

**The Sign
of the
Believer:**

LOVE

**By
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Love: The Sign of the Believer

“All men will know that you are my disciples
if you love one another” -John 13:35

This new study will be one dedicated to the fruit of the spirit called “Love.” We will be breaking this word down in its various meanings as the Apostle Paul does in 1 Corinthians 13. But first we want to look at it from a couple of different angles. And this first one is that love is a sign of a person who is a believer in Jesus.

It’s important to note that the word “love” as used in this text comes from the specific Greek word, *agapao*. It means love with a precise meaning: love that is unselfish. Remember, in the Greek language love is expressed in different ways. *Eros* means physical love. *Phileo* means brotherly love. But *agape*’ means love that gives, with no thought of return, with no manipulation, with no sinful motivation. That’s why the New Testament writers used that word for God’s love. Of course no word can fully describe the love of God. His mercy and grace are past finding out. Our minds cannot be wrapped around a God of love and discern all that it means. We are finite in our love, God is infinite in love. Nevertheless, the apostles used the word that came the closest to describing the love they saw in Jesus and especially at the cross when He died.

This is the word that John uses in his gospel to describe what Jesus said about us, His disciples. He wants us to have the same kind of love. And He says an awesome thing. He says that all men will know we are His disciples if we have love one for another. The sign of the believer is not a doctrine. Isn’t that interesting? I think it is important to believe in the orthodox view of Christ. By orthodox I mean the clear definition of Jesus that the early church came to in their councils which were called the “Creeds.” These councils had to happen because of the error that was rampant in those days. People could be led astray by various rumors purporting to come from those in authority. So I am not saying that orthodox doctrine is unnecessary. But Jesus didn’t say

that proper doctrine would be the sign of the believer. Do you find that shocking? Many people do. Jesus said that for eternal life a person needed to be born again or born from above (John 3). No one can come to the Father except through faith in the Son. That is a heart change that is brought by the Holy Spirit in anyone's heart when they repent of their own ways and turn to Jesus as Savior. But what is the SIGN of that heart change? Jesus said that LOVE would be the sign. What He meant was that when people are saved and born again, they become partakers of another nature – God's.

“. . . he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the DIVINE NATURE and escape the corruption that is in the world by evil desires” -2 Peter 1:4

This means that every one who believes, and begins to walk according to His word and His promises, gets the very nature of the Lord in them. Now what is the essential nature of God? We find the answer in 1 John 4:16 where we read: “God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.” Here is the divine nature revealed. God is love. This is His nature. Even though the counterpart of love is holiness and God has at times had to punish and send forth judgment, His heart is one of love. Love calls forth discipline at times because that is love, too. Any parent knows that to truly love their children is to discipline them in order to save them from wrong attitudes and wrong behaviors. But love is the essence of it all. And God is love. If I could say it another way, the sign of the true and living God is that He loves mankind, and was not willing that any should perish, but sent His own Son (having the same nature) to die on the cross that men and women could be saved. This is the “sign” of the true God of all—LOVE.

The true sign of the believer is not that he or she prays, reads the Bible, goes to church, witnesses, sings spiritual songs, believes a certain statement of faith or is baptized. These are all things that believers do, true. But none of them is the sign that they are the Lord's. The sign will always be the divine nature of

God in the believer—LOVE. Many people confuse the gifts of God with the fruit of God. The gifts of God are many— healing, discernment, prophecy, tongues, wisdom, knowledge, leadership, serving, giving, etc. But those are not the signs of a believer. The gifts come from God and say a lot about God, that He is good and generous. But the gifts say nothing about the one who receives them, nothing about the character of the heart. It's possible to do many exploits in the name of the Lord, but to not know the Lord. Jesus said this in Matthew 7:21-23:

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers.’”

The gifts of God can come in a moment of time to a person. But the fruit of God comes over a period of time. No tree gets instant fruit. I put in my grapevine several years before I got grapes. I was anxious for the fruit. I would have liked to have it instantly, but I had to wait. The branches had to stay attached to the vine; the sun shone; the rain came. One year, two years, and then the third year I had grapes. And they were good. It was excellent fruit. So the Bible calls LOVE a fruit (Galatians 5:22). Love (*agape*) is the divine nature of God. We can only get that nature by being born again and walking in the will of God, staying attached to Him day by day and obeying His word. Then, as time goes by we get more and more of God's nature and one day we see the fruit of the Spirit manifested in greater and greater ways. And especially we see the love of God.

But how do we define this kind of love? What are the standards? Is there any example? Yes, there is. Jesus said, “Love one another as I HAVE LOVED YOU.” This leads us to our next study where we will see how love was defined in Jesus.

Love: Jesus' Way

Love is a fruit of the Spirit, but now we ask what kind of love is this, how can it be defined? We know the New Testament writers used the Greek word *agapao* for the love that Jesus showed. It refers to an unselfish love, a purely motivated love. So Jesus says in John 13:34, "As I have loved you, so you must love one another." In using the word love, Jesus sets Himself as the example. The Bible says Jesus is the "the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being" (Hebrews 1:3). Therefore, we know that He will represent God the Father accurately in everything and especially in love. Let's look at some of the ways Jesus' love was manifested.

Jesus loved them when they were unlovely. To like someone depends on a number of things—personalities, hobbies, lifestyles, food, looks, dress, etc. We tend to like people who are more like us. But this quality of love that Jesus is referring to as coming from God goes beyond likeness. God's love will go toward people when they are not that nice to be around. We wouldn't say that Jesus had a high class of people as His disciples. Two of them had such quick tempers that their answer to rebellious people was to destroy them with fire. Another one betrayed Him for money. Another cursed and denied he ever knew Him when the pressure came. One was a tax collector (those who were known for extortion and bribery). All of them were maneuvering to get His favor so they could end up with the best positions in the upcoming kingdom that He supposedly would establish on the earth. No, Jesus had some earthy and troubled men around Him. But these were the ones He loved and cared for right up to the end. Love sees the end product, not the present messiness. (A very good word for parents!)

Jesus loved them when they didn't treat Him honorably. The love of God goes beyond the way we are treated and never answers in kind. The disciples oftentimes didn't meet His needs. He was the teacher and they were the students. But many times Peter would blurt out the wrong things in the presence of Jesus. God the Father

even interrupted Peter on the Mount of Transfiguration. They tried to keep Him from the children when He loved the children. They rebuked Him several times, such as in the boat when He was sleeping. Peter would contradict Him when he disagreed with Him. James and John took things into their own hands. Judas corrected Him about money and he was a thief. Jesus had real life around Him. He wasn't living in an ivory tower. But no matter how He was treated by His own disciples, He kept loving them. He loved them and didn't get self-defensive when all these things were coming at Him. He was able to handle rebukes against Himself with love.

Jesus loved them by never leaving or forsaking them.

Our kind of love can be quite fickle. That is, it goes by whims and emotions. If we feel good and everyone loves us, we can love them. But Jesus' love goes far beyond feelings. When God says He loves us, He means He is not going to leave us because He is upset. Jesus was unhappy with the disciples on several occasions. In fact, He had to rebuke them from time to time. But He never left them. When a husband, father, wife, or mother leaves the family, there is a lot of devastation and the hurts and offenses pile up. Rejection and betrayal set in. Never leaving is one of the greatest qualities of love. Loving people right up to the end is enviable. This kind of love cannot be our own. It must come from God. After Judas Iscariot had betrayed Jesus, he came with the rulers and the soldiers to seize Him. Even at that terrible time, Jesus says, "Friend, do what you came for" (Matthew 26:50). Jesus calls his betrayer, "friend." He had been with Jesus for three years. Jesus had never left him or forsaken him. And now, at the end of it all, betrayed by a man who was a close companion, Jesus calls him "friend." This is definitely not the love that is naturally in any man or woman. This is love and forgiveness on a higher scale.

