

RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH



The Greatest Need

“And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.” — 1st Corinthians 13:13

by Steven Harper

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Introduction

What is *love*? It is not so easy to define as you might think! The *Random House Dictionary of the English Language* has 28 different definitions and usages noted, and the meanings are quite varied. It defines *love* as *a profoundly tender, passionate affection for another person*; it defines *love* as *sexual passion or desire*; but it also defines *love* as *affectionate concern for the well-being of others*. From these definitions, it should be clear that when we speak of the need to “love” others, we must be careful and clear as to which definition should be applied.

But God’s word *does* speak of the great need to love others. Starting at the top, we find that not only did God so love the world “*that He gave His only Son*” (John 3:16), but we also find “*God is love*” (1st John 4:8). We also find that Jesus “*loved us and gave Himself up for us*” (Eph. 5:2). With these things in mind, it should not be surprising, then, that Jesus would say, “*This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you*” (John 15:12). Since we disciples are to be like the Master (Matt. 10:24, 25) and since we are to become more like the Father every day, it should again not be surprising that Jesus would command that we love our enemies that we might “*be sons of your Father who is in heaven*” and “*be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect*” (Matt. 5:44-48). It is no coincidence that Jesus spoke of *love* as the thing that would make us most like the Father!

In the Bible, particularly in the New Testament, there are two types of love of which God speaks. In the original Greek, the words are ἀγάπη [*agape*; *ag-ah'-pay*] and φιλέω [*phileo*; *fil-eh'-o*]. A third Greek word that is translated as *love* is ἔρος [*eros*], but it is not used anywhere in the New Testament. The Greek word *agape* is one that is called “the highest, most perfect kind of love” [ISBE], one that expresses a deep concern for another and would move a man to lay down his life for the one to whom this love is directed. On the other hand, the *phileo* love is much less intensive and often refers to *friendliness* or *fondness*. *Eros* is sexual in nature and is not dealt with anywhere in Scripture.

But in this study, we seek to know more than just the “dictionary definition” of love; we want to know how love is defined *by its attributes, by its character, and by its results!* We seek to know how **God** defines true love — the kind that is pleasing to Him — and how it is demonstrated. In the text for this series of studies (1st Corinthians 13:1-8), we will also see the great need of this love in the life of every disciple of Jesus Christ. In fact, we will see that love may rightly be called **The Greatest Need**. Someone once asked me what one thing I believed was the greatest problem among brethren and churches and, if I had the power to do so, what I would do to correct it. The best answer that I could conceive [on short notice] was that there needed to be a greater love — for God, for the brethren, and for lost souls. Friends and brethren, I believe that is *still* true. Even when we love as we should, there is still room for us to “*excel still more*” (1st Thess. 4:9, 10; NASB).

Many problems in marriages can be resolved and eliminated when we understand what it means to *love* our wife or husband; many problems in our relationship with Jesus Christ could be resolved if we understood what it means to *love* Him and to love one another. And to understand what it means to *love*, here is where we must go to see what true love looks like and what true love will motivate us to do. I believe without a doubt that if our life does not demonstrate each one of these attributes, then we are not loving as we should. It is not acceptable to say our love matches 40% or even 85% of the attributes here; it’s an “all-or-nothing” proposition. Either our love is defined by all of these attributes, or it is not the love we must have.

Let’s now take a closer look at *love* — arguably **The Greatest Need** for all disciples.

—— Steven C. Harper
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THE GREATEST NEED

Lesson One: Love...Suffers Long

(1st Corinthians 13:4)

Longsuffering. Mankind owes God a debt of gratitude for all He has done for us and for who He is, and when we consider this attribute of God [longsuffering], our praise and thanks should be unending. If it were not for the longsuffering of God, we would all be lost! Time and time again, we see God's longsuffering as the only thing that stood between man and his destruction. Though He has had multiple justifiable reasons for destroying or punishing us, the psalmist recognized the great longsuffering of God when he wrote, "*The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. He will not always strive with us, nor will He keep His anger forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities*" (Psa. 103:8-10). Though that was written almost 3000 years ago, the same could be said by all men, no matter what time in history. The "slowness" to anger is indicative of God's longsuffering, as is the fact He has not dealt with us according to our sins and has not punished us because of our iniquities, and for that we should be grateful and recognize this is *because He loved us*.

It should come as no surprise to the people of God that *longsuffering* is also named as a fruit of the Spirit, according to the inspired apostle Paul (Gal. 5:22). It is among the characteristics of the disciple of Jesus Christ that should be observed in us when we allow the Spirit [by the word of God] to work on us and change us. One who lacks love is one who has little or no patience with others and often has unrealistic expectations of new converts or even the mature Christians. He will expect overnight changes in the new convert and impatiently criticizes others when they do not meet *his* expectations as quickly as he would like. If changes need to be made, he often gives up when things do not move as quickly as he had planned. This lack of love is evident to those about him because he cannot wait for others and expects immediate results when he is involved in any work. In a word: He is *impatient*.

The Greek word for *longsuffering*, here, would be literally translated *anger a long way off*. One who loves another will not be angry with them all the time, and even when the other has done something that might bring anger, it is far from his thoughts *because* he loves the other. God's longsuffering is well known to all who know Him and His word [seen most often in His dealings with Israel], and is shown towards those whom He loved the most, though they often did not return His love in kind. Even after God caused Pharaoh to release them, the Israelites complained when they stood with the Red Sea in front of them and the Egyptian army behind them (Exod. 14:10-12); though they complained, God's longsuffering delivered them (vv. 13-31). When they stood at the edge of the Promised Land and refused to go in and take it because they feared the people (Num. 14:1-4), God's longsuffering prevented Him from destroying them on the spot (vv. 11-20). Throughout their history, God waited and withheld His punishment and gave them opportunity after opportunity to repent, though they certainly deserved a punishment far greater than what they received (Psalm 78).

The attribute of *longsuffering* is clearly evident in God because, at its base, *longsuffering* is an attribute of love and God is love (1st John 4:8). We are reminded that it is the longsuffering of God [part of His "*goodness*"] that extends our time for repentance (Rom. 2:1-4) and His longsuffering that has prevented Him from destroying the earth once again because He is "*not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance*" (2nd Pet. 3:9). Peter admonishes us to count His longsuffering as salvation because we are given this opportunity (v. 15). Paul himself would recognize that the fact he was able to be called a child of God was directly attributed to the longsuffering of God and saw it as something that was done for him to purposefully demonstrate the longsuffering of Jesus (1st Tim. 1:16); if he could be saved, then who was beyond saving?

The fact of God’s longsuffering should motivate us who are disciples of Jesus Christ to also have this attribute as a core part of who we are. *Longsuffering* is, at the heart, a form of mercy and *mercy* is what God has always expected of His people. He once asked, through Micah, “*And what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?*” (**Mic. 6:8**). Jesus made it plain that mercy is expected of us when He told the parable of the unforgiving servant in which the unmerciful servant would not extend to his fellow servant the same degree of longsuffering that had been shown to him (**Matt. 18:21-35**). Let us learn from this that *longsuffering* is to be extended to others — if for no other reason than God has extended longsuffering towards us. Disciples should *willingly* and *without hesitation* demonstrate longsuffering toward others because we love them.

Longsuffering means we do not get soon angry when we do not “get our way” or when things do not happen quite as quickly as we think they should. We are patient with the waiter or waitress and do not make a scene simply because they didn’t get our order right; we are patient in traffic when we find that yet another construction project is adding 45 minutes to our morning commute; we are patient with those of the world when we attempt to teach them because we understand that they simply have not known any better; we are patient with our children when they “forget” to obey us as they should because they are learning and we seek to raise them in the admonition of the Lord; we are patient with our brethren because they are striving to walk the path to heaven and our aim is to help them to get there and never be a source of discouragement. Love is patient. Love is longsuffering.

Questions and Application.

1. List some situations when a Christian deals with the world where longsuffering would have a positive impact. _____

2. List some situations when a Christian deals with his own brethren where longsuffering would have a positive impact. _____

3. How should God’s longsuffering toward us influence the extent to which we show longsuffering to others?

APPLICATION

4. Why is it wise to show longsuffering towards those who are older when they are trying to teach us? _____

THE GREATEST NEED

Lesson Two: Love...Is Kind

(1st Corinthians 13:4)

What Is Desired In A Man. The wise writer said, “*What is desired in a man is kindness*” (Prov. 19:22; NKJV). [The ESV actually translates this as “*What is desired in a man is steadfast love.*”] And who would argue with that? Who of us would choose to deal with a hateful man over one who is loving and kind? The fact is, this is an attribute we all seek in others but — at the same time — one we do not as carefully ensure we have as one of our own personal attributes. But if it is true that we seek kindness in others, would it not be logical that others would desire us to also be kind? Like many other things in life, this is one thing we expect of others but do not work hard enough on to make sure it is something *we* have or do.

