

“Loving Like Jesus”

– Part 1, **What it is**

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1 Corinthians 13:1-8a ...*Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. 2 And though I*

have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. 4 Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; 5 does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; 6 does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 8 Love never fails...



John 8:42 - “Jesus said to them, ‘If God were your Father, you would love Me...’”

Such an emphatic and yes, *potentially damnable* verse. It stands as the contingent...the “hanging in the balance,” precipitating upon our love of Jesus. I would think therefore it would behoove us immensely to be absolutely sure that we understand what Jesus means when He says ‘love.’ For if we fail in this issue, our very eternal position before God is in danger.

Love is the common denominator in how we relate—to God, to others, and even to ourselves. As followers of Christ, love is our trademark. Or, at least, it’s supposed to be.

Love is a tricky word though. It’s most often understood as an intense feeling of deep affection. Biblically though, love has a much deeper and richer meaning; it transcends a feeling or emotion. This is what we see in 1 Corinthians 13, wherein Paul tells us that love isn’t merely a feeling but a way of relating to others.

While most of us are fairly familiar with 1 Corinthians 13, we are apt to lose ourselves in the wedding ceremony poetry of it, and fail to understand that it was never speaking ...at least primarily, in terms of romantic love, although its principles play across the spectrum of life and love. Paul...the author of those words, lists at least eight things love embraces and eight things love resists. In those verses, Paul instructs us about what we need to hold close and what we need to let go. He empowers us with a framework to respond in love...moreover, a supernatural version of such that has all but been lost on pages of history past.

Part of adult living means we sometimes we will need to do things that are out of our comfort zone; sometimes we will need to *not* do things that feel natural to us. In both situations, the Spirit of God empowers us to respond beyond our feelings so we may impart life to others. When we fail in manifesting Christ purposed love, it is invariably because we have separated ourselves on some level from the Spirit's control. Any attempt to justify our response...when it is contrary to scripture and the nature of God, is a futile alibi and does not hold up.

Recognizing this priority of love in our spiritual lives does not yet answer the question of how we define 'love.' The contemporary usage of this word can be far-reaching. After all, we use the same word to describe our devotion for the Lord and our fondness for bacon or jam! Surely the two are not equal.

Looking this week at only the things that love is, we read that love is **“patient...kind...truthful...resilient...faithful...hopeful...and enduring.**

#1 - LOVE IS PATIENT

When Paul writes that “Love is Patient,” he urges Christians to adopt a love that is purposeful, persistent, and perspective-driven. Patient love is persistent love. Patient love also means choosing to love the other person even when you don't feel like it or it isn't easy. Even when someone has wronged you, you choose to love them anyway and won't call it quits just because you're tired, frustrated, or hurt. In many ways, patient love is the perfect foundation for the other manifests of love that Paul goes on to write about. When you have committed yourself to a type of love that isn't self-serving or short-sighted but rather is persistent and focused on the well-being of others, you learn to respond righteously towards those you are called to love. You become more forgiving, gracious, and trusting. For there is no such thing as selfish love. Love by nature is focused upon and goal centered upon the other individual. When it becomes *about me*, it is no longer love and definitely no longer involves Christ.

Paul encouraged the Corinthian church to be patient in their love for each other and patient in their love for others. When members of the church are patient and committed to loving each other, there is unity, purpose, and strength. Furthermore, when Christians adopt a patient love for the world, they develop a kingdom perspective that allows them to see people through the eyes of Christ. People are seen as precious, and Christians aren't tempted to rush God's timing or try and do too much on their own. They become more patient and persistent in their prayer and place more importance on the little acts of love that have eternal significance. Patient love doesn't look for immediate payoff or instant gratification either. It sees the big picture and focuses on the eternal worth of every human being, whether saved or not.

#2 - LOVE IS KIND

This is the fundamental principle that undergirds this entire passage. Christians are to express toward others the very love that Christ expresses to us. We cannot accept Christ's offer of agape love and refuse to express that outwards. To do so would be the highest form of insult – to Christ

and to our neighbor. As God expressed His love toward us, so too must we express the love outwards to one another.

Paul's call to a "kind love" is as life-changing today as it was in the first-century world. In an age known for its 'cancel-culture,' the call to be kind is radical. For Christ calls us to express love to those outside our circles of friendship and communion. Make no mistake, Christ's love is to be expressed to the very people we would otherwise choose to ignore. If we find ourselves dis'ing another person or group of people, for any reason, we can be sure that it is to them that Christ's love is to be expressed.

Instead of being rude, opinionated, or aggressive, Christ calls us to kindness. Pride, boastfulness, arrogance, or vanity destroys the work of Christ's love in our lives. There is no place for these things in the loving heart of the Christian.

