

## Prayers

### To God

Thank You Jesus, for loving me! May all my days be spent in giving You the praise and glory that is Your due, and may I hold my hands up high to receive Your love, Your joy and Your peace. Thank You Jesus! AMEN

### For myself

*Give glory to God for the way He can transform your life. Look back on the last few days. Has anything changed? Has the Lord done anything out of the ordinary to help you move forward in faith? If not, ask yourself some questions about where you are in your life of faith.*

### For others

*Pray for countries where there is political turmoil; at this time, pray for Egypt. In a world in which we know little of the people who hold real power, may God's will be done even though many do not know it, or even accept it.*

## Meditation

Did You look upon the people, Lord and see the hunger in their eyes?  
Did You know the ones who would walk with You;  
Saddened by those who preferred themselves and turned away?

Did You hope that those who turned would turn again;  
Instead of walking on in self, rejecting You forever?  
Or did you know, because of how they looked at You  
That there was either love or hate within their eyes;  
And every time You sought them out and caught their eyes  
You knew they either said a 'Yes', or a very definite 'No'!

With both elation and rejection standing there in front of You,  
You knew the consequences through and through;  
You always took the 'Yes' and let the 'No' just walk away.  
For love accepts the choices made; it grieves the sadness of a loss  
Yet loves the glorious fruit of Yes, eternally ensured,  
From now until You come again and all is said and done, forever.

## Bible Passage

### 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

<sup>4</sup>Love is patient, love is kind.

Love is not jealous,  
• boastful,  
• arrogant

- <sup>5</sup> or rude;

Love is not self seeking,

- it is not easily provoked,
- and does not dwell on evil;
- <sup>6</sup> it takes no delight in injustice but rejoices in the truth.

<sup>7</sup> Love protects all things,

- believes all things,
- hopes all things,
- endures all things.

## Review

Here is the marvellous heart of 1 Corinthians 13! As we saw yesterday, the first three verses focus on the world's lack of love and its desperate need for faithful, free and sacrificial love found only in its creator God. In today's passage, Paul allows us to rejoice in some of the qualities of love to which we may be inspired by the inspiration of God's Spirit. He writes about some of them positively, i.e. '*love is patient, love is kind ...*' (13:4), and some negatively, i.e. '*love is not easily upset*' (13:5), to offer us a fascinating analysis of love as experience by all people of all kinds. It is a passage which appeals to so many, it is often included in wedding services!

But we should not read this passage as if it was simple advice, given to tell us what we must do or not do and thence get 'love' right. These words reveal the very characteristics and nature of God Himself, and the qualities that took Christ to the Cross! This is not just a description of love's key characteristics, but as close a description of the heart of God as it is possible to get!

### ***The structure of this passage***

There are four sections to our reading. First, Paul identifies love positively as '*patient and kind*' (13:4), which is what we might expect of a generous description of love. Against this, we must contrast the next four characteristics, which are expressed as the opposite of love, that is, jealousy, boastfulness, arrogance and rudeness (13:4,5). Four more less obvious qualities of love follow, expressed again as the absence of the negative qualities, this time of self seeking, provocation, dwelling on evil and delighting in injustice (13:5,6). The passage is then capped with four profoundly positive characteristics of love, which are protection, belief, hope and endurance (13:7).

The overall effect of Paul's words is remarkable; he is persuasive, deeply moving and demanding, and all who read this are left with complex feelings. On the one hand we are blessed by this wise and comprehensive understanding of love, but on the other hand we are profoundly challenged by our own behaviour, which so often fails against the searing light of this spiritual and moral goodness. I fail to understand where people without faith imagine that standards and moral rectitude come from, but God's people know that it comes from God Himself and is made known to us through the love of our Lord Jesus Christ, in all these qualities.

### ***Patience and kindness (13:4)***

Patience and kindness work as a pair of words to give us an overall understanding of love. Yesterday I used the terms '*faithful, free and sacrificial*' to describe God's love, but we can hardly expect this to be generally understood so Paul offers a fuller explanation here. To begin with, patience is the ability to wait with faith and goodwill for right to prevail; it absorbs distress and anxious waiting because it is confident in God and His power, by which '*all things work together for good*' (Romans 8:28).

