

The Qualities of True Love, Part 4

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13:7

Code: 1867

INTRODUCTION

A. The Effects of Sin

Sin has effects. I doubt whether any of us would even bother to argue that it doesn't. We know that it does. We know that it has effects by virtue of our understanding of Scripture and of our understanding of our own circumstances. We recognize that when sin is in our lives, there are certain things that take place as a result. And we recognize that the Bible talks about the consequences of sin.

I suppose we could divide the effects of sin into two obvious categories:

1. Spiritually

First of all, sin has a great effect on the soul of a man or woman. It affects your relationship with God. When you sin, or live in a state of unconfessed sin, you forfeit blessing, you take yourself out of the place of being blessed by God, and you put yourself in a place where there is no joy. There's a soul sickness that occurs--a languishing of the soul--when a believer is sinful.

Secondly, sin also has a rather dramatic effect...

2. Physically

Sin will have results in pain and illness. A good illustration of this would be David.

a. Illustrated In 2 Samuel 12 we have the record of a rather terrible sin. David violated Bathsheba; and then as a secondary act, he ordered for her husband to be killed in battle, which was the equivalent of murder. So David was involved in adultery and murder. And as a result of this child of God entertaining sin, he not only suffered spiritually--the soul sickness that came, the terrible blight on his soul, the sense of alienation from God, and the anxiety of that sin as he realized he had forfeited the place of blessing--but there also came a rather dramatic impact on his own physical body. Let's look for a moment at Psalm 32 and see how David reacted to the physical illness that came upon him as a result of his sin. In Psalm 32, David is talking about his sin and how wonderful it would be if he could get out from under it. Notice that the effects of his sin that he mentions in verses 3 and 4, are in the physical area. He says, "When I kept silence [i.e., when I failed to acknowledge my sin, confess it, and deal with it before God], my bones became old through my roaring all the day long." Here we see that David actually had physical pain. The physical consequences of his sin was an aching of his bones--a deep-down physical pain. Then in verse 4 David says, "For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me; my moisture is turned into the drought of summer." David's life juices dried up. Things happened to his blood and to the secretion of various glands in his body. The fluids that accommodate the muscles were perhaps not operating properly--possibly causing tension in his muscles. That's the Hebrew significance of the word "moisture." So David is a vivid example of the tremendous physical impact that sin can have.

b. Investigated 1) The Source of Physiological Problems For a Christian or a child of God, sin constitutes emotional trauma. No question about it. It creates emotional anxiety, and emotional alienation from the only anchor that the Christian has. As a result of that emotional trauma, a debilitating or even fatal illness can occur. The emotional center of the brain is a stem from which nerve fibers run to every organ in the body. And because of such intricate connection to the brain, turmoil in the emotional center of the brain can create impulses that can cause any number of physiological problems.

2) The Specifics of Physiological

ProblemsPhysicians tell us that physiological problems due to emotional anxiety are created along three lines:a) The emotional center in the brain causes a change in the amount of blood flow to a given organ. This can become debilitating to that organ.b) Emotional trauma can create an effect on the secretion of certain glands, which also can affect bodily function.c) Emotional trauma can also affect the change in tension of certain muscles.

B. The Example of Sin

When Paul wrote to the Corinthians to tell them that they needed to love, it wasn't just for the healing of their souls, it no doubt had great consequences for their bodies, as well. Let me show you why I say that. Look back at chapter 11 of 1 Corinthians. In verse 29, in reference to the sinful way in which they were partaking of the Lord's Table, Paul says, "For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment [or chastening] to himself, not discerning the Lord's body." In other words, "If you eat this way, you're going to get chastened." Verse 30 continues: "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep." They had had sickness, severe illness, and even death.

Now I don't think the idea here is that God gave them a supernatural illness or miraculously killed them. That may happen (see Ac. 5:1-11), but more likely what happened here is that people in the Corinthian assembly were living in sin and experiencing physical ramifications. So, when the Apostle Paul in chapter 13 says to them, "Love each other," he is not simply saying, "This is a soul issue," he's saying, "This is a body issue as well. For the wholeness of your assembly, and for the wholeness of your own body, you need to love."

C. The Elimination of Sin

Now remember, all sin is a violation of love...all of it! So Paul is simply saying to the Corinthians, "You are sick both spiritually and physically because you are sinning. But if you start loving one another all of these things will disappear." You say, "John, are you saying that love will eliminate all sin?" Yes, I am. Let me show you why.

