

Title: The Betrayal of Bitterness

Text: 1 Corinthians 13.5

Theme: Love is not bitter

Series: 1 Corinthians #72

Prop Stmt. In giving others what we think they deserve, we forfeit the grace that can be ours.

Review Text:

1 Corinthians 12 and 14 are notorious battle ground chapters for those who engage in the debate regarding tongues and some of the so called miraculous or sign gifts. As I surveyed this book in anticipation of preaching through it, I assumed that we would roll up our sleeves and work through these chapters and deal with the issues as they presented themselves. Since I have not preached through 1 Corinthians before in this fashion, I had, before this series began, basically looked at this book as a topical index resource for church problems. Is there a problem with people who are cliquish and spiritually immature? Chapter 3 has some good stuff on that. Are there people in the church who are proud and acting like the leaders in the church don't get it? Then chapter 4 is a good resource for addressing that. What do you do when you have to deal with the issue of sexual immorality in the church? Go to chapter 5. Should I ever sue another christian brother or sister in a court of law? Good question, check out chapter 6. Do you have questions about marriage, intimacy, divorce, singleness, and remarriage? Chapter 7 is the place for you. And if you have people who are debating about lifestyle decisions, and whether or not these things are really wrong, or sometimes wrong, or what – then chapters 8 and 9 are very helpful. Do you have the rich people not wanting to associate with the poor people? Do you have people in the church dividing themselves up over preferences? Boy, does chapter 11 have some stuff you had better consider! And in that vein, I looked at the entire book. Here was your catalog, and if you had a question about a topic, check it out. Want to deal with tongues and prophecy – then chapters 12 and 14 are for you. I saw chapter 13 as being the love chapter in that way. Right here, in the middle of this book, is this great little chapter on love. But that is not how the apostle Paul wrote this book. On the surface, we see these topics. But this book began with the gospel. What I mean by that, is that Paul established at the beginning, that there is no way you can deal with the problems of life, family life, church life, without understanding the message of the cross and applying the implications of it to every situation. We are called to be people who smell like the cross, and we do that by living in a manner that is consistent with its message. Brothers and sisters, that is the theme that, like a river, flows through every single chapter and waters every single issue.

When we start to understand what happened at the cross, and what motivated the Father to send Christ to the cross, and what motivated Christ to die, then we are closer to understanding the message of this book. All that Paul is doing in chapter 13 is opening up the heart of Christ and contrasting that with how we tend to live. If the believers at Corinth really grasped the implications of the gospel for everyday life, then chapter 13 would not be so radical. Chapter 13 seems radical. But truthfully, if these believers were living as this chapter calls them to, then their church wouldn't be such a stinkin' mess!

But, it is not just them – is it? What we thought was going to be a nice little oasis in the midst of the controversial gifts issue, has turned out to be a seriously convicting study of our own hearts. As these weeks have rolled on, I have come to expect a high level of conviction in my study of this chapter. At least in chapters 12 and 14 I can get involved in a little more of the debate arena, where I don't mind treading from time to time. Chapter 13 is just plain convicting to me. But, that, truthfully is welcome and needed, and refreshing, and joyful because of the gospel. I remind you of how this chapter breaks down.

The priority of love – vs. 1-3

The properties of love – vs. 4-7

The permanence of love – vs. 8-13

We are looking at the properties of love. We are discovering more and more that: **Love is a commitment and an uncompromising devotion, rooted in the very character of God Himself, to give of yourself for the benefit of another, even if that person does not deserve it, cannot ever give back to you and even if no one else will ever know.**

We see love described both in terms of what it is and what it is not. Today, we are looking at three of the things that it is not. Here are three sinful actions that love does not take. These three actions are part of a life that is driven by its own sense of justice. This is an easy position to take. If I don't take care of my self, then who else will. I have to look out for what is good for me. And if you mess with me or the people in my world that I care about, then I am putting you on my list. Now that I have my list, I will be a little more prepared to protect myself or get even. That is a great recipe for bitterness.

Behind every sin is a promise. Bitterness is no exception. Bitterness promises you the satisfaction of revenge. If you can exact pain upon your perceived enemy, then you will be vindicated, satisfied and happy. But you cannot handle bitterness. Bitterness will betray you. It makes you think that if you retain the authority to be judge, jury and executioner then when you facilitate the demise of your opponent, that life for you will now become as it should be. But, instead of exacting pain upon others, bitterness pulls the joy right out of your life. You think you are hurting others, and perhaps to some degree you are, but not to the level that you destroy yourself.

