

1Corinthians 13:6-8a "Love Always..... Never Fails"

1CO 13:6-7 "Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. 8 Love never fails...."

This morning we close this section on Paul's defining of love. And though Paul had no intention of making this an exhaustive list of what love is and is not, it is sufficient in pointing out to these Corinthian believers and us how the love of God is to demonstrate itself in our lives.

Remember, God is love. And in our desire to be more like Christ, who is God, we are to find ourselves walking in the Spirit and truth of God's word in such a way, as to show the world that we are new creatures in Christ, in the power of the Spirit, thus bringing all glory to the God who gave us this new life in Christ.

Without this agape love of God being practiced in our lives we are so much brass just making noise. Without this love of God we can know all things, do all things and be all things, and yet, as Paul points out we are nothing, unless this love of Christ is shed abroad in our hearts to the degree that the world sees Christ in us as we love Him above all and our neighbors as ourselves.

1CO 13:4-5 "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs."

And as we come to our text this morning Paul continues with this theme of what love is not and what it is.

1CO 13:6 "Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth."

It's hard to imagine how anyone, least of all a Christian, could delight in evil. The Greek word for delight could be translated, to rejoice, be glad. Now the idea here is not that the person delights in doing the evil, or unrighteousness, as the NASB puts it, but delights in hearing of evil coming upon others, or delights in evil which others are doing.

As one commentator puts it, it's much easier to weep with those who weep, than to rejoice with those who rejoice, (William Barclay). How easy we might be tempted to hear of a misfortune

of someone we know who we really don't like, and then delight in that as we think to ourselves, they got what they deserve.

Over the years I've encountered a lot of people who have called themselves Christians and yet have harmed me and my family in things they did or said to others. I dare say that 99% of those people have ended up dishonoring Christ with their lives as they have tried to convince others that what they did was righteous. And I hear about them periodically as it is quite apparent that evil has befallen them as they chose to swerve into evil's path.

Early on there was the temptation to delight in that to the degree that I could say, "see I told you so. You were not in the right and now you're reaping what you sowed." Paul tells us that love does not delight in evil.

But over the years I've taken the attitude where I grieve for them and pray that the Lord would open their eyes and that they would choose the path that would bring glory to God. If these people are true Christians then we're still part of the same family. And if they're not Christians we need to pray for their salvation. Either way, love looks to their best and desires that in their lives.

But there's another sense in which we can delight in evil or unrighteousness, and that is vicariously. What I mean by this is that though we might not actually engage in a particular type of evil, when we see others do it, in a sense, we condone it or glory in it.

John MacArthur points out that "one of the most common forms of [delighting in evil or] rejoicing in sin is gossip. Gossips would do little harm if they did not have so many eager listeners. This sin, which many Christians treat lightly, is wicked not only because it uncaringly reveals the weaknesses and sins of others, and therefore hurts rather than helps, but because the heart of gossip is rejoicing in evil. Gossip that is true is still gossip. A person is never helped by spreading the news of his sin."

Another form of delighting in evil is taking the world's attitude toward sin. The world today has turned good into bad and bad into good. Forty years ago, for example, it was not vogue to bring homosexuality out of the closet. Part of that was cultural, but for Christians it had more to do with believing that the word of God condemned such behavior.

Now, I don't mean to suggest that the way some Christians behave toward homosexuals is righteous, as they treat such people badly. The homosexual is in need of salvation every bit as much as the heterosexual, or any other type of sinner in this world.

But years ago homosexuality was viewed as abhorrent because of the very nature of the sin. If you spoke out against such behavior you were not usually seen as being out of the mainstream. And yet, today, anyone who speaks out against such behavior is viewed as a homophobe or a bigot, or a religious fanatic, who is not in touch with reality.

What changed? Certainly not the word of God. What changed was the culture, and along with it a segment of the "church", and its view on such evil practices, to the degree that homosexuality is now seen as good. In fact, in most of our public schools there are sensitivity classes that encourage young students not to view such behavior as a bad thing.

For those leaders in the church who actively promote such a view they would fall into this category Paul speaks of as, delighting in evil. And unfortunately, many of the mainline denominations have adopted a position where they condone homosexuality, homosexual marriages, homosexual pastors, and so on. But, the Lord has something to say about this.

ISA 5:20-21 "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. 21 Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight."

And yet, even in that warning we should not delight that any homosexual would be lost in their sin forever, nor should we delight that those who have turned light into darkness should receive God's wrath. That too would be unloving.

It doesn't mean that we don't glory in our God who is holy and righteous and justly administers His wrath against sinners, but for us to delight in their destruction is to put ourselves in the same position Jonah placed himself when he said to the Lord that he wasn't willing to reach out to such unlovely people as the Ninevites with God's grace.

Jonah felt that the Ninevites deserved God's displeasure because of their wickedness. And though he was willing to declare that God would destroy them if they didn't repent, he wasn't prepared for

them to actually repent and receive God's grace. And he told God so.

JON 4:1-2 "But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry [when they repented]. 2 He prayed to the LORD, "O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity."

