

## The Character of Love

I Corinthians 13:4-8a

### I. Introduction: 1, 2

1. 3 For three years Jesus led and taught His twelve apostles.

- A. They lived and traveled together and they sat at His feet every day.
- B. In the latter chapters of John's gospel they traveled together to Jerusalem for what Jesus knew would be the last Passover they would celebrate together (Jn. 13).
- C. Only a few short hours lay between Jesus' last meal and the cruel cross of Calvary.
- D. John records (Jn. 13-17) that He had many things to say to His apostles to prepare them for the next few hours and for the rest of their lives.

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

**Jn. 15:9-12:** "As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. 10 If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. 11 These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. 12 This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."

2. 4 The concept of love in our day and age is often misunderstood, confused and deceptive.

- A. The modern idea of love is often expressed in one of two extremes: *erotic* love or *romantic* love.
- B. The Greeks had four different words for our one English word "love."
- C. Jesus commanded His disciples "to love one another" (Jn. 13:34), He used the Greek word "agapao."
- D. 5 The Greeks considered *agapao* the highest and purest love; obviously so does God as this is the kind of love Christians are commanded to have toward one another.
- E. *Agapao* "speaks of love which is awakened by a sense of value in an object which causes one to prize it. It springs from an apprehension of the preciousness of an object. It is a love of esteem and approbation (i.e., approval, cvt)" (Wuest).
- F. One writer expressed it this way: "All true love is grounded in esteem." (**Phil. 2:3-4:** "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. 4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.")
- G. So when Jesus commanded us "to love one another" He was saying "value, esteem, hold one another in high regard, or precious."

3. \*\* True followers of Christ will have a deep and abiding love for each other as one sage said, "They are true disciples of Christ, not who know the most, but who love the most."

- A. Often we fail or lose sight of how the character of love towards others is shown or displayed.
- B. God has not left us in the dark; through the apostle Paul, God has given us one of the most beautiful passages on love ever written (I Cor. 13:4-8a).

4. Let's examine the character of love we are to have toward one another.

### II. Discussion:

1. 6 Longsuffering (v. 4):

A. The KJV uses the word "longsuffering"; newer versions (NAS, NIV) use the word "patient."

(1) The word "longsuffering" is closer to the original thought in Greek.

(2) "...to suffer long under, the quality of self-restraint in the face of provocation, which does not hastily retaliate or promptly punish. It is the opposite of anger, and is associated with mercy..." (Wuest).

(3) It is the opposite of impatience and irritability; it is a spirit that “endures evils, confers blessings.” (2 Pet. 3:9)

B. One fulfills the command to love one another when he shows patience and is longsuffering.

(1) Not harsh, not rash, not irritable, not bitter.

(2) How many excuses do we create to avoid showing love in longsuffering?

(a) “I got up on the wrong side of the bed!”; “I didn’t sleep well, I haven’t had anything to eat all day!”

(b) “Well, you just have to excuse their behavior, they are: 1) “old and cranky,” or 2) “too young to know better, or 3) “that’s just the way they are.” Compare with **Eph. 4:1-3**: “I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, 2 with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, 3 endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

(c) \*\* “Patience strengthens the spirit, sweetens the temper, stifles anger, extinguishes envy, subdues pride, bridles the tongue, restrains the hand and tramples upon the temptations” (George Horne).

C. 7 We need to understand: “There is as much difference between genuine patience and sullen endurance, as between the smile of love, and the malicious gnashing of teeth” (W. S. Plummer).

(1) **Jas. 5:9-11**: “Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door! 10 My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. 11 Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord — that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.”

(2) True love means not only to endure the wicked but to be patient with brethren. We often can handle those who are not close to us, but are quick to abuse our own brothers and sisters in Christ and our own family members.

(3) \*\* “We never know how much one loves till we know how much he is willing to endure and suffer for us; and it is the suffering element that measures love.—The characters that are great, must, of necessity, be characters, that shall be willing, patient, and strong to endure for others.—To hold our nature in the willing service of another, is the divine idea of manhood, of the human character” (H. W. Beecher).

