

The Qualities of True Love, Part 2

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13:4d–5c

Code: 1865

INTRODUCTION

A. Paul's Portrait of Christ Communicated

The thirteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians is a portrait of love. It comes out, however, as a portrait of Jesus Christ, because he is love. Christ would like to reproduce His portrait in us, and to have His church be a collection of reprints. As we are studying the qualities of love in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, and examining the portrait of Christ, He is looking at us to see if His portrait is being reprinted and reproduced in us.

Now, the Apostle Paul is pointing out to the Corinthians what love is. In our last lesson we saw that love is something that can't be defined philosophically or ideologically; one can only describe how it functions. In fact, the Bible doesn't define love; it only describes it in action. In verses 4-7, Paul uses verbs to describe how love acts, rather than defining love with adjectives.

This chapter is the greatest, most far-reaching, broad description of love that has ever been penned by the Holy Spirit's inspiration. It's tremendously and intensely practical. And even though it's a portrait of Jesus Christ, which gives it an exalted character, it is at the same time a shoe-leather presentation of what Christ wants to reproduce in us in our daily living.

B. Paul's Portrait of Christ Contrasted

It's important to understand that the portrait Paul is presenting is in contrast to the behavior of the Corinthians. They didn't have love--and were actually the opposite of love--so Paul had to describe love's characteristics to them. I'm afraid, however, that we're no better. We need to hear what Paul is saying, and examine our own lives.

Basically, what Paul is saying is this: "Love is very patient, but we are mostly impatient. Love is very kind, but we are frequently unkind. Love knows no jealousy, but we are often jealous. Love makes no parade, but we are proud. Love is never rude, but we are often rude and ill mannered. Love is never selfish, but we are mostly self-centered. Love never gets irritated, but we are short-tempered very often. Love is never resentful, but we seem to look for slights and wrongs and make note of it. Love is never glad when someone else goes wrong, but we often take secret delight in someone else's failure. Love is gladdened by goodness, and is always slow to expose and eager to believe the best, but we are often judgmental." Now that's the approach that Paul's taking. He's giving all the positives of love against the negatives of the Corinthian assembly. And remember, since we are no better than the Corinthians when we're in the flesh, we are being contrasted as well.

When man was created, he was created in the image of God. And since God's love was his by possession, all these characteristics belonged to him. But when the Fall came, all of it was lost. Once the image of God was marred, love was marred and man became loveless. Unregenerate man, as well as a Christian functioning in the flesh, is loveless. So, Paul details for us what love is to be.

REVIEW

I. THE PROMINENCE OF LOVE (vv. 1-3)

II. THE PERFECTIONS OF LOVE (vv. 4-7)

A. Love Is Patient (v. 4a)

B. Love Is Kind (v. 4b)

C. Love Is Not Jealous (v. 4c)

D. Love Is Not Boastful (v. 4d)

"...love vaunteth not itself..."

1. The Definition of Boastfulness

You'll notice that the phrase "love vaunteth not itself" is followed by the statement, "is not puffed up." Now those statements may seem like synonyms or parallels, but they aren't. There's a difference. The first statement represents the verbalizing of pride, the actual speech of pride, the actual action of pride. The second statement represents the attitude of pride--conceit that is down inside. The Greek word that tells us love is not boastful, comes from a root word meaning "windbag." Boastfulness is just the verbalizing, the windbag, the hot air that comes out of the mouth of a proud, conceited person. Incidentally, this word is used only in this verse in the entire New Testament. Love is not a windbag. Love is not always shooting off its mouth about its own accomplishments. Love does not speak an arrogant, baseless chatter that is designed to make me look better than you. Bragging is an effort to make other people feel inferior because of what you are or what you have. In other words, it is the flip side of envy. Notice, in verse 4, that he says, "Love doesn't envy," and then turns it around and says, "Love doesn't brag." Envy is wanting something that other people have, and bragging is making people want what you have.

