

# 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Corinthians 13, if you're looking in one of the few Bibles, page 959, you're looking at this famous chapter of the Bible, sometimes called the Great Love Chapter, 1 Corinthians 13. We're going to be looking especially at verses 4 through 7 today, but I'm going to start reading at verse 1 and read through verse 7. So 1 Corinthians 13, let's start at verse 1 and read through verse 7. Paul, the Apostle Paul wrote these words, If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have and if I deliver up my body to be burned but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient and kind. Love does not envy or boast. It is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way. It is not irritable or resentful. It does not rejoice at wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth.

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Well nearly 50 years ago, on June 25 of 1967, the first live international satellite TV program called Our World was aired. 14 countries and over 10,000 technicians, producers and interpreters participated in the broadcast, gathered the largest TV audience up to that time, 400 million people or perhaps more, and to conclude the broadcast, the Beatles performed their song for the first time.

All you need is love. Love, love. And love is all you need. In the midst of the Vietnam War and the Cold War, the Beatles' song struck a chord.

For many people, it quickly soared to number one on the song charts when it was released. Isn't love what we need, more than anything else in the world? Many of us both then and now have a deep sense that yes, what we need most of all, maybe all that we really need, is love.

But of course, along with the Beatles' optimism that love is all we need, there are many people who have despaired of ever finding love for themselves or seeing love triumph in this world.

[ 2 : 5 3 ] For several years, there was a professor in the English department at Yale who taught a course entitled Doomed Love in the Western World, looking at why so many love stories end in betrayal and heartbreak and separation and frustration.

On the personal level, maybe you've experienced the fallout of a fractured friendship or a dysfunctional upbringing or a broken marriage. Maybe it feels hard to love and trust anyone again. Or maybe you've seen the failure of love on the social level. While the Beatles sang about love, Dr. Martin Luther King preached about love for enemies and nonviolent resistance in the pursuit of justice, and then he was assassinated.

And many times and places, it can feel like love doesn't get you very far in this world full of injustice and oppression. Or maybe you've been burned by past experiences in the church.

Perhaps you've seen church communities become shallow or self-serving. Maybe you've been part of a church that's split apart because of gossip or envy.

[ 4 : 0 6 ] Maybe people in the church turned their backs on you when you most needed their help. And you still believe in the love of Jesus, but it's hard to believe that the church will actually embody that love in any meaningful way.

In a world where love seems scarce, can we still sing a song about the sufficiency of love? In a world where love seems temporary, can we still persevere all the way to the end in living a life of love?

Well, this morning we're looking at the middle section of 1 Corinthians 13, which some people have called a hymn to love, a song in praise of love. It's written in poetic language, which short phrases, forceful verbs, and vivid metaphors.

It's one of the most memorable descriptions of love that has ever been written in the history of the world. But as one writer pointed out, this song about love is the rhapsody of a realist, someone who has known full well the disenchanting life of the churches that he dealt with, the Apostle Paul. The Apostle Paul was not, when he wrote this, a naive young man who had just fallen in love. He was a middle-aged single man, either never married or perhaps married and then widowed. [ 5 : 27 ] We can never know for sure. And he knew very well what it was like to be mistreated. He wrote in 2 Corinthians, Five times I received 39 lashes.

Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. I've been in danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger from false brothers. Paul knew what it was like to be the object of envy and rivalry and backstabbing.

He knew what it was like for the churches. He had personally started to descend into shallow self-promotion and sexual sin and shameful squabbling. In fact, as we've seen, that was exactly what happened with the church in Corinth.

And yet, having gone through all that, Paul still commended to the Corinthian church and the Holy Spirit still commends to us, through his words, the way of love. Verses 1 to 3, which we looked at last week, emphasize the necessity of love.

That we need love is what gives meaning and purpose to our activity. Verses 8 to 13, which we'll look at next week, point us forward to the permanence, the enduring, lasting permanence of true love.

[ 6 : 40 ] And today, what we're looking at, Paul focuses on the nature of love. What love looks like in action. Paul wants us to understand clearly what love is and what love isn't.

