

For the Love of God: a Study of *Agape* Love in First Corinthians 13:4-8a

The Bible says that God is love (1John 4:8). The Greek word here for “love” is *agape* (a-GAH-pay). In that section of Scripture the Apostle John is teaching believers to love one another by explaining the love of God. The passage reads:

⁷ Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. ⁸ But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

⁹ God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. ¹⁰ This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.

¹¹ Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other. ¹² No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us. (1John 4:7-12 – ESV)

In Matthew 22:35-40 a lawyer asked Jesus which was the greatest commandment (singular) in the Law. Jesus goes on to quote Deuteronomy 6:5, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” But then He says a second one is “like it” (Greek *homoia* – of the same kind), which is to, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” (from Leviticus 19:18). Jesus places within one great command the equal actions of loving God and loving others. Indeed John 4:21b says, “Whoever loves God must also love his brother.”

Well-versed in the Law, the Apostle Paul goes into a discourse on the topic of love in 1 Corinthians 13 that has become as popular a portion of Scripture as any in our time. It is often read at weddings where the young couple hears what love is like (and not like), and then may never come back to check in and see how they’re doing throughout the marriage.

Since Jesus and His disciples placed such an emphasis on love, let us soak in His inspired definition and self-reflect on how well we carry out His greatest command. We’ll follow Paul in 16 small devotionals; one for each description of love in 1Corinthians 13:4-8.

To set the stage, the Corinthian church was known for fleshly lifestyle and spiritual immaturity. Paul reminds them in Chapter 12 that they are all members of one body, the Church. But they are each equal individual members of that body, and each one if gifted by the Holy Spirit and has a vital function within the church. Paul lists several of these spiritual gifts and tells the believers to earnestly desire the greater gifts (i.e. apostleship, teaching & prophecy). But since not everyone will be given these gifts, there could arise jealousy within the church, so he is quick to point out there is a still more excellent way (12:31)... love.

The Greek word for “more excellent” in verse 12:31 is *hyperbole*. The root, *hyperballo*, originally meant “to throw beyond.” We can illustrate it this way. The longest passes the best NFL quarterbacks have thrown in the air are around 65-70 yards. Aaron Rodgers, Tom Brady, Drew Brees and others have done this in pressure situations when the clock is winding down. Imagine these star quarterbacks are the best

of the spiritual gifts one could have. But then comes another guy who can throw the ball out of the stadium. This guy's name is "love," and he makes those other guys look like nothing. In fact, Paul goes on to say that if we had all the other gifts and knew everything and could do anything, but didn't have love, we would be nothing. Paul closes chapter 13 by saying that in the end, faith, hope and love will remain, and the greatest of these is love.

Since the topic of love is this important, we will look at the qualities of this *agape* love in detail to start 2020. We will expand each trait to look at a deeper meaning and application, and then pray that God would infuse those traits more prevalently into our relationships with God, our spouse, our kids, our neighbors and with one another. I will try to get these out each week, and I encourage you to pray through that attribute of love in your life throughout that week.

Next study: 1-love is patient.

Lesson 1: Love is Patient (1Cor. 13:4)

The first part of the definition Paul gives us of *agape* love is that it is "patient." The Greek verb here is *makrothumeo*, or literally "long-heat" or, "having a long fuse." The King James translates as "suffereth long." Since patience is the fourth part of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22, perhaps the best example of a long fuse is God Himself. Second Peter 3:9 says:

⁹The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

You see that God's patience with humanity is a representation of His love. He desires all to come to repentance and He waits patiently while people rebel against Him and fail to see His great love for them. Exodus 34:6-7 says that God is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The Bible is clear that God displays perfect patience with us when we don't deserve it, simply because He loves us. Biblical patience then is not just waiting something out until something good happens. It is persisting in love towards someone through indeterminate time even while the one you love isn't behaving as they should.

Consider the parable of the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18. The servant went before the King (God) having a great debt. He pleaded for the King to have patience until he could pay off the debt. The King had mercy on him and forgave him. Later a fellow servant pleaded with him to have that same patience, but he did not. The King then withdrew His mercy when the servant did not show forgiveness to his fellow servant (Matt. 18:23-35). God's patience led to His showing love and forgiveness. This example was then to be followed by the servant. One would think that because he was shown mercy he would show mercy, but he did not.

God's expectation is that we love others as He has loved us (John 13:34). Since love is patient, and God has surely shown us patience, we should be patient with one another. God's patience and love is our example. How are we doing with our patience? I have heard it said that we should not pray for patience because God will give us an opportunity to learn it. But if God shows us patience while we

actively rebel against Him, should we not strive to learn to grow in our patience toward others? It is amazing how quickly we lose our patience with those we say we love, and many times in such trivial matters. We should constantly be praying to God to help us learn patience, no matter how painful the lesson may be, because that's His heart, and we want to be more like Him.

There's likely a reason Paul lists patience first in his definition of *agape* love. Perhaps it's because patience is our defense against pride. When we fail at any of the other 15 things in Paul's list, it is because our self defenses kick in and we protect ourselves in the situation and put others down in the process. Patience is the key to stopping and reflecting on God's patience toward us and beseeching Him to help us show His love to someone that may not deserve it.

Lord, teach me patience. Forgive me for having a short fuse with those I love. Remind me of how patient you are with me when I'm tempted to lose my calm over such trivial things. Help me to forgive others when they hurt me and show them grace when they don't act in the way I would want. Increase my love for others, and help me to be more like You.

Next study: 2-love is kind

Lesson 2: Love is Kind (1Cor. 13:4)

True *agape* love is patient... and kind. Paul uses the verb *chresteuomai* for "kind." Like patience, kindness is also part of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22. The Greek words for "Christ" (*christos*) and "kind" (*chrestos*) are different only by one letter. In fact, early Christians were sometimes called "Chrestians," or "little kind ones." *Chrestos* is a relational term and it means first and foremost "serviceable," "useful," or "adapted for purpose." In persons it can mean "worthy" or "upright" in a moral sense. A *chrestos* person is "excellent" for a specific function or task.

