

LOVE GONE RIGHT
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If you've ever attended a wedding, chances are good you've heard the "love passage", I Corinthians 13. My husband and I read that scripture at our wedding (we're not famous for being original), and it's perfect for a wedding. But it's not just for ceremonies; it's good for every day of our lives. And if we keep it in context, we remember that I Corinthians 13 is part of a letter Paul was writing to the CHURCH ... not just couples in love.

In chapter 12, Paul had been writing and teaching the church in Corinth about spiritual gifts and expressions of the Holy Spirit. These gifts are beautiful and important, and they're given to build up and encourage the church. And then Paul says, in essence, "But I don't care HOW incredibly spiritual you are – if you don't have love, you're only making noise."

Paul goes on to describe to the church what love is, and what it's not. He never once says, "Love is a feeling." Nope! Love is action, love is attitude, love is about humility and self-control. If we're waiting for our feelings to get all mushy about people who typically drive us crazy, we'll wait a long time!

Love is patient. And right away we see – this isn't easy! Many of us are impatient by nature. We're actually afraid to pray for patience because whenever we do, God puts us in situations where patience is REQUIRED. And that's hard. But notice that in a long list of things that love is and love isn't, Paul puts patience first.

Love is kind. This means, simply, that love is never mean. Love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. Love finds a way to be glad for the people who have the possessions, or money, or looks, or gifts of any kind, which we believe we don't have. Love doesn't brag. Love just doesn't need to feel superior to the people around us. In fact, love shares weaknesses openly, knowing that each of us has weaknesses, and ... it's ok. It's a level playing field, and we love each other warts and all.

Love is not arrogant. A church member said to me once, "I've never met anyone who's perfect – but I've met a few people who think they're perfect!" Love is never rude. Yes, you can get angry with someone and still love them – but whether you're angry or not, rudeness or unkindness is not allowed. And reconciliation is the goal.

Love does not insist on its own way. "My way or the highway" is NOT loving. It's not even Christian! We're called to worship and serve together – and that means, sometimes, that things aren't going to go the way we think they should. And when that happens, we need to forget about being envious, boastful, arrogant, or rude ... swallow our (foolish) pride, and keep on loving.

Have I mentioned that love is from God? I thought maybe I should remind us of that, because this kind of love doesn't come naturally!

Love is not irritable or resentful. Irritability isn't the same thing as anger. Irritability is being touchy, aggravated, resentful, and critical. We all have days when we're just plain irritable. It may be understandable, but it's not all right to take it out on others. It's time to go to God, get all our gripes out in the open while God listens, and ask God's forgiveness for ourselves and his help so we can forgive those around us.

Love is not resentful. We can and do resent folks for a variety of reasons. The trouble with resentment is, first, it's not loving; second, it allows bitterness to take root in our soul, and

bitterness will hurt us spiritually, emotionally, and even physically. It may not hurt the one we resent, but it will hurt US.

Love does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

What incredible power and grace! Imagine if we really put all these principles to work in our relationships with each other. The world would know we are Christians by the love we have for each other ... just like the Bible says.

I know this is a very tall order! So let me sum it all up in one word. This word may make loving easier or harder for us. But surely this is what Jesus demonstrated when he left his place in glory and came to slog around earth with the people he loves: US.

The word is ... HUMILITY.

I don't mean being a doormat or allowing ourselves to be stepped on. True humility requires strength, gentleness, a clear picture of Jesus' love for us and what he's called us to be and do. True humility has the confidence to put someone else ahead of ourselves because we know we're called to love and serve. True humility opens the door for that I Corinthians love to touch and help others. Pride has no place in love. Humility is the foundation for true, Biblical love – the way God loves us, and the way he tells us to love one another.

I know we all want to be people who are loving. I know that when we mess up, we're sorry and we want to get it right. So take advantage of the powerful, loving relationship God offers us – where we can talk to him, tell him the truth, get it out of our system, receive forgiveness, and start again. He's grace-filled and forgiving. He's the absolute embodiment of love. And he'll help us become the people we really want to be.