

HOW TO BE MORE LOVING

1 Corinthians 13:4–7

Dr. George O. Wood

Our Scripture today is from 1 Corinthians 13:4–7, “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres” (NIV).

I want to share with you today on the theme “How to be a More Loving Person.” The German philosopher Schopenhauer gave an illustration of the predicament all of us face when we seek to become a more loving person. He noticed that porcupines sought to huddle together on a cold and wintry day. But they faced this insurmountable problem. The closer they got together, the more their quills pricked one another. But when they parted because they couldn’t take each other, they all suffered from the cold by being alone.

How can we be together and not be porcupines? How can we be more loving people?

Last week, we made a start at beginning to answer that question. Two strategic points were made last week about 1 Corinthians 13 in reference to being a more loving person. One is that our love must be a Christian love rather than simply a romantic love. Romantic love is wonderful, beautiful, and what God ordains to get a relationship going that produces marriage. But there is something far deeper than romantic love. It’s Christian love. A love that is anchored in the will and not in the feelings—love that’s based upon commitment rather than the attractiveness of the other person; a love that draws upon the grace of God rather than simply what another person does to us by way of response. So we’re beginning to love to understand something about what Christian love is.

HOW TO BE MORE LOVING

1 Corinthians 13:4–7

Secondly, last week we said love must be our chief priority. 1 Corinthians 13 really talks to us about the priority of love, the practice of love and the permanence of love. Verses 1–3 are about the priority of love, verses 4–7 are about the practice of love. Have you ever noticed, if you've been in a large hotel and gotten on the elevator and gone to the upper floors, that there is no button for the thirteenth floor? They don't have a thirteenth floor button. Evidently, people are superstitious and don't want to stay on the thirteenth floor. So it always jumps from twelve to fourteen.

Could it be possible that some of us may be living the Christian life without the thirteenth floor of the Corinthian letter? 1 Corinthians 13—where the love is. Basically, the problem with the Corinthian church was that they were jumping from floor twelve to floor fourteen—to all the gifts—but they had missed the thirteenth floor—love, which is the center floor and the only floor from which the gifts can flow accurately.

In regard to making sure love is our chief priority, I'm not talking about making ourselves as love objects the chief priority. "I must be loved. I must find somebody who will love me." We're not talking about being loved. We're talking about being lovers. If I wait to be loved in life, then life is out of my control, because I must wait then for the right circumstances. That's why romantic love doesn't have the depth of Christian love, because romantic love must wait to be loved. But Christian love doesn't wait to be loved. Christian love makes the decision to love. The practice of love, how to be more loving, continues as we approach these verses today. Paul gives us two things to embrace—two positive things. In talking about the practice of love, he tells us what love is. Then he takes more time telling us what love is not. I think that's important, because sometimes in order to find what something is, you must say a whole lot about what it's not. Then you get done and say, "Love is everything else but what it is not."

HOW TO BE MORE LOVING

1 Corinthians 13:4–7

Love is patience and kindness. These are the passive and active sides of love. Patience is the passive side. It is the word which the King James translation calls “long suffering.” It is used to describe a person who has put a great deal of distance between himself and anger. It is being away from, a long way from, anger. The opposite of a short-fused person. It is a word that in the New Testament it’s used to describe patience with people, not with circumstances. It’s one thing to be patient with circumstances, another thing to be patient with people. It’s a people word. It describes a choice to, on occasion, suffer. I think it’s striking that Paul would start to describe love by describing it from a passive sense. Not as something you do, but something that you receive and take into your spirit. It is a way of response. Paul knows, as we all know, that life has its rocky moments and its bumps and shakes. People jar us—people in the closest relationships with us. Our greatest hurts are within families. These moments come. And how we respond in those moments is critical.

What the apostle is saying is that love is a response. On the passive side, it’s receiving, responding with long-suffering.

The word is used in the Gospels in Jesus’ story of the two debtors—Matthew 18:26–29—where they begged, “Be patient with me.” The debt was due. They recognize that, but, “Be patient.”

Love is long-suffering.

Here’s an historical illustration of patience I ran across this week—about Secretary of War, Stanton, who served under Abraham Lincoln. Before Lincoln was ever elected President, Stanton had a great hate affair with Lincoln. He called him a low cunning clown and the original gorilla. He said of a zoo keeper, at the time, who was off in Africa trying to capture a gorilla, that he was a fool to go to Africa when he could so easily find one in Springfield, Illinois. When Lincoln became president, he made Stanton Secretary of War. He said Stanton was the best man for the

HOW TO BE MORE LOVING

1 Corinthians 13:4–7

job. The night Lincoln was shot and lay in the house across from the theater, it was Stanton who kept the all-night vigil. When Lincoln breathed his last, Stanton said, “There lies the greatest ruler of men the world has ever seen.” Lincoln won him through his patience. Love is long-suffering.

