

The Qualities of True Love, Part 2

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13:4d-5c

Code: 1865

First Corinthians chapter 13. We're back to that marvelous chapter in studying about the qualities of love. All of us have really been blessed in this study, myself especially blessed, and I know many of you have shared your blessing with me about the chapter. And it'll be continued this morning, I trust, as we get into verses 4 through 7 again, and we won't finish it all but we'll take a few steps beyond where we were last time.

The 13th chapter of 1 Corinthians is a portrait of love, and it comes out as a portrait of Jesus Christ because He is love. And I thought about the fact that here is a portrait of Christ, and the one thing that Jesus Christ wants is to have His church be a whole lot of reprints. He would like to reproduce His portrait in us. And so as we are looking at chapter 13, particularly verses 4 to 7, which discusses the qualities of love, and as we are seeing in it the portrait of Christ, He is looking back at us to see if that portrait is in fact reprinted and reproduced in us.

Now, what he's doing here, the apostle Paul, is pointing out to the Corinthians what love is. And as we saw last time, love is something you can't define philosophically, it is something you can't describe ideologically, it is something you can only describe as it functions. You don't define love, you describe it in action. And so all of these from verses 4 through 7 are verbs describing how love acts rather than adjectives describing love in the terms of a definition.

And here Paul is giving us what has to be biblically the greatest, most far-reaching and broad description of love that has ever been penned by the Holy Spirit's inspiration. It's tremendously and intensely practical. And even though it's a portrait of Jesus Christ, which gives it an exalted characteristic, it is at the same time a shoe-leather presentation of what Christ wants to reproduce in us in the manner of daily living.

Now, further we've understood – just as another preliminary thought – we've understood that Paul is presenting a portrait of love in contrast to the behavior of the Corinthians at the time. They are the opposite of this. They need to hear what love is because they do not have love, and all of this is presented in opposition to what they are – and, I'm afraid, to what we are, very often. And what Paul is saying is this: "Love is very patient" – beginning in verse 4 – he says it suffers long, but what he's saying is love is very patient but we are mostly impatient.

And then he says: “Love is very kind,” but we are frequently unkind. “Love knows no jealousy,” and he says that against the backdrop that we have to sort of admit we are jealous very often. “Love makes no parade,” but we are proud. “Love is never rude,” but we are often rude and ill-mannered. “Love is never selfish,” but we are mostly self-centered. “Love never gets irritated,” but we are short-tempered very often. “Love is never resentful,” but we seem to look for slights and wrongs and make note of it. “Love is never glad when someone else goes wrong,” but we often take a secret delight in the failure of someone else. “Love is gladdened by goodness and always slow to expose and eager to believe the best,” but we are often judgmental. Now, that’s really the approach that he’s taking. He’s giving all of the positives of love against the negatives of the Corinthian assembly, and the Corinthians are no better than we are in the flesh, and so we’ll see all of the opposites of these things in ourselves.

When man was created, he was created in the image of God, and love was his by possession. And all these characteristics belong to him. But when the fall came, it was lost. When the image of God was marred, love was marred and so man is loveless. Unregenerate man is loveless and the Christian man, functioning in the flesh, is loveless. And so Paul details out what love is to be. And as we saw in the second section of the chapter, which we call the perfections of love, from verses 4 to 7, we said there were 15 qualities of love in action and we’ve begun to look at them. Paul discussed in the first three verses the prominence of love, and now he discusses the perfections of love, and he lists these 15 qualities of love. They’re very practical, they’re very simple, they’re very straightforward, they’re very necessary for the believer.

Now, we considered the first three of them last time. Do you remember? Verse 4: “Love suffers long.” And we told you that literally it means loves patient with people. It doesn’t have a spirit of retaliation. It is absolutely and totally forgiving. Secondly, we remembered that love is kind and the literal word there is “useful.” Love is useful. In other words, love uses itself to help others. That’s kindness. Thirdly, we learned that love does not envy, love envies not. Envy, we said, is two things. Superficially, it is wishing to have what someone else has, and deeper, it is wishing that someone else didn’t have it. It comes literally from a word that means “to boil” and it is the inner boiling that comes when you want what others have to the point where you wish they didn’t have it.

