

1st Corinthians 13:1-7

1 If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 3 If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. 4 Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant 5 or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6 it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. 7 It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

The church in Corinth had a problem. Speaking in tongues was not the problem. It was that the people who spoke in tongues used the ability as means of supremacy. So, the Apostle Paul spends a considerable amount of time in his letter to the church combating this problem. He lays out the significance of speaking in tongues along with some virtues. Speaking in tongues is nothing without love. Prophetic power is nothing without love. Wisdom is nothing without love. Even faith itself is nothing without love. That is a very important concept to grasp. We all know that we have to have faith. The Apostle Paul is stating that we have to have love because our faith is nothing without it. Anything that we do in ministry If I do not have love, it is of no gain or value. Love is the answer.

When the Apostle Paul was laying out his lesson he may have had some kind of real life scenario in his mind, or maybe he heard a story of situation that needed to be addressed. Perhaps he saw, heard about, or knew of someone that gave away a large amount of money but it was done for selfish gain or glorification. People that give from a spirit of ostentation are motivated by the display of impressionism, not out of care for the people. The Apostle Paul is addressing a problem of social notoriety, presumed status, and self aggrandizement.

The Apostle Paul does not define love. What he does is he tell the readers how it works. Love is patient and kind. Love is not envious, boastful, arrogant, or rude. The Apostle Paul made a brilliant case. One point established a foundation for the next. Spiritual gifts build up the body. Any gift that anybody has is for the whole body. The next point is that the body is one body with one spirit. The next point is that love is the cement that binds it all together in perfect harmony. Love is very crucial. Love is what God is all about. Love comes to us from God. Love unites us together. It is human desire that separates us, divides us, and creates conflict. Love is the answer and is to be practiced in all relationships, especially within the realm of the Christian community. Love is the bond of unity. Love deepens our fellowship with one another and with Christ.

Love is the antithesis and self importance and self display. Love is the motivational factor in all of our actions. The Apostle Paul addresses several gifts, talents, tools for ministry, and action taken. They are all to be motivated by love. The powers of prophecy, knowledge, and faith, are nothing without love. The powers of charity and self sacrifice are nothing without love. Any virtue is useless unless it is performed with love. The most worthy motive is love which is not envious or arrogant and does not insist on its own way. When love is missing our relationships disintegrate. Issues become vain, selfish, and fruitless. People become individualistic, self-serving, with an internal focus.

The nature of love is an external focus. The nature of love is relationship. It considers the needs of others, it is reciprocal, bears, and endures.

Many years ago, I was engaged in a conversation with a colleague. He was working with a wealthy member of his church for a capital project contribution. She flat out told him that she was accustomed to getting her way. Her sizeable contribution to the capital project came with the condition that she have it her way. My advice to him was to reject the gift, but be sure to explain why. Invite her into sanctuary where the atmosphere is most reverent and have a private meeting with her in front of the altar. Tell her this is God's church. It is not my church or your church but God's church. It is Gods way not your way and Gods way is love. Gifts to the ministry come out of love, are received out of love, and love is unconditional.

Love is the gift that God gives. The conglomerate of Christian virtues is founded on love. It is out of love that God gave us Jesus. It is out of love that Jesus sacrificed himself. Love is the answer. Love is a reflection of God's character. Love is the persona of Christ and the center of spirituality. Jesus is the best example of love. Jesus teaches us to love each other. Jesus teaches us that love comes first. The whole life of Jesus is an act of love. We are to love God with all of the heart, mind, soul, and strength. We are to love each other in a very specific way - as Jesus loves us. Love is the greatest gift we have ever received. It is the greatest gift that God has to give and the greatest gift that you can give to others.

The problem that the Apostle Paul was faced with back then is just like it is today. People tend to do their own thing instead of God's thing. It is the human will that is at odds with the will of God. The contemporary lesson for us is to do the very best that we can to take on the persona of Christ. We are to be guided by the Holy Spirit. We are to mimic the life of Jesus Christ.