



1 Corinthians 13:4-8

Family Foundations: Sacrificial Love

We live in a day that is characterized by the shallow half read page. We have everything from instant pudding to instant sermons. We go through instant marriages like a gallon of water.

Perhaps in no area of our lives has this shallow superficiality had its most ill effect than in our churches and our homes. We go from one shallow superficial fad or relationship to another. The day of depth in theology and relationships is almost gone.

One of the characteristics of a strong stable home is depth of relationships. Strong families have a sacrificial love. The apostle Paul used the word *agape*, to define unselfish love. This kind of love always seeks the highest good in the other person. Where does one learn that kind of love? It must be discovered in God's exceedingly great love for us and nurtured in family relationships. It is not a product of the natural man; it is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. You can not manufacture it. It must always come from the abiding presence of the Lord. He expresses His love through us.

Love is not a four-letter word. It is spelled COMMITMENT. *Agape* love is something you do. God loved us by sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to come to this earth and die for our sins on the cross. Love is something God did. It demonstrates His commitment to a lost world. *Agape* demands exercise of the whole person in which we seek the highest good in other people, including those whom we find it difficult to naturally love. This kind of love will transform your marriage and your family. It says I will seek nothing but the highest good for my mate, my children, my in-laws, etc. It is not simply a wave of emotion; it is an attitude and includes the mind and the will.

Let's examine some characteristics of this sacrificial love in First Corinthians chapter thirteen, and apply it to our home life.

INFINITE LOVE OF CHRIST

The apostle Paul personifies love with a description of its characteristics. He examines both sides of the coin. Keep in mind the context is dealing with spiritual gifts. Here Paul contrasts and compares other gifts with sacrificial love.

Negative Characteristics of Love

Love "is not jealous" (v. 4). It is not a fervent, boiling with envy and

Love "is not jealous" (v. 4). It is not a fervent, boiling with envy and jealousy. Envy, jealousy and character assassination are destructive to any family. You won't believe the "celebrity" mentality that goes on even in churches and among preachers. We live in a day when bigger is better, the winner is the one who ends the game of life with the most toys and is the envy of his peers. The tragedy is we miss the eternal purpose of God in our lives and our families are destroyed in the process.

Love "does not brag" (v. 4). True love does not put on a self parade. Jesus did not parade Himself, or put on a show. Love doesn't talk a lot and act presumptuously. Our Lord humbled Himself, and became obedient even to the point of death on the cross. Mark 10:45 reads, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." He is the supreme example of humility.

Love "is not arrogant" (v. 4). It is not puffed up like a big oversized advertising balloon. "Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies [builds up]" (1 Corinthians 8:1). "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6). Philippians 2:6-8 is the most beautiful picture of humility. Jesus Christ "existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond servant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even the death on a cross."

Love "does not act unbecomingly" (v. 5). It is not indecent. It does not act shamefully. You would have never heard a dirty joke or off-color story from the lips of Jesus. He never made a woman, or even a man, blush. The missionary David Livingston said, "The Lord Jesus was a perfect Gentleman."

Love "does not seek its own" (v. 5). It is not possessive. God's love is unselfish. A possessive parent will destroy a home.

Love "is not provoked" (v. 5). Love does not yield to irritation or sharpness of spirit. It is not touchy. Our original word means to irritate, promote to anger, to be irritable or touchy. This touchiness is caused by selfishness. Our Lord had no need to be irritable about someone else's toys. He had His priorities straight, and He stated His philosophy clearly in Matthew 6:33. "Continually seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you."

Love "does not take into account a wrong suffered" (v. 5). It "thinks no evil." Love does not record wrongs and doesn't keep accounts of people's transgressions. Love does not keep a ledger of evils done. It does not keep a notebook diary of evil done to it. It does not throw the whole kitchen sink at the other person when discussing problems. Love bears no malice. It does not store up resentments toward people. While dying on the cross Jesus prayed for those who were responsible for crucifying Him. He prayed over and over again, "Father forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). Forgiveness means that we wipe the record clean and never hold things against people (Ephesians 4:26, 32). Do you have a perfect memory when you think about wrongs done to you? Do you have a good forgetter and poor recall when you

memory when you think about wrongs done to you? Do you have a good forgetter and poor recall when you try to recall wrongs people have done?

Love "does not rejoice in unrighteousness" (v. 6). Moffatt gives us the best paraphrase, "Love is never glad when others go wrong." Jesus stood overlooking the city of Jerusalem a few days before His death on the cross and He wept over the city. He knew the city would be destroyed by the Romans in AD 70. He cried, "O Jerusalem, O Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling" (Matthew 23:37). His love did not rejoice when judgment came. He cried! How often do we fall on our knees and weep over the sins of those who do us wrong?

William Barclay observes: "If we seek nothing but a man's highest good, we may well have to resist a man; we may well have to punish him; we may well have to do the hardest things to him –for the good of his immortal soul . . . It will always be done in that forgiving love which seeks, . . . always his highest good. In other words, *agape* means treating men as God treats them –and that does not mean allowing them unchecked to do as they like" (*New Testament Words*, p. 22-23).

Love "never fails" (v. 8). It is eternal; it never comes to an end.

Positive Characteristics of Love

"Love is patient" (v. 4). "Patience" (*makrothymia*) is to be longsuffering. It is the capacity to be wronged and not retaliate. Trench said it is a long holding out of the mind before it gives into action or passion. It will remain steadfast and not give in. Peter asked Jesus, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven." It takes a long time before becoming irritated and braking into flames. Paul's emphasis is on the continual and habitual state of patience. That is love in action.

