

Title: Love Always Loves

Text: 1 Corinthians 13.7

Theme: A Christian love is a faithful love

Series: 1 Corinthians #74

Prop Stmt. A Christ-driven love never fails to carry out its God-glorifying mission.

Today is Palm Sunday. This is the time when we remember the day that Christ rode into the city of Jerusalem on the back of a donkey. That may not seem like that big of a deal, since he had gone to Jerusalem so many other times before, but this time was different. This time, he was coming to die. But, no one else really knew it, even though he had told his disciples. If they did think about it, then it was quickly wiped out of their minds as they saw the crowds yelling and singing and enthusiastically welcoming him as the Messiah. Revolution and hope were in the air. Expectation and anticipation gripped hearts. The people thought they were ready for a true king. Within five days, Christ was hanging on a cross, dying the most humiliating death that the Romans could inflict. But it wasn't a Roman idea to kill Christ. Christ was betrayed by one of his own disciples and handed over by his own people.

But his death, was far from a defeat. Ironically, his death and his resurrection absolutely changed this world. The irrefutable evidence of His deity and authority all serves to show His majestic power and right as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Jesus Christ is the hero of history. He is the object of our worship. King Jesus and the Kingdom of Jesus is the unifying theme of all time and space and mass and life and therefore, the Bible, because the Bible is God's account to us of what He has been up to, what He is up to and what He will be up to. It is all about Christ. So, even though we are looking at a letter that the Apostle Paul wrote to a group of believers in the city of Corinth, we need to remember that these were believers in Christ. The ultimate hero and focal point of this letter, like all of Scripture is Christ. When we read these words and memorize these verses, we do so, knowing that they feel like Christ. They smell like Christ. And if we put the ears of our heart close enough to these truths, we will hear the pulse of Christ thumping in our souls. Jesus is all over this chapter and is the ultimate fulfillment of it.

The Priority of Love (1-3)

The Properties of Love (4-7)

The Permanence of Love (8-13)

Rather than being some hallmark card stuck in the middle of 1 Corinthians, this chapter is embarrassingly humbling because it reveals how self-centered, and self-protective we really are. Love like this, is a language that I am barely familiar with, but, it is so intriguing and exciting to learn. Love like this, is the language and actions of God. This is how God loves and this is how we are called to love. But, this is not what we are used to. Normally, when we love, we start with what we find valuable in the other person. A guy sees a girl and his head starts to spin, his heart starts to race, his palms get clammy, and he finds it difficult to speak to her and he thinks, "I am in love." What the guy means is that he finds the girl attractive and he is responding to her.

But that is not love as God defines it. God's love is not a response to our attractiveness. God is not reacting to how lovely and desirable we are. God's love is self-originating. God's love is born from His perfectly free will. God freely chooses to love us, not because we are lovely, but because God for His infinite purposes chooses to love us. What is so amazing is that we are, in reality, unlovely sinners. We are not cute cuddly little people that elicit some sympathetic reaction from God. It is not that we are the lost puppy dog that God feels sorry for and can't help Himself, whose emotion overcomes His common sense and He wants to take us home and care for us. God knows the truth about us and God loves us because that is what God is; or that is part of who God is. This is a major shift to our natural way of thinking. We like to think that we are the center of the universe. Now, I just said that in reality, we are unlovely sinners, meaning that God chooses to love us even though there is nothing that He gains from this. However, there is more to the story. Yes, we are unlovely sinners, but that is not all that we are. We were made in the image of God. That makes you separate from animals and plants and dirt. You did not evolve from tadpoles and orangutans. You have a mind, a will, and emotions. This is all part of the imago dei (image of God) that sets the human race apart from all other aspects of the creation. Please understand what that means. Yes, we are sinners, but we were not originally made that way. We were not made for sin, we were made for God. The sending of Christ to this earth in order to rescue us from our sin, is more than a wondrously charitable act that enables us to go to heaven when we die. Christ became sin for us and died to pay the penalty of our sin, so that we could be declared righteous in the eyes of God and be restored back to our original condition.

After you truly come to faith in Christ, the Spirit of God takes up residence within you. This new life that you have enables you to live and love the way God does. Like God, you can learn to love people, irrespective of how lovely of a person they happen to be. Your love for others does not have to be a response to how attractive or appealing of a person they happen to be. Unlovely, broken, wounded and empty people can be the recipients of your love when your love is like God's love. The fact is, the most unlovely people are the ones who are usually in such a desperate need to be loved. But does it work? If you mean by that, do people always respond with appreciation to being loved? No. But, is God glorified when we love like that? Yes! I remind you again, that to glorify God means that we live in a way that puts Him on display. When we love the unlovely (which is all of us) then we are putting Christ on display in our lives. Even if the recipient of your love does not accept it, the character of Christ is being put on display.