(4) Example of longsuffering: During the reign of Queen Elizabeth, Dr. Thomas Cooper edited a dictionary adding 33,000 words. After spending eight years collecting materials, his wife burnt every note he had prepared under the pretense of fearing that he would kill himself with study. When the doctor came in and saw the destruction and heard his wife had performed the deed, he heaved a deep sigh and said, “Oh, Dinah, Dinah, thou hast given me a world of trouble.” Then he quietly sat down to another eight years of hard labor to replace the notes she had destroyed.

D. \*\* When our patience is tested we need to think about the longsuffering God has shown us! 2 Pet. 3:9

2. 8 Kind (v. 4):

A. “kind” “useful, good, pleasant, obliging, gracious, polite and courteous, willing to form good for others,”; A kind person is one who is pleasant and helpful both in words and deeds; not harsh, sour, or ill-nature”; Bovee: “Kindness is a language the dumb can speak and the deaf can hear and understand.”

B. 9 We need to speak words of kindness:

(1) The “worthy woman” of Proverbs 31:26 “whose price is far above rubies” “in her tongue is the law of kindness.”

(2) “Kind words are the music of the world. They have a power which seems to be beyond natural causes, as if they were some angel’s song which had lost its way and come on earth. It seems as if

they could almost do what in reality God alone can do—soften the hard and angry hearts of men. No one was ever corrected by sarcasm—crushed perhaps, if the sarcasm was clever enough, but drawn nearer to God, never” (Fredrick William Faber).

(3) \*\* “A ‘bit of love’ is the only bit that will bridle the tongue” (Fred Beck).

C. 10 To love one another we must *show* kindness to one another (**Eph. 4:32**: “*And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.*”).

(1) We need tender hearts. Have we become like the world with hearts of icy stone?

(2) **Col. 3:12**: “*Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering;*”

(3) “The greatest thing a man can do for his heavenly Father is to be kind to some of His other children” (Henry Drummond).

D. Too many Christians miss kindness.

(1) We are too busy looking for some big act thing we can do for God, some grand sacrifice we can make; when in reality, it is the small acts of kindness that God is really looking for.

(2) “Life is made up, not of great sacrifices or duties, but of little things, in which smiles, and kindnesses, and small obligations, given habitually, are what win and preserve the heart and secure comfort” (Sir. Humphrey Davy).

(3) “Better to do a kindness near at home than walk a thousand miles to burn incense” (*The Defender*).

E. 11 If you truly desire the character of love, show it in little ways of kindness.

(1) Kindness is in the quiet and friendly smile; kindness is the gentle word of encouragement; kindness is the small deed that helps another; kindness is the inclined ear that patiently listens; the sympathetic shoulder that is wet with tears and loaded down with the burdens of others; kindness is the light touch of assurance on the back of one who needs help; the reassuring word of prayer for those in pain; the feet shod ready to bring the gospel of peace; the strength and help for those whose hands hang down, support the feeble knees, straighten paths for wayward feet; it is the pursuit of peace and holiness in the face of provocation to war; it is the diligent search for any deadly root of bitterness that causes trouble and defilement; it is reproof, rebuke and exhortation of the sinful, wayward and lost; it is all this and much more.

(2) Love is not in saying “I love my brethren” but love is in acts of kindness that show that love.

(3) Stop and remember the time someone made your day with a small act of kindness, “*Go thou and do likewise,*” said Jesus.

3. 12 *Not Envious (v. 4)*:

A. Not only is love expressed in a positive manner in what we do, true love refrains from certain attitudes and actions.

(1) Envy is a feeling of *displeasure* produced by witnessing or hearing of the advantage or prosperity of others.

(2) Envy not only wants my grass to be greener than yours, but also wants your grass to be brown!

(3) On the contrary, love delights and rejoices when others have happiness, prosperity, rank, good reputation, wealth, health, success.

B. The wise man said, “...*envy is rotteness to the bones.*” (Prov. 14:30)

(1) Envy is terrible and destructive; jealousy and envy is the cancer of love (**Prov. 27:4**: “*Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous; but who is able to stand before envy?*”).

(2) Jesus was killed because of envy: “*For he knew that they had handed Him over because of envy.*” (Matt. 27:18)

C. Envy brings strife: “For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?” (1 Cor. 3:3)

(1) Do you love other brothers and sisters in Christ or are you envious them?

