

On Mission Together: Loving One Another Part 3

1 Cor. 13:1-13

We are in a series called On Mission Together and for the past 3 weeks we've been looking at how important it is for followers of Jesus to love one another. The NT uses some pretty extreme language to underline the priority that God places on believer's loving one another. Loving one another 1) evidences that we are born of God, 2) is the only new commandment Jesus gave his disciples, 3) is how the world will be able to identify us as followers of Christ, and 4) without love, our spirituality – no matter how intense – is worthless. The NT language makes it clear that loving one another is more than important – it's a make it or break it component of true discipleship. That we love one another isn't optional for the follower of Jesus!

1 Cor. 13 contains one of the most beautiful descriptions of love in all the Bible (and in all of literature). Paul lists eight positives – what love is and what it does - and eight negatives – what love isn't and what it doesn't do. Last week we saw that love is patient and kind – it treats others well. This morning time does not permit to go through each of the remaining 13 verbs Paul uses to outline love, but I want to give five categories that will help give us handles on what love is and what it means for us to love one another. Then I want to close with some brief points about how we can grow in loving one another.

1. Love doesn't see ourselves as big and others as small

Love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude... (vs. 4)

Pride makes us seem big and others seem small in our eyes. Paul lists four symptoms of pride that all stem from an inflated view of self.

Love doesn't envy. Envy is the desire to have what someone else has. It resents the prosperity of others and wants that prosperity for itself. There is a German proverb that says, *envy eats nothing but its own heart*. The person who envies not only wants what someone has – it wants that other person *not* to have it. Envy is poisonously self-centered.

Love doesn't boast. The Greek word for *boast* means to be pretentious or pompous. Boasting is trying to puff ourselves up in other people's eyes by highlighting our (real or imagined) greatness and importance. There's a fish called the pufferfish that, when it feels threatened, puffs itself up to make it appear that it is several times bigger than it really is. Boasting is like that: it's trying to puff ourselves up so that we appear bigger and better and more important than we really are.

Love is not arrogant... Arrogance is the mindset that thinks I am superior than others - my thoughts are better than everyone else's, my opinions are better, my achievements are greater, and so on. Arrogance elevates us (in our own eyes) over others. And so arrogance naturally leads to to the next symptom of pride on Paul's list:

...or rude... Being considerate of others is an expression of seeing them as important, but arrogance sees ourselves as big and others as small (or unimportant), so an arrogant person is rarely a considerate person. To be habitually rude to people is evidence that we don't think they are very important and that it's not important to treat them with courtesy.

Pride is a love-killer because it sees ourselves as big and others as small. Love sees things very differently - it is other's minded. It elevates the importance of others and deflates our sense of self-importance.

2. Love doesn't control or manipulate to get its own way

It does not insist on its own way...vs. 5

This is a powerful statement. Love doesn't need to get what it wants. It doesn't insist on its own way. When someone has control issues what they're doing is insisting on their own way by doing everything they can to control people and situations to get the outcome they want. It's not loving. Have you ever met someone who is manipulative? Manipulative people try to control others without it being obvious that they're trying to control them. There are people who are really good at manipulating. They know how to test a relationship to find out if someone is an easy candidate to be manipulated and often when they find someone who isn't vulnerable to their manipulations they move on until they find someone who is. It is not healthy and it's not loving.

There are actually many techniques that people use to manipulate others. It's sad, and many manipulators may not be consciously aware of it, but there are actually different techniques manipulators use to coerce people into doing what they want them to do.

There's the foot in the door approach – NPR did a study on manipulation and this is one of the techniques they discovered to be effective: you ask for a small and easy to fulfill request and then ask for something larger. For instance a panhandler asks you for the time and when you tell him, he then asks you for a buck. By getting you to say yes to a small request he has primed the pump for you to say yes to a larger request.

There's the guilt approach – trying to someone feel guilty if they don't do what you want them to do.

Closely related to the guilt approach is the "pity me" approach – this is the approach of highlighting your needs in order to get the other person to do what you want out of pity for you. Often the pity me approach ennobles itself by wearing the martyr's cloak: *don't worry about me, I'll manage somehow by myself. You go ahead and have a good time. Don't give me a second thought.*

There's the threat/reward approach - Threaten them with an undesired result if they don't do what you want and promise them a desired result if they do what you want.

There's the "hold a favor over your head" approach – they do something to help you out and then hold it over your head whenever they want you to do something for them.

There's the flattery approach – we used to call this "buttering someone up". By flattering them you make them feel indebted to you and more likely to do what you want them to do.

When we lay it out in cold, florescent lighting, we can see that manipulation isn't healthy for relationships but when we're in the middle of it, it may not be so obvious to us. Listen, if you are someone who manipulates or someone who is vulnerable to be manipulated, here's what you need to know and believe: love doesn't manipulate. It just doesn't. I mentioned last week that relationships often take detours and rarely go in a straight line, but one of the detours love doesn't take is the detour of manipulation. In that love draws a straight line. Love is straight with people – it doesn't play mind games. If you want someone to do something, you come right out and ask them, and then you respect their answer. Loving them means you want what's best for them, not just what you want. You can request, you can urge, you can appeal, but if you love you won't manipulate. Love can require and even command to the extent that it has authority to do so. Parents don't have to appeal to their young children to pick up their rooms – they can command. But as those children become young adults, the commanding diminishes and the appeal and influence increases. Love seeks to influence by example and appeal and instruction, not control by using strong arm tactics.