On the active side, love is kindness. It’s something we do for other people. It’s an ongoing, outward action; energy coming from us. “Kindness” is a difficult word for us to get a hold of. It’s something that when you see it, you know it. When you see a person who demonstrates it, you recognize it. Jesus says there are some elemental ways to become a kind person. It’s not necessarily innate to all. It can be a learned behavior. One of the ways is through the speech gate—bless those who curse you. The word “bless” means to speak well of those who curse you. One of the ways to demonstrate kindness is to begin to get hold of the language that we direct toward people. Then to copy that with our deeds, through good, and also beyond that, to develop a kind of responsiveness, of going the second mile when we are put upon. And even beyond that, in our own human spirit—pray. To show kindness towards those who may not be kind towards us. To be kind.

Paul says, “Be patient, be kind.” Henry Drummond, in his classic little book on 1 Corinthians 13 called *The Greatest Thing in the World*, says this about kindness “I shall pass through this world but once. Any good thing that I can do, therefore, or any kindness that I can show to any human being, let me do it now. Let me not defer it or neglect, for I shall not pass this way again.”

Paul goes on, in this passage, to tell us what to reject. He gives us eight qualities to reject.

I. To be a more loving person, there are some things that we are not to be.

A. The first is jealousy. Love is not jealous. Jealousy has a good and a bad side. It is good when it cares about another person. I care about relationships, therefore, I care about their integrity

HOW TO BE MORE LOVING

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

when someone might want to come along and destroy the relationship. I care enough about the relationship to be jealous. But on the other hand, jealousy has its bad side, when it cares only about ourselves. There may be marriages represented here today that have tremendous amounts of jealousy and envy. Jealous because the football season is coming back soon. Jealous because of a mother-in-law. Jealous because of the priority of work. Jealous because of a suspicion or seeing the reality of an extra-marital affair. Jealous. Love is not jealous.

I think of a person who shared this story with me and gave me permission to share it with others. She and her husband were often together socially with another couple their age. She learned that her husband was having an affair with the other woman. A dinner date was on their calendar to get together with this couple. The other woman did not know that this Christian wife had found out about the affair. As the dinner date approached, the friend who had been wronged was praying that somehow God would give her the grace and the ability and the strength that she needed to face that other person at the dinner table. She prayed that the Lord, in addition to that, would help her to love this other woman. The dinner came and went. Many times after the dinner, the two couples continued to be thrown together socially, always this friend of ours praying that the Lord would use her to love everybody involved. Time went by. The other woman moved away and sometime later, returned. While she was gone, she came to know the Lord. The two women met again and talked about what had happened. The one who had had the affair said, "At the time, I knew what you were doing. You were reaching out to me with the love of Christ."

I don't know that there are many people, naturally, who have the strength to bring off that kind of love. I told that to the person who shared that story with me. Her response was, "I don't have the strength. It was Christ loving through me." Was she concerned about her marriage? Yes. On

HOW TO BE MORE LOVING

1 Corinthians 13:4–7

the good side, she manifested jealousy—she was concerned about that relationship and its integrity. But she didn't allow jealousy to eat her up in the process. And she did not allow jealousy to eat up another person in the process. Somehow, to develop a reaction that says not, "What I'm living and feeling" but, "What is Christ living and feeling within me." If Christ lives in me, then He must react as well. He must feel a certain way about what has happened to me. How does He feel? Can I stay long enough in front of Him where I can say, "Jesus, what are You thinking right now? What are You saying right now? What would You say to everybody involved in the situation? What's in Your heart?"

We might want to say, if we are jealous, "This person is hurting me and I want to hurt them back." Christ is saying so often, "This person is hurting because they are hurting. This person is not loving because they have not been loved. So love them in My name."

Love is not jealous.

B. Love is not boastful. King James says, "Vaunteth not itself." "Boastful" is better. The Moffatt translation says, "Love makes no parade." Boastfulness can describe a person who talks about himself rather than listening to others. The person who is caught up with an exaggerated idea of their own self-importance.

It can also be used to describe a person who does deeds of love in order to manipulate other people. "Remember I did that for you? Now you need to do that for me." Boastful.

Arrogant.

C. A third thing to reject: "arrogant" is the word "puffing up." And Paul uses it ad infinitum in the Corinthian letter. He's always talking about, "But you are puffed up." It is different from arrogance, or puffing up is different from healthy self-esteem, which says before God and before others, and before myself, "I'm a worthwhile person in Christ." It is a kind of self-esteem which

HOW TO BE MORE LOVING

1 Corinthians 13:4–7

proceeds from arrogance or pride. Because it depends upon arrogance and pride, it needs to put other people down. The arrogant person never feels comfortable being on the same level as other people. He's got to put them down in order to establish his or her importance. Arrogance. It reflects disdain, a lack of respect. And often, it's manifested through cutting sarcasm.