But even in the world today we hear of "random acts of kindness." We're told we can feel better and make the world a better place if we do those each day. Is that what Paul is talking about? Not at all. We can certainly do kind acts to people and brighten their day and ours. But the kind acts of holding doors open or helping someone load groceries into the car can be done by Christians and non-Christians with the same effect. What then is the kindness that Paul says is wrapped up in Spirit-charged *agape* love? Let's hear it from Jesus on the kindness of God.

³⁵ But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil.

³⁶ Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. (Luke 6:35-36)

In Luke's account of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus names the recipients of God's kindness as the ungrateful and the evil. God is kind towards people who don't even acknowledge His kindness. Paul says that God's kindness is meant to lead people to repentance (Rom. 2:4). In Jesus' call to those who labor and are heavy laden He says that His yoke is "easy" (Matt. 11:28-30). That "easy" is also our word *chrestos*! Jesus' yoke isn't "easy" in the simple, care-free sense, it's "easy" in the comfortable, friendly

sense. His yoke is easy because of His great kindness. Christ's *chrestos* kindness is a place of refreshing from the burdens and pressures of this world, and sadly only a few truly find rest in that kindness.

So where does that leave us who have trusted in His kindness? Paul tells us:

³² Be **kind** to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. (Eph. 4:32)

Again, God's kindness is a model for us. We are commanded here to be kind to one another, and this is shown by our being tenderhearted (or deeply compassionate) towards others and by our forgiveness. This seems to invoke the meanings of God's kindness we saw earlier where He was kind to those who were unkind to Him. He offered pleasant rest when they were beat down. They were ungrateful and didn't deserve it, but He offered it anyway. That's the love of God.

Jesus, Your kindness is a sweet resting place for my soul. You bear my many burdens, and You do it because You love me. It's who You are. I pray Your kindness will lead me to exhibit true kindness to those around me; to those even who are ungrateful and are unkind towards me. Give me the humility to overlook wrongs and truly let Your love and light shine through my actions towards them. Help me to learn Your perfect kindness more each day to lead others to You.

Next study: 3-love does not envy

Lesson 3: Love does not Envy (1Cor. 13:4)

Paul appears to be talking out of both sides of his mouth here. The Greek word for "envy" is *zelos* (the verb here is *zeloo*). It's where we get both "zealous" and "jealous" depending on context and intended meaning. In the context of our love chapter, Paul had talked about Spiritual gifts where he commanded us to "earnestly desire" (*zeloo*) the higher gifts (12:31). In 14:1 & 39 he tells us to "earnestly desire" (*zeloo*) the gift of prophecy. So if *agape* love is known for not being envious, how do we reconcile the command to be envious of these gifts?

The gift of prophecy is given to build up and encourage the church (14:3,12,31). Paul tells us to jealously desire the "higher" gifts (apostleship, prophesying, teaching) not to build ourselves up but to build others up. These gifts are not something to brag about, but to use generously for the edification of the church. But how are we to think about Paul's definition of love that it does not envy? It seems the answer is in just *who* is being built up.

² You desire and do not have, so you murder. You **covet** and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. ³ You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. ⁴ You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. (James 4:2-4)

James uses the same word, *ze/oo*, and calls out the envious one as an adulterous enemy of God! Why? Because he is seeking out his own passions. Our word can be used both positively and negatively based on who is being built up. God is jealous for His name to be exalted to its proper place and not replaced by a lifeless image of a false god (Ex. 20:5). In that same vein we can be jealous for others to grow in obedience to Christ (see 2Cor. 11:2). But in each of these instances jealousy is warranted because of the exaltation not of self, but of God. Perhaps “zealous” is a better translation than “jealous” in this positive sense.

In the definition of love, jealousy is not allowed because it is self-seeking. James further says that while operating under the influence of bitter envy and selfish ambition, our thoughts are earthly, unspiritual and even demonic (Jas. 3:14-16). Since jealousy stems from a demonic root, it’s not surprising to see it on Paul’s list of works of the flesh (or the anti-fruit of the Spirit) in Gal. 5:19-21.

Can you see then how comparing ourselves to others can quickly turn envy hot and love cold? In envy the focus is self. If we desire someone’s material possessions, money, lot in life, or job, our focus is on self and that’s easy to see. But not so easy to see is our envy of wholesome things like someone else’s seemingly happy marriage, their kid’s friendships or achievements, their spouse’s good health, or even someone else’s spiritual gift. These are all good things but rather than praising God that He blessed them in that way, we sink down into negative thoughts of “why didn’t God bless me or those I love in that way?” It’s hard to think that we are all individual members of one body (Rom. 12:5; 1Cor. 12:18-27), but that’s the truth. We are on the same team, and our Captain is good... always. If God is good, then He knows what He’s doing. He can organize His team in any way He chooses and we can trust that His choices are always best. Love does not envy.

God, turn my ‘jealous’ into ‘zealous.’ As I seek to love You and love others, guide my thoughts toward You and Your kingdom and not toward my own desires. Help me praise You when You bless others in ways You chose for them and not for me. Help me praise You when You bless me in the ways You uniquely chose for me to bring You glory. Help me to be zealous for others to follow after You, to be obedient to You, to use their gifts to glorify You and build up Your church. Help me to love others in this way.

Next study: 4-love does not boast

Lesson 4: Love does not Boast (1Cor. 13:4)

The Bible speaks often of pride and boasting. One of the most famous places is in Proverbs 16:18: “Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall.” To reinforce God’s point of view, James 4:8b says, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” With regard to boasting, Jeremiah 9:23-24 says this:

²³ Thus says the LORD: “Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, ²⁴ but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.”

But when Paul says that love does not boast, he chooses his word very carefully. For all the places we find in Scripture that address pride, Paul uses a word that occurs only here (a word only used once is called a *hapax legomenon*). The word he uses is *perpereuomai* in the Greek. The word itself is late and rare, perhaps beginning its usage in the 2nd century BC. It is not found in the Greek Old Testament (the Septuagint). From its secular usage it seems to mean arrogance of speech. It is used with other words such as “talkative, exaggerating, asserting oneself, wounding, attacking with words.” In using the word in the middle voice, Paul is suggesting the arrogant words are used to attack with the goal of puffing up oneself. How unloving.