And now we come, fourthly, to the next of the qualities of love and the one we want to start for this morning: “Love is not boastful.” It says: “Love vaunteth not itself.” Love is not boastful, is perhaps an easier way to understand that. You’ll notice it’s followed by another statement, “is not puffed up.” Now, those may seem like synonyms or parallels, but they aren’t. There’s a difference. The first statement represents the verbalizing of pride, the actual speech of pride, the actual action of pride. The second, the attitude of pride, conceit that is down inside. The word that says to us love is not boastful literally comes from a word that points to a root meaning “windbag.” Now the word is this – this is just the verbalizing, the windbag, the hot air that comes out of the mouth of a proud, conceited person.

Incidentally, it's a unique word in that it is used only in this verse in the entire New Testament. Love is not a windbag. Love is not always shooting of its mouth about its own accomplishments. Love does not speak an arrogant, baseless chatter that is designed to make me look better than you.

You know, being a braggart – and all of us have suffered from this. I mean I'm not speaking strictly out of a biblical context only, I've lived this in my life and pride is a problem to me. And this kind of problem of wanting to brag is as much a temptation to me, I'm sure, or maybe more than to other people. And so what I'm saying to you is coming from out of inside of me as well as the Scripture, but bragging is an effort, really, to make other people feel bad about what you are or have, so that it is the flipside of envy. Notice in verse 4 that he says, "Love envies not," then turns it around and love doesn't brag. Envy is wanting something that other people have and bragging is making people want what you have.

Now, you know how it works. Somebody is telling a marvelous story about some accomplishment and you're listening and dying until they get done so you can say, "Well, if you think that's something, let me tell you about what I did," and off you go. And a third party chimes in and by then you're very uninterested in the whole thing. But the idea of bragging is to make somebody else feel like you are superior to them. And believe me, that is the opposite of love because love says I want you to feel superior, I'll take the role of a servant. Love never brags. Love never blows its own horn. And let's face it, nobody really likes people like that because they are loveless people. You know, when you get somebody around you like that, you don't want to fellowship with them, you want to leave – or wish they did.

You know, the Corinthian problem at this point was that they were a bunch of spiritual showoffs. That's really true. They were totally inconsiderate of each other. They were constantly vying for public attention, everybody vying for the rulership. There were no – as far as we know, there's not one single mention in the entire Corinthian letter of an elder. They didn't even have any leaders. As far as we know, nobody had responsibility. Paul finally says: "Will you tell the prophets to do something about it?" We don't even know what kind of organization the thing had, but it was absolute chaos. Let me show you 14:26 of 1 Corinthians. "How is it then," he says, "when you guys meet together how is it, when you come together, everybody has a psalm, everybody has a doctrine, everybody has a tongue, everybody has a revelation, everybody has an interpretation?" What kind of chaos is that?

If this morning everybody who had the gift of teaching, all of a sudden all of you started teaching, just stood up, "I have a few points that I would like to make," "Well, I have a point that I would like to make," and then a few decided to sing a solo, we had four or five solos, somebody started in ecstatic gibberish, a few folks were shouting interpretations across toward the people speaking gibberish, and that would be typical of a Corinthian assembly. And an unbeliever would come in and think they were really nuts – and he would be right.

You know, we have a problem in the church because there are a lot of people who like to do a lot of things. Dr. Criswell had a great idea. He said he has so many people in his church that want to sing solos that there's only two ways to do it: have them all sing solos at the same time or, he said, what they decided was twice a year they have testimony night and everybody who wants to sing a solo lines up, and for one whole Sunday night they march them across, everyone sings one verse of whatever he wants and they just keep going, see. And he says it gets it all over with on one Sunday night.

But in the Corinthian church, it was a whole case of everybody was a spiritual showoff and everybody wanted to do his thing. And so there was bragging, constantly vying for public attention.

