

1Cor. 13 God's Answer To Many Problems

Introduction:

Consider my key ring. One key starts my car. That is all it does. One open the front door of the church building. That is all it will open. But there is also one key here that will open many doors. It will open the front door of my house, it will open the side door, and the back doors. I want to talk about a spiritual key like that, one that will unlock many spiritual locks, one that will solve many spiritual problems.

Before I tell you what that key is, let me tell you about the problems I have in mind. Let us go to the book of 1 Corinthians. The church at Corinth was rife with problems: "preacheritis" (1:12ff); going to law against a brother, undisciplined immorality, association with idol worship, abuse of the Lord's supper, etc. But behind all these problems were inward attitudes at the source.

For instance, there was the problem of jealousy; "Since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?" (I Cor. 3:3). But not only were they jealous, they were also proud: "You have become arrogant, and have not mourned" (I Cor. 10:24).

If you would see all these disposition diseases on display in one part of Paul's letter, probably the best place to go is I Cor. 12-14. All three of the attitudes already mentioned are present in these chapters. Those who had (what they considered to be) the lesser miraculous gifts were jealous of those who had "the better." Those who had "the better" were filled with pride. and selfishness abounded as each thought of himself rather than the needs of the body as a whole.

Other wrong attitudes could be listed as well. They were impatient with one another. They were unkind. The attitude expressed in 12:21 shows that they were not mindful of the feelings of others: "I have no need of you." They were rude and discourteous. If one was speaking in the assembly and another wanted to speak, he interrupted. Apparently they did not care if their actions made the church the laughingstock in the community. They were irritable in their associations. They were suspicious of each other. They were unfeeling in their relationships.

Stand back for just a moment and look at this list of attitude problems: impatient, unkind, jealous, proud, rude, selfish, irritable, suspicious, unfeeling. The natural reaction would be; "What a mess. These are folks with Problems, with a capital P. How could one ever solve all these problems and get these Christians back on the right track?!"

Which brings us to the key that unlocks many locks. Evangelists V.P. Black suggests that in 1 Cor. 13, Paul is not merely showing that love is superior to miraculous gifts, but that he is also giving them the key to correcting the disposition problems that plagued the church there. This is especially true in verse 4-7 as he gives the characteristics of love. For a few moments, let us look at verses 4 through 7 from that standpoint-- always keeping in mind that what we are talking about is agape love.

1. THE PROBLEM OF IMPATIENCE: LOVE IS PATIENT.

Verse 4 begins, "Love is patient." The Greek word used here is the word for patience with

people. There is another Greek word for stamina, staying power, and endurance--in other words, patience with circumstances. But the word used here is the word used of the man who is wronged and who has it easily within his power to avenge himself and who yet will not do it. How we need this patience; how we need to be patient with one another.

Barclay gives a marvelous illustration of this kind of patience in his notes on this verse: ...no one treated Lincoln with more contempt than did Stanton. He called him "a low cunning clown." He nicknamed him "the original gorilla" and said that Du Chaillu was a fool to wander about Africa trying to capture a gorilla when he could have found one so easily at Springfield, Illinois. Lincoln said nothing. He made Stanton his war minister because Stanton was the best man for the job. He treated Stanton with every courtesy.... The night came when the assassin's bullet murdered Lincoln in the theatre. In the little room to which the President's body was taken there stood that same Stanton ... and, looking down on the silent face of Lincoln ... Stan said through his tears, "There lies the greatest ruler of men the world has ever seen." The patience of love had conquered in the end.

2. THE PROBLEM OF UNKINDNESS: LOVE IS KIND

Verse 4 continues: "Love is kind." Someone has expressed it this way: "Love is sweet to all." Being kind is a requirement of being a Christian. In Ephesians 4:32, Paul said, "And be kind to one another." For just a moment, think of the life of Jesus. How much of His life was taken up in helping others, in being kind, in making people happy?

Would it not help so much if we could just learn to be kind to one another? So many hearts have been broken because we have failed to be kind. V.P. Black had a story on this point that is very touching-- to the heart and to the conscience.

A businessman was on his way to work, and he stopped to get his shoes shined. The little boy who was shining his shoes was not doing the job as fast as the businessman thought he should, so he said, "Can't you go any faster? I'm in a hurry. I have an important appointment!" In a minute he looked down, and there was a tear on his shoe. The little boy was crying. "What's wrong with you," the man asked with no sympathy. "Are you sick? If you're sick, why didn't you stay home? I told you I was in a hurry." A man standing nearby overheard the conversation and said to the businessman, "No minister, he's not sick. His mother died last night, and he's working to get some money to buy her some flowers."

The man went to his office. He had many things to do, but he could not get that boy out of his mind. In spite of the fact that he had many important appointments, he left his office, walked back several blocks, and gave the boy ten dollars to buy some flowers for his mother's funeral. Is it not true that often we are unkind because we really do not understand? But love is kind. We may need to pray the little girl's prayer: "Make all the bad people good... and all the good people nice."