Most of you are aware that it was Judas Iscariot who betrayed Christ and was paid 30 pieces of silver in exchange for leading a group of soldiers to where they could arrest Christ. In John 12.4-6 we read that it was Judas who resented the fact that Mary had "wasted" an expensive bottle of perfume on Christ, by pouring it on his feet. Judas sounded real pious when he declared how this should have been sold and the money used to feed the poor. Jesus confronted Judas that day and any of the other disciples who had agreed with him. In Matthew's account of this (26.6-16) we read that immediately following this, Judas went and secretly arranged to betray Christ. Judas, it appears, was embarrassed and angry at Christ and he found away to get even. Did he cause Christ

pain? Absolutely! But, what was the cost? In attempting to destroy Christ, he destroyed himself.

The heart of this chapter is not about secrets to getting along better with others, or how to be thought of as a really nice person. The truth of this chapter is absolutely impossible to grasp, much less live unless one has a completely different heart. A person, who is without Christ, lives for self. He/she is born that way. We are pre-programmed, and hard-wired that way. The end of that is death. However, the person who has been born into the family of God has had the love of God poured into his/her heart. There is now, a new center. **“God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom he has given us.”** (Romans 5.5) This is one of the results of becoming a follower of Christ. This new center, this new person that you become now has the capacity to love on a completely different level. Instead of loving others as a means to loving ourselves, we are free to give of ourselves for the benefit of another, even if they cannot ever give back and even if no one else will ever know. Love is patient, kind, does not envy, does not boast, is not proud, it is not rude, it is not self-seeking. The three things that love is not that we are looking at this morning overlap each other.

1. **Love is not Self-Seeking** (pre-occupied with the interests of the self)

At the very least this means that love does not parade its gifts and accomplishments. A person who is not pre-occupied with self is free from trying to impress you with what he has accomplished, or what he is capable of doing. He is not ashamed of it, and will make it known if it will benefit others, but he or she just doesn't have to wear it on a sleeve and constantly rub your face in it.

This love is in such stark contrast to eros or a self-centered love. We hear about this on the news over and over and it strikes very close to home for some of you. A guy and a girl are in a relationship. Initially she likes the attention. But in reality he wants control. He wants total control. (it is not always the guy) She tries to break it off and he threatens to do something crazy, like hurt her, hurt others, or hurt himself. If you don't do what I want, I am going to take hurt you, or I am going to take my life and everyone will know that it was your fault. Eros turns people into things, lives into possessions, and friendship into power-plays. This point has numerous applications in marriage, potential marriage and friendship relationships.

True love as God defines it, is not the desire to gain mastery over another person and use them for your purposes. In fact, true love is not pre-occupied with the interests of self. But, does that mean that as believers that we are never to stand up for what it is right, if for example our rights have been violated? What if, for example, your business agrees to make \$10,000 worth of products for a customer? You ship the product and the customer fails to pay the bill. If you are a Christian, and you are supposed to love and love is not self-seeking, wouldn't it be wrong to seek payment? Shouldn't you take the high road and be willing to take a loss rather than go through the messy legal process? Is that what this is talking about? Does this mean that love and justice are at odds with each other?

No. If you do not get paid for your product, then you cannot pay your supplier, and neither can you pay your workers. Not paying your supplier and workers is not loving – is it? Love does not trample justice. In fact, pursuing payment is driven in this case by pursuing justice (which is a loving thing) for your suppliers, and your workers. There are certainly times when love is willing to set aside one's own rights, unless that will result in injustice for others.

We often quote Philippians 2.5-10 which speaks of the humiliation and the subsequent exaltation of Christ. This passage about Christ is part of an entire section where Paul is setting forth different examples of people who have loved others to such an extent that they have set aside their own comforts for the benefit of others. Christ is our ultimate example. But Paul is doing more than just saying, "Wow isn't that great...He makes this point because there are two women in the church at Philippi who have disagreement and neither one will humble themselves enough to seek to get the matter resolved. Someone's rights were violated. So Paul starts at the top.

What rights did Christ have? The answer is ultimate rights. Even though he had those, how did He use them? He set aside his rights in order for justice to be accomplished for us. (Part of which we will look at tonight) Christ was not held to the cross by nails. You cannot put nor keep God on a cross with nails. His love put Him and kept Him there.

What rights do you have that you think are being neglected? What rights have been trampled? Do you have to have your perceived rights restored in order for you to be at peace? Again, the gospel is so helpful because it reminds that anything this side of hell is grace. How are we doing? "Better than we deserve."

