

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 5/2/04 PM

Series: "Learning to Love God's Way"

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 "Another Look at Real Love"

In a Peanuts cartoon, there's a picture of Charlie Brown, and next to him a bubble which reveals the thoughts of Charlie's heart, "I love the world. I think the world is wonderful. It's people I can't stand."

Can you relate to Charlie? It's easy to say we love Humanity (with a capital "H"), but it's quite another thing to love individual "humans," especially when you consider "humans" have quirks and irritations that rub us wrong. The truth is, however, we can learn to love people we once couldn't "stand." In fact, we who know Christ must learn to do so. Granted, it doesn't come naturally, but we can learn how to love.

We've been learning how to love in our current series in 1 Corinthians 13. God did not give us this classic text merely to provide sentimental reflections at weddings and funerals. He gave 1 Corinthians 13 to His Church so we might learn how to glorify Him by loving one another as He loves.

It's important to remember that God gave the love chapter originally to a church that desperately needed to learn how to love--the Corinthian church. Here was a church that used the wrong stick to measure spirituality. They thought if they possessed and used the dramatic spiritual gifts, they must be spiritual. So right in the middle of a section which deals with spiritual gifts (chapters 12-14), Paul addresses the subject of love.

Review: From our previous studies...

In the first section (1-3), Paul underscores the necessity of love. A person can have the gifts of tongues, prophecy, faith, and can even be a martyr for Christ, but if he doesn't live a consistent life of love, he is a spiritual zero.

Next, in verses 4-7, we find a picture of love. It's interesting that rather than define love, the apostle describes it--in three ways. First, he says, "Here's what love is (4a). Love is long-suffering. And love is kind." Second, he tells us, "Here's what love is not (4b-6a)," and proceeds to identify what's out when love is in. Love doesn't envy. It doesn't promote itself. It's not proud.

That's where we stopped last time, and where we'll pick it up this evening.

This Week: What else is love not? Notice verse 5.

4. It's not rude. As the KJV puts it, "Doth not behave itself unseemly." The verb (*aschamoneo*) means "to act unbecomingly." The tense of the verb, as with the others in this section, is present, indicating continuous action. That is to say a person who exhibits love will not live a life that is unbecoming, unseemly, and rude.

It's been well said that you can spot a gentleman not by the way he addresses his king but by the way he addresses his servants. The former may not be courtesy at all, but merely enlightened self-interest (Carson, 62).

Frankly, some of the members of the church in Corinth had a problem with being rude. We find an example of this back in 7:36. There Paul indicates a man would be acting improperly if he touched a woman's heart (led her along) and then refused to marry her. It's rude for a single man to misrepresent his intentions to a single woman (or vice versa), to lead her along, to make her think he is committed to her but then refuse to substantiate that commitment before God in marriage. Love doesn't do that. It's not rude.

Young people, how do you treat a person from the opposite sex? Do you exhibit true love? True love doesn't "go with somebody" because it makes me look good. Those of you who date, allow me to ask you something. Do you ever think, "I'll go out with so-and-so because it'll make me look good with the crowd"? If so, realize that's not love, and it's not pleasing to God.

Rudeness shows up in lots of other ways. A rude person discredits Christ by behaving in unbecoming ways, big and small. If it's the pattern of my life week after week to come into Sunday School class 12 minutes late, interrupt the teacher, and distract others from learning God's Word, is that loving behavior that is becoming to Christ? Or is it rude?

When I speak my mind in a group, and throw out careless, hurtful words, and then say, "There, I feel better now that I've got that off my chest," is that loving? No, it's unseemly. It's rude. And it's what love is not.

5. It's not self-seeking. True love seeks not its own. It doesn't operate by the principle, "What's best for me?" Frankly, that's the

essence of the orientation of our society. People take a new job if its an upward career move for me. Never mind the effect the move may have on the spouse and children, and certainly forget the influence it will have on ministry in the church. Just make sure it's best for old number-one.