D. Rudeness. King James has it, "Doth not behave itself unseemly" (1 Corinthians 13:5). Is not rude. In other words, love has manners.

We were playing a family game this week, George and I were partners against the girls. I don't ever play a game I don't intend to win. George was just learning this game and he made a couple of critical mistakes that could have cost us the game. I was amazed at what came out of me, in terms of putting pressure on him to learn that game quick. In fact, I got downright rude towards him about how his mistakes were costing us the game and he better start watching what's going on.

Then I had to prepare this sermon. I discovered that you and I are not generally rude to the general public. I don't come here on Sunday mornings and insult you as you pass by. I only insult people that I trust to know me well enough that I feel safe enough to insult them. Love is not rude. Love has good manners. Even in families.

E. Love is not selfish. King James has "Love seeketh not its own." Would you like to take a little test to determine whether or not you're a selfish person? Simply answer yes or no.

Do I get upset when things don't go my way? Not just once in a while, but consistently: Do I get upset when things don't go my way?

Would the people who know me best say that I am a person who is difficult to live with?

Do I dislike to spend money generously on others?

Am I a poor loser?

HOW TO BE MORE LOVING

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Do I get angry with God when life doesn't go the way I think it should?

Does it bother me to be inconvenienced or put upon when I've got my agenda laid out?

Do I persist in doing anything that I know irritates or hurts someone close to me?

Am I set in my ways, and nothing is going to change me now?

Do I get upset when I don't get my share of the pie?

Is getting my share of the pie more important to me than being a disciple of Jesus?

Am I going to insist that this is going to be for me, whether the Lord wants it or not?

Do I have a tendency to become defensive or argumentative when I am criticized?

Am I a chronic complainer or a grouser?

Where did I get a test like that? I made it up. I took the times I'm selfish in my own life and just made questions out of them. Then I looked at Jesus' answer to these questions. How would He answer them? Is He a poor loser? Does He get angry at God when things don't go His way?

Does He get upset when He doesn't get His fair share of the pie? Does He persist in doing something which He knows would irritate or hurt us? Does it bother Him to be inconvenienced or put upon?

Someone has written of Jesus: "If you want a fitting accusation to write on the cross, this is the only one—'He loved too much.'" Love is not selfish.

F. Love is not irritable. Not irritable means "not easily angered." My son, George Paul, at age eleven, said, "I don't understand how you said nobody could ever make you mad, you could only make yourself mad." I said, "It's because I cannot control my circumstances. The only thing I can control is my response to them. That's why nobody can really make me mad. I'm the only one who can make me mad." Osborn talks about "the gunnysack technique of irritability." A gunny sacker is one who carries an invisible bag over his shoulder and puts in tidbits of anger,

HOW TO BE MORE LOVING

1 Corinthians 13:4–7

hour after hour, day after day. When the sack is filled and someone irritates him or her, however slightly, he or she erupts with unreasoning anger and dumps the whole gunnysack on the victim.

Love is not irritable.

G. Love is not unforgiving. It keeps no record of wrong. The words “keeps no record of wrong,” in the Greek, is the word that is used to describe activity of an accountant who enters something into a ledger. Once the debit or credit is entered into a ledger, there it stays as a permanent record. Love is not keeping a record of wrong. It’s not saying, “But you did that to me years or days go.” It keeps no record of wrong. Lawbuck reminds us that it’s often easier to love God than it is people. The God we see in Jesus is the most lovable being in the universe, but people are often so very contemptible. Unforgiving.

H. Paul says that love is not an unempathetic or unsympathetic heart. That is, love does not delight in evil but rejoices in the truth. Not the truth of two plus two equal is four. But the truth that looks at what is good and pure and beautiful and wonderful. Things that are lovely to consider. It is this kind of attitude, of looking on the truthful side, which is the opposite of gloating at another person’s misfortune.

Eight negatives, Paul says, what love is not. To the degree that negatives may be present in our life, to that degree, our love is weakened and dissipated. Obviously, to all the couples here today who have special relationships—us husbands—this has special meaning, because the Lord has told us through the apostle Paul that we are to love our wives as Christ loved the church.

I came across a poem. “Thank you for the things you never do. You never embarrass me with crude, uncouth remarks. You never criticize me in the presence of others. You never downgrade my personal achievements. You never compete with me. You never compare me unfavorably with other wives. You never make me feel unnecessary or unneeded. You never hide behind a

HOW TO BE MORE LOVING

1 Corinthians 13:4–7

newspaper while we're eating together. You never refuse to hear me out in a controversial discussion. You never remind me of past mistakes. You never rule me with an iron rod. You never treat my parents unkindly. You never degrade me. You never betray me. You never deluge me with 'I told you so's.' You never go to sleep without kissing me goodnight."

