

What does love look like from God's perspective?

I have performed countless weddings! A lot of them quote from 1 Corinthians chapter 13 about love. How many have had these scriptures read at your weddings?

Marriage is the perfect place to put into practice this kind of love because marriage is life up close. If there was a place to practice this kind of love it would be marriage. [The story about "my kitchen"]

1 Corinthians 13 is interestingly placed between two chapters talking about spiritual gifts. I find it interesting anyway! So chapter 12 is all about prophesying and chapter 14 is all about speaking tongues and separating these two teaching chapters is a chapter on love!

In the whole context of the Book of Corinthians this chapter on love is powerful to a church that desperately needed some order brought to it and the subject of love was paramount. The Corinthian church was a large, multi-ethnic and economically diverse group of people. It was a messy church battling many kinds of problems. Believe me they were a church with loads of problems.

Chapter 13 stands as a powerful exception to all this correction, instruction and teaching on church life and gets to the very basis of how to live as Christians in the midst of troubling church life and present our message to the world. Paul taught about love! It was gritty love, relentless love and a love that would drag each of them through the mud of difficult and dark situations.

It wasn't a secret – the church at Corinth had a lot of problems in using spiritual gifts. In fact there were people in the church abusing spiritual gifts. But let's face it they were abusing the church, church leaders and each other! This was an excitingly messy church. The church had loads of problems but continued to grow dramatically! Now Paul was an insightful pastor and leader and he brings it back to the greatest point of love.

1 Corinthians 13: 1 – 3, "If I speak in the tongues [or languages] of men or of angels, but do not have 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 do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, ***I gain nothing.***"

In this passage Paul argues that unless your actions are motivated by love you gain nothing. This powerful thought indirectly impacts on all of the concerns Paul had with this new church plant! The folks in Corinth knew precisely what he was on about too!

Live by the law of love in every area of church life – even when they are tough situations to deal with – deal with them with love. In Corinth Paul did just that! Paul's teaching struck a blow to motivation and spoke directly to the "why are we doing these thing."

Let's be honest, our motive are often called into question. I'm not here to judge the inner workings of your heart either. Not my job! Holy Spirit has that task! I don't know why you do what you do. I know Paul is teaching us that unless our actions are motivated by love ***it profits us nothing.*** It's hard to know and fathom the true motivations of the human heart. But Paul says if our actions are motivated by love we gain and not lose.

What is our motivation for our actions? Why do we do what we do? **Proverbs 16: 2** says, "All a person's ways seem pure to them, but motives are weighed by the LORD."

Paul's inspiration to us is to live love! Live as people who love God and love their neighbour. Have motives inspired by love. Serving on teams, caring for people, tithing and reaching out to others – we need to know we're being motivated by God's great love.

In **1 Corinthians 13** Paul argues that love is a clear and discernable action, not just an emotion. These actions motivated by love are in fact a demonstration of love not merely a warm fuzzy feeling or a mushy bit of sentimentality. God's love is gritty!

The Bible doesn't hide from us the nature of God's gritty love in **Romans 5: 6 – 8** says, "You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

Christ died for the ungodly – He offered Himself as a sacrifice for sin out of love. It was the joy set before Him that motivated His decision to die for us while we were yet sinners. God demonstrates His love for us. He reveals explicitly and unambiguously that love is giving sacrificially, love is giving when it hurts. This is a timely reminder to us in a world so divided and angry. Love remains the defining attribute that the world will see that will draw them to Jesus and His church.

John 13: 34 – 35 says, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

This theme is constant through scripture "**Love one another.**" The spread of Christianity in the early church was predicated upon love. Love for one another wasn't code words for "just love the people in your circle" but it remains as a powerful love for the world around us. Love was the action that impressed an unimpressible the world into believing these people were the real deal. It remains the action we employ to touch a desperate world to show them we are the real deal.

But how do we understand this love? We see it in Jesus and He encourages us all to love others but again what does it look like?? God's great love - what does it look like?? Paul sought to explain this kind of love to the Corinthian church in this way.

1 Corinthians 13: 4 – 8, "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, and it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres. Love never fails."

How about I read it to you in various translations – I'll read it slowly so you can hear it and apply it to your life – as I read these passages I'm sure we will all have a stirring in our hearts and minds of what and how you will need to apply it. In fact I am sure that people's faces will come unbidden before you and you'll know what you need to do when you leave this place today! You ready?

The Message Translation:

Love never gives up.
Love cares more for others than for self.
Love doesn't want what it doesn't have.
Love doesn't strut,
Doesn't have a swelled head,
Doesn't force itself on others,
Isn't always "me first,"
Doesn't fly off the handle,

Doesn't keep score of the sins of others, (But is willing to forgive)
Doesn't revel when others grovel,
Takes pleasure in the flowering of truth,
Puts up with anything,
Trusts God always,
Always looks for the best,
Never looks back,
But keeps going to the end.
Love never dies.

The Passion Translation:

- Love is large and incredibly patient. (Even in difficult situations.)
- Love is gentle and consistently kind to all.
- It refuses to be jealous when blessing comes to someone else.
- Love does not brag about one's achievements nor inflate its own importance.
- Love does not traffic in shame and disrespect, nor selfishly seek its own honour.
- Love is not easily irritated or quick to take offense. (This is overly sensitive or keeps score – love does not stare at evil - Love will overlook offenses and remain focused on what is good, refusing to hold resentment in our hearts.)
- Love joyfully celebrates honesty (what is right) and finds no delight in what is wrong. (This speaks to injustice or false witness or gossip)
- Love is a safe place of shelter, (Paul is using a word here that means life a roof covers a house so love covers all things) for it never stops believing the best for others. (Love believes the best – love does not believe rumour or speculation – but searches for the truth.)
- Love never takes failure as defeat, for it never gives up.
- Love never stops loving (Love never falls down – Love always seeks to go higher)

1 Corinthians 13: 13 says, "And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love." Why is love so great? Love is eternal – when this world has passed away and we are in the glory of Heaven – there will be no need for faith or hope but we will love God and praise Him. When we've been there ten thousand years our praises of Him will have only just begun.

This kind of love is revolutionary!

This kind of love powerful!

This kind of love is disturbing to the comfortable, troubling to the self-centred and unsettling to the cynic. This kind of love disrupts our routines, interrupts our lifestyle and upsets our well-ordered lives.

This kind of love is decidedly intrusive and disruptive.

This kind of love is gritty willing to go place normal sane people refuse to go!

This kind of love is steadfast and unfailing

This kind of love compels us to love others, forgive others and show grace to others

This kind of love will make us leave house and home and travel thousands of mile to reach the untouched peoples of the world and it is the same love that compel us to walk across the room to share God's love with those who don't know.

This kind of love give voice to those with no voice, speak of justice for those who are the victims of injustice. It is this kind of love that motivates people to touch the untouchable, to sit with those in darkness, to reach out to those who are broken.

It is this kind of love that compels us to share our faith with an unbelieving world and this kind of love that will convince them we are the real deal.