Would you carefully consider this question? Are you a self-seeking person? Does it grind you when people forget your birthday? (not if you're turning 40!) Does it get under your skin when you enter a room, and no one recognizes you? Self-seeking people live as though the world revolves around them. Listen, we can't be both loving and self-seeking at the same time. To the contrary, loving people are willing to say no to self.

George Whitefield and John & Charles Wesley were godly men whom God used greatly to advance the gospel in the 18th century. However, Whitefield and the Wesleys came from differing theological orientations which placed an unfortunate strain on their relationship.

In his biography of George Whitefield, Arnold Dallimore records this letter written by Whitefield to the Wesley brothers in his attempt to bring reconciliation and stop the mud-slinging. Whitefield wrote the letter from aboard ship as it approached England in March 1741.

"My Dear, Dear Brethren,

... Why did you throw out that bone of contention? Why did you print that sermon against predestination?...

Do you not think, my dear brethren, that I must be as much concerned for truth, or what I think truth, as you? God is my judge. I always was, and I hope I always shall be, desirous that you may be preferred before me. But I must preach the Gospel of Christ, and this I cannot now do without speaking about election...

O my dear brethren, my heart almost bleeds within me! Methinks I would be willing to tarry here on the waters forever, rather than come to England to oppose you."

6. It's not easily angered. It's not easily provoked. The Greek word (paroxuno) means "to sharpen, stimulate, provoke." Simply put, love is not "touchy." It doesn't have a blistering temper barely hidden beneath the surface of a respectable facade, just waiting for an offense, real or imagined, at which to let out an outburst (Carson).

To put it another way, love acts instead of reacts. A loving person doesn't merely react to what people do to him; he acts in a God-honoring way.

Kipling said that is was the test of a man if he could keep his head when everyone else was losing his and blaming it on him, and if when he was hated he did not give way to hating (in Barclay, 122).

Does that word apply to you? Are you a touchy person? What does it take to set you off? Do you go into a tirade when someone is driving too slow in front of you on your road?!

Two, pre-school siblings were playing, when all of a sudden mom heard a tirade coming from the play room. By the time she got there, both children screaming and hitting each other. "Stop it! What's the problem, Johnny?" the mother asked. "Billy, hit me!" Johnny replied. "Is that true?" Mom asked Billy. "Well, yea, but he hit me first!" Bill responded. Mom looked again at Johnny and asked, "Did you hit Billy first?" To which Johnny answered, "Well, he started it!" "What did he do?", Mom asked. "He looked at me funny!"

We chuckle at the scenario, but do you know what's sad? It's sad to see a touchy adult. My friend, love is not easily angered. A loving person isn't touchy, and doesn't get bent out of shape when his rights are ignored. She's willing to forbear.

7. It doesn't keep a record of wrongs. "Thinketh no evil," says the Authorized Version. True love does not take into account a wrong suffered (NASB).

If you had lived in Corinth, you would have had ample opportunity to keep track of wrongs. Just notice some of the wrongs Paul had to confront in the Corinthian assembly.

"You yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers (6:8)." They were actually cheating fellow Christians. The problems were affecting family relationships, too, so that Paul had to admonish individuals who were depriving their spouses (7:5). Another problem was that some Christians were hurting their weaker brothers by choosing to eat meat that had been offered to idols (8:11).

The people who had done wrong needed a firm word. So did the people who had been wronged. It's to the latter group that 13:5 speaks, "Love doesn't keep a record of wrongs." The word Paul uses is an accounting term (logizeshthai). It's the term used for entering an item on a ledger so that it will not be forgotten.

I've read (Barclay) that in Polynesia, where natives have spent much time in fighting and feasting, it is customary for each man to keep some reminders of his hatred. Articles are suspended from the roofs of their huts to keep alive the memory of their wrongs--real or imaginary.

Isn't that what we often do with the wrongs people commit against us? We hang on to them. We put them on the ledger in our minds, and mull over them until we find a time to even the score. One of the great arts in life is to learn what to forget (Barclay, 122). Proverbs 19:11 reveals, "The discretion of a man defers his anger, and it is his glory to pass over a transgression."