Show me a place where Jesus uses words to cut someone down with the goal of magnifying Himself. You can't. Jesus says of Himself that He is gentle and lowly in heart (Matt. 11:29). He did not come to be served but to serve (Mark 10:45). Paul says that Jesus humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death (Phil. 2:8). This is *agape* love, and in John 13:34 Jesus commands us to love one another as He has loved us. This does not and cannot include exaggerating, biting, self-aggrandizing words to those we say we love.

James says that though the tongue is small it boasts great things. Every creature can and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we both bless the Lord and curse people who are made in the likeness of God. These things ought not to be so (Jas. 1:5-10). James has a way of taking something you already feel guilty about and driving it even deeper into your soul, does he not.

God, I've been unloving in my speech. My defenses are up, and I've protected myself with words at the expense of those I love. I've put others down with my unbridled tongue; others who are made in Your likeness. Please forgive me and teach me Your humility, Jesus. Help me tame the tongue and redirect it with words that build up and not puff up; words that show Your love.

Next study: 5-love is not arrogant

Lesson 5: Love is not Arrogant (1Cor. 13:4)

From boasting last week, Paul now says that love is not arrogant. So what's the difference? If you remember, the word for boasting was only used one time in the New Testament and it meant to use biting words to tear down in order to build self up. This word for “arrogant” is only used seven times, so Paul is again being specific and using words on purpose to further define *agape* love. The word literally means to inflate or blow up... puff up. Think of the posture of the arrogant; chest swelled up, head held high, looking down on the one who must concede he's in the wrong.

Paul knows how to deal with this person. Only he uses this word (6x in First Corinthians and 1x in Colossians). Let's explore the Colossians passage first.

¹⁸ Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, ¹⁹ and not holding fast to the

Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God. (Col. 2:18-19)

The immediate phrase literally reads, “puffed up under his mind of flesh.” The puffed-up-one cannot see the Head (Christ) because he is under the influence of a fleshly mind. Paul reminds us that the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God (Rom. 8:7). Back to Corinth, a church that was struggling with fleshly, immature Christians, Paul leads by example saying that we (the spiritual Christians) have the “mind of Christ” (1Cor. 2:16). But he is addressing not spiritual believers, but believers who are of the flesh in the church at Corinth (1Cor. 3:1).

Many of these Corinthian believers were puffed up. They picked sides (1Cor. 3:3-5), causing division. They hid from addressing sin (1Cor. 4:18-5:2). Their spiritual immaturity resulted in loveless knowledge; a false theology where each thought their knowledge of how to live a spiritual life was better than the other’s which resulted in more quarreling and division and no growth (see 1Cor. 8:1-3). What a painful stunting cycle in which to be caught. Thus Paul writes:

⁶ I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another. (1Cor. 4:6)

Arrogance stems from going beyond what is written. True knowledge of God and His Word will not lead to arrogance and division in relationships, but to His love and unity.

Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that “all of us possess knowledge.” This “knowledge” puffs up, but love builds up. ² If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. (1Cor. 8:1-2)

Do you see the contrast between arrogance and love here? Paul said that if he possessed all knowledge but didn’t have love, he’d be nothing (1Cor. 13:2). That’s how he could write of the divisions in the church,

⁷ To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? (1Cor. 6:7)

To love is better than to be right. Lord, please deflate me. I pray that when the temptation comes to swell up with pride that I would breathe out and consider the one I love. Help me to choose to be wronged rather than to arrogantly put them down, even if I’m right. Help me build up rather than puff up. Lead me in Your love, to love others wholly and purely.

Next study: 6-love is not rude

Lesson 6: Love is not Rude (1Cor. 13:5)

Here we go again. Paul is being very specific in his definition of *agape* love, several times using words no other biblical author uses. The word here for “rude” is the Greek word *aschemoneo* and is only found here and in 1Cor. 7:36. The word breaks down as “*a*” (without) and “*schema*” (shape or plan), to take the meaning of “not proper,” “unbecoming,” or “indecent.” This kind of behavior simply does not fit; it should not be. The outward shape it takes is not the proper shape. We might say that the one who acts in this manner needs to “shape up.”

So what does this improper or unbecoming behavior look like in our lives? With only two uses in Scripture it can be difficult, but fortunately the antonym *euschemon* and related words are also used. Paul uses one of these words in 1Thess. 4:12, “so that you may walk properly towards outsiders and be dependent on no one” (see also Rom. 13:13). You see how the word depicts actions and how they show outwardly? The word is also used for “orderly” worship in 1Cor. 14:40. Consider these two verses from Paul:

³⁵ I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.

³⁶ If anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly [rude] toward his betrothed, if his passions are strong, and it has to be, let him do as he wishes: let them marry—it is no sin. (1Cor. 7:35-36)

The two opposite words are underlined in these verses. In the context here, Paul is discussing proper views on marriage. Getting married is no sin, but Paul says it can cause divided interests between being devoted to God and the spouse. Paul’s desire is that our devotion be in “good order” and not divided (v. 35). But he then says that if we can’t control ourselves we should get married (v. 36). This verse gives us a clue about improper (rude) behavior. Remember the account of the virgin Mary? When Joseph found out she was pregnant by the Holy Spirit he resolved to divorce her quietly because he was unwilling to put her to shame (Matt. 1:19). He loved Mary and deemed it improper for her to face open shame.

This is what Paul is talking about. In 1Cor. 7:36, he warns against the shame and disgrace placed upon the betrothed (Greek *parthenos* or ‘virgin’) by “not behaving properly.” What is proper? That one should wait until they are married to join sexually so as to not bring disgrace or shame to the one who is loved. Love is not rude. It does nothing to bring shame or disgrace to someone we say we love.

Think about this in our relationships. It naturally follows the biting words of “boasting” and the puffed up posture of “arrogance” that we would act in a way that would embarrass or shame someone. We’re only thinking of ourselves in that moment and we’ll do many things to protect our own self interests and being. But at what cost? Paul says that’s not love. He even uses the negative word to give us an example of what it doesn’t look like. “Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded? But you yourselves wrong and defraud – even your own brothers (i.e. the ones we are to love)” (1Cor. 6:7b-8).

