

Today is Mother's Day – a day in which we honor our mothers, but in reality, we should honor them every day, because where would we be without them. We celebrate this day by giving our mothers flowers, cards, gifts, taking them out to dinner, breakfast in bed, and many others ways. Now when you think of mothers, one of the first words that come to your mind is love, love for her family, children and in most of our cases, grandchildren. To me the best passage that describes mothers and their love is found in 1 Corinthians 13.

Read 1 Corinthians 13

According to the *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, Police Chief Phil Keith was in the middle of a city council meeting in Knoxville, Tennessee, when his pager beeped. Startled to see that the call was from his mother, he rushed to the press room and phoned her. "Philip James Keith, are you chewing gum?" demanded his mom who had been watching the meeting on the local cable TV station. "Yes, ma'am." "Well, it looks awful. Spit it out!" Keith obeyed, removed the gum, and went back to his meeting.

There's no one like mom! The words "mother" and "love" go together like our left and right hands; they should be interchangeable. Thus, on this Mother's Day, there is no better passage to study than the "Love Chapter" of the Bible which describes the agape love of God that is necessary for not only mothers, but also for fathers, sons, daughters, and all of us. This is the kind of love that Jesus Christ demonstrated in His life and the love that He expects from each one of us who call Him our Lord and Savior.

As we have discussed before, agape love is the attitude that always seeks the best for others no matter how you feel about them. If you regard a person with agape love, then it means that nothing he or she can do or say will make you seek anything but the best for them. When the well-being of another person is more important to you than your own well-being, then you are practicing agape love. Now doesn't that sound like a mother? However, the qualities of agape love are not restricted to just mothers, but are expected of all of us who call ourselves Christians.

In this 13th chapter of 1 Corinthians, the Apostle Paul gives us a list of qualities that we should all strive to reflect in our personal lives. Let's look at these characteristics and see how we stack up. Let's start with verse 1: "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." Love is superior to eloquent words. You may be able to speak in many different languages, but if it is not spoken with love, it is nothing but noise. Love in action speaks louder than mere words.

The *Message* paraphrases the second verse like this: “If I speak God’s Word with power, revealing all His mysteries and making everything plain as day, and if I have faith that says to a mountain “jump,” and it jumps, but I don’t have love, I’m nothing.” If you don’t have the love for God and your fellow human beings in your heart, then all the knowledge of the Bible and power in the world are useless. Mother Teresa said: “It’s not how much you do, but how much love you put into what you do that counts.”

In the third verse Paul addresses giving with love as he does in 2 Corinthians 9:7 which states: “Each person should give what he had decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” In other words we should give out of love for others. To give as a duty or obligation; to give with a certain contempt; to stand on one’s own little superiority and throw scraps of charity as to a dog; to give and to accompany the giving with a smug moral lecture or harsh criticism, is not charity at all – it’s pride, and pride is always cruel for it knows no love. You can give without loving, but you cannot love without giving.

In verses 4 through 7, Paul paints a beautiful picture of love for us to copy. Unfortunately, he starts with one of the more difficult characteristics for some of us; “love is patient.” How many of you have mastered the art of patience? It appears that I am not alone in falling short in this expectation of a Christian. We live in an impatient world; what we want, we want now. Our fast food must be just that – fast. Instant pudding, instant rice, and instant results are part of our life. An individual was praying for patience and told the Lord that he wanted it “right now.”

The Greek word used in the New Testament for patience always describes patience with people and not circumstances. It describes a person who is slow to anger, and it is also used to describe God’s relationship with us. We are called to exercise the same kind of patience with those around us as God does with us, and believe me some of us really try God’s patience! Someone said that the world would be a much better place if we showed the same patience with others as we do waiting for a fish to bite. This kind of patience never gives up on anyone; this is God’s love.

Love is kind; it does not envy. In other words, love cares more for others than yourself; love doesn’t want what it doesn’t have. Here again is agape love – wanting the best for others instead of ourselves. Paul tells us in Philippians 4:12 that he has learned “the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.” Paul’s focus was on Jesus and not himself; as long as he had Jesus, he didn’t need anything else. He trusted the Lord to provide his daily bread, what he needed for each day; thus he did not need to be envious of what others had. Unfortunately, we live in a society today where advertisements tell us that we need more, that we need to keep up with the Joneses, instead of being happy with what we have and how God has blessed us. It’s hard to have love in your heart when you are jealous of what your neighbor has.

Love does not boast; it is not proud. Love does not parade around and get all puffed up. Love does not brag or sing its own praises. It realizes that whatever it has is a gift of God. Have you ever met a proud person; someone who has to tell you how great they are, what they have done; their focus is entirely on themselves? Most of the time these people are all talk and no action. What a person does is a whole lot more important than what they tell you they have done or are going to do.