1. The Importance of Love

a. Matthew 22:34-40In verse 34 we read, "But when the Pharisees had heard that He had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together." The Pharisees were always trying to prove themselves better than the Sadducees. They figured that since the Sadducees had been humiliated by Jesus, if they got the best of Him, they would have the upper hand in their society. So, they prompted one particular lawyer to ask Jesus a question. In verse 36 he asked, "Master, which is the great commandment in the law?" Now, even though they believed that they had to keep the law to be saved, they were smart enough to realize that nobody could keep the law. So some of them decided that if they could just find one good law and keep it, they'd be all right. They were simply asking, then, which law was the best one to keep. Jesus answered the lawyer's question in verses 37-40 and introduced the concept of love in relation to the law: "Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."Now, if you love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength; and if you love your neighbor properly as yourself, you will never sin. Why? Because you won't do anything to violate God or your neighbor...that takes care of it. Love, then, fulfills it all.b. Romans 13:8-10In Romans 13 Paul says, "Owe no man any thing, but to love one another; for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Love worketh no ill to its neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law." In other words, you don't need a commandment that says, "Thou shalt not kill your neighbor," if you love your neighbor. You don't need a commandment that says, "Don't covet," if you love the person who possesses what you don't have.Both of those passages essentially say the same thing. And what

they say is this: To simplify all of living, love God and your neighbor...and you won't have to worry about anything else.c. 1 Timothy 1:5aPaul writes, "Now the end of the commandment [i.e., the reason, the objective, the sum, the point of it all] is love out of a pure heart...." God is trying to get us to love.d. 1 Corinthians 16:14Paul told the Corinthians, "Let all your things be done with love." Proper theology is no substitute for love. Activism and service can't substitute for love. Selective affection (or attraction to certain people) is no substitute for a widespread love. And immaturity or ignorance can't be used as an excuse to not practice love. In fact, in 1 Thessalonians 4:9, Paul writes to the Thessalonians and says, "But, as touching brotherly love, ye need not that I write unto you; for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another." Romans 5:5 says that "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts."God wants Christians to be happy and healthy in their soul. God wants you to know what it is to be blessed. He doesn't want you to feel His chastening, or experience physical illness that comes from the trauma of willful sin. The real key to all of it is to learn to love. This is the indispensable reality for the Christian. God is love; so if God is to be seen in us, it is going to be when we express His love.

2. The Injunctions to Love

Now, it is so important that we love, that the New Testament just keeps hammering away at it. For example, Christians are exhorted to...

a. Put on love (Col. 3:14)b. Follow after love (1 Cor. 14:1)c. Abound in love (Phil. 1:9)d. Continue in love (Heb. 13:1)e. Increase in love (1 Thess. 3:12)f. Be fervent in love (1 Pet. 4:8)g. Be consistent in love (Phil. 2:2)h. Provoke each other to love (Heb. 10:24)i. Be sincere in love (2 Cor. 8:8)

Love has always been the pinnacle of life. It's the pinnacle of wholeness for the Christian. The healthy, happy, positive, glowing, useful Christian is the one who loves. You say, "Oh, that's great, John, but how does it work? How does love function?"

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)

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

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

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

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

I. Love Thinks No Evil (v. 5d)

J. Love Does Not Rejoice In Unrighteousness (v. 6a)

K. Love Rejoices With The Truth (v. 6b)

Now, let's look at the last four qualities of love in verse 7: "[Love] beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things." These are statements of exaggeration-- hyperbole. The phrase "all things," which is used four times in this verse, isn't referring to all things universally. Love certainly has to make some discrimination. First John 4:1b says that we have to "try the spirits [to see] whether they are of God." We don't believe the devil, do we? The phrase "all things" doesn't mean all things in the general, total, universal sense. It does mean, however, all things within the limit of proper biblical boundaries and proper Christian discrimination--all things that come into the divine framework.

These four qualities of love are ascending, and are probably more closely tied than any of the other eleven. They really go together. Let's look at them:

L. Love Bears All Things (v. 7a)

"[Love] beareth all things..."

