

## Love Goes to School

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In 1 Corinthians 13 Paul writes about what love is what love does. Paul writes that love is patient, kind, not proud, not rude, not self seeking, and not easily angered. Paul also writes that love does not envy, boast, keep a record of wrongs, delight in evil, or fail. On the other hand, love does protect, trust, persevere, and hope.

But what does all this mean for parents, students and teachers and in a Christian school? In the Table included in this article I have outlined some applications of 1 Corinthians 13 for parents, teachers and students in Christian schools.

For parents and teachers, **patience** means respecting the fact that students will progress academically, socially, physically, and spiritually at their own rates and in their own ways. Parents and teachers should respect this individuality as part of God's creation, and not demand that students progress according to developmental timetables set by others. On the other hand, students need to respect the fact that learning is often difficult, and that mastery of anything worthwhile requires effort over a long period of time. As someone once said: "There are no short cuts to any place worth going". For these reasons, students need to learn not to rush their learning, but to be patient with the time and effort required to learn, especially complex material, effectively

**Kind** parents and teachers will be sensitive and responsive to the difficulties that students experience while learning. As mature learners parents and teachers sometimes forget how hard it was (and still is!) to learn the things they now find easy. (Think how hard it was at first to learn how to drive a car as opposed to how easy it is now). On the other hand, kind students will support the learning, and the social integration, needs of other students. Learning is hard enough without having to do it alone, or while feeling lonely.

Parents and teachers who do **not envy** the capacities and gifts of students will be able to genuinely celebrate students' developing abilities with them, without feeling inadequate (even when students become better than them at some things!). Students who don't envy other students will also be able to recognise and value the achievements of others without feeling the need to 'cut' other students 'down to size', or undermine them in other ways. C.S. Lewis once said that not envying others means feeling as good about other people's gifts and achievements as you do about your own.

The flip-side of not envying is **not boasting**. Boasting means talking about your abilities and achievements in a way that makes others feel inadequate, uncomfortable or belittled ('small'). If parents and teachers do not want to provoke envy amongst others, then they will not boast about their own abilities and achievements. Similarly, students who don't want to provoke envy amongst other students will not boast about their own abilities and achievements. This does not mean that parents, teachers, and students can not feel satisfaction in their achievements. Rather it means that satisfaction in achievement should not be used as a weapon against the adequacy and integrity of others.

**Not being rude** means that parents, teachers, and students will communicate to each other in ways that care for the feelings of others. This applies even when parents, teachers, or students ‘know’ they are right and the other person is wrong. Being right (especially when most conflicts really involve two wrongs anyway) doesn’t excuse inter-personal communication which affronts or antagonises others. Loving communication is gentle and polite, whatever the circumstances.

Parents and teachers who love are **not** ‘out for themselves’ (**self-seeking**). They don’t manipulate others in order to get their own way, and they don’t see their needs as always being paramount in any given situation. To paraphrase Paul (in Philippians 2), loving parents and teachers will balance their needs with the needs of others. Students who are not self-seeking will focus on serving others as much as on being served themselves. They will not demand that school (or family!) revolves around them, but will seek to share the load (see Galatians 5:23) with respect to both school and family responsibilities.

Parents, teachers, and students who are **not easily angered** deliberately seek to control themselves before they seek to control others. We often feel anger when others don’t meet our expectations ie. when they demonstrate they are not acting within our control! This does not mean that anger is never justified ie. Paul doesn’t say: “Love never gets angry” – only that it is slow to get angry. Rather being slow to anger means that we balance ‘righteous indignation’ with appropriate and effective self-control and compassion for others. Love doesn’t ‘fly off at the handle’.

**Keeping no record of wrongs** meant that parents, teachers and students will ‘forgive and forget’. It means that parents and teachers won’t hold past wrongs ‘over students heads’ (the image in this phrase is of a guillotine), and students won’t keep grudges against parents, teachers or other students. For parents and teachers keeping no record or wrong means that every student has the opportunity to make a fresh start – even if the student has deeply hurt the parent or teacher. For students it means not assuming that parents or teachers are ‘out to get them’ but, instead, believing and responding in gratitude to words of forgiveness when they hear them.

**Not delighting in evil**, but rejoicing in truth means that parents, teacher, and students will deliberately avoid situations or commitment in which their morality may be ‘on the line’. All will avoid ‘sticky situations’ as far as possible, and preserve a straight-forward (‘straight-shooting’) and upright approach to life. Neither parents, teachers nor students will attempt to cut corners, or get away with things. Rather all will preserve their moral and spiritual integrity with joy.

**Protecting** students means that parents and teachers will not only care for the physical welfare of students, but their social, emotional, and spiritual welfare as well. In school settings this particularly means assisting students through the emotional difficulties associated with learning – including those associated with failure experiences. For students, protecting each other means not leading other students into dangerous situations – again not just physically dangerous situations, but socially, emotionally and spiritually dangerous situations as well. It means ‘steering clear’ of trouble or, in Jesus’ words: “being as wise as serpents but as innocent as doves”.