Again, it should come as no surprise that this is an attribute of God. Before the Israelites went into captivity, Joel pleaded with them to repent and turn back to God that they might escape certain punishment, and he pleaded by the kindness of God when he did so. To the stubborn Israelites, Joel wrote, “*So rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm*” (Joel 2:13). And when the once-captive Israelites returned to Judah and Jerusalem, they recognized the longsuffering and kindness of God as that which spared them and allowed them to return, though they certainly did not deserve it. After a reading of the Law, they confessed their sins to God and recalled how God had been “*Ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abundant in kindness, and did not forsake them*” (Neh. 9:17). They had taken God’s kindness for granted once, and they learned their lesson the hard way.

The Greek word used here is one that implies *gentleness*. It is a manner of treating others with tenderness and a softness in word and in deed, rather than with roughness. But because it is an attribute of love, we should also see that it is an action of sincere desire for another’s well-being; it compels us to treat others gently, even if they

must be punished. We who are spiritual are urged to restore the fallen “*in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted*” (Gal. 6:1). It tones down our feelings of even justified anger by moving us to think about how *we* would want to be treated if it was us on the receiving end. We best learn this manner by the example of our heavenly Father, for Paul even admonishes us, “*And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you*” (Eph. 4:32). A study of Christ’s life would show one of kindness and gentleness, and even Jesus makes the great invitation to come to Him based on the fact He is “*gentle and lowly in heart*” (Matt. 11:28, 29). As we strive to work together as brothers and sisters in Christ, we must do so “*with all lowliness and gentleness*” in order to “*walk worthy*” of our calling (Eph. 4:1, 2). Our kindness [or *gentleness*] should be evident to all, too (Phlp. 4:5).

And — again — we should not be surprised to find that *kindness* is a fruit of the Spirit. It is another of the characteristics of the disciple of Jesus Christ that should be observed in us when we allow the Spirit [by the word of God] to work on us and change us. One who lacks love is one who is harsh towards others and returns poor treatment with poor treatment, instead of with *kindness*, and he will be ungrateful to the point he will seldom thank others [or even God] for what has been done for him. He is selective about whom he thinks is deserving of any act of kindness but always expects others to treat him better than he treats them. He will be mean, harsh, overbearing, and demanding — not someone anyone would want to be around for any length of time. His harsh manner is a source of embarrassment and a cause for the Lord’s name being profaned because his behavior is then associated with his faith. In a word, he is *unkind*.

As with each of these attributes of love, we should seek to have *kindness* as a part of our lives because of the great kindness God has shown towards us. When Jesus admonished us to love

our enemies, He pointed to the fact that God “*is kind to the unthankful and evil*” (Luke 6:35) as our motivation. Indeed, this is expected of those who would be God’s children, for Paul urges us as “*the elect of God*” to “*put on tender mercies, [and] kindness*” and “*above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection*” (Col. 3:12-14). Jesus outlined the manner of kindness in the Sermon on the Mount and reveals to us that it is treating others as we would want to be treated (Matt. 7:12), never turning away from a need (Matt. 5:42), not dependent on the actions of others (vv. 43, 44), and going beyond expectations (vv. 38-41). It should be clear from the passage which we are now studying that *kindness* and *love* are inseparable attributes, and that every disciple of Jesus Christ should be known for his or her kindness.

Kindness is a conscious decision to treat others with gentleness — even those who may be undeserving — and a conscious decision to speak gentle words instead of harsh ones. *Kindness* is a choice to speak words that calm instead of incite; it is looking around to see who is in need of help and fulfilling their need without making them feel unworthy or incompetent simply because they are in need; it is sitting with a lonely widow simply because she has no one else; it is grieving with those who grieve and rejoicing with those who rejoice; it is gently leading the lost back to the right path instead of further berating them for their errors; it is a constant mind set that expresses concern for the needs of others and — when a need is known — fulfilling that need. Love is *kind*.

Questions and Application.

1. How does love for others lead us to act with *kindness*, and how should this be a constant motive for how we treat others? _____

2. Why is *kindness* so important as an attribute of **every** disciple of Jesus Christ? _____

3. How should God’s *kindness* toward us affect the extent to which we show *kindness* to others? _____

APPLICATION

4. How will *kindness* affect others’ view of us and their willingness to hear what we say? _____

THE GREATEST NEED

Lesson Three: Love...Does Not Envy

(1st Corinthians 13:4)

Rottenness to the Bones. The wise writer said, “*A sound heart is life to the body, but envy is rottenness to the bones*” (Prov. 14:30; NKJV). Like the horrible disease of leukemia, envy destroys and spreads and eats away at the very life of the one infected, but is actually worse because it will adversely affect those around the infected one. One who cannot rejoice with his own brethren when good things come will wallow in self-pity and envy and surmise many evil things about why others are so blessed when he does not enjoy the same [or better] blessings. Envy is the response of the worldly-minded man and diverts attention away from the spiritual things. By the fact love does not envy, each and every display of envy indicates a lack of love and no matter how much we may vocally protest that such is not true, we cannot escape this conclusion.

By definition, envy is: *Chagrin, mortification, discontent, or uneasiness at the sight of another's excellence or good fortune, accompanied with some degree of hatred and a desire to possess equal advantages; malicious grudging.* [Webster's, 1913] Envy, in its simplest definition, is ill-will felt toward another because of an apparent advantage. Envy may be seen among family members and even fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, if love is absent. But no matter what our excuse, envy is in direct opposition to the express will of God and is not a fitting attribute for His disciples. It is, at best, destructive and does nothing towards the building up of the Lord's Kingdom and the saving of souls.

The Greek word translated as *envy* is ζηλόω [*zeloo*; *dzay-lo'-o*] and whose root word is the source of our English word *zealous* [and is translated as such in a few passages such as Gal. 4:17, 18]. Interestingly, this word is translated **once** in the New Testament as *jealous* (2nd Cor. 11:2) and is used in a **positive** way. While the Greek may have a single word to describe both *jealousy* and *envy*, there is a distinct difference: *jealousy* is an act of love [though it may sometimes be a foolish act], while *envy* indicates a **lack** of love. *Jealousy* is a desire to have someone for

one's own because of love for that someone; *envy* is a desire to have someone or something for one's own and for others to **not** have what one has. It is a demonstration of hatred for others, rather than love, because love shares while envy does not have any desire to share. Envy doesn't even want others to have what may be rightfully theirs!

Envy is a destructive attribute simply because of the behavior demonstrated by the envious one. Envy causes one to act childishly, such as seen in the behavior of the Philistines who envied the success of Isaac (Gen. 26:12-15). Their envy drove them to stop up his wells and fill them with dirt — not exactly a great display of maturity! Envy also causes us to act irrationally, such as seen in the behavior of Rachel who, envying her sister's child-bearing ability, demanded Jacob give her children (Gen. 30:1, 2) — as if he had some control over **her** ability to bear children! Envy also may cause us to become distracted from our spiritual goals because of the apparent success of others who are not so spiritually-minded. This is seen in the life of the psalmist, who looked on the wicked men and their ostensible success and envied them (Psa. 73:2, 3), though he had been personally and abundantly blessed by God. At its worst, envy may drive some to seek the elimination of the one who is the aim of their ill will. Envy drove Joseph's brothers to sell him into slavery (Gen. 37:11; Acts 7:9), it drove the accusers of Jesus to put Him to death (Matt. 27:18), and it drove some Jews to attack the house of Jason in search of Paul (Acts 17:4).

While *envy* obviously indicates a lack of love, it is also the sign of a carnal mind. Paul chastised the Corinthian brethren for having “*envy, strife, and divisions*” among them and pointed to the fact of them being “*carnal and behaving like mere men*” as the cause (1st Cor. 3:3). The most obvious reason we can say it is a sign of a carnal mind is based on the words of the inspired apostle Paul, who named it as one of the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21). The carnal mind will also lead some to act enviously because of their own pride. Paul tells

us that pride *leads* to disputes and arguments over words, which then leads to “*envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions*” (1st Tim. 6:3, 4). Envy will cause a man to elevate himself and, when others excel, the proud man will not allow it; envy then kicks in to drive him to try to bring others down to his own level. He cannot be content with his own station in life as long as there is someone higher, happier, or more successful than himself. However, as we will see in our next lesson, love is not arrogant and does not boast about self.