Before we look at the parts of this verse, I want to draw your attention to the wording. Is this text teaching that no matter what, love protects? If someone is attacking your child, obviously, it is a loving thing to protect your child. But, in protecting your child, you are not protecting the person who is attacking your child. So, in that case, love is not ALWAYS protecting. Are you supposed to protect those who do evil? And if you do not protect them, is that not being unloving? What about always trusts? Does this mean that as the race for president begins to heat up that as Christians we are supposed to believe everything that we hear? There are some people that I do not trust, with good reason. The reason I do not trust them is because they have demonstrated that they should not be

trusted. If given the right opportunity, that person will hurt someone. If I trust them, then I would not be protecting others. Do you see the tension? If I always trust, then I cannot always protect.

When Paul uses the word “panta”, which is translated here as “always”, he is not using a word that has no limits whatsoever on it. He is not saying that love always protects evil or always trusts evil, or always has hope in evil or always perseveres in evil. That would violate what he has just said in the previous verse. There are some limits to love. Love does not rejoice in evil. Therefore, in seeking to capture how deep this love really is, without violating the moral and ethical limits that governs love, I think the four points of the message capture the meaning of this verse without giving fodder to people like Karl Marx who think that indiscriminatory love supports the accusation that religion is the “opium of the masses.”<sup>1</sup> True love is discerning. Love is not gullible, but is not petrified at the thought of being taken advantage of either.

### **1. Love does not tire of protecting.**

The word translated “protects” has the idea of being a roof, which led one translator to say, “Love springs no leak.” I believe that what Paul is describing here is a love that puts up with and absorbs the weaknesses of others and it does this over the long haul. It does not demand perfection from others, even though it does not overlook sin, it has a long endurance to it that recognizes its role to care for, and to be a friend. The grace of God extended through Christ both frees and empowers a person to serve others without harshness and without demanding a return on the investment of love.

Notice the connection between the previous verses (4-6) and this verse (7). A person who is secure in Christ, does not have to be his own campaign manager and image consultant. He is not threatened by the success of others, and does not delight in hearing of their demise. He does not have meltdown when someone misunderstands him because he knows that eventually it will get straightened out. He knows the truth about Christ and the gospel. He therefore knows the truth about himself and understands what it means to live in the grace that has set him free. Because of the cross and the fact that his life has been changed by the cross, he is free to focus on others and serve them. He is not self-seeking, not easily angered and keeps no record of wrongs. In fact, he finds no joy in the failures of others, or even when their weaknesses are exposed. But, when a personal struggle is revealed, this person does not see that information as power to hold over that person, but instead will guard that information and not look for the first opportunity to tell others. Your life, your vulnerabilities, your fragileness is all safe with this person.

Do you love like that? Are you a safe person? Are you a harbor for broken lives? Can people and do people trust you with their weaknesses, and do you provide protection for

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx believed that religion, and he meant Christianity as he understood it, was the opium of the people. I.e. an effective drug that protected people from the real issues of life, but was not itself actually true. Nietzsche’s concept of Christianity was “servile mediocrity” and he claimed that the apostle Paul’s view of the cross “has sided with everything weak, low and botched; it has made an ideal out of antagonism towards...strong life...the will to nothingness sanctified.”

them? That can be a very tiring position because there is a lot of brokenness and fragility in this world. If you are safe, people can take advantage of it, in fact, they will. In order to love at this level, you need Christ's love in you because you cannot pull it off on your own. By God's grace, I am looking at many people this morning who are safe people. For so many of you, your relationships reflect that fact that people trust in you and are safe with you. That security that you provide to others is enormous and I cannot express to you how so very important you are to the lives of others.

Knowledge is power. You can use information about people to destroy them. In political circles it is a given that some of the people who serve on the inside of an administration, are only biding their time until they can write their expose, rake in their millions, and set themselves up. What would it be like to work in an environment where people are just waiting to write their books about each other? What if the foreman, the manager, the boss, the coach or teacher looked for opportunities to exploit your weaknesses and divulge to everyone around you your failures in order to humiliate you and render you powerless? But, that is how some people live, but not in the church! It goes back to the cross. Because our lives are safe in Christ, we are to provide safety for each other. We look out for each other. That does not mean that I will always agree with you or affirm you, if I think you are wrong. But, it does mean that I will seek to tell you the truth in a loving manner, and not use you. Love does not tire of protecting.

## 2. **Love does not give up on people.**

He is willing to believe in others. This does not mean that a person is gullible and is blind to problems. Not at all in fact, love rejoices in the truth. The fact that love does not give up on people, the fact that love does not lose faith, means that this person prefers to be generous in his openness and acceptance rather than suspicious or cynical.<sup>2</sup> Love means that you stop looking at every person as if they are evil incarnate.

Remember that this was written to a church. The church was divided up over personalities, over spiritual gifts, over wealth and over clear evidences of who was really spiritual. Every church faces this question. How are we supposed to define what it means to be spiritual? How did the church at Corinth define it? Some of them thought that the real spiritual ones were the ones who possessed the gift of tongues or other impressive and showy gifts. This fed the false view that church was a show, a stage, where people fought for the spotlight and approval of others. Anyone can do that.