2. The Description of Boastfulness

You know how it works. While somebody is telling a marvelous story about some accomplishment, you're half-listening and dying until they get done so you can say, "Well, if you think that's something, let me tell you about what I did!"...and off you go. Then a third party chimes in, and tries to do even better. The whole idea of bragging is to make somebody else feel that you are superior to them. But that is the opposite of love, isn't it? Love says, "I want you to feel superior. I'll take the role of a servant." Love never brags or blows its own horn. And let's face it, nobody really likes people who do, because they are loveless people. When I'm around somebody like that, I don't want to fellowship with them. I'd rather leave...or wish they did.

3. The Display of Boastfulness

The Corinthians were a bunch of spiritual show-offs. They were totally inconsiderate of each other, and constantly vying for public attention. The Corinthian church services were chaotic, with everybody talking at the same time and vying for the rulership. There is no mention in the entire Corinthian letter of an elder. They didn't even have any leaders. And as far as we know, nobody had responsibility. We don't know what kind of organization their church had (if any), but it was absolute chaos. Look at 1 Corinthians 14:26. Paul says, "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...." What kind of chaos is that? Everybody was a spiritual show-off and everybody wanted to do his own thing, so there was bragging and a constant vying for public attention.

4. The Desire of Boastfulness

I don't know if you realize it, but boasting is geared to hurt other people. It is geared to wound somebody else--to make you stand out and them look inferior. It's easy to do. I have to be careful about this, especially when I talk to other pastors--dear men of God who are faithfully serving the Lord. When someone comes along like myself, to whom God has given the very unusual privilege of being able to pastor a church that's very large and complex, these men are tempted to feel like failures. Why? Because there's too much propaganda going around today saying that if it isn't big, it isn't good. But that's a big lie! Big doesn't mean anything...except that it's big. People say, "Well, you have four thousand members in your church." That's true, but ninety-two thousand people show up at the L.A. Coliseum to watch men run around with a piece of pig. The fact that something is big doesn't mean anything at all. But it's very easy, when you're in the kind of position that I'm in, to be tempted to make other people feel inferior.

We all have at least one thing that we can do fairly well. And whatever it is, we usually let a few folks

know about it, don't we? Boasting is nothing more than blinding self-centeredness--the desire to make somebody else envy. It's a sin not only because it's a wrong thing to do, but because it makes somebody else jealous. Boasting makes your brother stumble.

Are you always the topic of your conversations?

I remember when I was in my first year of seminary, as I was trying to orient my life, I got ahold of a book by H. Clay Trumbull called Principles of Evangelism. He made a statement in that book that has stuck with me all these years. He said, "I made a vow to God to change my life. My vow was this: God, if You'll give me the strength, every time I have the opportunity to introduce the topic of conversation, it will always be of Jesus Christ."

When we open our mouths, what we say ought to be of Jesus Christ...not us. And once we learn to do that, we'll get away from always talking about ourselves. I hear pastors, radio speakers, and Christian television personalities who do nothing but talk about themselves, what they have done, and what they have accomplished. That can get very intimidating.

C. S. Lewis called boasting "the utmost evil...the greatest sin...the essential vice (i.e., the vice at the very essence of man)." There's no place for it in the life of a Christian.

5. The Denial of Boastfulness

Look at the pattern of Jesus Christ. If anybody had anything to brag about, He certainly did. But you never find Him doing that. In studying the Gospel of John, which presents His deity, it's amazing to see how many times Jesus denies the opportunity to boast. For example, in John 12:49a, Jesus says, "For I have not spoken of Myself; but the Father, who sent Me...." How many of you can say that? How many of you at the end of one day can say, "God, I have not spoken of myself today"? We should be able to say that!

