

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

- Love never fails -

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Introduction

- ❖ 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 (1 Cor 13:4-8a).
- ❖ If love is so fundamental, irreplaceable and determinative for our life as humans, we need to know more clearly what it is.¹

- ❖ The context, form and structure, theological, technical and hermeneutical notes given in this sermon outline overlap with other sermon outlines taken from 1 Corinthians. This makes it possible to use this sermon outline as a “stand-alone”. You can also fit this outline into a series of sermons.

Context

- ❖ 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 is part of 1 Corinthians 12-14. Paul discusses the tensions within the congregation of Corinth. There are two (or more) groups. The first group is advocating the “speaking in tongues” at the expense of the other group.
- ❖ A short outline of 1 Corinthians 12-14. It is advisable to read the whole passage, before looking at the details.

¹ Prior, D. (1985, p. 229).

The problem		
1 Corinthians 12:1-3		Introducing the problem
The answer		
Part I: The gifts of the Spirit and the body of Christ		
1 Corinthians 12:4-6		
	12:4	Spiritual gifts and the Holy Spirit
	12:5	Spiritual gifts and the Lord
	12:6	Spiritual gifts and the Father
1 Corinthians 12:7-11		The Holy Spirit and the body of Christ
1 Corinthians 12:12-26		The Lord and the body of Christ
1 Corinthians 12:27-31		The Father and the body of Christ
Part II: Christian love as the most excellent way		
1 Corinthians 12:31-14:1		Love never fails.
Part III: The speaking in tongues and prophecy – order and peace during worship – solving the problem		
1 Corinthians 14:1-25		Speaking in tongues and prophecy compared
1 Corinthians 14:26-40		Orderly worship

❖ Some additional remarks.

- In 1 Corinthians 12:4-6, the apostle Paul makes clear that it is necessary to resolve all problems in the congregation taking into account that the Christian church is related to the Triune God.
- Paul elaborates this in the ensuing verses.
 - 1 Corinthians 12:4 > 1 Corinthians 12:7-11 – the Holy Spirit.
 - 1 Corinthians 12:5 > 1 Corinthians 12:12-26 – the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - 1 Corinthians 12:6 > 1 Corinthians 12:27-31 – the God and Father.
- Before he discusses the problem of speaking in tongues and prophecy, and peace and order during the worship service (1 Cor 14), he makes clear that Christian love is the prerequisite for serving the Christian community. Love endures.

❖ A detailed outline of 1 Corinthians 12:31-14:1.

Transition: (verse 12:31)	And now I will show you the most excellent way.
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<i>Without love, I am nothing:</i> <i>(verse 1-3)</i>	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.
<i>Love contrasted:</i> <i>(verse 4-7)</i>	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.
<i>Love and the relative importance of the Spiritual gifts:</i> <i>(verse 8-12)</i>	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.
<i>Concluding words and transition:</i> <i>(verse 13, 14:1)</i>	And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.

- ❖ The great chapter on love and the congregation

Form and structure

- ❖ A detailed outline of 1 Corinthians 13:4-7:

Love contrasted (verse 4-7)	
<i>Two positive statements: (verse 4)</i>	Love is patient, love is kind.
<i>Seven negative statements: (verse 4, 5)</i>	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.
<i>Love and joy – summarizing statement: (verse 6)</i>	Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.
<i>The power of love: (verse 7)</i>	It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.
<i>Conclusion: (verse 8)</i>	Love never fails.

Technical, hermeneutical and historical notes

- ❖ Chapter 13 must be understood against the background of the problems which arose due to a conflict within the church of Corinth about the spiritual gifts, especially the speaking in tongues.
 - This section is very concise and succinct, that makes it necessary to study the separate words, and groups of words within the context of 1 Corinthians 13.

Verse 4:

- ❖ Love = “ἀγάπη”: 1. **the quality of warm regard for and interest in another, esteem, affection, regard, love** (without limitation to very intimate relationships, and very seldom in general Greek of sexual attraction).²
- ❖ To be patient = “μακροθυμέω”: 2. **to bear up under provocation without complaint, be patient, forbearing.**³
- ❖ To be kind = “χρηστεύομαι”: **be kind, loving, merciful.**⁴
- ❖ To be filled with envy = “ζηλόω”: 2. **to have intense negative feelings over another's achievements or success, be filled with jealousy, envy.**⁵

² Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 6).

³ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 612).

⁴ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 1089).

