

1Cor 13 LOVE--6-9-88

Whether or not you've had any kind of religious framework in your upbringing, all of us have been exposed to the term "spiritual" at some time or another. Right now, it's thrown around a lot in New Age circles, and in Christian groups you might hear the phrase, "so-and-so is so spiritual."

**What comes to mind when you hear that word used?**

- \*leather-bound Bible (like moi), and who diligently studies the Word of God?
- \*ability to write papers with great Biblical content--that are perfectly suited for the Theological Journal?
- \*someone characterized by getting up every morning at the crack of dawn to pray--never missed a day in 15 years?
- \*actively involved in social issues--Ethiopian Famine Relief

That's a lot of potential but very different ideas. **How do we know for certain what "spiritual" really means?** The only place to find the absolute definitive answer is to look to God's absolute authority--the Bible.

**Read 1Cor 13:1-3**

"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and I know all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not

love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing."

Paul doesn't mince words, does he?! Tells us in no uncertain terms that God's definition of Xtian spirituality or maturity is not measured by our head knowledge, our giftings, or even a willingness to risk our lives because of a deep devotion to a cause.

None of these things are good enough. True spirituality is only accurately measured by how well we love others. You could have every spiritual gift, and still be nothing if you don't express love. Everything else pales in comparison to Biblical love.

I purposely used the adjective 'Biblical' to describe love because it's used in a unique way--very different in nature to the way a lot of people think about love. Isn't it typical in our society to equate love with emotions and good feelings?

Hear it expressed in songs like the Beatles, "All you need is love," or one of my personal favorites by Dionne Warwick, "What the world needs now is love sweet love," or even Robert Palmer's animalistic, "Might as well face it you're addicted to love."

To fall in behind that kind of ideology would mean we'd really miss out on something much greater by God's standards. I'm talking about something called Agape Love--the love with which God loves us, that love Christ had for us when He died on the cross--that's the same love we're express toward each other.

Listen carefully: from a Biblical perspective, **LOVE is a commitment to give of yourself in every area for the the good of another.**"

I'm going to break this down so we get a better grasp of how significant love is in God's eyes.

**Commitment**--agape love is not based on contingencies; it's not contingent upon the way someone else behaves. "If you act this way, I'll love you back." Instead, the commitment is made independent from the other person's actions and reactions. (That means, taken to the practical extreme, it is possible to love anyone in any situation!)

**To give of Oneself**--true bcz love is a giving action. Opposite of the world's view>"I want you to give to me," = to take, to get something solely to make me feel good and benefit me. Probably the #1 killer of today's marriages = looking out for #1.

**In every area**--True agape love isn't selective in the way that it gives. To give in one area, say physically but not emotionally in marriage, is sub-biblical. It's my responsibility to tell Mark how I'm feeling, and not just expect him to conclude I'm depressed bcz I've been sleeping 12 hours a day.

Christ praised the Samaritan who helped the man beaten by robbers and left to die by the road. The Samaritan gave in every area--cared for him physically, financially and found him shelter.

(OR sum up Pg.35-36 Hudson Taylor on Jms. 2:13-15?)

**For the Good of Another**--interesting concept...how do you know what's good for someone else? Demands distinguishing btwn what someone says they want and what they really need.

Put the whole definition of Biblical love together = A commitment to give of yourself in every area for the good of another."

Given this definition, **what do you think the exact opposite of love is? Would it be hate?** True, only if we go by the world's def. of love--a feeling--then the opposite feeling is hate. Biblically speaking, not opposites. If love is focused on giving of yourself to others then then hate is focused on self, taking from others for yourself.

(Subtle manifestation = negative self-focus/self-hate. Dispatch article on 'Complaining'. Ann of Green Gables trying to get principle outward focused.)

Back in our passage, as we read vs. 4-8, **see several characteristics of agape love.**

**vs 4,5**--all deals with being others-focused.

"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs."

patient--Actually means long-suffering. Being willing to put up w/ things that bother you. Inconveniences that put you out so others can grow spiritually. (Mels and phlegs hate being inconvenienced).

Ex: **Mk6:30-34**--JC went across the Sea of Galilee to get some time alone...whole crowd invaded his privacy but did He turn them away? No. He welcomed them and even taught and fed them.

kind--goes hand in hand with patience on a more emotional level. You can show emotional sensitivity even when you don't feel like it. In fact, that's when emotional giving is at it's height. Possible bcz you have an attitude of compassion.