Jesus loved them by doing a servant's work. God's love is never shown as one that lords it over anyone. This is nowhere more evident than in the life of Jesus. Jesus lays down His life regularly, every day, for His disciples. He prays for them,

teaches them privately, eats and talks with them, adjusts their attitudes and cares for their physical needs. But He does not act like He is above anyone. When the time comes for the servant to wash the dusty feet, Jesus takes a towel and girds Himself and washes feet. The love of God was not yet in the disciples to such a degree. In fact, they were preoccupied with their own thoughts on this very occasion. What were these thoughts? They were arguing among themselves who was the greatest. That was their focus. Jesus had taught them differently. But they didn't get it. So now He illustrates it. He picks up the towel and is unashamed to wash their feet. There is no task where God's love is not to go. His love is to go everywhere. There are many things we won't do. But that was not true with Jesus. We are in the presence of an awesome love—not ours, but God's. Jesus is a reflection of His own Father's love.

Finally, Jesus loved them enough to die for them. Well, here is the capstone of it all. Here is a love that is willing to die for another. These disciples don't fully understand Jesus. They are dense and foggy. They deny, they reject, they betray, they run away like cowards. But these are the ones that Jesus died for. The Bible says, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Someone might die for a friend or a close loved one. But Jesus is going to the cross knowing that He will be offered up as the sin offering for the world, the world of enemies and of people who misunderstand, and who are truly sinful. But the love of God is in His heart. He cannot love His own life and fulfill the will of His Father. **HE MUST LOVE OTHERS MORE THAN HE LOVES HIMSELF.** This is not the way we naturally think and live. No, the love of God is so different, so unlike the world's ways, that we generally respond in unbelief when we are faced with it. Would I die for those who misunderstand me and revile me? Would you? It humbles us just to think about it, let alone do it.

These are some of the ways Jesus loved His disciples. Jesus asks us to do the same. And when He challenges us, He also brings the provision. It is in Him, it is in His Spirit that we are able to reflect and represent Him. We need to be born from above.

Love: The Highest Good

“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.”

- 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

“And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is LOVE.”

- 1 Corinthians 13:13

The apostle Paul now puts love in its proper place. The love that comes from God is the greatest thing in the world. Jesus said the first and greatest commandment was to “love God with all your heart, and all your soul and all your mind” (Matthew 22:38). Peter said: “Above all, love each other deeply” (1 Peter 4:8). John said in his first letter: “God is love” (1 John 4:16). Paul said: “Love is the fulfillment of the Law” (Romans 13:10). These Scriptures certainly have the same message. The love of God that Jesus showed us and comes to us when we are born again by the presence of the Holy Spirit and the application of God’s word, is the most powerful force in the world. Some writers have called it the “*Summum Bonum*” (Latin for “the highest good”) of the Christian life.

Here in his letter to the Corinthians, Paul devotes an entire passage to its virtues. But he begins by saying several things which places love in the proper perspective. We have already seen that Jesus told us that all men would know we are His disciples because of the love we would show each other. Jesus became the example of this kind of love. So love is the sign of the believer. In order to cement that in our hearts and minds, Paul writes a sonnet to love. In the opening sentences, he makes it plain that if we have a lot of other things working for us, but do not have God’s love as the highest motivational force, we are really nothing. What a word! Let’s look at it a

little closer.

Paul begins by contrasting a number of things with love. The first is *spiritual gifts*. We could speak with other tongues or languages as the Spirit gives us utterance. This is a wonderful gift from the Lord. The early apostles received this in the upper room after Jesus had ascended. This gift is mentioned in several other places in the book of Acts and in Paul's writings. Yet, even if we have this supernatural gift and do not have the character of God (love) in our hearts, we are simply making noise and drawing attention to ourselves. We would be like a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. These things are loud and everyone looks at them when they are played in an orchestra. And gifts are like that—something that arrests attention. Love is contrasted with prophecy, which has the aura around it of explaining mysteries of God. A truly prophetic person opens up God's words and gets revelation of what it means. Paul himself said he had received an understanding of a mystery: that the Jews and Gentiles had the middle wall of partition broken down between them and that those who believed were now one in Jesus. So revelation is a wonderful gift. But without love the person is nothing. Paul goes on to another spiritual gift, faith. With the gift of faith, one can move mountains. That would be an awesome power gift. Imagine a person changing the topography of the earth by a word of faith. Or if you interpreted it as spiritual mountains, some of those have been addressed by men and women of faith and removed. But what if the person did not have the love of God? The result is, they are nothing. That means that all is surface and froth, but not reality. What an amazing word. We can do mighty things in God's name but do them from a wrong motive. God looks on our hearts and judges us. What is outward could be misunderstood, but God never yields to just what is seen outwardly. He looks on the heart.

Paul not only contrasts love with spiritual gifts, but next with the altruistic attitude of *charitable giving*. Giving

is a wonderful attitude. Paul quotes Jesus as saying, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” Now here Paul says that if we give all that we possess to the poor, but do it not from a heart of love, we will gain nothing. In other words there will be no reward. Imagine that. Let us suppose we give one million dollars to the needy, yet we are not motivated by the love of God, but by some other motive. There is really no reward from God. This would be a shocking word to many of the great philanthropists of the world. Once again, God is looking on the heart. Money can be used for some very good things, but money is neutral. Love isn’t. Love that comes from God is a very definite thing and never seeks its own benefits.

Lastly, Paul makes a final contrast. He contrasts love with *martyrdom*. A person can give their body to the flames and yet be doing it not for God, but for themselves. This actually happened in the days of the persecution during the Roman Empire. When many believers died terrible deaths under the rulers of Rome, some bystanders were so moved by their courage that they jumped into the flames as well. But they did it emotionally, not spiritually. And there are people today, who have literally sacrificed all that they are and all they have, for a cause that has nothing to do with God and His love. What a great deception! (Consider the Communists, the Nazis, the Fascists and all the freedom fighter movements). Once again, the result is that we gain nothing.

Notice Paul’s progression:

-We can speak with tongues, but without love we are only *making noise*.

-We can exercise prophecy and faith, but without love we *are* nothing.

-We can give all our money away and give our bodies away, but without love, we *gain* nothing.

What this means is that we are looking at the greatest and most powerful motivational force in the world. It is God’s love and when it comes into people it has a result all its own. So what makes God’s love so great? That is the right question

to ask. And that is why Paul wrote the rest of the passage. He wanted people to see that only the love of God has the true character of God. Many people who don't know God do good things. Does this mean they have partaken of the Divine nature? Not at all. God's love is so much the opposite of the natural man. That is what we will turn to next.

Love is Patient

“Love is patient. . .” -1 Corinthians 13:4

One of the perceptions that bothers many believers is the biological one. What do I mean? I mean that there are people who appear to be believers or Christians but who are not. The reason I say *appear*, is that they are naturally nice, kind and considerate people. They seldom lose their temper, they seem quite stable in their lifestyle and care for their wives, children and neighbors. Other people are downright nasty and contemptible in all their dealings with their families and with others. But the truth is, all we are perceiving is often a biological difference. Some people are made with a milder temperament in their actions and reactions, others are volatile and boil over quickly. This is where we misjudge. We think that what appears outwardly means that is the way people are inwardly. But the Bible says “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). The truth is, the “good, moral” person that appears so nice (at times) is not redeemed or born again. Neither is the angry, bitter person. ALL means ALL!

When we see a person showing love to others, we immediately think they must be a believer. No, that may appear to be God’s love, but it isn’t. It’s a natural goodness that is on a person because they had a fine upbringing, or a good set of values. It doesn’t mean they know the Lord or have partaken of God’s love. I have often illustrated this problem by the following picture. One person is standing on the mountain, another is standing way down in the valley. One appears to be much higher than the other (the good, moral person). But the reality is, neither one can reach the stars. That is what it means to “fall short of the glory of God.” No one can reach God by themselves or by being the best they can be. One time a neighbor said to me, “I don’t cheat or steal and I treat everyone honestly. If that isn’t good enough for God, then too bad.” He made a judgment on his own merits and felt righteous. But God’s judgment is the only one that counts and He says no one

can be right until he or she repents and trusts in Jesus for their salvation. It's the gift of God. It's not by our own works.