Only love can save us from flaunting our knowledge, our ability, our education, our gifts, or ourselves. Love is not boastful. But at the root of boasting is a sin that Paul addresses next in his list of the qualities of love:

E. Love Is Not Conceited (v. 4e)

"...love...is not puffed up"

1. The Practice of Being Puffed Up

a. The Conceited Composer In the last lesson, I told you about Mascagni, the great composer who wrote an opera that he dedicated to himself. The opera, entitled The Masks, was dedicated with the following words: "To myself, with distinguished esteem and unalterable satisfaction." That's quite a commentary on the misery of that man's soul, isn't it? Conceit goes deeper than the mouth. There is bragging--the hot air, the shooting off of one's mouth--and then there is deep-down conceit.

b. The Conceited Congregation When Paul told the Corinthians that love is not puffed up, he was really telling them they had no love. Why? Because they were really puffed up. They saw themselves as spiritual hotshots. They thought that they had arrived. They felt that they had all the answers. Let me show you some of the specific things that they were puffed up about:

1) Their Past Teaching In 4:18 Paul says, "Now some are puffed up, as though I would not come to you." Why would they think that? They were probably thinking, "Why would Paul come here? We have it all...we already know everything. There's nothing that Paul can tell us that we haven't already heard. We've had the best teachers--Paul, Apollos, and Cephas--what more do we need? Paul will never show up around here." Not only were they puffed up about the knowledge they had received from certain teachers, they were also puffed up about...

2) Their Supposed Spiritual State Let's look at 4:6-10: "And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes [i.e., I'm using myself and Apollos as an illustration], that ye might learn in us [as models or illustrations] not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another." In other words, Paul says, "You better take a biblical evaluation of yourself, and stop being puffed up." In verse 7 he says, "For who maketh thee to differ from another? And what hast thou that thou didst not

receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?" In spite of the fact that they had nothing to boast about, in spite of the fact that everything they received was a gift from God, and in spite of the fact that God was the One who had made them different, they were still thinking too highly of themselves. In verse 8, Paul gets sarcastic and says, "Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us [i.e., You think you're really something!]; and I would to God ye did reign, that we also might reign with you. For I think that God hath set forth us, the apostles, last...." Then, getting very sarcastic, he says, in verse 10, "We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honorable, but we are despised." They were bragging about their supposed spiritual state, but the fact of the matter was they were in gross, gross carnality. Further, the Corinthians were puffed up about...3) Their Sexual Accomplishments In 5:1 Paul says, "It is reported commonly that there is fornication [Gk. pornea=sexual sin] among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles [or 'heathen'], that one should have his father's wife [incest]." And what was their attitude? Look at verse 2: "And ye are puffed up...." They were even conceited about their sexual accomplishments. 4) Their Biblical Knowledge Look at 8:1: "Now as touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge [i.e., 'We all understand the reality about meat offered to idols']. Knowledge puffeth up, but love edifieth [builds up]." They were puffed up about their biblical knowledge. They were puffed up about their sexual accomplishments. They were puffed up about their supposed spiritual status. They were puffed up about the certain teachers they had followed. They were egotistical and conceited about the spiritual gifts they had, which they were using to dominate other people. And they had an inner arrogance that spawned mouths full of hot air. Can you imagine an entire congregation of these people? Love is not puffed up. Do you know why? Because conceit says, "I'm better than you," but love says just the opposite. Conceit says, "I want everybody to know all about me," but love says, "I wish I could know all about you."

The Impossibility of Humiliating a Humble Person

William Carey was one of the greatest missionaries who ever lived, and one of the greatest linguists the world has ever seen...Christian or non-Christian. William Carey translated parts of the Bible into no fewer than thirty-four different Indian languages. He began his life as a cobbler, fixing shoes. When he arrived in India as a missionary, he was immediately regarded with dislike and contempt because of the very stringent caste system that the people had been locked into for centuries. So, he was given absolutely no respect.

One time, at a dinner party that Carey was attending, a snob had the idea of humiliating Carey because of Carey's low estate. So that all could hear, he said: "I hear, Mr. Carey, that you once worked as a shoemaker?" "Oh no, your lordship," said William Carey, "not a shoemaker, only a shoe repairman." He wouldn't even claim that he made shoes if he only repaired them. Somebody once said, "Empty trucks make the most noise."