Ex: **Jn 4**--JC had an attitude of kindness and compassion toward the woman at the well.

not jealous--this is bcz love isn't a possession or desire to have what others have. When you're roommate comes home and tells you something wonderful that's happened, do you think, "that's nice, but what about me?" You should be happy for them, period. Biblical love doesn't take security from comparing how we stack up to the next person in looks, abilities, successes or gifts.

Ex: **David and Jonathan**. Jon's dad happened to be King Saul. And Saul happened to appoint Jon's best friend David as his successor instead of his son. Instead of demanding his rightful place, Jonathan rejoiced with and for David bcz he loved him so much.

(? Talk @ how God is a 'jealous' God... How God's love is not jealous like this, but is jealous in a righteous way for our own good/in our best interest. Like for when we put other things in place of and as more important than God.)

doesn't brag/not arrogant--literally to puff yourself up (pic of cobra's head inflating). To do good things without bragging or always having to get recognition (the world). Maybe you don't directly boast, but how are you in conversations with people? Do you always bring the talk back to focusing on you? Love is truly interested in the other person and what they have to say. Love likes to build others up--not puff self up to try to look better.

Doesn't act unbecomingly--rude. Goes without explanation; you know when you're being rude...I should hope so anyway.

Doesn't take into account a wrong suffered/not provoked--like an outbreak of rage bcz someone did something that really ticked you off. When you think about how the aftermath of your actions will affect someone else, you'll be less inclined to do this. Similarly, we more passive types shouldn't keep tabs or store mental lists of the wrongs someone else commits against us, to write them off with down the road.

Does God keep lists of sins on us? Is He provoked to anger by us? No; He should be but no matter what we do He's not. Why not? The Bible says God put all of His wrath that we deserved and put it on Christ

substitutionally, so we only experience God's Forgiveness, love, and infinite patience. (Col 2:13,14)

**vs 6.** "Love does not rejoice in unrighteousness but rejoices with the truth."

Focuses on meeting others' needs/looking out for the good of others. Doesn't desire misfortune for others. Stands against taking juicy gossip that's destructive and passing it on. Instead, you have an attitude of unrest for that person's sake until the problem in their life is resolved. May even mean getting in the middle of difficult situations for other people's sake. Or telling people things they don't like to hear when it's for their own good. In some situations, to do anything less amounts to an unloving and uncaring attitude of selfishness.

**vs 7.** Love is a commitment. "It bears all things (always protects), always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails."

Bears all things--covers, protects.

Believes all things--no, not a commandment to be gullible!

Rather, it's a willingness to trust. Easy to do? What about when a person burns you--can you quickly trust again? If you love with agape love, you'll work quickly to do that. (Wouldn't you regret it if you, for some stupid reason, did something to a friend that stabbed

him in the back? And he chose never to trust you again? How close do you think your relationship would ever be?)

Hopes all things--realistic optimism. You give people hope like JC gives each one of us hope for what we can become when we depend on Him. We've all experienced feeling like a failure, like we can't change for the better, or feeling like we've let people down. Then a friend comes and encourages us and restores our hope for the future and how God's working in our lives. (Phil 1:6.)

JC had hope for Peter--(Jn 1:42) unstable, unsteady, unreliable; but JC saw his untapped potential and believed Peter could change. JC always had a vision for people and was able to bring out their abilities.

Endures all things/never fails--love never gives up. It's persistent. Amazing aspect because, when it comes to God, if you're like me you've given Him plenty of opportunities to say, "forget it, I can't take anymore of you."

Who can deny that these aspects of love are desirable? Wouldn't you like others to treat you in these ways? I would! So the question at the heart of the matter is **how do we get this ability to love** God says it's possible to do that--as long as you have a personal relationship with JC--you can have this other-focused, truthful, sacrificial love for others.

Furthermore, Gal 5 (22-26) says that God gives us the power to love like this through the HS. So, if every Xtian has the HS living within, why don't we see more Xtians loving in this way or growing in their ability to love?

1. they don't want to, simple as that. JC says love is an action and you have to do the acting.

2. maybe you do want to love like this but you just don't 'think' you're growing in this area. Not unusual, take a look at some of the barriers that hold us back:

#1. You forget that God love you. One of my favorite chpts. in Bible = 1JN 4--turn there. Pic of God's love and how it works.

vs. 16, 17. "And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him."