If you're being manipulated by someone, you need to realize that the most loving thing you can do for the manipulator is to refuse to allow yourself to be manipulated. If you are someone who manipulates, I hope you can see that and realize that love calls you to change your ways. You need to repent of the unloving tendency of manipulation and ask God to help you to love others by *not* insisting on your own way.

3. Love isn't angry or bitter

I actually prefer the way the NIV translates this verse: *...it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.*

Love isn't easy to get angry. It's not irritable, it's not grumpy. To the degree that we "blow up" at people, or act sullen and grouchy when we're not having the best day, we're not walking in love. By the way, we come up with neutral terms to sanitize our sin – terms like "grumpy" and "grouchy". It's easier to say, "I'm a little grouchy today" than it is to say, "I'm a little angry today" or "I'm a little irritable today". Grouchy actually sounds kind of cute. It sounds like "couchy". And who doesn't love "Oscar the Grouch"? Grumpy is one of the seven dwarfs. But just because we give it a cute label doesn't mean the attitude is cute.

Love doesn't keep a list of offenses – I like the NIV – it keeps NO record of wrongs. The ESV internalizes that: love is not resentful. In other words, love doesn't keep an internal list of wrongs that it pulls out every so often in order to stoke up feelings of resentment. Love doesn't lead us to become bitter.

4. Love has integrity

[Love] does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. (vs. 6)

There are many ways this can apply to our relationships, but what I want to highlight is that love doesn't mean we value relationships above integrity and truth. When people start to cover up for others, or get entangled in unethical behavior to protect someone from consequences, they are leaving the path of love. Love says the hard things to a straying or erring brother or sister. Love refuses to rejoice, or even look the other way at flagrant wrongdoing, but delights in the light of truth and integrity.

5. Love has a positive momentum even in the hard times

Paul then describes the positive attitude of love, but these positive attributes are deeper and stronger than just putting a happy, slappy face on everything. Love has a positive momentum that doesn't disappear at the first sign of trouble. In fact, each of these positive attributes imply a challenge to this positive momentum:

Love bears all things – it bears up under the stresses and difficulties of relationships

...believes all things – it believes the best whenever possible. It doesn't ignore sin – it rejoices in the truth – but it doesn't rush to believe the worst either.

...hopes all things, endures all things... when things look bleak, it hopes. When the relationship goes through hard times, it endures.

There is a positive momentum to love. Again, it doesn't mean we ignore issues or problems, but there is a way of putting people in a negative light or interpreting things in the worst way possible, or being critical of people that is not motivated by love, and doesn't seek to redeem or restore or build up, and we need to be aware that that negative approach to people lurks in all of our hearts. When you're tempted to be critical, to look at people through judgmental eyes, to see them in a bad light or put them in a bad light, remember Jesus' example. It cuts our critical legs right out from under us.

If anyone had an excuse to be critical, it was Jesus. I mean, he was a perfect man surrounded by the fatally flawed. He was pure, righteous and holy, surrounded by unrighteous and sinful people. It would have been easy for Jesus to see every human he encountered through devastatingly judgmental eyes.

Yet, there is a positive momentum to his love for people: he was able to see and accentuate the positive. When Peter asked Jesus to depart from him for he knew he was a sinful man, Jesus said, don't be afraid, from now on you will catch men. When the woman caught in adultery was left alone with Jesus, Jesus told her he did not condemn her, and then called her to leave her life of sin. When the skeptic Nathaniel came to see this Messiah that his friend Philip was excited about, even though he doubted anything good could come from Nazareth, Jesus saw in him a man in whom there was no guile.

Conclusion:

As we close, we need to know that the Lord knows that none of us love perfectly. We all fail and fall in many ways. God holds out forgiveness for our failure, but He doesn't hold out excuses for us to continue in unloving ways. The power of the gospel includes the power to grow in Christ's love. One of the reasons that the NT presses us to love one another so strongly is that it is an evidence of God's power – His DNA – in us as His children. So the Holy Spirit is here to help you and me to grow in Christ's love for one another.

How do we grow in love for one another?

1. Accept God's love for you – we need to be convinced of God's love for us. Loving one another doesn't begin with us at all, it begins with God's love for us, and when we know His amazing love, it overflows from our hearts to others. Romans 5 says that "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." (Rom 5:5)
2. Ask! We need God's supernatural help to love one another, especially in the hard times. Pray and ask God to put His love in your heart. Pray and ask God to take away the fleshly, unloving responses and replace it with loving responses.
3. Allow God to teach us to love in the crucible of life. It's in the closest relationships that we learn to love as Christ loves. In our marriages, our families, our friends, our church. There's a reason why our closest relationships are the ones where there seems to be the most problems. Why we find it tempting to think our co-worker understands us more than our wife or our husband, or our friends in church appreciate us more than our own family, or the church down the road seems to much more loving than our own church. It's the proximity that reveals the problems – and that's the crucible where God wants to do His work in you. Don't run or you'll just take your problem to the next place – and miss out on what God has for you. Allow God's work to take place right where you are.
4. Act! Paul uses 15 verbs to describe love. Love always takes action. Don't wait till you feel love to act in a loving way towards someone – act loving towards others and the feelings will follow. As someone has said, it's easier to act your way into feeling than it is to feel your way into acting.

Jesus loves us so unconditionally that it frees us to love others unconditionally too. Believe that God can empower you to love others as Christ loves you. And, GCC, let's make it a part of our DNA to love one another. That's not just a good thing, it's a God thing. It's what God requires of us as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Let's pray.