This is why the apostle Paul writes this great passage about God's love. He breaks it down so we can see that God's love can be defined. When someone says, "what do you mean about God's love being different?" you can respond and show them this passage. The natural man may keep a few of these attributes, but can never do them all, especially from a godly motivation. The only way a person is going to have these attitudes is by the grace of God working in them to change and turn them to God to receive His life. THESE ATTRIBUTES ARE NOT NATURAL TO MEN AND WOMEN. One can only live this way by the SUPER-NATURAL life of God that comes through Jesus the Messiah. We will certainly see this as we probe these words in this study.

The first attribute is PATIENCE. "Love is patient." This is a word that means to bear or endure long. It can also be translated, "to be of a long spirit, not to lose heart." What a great word! We will discover as we go along in this study that God's love deals very severely with the SELF CENTERED LIFE, which is the problem with everyone. No one is naturally unselfish, no matter what we look like.

First, we are to persevere patiently and bravely in enduring misfortunes and troubles. Problems are our lot in life. We are all going to have many trials and tribulations. It's part of human nature. We live in a sin sick world. The creation is cursed and so is man. All the problems of life will come upon us. The question is, how will we handle them? The believer has another Spirit, the Holy Spirit of God. He is representing the love of God to us. And patience is a grace that comes from this love that gives us the ability to "take it on the chin" and not lose our balance, not blame our husband or wife or neighbor or God. Most people will get very frustrated and angry when trouble hits. But the be-

liever says, “these things have passed by God, they have His approval to come into my life since my life is in His hands.” That is a totally different view than the natural man or woman has. The believer views God as sovereign and a redeeming God. Therefore, he or she is not crushed under the trials of life.

Notice also, we are to be patient in bearing the offenses and injuries of others. Jesus told us that offenses were going to come. Again, it’s our life on this earth. You are going to be offended by people and some are in the body of Christ. You are going to be hurt by words and by actions. It’s inevitable. You may say the insensitive thing yourself and get a bad reaction. Patience is great as long as you are not offended. But when it’s you, when you are weeping and crying with a deep hurt, that is when your self life needs patience. Love is patient. That means love is slow to get angry. When love deals with your self centeredness, your anger must leave. Anger is what usually rises when we are offended. That shows you how fast the self-life responds. But the love that God gives is slow to anger, much milder in responsiveness to situations of crisis. How can this happen? It happens because the sin nature, the self life, is being crucified day by day. That’s why love can work in us. Our sinful self is being killed by the power of the cross daily. This kind of longsuffering patience comes only to the one truly touched and saved by the Lord.

Further, patience is slow to avenge and punish. This is the big challenge in living on the earth. We will face trials and troubles. We will be offended and hurt. The natural reaction is revenge, an unredeemed attitude. We are surprised that even after becoming a believer we are deeply challenged in this way. Revenge is a part of the old sinful nature. It wants to punish and make the other person hurt a little, too. But the new creation in Christ has another attitude. The Bible says: “‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay’, says the Lord” (Romans 12:19). The believer begins to understand that he or she doesn’t have to pay back. God is the one who is in charge of paybacks. We can leave other people to Him. No one really gets away with anything. It may seem so for awhile. But the judgment of God will eventually catch them. The person who loves with the love of

God doesn't have to consider revenge. What a powerful word this is on patience. It's the love of God that is the motivation for patience. It can only come from Him. What a glorious way to live, trusting God to take care of every situation and every person. Patience reveals God in a way that other virtues seldom do. Next, we look at kindness.

Love is Kind

I am emphasizing that the love we get from knowing Jesus as our Savior and Lord is not a natural love. I know this is confusing at first. This is why I am referring to it every so often in order to help us understand. It appears that some people who don't know the Lord act in such loving ways that others feel they must be true believers. But we can be fooled by outward signs. No one can be saved by good works. Salvation is a gift of God. And the love of God is different than the natural love that is shown even in marriage or family life. The word is *agape*, and it means the kind of love that Jesus revealed.

What is the essential difference between God's love and our own acts of love? The difference is in the motivational forces of the heart. Everyone lives under the power of certain motivations. If we don't know the Lord, we live under our own motivations, which are basically self-centered. We rise from our beds when we feel good about it. We work to get promoted. We do good to our friends, but not our enemies. We show love in order to get it back. We spend all our money on ourselves. We live for the present, not the future. There are many ways of saying how we are motivated selfishly. BUT THE MOTIVATION OF THE BELIEVER IN JESUS IS DIFFERENT. Let me suggest three areas that might help us understand.

First, the main motivation of the Christian is to *glorify God*. Most people live for themselves. But the one who has truly been saved by the Lord no longer lives for himself or herself. Remember our Lord Jesus' words: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and *glorify your Father* which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16) (KJV). To glorify our Father is now our chief desire. Everything we do is to make Him pleased. We don't have a selfish end in mind; no, we desire for someone else to get honored.

Second, what we now do for others is motivated by an *expression of the love of God*. In other words, because God so loved

us, we want to express that same kind of love to others. It's not an expression of ourselves as much as it reveals how much God has loved us. That's why His kind of love can be expressed to everyone – friends and enemies. His love can be expressed to the lovely and the unlovely. It's not a natural love. It's God's love. And the motivations are altogether different.

Third, because it's God's love, the motivation is unselfish--*we are not looking for anything in return*. A purely natural love will in time begin to gripe and complain that no one we helped will ever do anything for us. This is not true of those who know God's love. When we express His love, we are not looking to be paid back. Jesus said: "If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others?" (Matthew 5:46-47). What a change of heart! Only God's love can do this in the inner springs of our hearts. He is the one who transforms us so we live like Him and not like the unredeemed. Do you see what I mean? This love is not to be confused with the kind acts that are done outwardly by those who don't know the Lord. The motivations are the difference.

Now we come to the second word in our text: "Love is kind" (1 Corinthians 13:4). Gill, a Biblical commentator, defines the word *kind* in the following way: "[A kind man] is liberal, and bountiful, does good to all men, even to enemies, and especially to the household of faith; he is gentle to all men, affable and courteous to his brethren, and not morose, churlish, and ill natured; he is easy and yielding to the tempers and humors of men; accommodates himself to their infirmities, capacities, manners, and circumstances, in everything he can, that is not contrary to the glory of God, the interest of Christ, the honor of religion, his own conscience, and the good of men."

It's interesting to note the contrasts that Paul uses with these words in this passage of Scripture. He has just said that God's love is first of all, patient. Now he says that this love is kind. Patience is a passive virtue. It is something that helps you to bear long in some tough situations and circumstances without complaining. But now we come to an active word—kindness. This is a positive force of love, moving out to confront people with clear acts of kindness. Paul said

in Romans: “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:21). This is the pro-activeness of the one who knows God personally. The natural person without God will try to respond in kind to evil, but not the believer. He or she is now under another spirit and seeks to overcome evil by good and kind acts. What a contrast to the world’s system.

Kindness is shown in many, many ways. There is no end to what you can do when you are impelled by the love of God. Kindness is having a *mild reaction* to people who are stirred up in anger or frustration at you. Kindness is being willing to *pray for* those who are offending you. Kindness is *going to a person who is offended with you*, and trying to work it out for fellowship to be restored. Kindness is seeing a neighbor in need of some *food, money or daily necessities*, and meeting that need. Kindness is *showing hospitality* to anyone who comes in the doors of your home. Kindness is *giving up your place*, so someone else can enjoy the program. Kindness is *cleaning up a mess* when no one else wants to. Kindness is *lending your car* to a person in need. Do you have this kind of love in your heart? Jesus’ kindness was shown in so many ways, and no more obvious one than when He took up the basin and washed the disciple’s feet. What a kind act, one which no one else wanted to do.