(a) How do you feel/react if you see a brother or sister in a new car? Are you happy for them and compliment them? Or do you sneer and ask how did they get the money to buy it?

(b) Women: If you see another woman dressed in a new, nice dress do you think or whisper under your breath, “Too fancy”?

(c) What is our reaction when our fellow Christian has anything we don’t have and can’t afford? Glad? Sad? Try to tear them down? Make a sarcastic remark? A disparaging look?

(2) It is amazing how bitter someone who is envious can be. I’ve seen and heard people cry over insensitive remarks made by envious and jealous brethren (**Phil. 2:1-3**: “Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, 2 fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. 3 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.”).

(3) “There is only one thing in this world that’s worth having: Love. L-o-v-e. You love somebody, somebody loves you. That’s all there is to it. But if you don’t get that you’ve got nothing. So you take the next best thing. You take power or money or fame or whatever little morsel you can pick up for yourself as second best” (Charles Mergendahl in *The Next Best Thing*).

#### 4. **13** Not Boastful or Arrogant (v. 4):

A. To love each other means we empty ourselves of our pride and self-importance; to love is to dethrone one’s self and place others first.

(1) The haughty speech of a braggart has no place in the character of a Christian with love.

(a) A braggart is one who is always telling others of his accomplishments, plans, and ideas.

(b) One does not have a conversation with a braggart, he talks at you and not to you (J. G.).

(2) Arrogance is closely associated with the braggart.

(a) In the Greek this word literally means “to puff up, to blow up.”

(b) One who is full of pride has an *inflated* opinion of their own self-importance.

(c) Ever see a “puffer fish”? He’s a fish no bigger than your hand who can swell himself up to the size of a soccer ball.

(d) Some people are just like the “puffer fish” in that they are actually very small people, but they are always “puffing up” themselves by bragging about themselves.

(3) Christians are to be humble and to regard others as more important than themselves.

**Gal. 5:25-26**: “If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.”

**Prov. 27:1**: “Do not boast about tomorrow, For you do not know what a day may bring forth.”

**Jas. 3:14-16**: “But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. 15 This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. 16 For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.”

#### 5. **14** Not Rude (v. 5):

A. If we truly love someone we will treat them with respect.

(1) One does not act rudely, ill-mannered, discourteously, or disrespectfully.

(2) Someone rightly said, “The only lasting foundation for love between two people is mutual respect.”

B. How sad it is to see brethren treating one another with disrespect.

- (1) For example, some people “wear their feelings on their sleeve” and at even the slightest perceived “slight” will not speak, shake hands, or greet the “offender”; as the NASV words it, this is to behave “unbecomingly.”
- (2) That word sums it up perfectly, such behavior is not attractive, especially so for a follower of Christ...it is unbecoming.
- (3) We need to be constantly examining what we say, how we say it, our attitudes and actions, even in what we may think are trivial matters so that we don’t treat others rudely.

**Phil. 4:8-9:** *“Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy — meditate on these things. 9 The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.”*

**Prov. 16:32:** *“He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, And he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.”*

C. Do you treat others with disrespect or with rudeness, with conduct that is unbecoming?

- (1) The Golden Rule says, “Treat others as you would want them to treat you.”
- (2) Do you make sarcastic remarks designed to cut down others?
- (3) Are you able to “read” the mood of others so your speech and conduct are appropriate?
- (4) Do you wear your feelings on your sleeve then react negatively at perceived slights by avoiding or ignoring others? **1 Pet. 3:8:** *“Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous;”*

6. **15 Not Selfish (v. 5):** As the KJV puts it “seeketh not her own.”

A. Love is the exact opposite of selfishness.

- (1) Roland Diller, one of Lincoln’s neighbors in Springfield told this story: “I was called to the door one day by the cries of children in the street, and there was Mr. Lincoln striding by with two of his boys, both of whom were wailing aloud. ‘Why, Mr. Lincoln, what’s the matter with the boys?’ I asked. ‘Just what’s the matter with the whole world,’ Lincoln replied. ‘I’ve got three walnuts, and each wants two.’”
- (2) “ME’ is always at the bottom of all sin. One little word M-E. It may spell drink, lust, pride covetousness, self-will; but it is some form of ‘me’.”
- (3) Richard Cecil said, “The very heart and root of sin is an independent spirit.—We erect the idol of self, and not only wish others to worship, but worship it ourselves.”