1. The Word Defined

This is a tremendous word...a glorious truth. The word "beareth," although it is used in various shades of meaning in the New Testament, primarily means "to cover with silence," or "to suppress." That's the basic meaning. It doesn't mean that love puts up with anything and gets shoved around because of a lack of dignity. What it means is this: Love, out of regard, respect, and honest concern for the real value of another person, will do everything it can to cover up and suppress the sin of that person. Genuine love is reluctant to drag a scandal in front of anyone. So when Paul says that love "beareth all things," he's not talking about enduring a trial, he's talking about covering the ugliness in someone else's life.

2. The Word Discussed

a. The Redirected Character of Love 1) Our Natural Response It is normal for depravity to want to uncover everybody's evil. You can illustrate the fact that this is a normal human behavior pattern by just looking at yourself and your own children. There's no question about it. The newsstands are filled with magazines that do nothing more than expose people's sin. And all the bookstores are jammed with exposes. You see, depravity is always looking to find the skeleton in somebody else's closet. Do you know why? Because it gives people a sense of self-righteousness. Children are a good illustration of this. They come into the world depraved, don't they? And one of the first manifestations of their depravity is the eagerness with which they want to tattle on their brothers and sisters. One of my children will come to me and say, "Do you know what Matt's doing?" (Obviously trying to get him in trouble.) I'll say, "I don't know what Matt's doing, and I'm not interested." Another one of them will come running down the stairs yelling, "So-and-so's jumping on the bed!" Well, that's typical, isn't it? Why? Because depravity is always trying to uncover somebody else so it can gain a sense of self-respect and self-righteousness. It's sad, but some people never grow out of that. Some people spend their whole life tattling on others. I always wonder about married people who constantly talk about the errors and the faults and the sins of their partner. I question whether they know the meaning of love, because love throws a blanket over somebody else's faults. The Corinthians didn't know the meaning of covering sin. They exposed everybody. In chapter 6, we read that if somebody offended one of them, they dragged him into court and sued him publicly before a pagan judge. But love doesn't do that. Love throws a kindly mantle over the faults, weaknesses, and sins of others. 2) Our New Response a) 1 Peter 4:8b--"...for love shall cover the multitude of sins." Love is a big huge blanket that runs around throwing itself over people's faults...not exposing them. b) Proverbs 10:12--"Hatred stirreth up strifes, but love covereth all sins." Have you ever noticed how easily you dismiss the faults of those you love? They do something wrong, and you say, "That's okay. Everybody makes a mistake." But how do you respond when someone you don't like does something wrong? You love it, don't you? Why? Because you want them to do something wrong and look bad. But love dismisses the sins of the one it loves. Now, love will warn, and exhort, and rebuke, and discipline; but love will also cover that sin, not expose it. It's a beautiful characteristic of love. b. The Redemptive Character of Love 1) Suppressing Someone's Sin The best illustration I can think of to describe the characteristic of love that bears all things is the cross of Jesus Christ. Love has a redemptive quality. God loved us, but He didn't sit up in heaven and say, "You know, those human beings are gross. What do you angels think about them?" They didn't have an internal discussion about us. Isn't it nice to know that we are not the subject of heavenly gossip? Well, do you know what God did? He said, "Because of their evil, I better take My big blanket and go down and cover their sin." And that's what He did, didn't He? The Bible says that God loved us so much, that He "sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 Jn. 4:10b). Do you know what the word "propitiation" means? It means "covering." Jesus is the covering for our sin. You see, God is not in the business of exposing sin, He's in the business of covering it. Rather than sit in righteous resentment, and gossip within the Trinity and with the angels about the sins of men, God came to a cross, threw a mantle over their sin, and bore their sins in His

own body. Love throws a mantle over sin and suppresses it because it has a redemptive element.2) Sympathizing with Someone's Sin Isaiah 53 says, "Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows....But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him..." (vv. 4a, 5a). Now, that is love. Love will actually go beyond throwing a blanket over sin; love is so sympathetic that it will feel the pain and endure the agony. Love will bear it. When a brother or sister sins, love will feel the pain. If I love that person, I hurt for them. That's why I won't expose their sin to others. Love is willing to bear the pain. Henry Ward Beecher beautifully said, "God pardons like a mother who kisses the offense into everlasting forgetfulness." That's what God does. The redemptive character of love is willing to throw a blanket over sin and to sympathize with that sin. Third, it also involves...3) Suffering for Someone's Sin The redemptive character of love is willing to take on the consequence of sin and endure the suffering. On the cross, God didn't just throw a mantle over sin and just feel sympathetic about it, He also bore our sins in His own body. Genuine love is never quick to exploit, expose, gloat, or condemn. It throws a blanket over sin, is burdened over it, and even takes the blame and accepts the punishment for it.