2. The Proverbs Against Pride

Proverbs tells us much about pride and bragging. For example:

a. Proverbs 8:13--"The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; pride, and arrogance...do I hate." b. Proverbs 11:2a--"When pride cometh, then cometh shame...." c. Proverbs 13:10a--"Only by pride cometh contention...." That's so true. All that pride ever does is breed contention, and start fights. That's all it ever does. Humility has never started a fight yet. Humble people don't have anything to argue about. They just give. Proud people are contentious and start fights. d. Proverbs 16:18--"Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall." That's just pointing out that proud people are always the most ignorant of all, because in their pride and smugness they don't understand what awaits them. e. Proverbs 29:23a--"A man's pride shall bring him low...."

Love is not bigheaded; love is bighearted.

For a period of time prior to Jesus' ministry, John the Baptist was a hero, a great prophet out in the

wilderness. Masses of people came to him day after day. One day, John's disciples were questioning him about Jesus, and he replied, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (Jn. 3:30). In other words, "The sooner you forget about John the Baptist, the better I'm going to like it." Now, that's humility! Now, what have we seen so far? Love is the only hope for the Corinthians...and for us, as well. This love is superior to eloquence, to spiritual insight, to knowledge, to faith, to charity, and to martyrdom. This love suffers long and is kind.

And it's the only power in the world that can save us from the stupid swagger of boastfulness and from indulging in the sneers of envy. "Love never begrudges," says Paul, "and never shows off."

Continuing on to verse 5, Paul gives us a sixth quality of love:

F. Love Is Not Rude (v. 5a)

"[Love] doth not behave itself unseemly..."

Love doesn't behave rudely. This is so practical. The verb here means "to behave in an unbecoming manner." It refers to poor manners...rudeness. You say, "Well, that seems rather minor, doesn't it? Is rudeness all tied up with agape, the great concept of divine love?" Yes, it is. Someone with poor manners and rudeness is saying, "I don't love you, because I could care less what affects you. I will do what I want whether you like it or not."

Slurping and Burping

When I was a little kid my mom was constantly telling me, "Don't slurp your soup!" I used to think, "Who cares if I slurp my soup?" Then one time I ate with somebody who slurped his soup. I wasn't really able to enjoy mine while he was enjoying his. At that point, I finally realized that not slurping my soup had nothing to do with keeping my clothes clean, it had something to do with how much other folks could enjoy their time at the table. It's a little thing that says, "Your happiness matters to me, so I want to do what makes you happy."

I knew a couple who got an annulment on the grounds that he was rude to his wife. It's the strangest thing you've ever heard. She went to court and claimed that he burped all the time. That's the truth! I actually knew the people. Well, the judge granted an annulment on the basis that it was apparent the man did not love the woman, or he would have been more considerate of her than to burp all the time. Now that's an extreme story, but it illustrates the point. Love is not rude.

The literal meaning of the verb, here, is "to be shapeless or unformed." So, it's not only referring to unbecoming behavior, it's also referring to undisciplined behavior. This describes a person, a man or a woman, who doesn't have the ability to discipline his behavior with others in mind. He's just rude, out of place, overbearing, and totally self-centered.

1. The Extent of the Corinthians' Rudeness

There couldn't be a better definition of the Corinthians than the word rude. They couldn't care less about anybody else. For example:

a. The Love Feast--They were so rude, that they came to the love feast and ate all their own food before the people who had none got there. They overindulged. They were like hogs when it came to eating at the love feast. b. The Lord's Table--Their behavior at the Lord's Table was so bad, they got drunk because they kept taking the cup. c. The Women--Women had overstepped the bounds of female propriety before God. They were taking their veils off, and usurping the role of men in the church. They were, therefore, not acting in a becoming way. d. The Glossolalists--The undisciplined, rude conduct of the Corinthian glossolalists had come to the place where it was the antithesis of love. Everybody was shouting out and trying to get the prominence without considering anyone else. And when you do that there's no love there. Love is never rude because love is always lost in how it affects somebody else.