Lord, You know my pride. You know that I can protect myself by putting those I love down and bringing them shame. Lord, forgive me and help me to shape up. Help me to remember You in those moments and take the advice of Paul to be wronged rather than to wrong others. Give me that wisdom and self-restraint. Give me the vision of Your love and how You show it to me even when I bring you shame. Lead me in Your perfect love as I seek to love others.

Next study: 7-love does not insist on its own way

Lesson 7: Love does not Insist on its Own Way (1Cor. 13:5)

Perhaps the King James renders this best as “seeketh not her own.” But so as not to confuse, the ESV carries the correct interpretation with, “does not insist on its own way.” The Greek phrase is literally, “does not seek her own [things].” Deviating slightly from his use of rare words, Paul uses a verb “to seek” that is very common in the New Testament.

We are commanded to seek things in Scripture. Consider for example Jesus’ saying, “Seek and you will find” in Matthew 7:7. But lest we ever think that this means seek what we want, Jesus earlier says:

²⁹ And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. ³⁰ For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them.

³¹ Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you. (Luke 12:29-31)

Jesus here commands us to *not* seek our own things, even important and necessary things. Instead, we are to seek first God’s kingdom. Similarly, Paul commands us through the Holy Spirit that since we are in Christ we should seek the things that are above, where Christ is (Col. 3:1). But perhaps the most relevant to our study here comes from the next chapter in First Corinthians:

So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek to abound for the edification of the church. (1Cor. 14:12 NASB)

The command here is that we seek to excel in building up the church, our brothers and sisters in Christ, for His glory. You see, never in Scripture are we commanded to seek our own things. But we’re so good at it you would think that it was in there. As with the other aspects of love, we can look to Jesus as our example. What did He seek?

³⁰ “I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me. (John 5:30)

⁵⁰ Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is One who seeks it, and he is the judge. (John 8:50)

If we need an example of complete, pure, selfless love, it is here. The One who truly does deserve to seek His own greatness, gave it up to seek His Father’s will; and this was for our salvation. How then can we seek our own? Have you ever caught yourself in the middle of this and hated it? Have you ever wondered what causes you to do this? Ever wondered if there is a way to stop it and be truly selfless? One more command from Paul:

³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Phil. 2:3-8)

God, give me the mind of Christ. When I'm caught in the bottomless pit of seeking self interests, show me Christ and His humility. Help me focus on the things that are above. Forgive me for self-seeking at the expense of those I love. Help me seek forgiveness from them and show them the love that You have shown Me.

Next study: 8-love is not irritable

Lesson 8: Love is not Irritable (1Cor. 13:5)

Have you ever felt like someone was just jabbing at you with a sharp stick? I'm talking emotionally, not physically. But it kind of feels like they have a physically sharp stick, doesn't it? Well, that's the heart of our next word. The ESV's translation of "irritable" is adequate for the Greek word "*paroxuno*," but the verb is here in the passive voice. As such it should be thought of as "does not let itself be irritated."

Our verb is only used twice in the New Testament (the related noun is also just used twice). The root *oxuno* means to sharpen, hence the sharp stick metaphor. The compound *paroxuno* then came to mean "provoke" or "irritate" like you're poking with that sharp stick. It can be used in a positive sense. In the other usage of the verb, Paul's spirit is provoked as he saw the city of Athens with all its idols (Acts 17:16). And the noun form is used here:

²⁴ And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, (Heb. 10:24)

Do you see the sharp stick here? We are to poke and prod other Christians in a positive sense to love and do good works. But also consider the other usage of the noun:

³⁹ And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus, ⁴⁰ but Paul chose Silas and departed (Acts 15:39-40a)

Now we see the negative side. Paul and Barnabas had a "sharp disagreement" possibly over Mark, but nevertheless the word choice indicates that it was sharp, and the brotherly love between the two apostles was irritated and provoked. It's important that our verb is used in the passive voice. We're not to think about how we irritate others here. We are only to think about our love toward them when they irritate us. Are their sharp jabs irritating? Sure they are. But *agape* love does not let itself be irritated.

We might now start to understand why Paul led off the list with “love is patient.” It’s hard to imagine the self control it takes to withstand attacks from those we love, either intentional or unintentional. That’s because it’s not natural. It is supernatural. Only God’s love can love through a poking stab. Think how often we might poke back at God for some misfortune in our lives, and yet He loves us through it. How powerful to turn that love towards our family and Christian community.

Lord, Your shield of faith is our defense against the flaming darts of Satan. Your perfect love is our defense against the hurtful irritating jabs of those we love. Lord, tear down my own defensive walls that I have built. Give me patience. Help me love through the sharp stabs, and show them a glimpse of Your love for them. Melt their hearts for You as You work in their life and bring them closer to You.

Next study: 9-love is not resentful

Lesson 9: Love is not Resentful (1Cor. 13:5)

Lest we think because we’re over half way through that we’re in the home stretch and it’s all downhill from here, Paul throws one of his toughest at us with “love is not resentful.” In my opinion the ESV is weak here. The Greek phrase is *logizetai to kakon* and literally means “count the wrong.” The verb *logizomai* is an accounting term and means “to count,” or “to reckon,” or “to charge to an account.” The NIV better captures the sense with, “it keeps no record of wrongs.”

Now you can begin to see where this is going. Everyone we meet has an account in our mental and emotional bank. What’s in their account? Are all of their kind and loving deeds they’ve done for us stored there? Or, is all of the hurt and pain they’ve caused us piled up in their account? When we see them, or when they behave in a certain way towards us, the button is pushed and we bring up their account in our minds almost instantly. But what do we see? Is it a wrong they have done to us maybe decades before that we bring up as if freshly done? Is it a pattern of wrongs that we bring back up that prevent us from forgiving and moving on in the relationship? Or is it a feeling of a past wrong that isn’t even related to the present situation but clouds our minds and we just can’t let go or move forward? Paul says that love lets it go. It wipes the account clean of any wrong.