Well, you know, boasting really is geared to hurt other people. I don't know if you know that. But you think about it, you know it is. It is geared to wound somebody else. It is geared to make you stand out and make them look inferior. It's easy to do it. You know, you – I'm tempted sometimes and I have to be so careful about this because it's very easy sometimes when I go to talk to certain people, especially if they're pastors, you know, dear men of God who are faithfully serving the Lord, and someone comes along like myself or someone else to whom God has given the very unusual privilege of being able to pastor a church that's very large and very complex with many ministries, and these poor people feel already somewhat like a failure because there's so much propaganda around today that if it isn't big, it isn't good. And there's not a bigger lie in the world than that. I mean if it's – you know what success proves? Success – period. Nothing else.

There are ungodly things that are big. You know, you say, "Ooh, you've got four thousand people in the church." "Yeah, well I was at the Coliseum yesterday and there were 92,000 watching people run around with a piece of pig." Big doesn't mean anything. Doesn't mean anything at all.

But it's very easy sometimes when you're in a position like that, you get this temptation to make other people feel inferior to you. And we all have a point in our lives in which we can do that because almost everybody's got one thing at least they do fairly well. Whatever it is, you'll find it and let a few folks know. And you know what happens? That's nothing but blinding self-centeredness. It's the desire to make somebody else envy. It's a sin because it's a wrong thing to do, it's a double sin because it makes somebody else jealous and that's a sin. You've made your brother stumble.

There's no place for boasting. I remember when I was in my first year of seminary and I was trying to orient my life and I got a hold of a book by Trumbull on some principles of evangelism and he said – and I never forgot this. I only read it once and it stuck with me all through these years, but he said in that book, he said, "I made a vow to God that changed my life." And so I wanted to know what it was, so I read on and he said: "This was the vow." He said, "God, if You'll give me the strength every time I have the opportunity to introduce the topic of conversation, it will always be of Jesus Christ." "God, if

You'll give me the strength, every time I have the opportunity to introduce the topic of conversation, it will always be of Jesus Christ."

Listen, when you and I open our mouths, it ought to be whom? Jesus Christ, not us. You learn to do that, and it'll get you away from always talking about yourself. You know, you hear people – I hear people even on the – pastors – and radio speakers and television personalities and so forth who are Christian people who do nothing but talk about themselves and what they have done and what they have accomplished. And that's very intimidating.

C.S. Lewis said, and I think he was right, he said, "This is the utmost evil. This is the greatest sin, it is the essential vice. It is the vice at the very essence of man." There's no place for it. And you know, if you look at the pattern of Jesus Christ, if anybody had anything to brag about, He did, but He never did. He never did. It's incredible if you study the gospel of John, in the book that presents His deity, how many times He backs away and almost disclaims anything. Listen to what He says. In John 12:49, "For I have not spoken of Myself." Now, listen to that. How many of us can say that? How many of us can come to the end of one day and say, "God, I have not spoken of myself"? Should be. Should be that we do that. There isn't really a whole lot to talk about, frankly. Only love can save us from flaunting our knowledge or flaunting our ability or flaunting our education or flaunting our gifts or flaunting ourselves so that we really come off as fools. When the fact is known, we're nothing. We're nothing.

Now, behind boasting – notice verse 4 again – behind boasting lies the root of it. Love is not boastful, it is not puffed up. Love is not conceited. I told you last time that I'd reminded you about the Mascagni, the great composer who wrote the opera and dedicated to himself. Well, I wrote down what the dedication is. It's written in the opera, it says this: "To myself, with distinguished esteem and unalterable satisfaction." I'll tell you, that's a commentary on the misery of the man's soul. You know, here is going deeper than the mouth, you've got the bragging, the hot air, the shoot-off-your-mouth and then you've got the deep-down conceit. And when Paul said to the Corinthians, "Love is not puffed up," he was really telling them they had no love because, believe me, they were puffed up. Boy, they saw themselves as spiritual hotshots. They had arrived. And it's so easy to get that attitude. They felt that way about their doctrine, that they had all the answers. In chapter 4 and verse – I think it's 18, it says: "And you are puffed up and think I won't come to you." "Why, what would Paul come here for, we've got it all? We know everything. Nothing for him to tell us. We've had Paul and we've had Apollos and we've had Cephas and all of these teachers and what do we need? Why, he'll never show up around here."

