

Love Never Fails

February 22, 2015 ~ 1 Cor 13

Introduction

- ❖ Many universities teach classes on “The Bible as Literature”
 - ✧ I’ve always been suspicious of such classes ~ “The Bible as Mere Literature”
 - ✧ Read “What Makes the Bible Literature?” Lesson 1 Intro
 - ◇ I concur with this writer’s statements
 - ◇ Our text today is a wonderful example of beautiful Biblical literature
 - ◇ This “love poem” is among the most beautiful found in all the world

Broader Context

- ❖ Chapters **12** to **14** are a unit in **1 Corinthians** addressing unity & diversity
 - ✧ The Corinthians were obsessing over gifts / leading to disunity
 - ◇ !!!: They were like toddlers armed with loaded revolvers
 - ✧ Paul addresses the unity and diversity of the gifts in **12** and **14**
 - ✧ But in chapter **13** Paul shows them “a more excellent way” (**1 Cor 12.31**)
 - ◇ Amidst a lecture on spiritual gifts & unity rests this literary masterpiece

Poem’s Definition of Love

- ❖ Let’s summarize our 13 verse poem
 - ✧ **6** things love is GREATER than . . . (3 verses)
 - ✧ **7** things love IS . . . (4 verses)
 - ✧ **8** things love is NOT . . . (same 4 verses)
- ❖ The first 7 verses are jam packed with detail / But then it changes
 - ✧ At **8a** we read “Love never fails” and the tone changes
 - ✧ These 3 words at the heart of Paul’s 1700 word argument (**chs 12 – 14**)
- ❖ The rest contrasts permanence of love with temporality of tongues & knowledge
 - ✧ **v13** ends with . . . **Read v13** ~ “And now abide faith . . . greatest of these I love.”
 - ✧ Faith & hope pass away
 - ✧ But love remains as strong and necessary as ever
- ❖ But before we get to **chapter 13** let’s read the intro to it (**Read 1 Cor 12.27-31**)
 - ✧ Paul sets aside his lecture on gifts to direct them to a more excellent way
 - ✧ “What is the more excellent way...?”

Xition: “6 things love is greater than . . .”

1. Love is Greater than Tongues

- ❖ **Read v1** ~ “Though I speak .. a clanging symbol”
- ❖ Paul is referring to more than mere eloquence of speech
 - ✧ He’s referring to the highly prized spiritual gift of tongues
 - ✧ Communicating with other cultures in their language
 - ✧ Yet this ability “**to connect**” is empty of meaning without love

2. Love is Greater than Prophecy

- ❖ **Read v2** ~ “And though I have the gift of prophecy .. I am nothing”
- ❖ To prophesy is to be the spokesman of God / What greater honor is there?
 - ✧ **III**: Balaam spoke for God / Yet he was judged by God and killed in war
 - ✧ God can have anyone speak for Him / “**or anything**” ~ “**donkey**” -or- “**rocks**”

3. Love is Greater than Knowledge

- ❖ Knowledge (i.e., gnosis) is highly valued in any culture / “**Knowledge is power**”
 - ✧ **III**: Irian Jaya – “**Peace Child**” & “**Lords of the Earth**” (by Don Richardson)
- ❖ America has advocated “**salvation through education**” for decades
 - ✧ Costs keep rising and yet scores keep dropping
 - ✧ The church embraces it too: **III**: Spelling, Trivia Crack
 - ✧ Apart from humility knowledge leads to pride
 - ✧ Apart from love knowledge leads to arrogance

4. Love is Greater than Faith

- ❖ A strong faith often leads to being used mightily by God
 - ✧ That could lead to fame and notoriety as for Elijah and Elisha
- ❖ **Read v2** ~ Last 3 end with “**I am nothing**” / But others think him something

5. Love is Greater than Generosity

- ❖ **Read v3** ~ “And though I bestow all my goods .. **profits me nothing**”
 - ✧ Many point out that love is more than emotion / it is an action - true
 - ✧ But this describes **action** / And it is of **no** personal value

6. Love is Greater than Self-Sacrifice

- ❖ **III**: Self-sacrifice “**martyrdom**” is venerated by many religions
 - ✧ Buddhist monks burned themselves in protest of Dali Lama imprisonment
 - ✧ Muslim male terrorists are to be “**greeted by 10 virgins**”
 - ✧ Let’s not judge / Crusades - Catholic bishops taught no time in purgatory

Xition: “Now Paul goes on to define love . . .”

What Love **IS** and **ISN'T**

❖ Read vs 4-8 “Love suffers long .. endures all things”

✧ SEVEN things love is / (2 then 8 isn't then remaining 5)

✧ EIGHT things love isn't

1 & 2. **IS** - v4a ~ “Love suffers long and is kind”

❖ Love suffers long through the unkindness of others

✧ Yet remains kind-hearted and forgiving

1. **ISN'T** - v4b ~ “Love does not envy”

❖ Love embodies contentment / Envy wants what others have

✧ III: A Separate Peace - Envy manifests itself in happiness at other's misfortune

2. **ISN'T** - v4c ~ “Love does not parade itself”

❖ Love is not a showoff / It does not attempt to inspire envy in others

✧ III: Jackie Chan credits rolling – “I am so proud of myself”

3. **ISN'T** - v4d ~ “Love is not puffed up”

❖ Love is not proud / It does not attempt to make others smaller

4. **ISN'T** - v5a ~ “Love does not behave rudely”

❖ Love wants others to be comfortable / to feel safe

❖ III: Blast from the Past – “impeccable manners”

5. **ISN'T** - v5b ~ “Love does not seek its own”

❖ All marriages would be wonderful if this was adhered to . . .