Do you hear what Paul is saying throughout this text? You have oversold the gift of tongues. You have put the emphasis on the wrong thing! Later on, Paul in essence says, "I'm not down on the gift of tongues per se, fact is, I speak in them more than anyone, but they are not the point." Don't put all of your emphasis on something that even the pagan religions can duplicate, here is the most excellent way. If you are looking for authentic evidence of the Spirit's work and power, here it is! Love, does not give up on people. Wow! Do you want to give up on certain people? I do. It is sort of like being a Lions fan – isn't it? Seriously, there are people, that you want to say, I am done with

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<sup>2</sup> D.A. Carson, Showing the Spirit. P. 63

you. Love does not do that! Why not? Is it because we are weak, spineless doormats, asking to be treated as fools? No, it is because we know that the grace of God goes deeper than the other person's sin, and even though they do not believe that now, we will anyway and hope and pray that they will come around.

Again, this was written to a church. This was written to a church that practiced what is often called, "church discipline." There was a man in the church at Corinth who was living in unrepentant sin. One of Paul's purposes in writing this letter was to admonish the church to remove the man from the membership of the church and to treat him as one who needed Christ, not as one who was a follower of Christ. There are times, when we as a church family have done the same thing. We go to people who have claimed to be followers of Christ, but who are living in a manner that is contrary to the gospel they claimed to believe. We plead with them to repent, but if they do not submit themselves to God's Word, then if we dare call ourselves a church, and followers of Christ, we have to follow Christ's instructions for us and remove the person from membership. That does not mean that we give up on them. No, in fact, the motive for doing so is because we have not given up on them, and we are hopeful that the unloving pressure of this world and the consequences of living in defiance to God, will drive them to the Savior and his church, where they will be welcomed with open hearts and arms.

### 3. **Love always looks for reasons to hope.**

Here is another combination of faith and hope. They go together, so much of what I said on the second point applies to this as well. Love always looks for reasons to hope, not because we believe in the ultimate goodness of mankind and the inevitable triumph of man's good over society's evil. Forget that! We believe in the infinite goodness and greatness of God. We believe in the grace of Christ. We believe in the power of the gospel to save. We believe in the cross and the life-giving, guilt-freeing, heart-changing, attitude-hijacking power of Christ. We know that because we are recipients of that. If you really understand the depth of your sin, then your attitude is, if Christ can save me, he can save anyone. Therefore, this love assumes the best and hopes for the best. Love is prepared to forgive and longs to forgive.

This love is not false esteem and relational manipulation. This does not mean that when a kid is doing poorly that you pat him on the back and say, you're doing great. No, it says, I know you can do better. I love you whether or not you do better, I love you. But, I know you can. This kind of Spirit-driven love enables you to face the truth about situations and not run from them. When you are dealing with difficult people problems, you can look at everyone in the room, right in the eye, and in the midst of this heart-wrenching, relational carnage you can say, "okay, this is the low point, we can build from here." Whether that is a coach in the locker room after getting blown out by 35 points, or that is a dad to his family, or friend to friends, when we communicate to people that we know that they do not have to live like this and we have reason to hope that they will change, that kind of a love can change the entire picture.

The reason that some of you have given up hope that other people can change is because you have no hope that you can change. You doubt the promises of God to be faithful to change you. You know what? I know that you can change! If I did not believe that, I would not preach. There are easier jobs.

4. **Love does not quit.** (always perseveres)

What can I add to that? It is like a summary statement of the previous three. He does not quit his willingness to protect, or believing, or assuming the best.

This is not a passive resigning monotony, like Eeyore the donkey in the Winnie the Pooh the series, but this word speaks more of a triumphant fortitude. As one man who had lost both his eyesight and then the girl he loved prayed that he might learn to accept God's will in his life, "Not with dumb resignation but with holy joy; not only with the absence of murmur but with a song of praise." Love fights for joy. Why does Paul put this in? This kind of love is not easy, and Paul knows that it is not easy. Unless God raises you up for this challenge, you will surely fail. But, by God's grace, you can love like this.

What does this have to do with Christ?

- He values and guards the people who believe in him. He never uses what He knows about people to harm them or destroy them. Christ is our safe harbor. And He never tires of protecting His own.
- He does not give up on people. He is the Good Shepherd who leaves the 99 in the fold and looks for the one lost because He knows His sheep by name and keeps them safe and secure. He is not caustic, or rude. He does not quit loving because His love is not a response to us, or even to our faith. His love originated with Himself. We love Him, because He first loved us. He started it! That is why, he loves us all the way to the end of ends. You can settle for a relationship with Christ based on the fear of punishment, but that is not what He made you for. He made you with the capacity and intent to trust in Him.
- Christ looks for reasons to hope and he does hope because his hope is not ultimately in you and your power, but in Himself and His commitment to carry out his plan for you.
- Christ does not quit.
- Only by means of Christ's life and power in you can you love like this.
- A church that loves like this, is glorifying Christ. He sets the mark, we keep the pace.