Love is not self-seeking. What would the church at Corinth look like if this one truth had been part of their relationships? The issue of what foods to eat would be no issue at all. The wealthy eating before the poor would never even be considered. The issue of interrupting speakers because of a supposed "instant revelation" meaning that what you had to say was more important than what the other person was saying, would not be taking place. The issue of someone going on and on in an unknown language (tongues) when no one could interpret and therefore no one received any benefit from it at all would not be a problem.

This first point is clearly related to these next two descriptions of what love is not. A person who is self-seeking view privileges as rights and demands them from others. A person who is not self-seeking sees his own responsibilities towards others as what is right and does them.

2. Love is not Easily Angered.

How many times did Christ respond to the thick skulls and hard hearts around him and say, "I quit! You guys are hopeless!?" Never! Love is not exasperated. "Exasperation is always a sign of defeat" (Barclay) Love does not become exasperated into blowing a gasket. The absence of self-interest keeps the pressure from building up that high.

This year the NBA instituted a new rule that seeks to govern the responses of the players and coaches to calls made by the officials. I may be one of the few who thinks that this is actually a very good rule. I recognize that there are inherent problems when you try telling a guy who is making \$10 million per year that he can't always have his own way and see what happens. How do you respond when you are accused of committing a foul and you never touched the person? Love is not exasperated. When you blow up at a person, even if you think it is justified, you have lost it. Rudyard Kipling touched on this in his famous poem of being a man when he said, "If you can keep your head while all the others are losing theirs, and when hated, not give in to hate."

Love does not "pet its hurts." Love does not review over and over the injustices that were committed against it. When you do, you get attitude. When you convince yourself that people owe you something, then you are well on your way to being easily angered. In fact, the ride is really short. For some people it does not take much at all to get them going. They are an attitude looking for a cause – know what I mean?

There is a series of land mines that rests under a very thin layer of skin in certain people. If you barely brush against them they explode. But this person is the exact opposite of that. This is the person who never complains. You can't get them wound up if you tried. That is the idea of this phrase.

By the way, hair-trigger tempers and intimidating attitudes are a very effective means of keeping people away. Those of you who use your anger to get your way and intimidate people, I want to ask you something. What are you afraid of? What are you hiding? What is the truth about yourself that you dare not let out? What is it that you think the cross of Christ cannot resolve?

At the very least, this (love is not easily angered) has to do with being touchy. Do people walk on egg shells around you? Do you make yourself vulnerable to suggestions? Do you make it easy for people to point out things that you could improve on?

But how do you not do this? This is ideal, how do you live it? I think that the key to being rid of a short fuse, so to speak, is to get rid of your list.

3. Love keeps no record of wrongs.

The operative word that Paul originally used in this phrase is the word to reckon or consider. It is an accounting term. Some of you have ledgers. You have lists of wrongs that others have done to you. From time to time you read over that list and remind yourself of why you are so much better than all those people. (role play) You read it again and justify your own coldness. In your attempt to condemn others, you try to exonerate yourself. It is okay if you are mean, withdrawn, unmoved, unfeeling, uncaring for them. After all, they deserve it. It says so, right here in your list. Why do you keep that list? Someone has to – don't they! You can't let that person get away with something – can you?

What happens if you keep petting your hurts and nursing your wounds? You keep them warm don't you? In one of the Polynesian island cultures, people used to keep reminders in their homes of past wrongs. When someone hurt them, they would hang an artifact on or in their hut, usually from the roof as a reminder of this past offence.

For some of you, what is even worse, is that there are things on your list that never happened. You imagined them, misinterpreted them, or relied upon gossip that itself was a lie, but you never resolved it in the right way. Now, some of the things on your list are no doubt things that have been done to you. Brothers and sisters, that is part of life. We are sinners who sin against others and are ourselves the recipients of others failures. The question is not, will you ever be hurt, the issue is, what are you going to do about it? If there is a legitimate issue, go to the other person. Go humbly, and ask questions. If the other person does not want to resolve it, you have done what you can. As far as you can, live at peace with others. There are some things that are beyond your control. Now what?

Now you have a choice. You can either take your list to the cross, or you can hold on to these things for the purpose of getting what is your due and rot your heart. Here is the betrayal of bitterness. If you hold on to those offenses in order to hurt the other person in return, you will discover find out that you ripped yourself apart and turn your heart more and more into stone. Love does not keep score. Only Christ, in the ultimate sense has the right to keep score. And he set aside that right in order to die. If we are genuine followers of Him, can we honestly do less? What are you going to do with your list?