Love does not delight in evil or the harm which may befall others. And yet, here Jonah was delighting in their possible destruction.

We certainly don't want to delight in calling good what the word of God calls bad, but we certainly don't want to delight in allowing those who call good to be bad to be eternally lost as we keep the message of hope from them. They may not repent, but at least we have loved them with the truth.

And this is a vital aspect of love as Paul describes here in our text. You see love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. The truth is that sinners can be saved if they will but repent of their sin and embrace their Savior Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sin.

But for the Christian to rejoice in the truth involves more than simply seeing the truth for someone else. And by the way, in our text, Paul is speaking of the truth of God's word. You see, all of us have a tendency to be selective in our acceptance of the truth of God's word at times in our lives.

And though we might agree that the word of God is most assuredly His truth for faith and practice, we will sometimes not deal with passages which may not agree with certain things we believe or certain practices we may be engaged in.

For example, how many times have we heard from certain segments of the church that we simply need to get along with everyone? We must be more tolerant of other people's beliefs.

What they're actually saying is that we must not rejoice in the truth of God's word. We must not take seriously that there is only one truth which can lead to the only one who can save eternally, Jesus Christ.

I've mentioned this on many other occasions but it's worth noting here again that the ecumenical movement today is a movement

which contends that it makes no difference what people believe as long as they are sincere and desire to promote peace.

But to say we love people and yet not give them the only truth which can save is not a true love, because love rejoices with the truth. And yet, there are those who claim to be Christians who use much of the same language evangelical Christians use, but mean something entirely different.

Dave Hunt in his February 2000 issue quotes from an interview Larry King had with a number of religious leaders including Robert Schuller, Gordon B. Hinckley, President of the Mormon church, and South African Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

It was a three-way phone hook up with Schuller in Bethlehem. Larry King asked Robert Schuller why he was in Bethlehem. He responds, "I'm very interested in ... doing what I can to bring peace on earth.... I've had a wonderful past few days ... several meetings --- three in his home -- with the leading Muslim thinker and leader in the world, the Grand Mufti of the great mosque in Damascus....

KING: The idea of bringing religions together, right?

SCHULLER: Absolutely! I have seldom met with a man [with] whom I felt an immediate kinship of spirit and agreement of faith and philosophy quite like I have with the Grand Mufti of the faith.

Here Schuller suggests that their respective faiths are at least the same as to what they will accomplish, bringing people together with a common cause of mutual peace. Nothing about the shed blood of Christ since Muslims don't believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who came to take away the sin of the world.

The interview went on with Larry King addressing Tutu who was in Washington, where Tutu said that they were about to celebrate Midnight Mass and to celebrate the coming of God into the world where God is saying, "I love you ... I believe in you."

Larry King then turned to Mormon President Hinckley and asked, do you think, really, it's possible that Reverend Schuller's dream and what Archbishop Tutu just said can happen ... all peoples, all religions ... can come together?

HINCKLEY: I would hope so ... things are better than they've ever been ... there's a new ... acceptance of other religions. We must recognize that all ... are sons and daughters of God ... brothers and sisters ... all of one great family, the family of God.

Now keep in mind this is the Mormon President who believes that God the Father was once a human being and evolved into a god who then had sexual relations with women and birthed other men who evolved into gods, including Jesus Christ, who also evolved into such a god and savior. The same process is promised to all Mormon men who will live righteous lives and will one day become gods of their own planet.

This is science fiction and yet we're told to embrace such religious beliefs as being in accord with the one true faith once delivered to the apostles. Schuller ends his conversation with Larry King by saying, "we religious leaders [must] begin to say, "I'm not trying to convert other religious people to my viewpoint" ...

This by the way, is the exact same line of thought which some "evangelical leaders" have adopted in the document entitled, "Evangelicals and Catholics Together." (ECT) People like Chuck Colson, James Dobson, A.W. Pink, who have signed this document whereby they agree, and in essence taking a vow, that they will not evangelize each other's people, and encourage all others do the same.

Being a former Roman Catholic I take offense to that, because the Roman Catholic way of salvation is not found in the Bible. And so, they don't want me loving Roman Catholics with the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ? Absolutely. And the reason is they believe that each other's faith is essentially the same. And even if it is not the same, who am I to impose my beliefs on you?

Love rejoices with the truth. "Does it make any difference if people don't agree with us about doctrine? [You better believe it.] What they believe affects their souls, their eternal destinies, and their representation of God's will, and therefore should be of the highest concern to us. It also effects the souls and destinies of those whom they influence." (MacArthur)

But this truth isn't just for those outside of us. The truth is for us. In fact, for the Christian to truly love, as we rejoice in the truth of God's word, we must be teachable. If the truth of God's word contradicts our preconceived ideas then we need to be willing to embrace the truth and let go of error.

Also, to say that we love the word of God and then not walk in it is to show that we are not rejoicing in the truth. That is nothing short of what James addresses when he says, "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." JAM 1:22

2 John 1:6 ⁶ And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, that you should walk in it.

Paul then moves to what true agape love will do in the life of a believer.

1CO 13:7-8 "It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. 8 Love never fails...."

