

“Dying to Love”

I Corinthians 13: 4-7

November 3, 2013

Prayer: *Who am I to preach on 1 Corinthians 13? Such love as this is for a perfect man. Only You, Jesus, fully embody such perfect qualities of love. In me they are aspirations; in You they are perfected. So how we need Your life to blossom in us. Be to us all that You are, Lord Jesus. Amen.*

Series: Life in the Body: Spiritual Gifts and the supremacy of love in the church.

Love is the supreme ministry of the church.

Our primary responsibility is not just what we do in the church, but who we are toward one another. When we love each other, a lot of ministry takes care of itself.

People often say, we just need to be like the early church again. Yet I’m not so sure you would have enjoyed being a part of the church of Corinth. There were a lot of problems and conflict in the church. And even though it was full of gifted people, they didn’t know how to use their gifts in love for each other. The Corinthian church was a place where people were impatient and unkind. They were envious of one another’s gifts. There was too much bragging and arrogance going around resulting in a rude atmosphere. How would you like to be a part of a church where people are all about themselves? And when they don’t get their way they get easily angered and always keep list of grievances to use against you. —Not a Corinthian problem but a human-heart problem.

You want to be a part of a church where people are not only rejoicing in the truth but where they are protecting one another, trusting one another, with undying hope and perseverance. You want to be a part of a church and a marriage and family where there is patience, kindness, contentment, humility, selflessness, forgiveness, and an absence of anger.

What we long for is not the church in infancy, but the church mature in love.

This morning we are going to be asking two questions: 1) What does love look like (I Cor. 13:4-7); 2) How does love grow?

What does love look like? (How do you identify genuine love? How do we know whether or not we are manifesting love?)

1. **Love is patient** (vs. 4).

Loving each other with patience is more than just graciously waiting for a long time. This word includes allowing ourselves to suffer inconveniences or and even being taken advantage of without retaliating.

2. **Love is kind** (vs. 4).

Just as patience is willing to take ill-treatment from others, so kindness is willing to repay it with good. Kindness carries the idea of being helpful, graciously serving. It involves actively working for the other person’s good.

3. **Love is not jealous** (vs. 4).

When we love one another we are not envious of others who have more impressive gifts (or possessions). Envy destroys contentment and erodes our love for one another. But love rejoices in someone else’s blessing.

4. **Love does not brag** (vs. 4).

Those with more impressive gifts must be careful not to flaunt them. Those with great accomplishments must never forget that they are the result of God’s undeserved grace.

5. **Love is not arrogant** (vs. 4).

Pride always destroys love because it only cares for itself. Humility puts the concerns of others ahead of self. There is no room for pride in the exercise of our gifts—they are grace-gifts, not achievements. Our desire to be made much of must die.

6. **Love is not rude** (vs. 5): “...*does not act unbecomingly*”

Rudeness is the opposite of honor. We should carry the image of God we possess with honor; and if we will *be* a people of honor we will treat all people with honor. It’s been said, “you can spot a gentleman not by how he addresses his king but by how he addresses his servants.”¹

7. **Love is not self-seeking** (vs. 5): “...*it does not seek its own*”

This is the biggie. You cannot be like Christ without this core aspect of love. [Phil 2:3-5] This Christ-like attitude is the key to God’s design for marriage and it will transform every other relationship in your life. Selfless love should be the hallmark of the church, because it’s the heart of Jesus.

Love by nature is other-focused. Love means we refuse to pursue our own agenda without first considering if it will have a good impact on others. That doesn’t mean having weak convictions, but be sure that the strength of your convictions is in proportion to the truth of God’s word, not just your own opinion—that will guard you against anger when others don’t agree with you.²

8. **Love is not easily angered** (vs. 5): “...*is not provoked*”

An unmastered temper is always destructive. But love is not touchy; not irritable. This is convicting—my irritability stems from a “strong craving for a trouble-free life.”³ But that has to die because God will use trouble for my good. So my personal ownership of my time and schedule must die—it belongs to God. My insistence that frustrations and interferences get out of my way must die. My greatest daily need is to have my soul satisfied in God which requires a surrendered life. A surrendered, satisfied life will not be easily angered.

9. **Love keeps no record of wrongs** (vs. 5): “...*does not take into account a wrong suffered.*”

Love does not keep a mental file of offenses that can be nursed and rehearsed as tactics of war. Love forgives.

10. **Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth** (vs. 6).

Love does not enjoy seeing others fail in their fallenness. Love does not enjoy saying, “I told you so!” Love does not have a critical spirit. Love doesn’t have the urge to broadcast the sins of others—love doesn’t gossip. Love grieves where there is sin and it rejoices wherever the truth blossoms in the lives of others. Love cares about what people believe.