#3 - LOVE IS TRUTH

"*Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ*" (Ephesians 4:15). Clearly there is an unloving way to speak the truth. That kind of truth-speaking we must reject. But there is a way to speak the truth in love, and we should seek such a path. I'm not saying that it is always a soft way to speak, or Jesus would have to be accused of lack of love in dealing with some folks in the Gospels. But such a road does seek out what is the most helpful thing to say when everything is considered. Sometimes what would have been a hard word to one individual is a needed act of love to another, and not a wrong to that person who is addressed. But in general, as we have already covered, love shapes truth into words and ways that are patient and gentle (2 Timothy 2:24-25).

We must admit that speaking the truth in love in a post-truth world is at times difficult, even as a child of God. We are often thought of as archaic, judgmental, profiling, and not relevant to society. It is too often that we find ourselves speaking lies instead of truth, appealing to people's emotions rather than their intellect, (not to even mention their spirit!) and being friends of the world rather than friends of Christ.

Speaking the truth in love is speaking that which is doctrinally correct and that which proceeds from a biblically committed life to a person who is in need of correction. It is done in love for the benefit of one who needs some adjustment to their attitudes or their actions. Indeed, one must acknowledge that no matter how much the *delivery* of such "love truth" is in the Spirit of Christ, unless the *recipients* are willing to *receive* that truth in the same spirit, there will most likely be a negative kick-back. But the point in this love aspect is that such cannot change our actions. To do so out of attempt for calm and non-confrontation is dishonest and child-like. Most of all, it is not Jesus style. Thus to attempt otherwise is mis-representing Christ, and even a cursory review of scripture will reflect that such always ends badly!

From these passages, we would say that we have a responsibility to speak the truth in love not only because it is a command, but also for the purity of the church. When we don't confront a

sinning brother, we weaken the resolve of the whole church, and allow a seed of discontent and division to take root.

Also, “*saving a soul from death*”... helping him to turn from the error of his way, is a worthy reason for doing this. We also ‘cover a multitude of sins,’ which means that the sinning stops instead of it continuing and being exposed before others.

#4 - LOVE IS RESILIENT

We Christians in America today are walking through pressures, temptations, strife, and exhaustion —such as I have never seen before. We have only one way forward. Our Lord above is calling us to a deeper place with himself and with one another. We do this or we are done. Our times demand shared resilience — steadfastness and solidarity together. The worst thing to do right now is drift apart. Our survival demands a strengthening of our relationships, for Jesus’s sake. Then, together, we’ll be able to face any future, by God’s grace.

Here’s a good objection to what I’m proposing: *we’re lousy at staying friends*. Our love just doesn’t last. We fragment too easily, walk away too quickly, stand aloof too stubbornly. And how can we face the opposition of an adversarial world when we can’t even get along together as Christians? It’s time to acknowledge this sin and love one another more deeply than we ever have before, more deeply than we ever dreamed we could. Our failure to step up in this is simply because we are in control of our lives and not the Spirit of Christ. I have witnessed innumerable instances of people claiming the mantle of Christendom while effectively burning down a village of believers. John 16 warns us that it will get worse... “*I’ve told you these things to prepare you for rough times ahead. They are going to throw you out of the meeting places. There will even come a time when anyone who kills you will think he’s doing God a favor. They will do these things because they never really understood the Father.*”

Here are some definitions of resilience: “*the ability to anticipate, withstand and bounce back from external pressures and shocks.*” “*The ability to make the best of any situation.*” “*Capacity to deal well with pressure.*” Here’s a particularly Christian definition: “*Resilience is having the strength to fulfill the call God has given us, even when it will be painful and difficult.*” Resilience is staying fixed on a higher purpose, motivated by love of God, our neighbor, and the world, and supported by friends. While others let us down, we are carried by the One who called us.

#5 -LOVE IS FAITHFUL

This one is much like the one before it. God love is faithful (Psalm 89:1-2 and 89:24). In other words, it is constant; it never fails (Psalm 136). In fact, when Paul blesses the people with ‘love with faith’, he no doubt means ‘faithful love’. In the Greek language, faith (which usually means trust in God) is the same word as **faithful**.

Let’s acknowledge something very important when it comes to this greater subject today. The true love that God gives to us is not weak, but strong (Song of Solomon 8:6). This is not an “I

think I can” kind of mojo, but rather a result... *a response*, of God’s love for us (1 John 4:19). The effect of it is that we love both God, and other people (Mark 12:29-31), because Jesus did so and we are called to be like Him. So God’s grace, or kindness, operates in our lives (1 Corinthians 15:9-10) to show his love in the world. That kind of love never fails (1 Corinthians 13:4-8).

“Faithfulness” is not as frequently written of as “love,” but it is a great indicator of the true character of God—and the source of our hope in the future: “*Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments.*” (Deuteronomy 7:9 NIV).

Faithful love. Covenant promise. Everlasting commitment. Not only do these words describe the relationship of God to His people, but they are to describe the relationship of His people to each other. Love and faithfulness, if they are to have any real meaning, cannot exist merely as abstract notions or disconnected, idealized sentiments. They must be embodied, given life and expression in a very real world marked by both the beauty and brokenness of very real human beings.