Because when we talk about love, we can bring in all kinds of assumptions about what love is. Sometimes we think of love as a gut-level romantic feeling, a mysterious force that you can't totally explain that comes upon you and gives you a desire to be united to another person.

When others talk about love, they mean something more universal, a general attitude of goodwill toward everyone in the world. For others, love is a personal affirmation, being not just recognized and tolerated, but appreciated and cherished for who you are.

In Paul's time, just as in ours, there were many different ideas about what love is. And even different words used to describe love, whether it was romantic love or friendship or family loyalty. And so Paul doesn't just say we need love, he goes on to explain what kind of love he's talking about. So I want to focus on three questions today as we look into our passage.

[ 7 : 58 ] First, what kind of love is Paul talking about? That's the most obvious question that's answered in verses 4 to 7. But we're also going to ask a second question, is do we have that kind of love?

Because Paul has just said in verses 1 to 3, we need love. Otherwise, we're nothing. We won't have any, we won't last. And the third question, which I'll ask at the end, is how do we get and grow in this kind of love?

So what kind of love do we have it? How do we get it and maintain it? Now, this passage is often read at weddings. Perhaps that's where you've heard it read.

And if you're married, let me encourage you, this would be a helpful passage for you to read and meditate on and pray through and seek to display to your spouse. But that's not Paul's primary focus.

When Paul wrote this chapter, he was speaking primarily about the church and what it means for us as God's people to display his love to one another and to the world.

[ 8 : 58 ] So first, what kind of love is Paul talking about? If you want to summarize this section in three words, you can summarize it in this way.

Love is tender. Love is truthful. And love is tenacious. Verse 4 to 5, Paul begins with statements about the tenderness of love.

Verse 6 emphasizes the truthfulness of love. And verse 7, the tenacity of love. So we'll sort of go through those three categories as we see what kind of love Paul is talking about and do we have those qualities of love.

Now, when we read this section, in this translation or in most English translations, it sounds like Paul is giving a definition of love. What love is and what love isn't.

But actually, it's more like a picture of love. What love does and what love doesn't do. Because in every phrase in this paragraph, even though some of these are translated as love is blank, an

adjective, they're actually all action verbs.

[10:04] Now, Paul uses an action verb to describe what love looks like. So when it says love is patient and kind, it's hard to translate it because it's simply one word.

But we might even say love waits patiently. Or love shows kindness. It's an action that Paul is referring to in each of these phrases in this paragraph.

And many of these verbs, as we'll see, contain vivid images. So let's dive into this list. First, verse 4 and 5, love is tender. Paul begins with two positive statements.

Love is patient and kind. And patient emphasizes the restraint of love. In other words, love is willing to put up with a lot.

Or as the King James translation says, love is long-suffering. Slow to anger. Forbearing of others' faults. Willing to wait until the time is right.

[11:04] Literally, the word translated patient means having a long spirit. It's a compound word. We might say long-tempered as opposed to short-tempered.

In the Old Testament, the word that's most commonly translated patience is never translated literally because literally it means having a long nose. In the Hebrew way of thinking, when you get angry, your nostrils would become inflamed.

Right? And so if you had a long nose, it meant that you were slow to anger. As an expression in English would be to have a cool head.

So being patient, having a long spirit, being long-tempered emphasizes the restraint of love. But being kind, showing kindness, emphasizes the active initiative of love.

Kindness, offering generous hospitality. Extending a warm welcome. Asking a thoughtful question. Giving a helping hand. Kindness recognizes that everyone carries a heavy load.

[12:13] And so it responds by offering to help bear it. Someone described kindness as sweetness to all persons. Soothing and comforting to cure the sore and heal the wound of excessive passion.

Interestingly, the word kind or kindness was often used as a noun or an adjective. This is the first time that we know of where it's used as a verb. So Paul may have taken an adjective and actually just made it into a verb.

