you are all the better for loving. There is no failure in the lives of those who walk in love because you are walking with God!
2. While we are living on this earth, we will never be able to know God's love fully. It is like looking into a poor reflection of a dim mirror. However, this doesn't stop us from experiencing and expressing God's love. We do see God clearly and know God's love perfectly, but God sees us clearly, knows us fully, and loves us perfectly. The limitation that exists on our side doesn't exist on God's side. How comforting!
3. Story of three survivors (c.f. 1 Cor 3:11-15) – Faith, Hope, and Love. This must start at home, then church, and flow out to the community. Francis Schaeffer said, 'The Lord has given the world a right to judge the church based on whether Christians love one another or not. The final witness of the church to the world is the unity of love within the Trinity expressed among believers.'