The Ring of Death Silenced by Love

In seventeenth-century England during the time of General Cromwell, a soldier was condemned to die by execution at the ringing of the curfew bell. This soldier, however, was engaged to be married to a beautiful young girl. With tears, the girl pleaded with the judge and with Cromwell to spare his young life. But it was all in vain. The preparations were made for the execution, and the city awaited the signal from the bell at curfew. The sexton, who was old and deaf, threw himself against the rope, as he had for years. He pulled it and pulled it and pulled it, not realizing that no sound was coming from the bell. The girl had climbed to the top of the belfry, and had reached out, caught, and held on to the tongue of the huge bell at the risk of her life. As the sexton rang it, she was smashed against the sides of the bell...but the bell was silent. At length, the bell ceased to swing, and she managed to descend from the tower, wounded and bleeding. Cromwell, waiting at the place of execution, wanted to know why the bell had not rung. The girl arrived and told him what she had done. A poet recorded it for all time. This is what he said:

At his feet she told her story,
Showed her hands all bruised and torn;
And her sweet young face, still haggard
With the anguish it had worn;
Touched his heart with sudden pity,
Lit his eyes with misty light:
"Go, your lover lives," said Cromwell,
"Curfew will not ring tonight."

Now, that's somebody who was willing to go where love goes--to throw a mantle over sin, to feel sympathy for sin, and to take the punishment for sin...somebody else's sin. That's redemptive love.

Love that bears all things suppresses someone else's sin, sympathizes with someone else's sin, and suffers for someone else's sin...if it can. To what extent do you bear the pain to cover someone's sin? Do you really cover other people's evil? Love does. Love bears all things.

M. Love Believes All Things (v. 7b)

"...[love] believeth all things..."

Love believes the best in someone else. Instead of being suspicious and eager to denounce an offender, love believes the best. Instead of saying, "He probably got exactly what he deserved" or "He's so far gone now, he'll probably never change," love believes the best. Love sees the weakness, throws a mantle of silence over it, and then believes the best. Love doesn't go through life cynical and suspicious--suspecting everybody and everything. Love doesn't automatically jump to the conclusion that when somebody does something wrong it proves that they were rotten to begin with.

Love always believes the best.

1. Believing the Best...

a. About an Unbelieving Child The characteristic of love that believes the best about someone is often seen in the hearts of parents who have a child that drifts away from the Lord. I met a couple at a conference, recently, who have a daughter that drifted away from the Lord. She is a source of great heartbreak to them. Now even though they recognize her sins, her faults, and her problems, they have thrown a mantle of love over her. And they believe with all their hearts that she'll come back to the Lord. Do you know why they believe that? Because they love her--and love has to believe that. Love cares too much not to believe it. When love wants something badly enough, it turns into faith. That mom and dad want that girl back so badly, and they love her so much, that their wish has become a belief. But that's what love does. Now, if they had responded by saying, "She's lost forever. She'll never come back to the Lord!" it would reveal that they don't love her. Why? Because love doesn't let go like that. Another illustration of this is seen in the many people who are constantly believing the best...

b. About an Unbelieving Spouse I know a Christian woman who has been married to an unbelieving husband for 30 years. Yet she's always saying, "He'll come to Christ someday." Do you know what that tells me? That tells me that she loves him. Her love for him makes her wish that he'd become a Christian; and that wish becomes so strong, it turns into a belief that he will. Yes, love sees wrong and weakness, and love rebukes it and deals with it. But love does not seek to expose it, it throws a mantle over it. This is also illustrated by Jesus in the way that He believed the best...

c. About Sinful Disciples Just think about Jesus and His disciples. They weren't anything special, quite frankly. The ones that are the most well known in the New Testament--Peter, James, and John--were sinful, weren't they? Peter, who was notorious for his faithlessness, continually fell on his face. James and John had a problem with pride and pseudo-spirituality. They had the gall to ask their mother to ask Jesus if they could have the chief seats in the Kingdom. Now we don't know very much about the rest of the disciples, but we do know that they were sinners, too. Now, Jesus could have scratched His head and said, "Father, I don't know what to tell You, but I don't think this plan is going to work out. I have twelve losers for disciples. If You think I ought to come back to heaven and turn everything over to them, I'll do it...but it's a little spooky." Jesus didn't say that, though, did He? Jesus knew the sins of the disciples better than anyone else, yet He believed the best about every one of them. He said, "They can do it," gave them the task, and sent them into the world. And they succeeded, didn't they? In fact, do you know what I think? I tend to think you make the best out of the people you believe the most in. Jesus believed the best about them and trusted them to fulfill His plan. And on that basis they carried it out.

