

Text: 1 Cor 13

Title: Love: The Supreme Virtue Among God's People – part 2

Intro: Central to the Christian life is the principle of love—not the world's kind of love, a sentimental love apart from the Spirit that can be enjoyed and even reciprocated by other unbelievers.

God's love is different, an infinitely greater kind of love, a love that moves toward sinners/the ungodly—Romans 5:8—"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

- God's love transcends human love

Everything about the Christian life is summed up in one principle—'love'—love for God and love for others

- Matthew 22:34-40—the greatest commandment is 'love God,' the second greatest is like the first, 'love your neighbor as yourself'
- Our struggle in life, especially in relationships, always boils down to a 'lack of love'—and that was the problem at Corinth
- The church at Corinth was a very gifted body—they had many natural talents and abilities—Paul says that they were not lacking in any spiritual gift—yet they lacked love—love as defined by God in the Scriptures
- It always amazes me when people try to define love apart from the WOG. Or, they try to manipulate you to do something and when you don't, they say 'you are not loving.'
- In 1 Corinthians 13, the Apostle Paul defines love—the chapter is planted among all the unholy things that the Corinthians were doing that Paul had to address.
- This is a simple, straight-forward text—penetrating, and difficult to hear because we are often such weak examples of this kind of love.

Prop: The text breaks down into three parts: The necessity of love (1-3), The character of love (4-8), and, The permanence of love (9-13).

Last time: we saw Paul begin his description of love with a series of contrasts in order to show that it doesn't matter what gifts you have or how much you know or how eloquent your speech or how much you sacrifice of yourself or your resources—without love, it is nothing—zero.

- 13:1—Communication is an important skill—some are more gifted communicators than others—they can make profound things simple and simple things profound—they can arrange words and sentences in such a way as to draw people in.
- If you were the most gifted communicator and could even give inspired messages from God, if you do not possess love, you are nothing more than noise.
- 13:2—knowledge is important as well—we marvel at those whose knowledge is profound—at Corinth, there were men of incredible knowledge, and God saved some and brought them into the church and gifted them spiritually—Paul says, 'If you could know all things, even spiritual things, and have all faith, yet without love, you are nothing.
- 13:3—some spend their lifetime giving away their resources to others—some give themselves, even their own life—Yet, without divine love, it is of no personal benefit—there's no eternal value

‘real love’—the kind of love expressed here—is not the kind of love as defined by our sinful society but defined by God. Without it, it’s like an empty theater that echoes with noise.

- The reason why churches get into trouble like Corinth did is because people exchange true biblical love for opinions of men and assess things from a human vantage point rather than from God and His Word.
- They are not humble in their appraisal of things but puffed up and arrogant.
- Therein is the danger.

Notice: the character of love. Love has characteristics that go against our human tendencies. Love, true love, can only be expressed by God’s grace and enabling power.

- In other wds, you cannot manufacture this kind of love—a ‘Christ-like love does not originate in the heart of fallen humanity’
- Ill—in studying this passage, you don’t get warm, cozy feelings and want to run out and embroider this text on something—you want to run and hide because there’s not one portion of this text that doesn’t touch your life and you know that at times you’ve been a total failure at this kind of love.

13:4—‘Love is patient’

- ‘love is patient’—means you’re very slow to become resentful—‘longsuffering’—you’re not vengeful
 - God’s love is always concerned with the welfare of others, not self.
 - Love doesn’t retaliate—the Christian who loves with a Christlike love never returns evil for evil—there’s no ‘paying back a wrong suffered’
 - Eph 4:2—says that ‘patience’ should characterize every believer in Christ

‘love is kind’—kindness is the counterpart of patience—love is not merely tolerating someone or ‘coping’ but active in doing them good.

