

Wise Up – High-Way Wisdom  
1 Corinthians 13  
April 2, 2017

*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. 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. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.*

Military people often joke that an order that can be misunderstood will be misunderstood. That same thought can be applied to raising children or being married. Misunderstanding is a problem the human race will never conquer. That's because the root cause of misunderstanding is sin.

Today we are going to look at something people usually misunderstand – the concept of love. People define love in an unlimited number of ways. Of all the ways there are to define love, only one is accurate. In the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of 1 Corinthians, Paul sets forth the only proper definition of love. It's a pure love. It's a selfless love. It's a God-like love.

### **The supremacy of love**

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In the opening three verses, Paul makes it clear there is nothing superior to love. You might have the best of human abilities. You might have power to do incredible things. You might even sacrifice everything you have, up to and including your life. But if you have a loveless heart, all you are and all you do amounts to nothing.

### **The character of love**

*Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.* (1 Co 13:4 NIV).

The patience of love isn't just ordinary patience. The Greek concept of this patience is patience while being provoked. That means love is "long-tempered" not "short-tempered." It's the patient love Jesus showed when he ask his Father to forgive his executioners.

The kindness of real love goes beyond the kindness the world knows. This kindness isn't just a gentleness toward others. It actively seeks good for others. This kindness respects and reaches out to others in ways that are meaningful for their lives.

True love is never jealous. It doesn't envy the success and possessions of others. Rather, it rejoices in the good God brings to other people's lives. Jealousy is one of the most vile sins we can harbor in our hearts. It was Eve's jealousy of God that brought her to eating the forbidden fruit. It was Cain's jealousy of Able that led to the first murder.

Love never brags about itself. Bragging is just an attempt to get attention. Bragging comes from an empty and insecure heart. The person who must be the center of attention at all times is a lonely, scared person. The person who must be center-stage at all times is not walking in true love.

Love is not arrogant or proud. Real love realizes that all it has and all it will ever have is a gift from God. All of our gifts and talents, no matter how spectacular they might be are ours because of the grace of our heavenly Father.

*[Love] is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.* (1 Co 13:5 NIV).

Love is never rude. True love treats other people with compassion, consideration, and respect. Have you ever met someone who just couldn't control their temper? That person needs a lesson in true love. Love is the only force that can restrain our negative human emotions. God-like love is never friendly one day and rude the next.

True love is never self-centered. It never says or thinks, "It's all about me." Real love has an outward focus. It concentrates on what will be best for the other person. It is concerned about the other person's needs. It always puts the other person first.

Love is not easily angered. This characteristic of love means that love never demands its own rights. Anger comes from having your goals frustrated. In other words, anger comes when you don't get what you want. Anger is based in selfishness. The only anger love should ever know are the things that anger God.

Love doesn't keep a list of all the things someone else has done. Everyone has a past. Everyone has done or said things they wish they hadn't. Would you like all of those things in your past to be forgotten, never again to see the light of day? That is the gift of true love. Love let's people enjoy the luxury of leaving the past in the past. To keep a list of another person's wrongs is to carry a grudge. Carrying a grudge is like being stung to death by one bee.

*Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.* (1 Co 13:6 NIV).

Love does not rejoice in sin. True love hates sin. Whether it's our own sin or the sin of others, love is repulsed by sin. Love is never glad to see someone else fall into sin. Therefore, love never passes on a juicy bit of gossip about a person straying from the straight and narrow.

While love hates sin, it always rejoices in the truth. Love rejoices when truth is proclaimed and truth is victorious over falsehood. Having said that, love also recognizes that sometimes the truth can be hurtful. True love lives by the rule of "*speaking the truth in love*" (Eph 4:15 NIV).

*[Love] always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.* (1 Co 13:7 NIV).

True love never runs from a battle to protect those who are in any type of peril. True love would never turn its back on the unborn, the elderly, the homeless, the hungry, the lost of society. Real love fights for those who cannot fight for themselves. It cares for those who cannot care for themselves. It loves those whom no one else loves. Love always protects.

Love always places the best possible construction on everything. It doesn't always go looking for a negative answer. True love always trusts that God is in control and God's Will will be done. Love trusts that good will triumph no matter what the present looks like.

True love always has hope. Love refuses to accept failure. Love looks for a positive future. Most of us, maybe all of us, know someone who has fallen away from the faith, or someone who has never come to faith. But true love maintains hope. True love storms the gates of heaven on that person's behalf, because the hope of salvation is based in love.

True love never "gives up the fort." To persevere means to stand firm under any and all opposition. Love continues in spite of persecution, ill treatment, and even betrayal. Love bears the unbearable, believes the impossible, holds on to the incredible, and never gives up. The word "quit" isn't found in the vocabulary of love.

*Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.* (1 Co 13:8-12 NIV).

When everything the world values so highly is gone, love will still exist. When all talents are erased, when all knowledge is useless, love will hold fast. When we put away childishness and start acting like mature adults, we realize the value and power of true

love. When the world turns us out, love takes us in. Love never fails. It never gives in or gives out. And that brings us to the last verse.

### **The resilience of love.**

*Now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.* (1 Co 13:13 NIV).

This verse tells us that faith, hope, and love are everlasting. Yet, if you go back to verse 7, you see that faith and hope are both products of love. The greatest thing a believer can possess is love. If our love is right, then our faith is right. If our love is right, then our hope is in the proper place.

So, what makes love so important? What makes love so great? Love is the defining quality of God. When the apostle John set out to describe God, he wrote: *Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.* (1 Jn 4:8, 16 NIV).

God doesn't have faith. Who is there for God to put his faith in? God doesn't hope. What could the creator and owner of the universe hope for? Yet God is love. We are never more like our God, we are never closer to living the High-Way of life, than when we love others the way God loves us.