I think this is one of the toughest ones in the whole list so this might be a bit longer than the others. As humans we can at best forgive (and that’s only by God’s grace), but we can never forget. That being true, let’s first consider our account with God.

²²That is why his [Abraham’s] faith was “counted to him as righteousness.” ²³ But the words “it was counted to him” were not written for his sake alone, ²⁴ but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, ²⁵ who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification. (Rom. 4:22-25)

Our word *logizomai* is the underlined word “counted” above. Just as with Abraham, our faith is “counted” to us as righteousness. In other words, our account which used to be just filled with sin, is now replaced with the righteousness of Christ through our faith in Him. Our account has been cleaned and cleared! So what of our sin? Read these passages carefully.

¹² as far as the east is from the west,
so far does he remove our transgressions from us. (Psalm 103:12)

²⁵ “I, I am he
who blots out your transgressions for my own sake,
and I will not remember your sins. (Isaiah 43:25)

¹⁹ He will again have compassion on us;
he will tread our iniquities underfoot.
You will cast all our sins
into the depths of the sea. (Micah 7:19)

And finally,

¹⁷ Behold, it was for my welfare
that I had great bitterness;
but in love you have delivered my life
from the pit of destruction,
for you have cast all my sins
behind your back. (Isaiah 38:17)

God not only forgives, He forgets. Our forgiven sins reside in fictitious places: behind His back, from east to west, the depths of the sea (an irretrievable place). That’s all fine, but we’re not God. How do we forget the wrongs done to us? We can’t. But in the accounts we store in our minds, we are still the bank manager. We can choose what fills their account, and with God’s help, we can choose to overlook or replace the wrong with love. Peter tells us,

⁸ **Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.** (1Peter 4:8)

Referring to Proverbs 10:12, Peter is literally saying that *agape* love can bury, hide or conceal the offense against us. In this way, we are not forgetting the wrong done to us, we are making the conscious choice to love in spite of, and in the place of that wrong. We are burying that wrong deep in their account with a covering of God’s love. This is the closest that a human can come to showing the love that God that He showed us by covering our sins with His Son’s precious blood.

I hope you can see that this is not an unhealthy, unresolved suppressing of our feelings, which can result in bitterness and a blow-up in the next heated argument. No, this is a full and complete resolution. When God forgave us, He replaced our sin record with a pure white righteousness. Our sins will never resurface and be held against us. As He dealt with those, love can deal with offenses against us in a similar way. The wrongs committed against us are covered by *His* love and forgiveness. That is the full resolution of the offense. But we must make that choice to allow His love to cover the wrongs in their

account. Does the offender need to be seeking forgiveness? One would hope they are, but *agape* love does not depend on them trying to earn it.

God, help me always remember Your great love for me, how it covers my sins. My account was tarnished with offenses against You. But in Your love, You wiped it clean through the death of Jesus as my substitute. Now when I look at the wrongs my loved ones commit against me, may You give me the love to bury that wrong deep in the vault, never to come back. Lord, when I'm tempted to bring it back, remind me of Your forgiveness. Help me forgive and move from the past and remember the bigger eternal picture. Lead me to love as You love.

Next study: 10-love does not rejoice at wrongdoing

Lesson 10: Love does not Rejoice at Wrongdoing (1Cor. 13:6)

If we made it past the last study we're doing good. All of our words so far in our definition of God's *agape* love have been verbs (action words). This one is no different, and the verb is "to rejoice." You'll notice that the word "rejoice" is used twice in verse 6. The verse acts similarly to a proverb where the two lines are opposite in meaning to stress a point. We will treat each line separately and focus this week on "love does not rejoice in wrongdoing," but we can learn a bit about this by looking ahead to the next line.

In Scripture "wrongdoing" (Greek word *adikia*- unrighteousness) is often set as the opposite of "truth" (Greek word *aletheia*). In John 7:18, Jesus says that the one who seeks the glory of God is true (*aletheia*) and in him there is no falsehood (*adikia*). In 2Thessalonians 2:10-12, the truth of the saving gospel is counter to wicked deception and unrighteousness (*adikia*). Consider 2Timothy 2:18-19 where Paul defines truth as a proper understanding of the end-times resurrection and encourages us to "depart from iniquity (*adikia*)." Hymenaeus and Philetus were upsetting the faith of some believers because their teaching was opposite the truth; that the coming of Christ and the resurrection are still future. Their teaching was clearly self-seeking, and not just an honest misunderstanding. On that note consider:

⁸ but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. (Romans 2:8)

Do you see the contrast? Someone who is self seeking is obeying unrighteousness (*adikia*) and is opposing the truth. Back to 1Corinthians 13, *agape* love does not rejoice in *adikia* "wrongdoing." It will not find itself allied with anything that is opposed to bringing God glory or in anything that counters the truth of His Word. We have looked at "wrongdoing," but what about "rejoice?"

"Rejoice" is a common biblical word. It is related to the word "joy" and means "to have great joy." But without much investigation it is clear that the Bible and world have vastly different views on where joy comes from. In ancient philosophy, joy is found in self-reflection and is often synonymous with hedonism (pleasure). In Scripture our joy comes from above. It is the second part of the Fruit of the Spirit after love. In fact, I only found two places in the New Testament where we are commanded not to rejoice, and they are both in selfish desires. Our verse says love does not rejoice in wrongdoing, which is

self-seeking and God-opposing. And in Luke 10:20, when Jesus' disciples were beginning to puff up, He tells them not rejoice that the spirits were subject to them, but rather to rejoice that their names were written in heaven. He quickly turns the source of their joy from their self to Himself. True joy can come in circumstances that aren't personally pleasant but glorify God (read 2Cor. 6:10; 7:9; 13:9; Phil 1:18; Col. 1:24; Jas. 1:2 & 1Pet.1:6; 4:13). It is clear that *agape* love cannot rejoice in anything that glorifies us. Against the popular worldview of self-focus, biblical joy abounds when we lose our self-serving desires and see God glorified.