They were puffed up about their knowledge and they were puffed up about their supposed spiritual state. Listen to chapter 4 verse 6: "And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and Apollos for your sake" – in other words, "I'm using myself and Apollos as an illustration" – "that you would learn in us as models or illustrations not to think above that which is written, that no one of

you be puffed up for one against another.” He says, “You better take a biblical evaluation of yourself and go no further and stop being puffed up.” Any way they could be puffed up, spiritually superior, intellectually superior, physically superior, anything. In verse 7, he says: “Who makes you different?” Who? God? “And what do you have that you didn’t receive? And if you received it, then what do you have to glory in if you just received it?” “But in spite of the fact ye have nothing to boast about, in spite of the fact that you’ve received it as a gift from God, in spite of the fact that it’s God that makes you different, you are still thinking something higher of yourself than you ought to think.” And he gets sarcastic in verse 8 and says: “Now you are full, now you are rich, you have reigned as kings without us.” Aren’t you something? Hot stuff.

See, he’s using it in sarcasm. And then he says: “I would to God you did reign. I would to God it was the truth.” And then he says: “I think God has set forth us the apostles last,” and he gets very sarcastic, he says: “We’re last and you’re the big shots.” Verse 10: “We’re the fools and you’re the wise. We’re the weak and you’re the strong. And you’re the honorable and we’re the despised.” Here they were bragging about their supposed spiritual state and the fact of the matter was they were in gross, gross carnality.

Look at chapter 5 verse 1. “It is reported commonly, common knowledge among you, that there is *porneia*,” from which we get pornography, the word for sexual sin. “Commonly there is sexual sin among you and such as is not even named among the heathen that somebody has his father’s wife” – incest. And what’s your attitude? Verse 2: “And you are” – what? – “puffed up.” “You’re even conceited about your sexual accomplishments.” The macho Corinthians.

Look at chapter 8 verse 1. Now, as touching idols, or things offered to idols, we have – we know that we all have knowledge, we all understand the reality about meat offered to idols. Knowledge puffs up; love builds up. They were puffed up about their biblical knowledge. They were puffed up about their sexual accomplishments. They were puffed up about their supposed spiritual status. They were puffed up about the certain teachers they followed. They were egotistical and conceited about the spiritual gifts they had, and they were using them to dominate and to lord it over other people, and they had this inner arrogance that spawned the mouth that was hot air. And you had a whole congregation of them. Love is not puffed up. You know why? Because conceit says, “I’m better than you,” and love says the opposite, doesn’t it? Conceit says, “I want everybody to know all about me,” and love says, “I wish I could know all about you.”

William Carey was one of the greatest missionaries who ever lived. He was one of the greatest linguists the world has ever seen, Christian or non-Christian. William Carey translated parts of the Bible into no fewer than 34 different languages. And William Carey began his life as a shoe repairman, a cobbler, fixing shoes. When he came to India as a missionary, he was immediately despised by everybody because India for centuries had been locked in a very, very stringent caste system. And he had absolutely no respect. Once at a dinner party, a snob that was there – I hear that

often happens at a dinner party – but at this particular dinner party, a snob was there, and he had the idea of humiliating Carey because of Carey’s low estate. And so that all could hear, he said, “I suppose, Mr. Carey, that you once worked as a shoemaker?” “Oh no, your lordship,” said William Carey, “not a shoemaker, only a shoe repairman.” He wouldn’t even claim that he made shoes if he only repaired them. Somebody said, “Empty trucks make the most noise.”

Proverbs tells us – and I don’t even want to get into discussion of these in depth, but Proverbs tells us so much about pride and bragging and all that. Let me read you some of the things it says. You don’t need to try to follow, but Proverbs 8:13 says: “The fear of the Lord is to hate evil, pride, and arrogance.” Because that’s what the Lord hates. Proverbs 11:2: “When pride comes then comes shame. Chapter 13 verse 10: “Only by pride comes contention.” Boy, that’s so true. All that pride ever does is breed contention. All it does is ever start fights, that’s all it ever does. Humility has never started a fight yet. Humble people haven’t got anything to argue about. They give. Proud people fight, start contentions. Proverbs 16:18: “Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall.” And that’s just pointing out that proud people are always the most ignorant of all because in their pride and smugness, they don’t understand what awaits them. And in 29:23 of Proverbs: “A man’s pride shall bring him low.” A man’s pride shall bring him low.