Kindness, however, is not merely an attitude, it is love 'in practice', as shown in deeds of generosity, often unexpected. The word used for kindness here is also found in the list of spiritual fruits (Gal 5:22), but is not found anywhere else in the New Testament, and only rarely in first century writing! The use of this word is an example of Paul remarkably 'polished' writing here, which has had linguists marvelling over it for centuries.

God's people have known for centuries that He has shown us patience and kindness over the centuries, as shown in the history of the Old Testament. The Jewish rejection of God's kindness and patience as demonstrated in His 'Messiah', Jesus, is the reason why the Church has been founded with a 'New Covenant'. Despite such rejection, God's kindness and patience can never come to an end, so He has started again with a new 'people of God who receive His love. Paul sets before his readers a picture of love that is patient and kind not so much a gift, but as the truth about God who saves His people. If we yield to Him, then He will make us patient and kind where necessary for the purposes of His Kingdom.

### **Love is not ... 'a,b,c,d' (13:4,5)**

When we speak of human qualities, it can often help to speak of what is not good, in order to emphasise what is, and Paul does this here, listing four negative features of human behaviour; *'jealous'*, *'boastful'*, *'arrogant'*, and *'rude'*. His message is that if we will indulge ourselves in these things, then we compromise the message of love that lies at the heart of both our call and our witness.

- Fascinatingly, *'Jealous'* is the negative of the same word Paul uses for *'strive'* in the previous chapter (*'strive for the higher gifts ...'* 12:31), or put another way, a negative form of *'zeal'*. This reminds us that at heart, jealousy is the angst of not being able to get hold of something for which you long.
- Any Greek dictionary will tell us that the word for *'boastful'* is uncomplimentary, referring to those who are so busy with their own opinions they have little time for others. This means almost the same as *'arrogant'*, and in the Greek, both words could be translated *'windbag'*, perhaps *'full of hot air'*! As we all know but find difficult, those who speak too much of their own opinions will rarely advance the cause of love.
- The word *'rude'* is the Greek *'aschemoneo'*, and you may spot within this the word *'schema'*, so rudeness may be defined as not keeping to an agreed plan or *'scheme'* of things. There may be times to get *'outside the box'* as we say today, but we should be careful not to be rude. To preserve the witness of love, we need know the difference!

### **Love is not ... 'e,f,g,h' (13:5,6)**

- Next, Paul says that love must not be *'self seeking'* (13:5), which sounds like a call to avoid self centredness. A literal translation of this however is, *'do not seek your own things'*, which suggests that what diverts us away from God are often the *'things'* of life, our possessions.
- Love does not work well when people are *'easily provoked'* (13:5). The Greek can be translated as *'easily upset'*, indicating irritability, quick anger, or perhaps touchy. The trouble with this is that it can be hard for people to be loving when surrounded by such *'edginess'*, because at any moment a safe situation can turn into a difficult one!
- We are next called not to *'dwell on evil'* (13:5). The phrase reflects allowing oneself to think about evil or keep a record of it, allowing evil to dominate thoughts and deeds, as in *'thinking the worst'* about someone or something. It is a destructive state of mind, and love is fundamentally compromised by it.
- Paul's last *'prompt'* says that love; *'takes no delight in injustice but rejoices in the truth'*. Now, the whole of the Biblical story concerns God's just and merciful work in this world, so unless God's people align themselves to His unremitting work for justice they can hardly expect to fall into the lap of His love!

### **The work of love (13:7)**

The final four words expressing the nature of love are impressive, but differing translations make them hard to understand. *'Love protects all things'* is sometime translated *'bears all things'*, but this phrase comes from a Greek word meaning *'to cover or protect'*, hence my translation. So love offers protection and care within a world full of evil and sin. The world pays little attention to this idea of protection and covering, but it is essential to the what we mean by the love of God, which we seek to emulate.

