

71. WHAT IS LOVE?

Bible Reading: I Corinthians 13:4-7.

Rebuke: By seeking the 'showier' gifts, you are not exhibiting love. I Cor.13 describes true love. Paul now lists fifteen qualities of true love in action. Each is a verb, and focuses on what true love does or does not do. Paul is trying to change their habits by measuring their lives against fifteen qualities of true love in action. This is a portrait of Jesus Christ, whose name is not mentioned in I Corinthians 13, but who is described as the personification of love.

1. Love is PATIENT (longsuffering).

It is the ability to be inconvenienced or taken advantage of by a person over time, yet not be upset or angry. Patience never retaliates, never takes revenge for being hurt, and refuses to pay back evil for evil (Romans 12:17). If God is so patient with rebellious men, ought not we be patient with each other? Jesus prayed while dying on the cross: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

2. Love is KIND.

Just as patience will **take** anything from others, kindness will **give** anything to others. It means to be serving, gracious, useful, generous and showing active goodwill. A Christian husband, wife and children must be kind and helpful to each other. Paul challenged the Corinthians to show kindness by repenting of their selfish, jealous, proud and childish attitudes, and to humbly use their gifts.

3. Love ENVIES NOT.

Here begins eight descriptions of what love is not. Don't confuse jealousy with envy. Jealousy is wanting what is rightfully yours, such as your spouse. God is a jealous God. Envy is wanting what is not rightfully yours. Envy comes in two ways:

- a) I want what someone else has, for example, a better boat, etc.
- b) Wanting evil for someone else that you don't like.

Examples include:

- a) **Eve** was envious of God's greater knowledge, to which Satan successfully appealed.
- b) **Cain** was envious of Abel's better sacrifice.
- c) **Joseph's brothers**, being full of envy, sold him as a slave.
- d) **Babylonian officials**, being envious of Daniel, threw him into a lion's den.
- e) **Pharisees** crucified Jesus for envy.

"Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous; but who is able to stand before envy?" Proverbs 27:4.

A loving person is never envious, but is glad at the success of others, even if it disadvantages them. For example, Jonathan still loved David when David was more popular and likely to take Jonathan's throne.

4. Love DOES NOT BRAG (vaunts not itself), or **boast**.

When a loving person succeeds, he does not boast of it or talk conceitedly. Love does not parade its achievements. Bragging is the other side of envy. Envy wants what others have, while bragging tries to make others envious of what we have.

Envy pulls others down, bragging brings us up. We dislike bragging in others, yet we brag ourselves.

The Corinthian believers were spiritual braggers, constantly seeking the spotlight of public attention. They wanted the showier gifts. They all wanted to talk at once, especially when speaking ecstatically. Most of their tongues-speaking was counterfeit, yet they bragged about it, like many Charismatics today. They cared nothing for Church harmony, order or edification, only for flaunting themselves.

"How is it then, brethren? When ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying." I Cor. 14:26.

Each did his own thing, as publicly as possible, to draw attention to himself, while disregarding what others were doing.

5. Love is NOT ARROGANT (is not puffed up).

The Corinthians believers thought that they had arrived at perfection. None of us have any reason to boast because every good gift comes from above. They were arrogant and proud about their spiritual gifts. John the Baptist said of Christ, "He must increase, but I must decrease." John 3:30.

"pride, arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward (bragging, arrogant) mouth, do I hate." Prov. 8:13. Pride & arrogance bred strife, filling the Corinthian church. Arrogance is big-headed, love is big-hearted.

6. Love does NOT BEHAVE ITSELF UNSEEMLY or RUDELY.

The loveless person is impolite, bad mannered, crude, careless of people's feelings or sensitivities. When the Corinthians came to the love feast, they were greedy to eat first, and became drunken (11:21). During worship services, each one tried to outdo the other in speaking in tongues, each speaking at once. Many Christians have forfeited the privilege of sharing the gospel by being rude to an unbeliever who offends them. The rude messenger can become a barrier to the gospel.

In Charismatic churches, women are "slain in the Spirit," sprawled on the floor, while altar workers cover their thighs and underwear with rugs to minimise their indecent exposure. The Holy Spirit would not endorse indecent exposure in God's people. "Love does not behave itself unseemly." (13:5). God is not the author of confusion (14:33), nor of indecent behaviour. When present, these are not of the Holy Spirit.

7. Love SEEKS NOT HER OWN (not selfish).

An English tombstone reads:

"Here lies a miser who lived for himself, and cared for nothing but gathering wealth.

Now where he is or how he fares, nobody knows and nobody cares."

In contrast, a plain tombstone in St. Paul's Cathedral reads: "Sacred to the memory of General Charles Gordon, who at all times and everywhere gave his strength to the weak, his substance to the poor, his sympathy to the suffering, his heart to God."

"Love seeks not her own" is probably the key to everything. Fallen sinful human nature wants to have its own way. Adam and Eve rejected God's way so that they could seek their own way. Self replaced God. Love is not preoccupied with its own things, but with the interests of others. Philipians 2:4.

The Corinthian believers were examples of what loving Christians should **not** be. They were extremely selfish. They did not share their food at love feasts. They sued each other in courts. They wanted what they thought were the "best" spiritual gifts for themselves. They should have used their spiritual gifts for the benefit of others, but instead they used them to make themselves feel good, building up themselves. Jesus, however, is our perfect model, living his life for others, never seeking his own welfare, but always the welfare of others.