You know, love is not big-headed; love is big-hearted, see? John the Baptist comes along, he’s been the hero, he’s been the great prophet, he’s been out in the wilderness, and the multitudes have been coming to him day after day, masses of people, and he stands up one day and he looks at Jesus Christ and he says, “He must increase and” – what? – “I must decrease.” “The sooner you forget about John the Baptist, the better I’m going to like it.”

Now, what do you see in all this? You see this, that love is the only hope for the Corinthians. And it’s our only hope. A love that is superior to eloquence, to spiritual insight, to knowledge, to faith, to charity and martyrdom, love which suffers long and is kind. Love that is the only power in the world that can save us from the stupid swagger of boastfulness and indulging in the sneers of envy. Love never begrudges, says Paul, and love never shows off.

And sixthly, let’s go to another one: Love doesn’t behave rudely. Love doesn’t behave rudely. This is such a practical thing. The verb here means “to behave in an unbecoming manner.” Poor manners, rudeness. You say, “Well, that seems like a simple little deal. You mean that’s all tied up with agape, the great concept of divine love?” Yes. Listen: Poor manners and rudeness is saying this: “I don’t love you because I could care less what affects you. I will do what I want whether you like it or not.”

When I was a little kid, my mom used to say to me – all the time she used to say to me – “Don’t slurp your soup.” And I used to think, “Well, who cares if I slurp my soup?” And then one time I ate with somebody who slurped his soup. I didn’t particularly enjoy mine as he was slurping his. And I realized that not slurping my soup had nothing to do with keeping my clothes clean, it had something to do

with how much other folks could enjoy their time at the table. Because see, it's a little thing that says: "Look, your happiness matters to me so, I want to do what makes you happy."

Do you know, I knew a couple, got married, got an annulment on the basis of the fact that he was rude to his wife? And it's the strangest thing you ever heard about. You know what? She went to court and claimed that – this is kind of crude to say, but I have to say – he burped all the time. You say, "That's a joke." It's not a joke. I knew the people. And the judge said, in essence, the judge actually granted an annulment on the basis that it was apparent the man did not love the woman or he would have been more considerate of her than to burp all the time. And she actually got an annulment. Now, for some of you that are looking for a way out, there it is. Start burping.

And what the idea is, is he has undisciplined behavior. He – this is a person, a man or a woman, who has not the ability to discipline his behavior with others in mind. He's just rude and out of place and overbearing and totally self-centered. And this – there couldn't been a better definition of the Corinthians. They were so rude, for example, they came to the love feast and ate all their food before the people who had none got there. They overindulged. They were like hogs when it came to eating at the love feast. Their behavior at the Lord's Supper was so bad they got drunk, kept taking the cup. Women had overstepped the bounds of female propriety before God and the women were taking their veils off and usurping the role of a man in the church and he's saying: "You are not acting in a becoming way." And the undisciplined, rude conduct of the Corinthian glossolalias had come to the place where it was the antithesis of love. Everybody shouting out, everybody talking, everybody trying to get the prominence and nobody considering at all the other. And when you do that, there's no love there. Love is never rude because love is always lost in how what it does affects somebody else.

Our dear Lord was so tremendous in personifying this. I just want to remind you of one incident in His life. Look at Luke 7. It's a beautiful one and it's a situation where the Lord protected a lady from rudeness. Luke 7:36: "And one of the Pharisee's desired Him that He would eat with him." A Pharisee named Simon asked Jesus to dinner at his house, and he had some other people there and so Jesus went. "He went to the Pharisee's house and He sat down to eat. Behold a woman in the city who was a sinner" – undoubtedly a prostitute – "when she knew Jesus was eating in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment," which would be extremely expensive. "She came in the house where He's eating." It must have been an interesting situation. "And stood at His feet behind, weeping, and began to wash His feet with tears and did wipe them with the hair of her head and kissed His feet and anointed them with the ointment."