11. **Love always protects** (vs. 7): “...*bears all things.*”

The idea here has to do with endurance—love puts up with a lot. Rather than exploiting another person’s sin, love protects by forbearing another person’s short-comings. Kids tattle because they lack forbearing love. A person “who doesn’t put up with much” needs to grow in love, while a person who “puts up with a lot” is generous in love. Love is willing to bear the imperfections of the one it loves.

12. **Love always trusts** (vs. 7): “...*believes all things.*”

Love gives each other the benefit of the doubt. Love doesn’t assign motives or assume it knows what the other person is thinking and what motivations are driving his/her hearts and behavior. Love assumes the best of people rather than being suspicious and cynical. Love is not gullible, but it is open-hearted.

¹ D.A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, pg. 62

² John Piper, June 25, 1995 sermon, pg. 4.

³ *Ibid.*, pg. 3.

13. **Love always hopes** (vs. 7).

It doesn't give up on people. Love leans more heavily on what God can still do in someone's life than on what the person hasn't yet done. Love refuses to see failure as final.⁴ Love insists that God's grace is infinitely superior to people's failures.

14. **Love always perseveres** (vs. 7): "*love endures all things.*"

Love doesn't give up. The word for endurance here (*hupomeno*) was a military term used of army holding a vital position at all cost.⁵ If love will last, if marriage will be for life, if relationships in the body of Christ will not dispensable, then it will require that we go to war against ourselves, until we die to self, and Christ alone rules the our hearts and minds.

This matter of love is extremely personal and presses us to see and know our own hearts. *I am naturally* impatient; I excel at impatience. But Christ in me, is patient. The question is, will I be loyal to me or to Jesus? ...

Unkind...kind
Envious...content
Brad...humble
Arrogant...humble
Rude...honoring
Self-seeking...selfless
Easily angered...(not about me)
Record of wrongs...forgives
Delight in evil...rejoices with truth

Christ in me protects, trusts, hopes, and perseveres. What I need is not greater effort to love people; I need Jesus to be manifested in my life.

⁴ MacArthur, pg. 354.

⁵ MacArthur, pg. 355.

We don't grow by just trying to be more patient; we don't grow by just trying to be more kind or selfless. We grow by dying. The weeds of self-centered living must die for the blossoms of love to thrive.

How does love grow?

A. Training:

We practice love. We choose to act lovingly toward others even though we may not feel loving toward them in the moment; not by being fake, but by surrendering ourselves to God, choosing to honor Him by treating the other person with loving attitudes and actions. Notice that I Cor. 13:4-7 is about actions and attitudes we can choose to express; not just emotions that we feel. *Love will often require that we exercise self-control over our emotions rather than just letting our emotions control us.* In other words, Love is based on our character; not on the of the attractiveness of the other person.

B. Transformation:

We embrace our need to die to ourselves and abide in Christ. Every difficult act of love requires that in some way I die to my self-life, my self-interests as superior over the needs and interest of those God has put in my life to love. The only way for us to die to our self-serving loyalty is by abiding in Christ—living in moment-by-moment dependence and surrender to Christ. This is more than a general prayer—"Lord, help me be more loving today"—though that is certainly commendable. The maturity of love is won inch by inch, conversation by conversation, choice by choice, action by action; surrendering and entrusting ourselves to Jesus for the grace and power to say no to self (to deny self, die to self) so that we can discover the joy of serving others with love each time we are tempted to be impatient, unkind, self-focused, rude, proud, etc.

Let me point out that if anyone wishes to follow Jesus (who is the perfect epitome of love), he must take up his cross daily to follow Him: Luke 9:23—*“If anyone would come after Me, he must take up his cross daily and follow me.”* [John 15; called to abide in Jesus because apart from Him we can do nothing → “This is my commandment that you love one another”]

C. Truth:

We must meditate on God’s love toward us through the *gospel*. We must think often of the cross and God’s love toward us in patience, mercy, and forbearance, forgiveness (etc.). We must live *in* the love of God if we will *display* the love of God to others. I am empowered to love others when I grasp more fully how God has loved me.

****We grow in love by embracing the “naturally unloving” moments and submitting our hearts to the loving authority of Christ, imitating His gospel.***

Gospel: *“The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.”*

Communion:

➤ **Bread: I John 4:9-10**

Love sacrifices; Love dies for sinners. There is no greater love than this.

➤ **Cup: I John 4:11**

Can we receive mercy from the Lord and not extend it to one another? The blood of Christ paid for our sin and theirs. Shall we not honor our cross-slain Master by loving and forgiving one another?