- ❖ To boast = “περπερεύομαι”: **to heap praise on oneself, boast, brag.**⁶
- ❖ To be proud, arrogant (ESV) = “φυσιόω”: literally ‘blow up, inflate’, figurative **to cause to have an exaggerated self-conception, puff up, make proud; become puffed up or conceited, put on airs.**⁷

Verse 5

- ❖ To be rude = “ἀσχημονέω”: to act contrary to the standard = *behave disgracefully, dishonorably, indecently.*⁸
- ❖ To be self-seeking / insist on its own way (ESV) = “ζητέω”: 3. **to devote serious effort to realize one's desire or objective, strive for, aim (at), try to obtain, desire, wish (for).** b. “τὰ ἔαυτῆς” **strive for one's own advantage.**⁹
- ❖ To be easily angered / irritable (ESV) = “παροξύνω”: *become irritated, angry.*¹⁰
- ❖ To keep records of wrongs / resentful (ESV) = “λογίζομαι τὸ κακόν” a. *count, take into account.*¹¹
 - To keep a mental record of events for the sake of some future action—‘to keep a record, to remember, to bear in mind.’¹²

Verse 6

- ❖ To delight in / rejoice at (ESV) = “χαίρω”: 1. **to be in a state of happiness and well-being, rejoice, be glad.**¹³
- ❖ Evil / wrongdoing (ESV) = “ἀδικία”:
 - 1. **an act that violates standards of right conduct, wrongdoing.**
 - 2. **the quality of injustice, unrighteousness, wickedness, injustice.**¹⁴

⁵ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 427).

⁶ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 808).

⁷ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 1069).

⁸ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 147).

⁹ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 428).

¹⁰ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 780).

¹¹ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 597).

¹² Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996, Vol. 1, p. 345).

¹³ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 1074).

¹⁴ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 20).

- ❖ Rejoice with = “συγχαίρω”: 1. **to experience joy in conjunction with someone, rejoice with.**¹⁵
- ❖ Truth = “ἀληθεια”:
 - 1. **the quality of being in accord with what is true, truthfulness, dependability, uprightness** in thought and deed.
 - 2. **the content of what is true, truth.**¹⁶
- ❖ There are two possible translations. Evil and truth can refer both to a quality and to result/content:

1. attitude / quality	2. act / content
Love does not delight in unrighteousness	Love does not delight in wrongdoing
but rejoices with the uprightness in thought and deed.	but rejoices with the truth.

Verse 7

- ❖ It always = “πάντα” is used four times as anaphora (rhetorical repetition)—The accusative of specification stands almost in the sense of an adverb (B-D-F §154; Rob. 487) **in all respects, in every way, altogether.**¹⁷
- ❖ To protect / bear (ESV) = “στέγω”:
 - 1. **to keep confidential, cover, pass over in silence**, so perhaps “ἡ ἀγάπη πάντα στέγει” (1 Cor 13:7) of love that throws a cloak of silence over what is displeasing in another person (Harnack, SBBerlAk 1911, 147; but s. 2).
 - 2. **to bear up against difficulties, bear, stand, endure.**¹⁸
 - To put up with annoyance or difficulty—‘to put up with, to endure.’¹⁹
- ❖ To trust / believe (ESV) = “πιστεύω”: 1. **to consider something to be true and therefore worthy of one’s trust, believe.**²⁰
- ❖ To hope = “ἐλπίζω”: 1. **to look forward to something, with implication of confidence about something coming to pass, hope, hope for.**²¹

¹⁵ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 953).

¹⁶ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 42).

¹⁷ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 783).

¹⁸ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 942).

¹⁹ Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996, p. 307).

²⁰ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 816).

- ❖ To persevere / endure (ESV) = “ὑπομένω”: 2. **to maintain a belief or course of action in the face of opposition, stand one's ground, hold out, endure.**²²

Verse 8

- ❖ To fail / end (ESV) = “πίπτω”: Figurative *become invalid, come to an end, fail.*²³
 - ‘Love never fails’ or, stated positively, ‘love is always sufficient’ or ‘love is always adequate for anything.’²⁴

Alternative translation (verse 4-7)

- ❖ (4) Love waits patiently; love shows kindness. Love does not burn with envy; does not brag—is not inflated with its own importance. (5) It does not behave with ill-mannered impropriety; is not preoccupied with the interests of the self; does not become exasperated into pique; does not keep a reckoning up of evil. (6) Love does not take pleasure at wrongdoing, but joyfully celebrates truth. (7) It never tires of support, never loses faith, never exhausts hope, never gives up.²⁵

Exposition

A short summary of 1 Corinthians 12

- ❖ The Corinthians are highly divided on the subject of the gifts of the Spirit (12:1-3). Some advocate the gift of speaking in tongues as the most important gift.
- ❖ Paul addresses this subject, first by pointing to the Triune God. It is impossible to focus on the spiritual gifts without giving any attention to the Spirit, the Lord, and God the Father (12:4-6). The Spirit gives, just as he determines (12:7-11), to serve the body of Christ, to the glory of the Father (12:12-26). God will appoint people to perform certain tasks, as an apostle, an evangelist, a prophet, to heal the sick, and to help others (12:27-31).