I tell you, that's a beautiful thing, isn't it? Here's a prostitute, weeping and wiping Jesus' feet and putting ointment on them. "Now when the Pharisee who had bidden Him saw it, he spoke within himself." He has a little conversation in his mind, a little soliloquy here. "This man, if He were a prophet" – he hasn't made his valuation of Christ yet – "if He were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that touches Him. She's a sinner." Now, if this guy was for real,

this wouldn't be happening. "And Jesus answering said to him" – isn't that interesting? He never even opened his mouth and Jesus answered his thought. "'Simon, I have somewhat to say to you,' and he said, 'Master, say on.'" Hypocrite. Hadn't even made up his mind whether He was Master yet.

"He said, 'There was a certain creditor who had two debtors, the one owed 500 denarii, the other 50. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him most?' Simon answered and said, 'I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most.' And He said unto him, 'Thou hast rightly judged.' And He turned to the woman and said to Simon" – pointing to the woman, he says to Simon – "'Do you see that woman? I entered into your house, thou gavest Me no water for My feet, but she hath washed My feet with tears and wiped them with the hair of her head. Thou gavest Me no kiss but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss My feet. My head with oil, thou didst not anoint, but this woman hath anointed My feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, her sins, which are many, are forgiven for she loved much, but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.'"

And boy, there's a sarcastic thing in that statement. "And He said to her, 'Thy sins are forgiven.' And they that were eating with Him began to say within themselves, 'Who is this that forgiveth sins also?' And He said to the woman, 'Thy faith has saved thee, go in peace.'"

What's the story teaching? It's just showing us a very simple thing. Here was a woman who entered a Pharisee's home. The first response of that Pharisee would have been rude, would have been arrogance, would have been scorn to that woman. "What are you doing in here, you filthy, vile, sinning woman? Out!" And Jesus shielded the woman from scorn and the arrogance and the rudeness and the indifference of the Pharisee, and Jesus loved the woman and Jesus forgave the woman and Jesus redeemed the woman. And Barclay is right when he translates the phrase this way, "Love does not behave gracelessly." Love is gracious. Love is never rude. And it isn't just a matter of whether you're rude to a believer but love is never even rude to an unbeliever. I've seen some Christians who don't smoke who were so rude to a non-Christian who did that they would never have had an opportunity to communicate something about Christ.

You know, we can get to the place where we've got all the doctrine and all the answers and we become these theological hardheads and we lose our grace and we lose our charm with people who aren't where we are. And that isn't right. We can close off the whole world except our little four and our little deal, "Shut the door, us four, no more," and there's no grace and there's no kindness, there's just a rudeness. You know, one of the things I believe that Christianity very often has to pay the price for is just plain rudeness to unbelieving people. We just are often very rude and thoughtless to people.

I heard a preacher last week when I was home, I listened to all the TV churches last week. This man was preaching a tirade against the ungodly that blasted them from pillar to post in a fashion that was

totally unbiblical, that made them to be something they were not. And I thought to myself, “I’ve never heard a man any more rude to unbelieving people than that man.” He was a Pharisee who would have picked up that woman in Luke and thrown her right out the door. But that wasn’t what Jesus did, was it? You know, it’s – love is not rude. And a good place to be is at home when you begin to practice this.

Well, love can save us from the bitter sneer of envy and the ridiculous swagger of boastfulness. Love can save us from the inner tendency to be so inflated with our own importance that we’re rude to everybody else and the tendency to behave without grace as contemptuous of others and others’ feelings.

Seventh – I’ll give you this one. “Love seeks not its own.” This is probably the key to everything. Love seeks not its own. It’s the opposite of self-seeking. Love isn’t interested in its own things. Love is interested in the things of someone else. Lenski, the great commentator, said this, he said, “Cure selfishness and you’ve just replanted the Garden of Eden.” He’s right.