B. **16** “Selfishness takes, love gives.”

- (1) Throughout the Bible the concept of love is never a *passive* feeling, but an *active* service or giving.
- (2) In John 3:16 we are told that “God so loved the world”? How was that love expressed: “He gave His only begotten Son.”

**Heb. 6:10-11:** *“For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister. 11 And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end,”*

**Gal. 5:13:** *“For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.”*

C. We’ve already noted that our culture has a very distorted view of love.

- (1) This has caused many marriages to fail and brethren to be torn apart.
- (2) *Erotic-love*—Some believe sexual desire is love. How many marriages come about for this reason and then fail when the desire wanes or turns elsewhere?

- (3) *Romantic-love*—This is the opposite extreme. Someone once wrote that “romantic love and gunpowder were the two worse things to come out of the Middle Ages.”
- (a) Romantic love is a selfish and unrealistic love. It seeks to create a selfish image of the object of its affections. It desires to mold the person into some ideal beyond the reality of the person.
  - (b) Many people enter marriage, not with the idea of unselfishness, service and respect but with the false idea of romantic love.
  - (c) They have idealistic and unrealistic concepts and expectations that marriage will make them a happy person and all their problems will be solved. But they soon are awakened to find their dream world is a fantasy that doesn’t exist and they become angry, dejected and depressed.
- (4) The brethren’s idea of loving other brethren can also be idealistic and unreal.
- (a) Some expect no conflicts or problems to ever arise among the brethren.
  - (b) Watch out! When the honeymoon is over, the sparks will fly!
- (5) **17** How can we love one another in an unselfish and realistic fashion?
- (a) Be devoted to one another: “*Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another*” (Rom. 12:10).
  - (b) Look out for one another: “*Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. 4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.*” (Phil. 2:2-4)
  - (c) Seek one another’s good: “*Let no one seek his own, but each one the other’s well-being.*” (1 Cor. 10:24)
  - (d) Serve one another: “*For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.*” (Gal. 5:13)

7. **18** Not Easily Provoked (v. 5):

A. The word “provoked” means “sharp contention.”

- (1) It has the idea of exasperation and wrathfulness.
- (2) It is a shame there are some people you have to “walk on eggs” when around them lest they explode and “fly off the handle.”
- (3) Such people are obviously lacking in love (**Rom. 12:9-10**: “*Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. 10 Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another;*”).

B. Are you easily provoked?

- (1) Are you considered “Oscar the Grouch” by your family, friends, co-workers, brethren, etc.? **1 Pet. 3:8-9**: “*Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; 9 not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing.*”
- (2) President Lincoln once dropped a few kind words about the Confederates. A woman flashed forth a question of how he could speak kindly of his enemies when he should rather destroy them. “What, Madam, do I not destroy them when I make them my friends?”
  - (a) “Love makes all hard hearts gentle” (George Herbert, *Outlandish Proverbs*).
  - (b) “Love is the thing that enables a woman to sing while she mops the floor after her husband has walked across it in his barn boots” (*Hoosier Farmer*).

8. **19** Thinks No Evil (v. 5):

A. This phrase is literally “does not reckon evil”; “*taketh not account of evil,*” (ASV), “does not take into account a wrong suffered” (NASV), “it keeps no record of wrongs” (NIV).

B. Some people keep a mental scorecard of wrongs, real or perceived, that they feel have been perpetrated against them.

(1) They mark down everything they feel someone has done wrong to them.

(2) The “Richard Nixon syndrome”; remember how Nixon had his so-called “Enemies List.”

Years ago a man and a woman had just married and he was driving his bride home in their horse and buggy. As they came to a fork in the road, the man told the horse “Gee” (turn right) and the horse hawed (turned left). The man stopped the buggy, got out, and grabbed the horse’s bridle, hit him in the nose and said, “That’s one.” The couple continued down the road and as they came to another turn the man yelled out, “Haw” (turn left) but the horse turned to the right. Again the man stopped the carriage, hit the horse in the nose and said, “That’s two.” Shortly as they continued down the road, the horse made another wrong turn and the man stepped out of the carriage, walked up to the horse, pulled out his pistol, said, “That’s three,” and immediately shot the horse dead. His bride was beside herself and said, “How could you ever do such a thing?!” The man looked her straight in the eye and said, “That’s one.”