To emphasize the active nature of showing kindness. Waiting patiently and showing kindness. But then, if you notice, the rest of verse 4 and 5, Paul goes on with seven negative statements.

Two positive statements and then seven negatives. What love doesn't do. Let's go through these briefly. Love doesn't envy. The image of this verb is of burning or boiling.

In other words, love doesn't burn with envy. Or jealousy of other people's position and status. Next, love doesn't boast or glory. We've heard that verb before in 1 Corinthians.

[13:19] In one's own status and achievements. Love is not arrogant. Literally, that means love does not puff itself up. Like a balloon. It doesn't over-inflate its own importance.

Or seek attention for its own sake. Love is not rude. That word could also be translated love. Does not behave shamefully. Or disruptively.

Or improperly. 5. Love doesn't insist on its own way. Or literally, love does not seek its own. Seek its own way. Seek its own interests. The love that Paul is talking about is a self-giving love.

And if you want to say, what's at the core of the nature of love that Paul is talking about? I think that's what it is. It's a self-giving love that lives for the sake of others. And really, you could argue that that's the major theme that runs through every single section of 1 Corinthians.

You know, we've seen all these different issues that Paul has addressed in 1 Corinthians. In the beginning, divisions in the church. And Paul says, don't puff yourself up.

[14:28] Instead, seek to build up the body. And God's the one who builds the church. Then we looked at the section about sex and marriage. And part of what Paul is saying there is don't seek your own pleasure above all else.

Seek to honor one another in the body of Christ. And then we've seen the section about food sacrifice to idols. Where Paul says, don't just eat whatever you want because you're propelled by your own cravings.

Love your brother or sister for whom Christ died. Consider their interests above your own. And then this section about spiritual gifts. Which we're in the middle of here. Paul says, you can have all the gifts in the world.

But what you need even more than that is love for your brothers and sisters. Love for the other.

That's perhaps a theme that runs through 1 Corinthians more than anything else. Going on, number

six, love is not irritable.

The image here is of a sharp edge or point. You could say love isn't touchy. It isn't prickly. It doesn't get easily exasperated and try to bite your head off. Love isn't irritable.

[ 15 : 39 ] Finally, love is not resentful. Literally, it says love does not count up wrongs. It's an accounting word. Love doesn't keep records and calculate all the injuries that have been done to you.

And look for how you could possibly seek to make the offender pay. It doesn't just wait for your chance to bring up all that list of grievances.

In a court of law or in a court of public opinion or simply to throw them in someone else's face. Love is tender. It waits patiently.

It shows kindness. Now, you might want to wonder, why did Paul spend so much time on the negative side, all the things that love is not? I think part of the reason is this.

Almost every one of the negative characteristics Paul listed was specifically present in the Corinthian church. So, if you go through the list, love does not envy.

[ 16 : 45 ] Well, in chapter 3, he said there is envy or jealousy, same word, and strife among you. Love does not boast. Paul's already said chapter 4. What do you have that you didn't receive?

If then you received it, why do you boast? As if you didn't. Love is not arrogant. Chapter 4, verse 18, Paul says, some of you are arrogant or literally puffed up.

Others were rude or behaving shamefully. Chapter 5, Paul says, it is actually reported there is sexually immorality among you of a kind that's not tolerated, even among pagans.

And others were seeking their own interest, as we've seen, seeking their own interest at the expense of others. Now, Paul isn't directly getting in their face and just directly rebuking them for all their ungodly behaviors.

He's done that at times. We've already seen that. He's willing to boldly, directly rebuke people. But what he's doing is he's painting a picture. He's showing the beauty of love.

[ 17 : 52 ] But it's also meant for them to ask a question and say, do I have this kind of love? Does this kind of love characterize me?

Does it characterize us as a community? Are we a people who are content to wait patiently for what we don't yet have? Or do we want to have it all now?

Are we characterized by acts of kindness, generously loving one another and others? And what about us?

Are we characterized by some of the flaws that characterize the Corinthians, seeking to make ourselves look good at others' expense? One writer said this, how much behavior among believers and even ministers is actually attention-seeking, designed to impress others with one's supposed importance?