God, I believe that Your joy comes when You are glorified. Forgive me when I seek joy in self, when I value pleasure over the truth of Your ways. Help me always call wrongdoing what it is, and take no part in it. Search my heart and shine Your light on any of my ways that would rejoice in things that displease You. Lead me in Your love, and help me to pour out that love on others.

Next study: 11-love rejoices with the truth

Lesson 11: Love Rejoices with the Truth (1Cor. 13:6)

Last week we looked at the first line in the couplet in verse 6; love "does not rejoice in wrongdoing." We found that wrongdoing, or unrighteousness, is opposite the truth because it is self-seeking. This week we will look more at the truth. "Truth" is the translation of the Greek noun, "*aletheia*." It is a common word in the New Testament and its original meaning is simply "non-concealment." It has to do with the movement of something that was concealed or suppressed into a state of being seen as it really is. It denotes the full or real state of affairs.

Jesus said that He was the truth in John 14:6. In this way Jesus is the full disclosure of the reality of God in visible human flesh (see also Col. 1:15 and Heb. 1:3). Jesus also said that the Bible was truth in John 17:17. In this way the Bible is the disclosure of the reality of the nature of God and His will for our lives. The Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Truth (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13) meaning He discloses the reality of our eternal life and relationship with Jesus as we walk in a world that does not know Him. The world is caught up in the suppressing of the truth (Rom. 1:18). They willfully conceal the very thing that is meant to disclose the reality of their sin and separation from God. When we heard the truth of the gospel, the disclosure of the reality of who God is, who we are, and what He did for us, we believed and were sealed with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13).

If God is love and God is truth, then our love for Him must also be in truth. Jesus even says that we must worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24). This means that we must come before Him in the full disclosure of the reality of who He is and who we are (see 1John 1:5-7). We cannot hide anything from Him. But this truthful loving towards God doesn't stop with Him.

²² Having purified your souls by your obedience to the **truth** for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, ²³ since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; (1Pet. 1:22-23)

Since we acknowledge the truth and love God, we are to translate that truthful love towards others. Peter calls it a “sincere” (Greek *anupokritos* or “un-hypocritical”) love. Paul uses the same word for our love in Romans 12:9 and 2Corinthians 6:6. A hypocrite is an actor, being something in reality, but pretending to be something else. There is no acting in *agape* love. There is no concealing in *agape* love. Love is so intertwined with truth that Paul tells us here that it “rejoices *with*” the truth. This is one compound Greek word meaning that where truth is, love rejoices. Think about your relationships. Are you hiding anything? Is there complete truth in the relationship? A partial truth is still a concealment, and synonymous with “wrongdoing.” True love can only be found together with the truth.

Jesus, You say that God must be worshipped in spirit and in truth. Some days I feel like I can come before You in truth, but I can still play it safe with the ones I love. Help me to see that as wrongdoing, and unloving, and to be open and true with them. Forgive me when I’m hypocritical, saying I love them, but acting as if I don’t. Show me Your consistency in love so I can build trust and love in the relationships You give me with others.

Next study: 12-love bears all things

Lesson 12: Love Bears All Things (1Cor. 13:7)

Paul begins a new pattern here in verse 7 in his description of *agape* love. Eight Greek words make up the verse; four sets of two words each. The ESV renders the pattern as “_____ all things.” He tells us that love bears, believes, hopes and endures all things. It appears we’ve moved from the seemingly impossible self-reflective part of the definition of love to the part that shows the true, divine power of the word. If we didn’t already get this by now, love is bigger than ourselves! So, what does it mean that love ‘bears all things?’

We noticed that Paul often uses less-common words in this passage and this word is no different. The Greek verb for “bears” is “*stego*,” which is only used four times in the New Testament. *Stego* means “to cover” or “to conceal,” but from an angle of “to protect” (see the NIV translation). Think of your roof in a hail storm. It covers and bears the attack of the hail and protects those inside. You might remember the popular dinosaur, the stegosaurus? This aptly-named dinosaur had a series of large bony plates along its spine as a covering which protected it from predators.

With an understanding of bearing, or protecting, we turn to what it is that love is protecting. Paul simply says, “*panta*,” an adjective used over 1,000 times which means “all” or “any.” It would be easy to throw our hands up at this point and say, “All things means all things. I get it, but what do I do with that?” I believe we need to read on and understand where Paul is headed. In verse 8 he says, “Love never ends.” In verse 13, he tells us that in the end faith, hope, and love abide, but the greatest of these is love. He’s going somewhere with this. Our verse here acts as a sort of bridge to get us to the end, with “all things” being the common thread, or steps on the bridge. Step one – love bears all things; step two – love believes all things; step three – love hopes all things; step four – love endures all things; and we’re there. The path leads to God and His perfect love, but the path is a treacherous path. We’re about to take our first step. But, Jesus, You go first:

³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38-39)

These mega-popular verses comfort us, don't they? As they should. Paul could have said that none of these things can separate us from God, and that would have been true as well. But he chose to say "the love of God." The picture here is of a secure place. Think of it as a sphere because that's the imagery of Scripture. The Bible says that we who put our faith in Christ are... in Christ (Rom. 8:1; 1Cor. 1:30). It is a place of secure position. Now for the believer *in Christ*, we are protected from anything that would seek to remove us. Those *things* are listed here in Romans 8:38-39. Christ's love covers and protects us from all things. No created thing that would want to penetrate that love or remove us out from under that protecting love is able to do so. His love for us bears all things.

What does that mean for my love for my family, my brothers and sisters, my neighbors? Jesus said to love one another as He has loved us. Think of the things trying to get between you and the ones you love. Is it a hobby? Is it your job? Your position? Your dream? Your possessions? Is it another person? We can't take that first step towards loving someone while something is competing for that love. But with God's help, using His love as a model, our love will ward off those attacks. It will protect. It will shield and provide a safe place for that love to blossom and grow. What does that look like? It may mean we have to remove ourselves from any situation, thing, or person that would seek to break into or tear down our love for those God gave us to love. If Christ loved us in that way, what could possibly be more important than for us to imitate that love.

