

1 Corinthians 13:1-8a If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³ If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. ⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. ⁸ Love never fails.

Dear Christians Redeemed and Made New:

What is love? We humans *think* we know, but our definition is often skewed by of years of misinformation. Men who take advantage of women claim it's "love." Parents who permit children to do whatever they please call it "love," and others who harm their children with abusive discipline call it "love." The truth is, we need instruction about love, and we aren't going to find proper instructions from modern society!

We need to sit at the feet of the Savior and learn. After all, Jesus doesn't just love, as true God he *is* love. Today Paul answers the question, "*What Is Real Love Like?*" (1) *The Lord shows you*, and (2) *The Lord instructs you*.

1

Over the past weeks, Paul in 1 Cor. has been writing about the gifts of the Spirit. He says the gifts we've been given serve the whole body, Christ's Church. They are to be used for our mutual welfare.

But there's one gift, Paul says, that glues all these other gifts together: *love*. "***If I speak in the tongues of men and angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging symbol.***" He adds, "***If I give all I possess to the poor...but have not love, I gain nothing.***" In other words, my gifts are worthless and meaningless unless motivated by love.

However, he's not describing mere fickle human love; this is **agape** love, the highest love, God's love -- the love of John 3:16. Jesus loved a world reeking of lust, hatred, greed, and blasphemy; a cesspool of rebellion and shameful acts; a world that slapped him around, pounded thorns into his skull, and executed him for loving people too much. And yet Jesus cared so deeply for this rebellious world that he made the ultimate sacrifice. This love is not just feelings or mere words, it is action -- action taken to love those who hated him.

A striking painting by English artist Gabriel Rossetti is simply titled ***Found***. Rossetti would write sonnets or prose to tell the story behind the picture. This is the story I found about *Found*:

A country boy and girl fell in love. They pledged their undying love to one another. But the girl yielded to wicked influences and was lured away to the sins of the big city. She sank lower and lower into the gutter of sin, throwing away her pure life, even attempting to forget the one she loved. The young man, however, sought her everywhere. Finally, one day at Blackfriar's Bridge, he came across a filthy woman dressed in rags. It was his love.

In the painting the country boy is taking her by the hand and the expression on his face is one of pure joy that the one he loved and who was lost had now been found.

2,000 years ago God's love compelled him to come into this sin-blighted world to save those who rejected him -- "*to seek and to save the lost.*" What is real love like? The Lord shows us! Look at the cross. Look at Jesus. Look at what he did for us! That selfless, sacrificial picture is true love.

2

In 1 Cor. 13, God also instructs us about love. Paul reminds us about various qualities found in *agape*, Christ-like, love.

“Love is patient” -- sometimes translated as **“long-suffering.”** In our impatient society, do we “suffer long” the shortcomings, mistakes, and faults of others as God does with ours? Are we willing to forgive the **“70 x 7 times”** Jesus told his disciples about? Christian marriage takes a lifetime worth of patience...each of us saying, **“My spouse must be very patient to be able to live with me!”** If we don’t have patience, the Lord reminds us it’s worth making every effort to develop it. The foundation element behind patience? Humility.

“Love is kind” -- **“Kind”** means more than just a sweet disposition. It entails *doing* things that are beneficial for others. “Good intentions” aren’t kindnesses -- they are potential kindnesses. To love we must do, and do from a sincere heart. And let’s face it. People who act in mean ways make this world a stinky place to live.

“Love does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.” -- Christ-like love doesn’t get jealous about the successes of others or the attention they receive that we may crave. True love doesn’t need to brag or say, **“Look at me!”** Instead it says, **“Look at Jesus and what he’s done for you!”**

“Love is not rude” or **“ill-mannered.”** Considering the prevailing wind of our society today, we could have a whole sermon on this one word: **rude** -- lack of respect for the feelings, rights, and property of others. Rudeness comes from caring only about myself. My schedule is more important than yours and everyone else’s, so why pull over for emergency vehicles or wait a moment for a funeral procession to pass through the intersection? After all, I matter more than and of you do! And if my opinions are the only ones I care about, I boo and shout down speakers at graduation ceremonies or public gatherings with whom I disagree. Our society is paying a huge price for our rudeness. If it continues unchecked, the next generation will suffer dearly physically and emotionally.

“Love is not easily angered; love keeps no record of wrongs.” Love doesn’t keep score of all the bad things others say or do. For one thing, if God kept a record of our sins, we’d be in *big* trouble! I know I wouldn’t like an angel following me around like a PGA golf tournament score keeper, marking down every offensive word and deed. And for another thing, **“It is mine to avenge, I will repay,” says the Lord** (Rom 12:19). The reason we keep track of others’ sins is so we can store up enough damaging ammo to “get back at them” someday. They lose, I win. That’s what we think. But the only winner there is the devil.

At the end Paul says, **“Love never fails.”** The truth is, while God’s love never fails, *we* fail at love all the time. If you’re like me, you get a sick feeling in your stomach when you read 1 Cor. 13. I see God’s kind of love and how far off base I am! There’s a huge gap! It reminds us of the stark truth: **“All have sinned (especially me) and fall short of the glory of God”** (Rom 3:23).

But remember, the Lord is using these words **not to condemn** the Christian who trusts in Christ’s forgiving love, **but to instruct** the Christian to continue to grow in our knowledge of what true love is, and to improve our skills of loving others as he has loved us. What is real love like? Jesus **showed** us his full love to our eternal benefit. In the Bible Jesus **instructs** us how to love others as he has loved us!

Amen.