

THE PRACTICE OF LOVE

Part 2

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Again tonight, 1 Corinthians 13. We'll look at just 3 verses. Verse 4-6. Great words that describe love in action. "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."

This morning we looked at the theme of the priority of love. We basically made two point. One is that our love as Christians must be different than romantic love. Our love as Christians is not anchored in the feelings but in the will. Our love as Christians depends on commitment, not upon the attractiveness of another person. Our love depends for its continuance on the grace of God and not simply another person's responsiveness.

Then secondly we noted that love must be our chief priority. That it is more important than the spiritual gifts of speaking with other tongues or prophesying or having faith or the gift of giving or even the gift of martyrdom. I think it's possible for a person to attempt to be living the Christian life and forget that there is a thirteenth chapter in 1 Corinthians. Certainly the Corinthian believers were trying to live without 1 Corinthians 13. When you have chapter 12 and chapter 14 the spiritual gifts without the essence of that of love then there is a devastating gap in our life.

I think most people see the problem with love is how can I be more loved. But the New Testament approach is how can I be more loving. If I am waiting to be loved then my life is out of control and I have passed the well being of my life and the happiness of my life into someone else's hands who has the responsibility to make me happy by loving me more. But if I can love them life comes back through the power of Christ to reside within my control.

How can we become more loving persons? These three verses tell us what to embrace. And they tell us what to reject. These verses also tell us what to seek after in terms of love.

Two words that tell us what to embrace. One word on the passive side of life and that is love is patient. Embrace patience in love. The King James translates this word "love" as "longsuffering." The actual Greek word comes from two words joined together to form one – *macro thumos*. *Macro* means long and *thumos* means wrath or anger. Therefore literally the patience being spoken of here is long wrath. Or long anger. Or referring to a person with a long fuse as opposed to a short fuse.

In the New Testament it is always a word which describes patience with people and not with circumstances. So I suppose it's all right to kick the tire of your car if your motor is not working! The word "longsuffering" or "patience" is a word not relating to circumstances or thing but to people. The word describes making the choice to endure what we do not want to endure. The choice to suffer not the desire to suffer. The choice to put up with a great deal. Extending love a person who from all appearances does not deserve it.

The word is used in Jesus' story of the two debtors, Matthew 18:26-29. Both debtors begged their creditors "Be *macrothumos* with me." Be patient with me.

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Love is not in a hurry to demand instant change from the one loved. It is willing to put up with a lot.

On the active side, Love is kind. The second thing to embrace. Kindness. How do we love with kindness? Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount presents us four ways to love with kindness, to love in word – that is to bless people rather than to tear them down. We are kind when we love in deed, that is do good to people. Love has that active side. We are kind when we love in our reaction – going the second mile. And we are kind when we love in spirit – pray for those who misuse us or abuse us.

Paul then turns next to give us a list of things that we are to reject if we are to be loving persons. He names eight things in all.

The first is jealousy. Love does not envy or love is not jealous. We know from reading the scripture that jealousy has both a good side and a bad side. It has a good side when it cares about another. If therefore I see one of my family members falling under the influence of someone whom I regard will do them harm I am right in exercising jealousy for their own well being and behavior. I want to protect them from that person who is usurping the role of goodness in their life. God himself is described as a jealous God. Not because he's selfish but because he's seeking our welfare. Jealousy becomes bad when it cares only about ourselves and protecting our own interest. It's possible there are marriages represented here tonight with tremendous amounts of jealousy or envy. Jealousy for example because mother in law is coming. Jealous because one of the partners puts a priority on work. Jealous because of suspicion. Jealous because the football season is coming.

There's always a reaction when we are jealous that has a sinful side that says this person is hurting me and I want to hurt back. But Christ is saying to us this person is hurting because they are hurting. They are being unloving because they need my love. Instead of returning their sinful response with jealousy on your part, love is not jealous. It does not simply seek feathering its own nest.

The second thing Paul tells us to reject in love is love behaves by not being boastful. The king James says it vaughteth not itself. Boastfulness can describe a person who talks about themselves rather than listening to others. It can describe a person who uses their deeds of love to manipulate another person. Love does not boast of the deeds it has done.