Err on the Side of Love

If you're going to make a mistake about somebody's character, do yourself a favor and err on the side of love. Make a mistake in the fact that you trusted and believed in them too much. Now, if somebody doesn't fulfill that trust once in a while, it's all right. It's better to err on the side of love. You'll find that most of the time it will put the kind of positive influence on people that will make them want to give the best they have.

2. Believing the Worst...

The Corinthians were suspecting and cynical, anxious to believe the worst about people, and assumed that nobody ever told the truth. This is also seen in the "friends" that believed the worst...

a. About Job Job's friends were quick to accuse, weren't they? "We know what your problem is, Job; you're evil. You're a bad egg, Job. Face it! That's why you're having all these problems." Well, Job listened to all of that palaver about as long as anybody could. He knew in his own heart, however, that his friends were wrong. Finally, in Job 21:27, Job said, "Behold, I know your thoughts, and the devices which ye wrongfully imagine against me." In other words, "You know, I've had it with you guys. All you do is think evil about me." And that just proved that they didn't love him. If they had

loved him they'd have said, "Job's a good man. Maybe he's made mistakes here and there, and maybe he's sinned, but he's a good man. There's something redeemable about him." But that's not the way they thought. Another illustration of this is the Pharisees, who were constantly believing the worst...b. About Jesus Do you want to know how the Pharisees felt about Jesus? Matthew 9 gives you as clear an indication as you'll ever get. Jesus had met a man sick of the palsy. And because He saw that this man and his friends had great faith, Jesus said, "...Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee" (v. 2b). Jesus gave him salvation, and then later gave him physical healing as well (v. 7). After Jesus forgave this man of his sins, verse 3 says, "And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth." Now this is interesting. Jesus says, "Your sins be forgiven," and the Pharisees say within themselves (not out loud), "This man blasphemes." Now, why did they say that? I believe it's because they had a predetermination that He was evil. You say, "Is it evil to forgive sins?" No, of course not! But they had a predisposition that He was evil; so whatever He did had to be evil. They were cynical and suspicious. I love verse 4: "And Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, Why think ye evil in your hearts?" That must have been something! They didn't even say anything, but Jesus answered what they were thinking, and indicted their evil hearts. Their evil attitude toward Jesus proved that they didn't love Him, because if they loved Him they would have thought the best about Him. You see, in the case of hate like this, even though they couldn't find any faults in Him, they kept on looking for them. Why? Because once you start hating somebody, you'll try to find faults. Conversely, once you start loving somebody, you'll start covering their faults. That's the difference love makes. Love is a harbor of trust for those who are doubted by everybody else. And as soon as somebody wants to get things right again, love is quick to restore the fallen brother (Gal. 6:1). You say, "But, John, what happens if you throw a mantle over a fallen brother's sin, and believe that he's going to get straightened out and come back to the Lord...and he doesn't come? And what do you do when you find your faith begin to fade because you thought he'd come back?" A parent with a wayward child says, "Well, I thought she would come back to the Lord, but it's been fifteen years." Or the Christian wife with a non-Christian husband says, "I thought he would become a Christian, but I just don't know anymore. I don't know if he'll ever believe." What does love do then?

N. Love Hopes All Things (v. 7c)

"...[love] hopeth all things..."

1. Hope's Object

When you run out of faith, hang on to hope. Hope is the long line, the long cord, that never gets disconnected. As long as the grace of God is operative, human failure is never final. What I always go back to is this: Is anything too hard for God? I think back a few years, to people that we've disciplined in our church because of various sinful situations. At the time, there was a great desire in my own heart, because of love, to throw a mantle over their sin and never talk about it or discuss it with anybody, except with those who were involved in praying for them. And then there was a great desire in my heart to believe that something would change--that they'd come back. And I guess in a couple of cases, now, my faith has gotten a little small. So do you know what I do? I hope. And every once in a while, when the long rope of hope pulls at my heart, I pray for them and keep hoping.