C. To bear a grudge is to take account of wrongs which is not characteristic of love.

**Prov. 10:12:** “*Hatred stirs up strife, But love covers all sins.*”

**Prov. 17:9:** “*He who covers a transgression seeks love, But he who repeats a matter separates friends.*”

D. Thousands of appeals for pardon came to Lincoln from soldiers involved in military discipline. Each appeal was, as a rule, supported by letters from influential people. One day a single sheet of paper came to him with an appeal from a soldier without any such supporting documents. “What!” exclaimed the President, “has this man no friends?” “No sir, not one” his assistant replied. “Then,” said Lincoln, “I will be his friend.”

#### 9. 20 Does Not Rejoice in Iniquity (v. 6):

A. Other versions: “*rejoiceth not in unrighteousness,*” (ASV), “*does not delight in evil*” (NIV).

B. There are some that take great delight in the sins and misfortunes of others; they just can’t wait to hear the next juicy story about someone’s fall from grace (**2 Thess. 2:12:** “*that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.*”).

C. “Truth is incontrovertible. Panic may resent it; ignorance may deride it; malice may distort it; but there it is” (Sir Winston Churchill, quoted in *Information*).

(1) “Truth makes the Devil blush” (Thomas Fuller, *Gnomologia*).

(2) Those who have the love that Christians should have rejoice in the truth and are glad to be with and enjoy the company and fellowship of those who love righteousness and seek it first in their lives.

**2 Jn. 3-4:** “*Grace, mercy, and peace will be with you from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love. 4 I rejoiced greatly that I have found some of your children walking in truth, as we received commandment from the Father.*”

(3) \*\* “Truth without charity is often intolerant and even persecuting, as charity without truth is weak in concession and untrustworthy in judgment.—But charity, loyal to the truth and rejoicing in it, has the wisdom of the serpent with the harmlessness of the dove” (Joshua Swartz).

#### 10. 21 Optimistic (v. 7):

A. Love is optimistic: “*bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things*” (1 Cor. 13:7).

B. It bears up under wrongs and keeps on going; it believes in the good and always hopes for the best; it endures the darkest night trusting the morning will dawn sunny and bright.

C. Think about your wedding day:

(1) Love made all things seem possible.

(2) Have you ever seen a young couple deeply in love who were pessimists?

(3) “Love makes people look at the bright side of things. They do see the bad things, but they make a great effort to see the good, so they do see the good” (Anonymous).

**I Pet. 1:22:** *“Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart,”*

II. **22** Never fails (v. 8):

- A. Think how wonderful and marvelous it would have been to have been a Christian in the first century and learned from the sermons of the apostles themselves!
- B. Think of how much of an honor it would have been to be one of those Christians who possessed one of the spiritual gifts: 1) prophecy, 2) knowledge, 3) wisdom, 4) faith, 5) healing, 6) working of miracles, 7) discerning of spirits, 8) tongues, and 9) interpretation of tongues (1 Cor. 12:4-10).
- C. Spiritual gifts:
  - (1) Only given through “*laying on of the apostle’s hands*” (Acts 8:18).
  - (2) A spiritual gift was not for the benefit of the one receiving it, “*But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all*” (1 Cor. 12:7).
- D. Just think of how important these gifts were in the days before God’s written revelation was completed!
- E. Yet all of these gifts would one day “cease” (1 Cor. 13:8-13) and when all the dust clears what would be left? L-O-V-E
- F. “When we’ve been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun”: what will be the case? \*\* “*Love never fails.*” We no longer will need hope, we will no longer will need faith, but we will still need love!

III. **Conclusion: 23**

- 1. Do you have the love the Bible speaks of? If not we are pretty pitiful people.
- 2. Paul said: “*Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. 2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.*” (1 Cor. 13:1-3)
- 3. **1 John 4:10-21**

Adapted from a sermon (“The Character of Love”) by Wayne Greeson in *Sowing the Seed* 3, pp. 98-106.