- The Scriptures tell us that we are recipients of God’s kindness
- 1 Peter 2:2-3—says that we are to ‘long for the pure milk of the Word if we have tasted the kindness of the Lord’
- Titus 3:4-6—“But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,”
 - You might say, ‘Jesus was kindness and love Incarnate’
- The kindness that we’re to show others is the same kindness that’s been shown to us—and, it’s not something we can generate ourselves—it is a fruit of the HS in the life of the believer (Gal 5:22).
- The idea here is that we cannot just ‘tolerate those who offend us’ but ‘in kindness, we must move towards them and make ourselves useful to them’—you want the best for the other person.
- One writer: “Love is not an idea for Paul, not even a ‘motivating factor’ for behavior. It *is* behavior. To love is to act; anything short of action is not love at all” (Fee, 628).
- Love is making yourself useful to people.

- What is in your heart??? Are you just ‘tolerant’??? Or, do you move toward them with kindness???
- Patience is not keeping a list of wrongs and then dumping on them when you get the first opportunity. That’s not kind...that’s sinful.

‘[love] is not jealous’—‘not envious’ (NET), ‘does not envy’ (ESV)—‘envy’—is incompatible with love—the term can be used both negatively and positively—meaning you could have an earnest desire for a good thing

- God’s love is a jealous love—he desires allegiance
- Perhaps the Corinthians did desire good things in the way of gifts, wisdom, etc. But those desires are only good if the context is ‘desiring the good and benefit of others.’
 - Do you want wisdom to lead and serve the body of Christ??? Or, to serve you in your rivalry???
 - Do you desire certain gifts so that the body is served well, or are they for your own satisfaction???
 - Some at Corinth were jealous of the gifts others had, and those who had certain gifts closed their hearts to those who did not. That’s not love, Paul says.
 - Jealousy leads to strife and division (3:3)—you can see that played out in chapter 12.

Here, the wd refers to having ‘intense negative feelings over another’s achievements or success’ (BDAG)

- Love and jealousy are incompatible—they are opposites

Jealousy has an equally ugly twin—‘envy’

- ‘jealousy’ is: ‘I want what they have’
- ‘envy’ is: ‘I don’t want them to have what they have’
- Do you desire the demise of your rivals???

Q—Do you find yourself comparing yourself to others and then complaining about what you don’t have or what you’re not getting??? That’s not love.

Jealousy is no small sin—Prov 27:4—“Wrath is fierce and anger is a flood, But who can stand before jealousy?”—in its extreme, jealousy has a viciousness like no other sin.

- James 3:14-16—“But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.”
- ‘selfish ambition’ is driven by jealousy—it’s the wrong kind of wisdom—it’s being clever in your jealousy, but it is ultimately demonic and destructive

Ask yourself: Am I glad for the successes of others???

- Am I content with where God has me???
- Can you bloom where God has planted you with the gifts and skills that he has provided???
- Are you thankful for how God has blessed you, your family, your brothers and sisters in Christ??? Or, are there other things pulling at you???

Love is not jealous.

- When someone does something a little better than we do or has something we think we deserve, our immediate temptation is to be envious.
- Our sinful tendency is to react with ill-will because we simply do not believe that what God has for us is best—So, we become envious—we want what they have and ‘we don’t want them to do well’—‘love’—on the other hand does wish them well—there’s no jealousy
- Another aspect of jealousy is not just wanting what someone else has, but working behind the scenes to deprive the person of it—you don’t want them to have it.
- Paul uses a form of this wd in 1 Cor 3:3 along with the wd ‘strife’ as he confronts their bitter rivalry over their favorite teachers.
- Their jealousy also showed up in those who stood against Paul as his rivals for the affection of the Christian community. They didn’t want Paul to have the notoriety that he had.
- ‘jealousy’ is the seedbed of rivalry and sinful competition...Is it not???
- Love, on the other hand, is not jealous nor envious—love seeks the opposite—to serve those for whom Christ died.
- See: Phil 1:12-18—jealousy and selfish ambition are twins because you’re wanting something and not getting it on your terms, you’re not trusting God with your desires—Paul refused to return ‘envy for envy’

‘Love does not brag’—‘bragging’ or ‘boasting’ is merely provoking others to jealousy. Jealousy puts others down; bragging builds us up—it’s ‘building up an image of greatness in the eyes of others’