The NASB puts it, "[love] bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

The idea here is that "love can cover anything in the sense that it will never drag into the light of the day the faults and mistakes of others. It would rather set about quietly mending things than publicly displaying and rebuking them. More likely it means that love can bear any insult, any injury, any disappointment. It describes the kind of love that was in the heart of Jesus Himself." (William Barclay)

The reason the NIV uses the phrase "[love] always protects" is because the Greek word means to cover or support. And so it conveys the idea that though we may find ourselves on the receiving end of someone's sin we are not quick to lash out and expose it to the world. Love would rather protect them from such things if at all possible while trying to correct the problem.

Love always trusts, or love believes all things. This is not being naive or simplistic or lacking wisdom and discernment, but rather it gives the benefit of the doubt when there's no reason not to believe what is being said.

It's so easy to be cynical in this world today, not wanting to believe anything anybody says. That kind of attitude leads to mistrust, and in its ultimate expression, paranoia of anyone who might desire our best, always leery of anyone who only wants to love us.

But love, always trusting, goes way beyond simply the way we may view other people, including other Christians. It includes trust and believing all that God says to us from His word. Not to trust God is not to love God in a particular situation because He can be trusted in all things.

DEU 32:4 "He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he."

1CO 1:9 "God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful."

2TH 3:3 "But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one."

What's not to trust? What's not to believe in? Only when our God becomes smaller than our circumstances do we not trust and believe. Love believes all things that God says to us.

HEB 10:23 "Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful."

The hope we profess is the hope Paul speaks of in our text, because love always hopes. It never gives up. It never gives up on those who have rejected the Savior. It never gives up the hope that one day they may come to Christ. It never gives up that the Lord may in fact open their eyes. And so, we should never give up praying for them and hoping that they will see their hope in Christ.

Love always hopes in those who have gone astray coming back to the Lord. It never gives up on them, because God's grace is always available and His love for them is greater than any love we may have for them.

It never gives up hope even, as that father who let his prodigal son go out into the world and see for himself how cruel and unforgiving it can be, knowing that that very thing could be the impetus for bringing the prodigal back to the hope he was taught as a youngster.

Hope and faith and trust all go together as we seek our Lord who is love. This is what the writer of Hebrews meant when he wrote, "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." HEB 11:1

And the reason we can be certain is because of the One who promises. He is our hope and we can trust Him.

HEB 6:18-20 "... it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. 19 We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, 20 where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf."

And this is why love always perseveres, or endures all things, according to our text. This endurance is not a passive endurance where we just let things roll over us and like Eeore in the famed

Winnie the Pooh series we just say, 'oh well, I guess I'll just have to be abused one more time for the sake of God.'

No, the idea here is that this is a triumphant enduring as we go forth in the midst of trials and tribulations and conquer for our King. This was Paul's attitude. Here was a man who endured to the end because he loved the Lord. Love always perseveres.

PHI 3:8-10 "What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ - the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.
10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,..."

Paul's perseverance didn't take a fatalistic attitude. His had a victorious attitude because he knew the Victor in his perseverance.

ROM 8:35-39 "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? 36 As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

This is what should cause all of us in Christ to go forward. Nothing will be able to separate us from the love of Christ, and His love in us will always persevere. After all, who persevered to the end for us but Christ Himself? This is why love never fails.

How can it fail? If God is love then love will always be present and working in our lives because we know the One who is love and has loved us to the end, even the death on a cross.

It's like someone saying, "I've tried Christianity but it just didn't work for me." "So, Christianity failed you?" "Yeah, I guess."

No, Christianity is Christ and He will never fail you. To try Christianity, to poke it with a stick, and hope something comes of it for us personally is not coming to embrace and know the person

of Christ Himself who promises I will never leave you or forsake you.

For the believer in Christ who reaches the point where they think God isn't interested in their life for whatever reason is not to understand the depth of love He has for us. He will never fail us, no matter how little we understand of our present situation.

SON 8:7 "Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot wash it away. If one were to give all the wealth of his house for love, it would be utterly scorned."

When we understand and embrace the love of God which has been extended to us in Christ then our spirits can rejoice in the truth that God is who He says He is, and does what He says He will do.

Love never fails. It never fails to love others and it never fails to trust God who gives us hope. Paul is telling these Corinthian believers that though they may have failed God, God will not fail them, which is precisely why He has sent them Paul with this very letter of exhortation and encouragement in the midst of their sin.

Granted, all of us fail God, but the word fail in our text means an ultimate failing. This was a word which was used of a flower or leaf that falls to the ground, withers and decays. True agape love cannot decay. In our lives it may be pushed to the side for the things of this world or our own desires, but if we have Christ we have a love that is everlasting.

This is the love that Christ wants all of His people to return to. Return to your first love He tells us. Why? Because it is a return to Christ who is love and who will never fail us. His desire for us is to persevere to the end faithfully representing Him in this world as we extend His kingdom through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

May we show the world this unfailing love as we live it before them and walk in the hope and the joy of our salvation and join Paul in saying, "I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection..."