

The More Excellent Way – Part 2
1 Corinthians 13:4b-7
May 30th, 2021

1. The absolute _____ of love (13:1-3)
2. Love is not _____ or arrogant (v. 4b)
3. Love is not _____ or self-seeking (v. 5a)
4. Love is not _____ or resentful (v. 5c)
5. Love does not rejoice in _____ (v. 6)
6. Love _____ through hardship (v. 7)
7. Who are we to love like this?
 - a. Love one _____.
 - b. Love your _____.
 - c. Love your _____.

Questions for Discussion/Reflection on 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

1. Why do you think it is easier sometimes for Christians to focus on growing in knowledge rather than growing in love?
2. It seems that we are most tempted to jealousy toward people whose lives overlap with our own (i.e. an athlete might be jealous toward another athlete). What areas of your life are you most tempted to jealousy? How can we learn to rejoice in love (Rom. 12:15) with the successes of others rather than experience jealousy?
3. “Love is not rude/does not act unbecomingly” (v. 5) What are some common ways that people in your stage of life (work, school, church, etc.) act rudely? How are rudeness and selfishness connected?
4. In what way is Jesus the perfect example of love that is not self-seeking? (See Philippians 2:3-8)
5. When are you most easily provoked? (v. 5)
6. What are some common ways that Christians may feel pressured by society to “rejoice in unrighteousness” rather than “rejoice in the truth”? (v. 6)
7. What would be the opposite of the qualities of love described in v. 7?

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Big idea: Gifted ministry without loving behavior is worthless.

Intro

What makes for a true church? What are the marks of a true church?

During the time of the reformation in the 16th century, this was an important question. They settled on an answer that may surprise you. What distinguishes a church from a generic gathering of believers. Prior to the reformation, this wasn't really a question. Validity was tied to an unbroken succession of bishops in the office of the pope.

Lutheranism – 13 years after 95 theses, Philip Melancthon – true church distinguished by two things: gospel is rightly taught and sacraments rightly administered.

Scottish confession 30 years later by John Knox – 3 identifying marks – added church discipline to the Lutheran list – true preaching of the Word, the right administration of the sacraments, and last ecclesiastical discipline rightly administered.

Belgic confession – the true preaching of the gospel, the pure administration of the sacraments, and practices church discipline.

Anglican – pure word preached and sacraments administered

Calvin's institutes – preaching of word and administration of sacraments but then added discipline in a later letter – doctrine, discipline, and sacraments

9 Marks of a Healthy church – preaching the Word, Biblical theology, clarity on the gospel, necessity of conversion, evangelism, membership, discipline, discipleship, leadership

All of these are helpful ways of explaining what should characterize a church, but what we see in 1 Corinthians 11-14 as it talks about the gathering of the church, is that embedded in to each of the characteristics must be love.

It's not that love is a "4th essential mark" in addition to preaching, the sacraments, and discipline or a "10th mark of a healthy church."

Rather each of the other marks must be done in love. Preaching must be done in love, the sacraments and discipline practiced out of love. Love must fuel our evangelism and characterize our conversations about Christ with people. It's not enough that churches have functioning elders and deacons, but those leaders must lead in a loving way.

That's what brings us to the "love" chapter. We've talked about already how this is the classic wedding passage, broken out when someone wants some Bible at their wedding, and it sounds great! It's poetic, it's lofty, but often the couples committing themselves to a love like this don't quite know what they are in for. One pastor said he feels like he should ask the couple throughout the ceremony, "are you sure?" It's a high bar, isn't it?

1. The absolute ***necessity*** of love (13:1-3)
 - a. Five gifts described with hyperbole that cannot be usefully exercised without love
 - b. Love is evident in concrete, observable acts and attitudes that affect people around you.

- c. Chapter 13 shows that even if they get chapters 1-12 right – they stop fighting over leadership, they take sin seriously in the body, they avoid meals with idol worship, they use their spiritual gifts in a right and orderly way – apart from love it is all wasted.
2. Love is not **jealous** or arrogant (v. 4b)
- a. Three terms that go together in this verse – jealousy, bragging, and arrogant
 - i. Jealous people tear others down, boastful people build themselves up, loving people build others up.
 - b. Jealousy
 - i. The term more literally means to burn with envy – there is an intensity behind the phrase
 - ii. We tend to be jealous of people whose abilities have overlap with our own
 - 1. Think of Saul and David in the book of 1 Samuel
 - a. Saul was king which meant he was to be leading his people in war and receiving their praise, but David rose to success and people praised him – and Saul became jealous.
 - b. **1 Sam. 16:21-22** ²¹ Then David came to Saul and attended him; and Saul loved him greatly, and he became his armor bearer. ²² Saul sent to Jesse, saying, "Let David now stand before me, for he has found favor in my sight."
 - c. **1 Sam. 18:6-9** ⁶ It happened as they were coming, when David returned from killing the Philistine, that the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with joy and with musical instruments. ⁷ The women sang as they played, and said, "Saul has slain his thousands, And David his ten thousands." ⁸ Then Saul became very angry, for this saying displeased him; and he said, "They have ascribed to David ten thousands, but to me they have ascribed thousands. Now what more can he have but the kingdom?" ⁹ Saul looked at David with suspicion from that day on.
 - 2. You may not be jealous of a pro athlete, but you might be jealous of the guy who is a little better athlete than you on the church softball team
 - 3. A mom might be jealous of the mother whose kids are better behaved or whose life seems more put together
 - 4. A spouse that is a more gifted teacher than you are
 - 5. A sibling who is better than you are in some area – grades, athletics, popularity
 - 6. A musician who is more skilled
 - 7. A friend with a more prosperous business or job
 - iii. Wayne Mack tells the story of Gustav Mahler, a famous composer, who married a woman who was also a very skilled composer. After they got married Gustav told his wife, Alma, that the only music that will be played in the home will be his music, not hers. That was his area so he was jealous of her strength in it.
 - iv. What is the opposite of jealousy or envy? If we are to NOT be jealous, what are we to be instead?
 - 1. Contentment and satisfaction with what we have, celebrating with others
 - 2. **Romans 12:15** Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.

