

A New Heart: Renovated Affections

1 Corinthians 13

I found a collection of children's observations about love that were cute and very insightful. The article was entitled, "What is Love — From a Kid's Point of View." Here's what they had to say:

- When my grandmother got arthritis, she couldn't bend over and paint her toenails anymore. So my grandfather does it for her all the time, even when his hands got arthritis too. That's love.
- Love is when my mommy makes coffee for my daddy and she takes a sip before giving it to him, to make sure the taste is okay.
- Love is what's in the room with you at Christmas if you stop opening presents and listen.
- Love is like a little old woman and a little old man who are still friends even after they know each other so well.
- Love is when Mommy sees Daddy smelly and sweaty and still says he is handsomer than Robert Redford.

(Have you seen Robert Redford lately? It's getting easier to be "handsomer" than him!)

I think these children have more insight into real love than most of the adults I see.

Folks, we live in a world that doesn't know what real love is or what it looks like. We use the word "love" so casually, so carelessly. How many times have men said to women "I love you," when in truth they only wanted to share their bed. How many times does "I love you," mean "I like what I get from you." If you're drawn to someone because they meet *your need*, because they fill *your emptiness*, that's not love. It's just another form of selfishness. And if your relationship is based on an "I'll care for you if you care for me" reciprocity, that's not love, it's a business arrangement.

Did the love we see in Jesus ever depend upon what he got back from people? Did he ever say, "I'll love you, but only if you do this thing for me"?

There is a lot of hurt and heartache in our world because we don't know what true love looks like, and we don't know how to give true love to others. That was certainly the problem among the Christians in the city of Corinth.

The Apostle Paul was not writing to couples about romantic love when he wrote 1 Corinthians 13. Paul was writing to people who needed a “new heart” for all of their relationships. These Christians in Corinth were bickering with each other, were taking advantage of each other, and were demeaning each other.

The people they should have loved the most they were treating the worst!

So Paul gives them a crystal clear picture of the fact that they needed new hearts. They needed an extreme makeover of their affections.

Let’s look at the changes he calls for. He lists the qualities they needed:

Love is...

- patient
- kind
- not envious
- not boastful
- not proud
- not rude
- not self-seeking
- not easily angered
- not score-keeping
- not happy about others’ struggles....

Now let me make a confession. I am sure that it is probably a sign of my inadequacy as a scholar, but I just don’t like long lists. If I hear, “These are the 10 essential qualities of a good car,” then I know right then that I’ll probably get a lousy car, because I can’t remember a list of 10 things that I only need to use once every 5 years.

So when I read this list of characteristics of love in 1 Corinthians 13, I think, OK, what’s the core of Paul’s message. Paul has held love up in the light and turned it slowly to show off its individual facets. And we need that. But what’s the big picture here?

Well, the smallest I could get it is this:

True Love’s focus is blessing others.

Love wants the best for others.

Love thinks the best of others.

Love does the best for others.

Let's look at how that fits with what Paul has said here:

Here are some indicators that we don't have this love, this "new heart" from God:

- **Envy** is when we see what others have and, instead of rejoicing for them, we're perturbed. We look at their blessings, and then instantly focus on ourselves... like a child who watches at Christmas to see if his or her sibling will get anything that he or she should have gotten.
- **Boasting** is when we have to try to get others to focus on us and confirm our superiority or importance.
- **Proud** – the Greek word literally means "puffed up" – We're so full of ourselves that there's really no room left for others.
- **Easily angered** – In my experience, people who are "easily angered" were already angry before you got there. It's just another way to stay focused on yourself... to live in constant awareness of how mistreated you are.

But this love of God, the new heart God wants to give us, can let go of all of our self-centered concerns and focus on the needs, the joys, the victories of others. This new heart doesn't live to *be blessed*, but to *be a blessing*.

And Paul tells us that this love, this "new heart" from God, that is focused on others, is more specifically focused on the *positive* in others.

A boy brought home his report card and handed it to his father. It was filled with Cs and Ds and even had one F. His father looked it over quietly, then looked up at his son and said, "Well, son, I'm proud of you."

The shocked son said, "You are?"

And his Dad said, "Yes, I am. With grades like these, there's no way you could have been cheating."

Love is determined to see the best in others. Paul gets specific about that....

Love keeps no record of wrongs — Some people are excellent "score keepers." They maintain a record of every offense, and can replay it for you at the drop of a hat. But the new heart that God offers us, this real love Paul talks about, only keeps score of the positive.

A “new heart” from God, a heart that loves with God’s kind of love, holds on to the best from the *past*, and it also searches for the best in the *present* . . .

Love does not delight in evil – God’s kind of love doesn’t find satisfaction when others stumble or when others are mistreated. Because this love from a “new heart” is positive, not negative. If your heart is better at noticing and recording the negative, then you need a “new heart.”

True Christian love is looking for a reason to rejoice rather than a reason to complain.

True Love’s focus is blessing others.

Love wants the best for others.

Love thinks the best of others.

Love does the best for others.

OK, so what if you find that your old heart is in serious need of an extreme makeover? What if you need a renovation in the “love department?”

The thing you’ve got to understand is that this kind of love doesn’t come from trying harder. It requires a surrender to the Spirit of God. We have to let the Spirit of God give us a heart transplant – to place His own love and grace within us.

Do you remember that famous passage from Galatians, chapter 5...?

“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” (Gal. 5:22-23)

The fruit of the Spirit is *love* – the very love Paul talks about in 1 Corinthians 13.

It’s not the fruit of trying harder.

It’s not the fruit of coming to church.

It’s not the fruit of reading the Bible.

This love is the fruit – the *by-product* – of allowing the Spirit of God to have control of your affections and your life. It’s a transplant of attitudes and affections that result in an extreme makeover of your relationships with others.

If you’d like to have that new heart today, it’s yours for the asking.

If you’d like to experience a renovation of your affections, God can do it right now.

All it takes is a simple request – “Lord, take my heart – take all the things that my heart is holding onto – and put a new heart within me.”

I want to love as You love,
I want to value what you value,
I want to rejoice in what you rejoice in.

And I guarantee you that
a lot of what you get worked up about,
a lot of what you get angry about,
will cease to be an issue . . .
And a lot of the joys you’ve been missing
will enrich your life each day,
as the focus of your heart becomes
how to be a blessing to others
as a channel of God’s love.

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