"Love is kind" (v. 4). This is the person who demonstrates gracious healthy wholesome service to others. It is a disposition that acts with kindness. "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love, in honor preferring one another" (Romans 12:10). We see the kindness of Jesus when He "felt compassion" for the multitudes, and healed "every kind of disease and every kind of sickness" (Matthew 9:35).

Love "rejoices with the truth" (v. 6). Love does not rejoice in a fraud or cover-up regardless of whose side you are on. It rejoices in the truth regardless of whose pride is at stake. We live in a day that admonishes "don't hurt anybody's feelings" instead of rejoicing in the truth. We put carnal feelings ahead of truth. In our day we are encouraged, almost demanded, to be "tolerant" and go by personal biases instead of rejoicing with the truth. This is a day in which it is wrong to side with truth. Love "rejoices with the truth."

Love "bears [covers] all things" (v. 7). Love covers like the protection of a roof, and endures. It has the ability to weather the storms of life. 1 Peter 4:8 reminds us that "love covers a multitude of sins." It throws a veil over things. Love patiently and silently endures persecution. We see it incarnate in the life of Jesus as He stood before Pilate and Herod and "He answered him not one word" (Matthew 27:14).

Love "believes all things" (v. 7). We are admonished to remain steadfast in the face of unpleasant situations in life. You don't have to be suspicious and question everyone. Try to see things in the best light. Don't be gullible, but do have faith in men.

Love "hopes all things" (v. 9). It perseveres and does not easily give up, even on the hopeless. It does not despair because it is optimistic.

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Love "endures all things" (v. 7). It is dependable; it never fails. It bears up patiently and survives everything. Jesus endured the cross, despising its shame and remained faithful to the Father's will. ". . . While being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting *Himself* to Him who judges righteously . . ." (1 Peter 2:23).

Love "abides" (v. 13). What was true of Christ's love toward His disciples is true of His love now. It abides.

Love is "the greatest" (v. 13). It is an attribute of God.

Love is something God does.

1 John 4:10, "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins." John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." Ephesians 5:25, ". . . Christ . . . loved the church and gave Himself up for her." Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ; and 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 up for me." Cf. 1 John 4:8, 16

Did you notice how love edifies? It builds up the body of Christ. Forgiveness means that we wipe the record clean and never hold things against people (Ephesians 4:26, 32).

Compare these characteristics with the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23. I like what Spurgeon wrote: "Joy is love enjoying itself; Peace is love resting; Patience is love waiting; Kindness is love reacting; Goodness is love choosing; Faithfulness is love keeping its word; Gentleness is love empathizing; and Self-control is love resisting temptation."

Perhaps someone is saying, "Yeah, that sounds great, but how do I respond with loving attitudes and behaviors in my situation? How do you do it? How do you put this into practice in my home?"

THE INDWELLING LOVE OF CHRIST

The Son of God indwells every believer.

"It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me," wrote the apostle Paul in Galatians 2:20.

Romans 5:5, "the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us." Wuest translates, ". . . the love of God has been poured out in our hearts and still floods them through the agency of the Holy Spirit who was given to us." (Cf. Titus 3:5-7) It is "the act of the Spirit at the time of the conversion of the individual taking up His permanent abode in his inner being" (Wuest). Every believer has the Spirit of Christ (Rom. 8:9) in the sense that He is indwelt by the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 John 3:24; 4:13).

The Holy Spirit makes real the living presence of Jesus Christ in the believer. It was Jonathan Swift, the satirical author of *Gulliver's Travels*, who said, "We have just enough religion to make us hate, but not enough to make us love one another." How tragic when Christ lives within us and desires to love the world through us.

Christ seeks to live His life through us.

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1 John 4:7-8, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love."

Has the Holy Spirit placed someone in your life that is hard to love? The Holy Spirit releases the love of God in us to reach out to others. The only way we can love the unlovely and unlovable is by abiding in Christ. Only as we walk in the Spirit can we put to death daily our "flesh" nature that is all together unlovely. Only by Christ living in me can I overcome jealousy, arrogant pride, an unbecoming behavior, selfishness, a quick flash of temper, or tear up a long agenda of wrongs done me by others.

The Holy Spirit takes possession of the believer and sheds abroad the love of God in his heart. It is realistic. It says, "Lord, I can't love that person's arrogant pride, or obstinate behavior, or the selfish attitudes. I can't, but You do. Here is my attitude. Here are my opinionated views, here I am. Please, you do what I can not do. Here I am, You love this person through me. I sincerely want the very best for this person the way you view it."

It is Christ living in me that produces patience, kindness, hope, endurance, steadfastness, etc.

God has provided us the power to die daily to our selfish ambitions and unwholesome motives and behaviors. He lives His life through us enabling us to love sacrificially those who are altogether unlovely.

C. T. Studd said, "If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice is too great for me to make for Him."

Ephesians 4:31-32 expresses love in action. "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you."

Husbands, do you love your wife in the same sacrificial love in which Christ loved and gave Himself for His church? (cf. Ephesians 5:25)

This grand passage of Scripture reminds us of the ABC's of love.

A = I ACCEPT you just the way you are.

B = I BELIEVE you are valuable.

C = I CARE when you hurt.

D = I DESIRE what is best for you.

E = I EASE the burdens you carry.

F= I FORGIVE you of all offenses.

There are people all about us who need that touch of Christ. Christ in you is the only one who can reach out and touch that individual. He has chosen to love that person through you. Perhaps, from past experience, you feel you can not do it. The Lord knows you can not do it in your strength alone. He does not even ask you to do it alone. But if you will ask Him He will love that person through you. May the Lord give us His grace to

do it alone. But if you will ask Him He will love that person through you. May the Lord give us His grace to apply this great truth in our lives this week.

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Series: The Christian Family

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