

What is Love?

We read from the Bible:

1 Corinthians 13:1–13 and Revelation 21:1–7

1 CORINTHIANS 13

The Excellence of Love

1If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love [for others growing out of God's love for me], then I have become only a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal [just an annoying distraction]. 2And if I have the gift of prophecy [and speak a new message from God to the people], and understand all mysteries, and [possess] all knowledge; and if I have all [sufficient] faith so that I can remove mountains, but do not have love [reaching out to others], I am nothing. 3If I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it does me no good at all.

4Love endures with patience and serenity, love is kind and thoughtful, and is not jealous or envious; love does not brag and is not proud or arrogant. 5It is not rude; it is not self-seeking, it is not provoked [nor overly sensitive and easily angered]; it does not take into account a wrong endured. 6It does not rejoice at injustice, but rejoices with the truth [when right and truth prevail]. 7Love bears all things [regardless of what comes], believes all things [looking for the best in each one], hopes all things [remaining steadfast during difficult times], endures all things [without weakening].

8Love never fails [it never fades nor ends]. But as for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for the gift of special knowledge, it will pass away. 9For we know in part, and we prophesy in part [for our knowledge is fragmentary and incomplete]. 10But when that which is complete and perfect comes, that which is incomplete and partial will pass away. 11When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. 12For now [in this time of imperfection] we see in a mirror dimly [a blurred reflection, a riddle, an enigma], but then [when the time of perfection comes we will see reality] face to face. Now I know in part [just in fragments], but then I will know fully, just as I have been fully known [by God]. 13And now there remain: faith [abiding trust in God and His promises], hope [confident expectation of eternal salvation], love [unselfish love for others growing out of God's love for me], these three [the choicest graces]; but the greatest of these is love.

REVELATION 21

The New Heaven and Earth

1Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away (vanished), and there is no longer any sea. [Is 65:17; 66:22] 2And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, arrayed like a bride adorned for her husband; [John 14:2, 3; Gal 4:26; Heb 11:10] 3and then I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "See! The tabernacle of God is among men, and He will live among them, and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them [as their God,] [Lev 26:11, 12; Ezek 37:27; John 1:14; 1 Cor 3:16, 17] 4and He will wipe away every tear from

their eyes; and there will no longer be death; there will no longer be sorrow and anguish, or crying, or pain; for the former order of things has passed away.” [Is 25:8; 35:10]
5And He who sits on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also He said, “Write, for these words are faithful and true [they are accurate, incorruptible, and trustworthy].” [Is 43:19] 6And He said to me, “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the one who thirsts I will give [water] from the fountain of the water of life without cost. [Is 55:1] 7He who overcomes [the world by adhering faithfully to Christ Jesus as Lord and Savior] will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son. [2 Sam 7:14; 1 John 5:5]

explanation

An entire chapter in the letter to the Corinthians is devoted to love; naturally, that can't be left out of this Bible study series, *Beloved*!

What is love, really? What does it look like? And how important is love?

Well, Paul says here: even if you could speak all the languages (!) of humanity and even the language of angels, it would mean nothing if you didn't have love.

And suppose you could prophesy!

Wow, then you'd be among the elite of the Christian community in the Netherlands! Because who has that gift?! That you know mysteries... that you have knowledge of what is going to happen/what God reveals to you..., or that you have enough faith to move mountains!

Well... if you don't have love, then you are nothing.

You are nothing.

And so Paul gives a few more examples.

Love is a basic requirement for a good life. For yourself and for others.

Because love is not (just) a feeling: when you see someone and feel happy.

Love is also: living from God, living as He intended. How we (should)

treat one another. Serving one another instead of ruling over one another.

Putting your own ego aside.

Love is a choice. Consciously thinking: how would Jesus have handled this if He were in the same situation?

The last verse is about faith, hope, and love. Familiar words for a believer.

Faith: believing in what is there but also in what you cannot see.

Hope: there is a bright future awaiting us. And also: God is with us.

Love: of these, Paul says: the greatest of these three is love.

I would think: faith is the greatest! But love stands even above faith.

Love is in the present. What you see and experience around you. How you deal with it. No hidden agenda, but sincerely loving people.

When I read: love is patient, it does not boast, it rejoices in the truth, it covers all things, it bears all things... then there is also a measure of wisdom and humility involved.

The opposite of the examples above is: love is impatient, it is

boastful, rejoices when the truth is twisted, it believes everything must be made public, it is intolerant...

You can already tell: that creates resistance within. That doesn't belong. That isn't pure. Not sincere.

Do everything out of love. What you do for another. How you think. Act appropriately; do not seek your own interests. Be open to others. Be interested.

That is not always easy; your own ego comes into play again: "But do you know what that other person said to me?" Or: "Do you know what that other person did to me?"

Or you disagree because you have different values and standards...

It can be hard to love the other person then.

But Paul isn't saying here: "Love only people who share your opinion."

Or: "Love only people who are nice to you."

So how do you do that?

Start by praying for that person. Ask God to bless them. That doesn't mean "give them lots of stuff." But ask God to give them what they need. Doesn't God know best what that is??

Also pray that you yourself may see that person as a child of God.

And pray that you may receive the love you need to love him or her.

Every time you think of this person with anger: pray for him or her!

And try changing your perspective. Don't just keep thinking from your own point of view.

For everything will pass away. But love will remain.

I am reminded of Genesis 1. There is nothing yet. Only God is there. And He is love.

At the end of time, the world will cease to exist. Everything we have been so concerned about will pass away. Except for love. That will remain.

God will create a new heaven and a new earth.

And then, when perfection has come, I will no longer know in part. But I will know as I am known.

The Father loves you so much! We only partially realize that now, but then you will experience it: abundant love!

Prayer: Love is so beautiful, Lord! Sometimes we get a taste of it in this life. A glimpse of how You intended it when You created paradise. But we live in a world full of brokenness. A world where love is sometimes so hard to find. Even in my heart. Even in how I treat others. Today You wanted to inspire us again to love one another. Because that has eternal value. Give us a heart, Lord, that overflows with love for others.

Questions:

- What does love mean to you?
- How important is love?
- Is it difficult to live from a place of love? Why or why not? When is it easier?
- “Love is a choice”—can you give an example of that?
- This Bible study is about how to treat others. In love. But what does it do for you?