Are you a person who keeps record of wrongs? Do you have a mental register that you review periodically? If so, you are not a loving person.

A practical word of application is in order. Please realize that time alone does not make ill feelings go away. Forgiveness does. Saying, "Ah, let's just forget it happened," isn't the answer, either. Dealing with a wrong biblically is. That's what love does.

8. It doesn't delight in evil. "Rejoices not in iniquity (6, KJV)." Love finds no pleasure in anything that is wrong. Anything. That includes violence on television and gossip. Love doesn't hear of the fall of a Christian brother, and smugly retort, "Hah, I knew it was coming! I knew he was a fake the day he was baptized. Maybe now you'll believe me."

Furthermore, love doesn't enjoy endless discussion about what is wrong--for example, it doesn't delight in hashing over what's wrong with school administrators, what's wrong with our government leaders, nor what's wrong with our supervisor at work.

You say, "Well, what if there is a problem?" Then, love deals with the problem, if possible, with godly action, not with petty talk. And if the problem is out of our control, then love keeps doing right, and leaves the situation with the Lord.

Love doesn't delight in evil. Ever.

Why is it that we are so prone to feel unspoken delight when we hear something derogatory about another person? Why do we snicker when we hear that our boss's wife is suing him for a divorce, or when we learn that a government official is being audited for tax problems?

By the way, listening to the news too much can foster this. Ironically, we can easily become cynical by watching too much Headline News. It's good to be informed, for sure, but not to delight in evil. William Barclay remarks (122-3), "It is one of the queer traits of human nature that very often we prefer to hear of the misfortune of others rather than of their good fortune."

To the degree that's true of us, we are not exhibiting biblical love. Why not? Because love doesn't delight in evil. What does love do? We find out next.

C. Here's what love does (6b-7). Here are five things love always does.

1. It rejoices in the truth. The contrast is clear in verse 6, "Not this, but this." Love does not delight in evil but rejoices in and with the truth. Love delights in that in which God delights. It looks for mercy and justice for all people, including those with whom we may disagree (Fee, 639).

What do you do when you hear untrue things being said about someone (even someone that doesn't like you)? Do you listen with inward delight? Do you nod in agreement? Or do you object and say, "No, that's not true." Love rejoices with the truth.

If you want to have a good relationship with someone you must control your thinking and limit your thinking to the truth. Refuse to think non-truths about a person.

"Well, I'll be! He frowned at me," Bob said to herself after seeing Sam across the room in church one Sunday. Of course, there were ten other people around Bob and it could have been a grimace from a migraine rather than a frown, but Bob was sure. "That proves it. He doesn't like my tie. Why, I bet he doesn't like me! Maybe I should just leave the church!" Love doesn't try to read minds and build cases on subjective feelings. Love operates on the basis of truth. Love rejoices in the truth.

Related to this is the next thing that love does.

2. It always protects. "It bears all things." Love always endures. It's the character of love to put up with everything. The NEB captures the sense of this by translating, "there is nothing love cannot face."

Gordon Fee put it this way (640), "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 to pour itself out in behalf of others."

St. Francis of Assisi understood this, as revealed by the following prayer:

Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace.

Where there is hate, may I bring love;

Where offense, may I bring pardon;

May I bring union in place of discord.

3. It always trusts. Love believes all things. Does that mean love is gullible? Not exactly, but if it errs, love will lean to the side of being gullible over being cynical and skeptical.

This quality indicates that love sees the best in others. When it's confused by what it perceives in another person, it doesn't jump to quick, condemning conclusions. It is so easy to think the worst. But love doesn't do that. True love is always ready to give the benefit of the doubt. It sees the best in others. It believes. It trusts.

You say, "Are you kidding? If I live that way, I'll get burnt! In a dog-eat-dog world, it's irrational to be trusting." That may be true for dogs, but we're not dogs! We are people who belong to the God Who rescued us, and Who calls us to walk in the footsteps of His Son, Jesus Christ. I remind you that Jesus was always ready to give a person the benefit of the doubt, and He knew the person's heart!