Love is the exact opposite of *envy*. Love does not begrudge the success of others, but rejoices with them and for them; love does not seek to have everything for self and none for others, but seeks to share what we have with anyone and everyone; love does not surmise evil about others just because they are materially successful, but congratulates the successful one and sincerely rejoices with them; love does not concern itself with how much more someone else has than self, but thinks on spiritual matters; love does not think that the success of others is a mark against self, but wishes others the best even as he strives for his own successes. Love does not envy.

Questions and Application.

1. How does envy affect the relationship of individual members within a local church? How does it affect the work in a local church? _____

2. How does envy affect our ability to influence those who are yet unbelievers? _____

3. In the examples of envious behavior as listed at the bottom of the previous page, how would *love* have changed the outcome? _____

APPLICATION

4. When our friends' focus is so materialistic, what will help us not be envious of their possessions and their way of life? _____

THE GREATEST NEED

Lesson Four: Love...Is Not Boastful or Arrogant

(1st Corinthians 13:4)

The Humble Spirit. God tells us, “*Pride and arrogance and the perverse mouth I hate*” (Prov. 8:13). Of all attributes man may have, this is the one God makes absolutely clear is unacceptable to Him. We are told within God’s Word, “*The LORD lifts up the humble; He casts the wicked down to the ground*” (Psa. 147:6). The wise writer tells us, “*Surely He scorns the scornful, but gives grace to the humble*” (Prov. 3:34). Peter and James both cite this as “*God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble*” (Jas. 4:6; 1st Pet. 5:5). In fact, God asked His people, “*And what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?*” (Mic. 6:8). In short, we find that God wants His people to be people of love!

Arrogance, by definition, is an *overbearing display of superiority and self-importance* and one who is **boastful** is one who *speaks with exaggeration and excessive pride, especially about oneself*. Such a man is selfish to the core, for everything centers on self; he is one who thinks little or nothing whatsoever about others and if there is any consideration at all before he acts or speaks, it is only a consideration of how **he** will be affected. In his own mind, he is most important and everyone else should bow to his needs and desires. The arrogant man within the church does not think in terms of “equality” and a brotherhood where all are on an equal standing before God; he thinks **his** views should have more significance and **his** desires should be considered above all — even Christ! He seeks positions of power **not** because he seeks to do God’s will, but for his own selfish purposes and his desire to run the church as **he** thinks it should be. Extreme arrogance will even lead some men to set aside the will of God and Christ that his own desires might be accomplished.

Haman exemplified the attribute of *arrogance* when he was brought before the king and asked by the king what should be done for the one whom the king favored (Esther 6:6); Haman thought first of himself as the one of whom the king spoke! Hear the arrogance in his thoughts: “*Whom would the*

king delight to honor more than me?” Haman was so self-centered and full of self-importance [arrogant] he could think of no one more worthy of honor than himself! Clearly, Haman lacked love and it was demonstrated in various ways throughout his life, but Mordecai stands in stark contrast to the arrogance of Haman, humbly going about his business and even speaking up to encourage others to act for the sake of others on more than one occasion. True to God’s word, Haman was humbled and was destroyed, while Mordecai was lifted up.

Consider also the example of the two men who were praying. Jesus spoke of the Pharisee who stood and prayed to God in a boastful way: “*God, I thank You that I am not like other men — extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess*” (Luke 18:11, 12). In all he said to God, **he** was the focus and his belief that he was superior to everyone else is clearly evident! He even felt he had to boast to God about how great he was! [As if God didn’t know...] In contrast, the publican “*would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’*” (v. 13). Let us note that Jesus said the second man was justified, while the first was not. He closed out the story by reminding us, “*everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted*” (v. 14). Without love, we begin to look down on others and begin to see ourselves as better or more important than what we really are and even God’s standing is diminished.

Arrogance and boastfulness is not a characteristic of the disciple of Jesus Christ if for no other reason than it was not a characteristic of the Master. Jesus described Himself as being “*lowly in heart*” (Matt. 11:29) and His life certainly demonstrated that to be true. He was the One who set aside the glories of heaven and of being the Son of God and came to earth in the form of lowly man (Phlp. 2:5-8); He was the One

born in a stable instead of a palace (**Luke 2:7**); and He was the One who died the cruel death on the cross, though He had done no wrong. In all that Jesus did, He humbly submitted to do the will of His Father — all because He loved us. As His disciples, we would do well to cultivate a quiet and humble spirit that others may see Christ in us.

Love, seen in its most recognized behavior, is *humble* in its manner. One who acts with love in all that he does is one who is readily recognized by others as a man of humility and who willingly steps aside that others might be exalted. Let us be aware that this attitude of self-seeking and self-importance does not come from God and, therefore, does not come from love (**Jas. 3:14-17**). True love is willing to step aside, willing to yield, and does nothing of selfish ambition (**Phlp. 2:3**); it moves us to see others as better than self and to look out for the interests of others before we look out for our own (**Phlp. 2:3, 4**). Pride and arrogance will bring strife (**Prov. 13:10**) and, eventually, destruction of self (**Prov. 16:18**), while love will bring peace (**Eph. 4:3**) and will build us up (**1st Cor. 8:1**). Arrogance is speaking about self almost exclusively and building self up above others; love speaks of Jesus and exalts **Him**, and lifts others up in word and deed. Love is not boastful and is not arrogant.

Questions and Application.

1. Spiritually speaking, do we have anything of which we might boast, or anything for which a man could believe himself superior to others? If so, what? If not, who gets the credit for all spiritual good, and why? _____

2. Paul wrote that the only thing that he might boast about was the cross of Christ (**Gal. 6:14**); what did he mean by this? _____

3. Why is arrogance so contrary to the plan of God for His people [the church]? [Hint: See **Colossians 1:18** and **Galatians 3:28**.] _____

APPLICATION

4. Though our society encourages boastfulness, why must we learn humility? _____

THE GREATEST NEED

Lesson Five: Love...Is Respectful

(1st Corinthians 13:5)

Uncommon Courtesy. I probably do not have to point out to you that, today, “common courtesy” is not so common anymore! I also probably do not have to tell you that very few people are taught to be respectful of others. It is common to see and hear children act disrespectfully towards their parents and it seems [at least from television, radio, and movies] that this is becoming an accepted pattern of behavior. And while children are becoming less and less respectful to their parents and other adults, we should not be surprised to discover that they learned it from their parents, who just as regularly refuse to show respect to others — especially those in positions of authority. And when we raise a generation who has not learned proper respect and that refuses to show respect for anything that has been done in the past, we see what it is like to witness the behavior and consequences raising a nation of loveless people.

Due to the various translations — none of which seems to give the best translation of the original Greek word used here — we may be missing the point of what Paul is saying here. The NKJV says, “*does not behave rudely*”; the ESV says, “*is not...rude*”; the NASB says, “*does not act unbecomingly*”; and the ASV and the KJV both say, “*doth not behave itself unseemly.*” While the latter translations may be accurate in their rendering of the word, the words “unseemly” and “unbecomingly” are not clear, and I believe a look at the original Greek might shed better light on what exactly Paul is saying here. The original Greek word is *ασχημονέω* [aschemaneo; *as-kay-mon-eh'-o*], which is a combination of the prefix *a-* [which implies an opposite, or absence of] and the word *schema* [which means *a mode* or *circumstance*]. Literally translated, this word implies an act that goes against, or does not conform to, the accepted social custom or common propriety. As it is a purposeful act, it is a demonstration of a lack of respect for such customs or propriety. In its basic application, what Paul is speaking of is the fact that love does not show disrespect — to people, property, or the standard

of accepted [moral] behavior. [Remember, as disciples, we follow God’s standard.]

Love — when we speak of how it affects our dealings with others — primarily considers our words and actions and how they might affect others. According to this text, love does not ignore social custom, the personal dislikes of others, their standard of decency, their rules or expectations of behavior, their traditions, their feelings, or even their conscience. One who *lacks* love will ignore any one or all of these things and simply do what he wants to do. This is the great power love has when we speak of personal or even public relationships in that it seeks peace and acts with propriety instead of demanding its own way. Though not specifically taught as a matter of practice in other places, we *can* see it in action through an investigation of the New Testament writings.

Consider Paul who, knowing the delicate situation of teaching Christ among the Jews, acted with love when he went to each new city. When he came back to Jerusalem, he did not ignore the custom of the Jews and their traditions, or even the regulations of the Temple. After the elders explained the mood and situation at Jerusalem, they commanded him to take the Gentiles who were with him and purify them and make it evident that they were following the regulations (**Acts 21:20-24**). Paul did as they said (**v. 26**). On another occasion, when Paul was taking Timothy with him to preach the gospel in other locations, he had him circumcised “*because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew that his father was Greek*” (**Acts 16:3**). It was not to abide by the Old Law that Paul did this, but to not offend their traditions and the social standards. If Timothy had not been circumcised, it would have limited him as to where he could go with Paul. [Paul refused to have Titus circumcised, **Gal. 2:3**, to make a point about the gospel.]