2. The Example of Christ's Love

Our dear Lord was so tremendous in personifying love. Luke 7 shows us an incident where the Lord protected a woman from someone else's rudeness. Beginning in verse 36 it says, "And one of the

Pharisees desired Him that He would eat with him. And He went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to eat.

And, behold, a woman in the city, who was a sinner [undoubtedly a prostitute], when she knew that Jesus was eating in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment [which was extremely expensive], and stood at His feet behind Him, weeping; and began to wash His feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hair of her head, and kissed His feet, and anointed them with the ointment." Isn't that beautiful? This prostitute is weeping, washing Jesus' feet with her tears, wiping them with her hair, and putting ointment on them.

Continuing on in verse 39: "Now when the Pharisee who had bidden Him saw it, he spoke within himself, saying, This man, if He were a prophet [he hasn't made his evaluation of Christ yet], would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth Him; for she is a sinner. And Jesus, answering, said unto him [notice that Jesus answered his thought], Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on." What a hypocrite! He hadn't even made up his mind whether or not Jesus was Master.

In response to Simon's rude thoughts, Jesus told the following parable, beginning in verse 41: "There was a certain creditor who had two debtors: the one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered, and said, I suppose that he to whom he forgave most. And He said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged. And He turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house; thou gavest Me no water for My feet. But she hath washed My feet with tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head. Thou gavest Me no kiss. But this woman, since the time I came in, hath not ceased to kiss My feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint. But this woman hath anointed My feet with ointment. Wherefore, I say unto thee, her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little." There's a lot of sarcasm in that statement, isn't there? "And He said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven. And they that were eating with Him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also? And He said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace."

You say, "What's the story teaching?" It shows us a very simple principle. A woman, who in all likelihood was a prostitute, entered a Pharisee's home. The first response of that Pharisee to that woman would have been rude, arrogant, and scornful. He would have said, "What are you doing in here, you filthy, vile, sinning woman? Get out!" But Jesus shielded the woman from the Pharisee's scorn, arrogance, rudeness, and indifference. And Jesus loved her, forgave her, and redeemed her.

Are you rude to unbelieving people?

William Barclay translates the first part of 1 Corinthians 13:5 in the following way: "Love does not behave gracelessly." Love is gracious...never rude. And it isn't just a matter of whether or not you're rude to a believer; love is never even rude to an unbeliever. I've seen some Christians who were so rude to non-Christians who smoked, that they would never have an opportunity to communicate something about Christ. Once we get to the place where we think we understand all the doctrine, and we think we have all the answers, we will become theological hardheads who have no grace or charm with people who aren't where we are. That isn't right! We can shut out everyone who isn't just like us and say, "Us four, no more, shut the door," without any grace or kindness. But that's rude, isn't it? I believe that Christianity very often has to pay the price for its rudeness to unbelieving people. Oftentimes, we are very rude and thoughtless to people. And wrongly so, because love is not rude!

So, love can save us from the bitter sneer of envy on the one hand, and the ridiculous swagger of boastfulness on the other. Love can also save us from the inner tendency to be so inflated with our own importance that we're rude to everybody else-- behaving without grace, in contempt of them and their feelings.

Seventh in Paul's list of the qualities of love is...

G. Love Is Not Selfish (v. 5b)

"...[love] seeketh not its own..."

Love isn't interested in its own things; it's interested in the things of someone else. Lenski, the great commentator, said this: "Cure selfishness and you plant a garden of Eden." He's right. I would say that in Paul's portrait of love, selflessness represents the eyes. The windows of the soul show the soul to be selfless.

1. The Corinthians' Selfishness

The Corinthians were extremely selfish...especially as it related to their spiritual gifts. In fact, if you studied the combination of the Greek words in verse 5, and compared them with the Greek construction of 14:4, you would see an amazing comparison. In 13:5 Paul basically says, "Stop being selfish and seeking that which is your own." Then in 14:4, as he talks to them about their use of the gift of tongues, he says, "He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself...." Now, because of the similar construction in those two verses, it's possible that in 13:5, Paul is speaking directly to the Corinthians' problem of seeking self- edification as seen in 14:4. In fact, this is further substantiated by 14:12b, where Paul says, "...seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church." The Corinthians had twisted the purpose of spiritual gifts. Instead of using their gifts for others, they were using their own gifts to individually build themselves up. But love is free from that. Love never dwells on itself.

