

Title: Love is Secure

Text: 1 Cor. 13.4-5

Theme: Love does not seek itself

Series: 1 Corinthians #71

Prop Stmt The cross eliminates our need to pretend.

Have you ever said, or heard someone say, “I have been hurt so deeply by that church; I don’t think I can ever go back.” Or, what about, “That last church experience was so painful; I am never going to join another church. I just can’t handle that.”

This church has the capacity to hurt you very deeply. Why? It is because we deal with issues of the heart that involve truth, trust and integrity. Not only that, but we are bunch of sinners. Put any two of us in the same room for any length of time and we have the potential for problems. The pastor has the capacity to hurt you. The elders have the capacity to let you down. The people in your small group could turn out to be a source of sorrow for you. And we could go down the line; every single person in this family of believers possesses the power to hurt your heart because you have made yourself vulnerable by investing yourself into the lives and relationships here. Now, before you start inching away a little bit from the people sitting around you, and begin to close up your heart, and look beady-eyed at me and everyone else, as a threat, you need to think a little deeper.

It’s not just them. You have the ability to offend, to wound, to damage and to discredit our message. You could say something today that is biting, and that burns like a hot knife into a soul that brings about great pain. People do that and we all know it, because we all have the scars to prove it. So, how do I protect myself from others? (or) How can I protect others from me? (or) How can I protect myself from myself?

I am so deliriously thrilled to be able to point all of us to the Savior. We, as a church family, have been intentionally singing many songs about Christ and His death for us because this truth more than any other sets us free to fully live as our Creator designed us, with eyes, and hands and heart wide open, in spite of the “risk”. Let me explain.

1) God’s view of my (your) life is the final and most important authority.

Whatever God says about me is, in reality, the most important thing. God, and his character (that is, his glory), is the reference point. You must begin with God. God is the standard because He is God – plain and simple. Because God is the standard, the standard does not change. However, we usually look to ourselves as the standard and assume that our personal perspective is objective. Here is how we tend to think:

You have a problem with your temper, but you have a co-worker who has a problem with drinking. In comparison, your temper does not seem too bad. Your co-worker, though, has a cousin who is addicted to crack, so, he thinks his drinking isn’t quite so bad. The crack addict is disgusted to find out that his source for drugs is selling to kids. But, the dealer cannot fathom this guy who murdered and dismembered his wife. But, this guy

thinks he has been a good dad and he has never abused his kids like other people, and besides, he only killed one, not 6 million, like Hitler. Hitler's 6 million is light compared to Pol Pot's 30 million and Pol Pot's 30 million is at least 20 million less than the 50 million that died under Stalin's reign of terror. We can all find someone who, from our vantage point makes us look pretty good by comparison. So, it is easy to conclude – "I got issues – but I ain't got issues like they got issues!" (bad grammar, but good description) However, you must begin with God. God is the standard because He is God – plain and simple. Because God is the standard, the standard does not change.

2) The gospel of God speaks the truth to my heart about the reality of my condition before God.

I was made by God for the enjoyment and pleasure of God and to enjoy and be satisfied by God. I rebelled against that. I sinned and went my own way. Though made in the image of God to reflect Him, I sinned against God and broke His law.

What God says is that I am a first rate sinner and I need an infinite amount of grace, just like every other sinner. And apart from the grace of God, my heart has all of the ingredients necessary to sin as atrociously and shockingly as any man from this or any other county that has been on the news in recent days. As a first rate sinner, who has offended a holy and righteous God, I deserve His justice. I deserve the just punishment for my sin. But I can't handle that punishment. It is too great for me. Because I have sinned against an infinitely holy God, I am deserving of an infinite punishment. Left to myself, I have no hope.

3) The gospel of God speaks the truth about the infinite grace of Jesus Christ.

Christ, who never sinned and therefore did nothing to deserve death, came to this earth for the express purpose of offering Himself up in death in order to pay the penalty for my sin. He did this, not because I have anything that He needs. He did this, not because I can offer Him something that He is deficient in. He, for His own purposes, chose to provide the means by which I can be forgiven and declared righteous in the eyes of God. When Christ died on the cross, He did it all. His death satisfied the justice of God and provided an infinite righteousness for me. So, that, when I, by His grace alone, put my faith alone in Christ alone, I am credited with the righteousness of Christ and born into the family of God. Once an alien, an outcast and orphan, I am adopted, embraced, accepted and made as a child of God, joint heir with King Jesus and part of His bride. And I can't take credit for a stinking thing.