Love was absent among the Romans when it came to the matter of eating or not eating meats.

Men from both sides of the issue apparently were acting with no consideration of the other and their conscience, and thus demonstrated this lack of love (**Rom. 14:15**). Simply put, neither side *respected* the position of the other and they each acted or spoke as if their way was the only way. Unfortunately, this behavior is commonly seen among some brethren who have the “my way or the highway” attitude when it comes to decisions made within the local church. It is also seen in many organized debates, wherein one side or both thinks they must insult the other side to get their point across; such only drives a wedge and hinders the truth’s effectiveness.

Let us not go too far when we speak of *respecting* the traditions, beliefs, customs, and such of others, however. The *respect* of which we speak simply means we treat all others with dignity and in a manner we would want to be treated; it does **not** mean we do not point out error, it does **not** mean we consider one religion as good as the next, and it does **not** mean we compromise the truth. Love demands we correct the erring, but it does not mean we have a right to berate them, insult them, and treat them with contempt. Let us never forget the admonition of Paul to make sure we are “*speaking the truth in love*” (**Eph. 4:15**). Love is respectful.

Questions and Application.

1. Since love is *respectful*, how should this affect our approach to God and how we offer up our worship? _____

2. Since love is *respectful*, how should this affect our approach to our fellow believers and how we treat them? Towards unbelievers? _____

3. How can a respectful attitude make a difference when we seek to lead others to know the truth and be saved? _____

APPLICATION

4. Does being respectful mean we never point out spiritual error? Defend your answer from the Scriptures. _____

THE GREATEST NEED

Lesson Six: Love...Is Not Selfish

(1st Corinthians 13:5)

Crucifying Self. If we are disciples of Jesus Christ, then we understand our life is all about our love for God that is expressed and demonstrated daily because He first loved us. That love for God moves us to live unselfishly, denying self and taking up the cross to follow Jesus (**Matt. 16:24**), and acting selflessly for the sake of others. The apostle Paul exemplified the attitude of self-sacrifice best in his words to the Galatian brethren when he wrote, *“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me”* (**Gal. 2:20**). His spiritual service was one of total self-denial and a complete lack of selfishness. In effect, Paul said he was simply returning the love Christ had shown toward him. He understood well that it was love that compelled Jesus to go to the cross and it should be love that compelled him to serve Jesus in response. It is, as John wrote, *“We love Him because He first loved us”* (**1st John 4:19**).

But selflessness must be demonstrated in the way we live before all men, too; it is not just a matter of our spiritual service to God. Paul wrote to the Philippians, *“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition”* (**Phlp. 2:3**); an honest look shows that this command omits nothing! In no part of our lives do we have room for selfishness, for such would reveal us to be people without love! He would go on to command them to *“Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others”* (v. 4); if we thought only of self, we wouldn't *care* about the needs of others. Paul would then appeal to the life of Jesus (vv. 5-8) as an example for us to see how one might obey this command. From beginning to end, Jesus demonstrated selflessness that He might both please the Father by His perfect obedience and, at the same time, save us from our sins. All in all, everything Jesus did was done out of love (cf. **Eph. 5:2**).

The selflessness of love is seen in all proper and good relationships. In a marriage, we see

that each partner is selfless in that they each seek to please the other (**1st Cor. 7:33, 34**), even to the point they do not consider their body as their own, but the other's (**1st Cor. 7:2-4**). This selflessness is what strengthens the relationship because each knows and believes that the other is just as committed to the relationship and they can trust that all things that are done are done for the good of the other. Even should mistakes be made, it is understood that the motives were good and no harm was intended. As we apply this to our spiritual relationship to Christ, we may understand that all Jesus did and all of His commands are for our spiritual good, and the degree to which He went to prove His love leaves no doubt in our mind. It is His love that compels us to show the same degree of love for our brethren (**1 John 3:16-18**); imagine how strong our relationship could be with one another if we all would act selflessly towards one another, as Christ did for us!

As our text states, *“love does not seek its own,”* so when we set our mind to show love to others, it **cannot** be done for selfish purposes or it is a meaningless, self-defeating act. Jesus chastised the religious leaders of the day for their hypocrisy and favoritism and admonishes us, *“love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return”* (**Luke 6:35**). One who appears to love his brethren, but does so only for what he can gain from the relationship, is not showing **true** love, but a hypocritical and superficial “love” that is not really love at all. Peter admonishes us to *“love one another fervently with a pure heart”* (**1st Pet. 1:22**); in other words, our love must be **sincere**. If we only seek our own good in our relationships [with the brethren, in a marriage, etc.] and do nothing for others, it will be a relationship without love and will be weak, superficial, and will not likely last very long. Imagine what our relationship with God would be if His love was shown merely for His own gain!

The disciples of Christ are admonished to be people who are willing to share because this form of selflessness demonstrates the degree to which

we are willing to love others. We are reminded to “*not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased*” (**Heb. 13:16**). John’s rhetorical question about sharing with our brother in need (**1st John 3:17, 18**) demonstrates the fact that sharing is in itself an act of love. The wise writer reminds us, “*The righteous considers the cause of the poor*” (**Prov. 29:7**); need we say that “*the righteous*” are those who love as they should? And whether it is sharing our material goods with others or giving for the support of the Lord’s Kingdom, it should always be done “*bountifully*” and “*not grudgingly or of necessity, for God loves a cheerful giver*” (**2nd Cor. 9:6, 7**). Love does not withhold anything, but is willing to give all when the need arises.

The *selflessness* of love moves us to always put the needs and desires of others before our own, as long as it conforms with God’s will, especially in matters of indifference. When choices must be made, we defer to others; when we see someone else’s *need*, we surrender our *desires*; when we see work that must be done, we do not wait for ‘someone else’ but step in and give our time, energy, and material goods, if necessary; when it comes down to personal gain or the benefit of another, we yield; and when it comes to our spiritual service, we give all to God — even our very lives — for that is what we do when we serve Him out of love (**Rom. 12:1**). Love is *selfless*.

Questions and Application.

1. Jesus commanded His disciples that they should “*love one another as I have loved you*” (**John 15:12**); how does the manner in which **He** loved us demonstrate the fact love is not selfish? _____

2. Jesus also told us that God “*so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son*” (**John 3:16**) and Paul said He “*did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all*” (**Rom. 8:32**);

how does the manner in which **God** loved us demonstrate the fact love is not selfish? _____

3. Does the demand of love [selflessness] mean we *never* do something for ourselves or *never* choose self over someone else? Regardless of your answer, how can we know when we should defer to others versus making a personal stand? _____

APPLICATION

4. How does the world make it difficult for us to live selflessly? _____

Lesson Seven: Love...Is Not Easily Provoked

(1st Corinthians 13:5)

A Calm Spirit. The wise writer tells us, “*An angry man stirs up strife, and a furious man abounds in transgression*” (Prov. 19:22). He also says, “*A wrathful man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger allays contention*” (15:18). With this knowledge in mind, is it any wonder that the one who has love is said to be the one who does not quickly get angry? The one who has love is one who will prevent strife, if at all possible, and end it should it ever start; the “hothead” will start a fight and keep it going. A calm disposition will go a long way in maintaining or bringing back peace, and love for our fellow man will help us to have that calm disposition.

In the context of today’s passage, the idea is that when one has suffered a wrong or another has done something that might be a cause for anger, the one with love will let it pass or at least deal with the situation in a calm manner, instead of losing his temper and adding to the trouble. The wise writer said, “*The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger*” (19:11a); he would further this thought when he wrote, “*He who is slow to wrath has great understanding, but he who is impulsive exalts folly*” (14:29). In other words, if we are *wise*, we restrain ourselves and do not show anger in such situations; it is, in fact, foolish to allow others to stir us up to anger. The wise writer also says, “*He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city*” (16:32). In this passage, we see the one who controls his anger has *real* strength, even more mighty than one who captures a city! But this is only if we have love; an absence of love will allow us to be irritated or angered and our weakness will be revealed to all. The fact that *restraint* is a sign of strength goes against the hot-tempered man’s thinking, who believes his unrighteous display of anger is a show of strength. In reality, it is a sign of a weak-minded man who has not bothered to control himself and who thinks he can control others by his lack of self-control. Consider also that uncontrolled anger is most often an act of pure selfishness [as we have already seen, a sign of a

lack of love]; one who lacks love and believes he has been personally offended, insulted, or snubbed will not think logically or with reason and will be overwhelmed by the passionate response in anger — with dangerous results. Love overcomes our impulse to show extreme displeasure and our sometimes impulsive desire to retaliate, and responds instead with a soft answer (15:1).

