

Text: 1 Cor 13

Title: The Supreme Virtue- part 3

Intro: Good for us to step back and evaluate our love.

- Central to the Christian life is the principle of love—not the world’s kind of love—in other wds, a ‘sentimental love apart from the Spirit that can be enjoyed and even reciprocated by other unbelievers.’
- Jesus said in John 13:34—“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.”
 - The OT commanded to love God (Deut 6:5) and love your neighbor (Lev 19:18).
 - In the NT, the command to ‘love’ found new expression in the life and ministry of Christ who came and gave up himself—what Jesus is saying is to ‘love redemptively...love as I have loved you...love by laying your life down for others’
 - In other wds, the command to love had a new illustration, a new backdrop—the love of Christ Jesus—a love for the enemies of God.
 - 13:35—“By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”
 - This kind of love is the defining mark of a Christian.
- John 15:9—“Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love.”—this is not an emotional, mystical kind of love—but the obedient love that the Son has for the Father—that is the model of love that we’re to follow
- Rom 13:8-9—“Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. For this, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”—lovelessness is behind every act of disobedience—just as love is behind every act of obedience
- In Corinth, the believers there had a shortage of this kind of love, and thus, the church was plagued with a plethora of problems that all stemmed from their lack of Christ-like love.
- This morning, we want to evaluate our love as compared to Scripture. Why? Because if we’re not careful, we will end up like Corinth.

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).

13:1-3—the Apostle Paul writes hypothetically to place a strong emphasis on the necessity of love

- Paul tells us that neither gifted communication, knowledge/intelligence, or personal sacrifice for other people is anything apart from love. Those are all ‘wonderful’ things that we hold in high esteem but do not spiritually benefit you or others.
- Those are the kinds of things Paul says will be ‘burned up’ in the judgment of believers.
- When ministering to one another in the body, love is sensitive to the other’s spiritual benefit.
- 1 Cor 3:12-15—“Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man’s work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work. If any man’s work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.”

Notice how genuine love is characterized: you have both passive and active responses. In other wds, 13:4—"Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant,"

- 'love is patient'—means you're very slow to become resentful—'longsuffering'—you're not vengeful but patient with others. The KJV has 'suffereth long'
- 'love is kind'—kindness is the counterpart of patience—love is not merely tolerating someone or 'coping' but active in doing them good.
- '[love] is not jealous'—'not envious' (NET), 'does not envy' (ESV)—'envy'—is incompatible with love. Love doesn't envy what other people have. Love doesn't envy someone's life because we think we deserve something better.
- 'Love does not brag'—'bragging' or 'boasting' is 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'—Love doesn't care how you're perceived by others...your gifts, abilities, and accomplishments.
- '[love] is not arrogant'—Lit 'not puffed up'—'to have an exaggerated self-conception'—the Corinthians were unconcerned with what Paul was saying to them and they were just arrogantly putting themselves above one another
- 13:5—"[love] does not act unbecomingly"—love 'does not act rudely'—'without regard for context'—the Corinthians were being rude during the Lord's Table—11:21—"for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk."—they didn't care who or how they offended others. Love doesn't do that.
- "it [love] does not seek its own"—this is key—'love' is not consumed with self-gain, self-justification, and self-worth. Love gets wrapped up in the interests of others, not self.
- "[love] is not provoked"—'love guards against being irritated, upset, or angered by things said or done against it.' The Corinthians took every little word, every little difference and squabbled over it—they were acting like toddlers. 'Taking issue over every little thing is a sure sign of a lack of love.' Love is able to absorb things because it doesn't have a sinful 'grid' by which people must conform to if they're going to interact with you.
- "[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. This is acting the least like Christ because you're not willing to forgive. Love is being like Jesus who has forgiven us an insurmountable number of sins.

That leads us to the concluding two verses (6-7). This must be your 'life habit'—in other wds, 'if you're going to love with a Christlike love, this must be what characterizes your life ongoingly.

13:6—"[love] does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth"—love never finds satisfaction in sin—whether ours or someone else's sin. This has to do with our response to evil.

- 'rejoice'—it's the same verb used twice but with exact opposite direct objects.
- 'love does not rejoice in anything that is unrighteous, but instead rejoices with the truth'
- 'rejoice'—means 'to be delighted, to be glad, to celebrate'
 - In Romans 16:19, the Apostle Paul was 'delighted' over the report of the obedience of those at Rome—"For the report of your obedience has reached to all; therefore I am rejoicing over you..."
 - Luke 1:14—says that at the birth of Christ, 'you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth'—in other wds, 'celebrate'
 - Love doesn't celebrate or glory in anything evil.