4) The cross eliminates any basis and need for boasting.

Because God knows the truth about me and in spite of that provided the means for me to be forgiven and declared righteous in Christ, I am free to speak the truth about myself. Because of what God, the Mighty Maker has decreed about my life, I do not have to pretend to be something in front of you that I am not. In fact, of all places, the church is called to be a family where pretence, airs, pretending and snobbishness are banned. You

can leave your attitude on 12 mile road, because all ground is level at the foot of the cross.

So, when someone asks me, “how am I?” What is the most theologically accurate answer? “Better than I deserve.” All of this is made possible because of the cross. I am free to speak the truth to God about my sin because I have a Savior and I don’t have anything to prove to God, He already knows the whole truth, including all of the secret thoughts that no one else knows. He knows them fully and still sent His Son to die for me. Because of the cross, I am free to admit to you that I am a first rate sinner. I do not have to live with the pressure of proving anything to you. I cannot be your Savior. You cannot be my Savior. I cannot be your hero; I have broken wings and feet of clay. But Christ is your hero. Christ is your Savior. I don’t have to depend on you for my happiness, Christ has provided for that. Christ and his cross have eliminated my need to attempt to impress you, or to attempt to prevent you from knowing the truth about what hurts me on the inside.

But, what I can do, and what I desire to do, is in this broken, and imperfect condition, I and you can point each other to the One who was broken, but now resurrected, who even though he was sinless took upon Himself our sins and died a death that paid in full the penalty for those sins and has provided for us all that we need to live this life with a joy and a security that can never, never, never be taken away.

This is what I mean about the cross being the watermark of 1 Corinthians 13. The church has been entrusted by God, with this infinite treasure called the gospel. Everything that we do, particularly our relationships with each other are to smell like the cross. But, the church at Corinth and many, many of our church experiences have been the exact opposite. Churches are notorious for pompousness and plastic piety and nauseating arrogance. Ceremonies and structure, titles and traditions, robes and tenure can easily become disguises that replace authentic Christianity. That is what is confusing and potentially so harmful. When you are dealing with the gospel, you are dealing with the most important truth that any human can ever come to grips with. But, if you deal with the gospel of truth and grace in an atmosphere of pride and pretending, then the very attitudes undermine the very message because they do not fit. Every group larger than 2 people has a problem with cliques, when we lose sight of the cross. You don’t measure up to my standard, what standard is that? Certain clothes, certain race, certain make of car, certain marital status, certain job-type, certain athletic ability, certain appearance, certain history, what? When we treat people like that, we do not smell like the cross, we smell like Wall Street, or Rodeo Drive, or Madison Avenue. The church, and our relationships here have to be different, but it has to be a difference that comes from the inside.

In order to become a follower of Christ, I had to stop trusting in myself and anything religious or moral that I could do in order to earn God’s favor, and instead, trust only in Christ. I had to cry out to God to empty myself of my self-effort, self-righteousness and self-centeredness in order to be filled with Christ. That is exactly how I am supposed to live. That is what it means to love. Love, is treating people in light of the reality of the

gospel in my life and for their lives. Therefore, the cross has set me and you free to treat each other with truth even while we breathe grace.

Notice these descriptions of what love is NOT!

1. **Love does not boast** (brag).

Love is not concerned about using the right phrases or crafting the right appearance or possessing the right symbols in hopes of making others respect you. People are focused on the external issues in an effort to cover up their own emptiness. They try to make themselves look really good. That is the problem with boasting. It always distorts reality.

What do we have to brag about? If I am thinking of the cross, I realize that I have nothing to prove. If you choose to love someone the way God enables you to, then your love is not going to focus on yourself. Now, this is a double-edged sword. Bragging, is the effort to draw undue attention to one's self since he is afraid of otherwise, not being noticed. Fueling that desire is the belief that if I am really someone of importance I am going to be noticed and if I don't toot my own horn here a little bit, I may not be noticed, and I don't think I could handle that. That desire reflects a lack of security in Christ. I don't have to be noticed in order to be secure because my security does not come from the empty applause of people. On the other hand, be secure in the grace of Christ that has saved you. When you do something that people appreciate and they express that, whether by applause or some other way, accept it with gladness, not because you are empty and you need it in order to be fulfilled but because by God's grace he used you to be a blessing. That is great! Love does not boast because it is full of Christ and is satisfied in the reality of the cross and does not look to artificial and temporal things to attempt to fill up a heart that only Christ can fill.

