

Calling the Bride



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The Art of Love - 11 Corinthians 13

"And you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free" – John 8:32

The dictionary describes the word "art" as "skill in performance." Paul's epistle to the church at Corinth was written to a people who had not yet achieved skill in the performance of those things that were most important to God. It is possible to be a "Jack of all trades, master of none" in a spiritual sense. We can exercise spiritual gifts and service as described in verses one through three, but without the character of love, as Paul says, we are "nothing."

In my opinion, there has not been enough emphasis in the church today regarding the formation of our characters. The church has become more focused on the external and has neglected the internal. It's easier to fill a church when the focus is on the material and the building up of self, rather than focusing on the Biblical precedent of self-sacrifice, or selflessness.

Jesus said that He has come to give us life abundantly. - *The thief comes not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly (John 10:10).*

I don't believe that we can truly know the abundant life until we allow ourselves to be formed in love. When this happens, we are better equipped to deal with the tribulations of this life, and we find we have been enabled to walk above the turbulence of our circumstances with Jesus. The devil no longer has the handles in us he uses to torment the inner man and rob and destroy our peace, joy and security.

Let's examine God's palette of colors that the Lord uses to create in us the masterpiece He desires us to be, and focus on what the Word of God reveals to be the development goals of the true Christian life.

1. Love suffers long and is kind.

The self-life is impatient with people. Love patiently endures or "suffers" the effects of the sin nature in others; the verbal jabs, insults, unkindness, inconsideration, etcetera. Love does not respond to any attack with unkindness. Love has learned to follow her Lord's example and because His strength is now her strength, she is strong enough to turn the other cheek (Matthew 5:38, 39). I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Philippians 4:13). This ability begins to develop when we come to the realization that the Lord requires us to die to self. This realization eliminates the "religious" spirit and permits the reformation of the inner man to begin. When we realize that this is something that God wants, and if our love for Him is sincere, we will want it, too.

Lord, please create in me the endurance and patience I need to not respond to anyone in unkindness, no matter how much I have been hurt. Let me learn to bring those hurts to You instead. Create in me this love.

2. Love is not jealous.

Envy is a monster that wants to eat you up from the inside out. It breeds competitiveness and pride. Again, the root of jealousy is self. When self has been crucified, love is enabled to rejoice in and enjoy the abilities of others. The dark chains the devil uses to manipulate your emotions are severed and happiness can flourish

like a beautiful garden in your soul.

Envy is removed when Jesus is our focus and our fulfillment is in Him. When we are fulfilled in our spirits through our intimacy with God, jealousy cannot exist. God replaces self with Himself. The person He has designed you to be, the image of His Son, begins to shine. You are satisfied and complete. The desire to take is replaced with the desire to give. You are a new creature.

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. – 11 Corinthians 5:17

Lord, please remove all jealousy in me and replace it with more of You. Continue to help me focus on You and what You desire me to become. Help me to feel Your Presence and know that You are all I need. Please create in me this love.

3. Love does not vaunt itself, is not puffed up.

The soul that knows that God is passionately in love with her, becomes secure. The assurance of God's love creates security. A soul that is secure in God has no need to vaunt itself, or seek approval from others, because that soul is secure in God's approval. The Gospel has taken root. The security of that love brings peace. The Self relaxes in its gentle embrace. The desire to boast or exalt is no longer a nuisance. This soul is humbled at the foot of the cross of self-sacrificing love.

The recognition of the heinousness of sin causes any remnants of pride to recoil. We recognize that all of our perceived accomplishments are nothing compared to the One who causes us to accomplish and achieve honor in this life. We lay our crowns at His feet (Revelation 4:10).

Lord, please create in me the security I need in in order to be truly humble. Help me to genuinely recognize and understand the depth of Your love for me. Help me to relax and feel satisfied with knowing You. Lord, please create in me this love.

4. Love does not behave itself improperly.

The soul that has submitted to God, has submitted to His gentle restraints. The soul that has come to recognize God's love, loves in response, and that love results in willing obedience to God's Word. Therefore, that soul restrains from behaving in a manner that would not bring glory to God. Lust is restrained by love. The soul that has submitted the self-life to God's care, has been released from the dictates of lust that previously directed the soul into self-indulgence. This soul is protected by her obedience. The snares that would discredit her witness are avoided. The Light of her life becomes a guide for others to follow.

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven (Matthew 5:16).

Lord, help me to always be guided by Your Word and Your Holy Spirit so I can be a light and be helpful to others. Help me to be always mindful of the fact that my life is a reflection of who You are in me. Make the fruit of Your Spirit in me be evident on a daily basis. Lord, please create in me this love.