**Trust** does not mean closing your eyes and hoping for the best. It means a deep and abiding understanding that God is at work in the world – including in the lives of ordinary human beings! So, trusting parents and teachers will look for God's work in the lives of students, and help students to identify this work for themselves. Students will trust that God is at work in their lives (and the lives of their parents and teachers!) and so will look for the best (ie. God's work) in others rather than looking for (or assuming) the worst in others.

Trust inspires **perseverance**. Trusting that God is at work in people will inspire parents and teachers not to give up on (ie. to persevere with) students. Trust will also inspire students not to give up on themselves. Perseverance means continuing to work hard in the face of difficult relational and intellectual challenges. It means not succumbing to the urge to quit but being 'steady under pressure'. This steadiness (or steadfastness) is motivated by a love for God and others which transcends the desire for personal aggrandisement ie. love for God and others is a more powerful and lasting motivation than love of self.

Love holds positive expectations (**hopes**) for the future. Hope believes the best is yet to come. For parents and teacher this means looking for continual improvement in students, believing that they are becoming, and are capable of becoming, both better students and better people as God works within them over time. For students, hope means looking past present difficulties to their future as God's servants, believing that God will lead them in His ways, according to His purposes, and in His timing.

Finally, love means being consistent, trustworthy and faithful (**not failing**) in all of the above. It means imitating God's faithfulness and constant love, rather than the 'fly by night' or 'one night stand' ways of the world. It means parents, teachers, and students will commit themselves to ongoing, faithful relationships with each other, within which all participants will grow to be more loving people and, so, more like God Himself.

**Some Specifics Examples of Love in School and Classroom Contexts**  
(*An Application of 1 Corinthians 13*)

Love...	This means, for example, that loving parents and teachers will...	This means, for example, that loving students will...
<i>is patient</i>	respect students' <b>individual rates of progress</b> , and don't demand that students progress at the rate the teacher desires.	respect their <b>limitations</b> and individual rates of progress, as well as the <b>complexity</b> of the things they are trying to learn.
<i>is kind</i>	be <b>sensitive</b> and <b>responsive</b> to the difficulties students experience in learning and relating.	<b>help other students</b> learn when and how they can.
<i>does not envy</i>	genuinely <b>celebrate</b> the <b>achievements</b> of their students, and don't hold students back even when they exceed the teacher's own capacities.	celebrate the abilities and achievements of others, and <b>focus on what they can do</b> not what they can't do (or can't do as well as others).
<i>does not boast, is not proud</i>	not make students or other teachers <b>feel uncomfortable</b> ('small') with/through their abilities, experiences, expertise and achievements.	not make others <b>feel uncomfortable</b> ('small') with/through their abilities, experiences, expertise, or achievements.
<i>is not rude</i>	find ways to communicate even 'hard' news in ' <b>soft</b> ' ways.	be <b>careful</b> and <b>considerate</b> about what they say and how they say it.
<i>is not self-seeking</i>	not demand that <b>students perform</b> in order to make the teacher look good.	see <b>service</b> , rather than personal achievement per se, as the primary end of their education.
<i>is not easily angered</i>	<b>stop, breath, and think</b> before they react to unpleasant emotional/relational situations.	try to <b>control themselves</b> before they try and control others.

<i>keeps no record of wrongs</i>	treat students who have 'wronged' them in the <b>same way</b> as students who have no 'wronged' them.	<b>not ignore</b> , exclude, or 'bad-mouth' students who have 'wronged' them in the past.
<i>does not delight in evil, but rejoices in the truth</i>	be joyfully engaged in <b>preserving their own morality</b> , as well as the morality of their students.	not try to 'cut corners', 'pull swifties', 'beat the system', or 'get away with things', but rather try to <b>do the right thing in the right way</b> .
<i>protects</i>	<b>keep students safe</b> from the physical and emotional dangers of schooling (including the emotional dangers of failure).	<b>not attempt to lead</b> other students into moral or physical danger.
<i>trusts</i>	believe that <b>God is at work</b> within and between students, even when that work is slow or invisible.	be more willing to <b>believe the best</b> of other students before they are willing to believe the worst.
<i>perseveres</i>	<b>not give up</b> in the face of difficulties (or difficult students).	<b>not give up</b> in the face of difficult intellectual challenges.
<i>hopes</i>	hold <b>positive expectations</b> for students and their future.	be <b>optimistic</b> about the future (including their ability to eventually master difficult material).
<i>never fails</i>	do all the above in a <b>consistent and trustworthy</b> manner.	do all the above to the best of their <b>developing abilities</b> .