And, again, we can see this attribute of love demonstrated most perfectly in God. Consider just the history of the Israelites and their relationship with God and we find that God was more than patient with them and was not prone to anger. Even when His anger was justifiable He did not react without restraint. Certainly, there were times when God *wanted* to destroy them (cf. Exod. 32:9, 10; Num. 14:11, 12), but He restrained Himself and listened to the words of Moses and did not do what He initially wanted to do. *That* was because of His love. That same measure of love is seen in Christ as He dealt with the rejection of the religious leaders and the majority of the Jews in the first century. One particular example stands out as a demonstration of this attribute and is worthy of consideration: when Jesus was passing through Samaria and was not received by those in a certain village (Luke 9:52, 53). The disciples were ready to call down fire on them (v. 54), but Jesus pointed out that He came to save, not destroy (vv. 55, 56); He was not provoked by the perceived slight. Throughout His time on earth, they tried to discredit Him and His power (Matt. 12:24), they tried to impugn His character by way of His associations (Matt. 9:11; Luke 15:2), and they made false charges against Him just so they could eliminate Him (Matt. 26:59-63). In the end, Jesus prayed to the Father that those who put Him there might be forgiven (Luke 23:34). When we realize what He *could* have done (cf. Matt. 26:53), we see that it was love that overcame the evil directed against Him. Peter points to the love of Christ [His lack of retaliation] as an example for us to follow (1st Pet. 2:20-23).

With these examples in mind, we who are His disciples should willingly strive to be like Christ and “*follow His steps,*” as Peter has admonished us. There is really no situation that should so inflame a disciple to want to retaliate; doing so would make us no better than the ungodly ones of this world who constantly seek their own and who demand immediate “justice” when they believe they have been treated wrongfully. We who are disciples of Christ must follow His example and not allow trials or perceived wrongs to stir us to anger, but purpose in our hearts to instead show love by *not* being provoked by these things. Consider the possibility that some of our trials are directed at us for the very purpose of seeing how we will react; what influence will we have on the unbeliever [or even our own brethren] if we respond to trials by getting irritated, flustered, and upset?

True love does not seek revenge when we have been wronged and seeks no retaliation when we have been harmed or offended; true love does not live by the “eye for an eye” rule but leaves retribution up to God (cf. **Rom. 12:17-19**); true love does not respond in anger when we are “cut off” by another driver, but ignores it and drives on without another thought; true love does not seek to destroy the reputation of another simply because we feel like he or she has surpassed us by unjust means, but is satisfied with our position in life; and true love does not “lose her temper”, but calmly answers and, if necessary, takes a break to get our thoughts together that we might deal with the situation logically and with compassion. True love *is not easily provoked*.

Questions and Application.

1. The only other time this word translated as “*provoked*” is used is in **Acts 17:16**, when we are told Paul’s “*spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols*”, and another form of the word is seen in **Hebrews 10:24**, where we are told to “*consider one another in order to stir up love and good works*”; what is the difference in those situations and that of which Paul writes in today’s text? _____

2. Whose influence will be evident when we respond to trials by getting irritated? If we respond calmly and without an urge to retaliate? _____

3. What is common about the reactions of the individuals of the following texts: **1st Samuel 18:5-11**; **Daniel 3:16-23**; **Acts 7:54-60**? What was obviously lacking in each situation? _____

APPLICATION

4. Why is it so important we show to the world a calm spirit? How does this reflect Jesus in our lives? _____

THE GREATEST NEED

Lesson Eight: Love...Does Not Impute Evil Intentions (1st Corinthians 13:5)

Giving The Benefit of the Doubt. The difficulty in understanding this attribute is no doubt made more so by the fact of the various translations. The NKJV reads “*thinks no evil*”; the ASV reads “*taketh not account of evil*”; the KJV reads “*thinketh no evil*”; the NIV reads “*keeps no record of wrongs*”; the ESV reads “[*not*] *resentful*”; and the NASB reads “*does not take into account a wrong suffered*”; together, these translations seem to be saying some very different things! But I believe the common thread in all the translations points to the real meaning: love does not assume evil and does not hold grudges based on those assumptions. The beginning point of this is the fact that love does not ever impute evil intentions in another, even when it may appear a great wrong has been done. Love moves us to have a presumption of innocence and good intentions, rather than assuming the worst. Love waits until the facts have been presented, and should the intentions never be known, love believes it was meant to be good and harbors no ill will.

The wise writer tells us, “*He who answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame to him*” (Prov. 18:13). With this now in mind, how foolish is it to impute evil motives in another when we cannot read their hearts? Unfortunately, we are seeing a rise in the number of brethren who are more than willing to impugn motives and assign evil intentions in others based on mere assumptions and their own inventions of the mind. Some preachers seem to have taken it upon themselves to reveal to the world [often, through the WorldWide Web — the Internet] what they claim are the thoughts and intentions of those with whom they disagree, and we are left to wonder just exactly *how* they figured that out just by them reading a response to their own writings or spoken words. Such behavior is shameful, at best, and a cause for the Lord’s name being blasphemed. What is obviously lacking in such accusations and presumptions is *love*.

Consider how Aquila and Priscilla dealt with Apollos: Apollos was not sitting idly by and

waiting for others to do the teaching when he came to Ephesus. Apollos was described as “*an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures*” and “*fervent in spirit,*” and his knowledge moved him to the point he “*taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John,*” and he “*began to speak boldly in the synagogue*” at Ephesus (Acts 18:24-26). But his teaching [based on an incomplete knowledge of God’s will] was not assumed by Aquila and Priscilla to be “false teaching” and Apollos was not quickly labeled a “false teacher” by them. We find that Aquila and Priscilla, when they “*heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately*” (v. 26). They acted with love towards Apollos by taking him aside [not in front of everyone] and gently correcting him, and the result was Apollos continued to teach and “*he greatly helped*” his fellow believers in other locations (v. 28). What if Aquila and Priscilla had *not* acted with love and what if they had assumed the worst?

Too often, brethren act without love towards one another in what should be easily-resolved disputes and end up destroying relationships and the unity of a local church. Most of these problems can be traced back to a lack of communication with one another and an unwillingness to confront those with whom we have issues and/or differences. Instead of assuming good intentions, brethren assume the worst and, when they do not talk to the one in question, they begin to surmise evil about each other and the wrongly-perceived evil intentions grow only worse and worse in the minds of both sides until the conflict erupts into a series of vocal insinuations and/or outright accusations of wrongdoing. And all of it is based on a faulty assumption that the other had evil intent! The obvious problem is a lack of love, but who will admit this?

The ironic thing about those who impute evil intentions is that their imputation of evil [without knowledge] is in itself evil! It is devoid of love and it presumes [1] evil motives, [2] an ability to know

the intents of another man’s heart, and [3] a right to judge others without a complete knowledge of the one whom he accuses. One brother hears a young man speak erroneously and he presumes he is a false teacher and marks him off as such and begins spreading the word [the young man simply misquoted a passage]; a sister sees a friend shopping at the local Wal-Mart after Wednesday evening Bible study and, because this friend did not attend the study, she presumes her friend was negligent in her attendance [her son was sick and she had to pick up a prescription]; an unbeliever who is searching for the truth comes into the meeting house Sunday morning, wearing shorts, and one of the local church’s members takes him aside and chastises the visitor for coming in with “indecent” clothing [the visitor was truly ignorant of the truth and had never even known clothing could be “indecent”]; and a brother notices his neighbor has an “I Love Jesus” sticker on his car and makes a mental note to himself that his neighbor is one of those “denominationalists” who just doesn’t know better than to go around boasting about their faith like the Pharisees, so he resolves to avoid speaking to him about religion [the neighbor *was* ignorant of the truth, but he truly *did* love Jesus]. In each of these cases, someone imputed evil intentions in the other without knowing the person and without bothering to get the facts before making a judgment. Love was absent in every case.

But what would happen in these situations if love was behind their every thought and action? The brother would have taken the young man aside and asked him about what was said, and he would have opportunity to correct himself; the sister would have talked to her friend, who would have explained her presence at the store after being absent from the Bible study; the church member would have initiated a study with the visitor and got to know him better, where he would have opportunity to learn the truth and learn about decency and indecency; and the brother would have noted the spiritual interest of his neighbor and taken the opportunity to explain to him God’s word and what it means to truly love Jesus [as stated by Jesus Himself in **John 14:15**]. Love *does not impute evil intentions*.

Questions and Application.