The Best Way to Help Yourself Is to Help Others

Fulton Oursler, some years ago, told the following story: A uniformed chauffeur approached the desk of a clerk in a cemetery and said, "The lady is too ill to walk. Would you mind coming with me?"

Waiting in the car was a frail, elderly woman whose sunken eyes could not hide some deep, long-lasting hurt. "I'm Mrs. So-and-so," she said weakly. "Every week for the last two years I have been sending you a five-dollar bill in the mail." "Oh yes... for the flowers!" the clerk remembered. "Yes, to be laid on the grave of my loved one. I came today," she confided softly, "because the doctors have let me know I have only a few weeks left. I shall not be sorry to go. There's nothing to live for anyway, so I wanted to drive for one last look at the grave."

The clerk blinked at her irresolutely. Then with a wry smile he spoke, "You know, ma'am, I'm very sorry you kept sending the money for the flowers." "Sorry?" she asked. "Yes," he replied. "The flowers last such a little while, and no one ever sees them." "Do you realize what you're saying?" she asked. "Oh, indeed I do. You see, I belong to a visiting society," he said. "I go to State hospitals and insane asylums, where people dearly love flowers...and they can see them and smell them. Lady, there are living people in places like that." The woman sat in silence for a moment, and then, without a word, she signaled the chauffeur to drive away.

Some months later, the clerk was astonished to receive another visit. Only this time he was doubly astonished, because the woman was driving the car. "I take the flowers to the people at the hospitals myself," she said with a friendly smile. "You were right! It does make them happy; and it makes me happy, too. The doctors don't know what is making me well...but I do. I have somebody else to live for."

She had discovered what most of us know and too often forget--in helping others, she had helped herself. Paul put it this way: "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2).

2. Christ's Selflessness

Jesus is the perfect example of selflessness. Matthew 20:28 says, "Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many." Love never seeks its own, it's always seeking the good of somebody else.

I believe that selflessness is the key to the whole concept of love as described by Paul, here in 1

Corinthians 13. If you're patient with people, kind with people, not jealous of people, not angry with people, not upset with people, not easily provoked by people, very tolerant with people, very generous with people, very gracious with people, and never rude to people...you're selfless.

Eighth in Paul's description of love is...

H. Love Is Not Provoked (v. 5c)

"...[love] is not easily provoked..."

The Greek word which is translated "provoked" is *paroxuno*. It is from this word that we get our English word *paroxysm*, which means "a sudden outburst." In other words, love never gets upset, irritated, or angry. Love is never ready to fight.

1. Spiritual Anger

You say, "Wait a minute! If love doesn't get provoked, how do you explain righteous indignation?" Well, if you're cleansing the Temple, go right ahead. It's all right. I'm sure Martin Luther was a little angry when he nailed his Ninety-five Theses on the door of the church at Wittenberg. I'm all for it. In fact, you can't really live the Christian life without a little bit of anger. You have to be mad at Satan, you have to be mad at the flesh, and you have to be angry with what defiles God's world and God's truth, don't you? That's righteous indignation--which I believe every man of God has to have.