Some parade their gifts, while others nurse their hurts. Does either side genuinely put others before self? Or perhaps the last two things, being irritable and resentful, being sharp and prickly, or calculating and unwilling to forgive.

[ 19 : 10 ] Paul says that is not what true love is. Love is tender. And then he goes on in verse 6, love is not only tender, it's also truthful. It doesn't rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.

Paul wants to say love is not unconditionally affirming whatever someone may choose to believe or however they may choose to live. In the church of Corinth, some people were happily engaging in lawsuits with one another over financial disputes.

Making a big stink of it. Some people were happily engaged, it seems, in visiting prostitutes and other forms of sexual immorality. Others were happily gorging themselves at church meals while letting others go hungry.

Others were happily going on and on. In unintelligible words, making a big scene and not actually saying anything that would build up their brothers and sisters. And Paul says that is not true love. Love does not rejoice at wrongdoing. It rejoices with the truth. Love rejoices in the unchanging truth of the gospel that Christ has died, Christ has risen, and Christ will come again, and that he is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

[ 20 : 29 ] Love rejoices whenever someone confesses and forsakes sin in order to walk in the light and in the truth of God. Love rejoices whenever truthfulness and trustworthiness and transparency prevail over manipulation and self-justification and denial.

In my experience, I think one of the hardest things for Christians to practice today is speaking the truth in love to one another. Jesus said to his disciples in the gospel of Luke, he said, pay attention to yourselves.

If your brother or sister sins, rebuke them. And if they repent, forgive them. According to Jesus, we should be characterized both by honest rebuke and by generous forgiveness.

And if we're really having meaningful fellowship with one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, you know, it's inevitable that we're going to see one another's flaws sometimes.

That's normal. And our knee-jerk reaction should not be to immediately rebuke someone whenever you see a little flaw. It should be patience and kindness and all the other things described in verse 5, verse 4 and 5.

[ 21 : 42 ] But if we see an ongoing pattern, if someone claims to follow Christ who's engaged in an ongoing pattern of wrongdoing, or even to something where you see someone who's probably offending and hurting other people even if they don't realize it, the loving thing to do isn't just to avoid and ignore the person and say nothing, but it's to go to them and speak the truth in love to them.

Not bite their head off and just throw it all in their face, but to speak the truth in love so that they can grow. So they can grow in walking in the way of truth and righteousness.

Love is tender. Love is truthful. And finally, love is tenacious. Verse 7, love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Now part of this verse is sometimes misunderstood. Especially the middle two phrases, love believes all things and love hopes all things.

Paul is not saying that we should be naive and gullible. Believing whatever anyone tells us because that's the loving thing to do. And neither is Paul promoting wishful thinking.

[ 23 : 03 ] The reality is wishful thinking, that is hoping for something that's completely unrealistic, often leads to despair when what you were hoping for doesn't actually happen.

So Paul's not promoting wishful thinking or naive trusting everyone. What Paul does mean is that love can go through all things, holding on to faith and hope in God.

And in God's promises. Love is tenacious. Love holds on and doesn't give up. One person put it this way. Love never gives in, bears all things. Love never gives in to the pressures of the world.

Never gives up its faith in the Lord. Never loses hope in the future God has planned for us. And never fails to endure. All the way to the end.

Long time ago, Shakespeare described the tenacity of love. In one of his sonnets, when he wrote, Love is not love, which alters when an alteration finds, Or bends with a remover to remove.

[ 24 : 12 ] Oh no, it is an ever-fixed mark, That looks on tempests and is never shaken. It is the star to every wandering bark, Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.

Love is not time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks Within his bending sickle's compass come. Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks, But bears it out even to the edge of doom.

In other words, love holds on and doesn't let go. Love perseveres all the way to the end. Love is tender. Love is truthful. And love is tenacious. It's a compelling picture of love.

I think that's why this chapter is so often read at weddings. Because it's so beautiful. But I think as we've seen, it's also deeply challenging Because it's really hard to live this way.