One of the great things I remember people saying about my own father was that during the depression days, when so many were out of work, he would come home from the Ford Motor Company and share his paycheck with several of the neighbors who had nothing. I am deeply moved inside whenever I think of it. When things are bad and you aren’t sure whether you have a job from one day to the next, you don’t usually think of giving up security for your own family’s future. But my Dad’s heart was different since he had come to know the Lord. And the love was different. The motivation had changed. He was doing it in the name of the Lord and trusted that God would care for him. For me it is a wonderful heritage. God will be in no one’s debt for acts of kindness. Can you release God’s love like this? Sure you can. Begin today to ask the Lord what you can do for others. Let the *motivation* be God’s love that He revealed in you.

Love Does Not Envy

This is the third description of *agape*’ love in 1 Corinthians 13. The Scripture says that God’s kind of love does not envy. Remember, we are saying that the love that comes from God is a supernatural love, not a natural one that comes from us. We must be born again; we must be born from above in order to have God’s love. No one can live like this unless they have turned from their own rebellious ways and embraced what Jesus did on the Cross for them. Our sinful natures will not allow us to love with a true motivation of God’s love until we become “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4).

The definition of envy is “to boil with anger and hatred.” That is an apt description, isn’t it? The heart gets hot and begins to boil over. It reminds me of the time my car radiator got so hot it boiled over. Heavy steam began to escape and there was nothing to do but stop and let the engine cool down and get some cold, refreshing water in the radiator. Well, our lives are like that when we get into envy. Basically envy means that we are UNHAPPY WITH THE GOOD FORTUNE OF ANOTHER. We can’t stand it and as we look at our own situation the anger and frustration turns to a boiling envy. There are several illustrations of envy in the Bible. Cain was the first. He couldn’t stand that God accepted Abel’s sacrifice of the animal, but not his of fruit and vegetables. He could have changed. God tried to reach him and called out to him that he could do what God said to do—sacrifice an animal. But no, he rejected God’s call and envy turned into a violent murder. Rachel envied Leah, her sister, because she had an easy time getting pregnant and she couldn’t. Joseph’s brothers envied him because their father loved him and gave him a beautiful coat. The envy boiled over one day when they saw Joseph coming to them in the fields. The story is sad. They wanted to kill him and finally ended up selling him to an Egyptian caravan as a slave. Unchecked envy is a terrible thing. The Bible warns us not to envy the wicked: “Do not envy a violent man or choose any of his ways” (Proverbs 3:31). In fact, when Jesus had such problems with

the religious leaders of His day, the word of God defined the problem—“For he [Pilate] knew that it was out of *envy* that they had handed Jesus over to him” (Matthew 27:18). The amazing thing about envy is that it can affect you physically. In Proverbs 3:31 we read: “A heart at peace gives life to the body, but *envy rots its bones*.” Envy is like a cancer that eats away at your bones. And bones are very important to our bodies. It’s in the bones that we manufacture the white blood cells that curb infections in our immune systems.

These are tragic illustrations of how negative an emotion we receive when we allow envy to come to a boiling point in our lives. But the good news is this, God’s kind of love does not envy. Some of God’s servants revealed this. Remember Moses, the man of God who had to lead the rebellious children of Israel to the promised land? The Spirit of the Lord came on some of the leading elders and Joshua, Moses’ aide, was unhappy. He challenged Moses to command them to stop. But Moses had a different spirit. He said: “Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the Lord’s people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!” (Num. 11:28-29). What a reaction from Moses! And then the time came when John the Baptist’s disciples left to go over to Jesus and Jesus began to have huge crowds. There was a season when the huge crowds came to hear John. Now they were gone. But what is John’s reaction?

“A man can receive only what is given him from heaven. You yourselves can testify that I said, ‘I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him. The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom’s voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. He must become GREATER; I must become LESS.’”

-John 3:27-30

What a word from John! And what a word for Christian leaders of today who are so envious of others’ success and wish it were their own. John’s view was that a man (or woman) can only do what comes to him from God—his destiny from Him. And he is

to be faithful with whatever that call is. He is not to envy what God has given another to do. God has chosen some to reap a hundredfold, but others only thirty. But we must rejoice if ours is only thirty because it is the best we could do with God's gifts. He gives His gifts sovereignly and to whomever he wishes.

Envy is a competition. Many men and women have bad doses of it. The Bible tells us not to get into comparisons because they end up separating people and causing all manner of evil. Remember what James wrote about it? "But if you harbor BITTER ENVY and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such 'wisdom' does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice" (James 3:13-16). Notice that the description of envy is that it is *bitter*. So what is the answer? The answer is that the love that comes from God is a generous and gracious love. It is not competitive. It rejoices in the success of others because it is a generous love. Competition and envy is strong in the Body of Christ. People are letting their natural love flow, but not understanding that God wants to let His agape' love flow. That love is patient, kind and not envious.

So when you see the good fortune of others, you are to rejoice in it. John the Baptist said his joy was full because he saw the Lord come. His crowds would diminish but his joy would know no bounds. He was happy. Can we be content in what God has given to us? He may or may not give us more. But can we rejoice in what we have already? If we can be happy with what we have received, then we can rejoice in the good looks of another, in the bigger house of another, in the fine car of another, in the church of another, in the job of another.

Wouldn't it be wonderful to have such an innocence in life that we could love like this? But this is what God's love is. If you want it, get close to Him and love His word and His ways and choose them day by day. Negative emotions will have no place in you. You will become like Jesus, who had no envy over others, but rejoiced in what God the Father had given from His own generous heart.

Love Does Not Boast

We are still in 1 Corinthians 13:4 where we are thinking of the awesome attributes of the word, LOVE. The apostle Paul is breaking down the great word, *agape*, and giving us some understanding. Remember, this quality of the believer is not something natural that they have, but something supernatural that the Lord gives to those who are His. If we are filled with the love of God, we will not boast. The word means to “puff ourselves up,” or to give undue honor to ourselves, or to lift up ourselves in others’ eyes. Therefore, the opposite quality to boastfulness, is HUMILITY. Love is humble and not boastful. Love doesn’t speak about itself and its achievements. It doesn’t draw attention to itself.

This is one of the big problems of religious people. There are certain good acts that we do, but sometimes the motives are for self-gratification. Jesus said that the Pharisees and the hypocrites do many things to be seen by men. “Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven” (Matthew 6:1). Jesus goes on to mention three areas of a believer’s life where he or she can get into the wrong motives. The first is giving, the second is praying, and the third is fasting. Jesus castigated the leaders of his day for making a big show of their giving, praying, and fasting. They announced it to everyone, because they wanted all the people to know how righteous they were. Jesus said that if you do it for men, then men’s regard is all you will get (if that); you will not get a reward from your Father who is in heaven. He said the Father sees everything, and whatever you do, do it in secret, so the reward will come from Him and not from men. And in doing it this way, we are kept from “puffing up ourselves.”

Love is humble. No one can be this way unless they have come through Jesus and see themselves as truly “poor in spirit.” When we see that we have nothing good in ourselves, then we can walk in dependence upon the Lord. A great principle to always remember is that SELF LOVE IS DEPENDENCE ON OURSELVES, BUT HUMILITY IS DEPENDENCE ON GOD. Peter says this

quality of love is very important when he writes: “. . . clothe yourselves with humility toward one another. . .” (1 Peter 5:5). When he uses the word “clothe,” his meaning is significant. He is talking about us being entirely covered with humility, not just a small portion. He wants us to be “immersed” in humility. Nothing less will work in the kingdom of God. If you desire to be honored and lifted up and spoken well of, then you are in another kingdom, not God’s. All boastfulness is from the devil’s kingdom. He was the one who was bragging in the wilderness when he faced Jesus. He said he had all the kingdoms of the world. But he was talking to the One who owned all the earth. Jesus answered him in humility, trusting in God.