It is wonderful to get a perspective on our life, as the Lord wants us to look at our life. To be lifted out of the humdrum and see again what we're called to be in Christ.

II. What to pursue in respect to love.

A. Verse 7 says, "Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres." In King James, it's, "Love beareth all things." The Greek word that's deployed here can mean one of two things. It can mean "love bears all things," that is, "it carries them." Or it can mean, "love covers all things." Either rendering is appropriate.

The same verb is used in 1 Peter 4:8, "Love covers a multitude of sins." In other words, true love does not scatter around the unpleasant. It doesn't remind other people of the failings to the person loved. It hides, it covers what is unpleasant. It protects. But it also carries. Love carries all things. Love carries burdens. Love carries possibilities. Love carries a brother as the story of the boy carrying his brother on his back. Love carries all things.

B. Love believes all things. This does not mean that Christian love is naïve. It doesn't mean that you believe everything that's told you. Jesus didn't say to Judas, when He met him in the Garden, "Love believes all things, Judas. What a beautiful kiss you've just given Me. I'm so glad to know you've changed your mind." Love is not naïve. Love isn't fooled. Love doesn't believe that black is white. But in doubtful cases, love will give the benefit of the doubt. Love does not wait for people to prove themselves. Jesus does not say to the woman taken in adultery, "I'm not sure I can ever trust you or believe in you enough. I need to put you on conditional probation. In

HOW TO BE MORE LOVING

1 Corinthians 13:4–7

twelve months, we'll come back and see if you're worthy of My love." Love doesn't put people on probation. Love believes.

C. Love hopes. Love doesn't give up on people. The early Christians said of the people who crucified Jesus, "You did it in ignorance." They're willing to have hope that the motive which they have used were best rather worst. Love hopes. Love waits for change. And love goes on lasting. Love perseveres. Love endures all things. It perseveres. It stands up. It stays under. There is a connection between love believing, love hoping and love lasting. When love really doesn't have any evidence, it still believes the best. When the evidence goes bad, then it still hopes for the best. When hopes are continually disappointed, love still keeps on lasting. It goes on enduring.

This beautiful passage on love is a model by which we're to arrange our own lives, so that we're the loving people Christ has called us to be.

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4–7, read the Scripture and in place of "love" put "Jesus". And in place of the pronoun "it," put "he," so it will read, "Jesus is patient, Jesus is kind. He does not envy. He does not boast. He is not proud. He is not rude. He is not self-seeking. He is not easily angered. He keeps no record of wrongs. Jesus does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. He always protects. He always trusts. He always hopes. He always perseveres."

Now, when you're beginning to feel like you're cast off from God, and that the Lord doesn't love, you take this Scripture out and read it that way. How is it that we feel all the time that the Lord doesn't love us when He tells us so explicitly how greatly the depth of His love is. That He doesn't have us out on some conditional string somewhere.

Now I want us to read it and put the pronoun "I" in the place of "love" and "it," so we say this about ourselves. You say, "But I'd be lying to say this about myself!" Then make a faith

HOW TO BE MORE LOVING

1 Corinthians 13:4–7

statement. This is where I want my life to go, and what I want it to be. This is the reality I want God to speak into existence in my life. I want this to describe me. Let this Word from God describe us, for love really has no meaning unless it comes in the flesh. Love has no meaning as an abstract idea or concept or word. Love only has meaning when it's lived in us. We are to be as love. We're to take on the characteristics of love.

“I am patient. I am kind. I do not envy. I do not boast. I am not proud. I am not rude. I am not self-seeking. I am not easily angered. I keep no record of wrongs. I do not delight in evil but rejoice in the truth. I always protect. I always trust. I always hope. I always persevere.”

Closing Prayer

May it be so, Lord. May it be so!—when the moments come in which the enemy of our soul causes us to want to think that Your love is something very flimsy, as though it were a thread hanging down, with all the fibers eroded away but one small strand. Help us to see the great big rope of Your love, which is so big nobody can get their arms around it. A love that is strong and constant and true. A love that believes, forgives, and goes on serving. A love that is patient and kind. Help us, Lord, in our own life, to follow in Your steps. You've called us that we might follow You. That Your life might be lived out in us. Teach us, Lord, how to love. Help us as an entire community of people, as a church, to be able to read the “we” into this passage as well.

That “we are loving,” as Your people, and, “We are kind.” Forgive us, Lord, for those moments, whether in distant or recent experience, in which we have ceased to be what You in fact call us to be. Help us to become, O Lord. Help us to become. We ask this in Your name. Amen.