1. What is the primary problem with presuming evil intentions in another [besides a lack of love]? _____

2. Of what are we guilty when we judge others [or impute evil intent] based on outward appearances (cf. **Jas. 2:1-4**)? What else (v. 9)? _____

3. How does the lack of love [wherein we impute evil intent] affect the local church? [Think about all the ways in which it will be affected negatively.] _____

APPLICATION

4. What do we know about the ability of man to correctly assign the motives of another (cf. **1st Cor. 2:11a**)? How should this influence our willingness to do so? _____

Lesson Nine: Love...Does Not Rejoice In Evil, But In Truth (1st Corinthians 13:6)

No Indifference. The first thing we should note in this statement is that love is not *indifferent* towards either truth or evil; love rejoices in truth but not in evil and — at the same time — does not rejoice in evil but in truth. [Is that clear?] In other words, one who desires truth must also **not** desire evil; it is not just a matter of desiring truth, but also having absolutely no desire for evil so that we will never be tempted to follow after it. The wise writer said, “*The fear of the LORD is to hate evil*” (Prov. 8:13); the psalmist added, “*You who love the LORD, hate evil!*” (Psa. 97:10). Amos would state plainly, “*Hate evil, and love good*” (Amos 5:15). Paul would also admonish the Roman brethren, “*Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good*” (Rom. 12:9). As strange as it may sound, *to love* means we must *hate*.

From this, we must surely understand that love — in its truest and purest form — entails a desire for all to follow after God’s word [which is itself *truth*, John 17:17] and be saved. Love looks out for the well-being of others, and what greater care could there be than for the souls of all men? *Love* does not rejoice in evil personally [has no desire to be involved in it], but that means **completely**, too [we have no desire that others be involved in it, either]. Love is not merely a matter of personally despising and avoiding sin, but also a matter of desiring that all men despise it and avoid it. The faithful disciple of Jesus Christ does not rejoice when the unbeliever wallows in sin, but rejoices when he repents and turns to God (cf. Luke 15:7). The worldly man and the ungodly man rejoice to hear others have joined with them in their sin, for that removes one more critic!

The wise writer said, “*Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles*” (Prov. 24:17). Though this is speaking of a literal downfall of one’s enemy, surely application to their spiritual fall would be just as true. The faithful disciple, because of love, does not rejoice when others are overtaken in sin because we seek the salvation of all, not their destruction; the spiritual man does not rejoice

when his own brother has been overtaken in sin, but seeks to restore him (Gal. 6:1). We must have the mind set of God, who “*desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth*” (1st Tim. 2:4) and who is “*not willing that any should perish*” (2nd Pet. 3:9). From His own words, it is God who says, “*I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live*” (Ezek. 33:11). God does not **rejoice** when the wicked is in sin and certainly not when he dies in that state; we should adopt His way of thinking that we might demonstrate true love towards **all** men and not just to those who believe.

In society today, it is popular to find faults in others, and there are even newspapers and television shows [tabloids and “tabloid TV” programs] dedicated to this effort. These papers and programs pay big money to get the latest scoop on some celebrity’s scandalous behavior or to have someone dig up their lurid past. The tragic part about this is the fact that they have subscribers and an audience! If there weren’t people in society who reveled in the sins of others, the sleaze business would die out on its own, but far too many people *rejoice in iniquity!* It should be evident that this is a clear indication our society is lacking in love for one another, but this is the expected behavior of the worldly and the ungodly; the problem is when disciples likewise rejoice in iniquity. Disciples should mourn at the condition of our godless society and should be seeking to turn the hearts of the unbelievers to God, rather than rejoicing in their headlong rush into eternal destruction.

The disciples of Jesus Christ should be those who love the truth and who **live** as if they loved the truth, not just in word. Love rejoices when truth finds a foothold in the heart where the seed has been planted and fruit is produced (Matt. 13:23), but **does not** rejoice when the seed falls upon the heart and is lost to indifference, persecutions, or worldliness (Matt. 13:20-22); love rejoices when we are able to teach others and they “*come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil*”

(2nd Tim. 2:24-26), but *does not* rejoice when they refuse to believe and remain captive; love rejoices when others accept the truth for what it is, the word of God (1st Thess. 2:13), but *does not* rejoice when it is slandered, maligned, and blasphemed; love rejoices even when a faithful life brings us persecution, because we know what awaits us (Matt. 5:11, 12), but *does not* rejoice in the fact men are so opposed to truth; love rejoices when a lost one is restored because we know a soul is saved (Jas. 5:19, 20), but *does not* rejoice when the erring one refuses to heed and is put away (Matt. 18:15-17). Love *does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in truth.*

Questions and Application.

1. For faithful disciples, what is it about love that causes one to rejoice in truth? To not rejoice in evil? _____

2. Can disciples restrict their lack of rejoicing in evil only to themselves, or must this extend to not rejoicing when others are involved in evil? Why, or why not? _____

3. For those who seek to please God, is it enough for one to hate evil, without having a love for truth? Why, or why not? _____

4. In regards to this attribute, how does *love* play a part in proper repentance (cf. Acts 26:20)? _____

APPLICATION

5. Why is it important we start learning to love truth early in life? _____

THE GREATEST NEED

Lesson Ten: Love...Acts With Restraint

(1st Corinthians 13:7)

That Which Moves Us *And* Restrains Us.

First, let us note that there are some variations in the translations that may lend to some confusion about what is meant here. The NKJV, NASV, and ESV all read “*bears all things*”; the ASV and KJV basically read the same, but with more archaic language; the CEV says “*is always supportive*” [not a good rendering, based on the original Greek word]; the NIV reads “*always protects*”; obviously we have some differences in the translations, so which is correct, if any? To get a better understanding, let’s consider how the original Greek word is used in other places. In the only other passages where this word is used, we find it translated as “*suffer*” (1st Cor. 9:12) or “*endure*” (1st Thess. 3:1, 5) [NKJV translation cited].

Now, based on the fact “longsuffering” [patience] is already mentioned in today’s context (v. 4) and “endurance” is mentioned in the same verse (v. 7), I believe God used this word purposefully and intended a different meaning than the other two, else we have an inexplicable redundancy. [Note: The Greek word translated as *longsuffering* in verse 4 is not the same word translated as *endures* in verse 7, and neither are the same as the word used here for *bears*.] When we consider the other passages in which the original Greek word is used, we may conclude that a better understanding/distinction would be gained by using the word “restrains” [i.e., “love restrains”]. In 1st Corinthians 9:12, Paul “restrained” himself from demanding material support from them that the gospel might not be hindered; in 1st Thessalonians 3:1 & 5, Paul basically said, “When I could no longer restrain myself...” he sent Timothy to find out their spiritual condition and that he might encourage them.

If this translation is valid, then what did Paul mean when he said love “restrains”? In many ways, love *restrains* us from acting in ways or speaking words that do more harm than good. In just about every one of the attributes we have considered so far in this series of studies, *restraint*

is found: Longsuffering demands we *restrain* ourselves from acting hastily; kindness demands we *restrain* ourselves from acting with harshness, even when we have been treated harshly; we must use *restraint* to not allow ourselves to think materialistically and become envious of others; *restraint* of our ego is needed that we do not boast or act arrogantly; *restraint* is needed to not offend the conscience or customs of others; to act selflessly demands we *restrain* our personal desires that we might act to benefit others; and *restraint* is needed when others do or say things which might otherwise incite us to anger or retaliation.

The basic thought behind *restraint* is an attribute familiar to the disciple of Jesus Christ: **self-control**. And we should not be surprised to find that this [self-control] is a fruit of the spirit (Gal. 5:22, 23). The wise writer admonishes us to not walk in the way of the sinners because of the life they lead and the end of those who so walk (Prov. 1:8-19; 4:14-19); he warns against falling for the enticements of the immoral woman (5:1-14; 7:24-29) and the adulteress (6:23-25); he strongly urges self-control of the appetite when one sits with a ruler (23:1-3), when eating honey (25:16), and even in the company of a miser (23:6-8); he urges us to not be hasty to take our neighbor to court lest we be put to shame (25:8-10); he praises the one who is slow to anger on more than one occasion (16:32a; 14:29) and condemns those who are quick-tempered (14:17); he warns against falling to the lure of alcoholic drink which seems, at first, to be pleasant but afterwards yields some unpleasant and unwanted results (23:31-35); and he makes some important observations about any who would be hasty in their thoughts, words, or actions (18:13; 21:5; 29:20). While some of these situations may never arise *particularly*, the principle of **self-control** certainly applies at all times and in all situations. One who cannot control himself will never be able to lead others to follow after God and Christ and will be demonstrating to the world that love is lacking in his life. Love, in effect, is what compels us to employ self-control

because we consider how our actions and words will affect others, and how our actions and words will influence others to believe in and follow after Jesus Christ.