3. THE PROBLEM OF JEALOUSY: LOVE IS NOT JEALOUS

The next quality Paul lists in verse 4, Love "is not jealous."

Envy is a terrible sin. It is listed with the most hideous of sins (Galatians 5:19-21). Envy caused Cain to kill his brother, Abel (I John 3:12). When Joseph's brothers were eaten up with

jealousy, they actually sold him to strangers (Acts 7:9 "And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him"). Because of envy, Saul hunted David like one would hunt a wild animal (1 Samuel 18). Pilate noted that it was because of envy that the Jews delivered up Jesus (Matthew 27:18). In the KJV Solomon called envy a "rotteness of the bones" (Proverbs 14:30). Today he would probably call it the cancer, the malignancy, of the bones. Think of all the heartaches, all the disappointments, all the grief, all the sorrows brought about because of some envious scheming heart!

How can I overcome the terrible tendency of jealousy? Paul says the answer is LOVE. All of my sons have their own special talents and blessings. David has a phenomenal memory for all the technical names in anatomy, biology, and chemistry. Andy has a friendly and outgoing personality, and a winning smile. And Danny has the complexity that he can discuss in great detail the modern sports scene and then startle you with an analysis of the world's

So when I hear David name and describe some muscle or bone and its function, or hear Danny explain the writings of some philosopher, I'm eaten up with jealousy, right? You know better. There is no envy in a father's heart, just thankfulness to God for the his blessings He has given my sons. Why? Because I love them.

I know a preacher who preaches for small congregations. He has a son who preaches for one of the larger congregations in the brotherhood. But when he talks about his son, there is no jealousy in his voice. Why? That is his boy! he loves his son. If I am jealous, it is because I do not love enough.

4.THE PROBLEM OF PRIDE: LOVE IS HUMBLE.

Verse 4 concludes: "Love does not brag and is not arrogant." The previous quality of love spoke of those times when others do better than we do. This quality speaks of those times when we do succeed. Even when one does well, love feels no need to brag or exalt self. Nothing is more unattractive than the individual who apparently feels he must constantly be blowing his own trumpet. It was said of one preacher, "He is the only man I know who can strut sitting down." And this comment was made about an individual: "If you could buy for what he is worth, and sell him for what he thinks he is worth, you would make a fortune." In Matthew 6, Jesus spoke of those who desire the applause of men, and He said, "They have their reward in full" (vv. 2, 5).

In contrast with that spirit, there is a self-effacing quality about love. It is humble. As Paul commanded in Romans 12:3: "I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think." If I understand the biblical concept of humility, it is not that one thinks badly of oneself, but rather that one does not think of oneself at all. Love is so concerned about others, so interested in encouraging, exalting, and building up others, that it feels no need for self-exaltation.

5. THE PROBLEM OF RUDENESS: LOVE IS COURTEOUS

Verse 5 begins: Love "does not act unbecomingly." The NKJV has, "does not behave rudely." Most modern recent translations have "is not rude." One adds "is not ... unmannerly." [Amplified Bible]. Another puts it this way: "Love is not discourteous."

Some may think it strange that this quality is listed along with "important" things like kindness and humility. What difference does it make if we have good manners or not? Whether we are polite, nice, considerate, inoffensive--or just the opposite?

It makes a great deal of difference, for at the root of genuine courtesy is a concern for the other person and his feelings. It makes a great deal of difference, for it has to do with the impressions we leave on people, whether we are the salt and light of the world to God's glory (Matthew 5:12-16) or whether we repulse people by our actions.

One year, after the lectureship at one of our Christian colleges, Charles Hodge had a disturbing article in his bulletin. While at the lectures, he had talked with a number of waiters and waitresses in eating places near the campus. They said they dreaded the lectureship because those who came to them were so rude in the area cafes and restaurants. The saddest thing of all, however, was that not infrequently some of the rudest were those who bowed their heads in prayer before the meal.

Love is thoughtful, considerate, respectful, mannerly, tactful, and polite. These are considered by some to be old-fashioned qualities now outdated, but Paul says if you are filled with love, that is how you will act.

6. THE PROBLEM OF SELFISHNESS: LOVE IS UNSELFISH.

The second quality of love listed in verse 5 has been called the best sentence definition of love: Love "does not seek its own." Other translations read like this: "Does not insist on its own way" (RSV): "Never selfish" (NEB). "Does not insist on its own rights or its own way, for it is not self-seeking" (Amplified Bible.) To return to a definition of agape love given earlier: "Loves seeks the best for the one loved." Love is concerned about the other person, not

The prophet said, "Are you seeking great things for yourself? Do not seek them" (Jeremiah 45:4). Paul said: "With humility of mind let each of you regard one another more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in you which was also in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 2:3-5). It is hard to be more concerned about others than self. Paul says the secret is to learn to love. One writer notes that basically the world is divided into two groups: The first group is concerned about rights; the second group is concerned about responsibilities. Again, group one is concerned about "what life owes me," while group two is concerned about "what I owe life." The second group has caught a glimpse of agape love.