We can walk in boastfulness or in humility. And the results are quite different. The Bible says that “pride goes before a fall.” If you want to fall, then persist in your pride and boasting of what you have done. This happened to Nebuchadnezzar, the ancient king of Babylon. God even gave him forewarning through the prophet Daniel to amend his ways, but he was stubborn. Then one day as he walked on the roof of the royal palace he said: “Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?” (Daniel 4:30). Then the judgment of God fell. The king lost his mind and became like a wild animal with a hairy body, fingers like bird claws; and he ate grass like cattle. It was several years before his sanity returned to him. And when it did, he praised the God of heaven. What a tragic story!

What are the results of a humble spirit and a contrite heart? The Bible speaks of humility bringing forth at least six things.

First, Proverbs 11:2 says: “With humility comes *wisdom*.” Do you want wisdom? Then walk in humility. The person who gets understanding about living, gets it from humble dependence upon God, in obedience to His word.

Second, Proverbs 18:12 states: “Before his downfall a man’s heart is proud, but humility comes before *honor*.” There are those who go to get honor for themselves. It doesn’t usually come

that way. But there are those who live in humility before God, giving Him glory and not seeking honor for themselves, who will later receive the honor that only God can give.

Third, Proverbs 22:4 tells of another thing coming from humility: “Humility and the fear of the Lord bring *wealth*. . .” Riches can be sought after with intensity and yet slip through our fingers again and again. But those who do not seek after wealth, but seek to walk in humility, find that wealth comes to them, and wealth not just in money, but well-being in all of life.

Fourth, humility will bring us the protection of God. “Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, you who do what he commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be *sheltered on the day of the Lord’s anger*” (Zephaniah. 2:3). Think about this. In the days of judgment, the humble will be kept by God. Many of the proud seek to set up their security for that day but they will be destroyed. The humble will be protected.

Fifth, humility brings *grace*. “Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble’” (1 Peter 5:5). Grace is the unmerited favor and love of God. It’s not something we work for. It’s a gift of God. Do you want grace? Everyone needs grace. But many miss it because they work to get it. However, a humble spirit releases God’s grace and favor on us. It’s when we aren’t demanding our rights and this and that to come to us, that we receive the best gifts. Do you want your reward from God or from men? Boast and it will come from men. Be humble and God will come to you.

Finally, humility *exalts others*. “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves” (Philippians 2:3). Ask yourself this question: Am I trying to make others more successful than myself? If not, why not? Let the love that comes from God bring you into a humble dependence on Him.

Love is Not Rude

We are looking at the many-sidedness of the word LOVE. It is the word *agape* in the Greek language and means the love of God that was shown in Jesus' life. It is a word rich in meaning and the apostle Paul is showing us some very powerful aspects of it. So far we have seen that love is patient, kind, not envious, and not boastful or proud. Now we see that it is not unbecoming, or unseemly or in a modern word—rude. Another way to say it is that love is not discourteous. This is a very interesting attribute of the life of love.

Courtesy is said to be love in the little things. Things that many believers might overlook. The English word, “gentleman” is a word made up of two words—gentle and man. A gentleman is a man who does things in a gentle way. He doesn't run roughshod over people. He is tender and sensitive. A gentlewoman would be the same. When the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts we develop a politeness about our lives that reveals the care and love of God in little things. A way to look at this aspect of love would be to consider first, the attitude of the mind; second, the words that come out of our mouths; and finally, the actions of our lives.

First, the attitude of our minds. Everything starts in our hearts and in our minds. The way we think is the way we live. It's very important for a believer to be so renewed in his or her mind that good thoughts will begin there. In fact, Paul gives us a great Scripture about this in Philippians 4:8 when he writes: “Finally, brothers, whatever is *true*, whatever is *noble*, whatever is *right*, whatever is *pure*, whatever is *lovely*, whatever is *admirable*—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.” Have you stopped and considered the thoughts that take up space in your mind? A great deal of discourteous and rude behavior begins in our minds. But consider the words that Paul uses here. We are to think mostly of what is true, noble, right, pure, lovely and admirable. What a list! How about you? How are you doing with a list like this? Can this be said about us as believers? If we can think more thoughts like these, we

know that the courtesy and politeness that comes from the love of God will come out of us. Put a test on yourselves this week. See what kind of thoughts you have about people and situations around you. Make a little game of it and test yourself. If you want to be known as a gracious man or woman, ask God to renew your mind with the right thoughts, read the Bible more and have less TV and other reading materials. Our society is becoming more and more crude, crass and cynical. We want to be different and we start with our thoughts.

Second, we come to the area of the mouth. This is where most of us fail. We speak rashly and quickly. James says: “My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry” (James 1:19). Rudeness comes very easily from our mouths. In our generation we have seen a great change take place in conversation. If anyone doubts this, all they would need to do is to read some present day novels, look at some magazines on the rack and listen to some of the sitcoms on TV, or view the comedians and comediennes on the various channels. The talk now is usually sexually graphic. I am not a prudish man. I believe I can laugh at some jokes that are sexual in nature, but not gross. But the words we now hear are inappropriate. That is what the problem is today. We are so unbecoming in our words, that we do not recognize appropriateness anymore. Private areas of our lives are to be honored. But apart from God’s love they will be besmirched. The degradation of the sexual area leads to continual vulgar language. The F word has become a common word even down to children in the elementary school. This is a sad commentary on where vulgarity has taken us as a nation.

Believers should never be using those kinds of words, but guess what—they do. It has been a shock to me that so many Christians have their fights with each other (even in marriages) and damn and curse each other. Brothers and sisters, this should never be. Not if we are serious about letting God’s love flow through us. Remember Paul’s admonition to us: “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs,

that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God. . ." (Ephesians 4:29). It is not just that we are hurting others (and ourselves), but it is God the Holy Spirit who is truly hurt and grieved.

Words are powerful. They have the power of life and death in them. Words that are spoken cannot be taken back again. They do go on and on. But words that are gracious, loving and true (though hard sometimes of necessity) are friends, not enemies. They are the apt words that build up and do not tear down. You can even say "no" to certain people and they will almost think you said "yes." It's the way you speak, the way you love, the gentleness and care that affect people positively.

Finally, our actions should be loving and gracious. Young believing men should not be inappropriately touching young believing women. There should be a respect in boy-girl relationships. There should be respect for older people. We should rise in the presence of women and older people. We should say "thank you" more. We should have better table manners. We should open the doors for our wives and girlfriends. We should wait and make sure they are seated. We should respond to telephone calls and to letters. One of the personal habits I trained myself in when I was a young pastor was to return telephone calls the same day if at all possible and to respond to letters in at least three days. It is a respectful reaction. Another good behavior is to be on time with appointments if at all possible and it's possible most of the time. It honors the other person. The Bible says we should look not only to our own interests but to the interests of others. This is love that is polite and courteous. Many people cannot stand to be in line and push their way to be first. Can't we relax a little as believers and bless other people? Let us not yell and scream at the other drivers. Some drivers are pulling guns out and shooting people. This is a terrible time for graciousness and courtesy. Can we set a new standard?

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13). You can do these things in the spirit and love of our Lord Jesus. Love is not rude.

Love is Not Selfish

Wow! God's kind of love—*agape* , is an awesome love. We have seen the apostle Paul examine it under the microscope of the Holy Spirit. In this way we can see what it really means to have the love of God. If we just used one word—love, we would have to imagine all that it means. But here in God's word, we can truly know what love means when we see it in its various aspects.

The next view to consider is this one: “Love is not self-seeking” (1 Corinthians 13:5). This one hits home and hits us hard. Self-centeredness is the major sin in human life. There are three enemies of our lives. The first is the devil--Satan and his evil cohorts. The second is the world system that seeks to capture our eyes and flesh. But the third is the worst. It's the sinful nature that is inside us. It's our own evil and deceptive hearts. Remember that Jesus said it was out of our hearts that evil arises (Mark 7:20-23). The devil adds to it, the world adds to it, but it really comes from the lusts of our own hearts (James 1:14-15). That's why the self-love of our lives is so strong. The self doesn't want to be hurt or wounded or corrected or shamed or guilty. It wants complete freedom to do whatever it wants and not be accountable for anything. This is the condition of our hearts and it's only by DAILY CRUXIFIXION WITH CHRIST that we are able to put the self under authority and keep it dead.