When it comes to this attribute [*restraint*], Jesus again is our supreme example. Consider first that Jesus could have come with all the glory of heaven as deity, but *restrained* Himself and came in the form of lowly man (**Phlp. 2:6-8**); when He was tempted by the devil (**Matt. 4:1-11**) we see Jesus *restrained* Himself and did not sin — ever (**Heb. 4:15**); when Jesus prayed in the garden that there might be another means of man’s salvation, He *restrained* Himself and asked that the Father’s will be done (**Matt. 26:39**); when Jesus stood before the *Sanhedrin* just a few hours later and was falsely accused, He “*kept silent*” (v. 63) [the ASV says He “*held His peace*”]; though He was spat upon and beaten and slapped (v. 67), Jesus *restrained* Himself; though He was vehemently accused [falsely] by the chief priests and scribes and though He was treated with contempt and was mocked by the soldiers of Herod (**Luke 23:10, 11**), Jesus *restrained* Himself; when He was again mocked by the soldiers of Pilate (**Matt. 27:27-31**), Jesus *restrained* Himself; and when He hung on the cross and suffered, Jesus did not come down and walk away to avoid the great personal pain and humiliation, but *restrained* Himself and willingly gave Himself for us — and it was all because of love (**Eph. 5:2**).

Questions and Application.

1. What is it about the nature of love that it can *restrain* us? Be as thorough in your answer as possible. _____

2. List the reasons why — and/or situations where — *restraint* demonstrates love. _____

3. Since self-control is inseparable from the other attributes of love [as seen above], how important must this be in the life of every disciple, and why? _____

APPLICATION

4. Even when we perform acts of love, why must *restraint* be exercised? _____

Lesson Eleven: Love...Believes All Things

(1st Corinthians 13:7)

A Matter of Trust. In any relationship, *trust* is the central factor of what makes the relationship strong, and helps it to get stronger. When it is a relationship built on love, *trust* is an **absolute necessity**. As this text has revealed, love *trusts*, but let us understand that without trust, it is not love at all! Consider the dilemma of a newly-married couple: They have entered into what is intended to be a permanent relationship, but upon what basis? At the onset of the relationship, the trust is not very deep — certainly not enough to know that it will last permanently. But the saving factor is *love* itself! Since love *trusts*, that love will bind them together as their relationship grows and matures and they will eventually get to the point they now have intellectual, logical, and emotional reasons to trust one another. The relationship becomes stronger because they love one another, and they love one another because they *trust* one another! A relationship without trust will be soon devoid of love, while one where each partner fully trusts the other will have a deep and abiding love that will not soon grow cold. In our spiritual relationship with God and Christ — and with one another as brethren — we would do well to keep this in mind.

The psalmist is one whose love for God was obvious from his inspired writings, and listen to what he says: “*O LORD my God, in You I put my trust*” (**Psa. 7:1**); “*In the LORD I put my trust*” (**11:1**); “*Preserve me, O God, for in You I put my trust*” (**16:1**); “*My God, my strength, in whom I trust*” (**18:2**); “*O my God, I trust in You*” (**25:2**); and “*Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You*” (**56:3**). We could certainly go on, but it should be obvious that *trust* was a major part of their relationship. David, especially, was one who trusted in God and it was evident by the fact he often sought God’s counsel when preparing to go into battle (**1st Sam. 23:2-4; 30:8**) and in the fact he clearly believed forgiveness would be forthcoming when he repented (**Psa. 25:7, 18**). Likewise, we may trust in God to give us victory in our spiritual battles (**1st Cor. 10:13**) and to forgive us when we confess and repent of our sins (**1st John 1:9**).

When we forget, or when we lack the love for God that we should have [which must include trust in Him], it is then that we fail and it is then that we are unnecessarily overwhelmed by our sins.

Our *trust* in God is based on the fact He cannot lie (**Titus 1:2**), but what about our brethren? What is the basis of our *trust* in them — the ones whom we must love (**1st John 4:21**)? Especially for the new convert or for brethren who move into new locations and seek to join with the brethren there, what is it that can and should be the basis for trust? It all comes back to love. Just like that new marriage, brethren must love without question first and make the effort to get to know their new family; with time, that relationship will become stronger and the trust will become deeper. With that growing trust, we should get to the point that we would not hesitate to put our lives in their hands. As the wise writer said, “*A man who has friends must himself be friendly, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother*” (**Prov. 18:24**). Our friends should be our spiritual brethren. With love as the basis for the relationship, trust will inevitably come and it will grow as our love for one another also grows. Let us never be content with loving our brethren to the smallest degree, though, for even those who excel in this are urged to “*increase more and more*” (**1st Thess. 4:9, 10**).

This true love of which we speak is one with *trust* because it is real. When love is even *perceived* to be insincere, trust will be hard to gain; if it is not pure, then others will not trust our motives; if it is hypocritical, others will not trust us because they will see us for who we really are and our love will be just as false; and if it is shown selectively or inconsistently, we cannot be trusted simply because we are unreliable. Of all people in the world, disciples of Jesus should be people who are trustworthy, but so should we be trusting in others. It is not a one-way relationship.

True love is one wherein brethren can *trust* one another to stand by them when they need help in spiritual matters or even in material or emotional

APPLICATION

5. What happens when we cause others to lose *trust* in us? _____

matters, when brethren *trust* others to restore them when they fall (**Gal. 6:1**), when we can *trust* that our brethren will join with us in the work of the Lord and will go to great lengths to accomplish what must be done (**Phlp. 2:25-30**), when we can *trust* them to speak the truth to us (**Eph. 4:25**); and when we *trust* that all decisions and all efforts within the local church are for the well-being of all and for our own individual, spiritual well-being. Love *believes all things*.

Questions and Application.

1. How is *trust* an integral and inseparable attribute of love? _____

2. How does our *trust* of God affect our love for Him? _____

3. How does our *trust* of one another affect our love for our brethren? _____

4. To what degree must love be *trusting*? [In other words, where do we draw the line regarding how far we will trust someone?] _____

THE GREATEST NEED

Lesson Twelve: Love...Hopes All Things

(1st Corinthians 13:7)

A Confident Expectation. A long-used definition of **hope** is *a confident expectation*, which is a reasonable way of defining the term. As it is used here, implied also is *hope* when all else fails and all others have given up. The apostle Paul tells us “*hope does not disappoint*” (**Rom. 5:5**), which points to its sustaining power. Love is that within us that causes us to believe the best and look forward with a positive anticipation instead of giving up and believing the worst. It is that which drives us to keep trying to reach the lost, though we have been rejected many times; it is that which keeps us going back to the one who has fallen away, though he has not yet repented of his sins; it is that which motivates us to remain faithful throughout even the most difficult times because we have such a love for God. The writer of Hebrews says this hope of heaven is an anchor for the soul (**Heb. 6:19**) and — in a sense — all legitimate hope we have is an anchor, holding us firm in one place and not allowing us to drift with the tides of change, uncertainty, and despair.

In our materialistic world, it seems that the more we get the more unhappy we become. We are one of the richest nations in the world but we also have one of the highest rates of depression and suicide. Part of the problem is that many Americans have hope in material things, and those things will always disappoint. Automobiles break down, clothes go out of style, houses need repairs, storms can destroy, what once looked new fades with the sun and time, and most everything that is not nailed down can be stolen [and even some things that **are** nailed down]. Our nation is in a hopeless state because they *love* the wrong things: “things”! A mind focused on this material world really cannot comprehend the meaning of true love because this kind of love [for material things and for the praise of men] is more properly identified as **pure fleshly desires**. Because this worldly-minded nation has seen so many disappointments, they no longer *hope*. We must help them to change their focus!

Though we cannot say God ever *hopes*, based on God’s own description of *hope* (**Rom. 8:24**; and we know God sees all), we **do** know God had a favorable expectation for man when He demonstrated His love for us by sending His only Son to die for our sins (**Rom. 5:8**). Though He had seen generations of men who had rejected Him, God still knew some would obey and so provided the means for our salvation. With His infinite knowledge, God could certainly know ahead of time what man would do, but He moved forward with the plan of salvation that was instituted before time began (**2nd Tim. 1:9**) with the knowledge *some* would obey. Yes, He knew man would even reject His Son, but He knew that those who loved the truth would hear and obey and that those described as hopeless needed hope. As Christians, that hope of receiving the reward of eternal life is that for which we live, and it is our love for God and Christ (**John 14:15**) that gives us that hope.