Sometimes we think too highly of ourselves. For example, the legendary coach of the Green Bay Packers, Vince Lombardi, became accustomed to fans seeking his autograph. One day while eating in a restaurant, he spotted a young boy approaching his table. Lombardi grabbed a menu and quickly scribbled his name. When the kid got to Lombardi's table, the coach handed him the autographed menu. To which the boy replied: "I don't need a menu; I just came over to borrow your ketchup."

Love is not rude. Rudeness displays a lack of regard for the other person's feelings. Speaking the truth is never an excuse to criticize. You know sometimes we don't realize how rude and hurtful our comments can be. As a Christian, this is something that we all need to be aware of. It is wiser to choose what we say than to say what we choose.

Love never insists on its own way. Someone said that there are two kinds of people in the world: those who always insist on their privileges and those who always remember their responsibilities. There are those who are always thinking of what life owes them and what's in it for them. But fortunately, there are those who never forget what they owe to life and what they can give back. Our country, communities, and world would be a lot better place if more people would think less of their own rights and more of their duties and services to others. Love never seeks its own way at the expense of others; it is not self-seeking, not self-centered, but Christ centered.

Love keeps no record of wrongs. The word used here is translated "store-up" and is an accounting term. It's like keeping a ledger of all the hurts; it's a "who-done-me-wrong list." If you want to destroy a marriage or relationship, then start keeping a scorecard and bringing up the past. When I counsel couples preparing for marriage, I try to make sure they understand this. One of the greatest lessons in life is not only learning to forgive, but also to forget. As Christians we are called to forgive and forget. The Lord's Prayer puts it very clearly: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." We are to wipe the slate clean as our Lord and Savior has already done for us.

Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices in the truth. This can be better translated as: "love finds no pleasure in anything that is wrong." I don't think Paul is talking about taking pleasure in doing something wrong; instead I believe he is focusing on those who enjoy hearing about

the problems in other people's lives. Unfortunately, it is human nature that we would rather hear about people's problems than their joys. What's the old saying: "bad news travels fast." As Christians we are called to exhort others and encourage them, not to criticize them or to spread gossip or rumors about them. Love rejoices in the virtues of others, not their vices.

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. In other words love covers all; it never exposes the faults and mistakes of others. We all know people that if you make a mistake, they will make sure that not only you but everybody else is aware of it. However, Christian love will seek to resolve the issue behind the scene one-on-one. This is the kind of love that is always positive, not negative; always building others up instead of finding fault and tearing them down.

The concluding verses in this chapter tell us that love never fails; it abides forever; and it can be adapted to all the circumstances we find ourselves in. Love is the greatest gift of all that a mother or any of us can give. It should be our number one priority. Love is the litmus test for those created in the image of God.

It describes the kind of love that is in the heart of Jesus Christ Himself. On our own we cannot develop this love, especially for those difficult people in our lives.; it is only through the power of the Holy Spirit that we are able to love others as Jesus taught. All the statements and doctrine in the Bible can be summed up in three words: "God is love;" and this love is demonstrated in Jesus Christ. He set the example for us to follow.

Each of us has been given one life to live. How we live it will depend a lot on how we love one another. And this in turn will determine if we will really make a difference in this life. Now by difference, I'm not talking about how big an inheritance you leave, how much money you have in the bank, the size of your house or car, or how many degrees or titles you have. No, I don't believe any of these things matter to God.

What will and does matter is whether we are living as described by Paul in this letter to the Corinthians. Love is what makes the difference in life; love for one another. Jesus told us in John 13:34-35 that we will be known as His disciples by how we love one another; if we seek the best for our fellow human beings in all situations. This is the kind of love that I believe most mothers have. Note that I said most because some of you may not have experienced this kind of love from your mothers. Mothers like all of us are human and not perfect.

Now my mother was a wonderful Christian woman, but she had her faults. She never stopped talking; the apple didn't fall far from the tree, did it? You had to wait for her to stop to catch her breath to get a word in and it was usually "yes ma'am." But she had the love of Jesus Christ in her heart, the kind of love Paul wrote about. When she died in 1994 my brothers and I found out that she had died in debt. One of the town fathers told me that my mother's heart was

bigger than her pocketbook. She was always helping those in need. What a legacy to leave! What kind of legacy will you leave? Let us all commit to love as Jesus wants us to and to make a difference in this church, community and our families by demonstrating this love in every aspect of our daily life. May God give us loving moms, loving dads, but most of all, may He give us all loving hearts. Amen