I would say that in the portrait of love, “love seeks not its own” are the eyes. They’re unselfish eyes. The windows of the soul show the soul to be selfless. And the Corinthians were selfish. Oh, they were selfish. They were selfish in their spiritual gifts, they – you know what? In fact, if you look at chapter 14 verse 4, and he talks to them about their use of the gifts of tongues, he says, “He that speaks in a tongue edifies himself.” And in verse 12 he says, “Seek that you may excel to the edifying of the church” – not yourself. Even in the area of spiritual gifts, something that was good, they had twisted around to make it a selfish thing. Instead of using their gifts for others, they were using their gifts to build themselves up. But love is free from that. Love never dwells on itself.

There was an interesting story told by Fulton Oursler some years ago. He said there was a uniformed chauffeur that drove up to a cemetery, and there was a minister who took care of the cemetery, and he came out – anyway, he came out to the car – always get those confused – came out to the car, and the chauffeur walked up and the chauffeur said, “The lady is too ill to walk. Would you mind coming with me?” Waiting in the car was a frail, elderly woman whose sunken eyes could not hide some deep, long-lasting hurt. “I’m Mrs. So-and-so,” she said weakly. “Every week for the last two years, I have been sending you a five-dollar bill in the mail.” “Oh yes, for the flowers,” he remembered. “Yes, to be laid on the grave of my loved one. I came today,” she confided softly, “because the doctors have let me know I have only a few weeks left and I shall not be able to live beyond that. And there’s nothing to live for anyway and so I wanted to drive for one last look at the grave.”

The clerk blinked at her irresolutely, says Oursler, and then with a very wry smile he spoke, “You know, ma’am, I’m very sorry you kept sending the money for the flowers.” “Sorry?” “Yes, because the flowers last such a little while and no one ever sees them anyway.” “Do you realize what you’re

saying?" she asked. "Oh, yes, I do. You see, I belong to a visiting society," he said. "State hospitals, insane asylums, people in places like that, they dearly love flowers and they can see them and smell them, Lady. There are living people in places like that." The woman sat in silence for a moment and then without a word, she signaled the chauffeur to drive away.

Some months later the clerk was astonished to receive another visit, doubly astonished because this time the woman was driving the car. "I take the flowers to the people myself," she said with a friendly smile, "at the hospitals. You were right. It does make them happy and it makes me happy and the doctors don't know what is making me well but I do. I have somebody else to live for."

Well, I think Jesus was saying something about that when He said, "Bear ye one another's" – what? – 'burdens.' To have somebody else to live for. Jesus did. "The Son of man has not come to be ministered unto but to" – what? – "to minister and to give His life, a ransom for many."

Love never seeks its own. Love is always seeking somebody else's. This is the key to the whole concept of love. It is selflessness. You're patient with people. You're kind with people. You're not jealous of people. You're not angry with people. You're not upset with people. You're not provoked by people. You're very tolerant with people. You're very generous with people. You're very gracious with people. You're never rude to people. All of that means you're selfless.

Let me give you the last one for this time, number eight, and that's something I just mentioned, "Love is not provoked." Love is not provoked. From the Greek word, we get our English word "paroxysm," which means a sudden outburst. Love never gets upset. Do you ever get upset? Love never gets irritated. Love never is ready to fight. Now you say, "But wait a minute. What about righteous indignation?" Well, that's all right. If you're cleansing the temple, go right ahead, it's all right. I mean I'm sure Martin Luther was a little angry when he nailed his thesis on the door of the church at Wittenberg. I'm for it. And you know, you can't really live the Christian life without a little bit of anger. I mean you've got to be mad at Satan, you've got to be mad at the flesh, and you've got to be angry with what defiles God's world and God's truth, don't you? And that's fine, that's righteous indignation, and I believe that every man of God's got to have that.

You know, we were talking about that when I was at Dallas Seminary. I was sharing with some of the students that Dr. Robinson was telling me that – and I agree with him – he has never met a minister or a preacher in his life who was any good who wasn't competitive, who wasn't always in a fight. I said, "Well, what do you mean by that?" before I agreed with him. He said this – and we talked about it and I agree – I'll use myself as an illustration. I'm very competitive. I like to win, I don't like to lose. I've always been that way. I spent a lot of my life losing but I never did like it. I like to win. I'm competitive. He says, "A preacher who isn't competitive isn't going to be a good preacher of the Word of God week after week after week." You know, a blind dog will stumble over a bone once in a while. And every once in a while, everybody's going to preach one or two good sermons, just by a law of

averages. You've got to find some good truth now and then. But to be good week after week after week after week after week, you've got to be a fighter.