Remember also that Jesus is our prime example. He is the one to follow as we look at *agape* , since this is described as “God's love.” Let us note three things about “love seeks not her own,” as it is translated in the KJV.

First, *love doesn't seek to be served, but to serve*. Jesus said of Himself, that the “Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28). The self loves to be served. The self loves to be the center of attention. It craves to have food, drink, clothes, stereos, entertainment, pampering, cars, boats, girlfriends, boyfriends, plenty of cash, fine homes and all kinds of security. I'm not saying it's wrong to have those things, I'm saying the self craves them, seeks them, because it is always wanting to be gratified. But to have God's love working in you brings an altogether different attitude. It means that you are now seeking to serve,

rather than to be served. To have a servant's heart does not mean that you merely do good things for others. Many people do that. What it means is that you love to do it and that you will do it when no one knows about it. It means that you will do anything to bless and help another. Many of us pick and choose how we will serve. Have you ever noticed how some people respond to more glorious works of service, but not the mundane, simple tasks that need to be done. They serve, but they don't have servant's hearts. Jesus showed us the difference in the upper room when he realized no one else would take the basin and wash the feet. So He did it. He had a servant's heart. He would do anything to help others. That is the love of God. By the way, being a servant will help kill the selfishness of our hearts more than anything else.

Second, *the unselfish heart does not seek great things for itself*. This is one of the curses of the self-life. It looks for honor and esteem for itself. Isn't it ironic that in our generation there is so much personal seeking for self-esteem? God's view is that the more one seeks for self-esteem, the less they find it. God's word is that if we lose our life we will find it. Think of the books that are written to help people find the self-esteem that was supposedly lost in the offenses of their childhood or their marriages. But God says that offenses will come and keep on coming. The only way to deal with them is to grant forgiveness and not seek to be vindicated. Leave the revenge with God. Can you see how different is this kind of love? It is the supernatural love of God that fills our hearts and gives us the desire to obey God's word in all these matters.

Jeremiah reported to his servant Baruch the words of the Lord. Baruch was suffering in the land because it was a time of judgment and he was finding it very tough. He was hoping for some respite. But God's word came to him: "Should you then seek great things for yourself? Seek them not" (Jeremiah 45:5). The Lord has never encouraged us to seek great things for ourselves. Our culture demands that we do. Our culture truly wants to pamper the self life. The only thing God has said for us to seek is to know Him and walk in His kingdom life and His will.

There is no greatness in things. People who have great things are not necessarily happy in their hearts. They may be restless and uneasy. Things are great in the beginning, but they wear off. Then you have to seek more exotic things. Thus the cycle continues. Don't seek for the greatest position. Seek for God.

Finally, *this kind of love doesn't even seek for what is rightfully its own*. Many people say, "These are my rights, I deserve this." But for the believer who is filled with God's love, there is even a great joy in giving up what is truly their own. You may deserve that apology, but can you give it up? You may deserve to be promoted, but can you give it up? You may deserve to be honored. But can you give it up? You may deserve that vacation. But can you give it up? You may deserve to be paid that money back. But can you give it up? You may deserve to go to the courts with a brother or sister. But can you give it up? You may deserve this or that. But can you give them up? What I'm talking about here is not becoming a doormat that people walk over. I'm talking about a person who is so filled with God's love that they believe God is able to give them whatever He wants them to have and they don't have to hold on to their rights. In other words, you don't always have to stick up for yourself. You can freely give up some things that you treasure and look forward to. This puts the self to death. WHEN THE SELF DIES, JESUS RISES IN RESURRECTION LIFE. Which would you rather have, self-love or Jesus' life? We are encouraged by Jesus to choose Him rather than ourselves.

This is exactly what Jesus did. If you are having a hard time with this thought, go to Philippians 2. In this great passage of revelation we see that Jesus, "Who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something TO BE GRASPED, BUT MADE HIMSELF NOTHING, taking the very nature of a servant. . .he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!" (Philippians 2:6-8). Jesus did not hold on to His rights as God's only Son, but gave them up for His Father's purposes. May we be filled with the exact kind of love that will not "seek its own."

Love is Not Easily Angry

Anger is an intriguing subject. All of us get angry. Anger is an emotion that is common to human nature. The Greek word itself is interesting. It comes from the root that is translated as “paroxysm.” A paroxysm is a “sudden convulsion or outburst as of laughter, rage. . . a fit or a spasm.” So we see that anger is a very active reaction to a situation that disturbs us. We are all disturbed at times. That is not the problem. The problem is what kind of reaction follows from our being upset. Anger that is unchecked is one of the fiercest of emotions and leads to hatred, spite and murder.

Notice that the first sin recorded in the Bible after the fall of Adam and Eve is the one with Cain’s reaction after God rejected his offering of fruit and vegetables. God commended Abel’s sacrifice because he offered an animal. Animal sacrifice was God’s command. Cain liked to garden and thought he would offer its produce. There was nothing wrong with the produce of the land, but it could not be the atonement for sin. God chose another way. Cain did it his way. God did not approve and Cain became angry. God came to him and encouraged him: “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it” (Genesis 4:6-7). Cain did not receive this correction and his anger was unchecked. His anger led to hatred of Abel and he rose up in the field and killed him. He had a paroxysm—an outburst of rage that he could not control.

Let’s look at anger in two ways. The first is how anger is used in a healthy way and the second is how to handle anger that is not healthy.

First, we note the *healthy* anger. The Bible is very clear that God gets angry. The word anger is used over 250 times in the Bible and many of those references are to God. God gets angry with His people. When Jesus was here on earth, He was the exact image and representation of the Father (Hebrews 1:1f). Jesus never sinned. But he was angry. The word of God says, “In your anger do not

sin” (Ephesians 4:26). On one occasion when Jesus came into the temple, He was angered. He saw the merchants were making the temple a place for commerce and business. He knew that God’s desire for the temple was that it be a place of prayer for all the nations. His words were strong: “But you have made it a den of thieves.” He got a whip of cords together and drove out the moneychangers. The Scripture says that the zeal He had for the house of God was the motivation of His anger. We would call this anger a “righteous anger.” This is an anger that is appropriate and is still under control. In another episode of Jesus’ life, we find Him in the synagogue healing a man with a withered arm. He knew the thoughts of the leaders around Him were condemning Him for healing on the Sabbath. “He looked around at them in anger. . .” (Mark 3:5). His anger was directed at the stubbornness of their hearts. Sin makes God angry.

Another reference is the one that portrays Paul in the city of Athens. The Bible says: “While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed (paroxysm) to see that the city was full of idols” (Acts 17:16). Paul was angered to see such blatant idolatry. As a Jewish believer he knew God’s commands against putting anything in the place of the true and living God. His spirit was stirred and he reacted with anger. Again, this is a righteous anger. We should have some righteous anger at the sin and idolatry that abounds around us. If we haven’t been angry at the laws of our land allowing abortion on demand, what kind of people would we be? It angers me to see exploitation, or kidnapping or sexual abuse. It angers me to see senseless killing. It angers me to see children and women hurt by violent and perverted men. If this anger comes and it is under control, it is a healthy anger. It can spur us on to good works and prayer.

However, second, there is an anger that is *unhealthy*. This is the anger that comes when we take certain situations personally. Then the focus of our anger becomes another person and the outburst can get out of control. This is what happened to Cain. Jesus was angry at sin and unrighteousness that affected others. But when the leaders personally came for Him to kill Him, He was like a

lamb. He did not resist nor did He have a violent anger. He did not take it personally. Notice our text is that “Love is not *easily* angered.” It’s difficult not to experience some anger in the common situations of life. But with God’s love working, the anger will not go far. So the love of God working in us changes the *intensity* of our reactions.