So, how is love perfected in us? Knowing & believing & abiding in God's love for us. John tells us our starting point in learning to love is NOT in trying to express it but in RECEIVING it.

\*as I know God love me

\*I must CHOOSE to believe it

\*Then, I want to abide in it, receive it--be surrounded with it.

= Then, it's thru receiving this that you will have the ability to love others.

John carries this further in

**vs 19. "We love because He first loved us."**

This is an extremely important principle. **If you're not a Christian,** you may try to do good things to please God and win His acceptance--I did before I accepted Christ. But that's moving backwards. In fact, to even try to love God is going in the wrong direction.

God wants you to take first things first. He asks, "Will you let Me love you?" (Rev 3:20 = Will you open up your heart so I can come in and show you how much I love you?")

If you respond to this, the Bible says (Rom 5:5) that God's very own Spirit will personally fill your heart with His love. How will you know? God will let you know in a personal way. (Rom 8:16 "bears witness...that we are children.")

**What about those of us who are Christians? How can we apply this love?**

1. It may be pretty easy for us to believe, "yea, God accepts me just as I am when it comes to assurance of going to heaven". But when you look at your life right now, in your day-to-day activities, you still live like there are standards you have to meet before God will accept you relationally. You get performance and self-focused = The 'Do, Do, Do Syndrome.' = "I don't have time to think about others, I'm too busy thinking about how well I'm doing."

But if I don't have to spend my time worrying about me..if I believe I'm accepted...I can focus on others and be able to love them...and better yet, WANT to love them!

**Example:** Say you do many good things--serve, help people, reach out, teach--but sometimes you get so wrapped up in doing all of these good deeds that you forget one crucial element == to take time to feed on the TRUTH of God's love for you. What happens to your perspective? Are you still fired up about helping people and telling them about God? Or do things become a drag, more like work than a joy, and you finally feel burned out? Even asking yourself, "why am I doing this?"

Maybe you think about your situation, realizing you're perspective is off, and decide you just need to love God more. That you initiating love toward God will help you love others more, too. (notice a problem with that logic?) So you try to love God more but you wind up feeling more distant.

What you really need to do at this point is feed on God's love for you--like reading 1Jn4 and remembering that God has a lot of love for you right now, despite your feelings to the contrary. Of course, the worst thing to do is to pull further away from God when you feel distant already.

To sum up barrier 1 then: we forget to start a deep understanding of how much God loves us.

2nd and last Barrier: When God tries to show us our weaknesses in the area of love and we refuse to listen.

Ironic really--we say we want to learn how to love, God's way, but when He tries to teach us how, we say we don't need His help.

--Maybe you don't trust God because you were hurt by someone else and now you've put up walls so no one else, including God, can get in too close. Once God proves how much He loves you, expect Him to help you tear down those walls. He'll ask you to go and build a deep relationship with another person. When you act, you'll experience God's security and love.

--Or maybe you're depressed bcz you want a romantic relationship with someone, right now, and THEN you'll be able to serve people? But God says the only thing you NEED to serve is action on your part. If you agree with Him and ACT instead of feeling sorry for yourself, then you're depression will go away.

--Maybe you've held onto some bad feelings about someone and become bitter. This really blocks love from pouring out of you and into anyone else. And when God puts His finger on resolving this, you say, "But God, you don't realize what they did to me. It's not fair for you to ask me to love them." Of course, God can respond, "What's fair? Was it fair they nailed me to the cross?" And actually we each had a part in that, but God forgave each of us who's accepted His love personally.

The point is that **if I can understand and accept God's forgiveness, which is definitely an expression of His love, then I can be freed to forgive and love others, too. But, it's a CHOICE.**

God never forces us to do anything--not even to be free or to love. He just makes it available to us.

The only way you'll experience God's love in the fullest measure, is when it flows out of you while you learn to actively love others--not while it's bottled up inside of you.

There's no shame in admitting to GOD that you don't have this ability...Only in not doing anything about it. He's always willing to teach us to love.

Of course, this ability to love doesn't happen overnight. It's something that will be perfected in you more and more throughout your life. God promises the results will be magnificent and visible--both in your life and in the people's lives you touch. (Ann of Green Gables--just an ordinary girl, Christian, willing to get involved with all kinds of people, had an effect on them that was visible and deepened her ability to love.)