2. Hope's Optimism

You see, love is hopelessly optimistic--it never stops hoping. Love says, "God is still God and He can do it, so that's what I have to hope in." Love refuses to take failure as final. God wouldn't accept it from Israel, Jesus wouldn't accept it from Peter, and Paul wouldn't accept it from the Corinthians. Many a loving wife has held on to a husband with nothing but that rope of hope. Many a loving parent has held on to a wayward child, and many a loving friend has held on to a fallen brother...just holding on to hope.

3. Hope's Obstacle

When all your faith gets clouded in, you have to hold on to hope. Don't give up on hope--love doesn't. You might say, "Well, I've lost faith in them totally. They're completely lost. They'll never come back.

There's no hope left. I give up." Well, love doesn't give up on hope. That would be like arriving in a village beneath the Matterhorn in Switzerland on a foggy day, and having people say, "You've got to see the Matterhorn on a sunny day. It's the most beautiful sight you've ever seen." Now, if you sat on the ground and said, "Liars, there's no Matterhorn. I'm right here, and I can see that there's no Matterhorn," you would be wrong, wouldn't you? But in that foggy moment, you thought you made a clear judgment. Love doesn't do that. When faith gets clogged up and fogged in, love still hangs on to hope. When doubt and despair steal faith, love still has hope.

The Determined Dog that Didn't Despair

In a large city airport, there's a dog patiently waiting for his owner to return. His master got on a plane and left him there...over five years ago! Given food and water each day by people at the airport, he patiently waits in the same spot...hoping that his master will someday return. Now, if the attachment of a dog for his master could produce that kind of faithful hope, certainly love could produce it in us if we really loved.

Love, you see, doesn't run, bail out, and leave as soon as the first mistake is made, or the first sin is committed. Love waits and waits. And there are enough promises in the Bible to make hope work. You say, "But, John, if you bear all things, and you believe all things, and you hope all things, but the rope keeps getting further and further out, so that you feel that you're losing hope...then what do you do?"

O. Love Endures All Things (v. 7d)

"...[love] endureth all things."

1. The Term Explained

The Greek term translated "endureth" in verse 7, is a military term which has to do with being positioned in the middle of a violent battle. The emphasis, here, is not on handling little, minor annoyances. It's referring to love that stands against incredible opposition...and still loves.

2. The Term Exemplified

a. The Apostle Stephen When Stephen was lying on the ground with his life being crushed out with stones, he said, "...Lord, lay not this sin to their charge..." (Ac. 7:60b). He wanted to throw a mantle over the sins of his people. He believed and he hoped--he preached with the belief that some would listen, and he hoped that they would come to Christ. And when he ran out of faith and hope, all he had left was endurance. As they were stoning him and crushing out his life, he was simply enduring, wasn't he? Why? Because he loved them. b. The Lord Jesus On the cross, Jesus threw a mantle over His crucifiers' sin, believed that some of them would believe, hoped that they would come to Him, and endured in the end while they spit on Him, with the words, "Father, forgive them..." (Lk. 23:34a). You see, love never dies. You can't kill it. It never fails. Even when that love for a wayward child continues year after year, and you get back hatred and bitterness and rejection, you never stop loving...you endure. That's the crescendo of love. Love bears all hurts, wounds, sins, and disappointments; covers them with a blanket of silence; and feels sympathetic, redemptive, and even bears the pain, if it can. Love believes the best about somebody, is never cynical, and is never suspicious--in spite of the way it's been wounded. And when love's believing is betrayed, love turns to hope, because God is still God and He can do anything. And even when hope grows thin and all hope seems lost, love endures. It endures the deep hurt that seems so final, with a triumphant confidence that the God who gives His children peace is still on the throne. You see, love is never overwhelmed. It cares too much to give up. It will die caring. Tragically, there wasn't any love in the Corinthian church. They were like the church that Reinhold Niebuhr spoke of when he said, "The church is like Noah's ark. If it weren't for the storm outside, we couldn't stand the stink inside." But that isn't the way God wants it. He wants us to be characterized by love and the church to be a community of love. He wants to see these principles of love in operation.

CONCLUSION

A. The Fact of Love's Importance

You say, "John, I know now that love is important. It's important because of the fact that it brings spiritual and physical wholeness, and it's important because it's characteristic of our Lord Jesus Christ, whom we are to manifest to the world. Now that I see what it is, what it does, and how it behaves, how can I begin to see God's love manifested in my life?"