- The wd ‘brag’—means ‘to talk conceitedly, to boast’ (only used here in the NT)—‘to heap praise on oneself’ (BDAG). Lit ‘to be a windbag’
- Love doesn’t parade its accomplishments. Love doesn’t ‘self-promote.’ Love doesn’t care how you’re perceived by others—your talents or gifts or abilities that God has given.
- Sometimes we want to be perceived as knowing everything or having everything—that’s not love
- A person who boasts comes off as someone who has nothing else to learn. You cannot boast and love at the same time. It’s not possible.
 - Calling attention to your accomplishments and greatness while trying to lift others up is not possible.
- Love doesn’t seek to impress others—there’s no sinful fear of man that tries to portray an image of oneself in the eyes of others while hiding the real you.
 - Some people want to show hospitality, but not as a means of serving others—they really just want to show off their stuff.
 - Some people want to lead a Bible study, but not as a means of genuine edification—they just want to show off their Bible knowledge—that’s not love. You’re manipulating people for your own selfish ends—to garner followers to yourself.
- Do you obsess over how others perceive you??? That’s not love.
- The irony is: ‘we don’t like it when others brag, but we have no problem doing it ourselves.’
- The Corinthians loved the attention of others—at the expense of real fellowship, order, and mutual edification.
- ‘bragging’—is a form of pride—and it robs others of usefulness to God

- Proverbs warns against this—27:1-2—"Do not boast about tomorrow, For you do not know what a day may bring forth. Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; A stranger, and not your own lips."
- A braggart is not concerned with unity and harmony in the body of Christ.
- Exalting yourself in the eyes of others is not love.

'[love] is not arrogant'—Lit 'not puffed up'—'to have an exaggerated self-conception'

- 1 Cor 8:1—says that 'knowledge puffs up'
- In chapter 4, the Apostle Paul reminds the Corinthians that everything they had came from the Lord, even though they acted otherwise.
 - They had a habit of not coming under the Truth that was spoken.
 - Corinth had many leaders that bragged about themselves, but they refused to come under straightforward principles of the WOG.
 - Paul says, 'That's not love—when you resist the truth'
 - You set yourself up as the standard instead of God's Word. That's arrogant and unloving.
 - They were so swallowed up by their own pride that they refused to repent—they bragged rather than mourn over their sin
- Prov 8:13—"The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverted mouth, I hate."—to be wise is to hate pride and arrogance
- Love hates evil, boasting, bragging, and arrogance
- One writer: "Arrogance is big-headed; love is big-hearted."¹

13:5—"[love] does not act unbecomingly"—some translate it: 'does not act rudely'—the wd Lit means 'to behave disgracefully, dishonorably, indecently' (BDAG).

- The idea is: 'acting without regard for context—in other wds, you just do whatever, say whatever, don't care whose toes you step on—if someone is offended by your actions, you blame it on them.
- While not the same as bragging, acting rudely is motivated by the same lack of love.
- Some people live eccentric lives, but when you bring that eccentric behavior into your relationships there's problems—Why? Because you don't care about others.
- If you are going to manifest genuine love, 'You cannot be careless with context.'
 - One writer: "**love** does not rush in to impose its idiosyncrasies on those for whom bad manners are offensive."²
 - You must realize that relationships are not a place where you can be independent—relationships are 'interdependent'
 - Love is not being a people-pleaser but having others' interests and sensitivities in mind.
 - In a society like ours where rude behavior is celebrated, Christians ought to be different—careful, sensitive to others, humble, not selfish.

¹ John F. MacArthur Jr., [*1 Corinthians*](#), MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), 343.

² Anthony C. Thiselton, [*The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*](#), New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 1050.

- Lovelessness says, ‘I don’t care enough for those around me to be polite and act appropriately. It cares nothing for their feelings and is insensitive.
- The loveless person is careless, overbearing, and often crude.
- That kind of lovelessness is what characterized the Corinthians in how they lived and communed with one another—they were rude and unloving.
 - When celebrating the Lord’s Table, the ‘haves’ were shaming the ‘have nots’
 - They were selfish, insensitive, careless, and offensive.
- 11:21—“for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk.”
- Love is gracious towards others—and when we’re offensive and rude, we forfeit ministry opportunities and gospel witness.

