

Families and Unconditional Love

Introduction

In a God-fearing home, family members love one another. But what does that mean? How does such love look? How do people show their love for one another? Scripture speaks often about godly love. In 1 Corinthians chapter 13 the apostle Paul eloquently captures the essence of godly love. He describes it as one would describe an action. And he also tells what love is not.

Scripture

1 Corinthians 13

1 If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 3 If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. 4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

8 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. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. 11 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 the ways of childhood behind me. 12 For now we see only a 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. 13 And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

Study

1. Paul uses the Greek word *agape* for love throughout this chapter. Agape love is the selfless love that God has shown to us—the love described in John 3:16. Such love is never based on merit, nor is it conditional (“If you do this, then I will love you”).

How does the use of this word color the whole meaning of this entire chapter?

2. In verses 4 through 7, the apostle lists 15 specific love-actions that apply to our relationships with others: patient, kind, not envious (jealous), not boastful, not proud, not dishonoring others (not rude), not self-seeking, not easily angered, does not keep a record of wrongs, does not delight in evil, rejoices in the truth, always protects (helps bear others’ burdens), always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Choose two or three, and describe how each might look in an ordinary family setting.

3. Read 2 Corinthians 5:14-17 and 1 Peter 4:8. In what ways should we expect attitudes to change when people come to faith in Jesus?

4. Evaluate the following statement: “When we see a Christian show kindness, generosity, patience, or compassion to others, we are seeing a reflection of God himself.” (See also 1 John 4:12)

5. Read 1 John 3:18. What encouragement and direction do these words offer to parents who want to teach their children to be loving people?

6. In 1 Corinthians 12, St. Paul talks about spiritual gifts and how they were to be used in the context of a Christian congregation and the Christian life. What does chapter 13 teach us about using our gifts and talents?

Closing Prayer

Teach us, Lord Jesus, not only to talk about selfless and unconditional love, but to reflect such love every day through actions and behaviors that resemble your life of sacrifice and compassion. Amen.