- We don't delight in sin, and we don't delight in its destructive consequences—we don't delight when someone is deceived and taken in by sin and suffers consequences
- Love does take notice of the evil in this world but it doesn't gloat over it—love grieves over the evil done—it grieves over the sins and wickedness perpetrated against one another.
- True love always despises sin and evil—we hate the way sin destroys families and relationships and gospel influence
- True love refuses to rejoice in sin both internally and externally—both sin in our hearts and sin in the lives of others.

Appl—In a world full of evil being perpetrated it becomes a challenge to find things to rejoice in—things which are true, things which are worthy of praise—but love finds them—love seeks them out.

- To 'rejoice in unrighteousness' is essentially to endorse it...to justify it...to make wrong appear to be right—that's what our corrupt culture does
- Isa 5:20—"Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; Who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!"—to call evil 'good' is to turn the truth upside down—God's truth—what He calls evil
- For the worldly person—for the unbeliever, he declares what is right—he sets up his own standard of what is right and what is wrong—whatever he wants/loves/worships is 'right' in his eyes.
 - Believers are not immune from such practices—instead of turning to the Scriptures and what is true, we make up our own standard.
 - Sin is always sin—and we're not to envy the unrighteous.
 - We're not to envy their sinful lifestyle.
- Love isn't entertained by unrighteousness.
- Man's experience is tainted by sin—that is evident throughout the pages of Scripture—we acknowledge that sin is a part of life—we see it, we experience it, we're around it—the point is that we don't glory in it—we don't celebrate evil.
 - This becomes problematic when it comes to the kind of movies and entertainment we watch—most movies depict certain evils being perpetrated against someone.
 - The question is: does the movie rightly condemn evil as evil, or does it celebrate or accept evil...or, just leave it out there??? Is it gratuitous to what the Bible calls evil?
 - If a book or a movie doesn't rightly indict evil, that will ruin your conscience.
 - Celebrating or glorifying evil of any sort is not love.
- 'No amount of evil is ever going to 'enhance' genuine love; but it sure can diminish and destroy it.'

A simple principle here: 'What's an affront to God ought to be an affront to us.'

- David said in Psalm 69:9—"For zeal for Your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me."
 - When God was dishonored, David was grieved—and so should we...
 - When we enjoy sin, whether directly or in others, we prove our lack of love for God and the truth.
- See: Eph 5:1-14—the Christian has no greater calling or purpose than to imitate his Lord and Savior

- Notice: the command to 'walk in love'—immediately gives way to what 'love avoids'—5:3—'immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you as is proper among saints'
- 5:7—'do not be partakers with them'
- See: Rom 13:10-14—today, we often find believers celebrating drinking, drunkenness, fornication and don't even acknowledge that premarital sex is a grievous sin.
- Some people, when such sins are discovered among professing believers, go on without a word—without any confrontation of evil—that too is a form of 'rejoicing in unrighteousness'

Some people 'rejoice in unrighteousness' by spreading it around. Instead of 'covering a transgression' they repeat it and spread it around. Gloating over the sins and weaknesses of others. Love doesn't rejoice when someone fails—we don't 'parade that sin around.'

- You do realize that if we just practiced this kind of love, we would end all gossip and slander?
- There may be times when we must discuss it—when sin is rampant in people's lives—and we may need to bring attention to it through corporate church discipline (Matt 18).
- But we don't repeat matters that should be addressed in person or in private.
- 1 Peter 4—'love covers a multitude of sin'—in other wds, love throws a blanket of grace upon a sin/weakness and seeks to address the issue appropriately.
 - We stop the ripple effect of sin. We don't 'sweep it under the rug.'
- Love doesn't seek to personally bring shame upon someone to gain some advantage over them.

"but rejoices with the truth"—one of the characteristics of love is that it constantly seeks good and praiseworthy words, thoughts, and deeds in a person.

- Love searches for truth—love and truth are inseparable
- The 'truth' in the context here is 'God's truth'...God's revealed Word.
- This is the opposite of 'rejoicing in unrighteousness'—a pushing back of evil with truth
- Matthew 5 says we're to be 'salt' and 'light'—we're to be a check and restraint on evil by being a 'spiritual preservative'
- Real love doesn't tolerate evil but exposes it with truth.
- And, even in our 'exposing' of evil—we don't revel in that—in other wds, we don't take pleasure in rebuking people of their wrongdoing.
 - Love doesn't delight in lecturing to someone about their poor conduct
 - Love delights when someone has victory over sin
 - Love delights when someone is encouraged and strengthened by the truth
 - Love is all about truth

Love doesn't tolerate false doctrine. Love always rejoices with truth and never with falsehood or false teaching.