What are some of the steps we can take as believers as we allow love to have its way? First, the Scripture admonishes us, “Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry” (James 1:19). When God’s love works in us we become much more mild in our reactions. The word of God says: “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (Proverbs 15:1). Quick words are usually hard and harsh ones. They are the kind of words that heighten anger. We can make a lot of mistakes by being too quick to respond to words and situations we hear about. The good thing about God’s love is that it quiets our hearts and makes us softer and more tender.

Second, deal with anger before the day is over. The words of Paul to the church at Ephesus refer to handling anger in this way. “Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry” (Ephesians 4:26). When you don’t deal firmly with anger by evening, it will be stirred up even more the next day. Paul is helping us to see that anger that is unchecked can get out of control. Make sure you don’t give anger another day.

Third, remember to forgive quickly. The love of God is awesome. It’s the love that sent Jesus to die in our place for our sin. We have forgiveness because of His great love. He gives us the same love and therefore we cannot hold back forgiveness when others treat us badly. We will be hurt, offended, mistreated, misunderstood and misquoted. An accident may occur through another’s weakness or foolishness. The love of God toward us and in us will have to flow out in forgiveness to others. In these ways we can control the reactions we have. “Love is not easily angered.” Ask the Lord to fill you more and more with Him. In this way we partake of His divine nature.

Love Keeps No Record of Wrongs

What a word this is! Can you imagine this? The love of God that comes to us through our faith in Jesus Christ, does not keep track of wrongs, hurts and offenses. Now this is a challenge. Some believers have read through 1 Corinthians 13 and said, “it can’t be done, no one can live like this.” Oh yes, by the grace that comes from God and by our obedience to His word, we can live like this.

Jesus told us that as long as we live here on the earth we will have offenses. We are not going to be treated fairly or even justly on certain occasions. I was talking with a young woman not long ago. She told me she felt hurt. I said, “Welcome to the club, everyone has been hurt.” Her self-love was so powerful and so alive that she couldn’t imagine not having these hurt feelings. I don’t think she understood the provision of the Lord for hurt feelings.

The problem that we are discussing here can come under the heading of resentment and unforgiveness. The person who keeps track of wrongs is going to have some severe trials. Jesus told us all about this in the parable of the Unmerciful Servant. It is recorded in Matthew 18. The servant owed the Master a huge debt, say like 10 million dollars. Of course he couldn’t pay, so the Master forgave him and cancelled it. The servant was overjoyed. But then he saw someone who owed him money and hadn’t paid. He grabbed him by the neck and threatened him if he didn’t pay the 10 dollar debt. He couldn’t pay, so the servant who was forgiven of the huge debt threw his debtor into prison. When the Master heard of this, he was angry and seized the servant and put him into prison. And then Jesus ends the parable by saying, “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart” (Matthew 18:35). If we are not able to cancel the wrongs of others to us, then something will happen that is very serious. **WE WILL NOT BE FORGIVEN FOR OUR OWN SINS.** When unforgiveness works in anyone’s life, the result is a cancer that eats away the love, joy and peace of that per-

son. Jesus said the same thing on many occasions.

“And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, FORGIVE him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive your sins.”
-Mark 11:25

This is so unlike the natural, secular, worldly way. Only by the grace and mercy of God’s love coming into us can we be such a people—a people who do not keep track of all the hurts and wrongs that come our way. This is love on a grand scale. What is in the believer’s mind as he or she walks in this way? Consider the following three things.

First, *we are not to imagine that if we forgive once our obligations are met.* Peter had this thought and brought it up to the Lord. Peter began to understand what the Lord was saying about forgiveness and thought he had a great idea, one that the Lord would commend him for. He said: “How many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?” (Matthew 18:21). Seven is an unusual number in the Bible. It is the number of perfection and completion—seven days of creation, seven churches in Revelation, seven bowls of judgment and wrath. So Peter thought this was a great idea about forgiveness. But Jesus rejected Peter’s mathematics. The Lord’s response was, “No, I tell you up to seventy times seven.” Jesus went up to 490 times. What He meant was that there was no limit to the granting of forgiveness, even to the same person. Why was He so adamant about it? Because He knew how keeping track of hurts and wrongs can kill our spirits and eat us alive. He knew that the tormentors (evil spirits) will torment those who do not forgive the wrongs against them. Jesus really knew. That’s why he said to keep forgiving no matter how many times you need to say it. Some of us need to say it daily over some situations.

Second, *remember that God has forgiven you of the huge debt.* When He saved you by His grace, it was an act of mercy. No one of us could ever pay the debt of sin we owe. We can never work for it, pray for it, give for it. Only Jesus could pay

that debt. It is a 10 million dollar debt. Forgiveness is the gift of God. Stop and think about it and you will love Him more and more. He is our Savior and Deliverer. Remember the song: "He paid a debt He did not owe, I owed a debt I could not pay, I needed someone to wash my sins away. And now I sing a brand new song, Amazing Grace, Christ Jesus paid the debt that I could never pay." So when you are wronged, hurt and offended, stop and think: "this is not a huge debt. This is a 10 dollar debt. I can forgive this person. I have the power to do it. I did not have the power to pay the big debt of sin, but I have the power to forgive this person." You can do it. I can do it. And when we do it, we do it from our hearts. We don't hold it against the person any longer. And we don't talk about it anymore. God's love is so powerful.

And then, finally, we have this great word. *No one ever gets away with anything.* God is the judge of the whole earth. He is able to take care of any injustice in my life. He can do it while I am still on the earth and He can do it when I get to heaven. Just think, if we don't hold hurts and wrongs, God will judge the wrong doer Himself. In fact that is what He said in Romans 12:19: "Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord." Isn't that great? God is in charge and NO ONE GETS AWAY WITH ANYTHING. What a relief. I can leave it all to God.

I have told this story before. When I was a young pastor and began to face the challenges of relationships, I had some tough cases. And in most of them I was manipulated and misunderstood. It made me mad. But when I confronted the people I got blank stares. I found myself thinking about these wrongs and building my own case against them in my mind. But one day God spoke plainly to my heart. He said: "Don't carry your little black book of hurts and wrongs anymore. I am big enough to take care of everyone, and no one gets away with anything and that includes you." I heard God, and have tried to obey Him since then. Thank God for His great and marvelous love.

Love Does Not Delight in Evil But Rejoices with the Truth

Now here is an insightful word about love. Paul expresses it in both the negative and positive aspects. He speaks here of two different kinds of rejoicings. People can either rejoice in evil or rejoice in and with the truth. But true love rejoices only in the truth. Let's look a little closer at these two thoughts.

“Love does not delight in evil (unrighteousness).” There is a very obvious application first. No believer wants to ever rejoice in what is overtly sinful and evil. We cannot rejoice in the millions of babies that have been killed in the wombs; we cannot rejoice in sexual uncleanness, fornication and sexual perversion; we cannot rejoice when justice is thwarted by influential people; we cannot rejoice when we see blatant greed; we cannot rejoice in the degradation of men and women in pornography and in the popular culture of the day; we cannot rejoice in the materialism and indulgences that we see day by day; we cannot rejoice in the idolatry of our times. No, these things cause us rather to be ashamed, to be broken and humble and repentant. We are sorry that all these things are taking place.

However, there is a further application that relates more to the believers in the Lord. There is a certain self-restraint that comes on the believer in Jesus as he or she gets involved in the nitty-gritty of life. Many things happen that are not good. Evil abounds in a multitude of ways. The Bible reveals the truth that many people like to be nose about problems that others have. The effects of sin in us work to get us to disregard caution and restraint when evil occurs in other's lives. Everyone of us has *faults* in our lives. Everyone of us has *weaknesses*. Everyone of us has an attitude that may be dishonoring at times, such as *jealousy* or *anger* or *bitterness* or *unforgiveness*. These problems in others can become a wrong focus. What do I mean? I mean that some believers actually have a subtle delight in seeing the problems that others have that they ostensibly do not have. They make the comparison and in the comparison they turn out better.