God, give me the wisdom and the peering insight to recognize the things that are coming between me and the ones I love. Your perfect love covers and protects me from all things. Forgive me for allowing things to steal my love away. Give me the strength to remove those things, or remove myself from any situation that would hinder my love towards those You gave me to love. Lord, lead me in Your love to also love others in a way that protects and shields and grows and leads them to You and Your love for them. Help me to take that next step.

Next study: 13-love believes all things

Lesson 13: Love Believes All Things (1Cor. 13:7)

We are in the home stretch in this study. Last week we mentioned that verse 7 was leading us towards God's perfect love with an image of a bridge with four steps. Each step was the "all things" that Paul uses in this verse. The first step was that love "bears" (or protects) all things. Love defends against anything that would seek to remove us or get between us and our loved ones. Now Paul tells us the next step is that love "believes" all things.

"Believe" is a very common biblical word. Jesus tells us to believe in Him. He says that anyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16). Believing is therefore so important that it is the only verb that gets us from eternal separation in hell to eternal life in heaven. Believe is the Greek verb *pisteuo*. The related noun *pistis* translates in our Bibles as "faith." They are from the same

root in the original language and mean the same thing, only one is a noun and one a verb. The Bible defines faith as follows:

11 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. (Hebrews 11:1)

Biblical faith should be thought of in terms of assurance and conviction. Knowing that, Jesus tells us that He is the only way to the Father (John 14:6). So how now does Paul tell us that love believes “all things?” Are we to put other things on the same plane as Jesus? Are we to believe there are many paths to God and heaven? This passage has nothing to do with that. This is not a passage on how to get to heaven. This is a passage on the nature of love and how to truly do it as God does it. Consider the context and remember our first step.

Our first step was love building a covering that protects against anything that would penetrate or destroy. Building on that now, love believes that against all odds it can and will make it to the end. Again, think in terms of assurance and conviction. Just as believing in Christ does not mean that you have an emotional feeling that you’ll get to heaven. The believing of love is not just a feeling that you have that this will make it through. We have a firm convicted assurance that Jesus is who He said He is, and He will do what He said He will do. So now love has a firm convicted assurance that whatever seeks to destroy it will be unsuccessful and that it will make it and triumph in the end.

Hopefully we’re still thinking about the things or people that distract us and steal our love away from last week. Biblical love believes that those things can be removed and a healthy, nurturing, loving path cleared because in the end faith, hope, and love remain, and the greatest of these is love (1Cor. 13:13). It’s vital we look ahead towards the end, because here, today, it might seem hopeless. We might feel stuck. We might have even thrown in the towel. Love says go pick up the towel and believe.

Lord, as the man in Mark 9:24 cried, “I believe. Help my unbelief.” I feel helpless and hopeless sometimes. I mentally rob You of Your ability to save and carry me to the end. Forgive me. I know Your Word says that Your love for me covers me, forgives me, saves me. I believe that, but sometimes feel that my relationships with the ones I love are going in different directions, or even stuck. Help me trust You to get them unstuck and then also do all the things I can for them. Help me love as You love. Give me the strength to show others love, over and over and over again, and then do it again. Help me to believe and take love to the next step.

Next study: 14-love hopes all things

Lesson 14: Love Hopes All Things (1Cor. 13:7)

Continuing on the bridge to the end, love bears all things, believes all things, and now hopes all things. The third step on the bridge is built on hope. Just like the word “believe,” we use the word “hope” sometimes in a very different way than the Bible. I can say that, “I hope it rains tomorrow,” or “I hope we go out for ice cream after dinner.” In any of those cases I truly have no idea if what I’m hoping for will actually happen or not, even if there’s a good chance or if there’s a historical pattern of happening.

The future of this hope is still uncertain. It amounts to nothing more than wishful thinking. Sometimes the Bible speaks of man's hopes in this manner, but never his hope in God. So what is biblical hope? Remember our verse last week?

11 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. (Hebrews 11:1)

The author is defining "faith" here, but clearly shows its connection to hope. Faith allows us to move past wishful thinking when it comes to hope. When we hope with biblical hope, we believe that what we hope for will happen. When our hopes are in things of this world, the best we can do is wish. But not so with God. Recall Paul telling Timothy:

¹⁷ As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. (1Timothy 6:17)

Similarly:

⁸ for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. ⁹ The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. ¹⁰ For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe. (1Timothy 4:8-10)

And Peter tells us:

¹³ Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1Peter 1:13)

The phrase "will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" contains a verb that is passive, meaning that it does not depend on us, but on God doing it for us. That grace will be brought to us by One who is perfect, is able, is trustworthy and cannot lie. How confident should we be in that! Biblical hope does not depend on man with any confidence, but on God, that He will deliver on His promises whether it seems like it now or not. Our faith, our assurance and conviction, is in that hope that He will do as He says.

So, when it comes to our phrase love "hopes all things," we cannot be placing this hope in man or we're back to wishful thinking. Paul isn't meaning that love hopes the other person comes back to us, or loves us back, or hopes they live wisely. The love that "hopes all things" is hoping in God's *agape* love that assures us that there is nothing that can separate or penetrate the sphere of that love to defeat it. Similarly our love for others can confidently hope not in them, but in God that He will get us through

whatever lies before us to the end because He is faithful. The end is already assured. In God's eternal eyes, the end has already happened. Love is there. Believe and hope in that today.

God, be my hope today. Help me have that confident assurance that what I'm going through right now, and what I'm feeling right now is not the end. It's not hopeless. Give me love that hopes, not just wishes. Forgive me for hoping in things in this life, even including those I love. Help me not hope in them that they will turn around or do something in their power for our relationship. Instead, help me set my hope in You that You will grow our love because You are love. Give me the strength to take the next step.

Next study: 15-love endures all things

Lesson 15: Love Endures All Things (1Cor. 13:7)

The fourth and final step in our bridge from the self-reflective character traits of love to the divine end where love abides forever is "endures all things." Why is this one last? And is it different than "bears all things?" I think there's a logical progression here in this penultimate verse. Love protects against all things that would separate and destroy it. It believes with conviction that it will make it to the end intact. It hopes not in man but in God who sees the end from the beginning. Now it is able to make the journey. In the same way that our faith saved us and God justified us at a point in time in the past, He now is lovingly sanctifying us as we walk through life on our way towards our glorified future with Him. Sanctification is a process of obedience and endurance. Easy? No. Worth it? Absolutely!