Competition and the Preacher

Dr. Haddon Robinson once told me that he has never met a preacher who was any good, who wasn't competitive and always in a fight. I asked him what he meant before I agreed with him, and this is what he said: "A preacher who isn't competitive isn't going to be a good preacher of the Word of God week after week after week." Well, I agree with that. I'll use myself as an illustration. I'm very competitive. I like to win--I've always been that way. I did spend a lot of my life losing, but I never did like it. I like to win because I'm competitive. You say, "How does that relate to preaching?" Well, in the same way that a blind dog will stumble over a bone once in a while, every preacher is going to preach one or two good sermons. That's just a law of averages. Every preacher will find a good truth every now and then. However, to be good week after week after week, you have to be a fighter...you have to be competitive. You have to fight the clock, you have to fight your own ignorance, you have to fight the difficulties in the text, you have to fight the people who try to change your priorities, you have to fight your own laziness, you have to fight your own sin...it's an all-out war! But Sunday is victory day. Do you know why I get so excited when I preach? The fight for the week is over. It takes me a lot of time to prepare the message, and being competitive certainly helps.

I'm not depreciating the fact that there is, in the Christian life, a need to get irritated about certain things. But what Paul is saying, here in 1 Corinthians 13:5, is that love doesn't get mad, angry, and upset at other people.

2. Self-Centered Anger

Next time you get mad or upset at home, remember this: You're angry because you don't love the one you're angry at. When you get angry, what you say often wounds the other person. But that's because you want to wound and hurt them. When you get angry, you decide, "I want my way, and I want it the way I want it. And if you don't do it the way I want it, I'm going to hurt you." Anger causes us to say things that will never be forgotten--things that leave deep scars. We do things that hurt and injure, but love bears all injuries. Love suffers everything without irritation and exasperation, unless it's defending God. But when it comes to defending yourself, love is not provoked.

When a husband lashes out and punches his wife, does he love her? Absolutely not! He doesn't love her. He is more concerned about himself than anything else. So, if she crosses him, he lets her know about it. What do you do if your child does something that you don't like? Does that frail little baby become a battered child? Does your child get knocked across the room into the wall because he does something that stepped on what you thought you wanted for yourself? Well, that's anger. Anger is the opposite of love because anger says, "I matter so much, if you do something that I don't like,

I'm going to let you have it."

Anger is not an easy thing to handle, but unless you learn to handle it, you'll never really experience love. You can constantly tell your husband you love him, but if all you ever do is get angry at him, it's going to be very hard to convince him of it. You can tell your children you love them, but if all you ever do is yell at them, get irritated at them, and get upset at them, they're going to wonder why they can't ever do anything that makes you happy...and it's going to be hard to convince them of your love. Love is the only cure for irritability, because irritability, in the last analysis, is simply self-centeredness.

The Consequences of an Uncontrollable Temper

Jonathan Edwards, the third president of Princeton University, and one of the greatest preachers of history, had a daughter with an uncontrollable temper. A young man fell in love with her; but because their courting was all hearts and flowers, he was unaware of her temper. The day finally arrived when the young man went to the girl's father to ask for her hand in marriage. "Dr. Edwards," he said, "I want to marry your daughter." "You can't have her," was the abrupt answer of Jonathan Edwards. "But I love her," replied the young man. "You still can't have her," Edwards repeated. "But she loves me!" argued the young man. "You still can't have her," Edwards again repeated. "But why not?" the exasperated young man pleaded. "Because she's not worthy of you," Edwards answered. Astonished, the young man asked, "But, Dr. Edwards, she's a Christian, isn't she?" "Yes," said Edwards, "but the grace of God can live with some people with whom no one else could ever live." His daughter was like the lady who said, "I lose my temper, but it's all over in a minute." So is the atom bomb!

I could talk a lot about temper and how it can destroy a person, but the point that Paul is making here is simply this: Being provoked--getting angry--isn't loving.

Consider the following: As a Christian, the love of God is shed abroad in your heart. Jesus personified love, and Paul modeled it. Are you following these examples, or are you carnal like the Corinthians--seeing yourself as the opposite of all these qualities of love?