As we reach the end of today's passage we find a theme beginning to develop, for when Paul says that love *'believes all things, hopes all things ...'* (13:7), he is setting down in writing something to which he will shortly return. These two qualities of faith and hope are to be found in the famous last verse of the chapter; *'so faith hope and love abide, but the greatest of these is love'* (13:13). Nevertheless, we are not yet in the land of the eternal, and so faith and hope are recorded here as essential ingredients to the one quality Paul is writing about here in this chapter, the quality of love.

And lastly for today, Paul tells us that love *'endures all things'* (13:7). How wonderful this sounds when we want love from others and how hard it sounds when we are called to give it! Yet how true we know this to be. True love is not willing to stand down from supporting anyone; it is not willing to walk away from the Cross, and it is willing to be patient for ever. We have now turned full circle in this powerful passage about love, returning to its qualities of patience and endurance (13:4,7). The Christian knows that God's love is patient and endures all things, because Jesus has done this for us, waiting for us and enduring all things for our salvation on the Cross. We cannot turn away from this gracious and essential quality of God's love.

# Discipleship

## Application

### *Love in the life of the church*

It is tragic that today, many people have a clear lack of love for the church of God, sometimes even those who attend it. So it is no wonder that in some places, the church is open to attack from the enemy. It needs the protection of love! But in addition to protection, love *'believes all things and hopes all things'*. Surely, we need to share this quality of love within the church today, for as soon as we place aside all the problems, personalities and divisions, we quickly realise that absolutely nothing is impossible for the smallest group of God's people! Faith connects believers with the greatest power known, the Holy Spirit, and this connects us with the ultimate destiny of the world in the heart and mind of God. Why should we not hope in complete success, when trusting in the love of God?

### *Love in action*

There is so much for us to rejoice in within this passage, but it is not just that Paul has given us here a model of human love to which we may aspire, and perhaps achieve in part. This great vision of love comes from the love of God shown to us in Christ Jesus. Moreover, it is a love we may know in depth because of the presence of Christ within us. With this full assurance, we may be confident that we do not have to strive for these qualities as if they were some necessary response to God, and obedience to them was an alternative to Old Testament Law! We need to know this passage, because by knowing Christ and knowing that these are His words imprinted on our hearts by His love, we can put love into action successfully. On the one hand, Christ works through us to achieve what we cannot, and on the other hand, we commit ourselves totally to a right attitude, and the 'checklist' of 1 Corinthians 13 is not there to condemn us, but to make sure we know where, in Christ's strength we should be heading.

### *Following through a passage such as this, in detail*

We may indeed be at fault if we ignore such scriptures. Surely, each one of us must respond to a text like this and ask the Lord how we should receive His word, and apply it. It may be that we each need to take one item from this list and seek the Lord's help, so that our good intent to express love through faith may become a reality. Some of our own attitudes may need to be given over to Him so that He can work in us anew, in faith and hope. It may be that others are called to read these words each morning, because a gentle reminder every morning will ensure that we knowingly submit our more difficult characteristics to His grace and guidance. There are thousands of applications of this text, but only one that may change your life to one that is in line with God's will for your life, and breaks the power of the enemy so that your life will become a testimony to the living God, and His love.

## Ideas for what to do

- *Take time to ask the Lord how He wants you to remember this text, and use it to become a more loving and Christ-like person. If you ask Him, He will show you the way to use this text positively.*
- *Ask the Lord to help you maintain a life that is a demonstration of His love, and seeks to overcome all that is contrary to love in your own life.*

## Questions (for use in groups)

1. *In your group, write down a list of what love is, and then compare it with what Paul says in this passage.*
2. *In you group, write down a list of what love is not, and then compare it with what Paul says in this passage.*
3. *Where would you go in the Bible (apart from this passage) to answer the question 'what is the love of God like'?*

## Final Prayer

We give You glory, great and powerful Lord;  
We wait on Your word, Lord Jesus Christ;  
We listen to You, Covenant Lord of all;  
We do what You tell us, glorious Saviour;  
And by so doing, our lives are complete. **AMEN**