- a. This is the opposite action of jealousy and envy – rejoicing with someone else who is rejoicing – being happy for them – finding joy in their success
 - c. Does not brag and is not arrogant
 - i. We could translate it as boasting or bragging – it means to parade your accomplishments before others. Bragging may be an attempt to make others jealous.
 - 1. The solution is not a false humility that pretends to be worse than you are. The solution is to turn outward and upward – outward to others and upward to God.
 - 2. **Jeremiah 9:23-24** Thus says the LORD, "Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; ²⁴ but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things," declares the LORD.
 - ii. To be arrogant is the attitude of conceit or pride that comes out in boasting or feels threatened with jealousy.
 - iii. A question to ask yourself is, "who is most often the hero of the stories I tell?" If the answer is, "me" then whether good intentioned or not you may be guilty of this.
 - d. The parallels between 1 Corinthians 12-13 and Romans 12 are interesting. They are the two great sections on spiritual gifts, but both are loaded with corrections on our attitudes and motives.
 - i. **Romans 12:3** For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you **not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think**; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.
 - ii. **Romans 12:10** **Be devoted to one another in brotherly love**; give preference to one another in honor;
 - iii. **Romans 12:13** practicing hospitality.
 - iv. **Romans 12:16** Be of the same mind toward one another; **do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly**. Do not be wise in your own estimation.
 - v. What does that tell us? In our strengths we can be prone to pride and unloving behavior.
- 3. Love is not **rude** or self-seeking (v. 5a)
 - a. May be translated as rude, unseemly, improperly
 - b. True of the Corinthians when they were eating without the other, more poor members of the congregation rather than waiting and eating communion together
 - c. What is rude in one setting may not be in another.
 - i. A loving person seeks to be aware of that and isn't bothered by complying with reasonable expectations of behavior – what clothing is appropriate, whether shoes are taken off inside the home, whether it is appropriate to be on the phone or not in a gathering.
 - ii. Several years ago I visited the home of a Japanese couple that we had gotten to know. They gave me a quick tour of the apartment and only at the end did he notice, somewhat embarrassingly, that I had left my shoes on, which was a major cultural faux pas.
 - d. Rudeness is related to self-seeking because it is a functional focus on self, unconcerned with how an action or word affects someone else.
 - i. The ESV translates this helpfully that love "does not insist on its own way."

- ii. I'm not sure that "narcissism" is a helpful term because it can be loaded with meaning based on a person's worldview about what makes people do the things they do, but at the heart of what is often called narcissism seems to be an exaggerated sense of their own importance, jealousy, and a focus on themselves.
 - 1. One description of a narcissist is that they see everything from a "how does this affect me?" perspective.
 - 2. Isn't that what we are seeing critiqued as unloving here?
- 4. Love is not ***provoked*** or resentful (v. 5c)
 - a. Both of these terms have to do with anger and offense.
 - b. Love is not easily provoked – not easily irritated.
 - i. We already saw in v. 4 that love is patient, meaning it is slow to anger.
 - ii. This term would also warn against a quick fuse that is easily ignited. Love does not require others around you to walk on egg shells for fear of igniting your anger.
 - iii. Anger is a whole-personed, active response of negative moral judgement against perceived evil. (Robert Jones?)
 - 1. Someone easily provoked, easily angered may be responding to a wrong but rather than showing patience or helping the person, they just get angry and attack or withdraw
 - iv. I look back with remorse on times I have allowed a quick word spoken in anger or irritation, I imagine you do also.
 - c. "does not take into account a wrong suffered" is a good way to translate the phrase that has to do with accounting, keeping a financial record for a business.
 - i. Love does not keep this detailed record of faults that ought to have been forgiven. To do so would be to nurse bitterness and become resentful.
 - ii. This does not justify naivety in which we can't talk with someone about a pattern of behavior because we have forgiven an offense. Rather it warns about record keeping rather than overlooking and letting offenses build.
 - iii. It's been described like adding stones to a backpack that you're lugging around or like an argument time machine. Maybe you've been in this time machine. You're arguing about one thing (your inability to put your dirty clothes in the hamper) and then conversation suddenly jumps to time four years ago that you forgot to deposit a check and the checking account ran out of money. "Wait? I thought we were talking about dirty clothes?" Conflicts escalate because they don't remain on the issue.
- 5. Love does not rejoice in ***sin*** (v. 6)
 - a. It's not the contrast we would expect
 - i. We would expect "does not rejoice in unrighteousness" to be followed with "but rejoicing in righteousness/good" or falsehood contrasted with truth.
 - ii. And yet righteousness and truth are connected just as sin and falsehood are connected.
 - iii. The Lord through Isaiah warns
 - 1. **Isaiah 5:20** Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; Who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!