This is not simply the natural way that human beings act toward one another. The love that Paul is talking about is not just a gut-level romantic attraction That mysteriously comes upon you.

[ 25 : 19 ] Yes, that kind of love is real and wonderful. And it can draw two people together, but it cannot keep two people together for a lifetime. You need more than that.

And the love Paul is talking about is also more than a general attitude of goodwill toward everyone in the world. That's a nice ideal for philosophy class. But it won't get you very far beyond philosophy class.

In a world where people betray and hate and dehumanize each other, You need more than a general ideal of goodwill. So we need to ask the final question.

Where do we get this kind of love that Paul is talking about? This tender, truthful, tenacious love. And how do we grow in that kind of love?

Romans 5 verse 8 says, God demonstrates his love for us in this. While we were sinners, Christ died for us. Christ gave himself for us on the cross.

[ 26 : 22 ] You know, if you've been coming to Trinity for a long time, You probably guessed that answer when I asked that question. How do we get this love? And how do we keep it? It comes back to Christ on the cross. Almost every sermon gets there.

Here. And if you've noticed that, we have that pattern for a reason. Because what God has done for us in Jesus Christ, We believe is the central message of the Bible. And so whatever we're preaching on, We're always going to come back to that at some point.

Or in some way. Because that's where we get the power to obey the commands God gives us. That's where we find forgiveness. That's where we find, it's the core of all that we need.

And everything else radiates from that. And so where do we find love? Well, certainly we see it in God the Father being willing to send his son for our redemption.

And in Jesus Christ willingly laying his life down for us on the cross. And in the work of the Holy Spirit applying it to us. But think of Christ in light of this passage.

[ 27 : 21 ] Christ waited patiently in the Garden of Gethsemane when he prayed, Not my will, but yours be done. And when people shouted to him as he hung on the cross, You saved others.

Why don't you save yourself? And he waited patiently. And he showed kindness, reaching out in love to us when we didn't deserve his mercy and his help.

He looked beyond our sin and he came to us in our need. And he showed kindness. He didn't puff himself up with pride, but he humbled himself and washed his disciples' feet.

As a picture of how he would take the lowliest role in order to cleanse us. Christ didn't insist on his own way or seek his own advantage.

But he prioritized our redemption. He didn't count our sins against us. He didn't count up all the wrongs.

[ 28 : 24 ] And just wait for an opportunity to display them to us. He went to the cross and paid the price. Paid the price for our sins.

The love of God in Christ never gives in. And never gives up. And never loses hope. And never fails to endure.

This is the love that you can rely on if everything else fails. The love of God in Jesus Christ. So come to Jesus.

Find security in his love for you. Don't we all seek security in something else? This is something you can find security in. And never lose.

In Jesus Christ, you can have a love that never fails. You can't give what you don't have. Come to Christ and receive this love that he offers.

[ 29 : 32 ] But from that, the Bible also says God has poured out his love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit whom he has given us. Not only did God send his Son, he also sent his Holy Spirit who takes what Christ did 2,000 years ago on the cross and applies it to our hearts.

And dwells within us personally today so that we can be shaped into the character of Christ and display this love personally. You see, one of the ways that the love of God in Christ becomes more deeply rooted in our hearts.

And that we see how real it is as we see its effect on other people's lives. That we see these words displayed in someone's life.

You know, several years ago, a few of us from this church went into New York to see John Stott speak. I think it was one of the last times he ever came to the United States.

That was the only time I've ever seen him speak in person. But I remember exactly what he said, even though it was probably 10 years ago. He spoke about one verse from Colossians that said, Now, most sermons that I heard 10 years ago, I don't remember.

[ 30 : 56 ] I don't know about you. I think hopefully they sink in and become part of your life even if they fade into the unconscious part, right? So they can still have an effect on you even if you don't explicitly remember them.

But most sermons I don't remember, but I remember that one. And the reason I remember it is because that's what John Stott spent his whole life doing. Proclaiming Christ.