✧ Love is not selfish / It is more interested in happiness of others

✧ It is no sacrifice to not have the attention / just the opposite / happy for others

6. **ISN'T** - v5c ~ “Love is not provoked”

❖ Love cannot be manipulated into losing its composure / its trust of others

❖ III: Sitcom ~ Throwing attention off self by sowing seeds of mistrust / self-doubt

7. **ISN'T** - v5d ~ “Love thinks no evil”

❖ Love does not plot vengeance or connive to get its way

8. **ISN'T** - v6a ~ “Love does not rejoice in iniquity”

❖ Love is not fed or strengthened by sin

❖ Hatred and evil are fed by sin

✧ Yet the hunger grows more and more with feeding

Xition: “Remaining **FIVE** of what Love is . . .”

3. IS - v6b ~ “Love rejoices in the truth”

- ❖ Truth is right, subverting it and hiding it makes us feel bad

4. IS - v7a ~ “Love bears all things”

- ❖ Love is not cowardly – but courageous / It faces reality with fortitude and heart

5. IS - v7b ~ “Love believes all things”

- ❖ This one can be easily misunderstood
 - ✧ It’s not that love is soft headed or foolishly self-deluded
- ❖ But it is quick to believe the very best of people / to look past faults & flaws

6. IS - v7c ~ “Love hopes all things”

- ❖ This is biblical hope / knowledge and confidence in a certain outcome
- ❖ The all reflects things that are known / promised / prophesied

7. IS - v7d ~ “Love endures all things”

- ❖ This combines “suffering long” and “bearing all things”
 - ✧ Love endures for the sake of all that is true, right and worthy of attention
 - ✧ Love endures because to not do so is to give in to evil, to succumb to it

We’ve Viewed LOVE in 3 Different Ways

1. **6** things love is GREATER than . . .
 2. **7** things love IS . . .
 3. **8** things love is NOT . . .
- ❖ Now we come to the central thought of the entire discourse

v8a ~ “Love never fails”

- ❖ This is the title of today’s message
 - ✧ Reaching this statement is like cresting a hill / Everything is different now
 - ✧ You’ve climbed to this point / And now you see a different vista
- ❖ Failing can be perceived in various ways / 3 examples
 1. Love is active and will not fail to achieve its goal
 - ◆ III: We might refer to a “**closer**” baseball pitcher, “**He never fails**”
 2. Love is passive - strong and reliable, and will withstand attack
 - ◆ III: Like a building being strong in a storm “**It never fails**”
 3. Love is everlasting - something that endures through all time
 - ◆ And that is the sense meant here / The rest of chapter proves that

Xition: “The permanence of love . . .”

The Permanence of Love

- ❖ Paul's definition of love encompasses all 3 meanings
 1. **ACTIVE** - Love always achieves its objective
 2. **PASSIVE** - Love endures against all foes that attack it
 3. **FOREVER** - But the main point is that it will do this forever
- ❖ This describes God's love - not our own / Ours is weak and feeble by comparison

Biblical Proofs of the Power of Love

❖ Read 1 John 4.7-11

- ✧ "Love is of God" / True love is of God ~ Not for us to define
- ✧ "everyone who loves is born of God" / Unbelievers can't truly love
- ✧ "God is love" / God's very essence is love
- ✧ "God loved us and sent His Son" / Sacrifice is a hallmark of love
 - ◆ "Greater love has no man .. lays down his life .."
- ✧ "we also ought to love one another" / We show love through sacrifice

❖ Read 1 John 2.15

- ✧ "If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him"

❖ Read John 12.25

- ✧ "He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life" / We must remain aware of this truth

"Is Your Love Supernatural?"

- ❖ "Do you love as God loves or as the world loves?"
- ❖ "Your character reflects the truth" / Is your behavior one of:
 1. self-sacrifice or selfishness
 2. humility or pride
 3. patience or anger
 4. kindness or meanness
 5. peaceful or angry
 6. politeness or rudeness

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling,

And to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy,

To God our Savior, who alone is wise,

Be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever.

Amen *pause* Go in peace . . .

Lesson 1 - What Makes the Bible Literature?

This lesson explores what it means to say that the Bible is literature, and provides an introduction to literary approaches to the Bible.

The Good Book

Adam and Eve . . . The 10 Commandments . . . The birth of Jesus . . .

Even if you've never read the Bible, you know it. Its stories and psalms, phrases and proverbs, have seeped into our everyday lives. It is the book that has permeated Western culture more than any other. It is, in common parlance, the Good Book.

Of course, the Bible is a religious text — but it's also a work of literature. In fact, it's a literary masterpiece. The Bible can't be beat for sheer diversity of form and content, for artistry, for affective power, and for the way in which it keeps springing surprises on us. It is not simply a good book; it is the best. This book is dynamite.

In this class, we'll look at ways to read the Bible for its literary qualities — its narrative genres, its stylistic forms, its poetry and prose. You need not have a particular religious orientation to take a literary approach to the Bible. You can pick it up as you would a novel and delve into its world, get to know its characters, and follow its rich and wonderful stories.

Even if you feel you already know the Bible, this course will give you an opportunity to engage it on another level. Together we will look at the Bible through new eyes.

<https://bibleasliterature.wordpress.com/lesson-1/>