- b. Wayne Mack in his book on 1 Corinthians 13, *Maximum Impact*, gives several practical examples of this:
 - i. Love doesn't enjoy doing evil to others –
 - 1. Putting others down, mocking and belittling them
 - ii. Love doesn't rejoice in encouraging others to do what is wrong.
 - iii. Love doesn't enjoy watching others do evil.
 - 1. It doesn't find delight in reading about a new scandal that someone is involved in.
 - iv. Love doesn't find joy in exposing the sins and faults of others.
 - v. Love is saddened by the violence, cruelty, brutality, and crime that are prevalent in the world and displayed in movies.
 - vi. Love avoids being abusive in any way, whether it is physical, verbal, or emotional.
- c. If we love someone we should not be glad that they are involved in something that God says is wrong. We should not rejoice in that.
 - i. Why? Ultimately, it's not good for them.
 - ii. Rather we should rejoice in that which is good, true, and beautiful according to God's design.
 - iii. Rather than the false idea that someone may have that disobeying God is going to be better for them, we should rejoice in what is true about God and people.
- d. "Gradually, the unthinkable becomes tolerable, then acceptable, ... then praised." Joni Eareckson Tada
 - i. We've seen this with sexual ethics in a generation.
 - ii. As it's been said, we leaned over to help the world and we fell in.
- e. ~~"What a man rejoices in is a fair test of his character." Graham Scroggie~~

6. Love **endures** through hardship (v. 7)

- a. We live in an era of thin relationships –
 - i. We are quick to cancel a family member for an offense
 - ii. We are quick to leave a church over minor differences or conflicts
 - iii. We are quick to eject from marriages rather than do the hard work of change
- b. This description of love is good for us to hear and personalize.
- c. The terms are related in a chiasm
 - i. Love bears all things
 - 1. Believes all things
 - 2. Hopes all things
 - ii. Endures all things
- d. Love is not naively gullible but it does generously believe the best about others.
 - i. When assigning motives, do we believe the best possible motives or assume the worst? Love would assume the best until shown otherwise.
 - ii. But...

1. **Proverbs 14:15** The naive believes everything, But the sensible man considers his steps.
 - iii. Wayne Mack, "If we are loving people, we will not allow suspicion, cynicism, or a judgmental, critical attitude to become a dominant feature in our relationships."
 - iv. Jared Wilson - Walking by the Spirit and not with the Enemy means, when you ponder the flaws and failings of others, you advocate for them in your imagination rather than accuse.
 - e. Love wants others to flourish – it hopes all things
 - f. Love endures when convenience would say to give up.
 - i. If we're only committed to someone to someone when its easy and pleasant, what are we really committed to? Our own happiness.
 - ii. Several examples in our own body of people whose spouses of long term, chronic, significant health challenges. As they serve, love, rearrange their lives and homes, they are modeling this kind of love.
7. Who are we to love like this?
- a. Love one **another**.
 - i. **John 13:35** "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."
 - ii. Our interactions with each other should be marked by these expressions of love, yet often we are less-loving to the people closest to us.
 - iii. Husband, love your wife
 1. Be patient, kind, not jealous or proud, not self-seeking, not easily provoked or irritated
 - b. Love your **neighbor**.
 - i. **Matthew 22:39** "The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.'
 - ii. In Luke's account, someone follows up with a question to wiggle out of the implications
 1. **Luke 10:29** But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"
 2. Jesus responds with the parable of the Good Samaritan.
 - c. Love your **enemies**.
 - i. **Luke 6:27-28** "But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.
 - ii. **Luke 6:32-33** "If you love those who love you, what credit is *that* to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³ "If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is *that* to you? For even sinners do the same.
 - iii. There is no way to wiggle out of the command to love. 1 Corinthians 13 leaves us without excuse on what exactly that love should look like as well.
 - iv. Friends, this is one of the beautiful truths of Christianity that transforms a culture for good.
 1. In this generation, the attack against Christianity is often not that it is untrue, it's that it is harmful. And yet can't we not see the benefit to society if Christians are committed to loving like this – patient, kind, not self-seeking, enduring – towards their enemies as well as their friends?

- v. And this is the way Jesus loved us – His enemies now made His friends.
 - 1. He was patient and kind. He was not self-seeking. He did not hold a grudge. In fact He said while even on the cross, “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they’re doing.” He endured rather than gave up. It’s His love that truly never ends. It’s the gospel that motivates our love.



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