8. Love is NOT EASILY PROVOKED.

Provoke means to arouse to anger. Love guards against being irritated, upset or angered by things said or done against it. Paul does not include righteous indignation here. Jesus was righteously angry with how the Pharisees mistreated the weak and opposed the Word of God, and how they made His Father's house into a den of thieves. (Matthew 21:11,12,13). But when Jesus was personally abused, He did not become angry. Paul and Christ were only angered by things that angered God. Paul did not become angry or easily provoked at those who beat him, jailed him, or lied about him. Love never reacts in retaliation or revenge. The person who wants his own way is easily provoked. When everyone seeks his own rights, everyone grabs, no one gives, and everyone loses. Love considers nothing its right, but everything its obligation. Telling our spouses that we love them is false if we continually get upset and angry at what they say and do. Telling our children that we love them is false if we often yell at them for doing things that irritate us. Love that seeks the welfare of others is the only cure for self-centredness.

9. Love THINKS NO EVIL, (not keeping record of wrongs suffered).

Keeping record of things done against us is a sure way to our and others unhappiness. "Thinks no evil" in Greek, is "logizomai" meaning "take into account," a book-keeping term for keeping a permanent record. When God pardons those who receive Christ as Saviour, He keeps no more record of their sins. "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute (take into account) sin." Romans 4:8.

Love forgives, keeping no books, because it holds no resentment or grudges. If God so completely and permanently erases the record of our many sins against Him, how much more should we forgive and forget the much lesser wrongs done against us?

10. Love DOES NOT REJOICE IN INIQUITY (sin).

Love never gets satisfaction from sin, whether ours or others. Doing wrong is bad, bragging about sin is worse. To rejoice in sin is to make wrong appear right. "Woe to them that call evil good, and good evil: that put darkness for light, and light for darkness...." Isaiah 5:20.

This is turning God's truth upside down. Many magazines, books and TV programs glorify sin, and rejoice in unrighteousness. They teach that anything goes, and that everyone sets their own standards of right and wrong. They say "Right is doing what you want." Sometimes rejoicing in iniquity takes the form of hoping that someone will fall into sin or trouble. Rejoicing in sin is wrong because:

- a) We are delighting in what **offends** and **grieves** God. When we enjoy sin, we prove our lack of love for God. Gossip reveals others sins and hurts them. Gossip is gloating over others shortcomings and sins. Gossip that is true is still gossip. A person is never helped by spreading the news of his sin.
- b) It produces **harmful consequences** to the sinner. He is out of fellowship with God.

11. Love REJOICES IN THE TRUTH (The Word of God).

Righteousness is based on God's truth. Love rejoices in Bible truth and in sound doctrine. Love cannot tolerate wrong doctrine. What people believe affects their well-being now, their eternal destiny, and their understanding of God's will. Love will not compromise the truth, because it is unkind to mislead people by our failure to stand up for the truth. Love, truth and righteousness are connected. Love looks for the good, hopes for the good, and emphasizes the good. Love rejoices in people living the truth.

12. Love BEARS (covers, supports, protects) ALL THINGS. 13:7.

The four qualities in 13:7 are hyperbole, the "all things" are exaggerations to make a point. Love rejects envy, bragging, arrogance, rudeness, selfishness, easy provocation, evil thoughts, and sin. "All things" means all things acceptable to God's will. "Bear" means to cover, support and protect others from exposure, ridicule or harm. "Love covereth all sins." Proverbs 10:12. We measure our love for a person by how quick we are to cover his faults. For example, when one of our children does something wrong, we cover his faults by saying "He's a good boy, he didn't mean it." When someone we don't like does wrong, we say "That's typical of him." Love does not justify sin, or compromise with error, but love warns, corrects, encourages, rebukes and disciplines. Love doesn't expose readily or broadcast wrongs.

Note: Love feels the pain of those it loves, and helps them carry the burden or hurt. True love is willing to bear the consequences of the sin of those it loves. "He was bruised for our iniquities." Isaiah 53:5.

"Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." Galatians 6:2.

Fallen human nature has a perverse pleasure in exposing other's faults and failures.

13. Love BELIEVES ALL THINGS, not gullibly, but only on the basis of facts.

Love is not suspicious or cynical. Love believes all things in two ways:

- a) It believes in the **best outcome** for the wrongdoer, that the wrong will be confessed, forgiven, and restored to fellowship.
- b) If there is a doubt about a person's guilt or motivation, love will always conclude the most favourable possibility. Love will consider an accused person **innocent until proven guilty**. When a person fails, let us help them come good. For example:
 - i) **Job's** friends gave him no benefit of the doubt, because they had no true love for him. They were ready to believe the worst about him.
 - ii) The **Scribes** and **Pharisees** showed lovelessness by seeing the worst in others.

When Jesus forgave and healed the paralysed man (Mark 2:1-12), the Pharisees accused him of blasphemy. Hatred believes the worst, love believes the best.

14. Love HOPES all things.

Even when a friend disappoints us, love still hopes. Failure is never final where God's grace is operating. For example, God would not take Israel's failure as final. Jesus would not take Peter's failure as final, and Paul would not take the Corinthian's failure as final. Bible promises give hope to encourage our prayers. We all hope that a rebellious child, a wayward spouse, an erring believer will be restored. Love refuses to take failure as final. "And now abideth faith, **hope** and charity..." (13:13).

15. Love ENDURES all things.

To endure ("Hupomeno" in Greek) was a military term used of an army holding a vital position at all costs. Every hardship and every suffering was to be endured to hold on. Love holds fast to those it loves. Love endures all things at all costs. Love is commitment to each other in good and bad times, for better or for worse.

Conclusion: Let us develop these qualities of love by developing our relationship with Christ.

Let us be givers to God and others, and not just takers.