You have to be competitive. I mean you've got to fight the clock, you've got to fight your own ignorance, you've got to fight the difficulties in the text, you have to fight the people who would take your priorities, you've got to fight your own laziness, you've got to fight your own sin – I mean it's a war. Listen, victory day is Sunday. You want to know why I get excited? The fight is over, folks, and it took me a lot of time to get this together. So, I'm not depreciating – I'm not depreciating the fact that there is in the Christian life a need to get irritated about some things and to charge a little bit in terms of accomplishing God's will, but what he's talking about here is love doesn't get mad at other people. Love doesn't get angry with people, doesn't get upset.

Next time you get upset at home and you get mad, remember this: The reason you're angry is because you don't love the person you're angry at. Because when you got angry, you said what you shouldn't have said and you wounded them, and the reason you wounded them is because you wanted to wound them. And you know what? You decided "I want my way and I want it the way I want it, and if you don't do it the way I want it, I'm going to hurt you." You see, you say things that won't ever be forgotten. They leave scars. You do things that hurt and injure. Love bears all injuries. Love receives all injuries. Love suffers everything without irritation and without exasperation – unless it's defending God. But when it comes to self, it takes it.

What happens when a husband lashes out and lets his wife have it? Really punches her? It happens. Does he love her? No. No, he doesn't love her. He is more concerned about his thing and himself than anything and if she crosses it, boom. A kid does something, you don't like it, what happens to that frail little baby that's been battered? What happens to that kid that just gets knocked across the room into the wall because he did something that stepped on what you thought you wanted for you? That's anger. Anger is the opposite of love because anger says, "I matter so much, if you do something that I don't like, I'm going to let you have it.

It's not easy to handle this, but I'll tell you, unless a Christian learns to handle it, you'll never really experience love. You can tell your husband you love him all the time, but if all you ever do is get angry at him, it's going to be hard for him to be convinced of it. Very hard. You can tell your children you love your children, but if all you ever do is yell at them, get irritated at them, get upset at them, they're going to wonder how come they can't ever do anything that makes you happy and how come once in a while you're not just happy that they're happy and you're unhappy for a change. Love is the only cure for irritability, for irritability, in the last analysis, is simply self-centeredness.

Jonathan Edwards – I'll close with this – third president of Princeton University, one of the greatest preachers of history, had a daughter with an uncontrollable temper. A young man fell in love with his daughter and he came and, of course, the young man wouldn't have known that probably, because,

you know, when you're courting it's all hearts and flowers. But the young man fell in love and asked to marry her. So he came and he says, "Dr. Edwards, I want to marry your daughter." "You can't have her," was the abrupt answer of Jonathan Edwards. "But I love her," the young man said. "You still can't have her," Edwards repeated. "But she loves me," replied the young man. "You still can't have her." "Why?" he said. "Because she's not worthy of you." "But," he said, "she's a Christian, isn't she?" "Yes," said Edwards, "but the grace of God can live with some people with whom no one else could ever live."

Like the lady who said: "I lose my temper, but it's all over in a minute." So is the atom bomb.

We could talk a lot about what temper does to destroy you, but the point that Paul's making here isn't that, it's just simply this: It isn't loving. Ask yourself – you're a Christian, the love of God is shed abroad in your heart, Jesus is love personified, Paul is a model of love. Are you following those models or are you a Christian like the Corinthians and seeing yourself as the opposite of all of these qualities? Let's pray.

Thank you, Father, again this morning for ministering to us, to me again. I've got a long way to go with some of these things. I want You to help me to be the man that You want me to be, treat my wife and my family and my friends and my world, my unsaved neighbors, the way they ought to be treated, the way Jesus would treat them, totally out of love and selflessness. And I pray that for all these dear people. I thank you for all who've come this morning. Meet their needs, Lord, in just that special way that You can do it. In Jesus name, amen.

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