B. The Five Keys to Love's Implementation

1. Acknowledge It Is a Command (Rom. 13:8-10)
2. Agree You Have the Power (Rom. 5:5)
3. Understand It Is Normal Christian Behavior (1 Jn. 4:7-10)
4. Realize It Is the Spirit's Work (Gal. 5:22)
5. Practice It (1 Pet. 1:22; 4:8)

Did you know that even Jesus learned obedience (Heb. 5:8)? We're to practice love. Start in your own home. If we put these fifteen characteristics of love into action, the world will look at us and say what God wants them to say: "Oh how they love one another!" And that will exalt Christ.

Focusing on the Facts

1. How do we know that sin has certain effects? What two categories do these effects fall into?
2. What Old Testament passage dramatically shows us that continued unconfessed sin in the life of a believer has physical consequences?
3. What is the connection between emotional trauma and physiological problems? How does this relate to a Christian sinning?
4. How was the sin in the Corinthian assembly affecting them?
5. All sin is violation of _____.
6. What is the greatest commandment? Why? Give scriptural support.
7. Why doesn't a Christian have an excuse to not practice love? (cf. Rom. 5:5; Gal. 5:22)
8. How do we know that Paul was using hyperbole in 1 Corinthians 13:7?
9. What is the basic meaning of the word "beareth" in 1 Corinthians 13:7?
10. When Paul defined love as bearing all things, what sin was he addressing?
11. Why do people always seek to uncover the skeletons in somebody else's closet? Why is this not to be characteristic of Christians?
12. What does 1 John 4:10 mean when it says that God sent Jesus "to be the propitiation for our sins"?
13. Love that bears all things: _____ someone else's sin, _____ with someone else's sin, and _____ for someone else's sin.
14. Explain what Paul means by describing love as believing all things. What are some practical applications of this quality of love?
15. What kind of effect do you have on people when you believe the best about them?
16. How do we know that Job's "friends" didn't love him?
17. When we begin to run out of faith, what is the long cord that we can hang on to?
18. How does hope differ from faith?
19. What does the Greek term translated "endureth," in 1 Corinthians 13:7, refer to?
20. What are the five keys that will allow us to see God's love manifested in our lives?

Pondering the Principles

1. In Psalm 32:3-4, we discover that David experienced physical consequences because of sin in his life. Then in verse 5, we read how he finally dealt with it: "I acknowledged my sin unto Thee, and

mine iniquity have I not hidden. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD, and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." Can you think of a New Testament equivalent to this verse on how we are to deal with our sin? What's the best way to guard against the effects of sin in your life? Commit yourself to take inventory of your attitudes and actions at the end of each day. Confess your sins, and then ask God to show you the areas in your life that need to be worked on and improved. This type of daily spiritual accounting will keep you from suffering from the debilitating effects of sin.

2. Review the list of nine New Testament injunctions to love. Look up each of these verses and then choose one of them to memorize and meditate on.
3. What is your first reaction when another Christian sins against you? Be honest! Is your first response to go to that person and confront them with their sin (Mt. 18:15), or do you rush to tell someone about what they did? How does love react? When someone comes to you with a juicy piece of gossip about another Christian's sin, do you discourage them from spreading the gossip, or do you encourage them with listening ears? Strive to love one another by covering one another's sins with silence. Now this doesn't mean that sin isn't to be confronted, it simply means that it is not to be broadcast to others. In fact, realize that gossiping is a sin, too; as it is a lack of love.
4. Do you talk about the faults and sins of your marriage partner or members of your family to others? If so, recognize that you are violating the character of love that covers a fault with silence. Ask God to help you become more aware of those times when you verbalize the faults of those closest to you--those to whom you have the greatest responsibility to love.
5. Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 and review the meaning of each of the fifteen qualities of divine love. Which of these do you have the most problems with? Write them down and put them someplace where you will be reminded of them daily. Realizing the importance of love, as it fulfills the whole law, commit yourself to concentrate on practicing love.
6. Review the five keys to implementing love in your life. Look up the references to each of these points. Then sometime today, get on your knees and say, "God, I know that I'm commanded to love. I agree that I have the power to love. I understand that it is normal Christian behavior to love. I realize that it is the Spirit's work to love through me. So, help me to practice love."

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