2. **Love is not proud** (not inflated with its own importance).

Napoleon Bonaparte thought that moral laws, strong families and public worship were good for everyone else. Regarding himself he said, "I am not a man like other men. The laws of morality do not apply to me."

Missionary William Carey was one of the most gifted linguists that I have ever read about. His initial occupation was that of a cobbler, a man who repaired shoes, but before he died he had not only opened India up to the gospel, but he had helped translate parts of the Bible into 34 Indian languages. He was at a dinner in India one night where someone within the caste system who was extremely conscientious of class distinction, with much disdain said to Carey, "I suppose, Mr. Carey, you once worked as a shoemaker." The snob intended to humiliate this Mr. Carey, who simply replied, "No, your lordship, not a shoe-maker, only a cobbler." He did not even claim to make the shoes, just fix them.

Love does not attempt to grasp things that it really does not possess in order to make people think that it is something that it really is not. What makes pride so wicked is that

it is a claim to be something that we have no right to claim. Pride attempts to use a position to step on people in order to gain more power. It sucks power from all around it, because there is nothing authentic on the inside.

I have watched empty parents attempt to suck power and identity from their children in a sad and pathetic attempt to make themselves feel important. The child's performance in the game or in the class room or on the job has very little to do with the child, but almost everything to do with the parent who wants to exploit the child's accomplishments in order to prove to their friends that because their child is successful, they must be a very important person. That child resents the fact that he or she is being used by the parent who has a very shallow life and empty heart. That kid cannot be your Savior. Only Jesus can fill that empty heart. When you demand your child to be the solution for your happiness, you are teaching that child to manipulate, not love.

When you realize that you are infinitely and eternally loved by Christ, your happiness and your true identity is secure. Your kid does not have to be the most talented, the most gifted, or whatever. You do not have to go on the greatest vacations, or eat the most amazing foods. You do not have to tell others that if they don't do what you want, then they are really going to let you down and make you sad.

**3. Love is not rude** (does not behave with ill-mannered impropriety).

“Well, at least everyone knows what I think. You know me; I don't keep my opinions to myself.” People say that as if it is a badge of honor. Rude people are empty people. Rudeness is using words or actions to trample others. You think that it is more important that you be heard, than you listen. The assumption is, I can't learn from you. You have nothing for me. If I think that you have nothing to offer to me, then I can be rude to you. It has been said, that the best way to spot a gentleman, is not by the way he speaks to a king, but by the way he treats his servants.

Conclusion:

**1. A person full of himself is an empty person.**

When you see a sailboat on the lake, you are not seeing everything. Underneath is the keel, which is the part of the hull that goes down into the water. This part is weighted with ballast at the center to keep the boat from capsizing. The proper position of ballast in any boat is critical to its survival. A person who is full of himself is like a boat without ballast. There is no centering and so they are desperate for attention and will do silly, sometimes stupid and many times sinful things in order to get the illusion of affection. Why are some girls so desperate to get attention that they will dress, or talk in a way that makes it so clear that they have no respect for themselves? Why do some guys try to impress you with all of their knowledge of sports trivia, or even theology in an effort to gain your affection? They have no personal ballast in Christ.

Empty people consistently look at every situation by asking, “What can I get for my image, for my ego, for my applause, for my comfort, out of this situation?” How can you contribute to what I want out of life? And, if in their view, you can’t contribute, then they have no further need of you. You know what it is like. You only hear from certain people when they need something from you.

But the reason why I am so sensitive to that from others is because that is the tendency of my own heart. And I am sure that I treat people like that too, when I am not seeing life through the lens of the cross.

## **2. Only a person full of Christ is truly full.**

Love does not brag, even when you want to tell the world all about what you have accomplished because the person who is full of Christ is truly full and does not look to the approvals and applause of others to fill themselves up. Love does feel the need to improve its image in the eyes of others, because it is already secure in Christ.

Love is not arrogant, even when you think you are right and others are wrong. Love is patient and can handle a difference of opinion without resorting to being overbearing or domineering.

Love does not draw attention to itself by behaving in an obnoxious manner. Interrupting conversations, and demanding to be noticed – right now, is evidence that you are an empty person, and you think that being noticed or treated kingly is what you have to have in order to feed your sense of self-importance. The truth is, the cross is all the ballast we need.