William Barclay tells a story that reveals the power of a trusting love (p. 123). He writes, "When Arnold became headmaster of Rugby he instituted a completely new way of doing things. Before him, school had been a terror and a tyranny. Arnold called the boys together and told them that there was going to be much more liberty and much less flogging. 'You are free,' he said, 'but you are responsible--you are gentlemen. I intend to leave you much to yourselves, and put you upon your honour, because I believe that if you are guarded and watched and spied upon, you will grow up knowing only the fruits of servile fear; and when your liberty is finally given you, as it must be some day, you will not know how to use it.' The boys found it difficult to believe. When they were brought before him they continued to make old excuses and to tell the old lies. 'Boys,' he said, 'if you say so, it must be true--I believe your word.' The result was that there came a time in Rugby when boys said, 'It is a shame to tell Arnold a lie--he always believes you.' He believed in them and he made them what he believed them to be. Love can ennoble even the ignoble by believing the best." Love believes all things. It always trusts.

4. It always hopes. To put it another way, love always hopes for the best. Paul's not saying that love blindly believes the best about everyone and everything. He is saying that love never loses hope. In one of his famous lines, Shakespeare wrote, "Love is not love that alters when it alteration finds."

Are you an optimistic person? As Christians, we have reason to be! You say, "How can we be optimistic about life? We don't know the future. We don't know the bad things that may happen." No, we don't. But we do know the end of the story and the One Who is writing the story, and both it and He are good! Knowing the God of hope gives us sufficient reason to be optimistic in relationships. We can take risks with people. Love does, for it always hopes.

5. It always perseveres. Love endures all things. The verb used here (*hupomenein*) is a fantastic word. Generally, it is translated "to bear, or to endure." The idea here, however, is not passive--that is, that love merely puts up with things--but active. Love courageously keeps going. When hopes are repeatedly dashed, love has a conquering mindset.

I like the way William Barclay assessed this trait of love (124), "Love can bear things, not merely with passive resignation, but with triumphant fortitude, because it knows that 'a father's hand will never cause his child a needless tear.'"

The late Corrie ten Boom recalled in her book *The Hiding Place* an event that happened after World War II. She met a former guard from the Ravensbruck concentration camp, where her sister had died and she herself had been subjected to horrendous indignities.

"It was at a church service in Munich that I saw him, the former S.S. man who had stood guard at the shower room door in the

We've seen today what real love is. We've also seen what it takes to love that way.

Next Time: We'll consider...

III. The Permanence of Love (8-13).

A. Paul identifies the difference between love and spiritual gifts (8-10).

1. Love never fails.
2. Spiritual gifts have a temporal purpose.

B. Paul illustrates the difference between love and spiritual gifts (11-12).

1. Consider a child.
2. Consider a mirror.

C. Paul insists on the enduring value of love (13).

Response: Let's make it personal.

We are living in a world that desperately needs to see the love of God lived out in our lives. Let's ponder this need as we sing the next song again.

Hymn of Response: #284 "They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love"

Let's bow our heads and reflect on God's Word together. How are you doing as a person when it comes to exhibiting biblical love? How are we doing as a church? Do we have the reputation in this community for being a loving church?

Let's take a test. Let's substitute our name (either personally or as a church) in place of the noun "love" in verses 4-7, and see if it's true.

"Wheelersburg Baptist Church is patient, WBC is kind. The members of WBC do not envy, they do not boast, they are not proud. WBC is not rude, its members are not self-seeking, they are not easily angered, they keep no record of wrongs. WBC does not delight in evil, but rejoices in the truth. The people of WBC always protect, always trust, always hope for the best with one another, and always persevere even when they feel like throwing in the towel."

Is this true of us? May God help us. Let's spend time repenting of where we've strayed from being a people who truly love.

Time for Reflection and Prayer

1 John tells us, "We love because He first loved us." The best thing we can do in order to become a more loving people is to saturate our minds with the amazing fact of God's love for us. As Paul states, "The love of Christ constrains us." Let's sing about His love.

Closing Song

Adapted from series preached at WBC in 9/96 PM