The Qualities of True Love, Part 3
1 Corinthians 13:5c-6
1866

We're discussing 1 Corinthians chapter 13 and we're taking our time with it because it's so very, very vital. And in the 13th verse of 1 Corinthians 13 it says: "Love is the greatest," and consequently it demands a great amount of attention. It wouldn't be right to deal with a subject like this with any kind of limited consideration. So we have been taking our time and looking carefully at these thoughts. And most specifically, we are noticing verses 4 through 7, 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. This is in our continuing study of 1 Corinthians and in this marvelous chapter, we are reading really four verses here that give us God's own definition of love. If anything ever needed to be defined, it's love.

In our day and time, in our world, the word is used and abused, and so here is God's own definition of what love is and He defines it on the basis of what love does. And we've been learning many, many facets about love as we've been going through the 15 qualities of love in verses 4 to 7. Let me read them to you, follow as I read: "Love suffereth long and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, or rudely, seeketh not its own, is not provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth with the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things." Now, in that simple list of 15 qualities, you have what sums up God's own definition – God's own description, better, of love.

It is said that in a churchyard in the old English village of Lemington, England, there stands a tombstone. And the only thing written on the tombstone are these words: "Here lies a miser who lived for himself and cared for nothing but gathering wealth; now where he is or how he fares, nobody knows and nobody cares." In contrast, there's a plain tombstone at St. Paul's cathedral in London and it says this: "Sacred to the memory of General Charles George Gordon who at all times and everywhere gave his strength to the weak, his substance to the poor, his sympathy to the suffering, his heart to God."

Two epitaphs, two distinct opposites. One life shows lovelessness, the other life shows love. And really, I guess, in the last analysis of it all, the only people who really contribute at all in the world are the unselfish ones. Or stated another way, the only time anybody contributes is when they do something that is unselfish. The really useful people in the world are the people who have given their strength to the weak, their substance to the poor, their sympathy to the suffering, and their hearts to God. And that's what love does.

I don't know what the commentary's going to be on my life. I've often thought that the smart thing to do is do like Benjamin Franklin and write your own epitaph so they have to put it on your tombstone. But certainly it would be tragic if at the time of our death it was made public that we were spending our entire life flaunting our selfishness. Nothing is sufficient in the life of a Christian except love – it's everything. And the behavior of love is what the Holy Spirit is after here. In the Corinthian assembly, it just didn't happen, and it needed to happen, and so some strong words are given here. These

Corinthians had received from the Lord everything He could give. He had given them salvation, the Holy Spirit, the hope of heaven, security, the truth of sound doctrine, spiritual gifts, leaders, abilities, teachers, gracious blessings, and in spite of it all, they were selfish and loveless. They were self-indulgent and self-centered and they wounded each other with their arrogant displays.

Even in the area of their spiritual gifts, which were designed for each other, their gifts were designed to be used to minister to others, they had become a selfish, arrogant, egoistic display. And so the Holy Spirit writes in the middle of the section on spiritual gifts this great, great chapter on love and defines love because without love, all their ministry is noise, all their ministry is nothing. And so, they must understand what love is and how it behaves. And as I said, this is God's own personal description of love. And I mentioned several items in the last couple of weeks. Let me just draw them together very briefly so you'll understand some keys to these verses.

One, love can only be described by observing it in action. So all the terms here are verbs. Love is not just something you define, it is something you do. It can only be described in action. Secondly, love is not a feeling or an attitude. It is an action. First then, love can only be described by observing it in action. Secondly, love is not a feeling or an attitude, but an action. And thirdly, love is always related to somebody else, never to me – never to me.

Now, with those three things in mind, we get a grasp on the meaning of these verses. They are discussing what love is doing unrelated to the doer but related to the one who is the object of its love. And as we see Paul split love into all of its components here, 15 qualities, it's as if the great light of God's love hit the prism of Scripture and shattered into its component parts and you see all the colors of love. And remember that the portrait of love here is the portrait of Jesus as well because He is love incarnate.

Now, we have already studied several of these qualities. Let me just run them by and then we'll start where we left off last time. But let's look at all of them very briefly, beginning in verse 4, 15 qualities of love, all describing the action of love.

First, love suffers long. And we saw that what that means is love is patient with people, it never runs out of patience. It is the heart, for example, of the waiting father of the prodigal son who waits and waits and waits, and when everybody else has given up and when other people have turned to bitterness, his arms are open to receive the son when he comes home, no matter what he has done. Love is patient with people.

Secondly, love is kind. We saw that the root meaning of the word means "love is useful to other people." It spends itself on others.

Thirdly, love envieth not. Love is never jealous. The Corinthian assembly was jealous. There was a party spirit, there were factions and fightings, but love never does become jealous because love never seeks anything for itself so it never wants what somebody else has, and since it loves somebody else so much, it is thoroughly pleased that somebody else has what he has.

Fourthly, we saw that love is never boastful, and we saw the root meaning there is "windbag." Love is not a windbag, shooting off its mouth about its accomplishments. Since love is far more concerned that somebody else receive the honor, love doesn't have a lot to say about itself. Arnold Bittlinger hits

particularly at the Corinthian issue when he says: “Love does not even gossip about sensational miracles, visions, and prophecies, *et cetera*.” And we are seeing that even today. Boasting is designed to make other people feel inferior. Love would never do that.