“it [love] does not seek its own”—this is key because many people ask whether something is ‘right to do’ rather than ‘does this benefit me or others?’

- ‘love’ is not consumed with self-gain, self-justification, and self-worth.
- Love seeks to do good to one’s neighbor—even your enemy.
- See: Rom 15:1-3—“Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves. Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification. For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, “THE REPROACHES OF THOSE WHO REPROACHED YOU FELL ON ME.”
- Love seeks the good of the other—love doesn’t force itself into the room and focus on self
- Phil 2:3-4—“Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.”
- People today rarely get wrapped up in the interests of others.
- According to 1 Cor 9:18, the Apostle Paul pastored the Corinthian church without any financial support from them.
 - Yet, repeatedly he sought the benefit of others and not himself.
 - 10:24—“Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor.”
 - 10:32-33—“Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God; just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but the profit of the many, so that they may be saved.”
- Love never seeks its own advantage.

“[love] is not provoked”—The ESV has ‘love is not irritable’—the NET ‘love is not easily angered’

- The root wd Lit means ‘provoked to anger...to arouse to anger’ (passive verb)—this has to do with things done against us.
- In other wds, ‘love guards against being irritated, upset, or angered by things said or done against it.’
 - Some people have already determined a certain standard that they themselves have assembled as to how they must be treated by others.
 - You have expectations of other people—and most of those expectations are yours and not God’s expectations.

Paul doesn’t rule out ‘righteous indignation’—13:6—says ‘love does not rejoice in unrighteousness’

- Love is not ‘provoked to sinful wrath/anger’
- Acts 17:16—the Apostle Paul says that while he was in Athens, his ‘spirit was provoked within him’—that was ‘righteous indignation’—when someone (God) or something else is profaned, maligned, or mistreated
- Love doesn’t take personal offense
- Jesus was angry at the profaning of His Father’s house (Matt 21:11-12), but he never became defensive or angry when he was vilified or abused.
- When Paul was mistreated and jailed—he never got angry or retaliated. But, when there was immorality in the church, or incest, or heresy, he responded strongly.
 - And, when he took up the reproaches that fall upon God, he never took them as though he was God—he was humble, kind, but straightforward
 - Gal 6:1—“Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.”
- ‘People who are determined to have their own way are easily provoked and easily angered.’
- You cannot love and at the same time be preoccupied with ‘your rights, your agenda, getting your way, pursuing your recognition, or anything else for yourself.
- Telling your spouse or children that you love them, and then get sinfully angry with them is not convincing...it’s not biblical love.
- If you’re known for losing your temper, it’s not your personality or even your attitude that’s issue—it’s a lack of love. Love is not provoked.

“[love] does not take into account a wrong suffered”—the fastest and easiest way to be provoked to anger is because you are keeping a list of personal offenses against you.

- Lit says that love ‘does not reckon the evil’
- The language here is similar to the LXX in Zech 8:17—“...let none of you devise evil in your heart against another,...”
- Paul’s usage of the phrase means ‘put to one’s account’—to ‘reckon’ or ‘to count in an evaluative sense’—it’s a ‘bookkeeping term’—‘putting an entry into a ledger’ is the idea.
 - Some people keep a list of wrongs suffered.
 - The purpose in a bookkeeping entry is to have a permanent record that can later be consulted when needed.
- God in Christ ‘does not reckon our sins against us,’ so the one who loves ‘does not take note of the evil done against him/her in that no records are kept’
- Jesus illustrated this principle in a parable in Matthew 18.
 - Our problem is failure to show compassion to sinners.
- Love forgives and puts it behind.
- The ESV has ‘love is not resentful’—love has no place for resentment or grudges.
- JM: “If God so completely and permanently erases the record of our many sins against Him, how much more should we forgive and forget the much lesser wrongs done against us.”³

³ John F. MacArthur Jr., 1 Corinthians, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), 347.