A third thing that Paul tells us to reject is arrogance. Or being puffed up. This is much different from self esteem. In arrogance one is not simply having a good healthy self image. But arrogance involves a kind of pride that in order to put ourselves up demands that another person be demoted. Arrogance brings with it disdain and lack of respect and often cutting sarcasm. The apostle tells us to avoid this arrogance in our life.

Rudeness. King James says "Love does not behave itself unseemly." Or "Love is not rude." Or a positive way to say that is "Love has manners." We are most at home with members of our own family and will say crude and rude things to people that we feel safest with. I'd never dare say some of the things in a church service that I've said to my kids on occasion.

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Love is not selfish. That's the fifth thing that we are to avoid. That's hard. How do you look at your own life and know whether you're selfish or not?

Someone has written of Jesus, "If you want a fitting accusation to write on the cross of Christ this is the only one: He loved too much."

The sixth thing to reject in regard to bad habits related to love is irritability. Love is not easily angered. With Christ's help circumstances can be controlled.

Seventh to reject is unforgiveness. Love keeps no record of wrongs. The word in the Greek language is an accountant's word. It literally means to store up. Enter into the ledger so that it will not be forgotten. A CPA word. Love does not write things into the record and haul them out and use them in an argument.

Eighth thing to reject is an unempathetic and an unsympathetic heart. Love does not delight in evil. Love doesn't rejoice when an enemy is down. Love does not gloat at someone else's misfortune. Or say, "They had it coming to them."

Paul goes on to close this passage by giving us four things we are to pursue. Love always protects. That is to say love covers up and carries up. Both of those meanings are involved in the Greek words of love always protects. It can mean to cover up and it can mean to carry up.

1 Peter 4:8 uses the same word in describing the fact that love covers multitude of sin. That is love does not scatter unpleasant news. Love also carries. Love protects in that it carries burdens. Carries possibilities. Carries all things.

Then a second quality of what to pursue in love is love believes. Love believes, it always trusts. This does not mean that to be a Christian is to be naïve. Love isn't fooled by the robes. It doesn't believe that black is white. Love however in doubtful cases remains generous. Love gives the benefit of the doubt. Love does not wait for another person to prove himself or herself. Love believes.

Then third, love always hopes. Love does not give up on people. Jesus says "Father, forgive them." Peter will later say of those who crucified Jesus, "You did it in ignorance." Even though they appear to have done the crucifixion with deliberate intention the love of Jesus Christ doesn't give up on people and it says God is willing to take your intentionality and the wrongs, which you have done with deliberateness and treat them as though you didn't mean them. That's love. That hopes.

And love goes on lasting. Love perseveres. The fourth thing to embrace. When love has no evidence it believes the best. When the evidence is adverse it hopes for the best. And when hopes are repeatedly disappointed love still courageously waits.

One of the things that I've learned to do in 1 Corinthians 13:4-6 is read these 3 verses in three different ways.

First, 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. He

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does not delight in evil but rejoices in the truth. He always protects, always trusts, always hopes and always perseveres. Those words are true of Christ.

And if we are in Christ these words are meant to describe our life as well. So in the place of “love” we could put the personal pronoun “I” as a faith statement. 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 with the truth. I always protect, always trust, always hope, always persevere.

A third way to read that passage is to put the plural pronoun to describe the body of Christ: we are patient, we are kind, we do not envy, we do not boast, we are not proud, we are not rude, we are not self seeking. We are not easily angered. We keep no record of wrongs. We do not delight in evil but rejoice in the truth. We always protect, always trust, always hope, always persevere.

I think that’s how that passage is really meant to be read.

Prayer:

Lord, we really do need each other. Save us from the times that we who make get out ahead and look back and some way shout advise to people who are struggling, rather than coming back and putting an arm around them and being present with them. Teach us to be people who love. Help love to be a verb in our life. Make us your people who are known not for our intelligence, not for our personality, not for our possessions, not for our faith but for our love, the love of Christ dwelling in us. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.