As a pastor in London, as someone who wrote over 40 books that were translated into 70 different languages for the benefit of the church throughout the world.

He started a ministry to help pastors and church leaders in the developing world. His message about proclaiming Christ and admonishing and teaching everyone, seeking to make believers mature in Christ.

That was, his message carried not just the weight of his words, but the weight of his life. Now, when the Corinthian Christians heard this chapter that Paul wrote, I think Paul's words would have struck them in a very similar way.

[ 32 : 00 ] That Paul had lived what he preached. Paul had been patient and kind. And he didn't envy or boast or puff himself up.

He was willing to humble himself. He wasn't irritable or resentful. Through many sufferings, he kept his faith and maintained his hope in God. And so the Corinthians could see in Paul the power of the Holy Spirit.

The power of the cross of Jesus Christ that had transformed his life. And so when they heard those words, they had a weight to them.

That's why Paul said in chapter 11, be imitators of me as I am of Christ. Paul wasn't perfect. In fact, I think it's pretty clear that Paul was not naturally a patient and kind person.

He had persecuted Christians. He was naturally a truth person. He was not naturally very tender, but God had made him both truthful and tender. And he was a living example of the power of the cross of Jesus Christ.

[ 33 : 08 ] May we, by the grace of God, become people whose lives reflect these words.

So that when we speak these words about love, that they would not only be truths that are eternally true in Scripture, but also truths that have come to be reflected and embodied in our lives and that people can see the power of the Holy Spirit in us.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you that you demonstrated your love in sending your Son to die on the cross for us.

We thank you for all the ways that you're patient and kind to us, day by day. Lord, we thank you for not only presenting us this beautiful picture of love, but even giving us people, people in this church, people that we can look to as examples of how your love can make an impact and be displayed.

And Lord, we pray that you would make each of us individually, in our families, in our friendships, and in us as a church, Lord, to be characterized by this kind of love, this kind of self-giving love.

[ 34 : 38 ] Lord, we pray that by the power of the Holy Spirit, that would be more and more evident in us.

And we pray that we would abide in you, that we would abide in your love for us, for it is only in knowing your love for us that we are enabled and empowered to display and extend that to others, even in very hard situations.

Lord, we pray that we would abide in your love for us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. As the music team comes forward, we're going to conclude by singing a song.

So let's stand as we sing Love Divine, All Love's Excelling, about the love of God and how it comes to dwell in us. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[ 35 : 43 ] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. to sin thou found and thou made of me and all faith as it's beginning set our hearts at liberty thou almighty to deliver and also thy life may see suddenly we turn and ever ever more white and holy may live and be always blessing serve me as thy who subpo me pray and praise me without ceasing glory in thy perfect life in thy perfect life love creation my new creation pure and spotless let us see let us see thy great salvation love love and grace love and love and love and love and love and praise hope and things happening. In the Fellowship Hall classroom, starting in about 15 minutes, there's going to be a meeting for any men interested in being involved in men's ministry with John Dunlop and Jeff

[ 39 : 08 ] Stevens. So go down there. It'll be a brief meeting, just about 15 minutes, just to get some input and ideas. Or talk to one of them if you can't make the meeting. We also invite you, Pastor Matt, invite you to a picnic in the park with him and his family. And it's going to be in Worcester Square Park, which is just a few blocks away. The address is in your bulletin. If you need directions, it's just about a 5-10 minute walk. It's bring your own lunch. So they'll head over there and you can meet over there anytime after 12 noon if you want to just join for a casual lunch together. Tonight, our evening service, Peter Almo is preaching. You can come back for that. And

Tuesday is our congregational meeting. At 6 o'clock, we'll have dinner. If you can bring a side if you're going to join for dinner, that'd be great. You can park across the street as usual. And the agenda and proposed budget are on the back table and have been emailed out to all members. So members, if you feel free to take note of that and be prepared for that meeting on Tuesday. All right, go with this word of blessing. May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all so that he may establish our hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. And all God's people said, amen. Go in peace.