5. Love seeks not her own.

Love is not selfish and lives for the welfare of others. Jesus is selfless. We watch as He willingly gives His life to make us selfless, too. Selflessness, is love exemplified. Selflessness requires us to pick up our cross and carry it in the wake of the footsteps of the One who has gone before. This love never fails no matter what has to be left behind.

The security that comes from truly knowing God and feeling safe in His care enables us to sacrifice ourselves in this way.

We are growing stronger with His strength. The cross we must carry is not as heavy as we first thought. We are growing in love. *Lord, help me to recognize that selflessness is what it means to be conformed to Your image, because You are selfless, You are free. Please create this freedom in me. Please give me this love.*

6. Love is not easily provoked.

Love can have a conversation with someone who has differing opinions without being provoked or becoming offended by mere words, or the actions of someone else who has not been formed by love.

Love remains calm, because love exists on another realm seated with Christ at the right hand of God, above any conflict.

Love is secure, therefore love does not argue or defend herself. Her trials have developed trust. Her focus is on her Savior; her purpose is to respond for the benefit of the other, resulting in peace.

This is spiritual maturity in action.

Lord, please hide myself in You to such a degree that I cannot be easily provoked and my responses will be directed by Your Holy Spirit. Lord, I fall so short of what it means to be Your disciple. Please create in me this love.

7. Love thinks no evil.

Love desires and is willing to put every thought under the obedience of Christ (11 Corinthians 10:5). Love recognizes the mental intrusions of that which is not of God, and rejects them the minute they begin knocking on the door of her mind.

The mental workings of love never wills harm to another. Therefore love does not judge or gossip. The mind of love rules the mouth.

Lord, please always help me to be aware of what is entering my thought life because You know everything that comes into my mind, good and bad. Teach me to be a skillful mental prospector, sifting away the refuse allowing only the gold to remain. Lord, please create in me this love.

8. Love rejoices not in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth.

Because love is guided by God's Spirit and is the fruit of His Holy Spirit, the soul that has learned to love has learned to become discerning. Iniquity comes in many forms and dons itself in many subtle disguises. It parades upon the stage of this life and sometimes we can become deceived into applauding things that are contrary to God's Word and offensive to Him.

Love seeks to please the One she loves, and turns her eyes away from beholding falsehood in any form.

Love turns her gaze to the Cross, and the Truth it proclaims.

Love rejoices in the things of God, and rejects the enticements

of a world drenched in darkness.

Joy is the fruit of holiness.

Lord, please help me to always keep me focused on Your truth, Your Word. Help me to be discerning and strong enough to turn away from iniquity. Help my soul to recoil from its presence and remove any love I may have for the things of this world. Lord, please create in me this love.

9. Love bears all things, believes all things, Hopes all things, endures all things.

Love bears and endures all things because belief and hope in all of God's goodness has been cultivated within. The outward bearing and enduring are the result of her progress to replace the self-life with God's love life in Jesus.

This soul has learned to smile through her temporary trials because she is empowered by the treasures of eternity. She has taken her lessons seriously and embraced their truth with all of her mind and heart. And within the hidden chambers of her identity in Christ, she dwells in victory.

She knows the love she has become...

10. ...will never fail.

*Lord, please create in me this love
Amen.*



Glorified by Love

And now, O Father, You glorify Me with Your own self, with the glory which I had with You before the world was. – John 17:5

Before Jesus was arrested and crucified, He prayed that God the Father would glorify Him with God's own "self." God's self, His being, is a holy, selfless love, which is His glory; a glory that is so radiant and intense, no man can approach it in his flesh (1 Timothy 6:16). Yet, it is the glory that Jesus shared with His Father before His incarnation.

Jesus knew He was about to endure the greatest trial of His life. In order to fulfill His purpose as the Messiah and take the sins of the world upon His soul, fulfilling the prophecy in Isaiah 53:10, He would have to resist every natural instinct of His flesh to preserve itself. Thus Jesus prayed for the Father's "self" to glorify Him. He was asking for the same selflessness that is the Father's love that Jesus always had, but now needed to be exhibited and expressed on a whole other level.

Some people, when they look at images of Jesus hanging on the cross, see them as pictures of His humiliation and turn their heads away.

And there are also some people who look at those images and see a miraculous portrait of selfless love that enabled its Bearer to die to save others. As we witness the pain and agony that was accepted and endured for the benefit of mankind, we realize that Jesus' prayer to be glorified with God's selfless love was abundantly answered.

*These things I command you, that you love one another.
John 15:17*