When we examine the Greek word *hupomeno* (translated "to endure"), we find that it is a compound word from *hupo* (a preposition meaning "under") and *meno* (a verb meaning "to abide," or "remain"). Putting them together it means literally "to remain under." The idea is that one would remain or stay put under a burden or attack without being moved by the weight or pressure. Can you see how this extrapolates to "endure?" When the attacks come we stand firm under pressure, we endure. The word differs from our first word in this study, "patience," in that endurance has an active component. It includes an active and energetic resistance to hostile power, according to the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament.

If we know Paul, it should come as no surprise that endurance follows hope in this study. He writes...

²⁴ For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance. (Romans 8:24-25 [NKJV])

Did you catch that? We wait for it with perseverance (that's the noun form of our word, *hupomene*). Endurance draws its power from hope. A love that endures all things can do so because it hopes all things. But endurance is active. How do we actively wait? Think of the trajectory of sanctification. The believer who is being sanctified is marching onward to his glorification. We are active in that process. We can passively wait for God to act during hard times, but our action in those times is that of endurance. That doesn't mean we actively attack our enemies. It means we actively entreat God to

strengthen us to not budge or give way under the pressure of attack. We don't sit back and let God bail us out. We actively go to Him, day by day. Consider Paul at the end of his life:

¹⁰Therefore I **endure** everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. ¹¹The saying is trustworthy, for:

If we have died with him, we will also live with him;

¹² if we **endure**, we will also reign with him;

if we deny him, he also will deny us;

¹³ if we are faithless, he remains faithful—

for he cannot deny himself. (2Timothy 2:10-13)

These verbs are in the active voice in the Greek. Paul realized that he must endure as an example for us, so that we may obtain our salvation. Endurance is the march of the faithful to glory, and the reward of that endurance will be to reign with Him!

If we've made it this far, we can see the end; maybe not with our eyes, but with our faith and our hope. If we have our hope in the right Person, then our love will endure. This love will actively march onward no matter how heavy the load. Though the attacks come, though the burdens pile high, though the pressures overwhelmingly seek to stall and squash us in our place, love carries on. Have you plateaued in your relationships? Do you feel like you can't go any further? Do you feel that you're losing ground? Do you even feel that you *want* to go on? Is this fourth step of endurance missing or broken? Don't give up. Look back and check the first steps. Is there something you've allowed to come between you? How's your faith? What are you hoping in? *Agape* love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and most certainly endures all things.

Lord, it is so easy to give up. But You never give up on me. You've loved me since before the world began. With Your love I believe I can endure all things. You're my only hope. I pray You will give me strength to endure the pain, the burdens, the attacks, the pressures that will come in my relationships, and that I will love through them. In the strength of Your *agape* love, help me march onward toward You, unwavering, carrying others with me, and setting an example for those around me, leading them to You.

Next study: 16-love never ends

Lesson 16: Love Never Ends (1Cor. 13:8a)

After nearly four months of studying the characteristics of *agape* love, this study has reached the end. At the end, Paul simply says, "Love never ends." Some translations, particularly the older ones, read, "Love never fails." In one of the earliest English renderings John Wycliffe states, "Charite fallith not down." This is perhaps the closest meaning to the Greek word *pipto*. *Pipto* is a common word that

means “to fall” or “to fall down.” Modern translators have usually taken this last phrase to go with what follows where the contrast is with what will cease or pass away, thus “love never ends.” That makes good sense because remember where we’ve been. It’s been a long journey that started with patience. It navigated through treacherous paths of humility against stinging insults. All along the way it resisted against all natural instinct the temptation to puff up and self-preserve. And finally, it crossed over a narrow four-plank bridge where love protects, believes, hopes and endures all things against all odds. This journey must lead somewhere. It leads to the end. But then it keeps going... forever.

Though this journey is very difficult, in fact it feels quite impossible at nearly every turn, Paul does wish to convey to us the idea that the difficult path goes on forever. We need to look at this as we look at the life of a believer in Christ. The hardest part of a believer’s life is the part between being born again and death. But the end of this life is not the end of the journey, right? We go on to see Him who will wipe away every tear, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away (Rev. 21:4).

⁸ Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰ but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. ¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. ¹² For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

¹³ So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love. (1Cor. 13:8-13)

When the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. The perfect will come, but to get there, the last word Paul gives us is endurance. Endurance feels impossible at many times. But the perfect will come. When the perfect comes, perfect love will be there. Ten billion years later, love will be there. We go back to the very first words of this study quoting 1John 4:8, “God is love.” God existed before the universe was created, which means love was there at the beginning. God will reign forever and ever into eternity, which means love will be there as well. Faith and hope also will remain, but our faith will be sight and our hope will be realized, so the greatest of all that remains will be love.

Love never ends. Remember the word here, “*pipto*,” literally means “to fall” or “to fall down.” How appropriate that when the perfect comes, we will join the saints in heaven in falling down (*pipto*) before the One seated on the throne and before the Lamb (Rev. 4:10; 5:8). Love never falls down, but we who love God will fall down. Our fall will be in true worship, pure worship, seeing His face, beholding *agape* love right in front of us... forever.

Let this be our encouragement, that even though we may fail countless times in loving others as Christ has loved us, the journey continues on in His love and towards His love. At any point in that journey, He is there to help us back on track. He will be faithful to teach us to be patient and kind; to help us not envy or boast, or to not be arrogant or rude; to help us not insist on our own way, or to not be irritable

or resentful; to help us not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoice together with the truth; or to help us bear, believe, hope and endure all things.

God, You are love. As Your child, I humbly fall down before You. You were there at the beginning. You know no end. Lord, this life is hard. I fail every day. I fall short of what You want of me. I am full of pride. I need the reminders that You are on Your throne, and that the perfect will come. Please help me as I go forward each day to lead those around me forward in love, toward Your perfect love. Amen.

Dan Leiphart, 2020