Verse 1-3

- ❖ If a Christian wants to serve the Christian church, he must be motivated by the love of Christ.
- ❖ In these verses, Paul makes use of several hyperboles to stress this point.

²¹ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 319).

²² Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 1039).

²³ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 815).

²⁴ Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996, Vol 1, p. 679).

²⁵ Thiselton, A. C. (2000, p. 1026).

- A **hyperbole** is the use of **exaggeration** as a figure of speech. It emphasizes, evokes strong feelings, and creates strong impressions. As a figure of speech, it is usually not meant to be taken literally!²⁶
 - 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.
- These hyperboles are used to stress the importance, the necessity of the Christian love.
- ❖ He mentions six gifts in particular:
 - The ability to speak in tongues (verse 1).
 - This ability caused a lot of tension and discussion among the Christians in Corinth.
 - Tongues of men = human languages.²⁷
 - The ability to prophecy, the gift of knowledge, and the gift of faith (verse 2).
 - The gift to help the poor, and self-sacrifice (verse 3).
- ❖ The Christian love is not emotional, sexual, or ecstatic.²⁸
 - This love shows no partiality or favouritism.
 - This love is a result of the will of a person: "I want to love you."
 - This love is commanded by Jesus:
 - "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love" (Jn 15:9).
 - This "**love denotes above all a *stance* or *attitude* which shows itself *in acts of will* as *regard, respect, and concern for the welfare of the other*.** It is therefore profoundly **christological**, for the cross is the paradigm case of the act of *will* and *stance* which **places welfare of others above the interests of the self.**"²⁹

Verse 4

- ❖ **"Love is patient, love is kind."**
 - The Corinthians were blaming each other. It is important to be patient and kind.
 - Patient: to bear up under provocation without complaint.
 - "Love, Paul urges, **waits patiently** not only because it deals patiently with the loved one but also because it recognizes that *the right timing* plays a huge part in securing the welfare of the other."³⁰

²⁶ Hyperbole. (2018, June 04). Retrieved from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hyperbole>

²⁷ Ellingworth, P., Hatton, H., (1995, p. 293).

²⁸ Thiselton, A. C. (2000, p. 1033).

²⁹ Thiselton, A. C. (2000, p. 1035).

³⁰ Thiselton, A. C. (2000, p. 1047).

- Love is paired with wisdom! “But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere” (Jm 3:17).
-
- ❖ “**It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.**”
 - Self-indulgence with spiritual gifts easily leads up to pride and arrogance.
 - The lack of certain gifts might provoke jealousy and envy.
 - “How much behavior among believers and even ministers is actually “attention seeking” designed to impress others with one’s own supposed importance? Some “spiritual songs” may appear to encourage, rather than discourage, this preoccupation with the self rather than with others and with God.”³¹

Verse 5

- ❖ “**It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.**”
 - The apostle Paul describes the consequences of a quarrelsome atmosphere.
 - “**Love** does not elbow its way into conversations, worship services, or public institutions in a disruptive, discourteous, attention-seeking way. Insofar as courtesy (versus courtesy) and politeness (versus impoliteness) relate to what is deemed publicly pleasing or displeasing, **love** does not rush in to impose its idiosyncrasies on those for whom bad manners are offensive.”³²
 - “The background here may allude to the intrusion of tongues or prophecies at inappropriate moments (1 Cor 14). But today it may also include any kind of monopolizing of a congregation’s time and attention in the service of the self: in the tone, style, and vocabulary adopted in notices or sermons, or, worst of all, the minister as overfamiliar chat-show host or “prophet” of ill-mannered rebuke.”³³
 - “Nygren writes, *Agape (love)* in Paul stands in “**opposition to all that be called ‘self-love.’**”³⁴
 - “Many local churches and many theological colleges contain *some who parade their “gifts” while others nurse their “hurts.” Does either side, Paul asks, genuinely put the other before the self?*”³⁵

³¹ Thiselton, A. C. (2000, p. 1049).

³² Thiselton, A. C. (2000, p. 1050).

³³ Thiselton, A. C. (2000, p. 1050).

³⁴ Nygren, A., (1957, p. 130).

Verse 6

- ❖ “Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.”
- The first part of this verse refers to someone else’s wrongdoing. When a Christian loves other people, he cannot delight in evil. Love never can delight in evil.
 - Love rejoices with the truth. Truth is not a set of verifiable facts, but the Christian truth sets people free! Truth within the context of relationships is directed towards the well-being of the other.
 - “The symmetry of verse 6a and verse 6b is now apparent. No taint of evil can enhance or give pleasure to love, where love is genuine. Love takes no pleasure in someone else’s failure, and delights in integrity and reality. If the situation is bad, love wants to help; if the situation is good, love wants to celebrate.”³⁶
 - “Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me’” (Jn 14:6).
 - “It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us” (2 Jn 4; 3 Jn 3).