Regarding our earthly relationships, love is no less *hopeful*. Among brethren, we are told to love one another (**John 13:34**) and with this love must come *hope* in one another. Faithful disciples have *hope* for the new convert, that he will grow in the grace and knowledge of the Savior (**2nd Pet. 3:18**) and one day be a leader in the local church (**Titus 1:9**); the new convert has *hope* that his brothers and sisters will stand with him and help him to grow spiritually. Brothers and sisters in Christ have *hope* that each will be there for them in their need (**1st John 3:17**; **Acts 2:44, 45**), and that the one in need will come to them for that help. Preachers of God’s word *hope* that the hearers will not turn away from the truth (**2nd Tim. 4:2-4**), but take the lessons from God’s word and apply to their own lives; the audience *hopes* they will be filled with a greater understanding of God’s will and how it applies to them personally (**Acts 17:11**). The teacher *hopes* the students will be able to understand the many lessons from the Bible and also grow in knowledge; the students *hope* the teacher will give them lessons they can

understand and which will help them in their daily lives. And the unbeliever comes, *hoping* he will hear the words of truth for which he has been seeking (**Acts 8:30ff**); the members in the local church *hope* the honest heart hears and responds positively to the message.

Parents look at their children and the ungodly society in which they are being raised and *hope* their children are not led astray by the evils of this world, but learn to love God and obey His will; children *hope* their parents will raise them in a godly atmosphere and will set the example for them to follow. Wives *hope* they will lead their husbands to obey the gospel — if not in word, by their godly conduct so that one day they will sit together and join together in worship of God. Sons and daughters *hope* they will lead their parents out of the confusing denominational system and back to the pure church of Jesus Christ. Brethren everywhere *hope* the word is spread to every nation and every home; they *hope* they are able to be a shining light and lead others to glorify God; and they hold onto *hope* when their own government oppresses and persecutes them for their faith.

Love does not allow disappointments, failures, and rejections to cause us to lose sight of the eternal goal and the slightest possibility one may stop and listen to the words of truth and be saved. Though this world gives us many reasons to be discouraged, love *hopes all things*.

Questions and Application.

1. The world considers many things of God to be foolishness; why would they think it so foolish that we should have *hope*? _____

2. Without *hope*, what happens to love? Be as thorough in your answer as possible. _____

3. Is it Scriptural to have *hope* in others, and is this a different kind of *hope*? If so, give examples of those who did; if not, cite Scripture for your defense _____

APPLICATION

4. In what ways do our parents show that they have *hope* for us, and how does this demonstrate their love for us? _____

Lesson Thirteen: Love...Endures All Things, Does Not Fail

(1st Corinthians 13:7, 8)

Refusing To Quit. The Greek word translated as “endures” (v. 7, NKJV) implies a refusal to give up and resisting by holding one’s ground, especially in the face of difficulties and opposition [*Louw-Nida Lexicon*]. When we tie this with the last defining attribute, we see that true love is—at the very least—dependable. It is more than just an *ability*; it is also a *mind set*. Love doesn’t quit; love doesn’t walk away; love doesn’t give up at the first sign of trouble; love doesn’t look for the “easy way out”; love doesn’t make excuses for not remaining; love is steadfast and resolute. Again, when we consider that God *is* love, can we see that all these statements could be applied to Him and how He deals with man?

If we take a closer look, we find that these attributes are *dependent* on all the others we have previously considered. It is *longsuffering* that allows love to remain steadfast and not give up; it is *kindness* that moves love to stay; the *humility* of love stays for the sake of others and not self; the *respectfulness* of love considers the moral code of righteousness and cannot in good conscience abandon others when they need us; the *selflessness* of love ignores the personal sacrifice and hardship that must be faced to remain; when love does not *assume evil intents*, we are willing to stay for them; the love of truth and hatred of evil gives love the courage to stand; *restraint* will prevent love from running away; the *hope* of love looks beyond the present hardship and forward to better days. All is all, there is more in love that would cause us to never give up than reasons to abandon the cause. If we quit when times get difficult, then we do not really love. When his own wife was ready to give up in the face of their extremely difficult times, Job pointedly asks, “*Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?*” (**Job 2:10**). Giving up on God and giving up his own life was not an option, for Job loved God too much to abandon Him (see **Job 13:15**). And as the wise writer said, “*If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small*” (**Prov. 24:10**).

Friends and brethren, if our love fails in the day of adversity, our love is not what it should be.

Consider, also, the life of Paul, the apostle. Here was a man who gave up everything of his former life as a persecutor of the church (cf. **Phlp. 3:4-10**) and began preaching the gospel immediately after his conversion (**Acts 9:20**). What did he get in return? The Jews who had formerly been his best friends and companions in his efforts now plotted to kill him (vv. **23-25**)! Throughout his life as a follower of Christ, Paul suffered many hardships (cf. **2nd Cor. 11:23-33**), yet he considered it a “*light affliction*” (**2nd Cor. 4:17**). Even while imprisoned, Paul saw it as a positive thing (**Phlp. 1:12-18**) and considered his life or death a worthy sacrifice for the sake of Christ (vv. **19, 20**); he looked forward to being with Christ, but was not ready to leave the work that was yet to be done (vv. **21-26**). He admitted the hardships but did not let them discourage him that the work he had to do for the Lord’s Kingdom might be completed (**2nd Cor. 4:8, 9**). Even when he knew his death was near (**2nd Tim. 4:7, 8**), he continued writing to his fellow workers and asking that they might help him to do more until the day arrived when he could do no more (vv. **9-21**).

On an earthly scale, *love never fails* because it is that which moves us to constantly consider the needs of others—whether physical, emotional, financial, or spiritual—and fulfill that need when we are able. Love encourages those who are overwhelmed by this life’s troubles, supports those who cannot stand on their own, stands by those who have no one, and comforts the brokenhearted. Since these things will always exist, there will always be a need for love and as long as there are people of God, *love* will be there for those needs. *Love never fails* because we are moved to love others because God loved us first (**1st John 4:11**); *love never fails* because we are moved to love our brother because God loved us first (**1st John 4:21**); *love never fails* because we are moved to

love the lost because God loved the lost enough to send His Son that they might be saved (**John 3:16**); *love never fails* for we love God because He first loved us (**1 John 4:19**), and our love for Him will continue in eternity.

On the grandest scale, *love never fails* because as God is eternal (**Isa. 40:28**), so must love because God is love (**1st John 4:8**). In fact, Paul closes out this portion of text by writing, “*Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away*” (**1st Cor. 13:8**). Prophecies were given to us by God to show that His plan was accomplished and that He knows all things; the tongues were given as proof that what was spoken was of God; the knowledge He has revealed is that we might have faith and believe to the saving of our souls; all of these things were given by God for our spiritual good and will remain until we have received the eternal reward and their need will have been fulfilled. *Love*, however, will remain. When Paul closed out the thought, he rightly said, “*And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love*” (v. 13). Faith and hope will be lost in sight, but *love* will remain throughout all eternity. *Love never fails*.

Questions and Application.

1. What is it about *love* that enables it to “*never fail*”? _____

2. Based on Scripture, why *must* love never fail? _____

3. How does the love of God compel us to ensure our love “*never fails*”? _____

4. Since love “*endures all things*,” what are some of the things a believer must endure because of love? _____

APPLICATION

5. What happens when there is no more love in the home? In our spiritual relationship? _____

THE GREATEST NEED
Lesson Fourteen: Review
(1st Corinthians 13:1-8)

REVIEW QUESTIONS:

1. To what degree do we show longsuffering to brethren who are in error? The unbeliever?
2. Identify at least three situations in which Jesus acted with *kindness* while on earth.
3. Since the wise writer said, “*A sound heart is life to the body, but envy is rottenness to the bones*” (Prov. 14:30), what should we expect if we have envy in our own heart?
4. How will focusing on Jesus help us from being boastful or arrogant?
5. How will a lack of respect for one another affect a marriage union? A local church?
6. Since Jesus gave Himself out of love for us (Eph. 5:2), what should that motivate us to do (1st John 3:16)?
7. What was it about the reaction of the *Sanhedrin* that demonstrated they had no love for Stephen (Acts 7:54-58)?
8. When we consider the critics of Jesus, what often was the motivation for them imputing evil motives or evil sources for what He taught or did?
9. How does love help us overcome temptations and, therefore, avoid sin?
10. How does personal *restraint* demonstrate love to the world?

11. What are some of the characteristics of God that demonstrate His trustworthiness and, thus, a God of love?

12. Since love “*hopes all things,*” how important, then is love in the success of the local work in this church?

13. List the consequences if God had not shown love towards man, if Christ had shown love towards man, and if we do not show love towards one another.

APPLICATION

14. Looking back on all these things, explain now why Jesus said the greatest commandments are loving God and loving our neighbor (**Matt. 22:37-40**).