Focusing on the Facts

1. Why is 1 Corinthians 13 seen as a portrait of Jesus Christ?
2. How can we benefit from studying 1 Corinthians 13?
3. The end of 1 Corinthians 13:4 says, "...love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up." What is the difference between these two qualities of love?
4. The Greek word for boastfulness comes from a root word which means "_____."
5. _____ is wanting something that other people have, and _____ is making people want what you have.
6. What is the underlying motive behind boastfulness?
7. What was chaotic about the Corinthian worship service? Why was it this way?
8. How are boastfulness and conceit connected?
9. What does it mean to be "puffed up"? What were some of the areas that the Corinthians were puffed up in?
10. What are some of the consequences of pride, according to Proverbs 11:2; 13:10; 16:18; and 29:23?
11. Why is John the Baptist such a great example of humility?
12. What does it mean that love does "not behave itself unseemly"?
13. When people are rude, what are they basically saying to those that they are rude to?
14. In what ways were the Corinthians rude?
15. What lesson can we learn from Luke 7:36-50?

16. Are Christians ever justified in being rude to unbelievers?
17. How were the Corinthians selfish, as it related to their spiritual gifts?
18. Why is it important for us to bear one another's burdens?
19. How is Christ the absolute example of selflessness?
20. Explain why selflessness could be considered to be the key to the whole concept of love as described in 1 Corinthians 13.
21. What does it mean to be provoked? Should Christians ever get provoked? Explain.
22. Why is it important for an effective preacher to be competitive?
23. Explain the difference between spiritual provocation and self-centered provocation.
24. Can a person love someone and at the same time be constantly angry with them? Explain.
25. What is the only cure for irritability?

Pondering the Principles

1. When was the last time you were involved in boasting about yourself? What was the content of your boast? Why did you boast? Do you boast frequently? When someone is telling a story about something that they have done, do you usually chime in with a story to better their's? If so, why? Everybody has at least one thing that they do fairly well. What are you good at? Do you make it a point to let others know about it? Answer these questions honestly, and then ask God to make you sensitive to those times when you are prone to boast. Commit yourself to being able to say at the end of one day, "God, I have not spoken of myself today."
2. Do you enjoy being around someone who is conceited and boastful? Why or why not? Has anyone ever accused you of being conceited? Did you feel falsely accused? If so, did you ask your accuser why they felt that way? Was their perception of you based on a misunderstanding, or did God use them to show you a problem area in your life that you were previously blind to? The Apostle Paul was certainly someone who could have become proud. However, look at the following passages: 1 Corinthians 1:26-2:5; 15:9-10; 2 Corinthians 3:5; 10:7-18; 11:16-30; 12:6-10; Philippians 3:3-10; 1 Timothy 1:15.
3. One of the qualities of love is that it is not rude. How would you define rudeness? Think of some illustrations of rude behavior that you personally have received. What was your response to those acts of rudeness? Can you think of times when you were rude? What prompted your rudeness? Oftentimes, people who would never think of being rude to strangers are habitually rude to their family and loved ones. Is that true in your own life? Why is this so often true? Another problem is that Christians are often extremely rude to non-Christians. Is our love to be limited just to Christians? Why, then, do many Christians feel that their rudeness is justified? Ask God to make you more aware of the times when you are rude, and to be sensitive to how your actions and words affect others...Christian or non-Christian.
4. Selflessness could very well be considered the key to love as described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 13. List the fifteen qualities of love from verses 4-7, and then determine how selflessness relates to each one.
5. There is a place for anger in the life of every Christian. Paul said, "Be ye angry, and sin not..." (Eph. 4:26a). This anger that Paul is referring to is a righteous anger--anger which is designed to defend the great, glorious, holy nature of God. However, in the same verse and the next, Paul also says, "...let not the sun go down upon your wrath; neither give place to the devil." You can be angry over that which grieves God, but you're not to get angry when people offend you. Anger that is self-centered, undisciplined, and uncontrolled is sinful, useless, and hurtful--and it must be confessed and dealt with before it's slept on. "Why?" you ask. Because anger that isn't dealt with gives Satan victory in your life. You ought to be angry over sin--especially sin in the church--but your anger must never degenerate into sin. Commit yourself to get angry over only that which offends God, never over that which offends you. Also, make it a habit to deal with your anger (or any sin) quickly, so that

Satan won't get an advantage over you (2 Cor. 2:11).

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