Verse 7, 8a

- ❖ “Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”
- The fourfold use of “all things” is remarkable. It conveys the thought that love has no limits.
 - These words can easily be misunderstood! Thiselton warns: “The traditional translations invite the kind of misunderstandings of Paul and indeed of Christianity which fuel the critiques of Feuerbach, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. The well-known AV/KJV and RV rendering *beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things* appears to support Marx’s notion of Christianity as the opium of the people, or Nietzsche’s concept of Christianity as ‘servile mediocrity.’”³⁷ Genuine Christian love cannot believe all things, which if taken literally would include pertinent lies. In that case, Christian love would be ultimately naive.
 - Love transcends everything, that means, love must be the guiding principle for Christians. This love is based on the love of Christ. Love always trusts Christ. Love is not fixed on the present but reaches further into the future. Love knows that God who will do justice will save, and will renew all things. That is why Christian love can persevere, no matter what happens.

³⁵ Thiselton, A. C. (2000, p. 1052, 1053).

³⁶ Thiselton, A. C. (2000, p. 1056).

³⁷ Thiselton, A. C. (2000, p. 1056).

- “Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law” (Rom 13:10).
- “Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins” 1 (Pet 4:8).

Application

Before

- ❖ Reflect on yourself and ask yourself the question:³⁸ am I motivated by the love of Christ when I preach, teach, and serve the church of Christ.

Christ	Is patient, is kind.
He	Does not envy, does not boast, is not proud.
He	Is not rude, is not self-seeking, is not easily angered, keeps no record of wrongs.
He	does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.
He	It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.
And I?	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.

- ❖ Identify the needs of the congregation.
- ❖ Praise Christ for his love:
 - “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. **Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.** You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit — fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: Love each other” (Jn 15:12-17).

Christian Love (verse 4)

- ❖ “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you” (Jn 15:9-12).
- ❖ “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Gal 5:22, 23).

³⁸ Prior, D. (1985, p. 229)

- ❖ This love is patient (= **to bear up under provocation without complaint**). The believer knows that (s)he is serving the Kingdom, and community, the church of Christ and not the own interests.
 - If injustice is involved, (s)he knows that Christ will justify. This love is characterized by forgiveness, mercy, and self-control.

The opposites (verse 5, 6)

- ❖ The apostle Paul used opposites to teach and to make his point. It is possible to mirror love with jealousy.

LOVE	JEALOUSY
Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.	Jealousy is not patient, jealousy is not kind. It does envy, it does boast, it is proud.
It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.	It is rude, it is self-seeking, it is easily angered, it keeps a record of wrongs.
Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.	Jealousy does not delight in truth but rejoices with evil.

- ❖ This can be applied to all situations where humans interact:
 - Paul focussed on the worship service and church life. But it is equally possible to apply these to these words to different contexts.
 - Marriage;
 - Family-life;
 - Workspace.
 - “**It keeps no record of wrongs.**”
 - “If we genuinely love a person, we should **not take pleasure at** conduct which gives us the opportunity to lecture them or to rebuke them about their **wrongdoing**. Here, again, may be an allusion to overly ready pleasure in *prophetic rebuke* and *pronouncing judgment* on failures within the congregation. Does such a prophet or preacher genuinely **love** those whose welfare he or she claims to cherish if this gives **pleasure?**³⁹
 - Compare: “For I (Paul) wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart and **with many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you**” (2 Cor 2:4).
 - “The practical thrust of *love joyfully celebrates truth*, then, is that love does not use manipulative devices and subtexts to protect itself from **truth** or from *the truth*. It is

³⁹ Thiselton, A. C. (2000, p. 1054).

honest and open, not defensive, for it has placed the good of the other above the good of the self. Theology enters the picture in a different way from that envisaged by most commentators. As Karl Rahner observes, the person who has placed everything in the hands of God has no need to fear, or to hide from, the truth. For God already knows it and has accepted the believer as he or she is.⁴⁰

LOVE	ENVY	RUDENESS
always protects	never protects the other	never protects the other
always trusts	never trusts the other	never trusts the other
always hopes	never hopes	never hopes
always perseveres	always perseveres	always perseveres
Is constructive	Is destructive	Is destructive

Love never fails (verse 7, 8a)

- ❖ Love transcends everything, that is, love is the guiding principle. This love is based on the love of Christ. Love always trusts Christ. Love is not fixed on the present but reaches further into the future. Love knows God who will do justice, will save and will recover. That is why Christian love can stay, no matter what happens.
- ❖ “Love is creative, innovative, transforming, and indifferent to ‘returns’”⁴¹
- ❖ Christian love sets people free.

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⁴⁰ Thiselton, A. C. (2000, p.1056).

⁴¹ Thiselton, A. C. (2000, p. 1057).

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