Love is not concerned with self; love is concerned about the other person.

7. THE PROBLEM OF IRRITABILITY: LOVE IS GOOD-NATURED

The third characteristic of love in verse 5 is stated in these words: "Is not provoked." The KJV has "is not easily provoked." The NIV has "not quick to take offense," while several

There is no more destructive element in human nature than that of being quick-tempered. So many terrible things have been said, so many terrible deeds have been done, so many precious relationships have been destroyed because of quick temper. Some would never think of becoming

drunk with alcoholic beverages, but they will become drunk with anger--and do so much damage.

In contrast, love is not quick to take offense; it is not touchy; it does not go around with a chip on its shoulder. Why? Because love does not think about itself; it thinks about the other person. When I get my feelings hurt, when I am touchy and have a foul temper, it is generally because I think someone has done something to me. But if "I" am unimportant, then slights, real or imagined, cannot touch me.

But someone objects, "That's hard; that's just the way I am (or that's just the way my family is). It's just natural for me to fly off the handle." "Just natural?" Does that mean that nothing can be done about it? Let me ask you, was it "natural" to allow oneself to be led to Calvary, to allow nails to be driven through the flesh, to suffer all the pangs of the cross? Keep in mind that at any time Jesus could have called a legion of angels to rescue Him. What enabled Jesus to go through that ordeal? Love.

There is a transforming power in love to overcome the traits of a lifetime.

8. THE PROBLEM OF BEING SUSPICIOUS: LOVE BELIEVES THE BEST.

Verse 5 concludes, "Does not take into account a wrong suffered." The KJV has, "Thinketh no evil."

Is it not true that often we are ready to believe the worst? If someone does something well, "they just did it to show off." If someone compliments us, "they really didn't mean it." But love "thinks no evil"; love believes the best. In a moment we will notice verse 7: "Bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." Many feel that the significance of "believes all things" is that LOVE "puts the best possible construction" on whatever happens.

If I really love someone, I will put the best possible construction on what that person does until I am forced to do otherwise. But even then I will "hope all things"; I will maintain the hope that the one I love will change.

But there is still more to be learned concerning this characteristic. One translation uses the phrase "does not take into account a wrong suffered." In the Greek text here, an accountant's term is used, a word related to the ledger sheet. It refers to writing something down where it will not be forgotten, where it can be taken into account tomorrow, the next day,

Are we not often like that? If we feel hurt, we write it down in our mental notebook and file it away. We brood over those wrongs until, for all practical purposes, they are impossible to forget. We nurse our wrath to keep it warm.

But love is not self-centered. Love is not concerned about wrongs done to self. So love can even put the best possible construction on what is done to self. And love can forget. Love does not put

9. THE PROBLEM OF BEING UNFEELING: LOVE IS CONCERNED

Finally, verse 6 has, Love "Does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth." There is so much packed into those words, but let me summarize them by saying: Love is happy when things are right; love is sad when things are not right. And both "right" and "not right" are determined by the Word of God. John expresses this attitude in his second letter: "I was very glad to find some of your children walking in truth" (2 John 4).

You might think that would be natural. But it is not. Many people are happy when bad things happen to important people. Certain publications are circulated in the hundreds of thousands because of the perverse tendency to gloat over the problems of the glamorous. There are those who make their living going through the garbage cans of celebrities, trying to find some hint of scandal. And when they find it, the garbage is printed.

Again, many are happy when bad things happen to people they do not like, or if it is shown that there is sin in their lives. But God's Wise Man in the Old Testament said, "Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles" (Proverbs 24:17). Such attitudes do not reflect love.

Let us pause here to make a some. Some do not understand love. They think that if one really loves, it makes no difference whether truth or error is taught, whether people live right or not. But this verse declares that love is in harmony with truth. Unrighteousness, disobedience, and error break the heart of the one who has learned how to love. Love can never rejoice in nor overlook unrighteousness and disobedience.

Unrighteousness can condemn a person's soul. And love is concerned about that person.

This section closes: "Bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails" (vv. 7, 8).

In a sense, all that Paul says here has been said in the verses before, but Paul is now saying that there are no exceptions. Love is love, everywhere in every place, no matter what. The NIV has, "It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres."

So in 1 Corinthians 13, especially verse 4 through 7, declares that love is God's answer to many problems. If you do not have this passage marked, let me suggest that you do so right now. When preachers counsel with couples with problems, usually the starting place is 1 Corinthians 13. It is good for what ails you.

May God help us to becoming loving. Love is the answer to many problems. May the Lord help us to become more like His Son.

It is not easy to stand up and say you need help! It is not easy to walk up before [number] people and confess you need something, it is not easy. Then after you make this commitment, life will not be easy. What will help you come down the aisle? What can help you face the Christian life with confidence? LOVE. Do you love Him enough to come?

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