- How many times do we hear people criticize doctrine and say what matters is that we love people??? As if those two concepts are mutually exclusive???
- Loving someone means we rejoice with the truth—we celebrate the truth—we speak the 'truth in love'—because love and truth are not exclusive but are directly and inseparably tied together

- If we love others, we're concerned about whether or not they are being deceived—they're being deprived of the truth.
- The souls of men are eternal. Eternity hangs in the balance. Truth Matters.
- Love doesn't compromise the truth.
- 2 John 6—"And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, that you should walk in it."

Love doesn't parade evil and celebrate it but delights in the truth.

The final group of characteristics.

13:7—"[love] bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."—this is the summary and crescendo of this passage. Paul's description of love has been building towards this fitting conclusion.

- 'all things' is like saying 'in everything' or 'always'—'there is nothing love cannot face'
- Love is not the 'external things' like speaking ability, nor the superficial things like intelligence, nor the mere outward acts like giving away your resources.
- Love is the meek and humble things—like patience, kindness, and selflessness, not seeking its own—forgiving sinners, not holding a list of wrongs against them, celebrating truth and not evil/evil things.
- If you're going to love with that kind of love, you will have to be a Christian that learns to 'bear all things'
- The idea here is: love bears up under any and every trouble because there is something greater in the end.
- One writer: "Love has a tenacity in the present, buoyed by its absolute confidence in the future, that enables it to live in every kind of circumstance and continually pour itself out on behalf of others."¹

'[love] bears all things'—love bears up under all the troubles of life because there is something much greater to be revealed in the future.

- Love is 'fixing our eyes on the perfecter of our faith'
- When truth is being maligned, love is willing to stand up.

Love is always active, always engaging, willing to step in and be subject to mistreatment. All four verbs here are 'present, active, indicatives'—'love does these things'

- 'bears all things'—Lit 'to cover'—'love covers all things'
- Love is willing to feel the pain of those it loves.
- The idea is 'to suffer all things without resentment' (Vincent Word Studies).
- To 'stand up against difficulties'—a willingness to be an example that inspires others to look to Christ.
- We get weary—but the patient enduring puts pressure on us and ultimately makes us more useful to the Master.

¹ Findlay, 899.

- Love doesn't lose heart. There's a refining process that God is working out in our lives—He chastens us, He disciplines us, He sanctifies us—and we bear up because God is building greater and greater spiritual endurance in our lives.

'[love] believes all things'—this often comes up when we're encouraging someone to 'believe the best' about someone or something. And, while that is true—that love doesn't want to see people in the 'worst light', and that might be an extension of what is said here—that's not exactly what Paul is speaking about. The idea is that love never ceases to have hope. Love never ceases to have faith. It's never without hope. Thus, love can endure.

- What happens in the body is that sometimes one's faith grows thin—it grows weak and dim—and love says, 'come alongside me and let my faith be an inspiration for yours'
- Gal 6—says we're to bear one another's sin burdens (Rom 15).
- Love has a strong trust in God that moves people into that direction.
- Proverbs 3:5-6—"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight."—love believes that God will make your paths straight—that God IS doing it and will CONTINUE to do it.
- Love believes in the best outcome.
- What's tragic in the body is often someone with weak and failing faith gets up with a fellow believer and they feed off one another's misery and no one is helped.
- Love doesn't sit around and wallow in self-pity—love moves in and is patient and shows someone the WOG and how it should impact their thinking and attitudes—and moves them in the direction of strengthening faith.
- Love 'believes all things'

'[love] hopes all things'—this is not mere wishful thinking—this is hope when you have no hope

- Real love hopes in the promises of God.
- Hope is the opposite of pessimism.
- Love shows others how to make steps in the right direction.
- One of my mentors has said on more than one occasion: "As long as God's grace is active, human failure is never final."—love refuses to take failure as final

'[love] endures all things'—the similar word 'remaining under'—'love willingly remains under whatever God has for us'

- In Corinth, believers were getting off track because of a lack of this kind of love—they weren't 'enduring all things'
- Love is tenacious in all circumstances. Love refuses to give up or give in.
- Love will not stop 'bearing, believing, hoping'
- JM: "Love bears what otherwise is unbearable; it believes what otherwise is unbelievable; it hopes in what otherwise is hopeless; and it endures when anything less than love would give up."²
- Love for God and love for others never gives up.

² John F. MacArthur Jr., 1 Corinthians, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), 355.

13:8—"Love never fails..."

'Love never fails'—genuine love always triumphs in the end.

- At no time does love fail.
- Love is the supreme characteristic of the life that God gives every believer.
- Whenever a Christian is triumphant it is because love prevailed.

Summary: Love isn't about your gifts, talents, or resources.

- For the believer, there's no excuse for not loving.