Let me ask you a personal question? When someone brings up a problem they have heard about someone you don't particularly like (family member, friend, famous personality, etc.), is there a quickened desire to know what the problem is? Is there something deep down in you that loves to know about their problem? Is there a subtle but unmistakable thought that says, "I thought so; I always thought there was something wrong." And in the process there is an ever so small gloating that someone was caught in their fault, weakness or overt sin. It wasn't you. It was them.

But what is the believer's reaction to evil and unrighteousness? Isn't it a sadness, a grief and a mourning? Isn't it a sorrow that an evil has overtaken someone? Should we not be feeling a compassion that someone has fallen? It is a very easy thing to subtly delight in the problems of others. Many Christians are caught in this trap.

But the true life of love (*agape*) is totally different. It does not rejoice in evil but it does rejoice. It delights in truth. This is the positive side of Paul's admonition. These are people who search out reality, genuineness and facts. Whatever is real is a delight. Whatever is genuine is a delight. Whatever is factual is a delight. Jesus said: "You shall know the truth and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32).

The first truth we want to emphasize here is *Jesus*. He is the "way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6). He is the One to commit our lives to. He is the One who leads us by His word and example. He is the One who sets us free. We are to rejoice in Him. We are in fact commanded to rejoice in Him. He is pure and holy. We cannot go wrong worshipping Him and finding our joy complete in Him. He will never be false or unfaithful. He is always the same "yesterday, today and forever" (Hebrews 13:7).

And second, we want to rejoice in the truth about *ourselves*. When God (or others or circumstances) deals with us and we see truth about ourselves that isn't good, we need to rejoice. Not that we are rejoicing in the problem that has been revealed, but that somehow we now see the reality about ourselves, as bad as it is. If we embrace the truth about ourselves and change, we are rejoicing in the truth.

Rejoicing in the truth about ourselves means we have a sincere desire to be changed into the image of the Lord. That is what is good. The truth can set us free. This is something I have learned to rejoice in. If God hadn't shown me my faults, my weaknesses, my sins, I would be deceived. That is a bad place to be. Therefore, we thank God for the truth He reveals about us that isn't good.

Finally, we rejoice in the truth about others. This is really where our focus of others should be found. What do I mean about the "truth" in others? I mean that which is real and genuine. That is what we admire as believers. And when we look at others we can focus on one of two things—either their weaknesses and sins, or the truly fine things. If we see the wrong things, we do not rejoice; we pray for them. But when we see the good things that the Lord has done in them, we rejoice. What do you think about Peter's words: "Above all, love each other deeply, because LOVE COVERS OVER A MULTITUDE OF SINS" (1 Peter 4:8). When we have God's love working in us we love each other deeply. And the result is that even when we see the sins of others, our love still reaches out and covers those sins. Forgiveness is granted easily, offenses are given up instantly. Why? Because we love each other. It's not worth it to rejoice in what is wrong. It is godly to not EXPOSE THE WEAKNESSES AND SINS OF OTHERS, but to sincerely love them and pray for their best. It is in this way that we change our focus and learn to see what is good and true and to rejoice in it.

Have you found that when others hear your words of encouragement of what you see is truth and reality in them, they seem to respond and be better people? Yes, it's true. When we are focusing on other things, then people know it and they get disgusted and discouraged. But love focuses on the best and in doing so causes people to rise above their present problems. This is what Jesus has done for us all. Can we do the same for others?

Love Never Fails

When Paul ends his inspired passage on love, he says, “And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the GREATEST of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13:13). Love is the greatest of all the fruits of the Holy Spirit. And that’s why Paul by the Spirit is able to say that “Love never fails.” God’s kind of love will always get the final victory. It may seem at first sight that love fails. Many people must have said this about Jesus when He died. It’s over. It’s finished. What an end to the greatest man who ever lived. Look at what His love brought. But it wasn’t over even with death. God’s love won in the end and especially over death. Even death could not quench the mighty river of love that flowed from God’s heart through Jesus’ life. It was for love that He died: He died for us. And because of His faithfulness to love to the end, He was raised from the dead and now sits at the right of the Father forever. Love never fails.

Just before Paul wrote the above words, he wrote these: “It (love) always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always endures” (1 Corinthians 13:7). What a finish to this powerful word on God’s love. There are four things that love does to ensure that it will never fail.

First, it will *protect*, or as the authorized version says, it “beareth all things.” This word is the word for roof or covering. Love will watch over everything and bear whatever is necessary. In the process of doing this it protects others and covers a multitude of sins. Jesus bore the denials of Peter. But when Peter had said his last curse and denied the Lord, the Scripture says that Jesus looked at him across the courtyard. He must have looked at him with a lot of love, because Peter was crushed and immediately went out and wept bitter tears. Love covered betrayal. And betrayal has happened to all of us. But love never fails.

Second, love always *trusts*. Here is one of the most powerful motivations for a positive life. The love that God gives us makes us faithful brothers and sisters. We will always believe and trust for we know the sovereign God is in charge and love will never

fail. Jesus said all men would forsake Him and flee. But He said that His Father would always be there for Him: “. . . who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame. . .” (Hebrews 12:2). Jesus could trust even in the darkest hour that God was God and that love would win in the end.

Third, love always *hopes*. Hope is a Scriptural word for the future. Our hope is resting on the sure word of God that what He says is coming is the very best for all His people. The best is yet to come for all of us who name the name of Christ. But hope is a sure anchor for the soul. An anchor is what holds a ship still in prevailing winds and currents. Our hope in Christ will do just that. When all the pressures build up and our ship begins to be tossed, love will hold us fast because love always hopes. It will never lose hope that God will bring us into a safe harbor and haven. When Paul was on the seas and going through the shipwreck, his hope was secure—God would bring him and all the people to a safe place. Love in our hearts will keep the focus right in our lives.

Fourth, love always *endures*. Paul just piles word on word and seems to build to a crescendo. Love protects and bears everything, trusts in everything, hopes for the future and finally, it endures everything. That is, God’s love will go through all of life with its ups and downs and ins and outs and still make it. You might have thought that it was the strength of your finances, or your good health, or your physical strength, or your personality, or your personal discipline or your good deeds. No, the only thing that will make us endure everything will be the love that comes from God. That will be what will get every believer through to the end. That is why the Bible says: “Love never fails.” Remember, it’s not your love, it’s God’s love. You will overcome all the pressures and all the problems because love will hold you in the arms of the Lord.

David Cargill was a Covenanter in Scotland. He was part of a renewal in the Holy Spirit that put him at odds with the existing church back in another century. So they killed him. But these are his words: “Weep not for me,” he cried from the

scaffold in Edinburgh where he was about to die. “Why should you weep for me? I have gotten me Christ and Christ hath gotten me the victory!” Love will never fail.

And now you ask, how can I love like this? Well, I think loving with God’s love is a lot like practicing for anything. You only get better by practice. Talk to any musician and ask how they attained their expertise. They will reply, “hard work.” Talk to any athlete and ask how they could get their victories and the answer will be the same. Ask anyone how they gained understanding and prowess in any endeavor they attempted and you will hear the same word – “I worked at it.”

Brothers and sisters, love will only be perfected in you and me when we work at it. What was Jesus doing in the carpenter’s shop? He was practicing His trade. He learned obedience in everything. Do not quarrel with your lot in life; all the vexing things that come up in business and school, all the pettiness of people that may be in your life, all the extra expenses that come from nowhere and pile up. Do not resent the temptations that press in on you from day to day. This is your practice of the love of the believer’s life. If none of these things existed you and I would never be perfected in love. All these things are necessary for us to build the character of God. Therefore, we should not try to isolate ourselves from the troubles of this life. The famous writer Goethe once said: “Talent develops in solitude; character in the stream of life.” Character can only take shape in the stream of life that flows around us. This is how we grow in God’s love.

Jesus taught us all of this. There is nothing that is written about this life of love that He did not do already. He has set before us a glorious example. He never shirked real life. He never isolated Himself from the problems that grew increasingly around Him. So what was it that held Him? The love of God. It will bear everything, trust in all things, hope in all of life and finally endure to the end. It was His victory and it will be ours.

LOVE NEVER FAILS!

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