“Faithful to your word.” That is a concise, clear definition of what it means to be a faithful person, and a faithful loving person. If you are really a Christian, there is consistency between what you say and what you do, between what you believe and how you behave, between what you promise and what you perform.

When we (and the Bible) describe someone as “faithful,” we’re almost never referring to how much faith that person possesses, but to how much faith others can place in that person — how much others can trust him to perform what he promises. A faithful person keeps (cherishes, maintains, guards) the faith of those who put their trust in him.

We all want to think of ourselves as faithful, but we all fail at different times and in different ways. As a character quality, as a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22), faithfulness is all too often in short supply. It always has been, which is why this proverb is in the Bible: “*Many a man proclaims his own steadfast love, but a faithful man who can find?*” (Proverbs 20:6). And sadly, such a fact is generally manifested in most churches and in most confessing believers, as well as in the world. At some point we are scripturally forced to acknowledge that much of the greater church has been corrupted by a worldly acquiesce. Today, 176 million Americans claim to be Christians—69% of the population. Yet, only 6% of U.S. adults—which is 9% of those identifying as Christians—possess a biblical worldview, believing the Bible to be accurate and reliable, among other convictions. Therefore, it is no surprise that a message as I am giving today is so bluntly necessary.

#6 - LOVE IS HOPEFUL

When we read such sobering statistics like that which I just gave, our worldly tendency is essentially to “throw in the towel.” Just pull in and operate the local church as a closed community...a “private club” and write off those of the world as just doomed for the sewer drain. But again, we would be hard-pressed to say we would then be in anyway reflecting

Christ's version of love. His version always operated with hope. Not necessarily for a corporate redemption...for we know that no such recovery is coming. But *Christ love*...while poured out on humanity at large, is inevitably revealed one-to-one...*to and on behalf of* the individual.

Our hope lies in Christ, and just as He found you, He will find another. So we are called to express our love...as a church and as individuals, toward those God “put’s in our way,” to continue to reach out...to express a Jesus love. The Greek word translated “hope” is from ‘elpidzo,’ meaning “to hope or wait for salvation with joy and full confidence.” Used 32 times in the New Testament, this word expresses more than a wish or desire, but a confident belief in the unseen. Hebrews 11:1 says, “*Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.*” Faith, hope, and love are often intimately connected in Scripture (see 1 Corinthians 13:13).

Part of showing love is hoping, and part of hoping is seeing the potential of others. As Goethe (Gur-ta) said, “If we treat people as they ought to be, we help them become what they are capable of becoming.” In love, we can always be hopeful and show confidence in others. This does not rule out confrontation or the dispute of wrongs, but the impact of a positive attitude in the life of another person is incalculable.

#7 - LOVE IS ENDURING

Many people in our day have a shallow and superficial view of love that says it is a mere feeling that is outside of our control and can come and go as it pleases. If nothing else, 1 Corinthians 13 certainly negates that notion. Indeed, we have seen that a true understanding of love as God has revealed this virtue realizes that love is a high calling, a demanding effort that must be put forward even when we do not feel like it.

Love is no mere sentimental emotion. It actively works not to boast or show envy. Real love is selfless, and it refuses to rejoice in evil, choosing instead to seek out and proclaim the truth in all circumstances. This kind of love also has a sure hope for the future, believing the truth of the Lord's Word and taking what others say at face value until they prove themselves untrustworthy (vv. 1–7). True love, then, is a supernatural gift, because apart from our union with Christ, such love is impossible.

#8 – LOVE IS PERSEVERING

In 1 Corinthians 13, we find the supernatural characteristics of Christian love reinforced when Paul explains that love will bear and endure all things (1 Cor. 13:7; see Gal. 6:2). Love perseveres in even the worst of circumstances, fulfilling the call of Peter and others to endure suffering of all kinds (1 Peter 2:20–21). But given the pain that this kind of suffering brings, such endurance is impossible without God pouring love for Him — and thus for others — into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5).

Everyone who has ever suffered in a significant way from loving someone, understands that it is easy to let pain diminish our attempts to love again. Tragedies can tempt us to doubt the worth of such attempts to love, but we should recall that the same Lord who poured out His love towards us has had *His* heart broken innumerable times and yet He has never flinched to give to the next guy. Reminding ourselves of this evidence of His love enables us to overcome any doubts about God's care as we suffer.

God's love is not like the secular version on earth: "I will if you will." It's not based on a "falling in or out" kind of relationship. He loved us before we were ever born. And His love lasts forever. His love is never stingy; it's extravagant. He never acts in any way, but out of love toward us. He will never stop loving us. His love and His Bible promise are both enduring. And that is exactly the manifest of love that Christ seeks us to reflect to those around us. Not in mere words...but in absolute and faithful action. Jesus didn't just *say* He loved us. He proved it and is still doing so every day we breath.

Our world and our nation needs us to show Christ's love. They are looking to us to see how His love works. Hate, revenge, unforgiveness, and selfishness—these are not the marks of a follower of Christ. He gave us a "new" commandment to follow:

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:34-35).