Fifthly, love is not puffed up. And we saw that this is talking about the inner attitude that results in the windbag mouth. The word *phusioō* means “blowing,” and that’s what puffed up comes from. And blowing, you know, you take a balloon or whatever and you blow it up. And the word simply means to exaggerate. And when a person is *phusioō*, when a person is blown up, he’s blown up or exaggerated his own image of himself, a person who exaggerates his concept of the facts about himself, and the result with all that hot air blown up inside is it’s going to come out. So, somebody blown up on the inside is going to be a windbag on the outside. Those two go together.

All right, number six we learned, in verse 5: Love does not behave itself rudely. Rude people are self-centered. They are saying, “I will do what I want the way I want whether you like it or not,” and that’s rude. But love is never rude. Love always takes into consideration how someone else is going to feel, how they’re going to respond, so it never behaves rudely. It’s never indifferent of the feelings of others, it’s never contemptuous or disdainful of others’ attitudes and proprieties.

Seventh, and we’re still reviewing, this is really the key to the whole section: “Love seeks not its own,” verse 5 says. “Love seeks not its own.” Love is not selfish. The Corinthians, of course, were so very selfish, they sought only personal edification, personal satisfaction. Love seeks the satisfaction and the edification of others. It is selfless.

Then we closed our study last time by discussing the eighth of these qualities in verse 5: “Love is not provoked.” And we saw that the word “provoked” literally means “irritated or upset or angry.” Love never gets irritated. Love never gets upset. Love never gets angry. Now, it can be used, this word can, in a good sense, of righteous indignation. For example, in Acts chapter 17 and verse 16, it says: ”And the apostle Paul was waiting for them in the city of Athens and his spirit was stirred within him when he saw the city wholly given over to idolatry.” And it uses the same word there when it says his heart was stirred. He was upset, he was irritated, and he was angry about idolatry. Now, that’s righteous’ indignation. He was angry because something was an affront to God.

But what Paul is talking about here is not that. He is saying, “Love never gets angry when somebody offends you.” It’s not talking about God’s character being brought into ill repute, it’s not talking about defending the righteous nature of God, it’s simply talking about personal relationships, and love doesn’t get irritated when it is offended by another person. It doesn’t get upset, it doesn’t get angry. And we went into some detail talking about that last time.

And William Barclay says, “There are in this world only two kinds of people: those who are continually thinking of their rights and those who are continually thinking of their duties.” And your duty is to love. You can boil it down to that – it’s simple. If you have a problem getting irritated and upset, if you have a problem getting angry, getting mad, losing your control, losing your temper, it’s because you have a mindset that is selfish. In other words, your whole preoccupation is self-centered.

You’re driving down the road – simple illustration we’ve all been through – you’re driving down the road and there’s just, you know, a little space between you and the guy in front and some guy whips

in in front of you, see? And what happens? Up goes the thermometer. “That dirty” – you know. Why? What’s the difference? The difference is you wanted that territory. “That’s mine.” See? That’s the attitude. And somebody took away your rights. And the reason you got mad is because you had a preset mind to determine that you are the one who matters. It doesn’t matter that he had to go somewhere, too, and that that was a possible option that he had. Or you see it when two lanes go into one lane and you see some guy going like this and stepping on the gas so he can stay one inch off the bumper in front so you can’t get in. And how do you handle that? Do you mind? Or do you find yourself beginning to get angry? It will depend upon whether your mindset is selfish or selfless. That’s that simple.

So when people get angry and upset and irritated and they say, “Well, I have a right,” “I can’t help it,” “The circumstance.” No, it isn’t the circumstance; it’s the preoccupation of your mind that you matter, that your rights matter, that your territory is invincible, and when somebody steps into your territory or violates your rights, they trigger that anger because you’ve already preconceived that you have those rights. But where you consider nothing your right but everything your duty, you’ll never have a problem. Because people can offend you again and again and your only response is that “since my duty is to love them, this is just another wonderful opportunity.”

You look at the apostle Paul, for example, and you see a man who never retaliated. Why? Because he never saw himself having any rights. He never retaliated. The only thing that angered Paul was the things that angered God. He was defending God’s righteousness, but he never cursed the people who stoned him. He never got mad at somebody who got in his way when he was trying to preach a sermon. He never lambasted somebody who threw him in jail. He never said nasty things about the Jewish people who finally got him in prison. He never cursed the people who took him and chained him in Rome. Why? Because he never saw anybody as violating his rights because he never considered anything a right, it was only a matter of everything being a duty, and the duty was always to love.

But in Corinthian church, you did one thing to offend a Corinthian brother and look at chapter 6, the next thing you know you’re in court – he’s suing you. They were busy defending their rights. You see, love bears the injuries suffered at the hands of others without any irritation because love is so totally selfless. It never gets on the defensive. It never defends itself.

Now, I’m not saying that you’re to be ridiculously insensitive. If there is offensive behavior, you will sense it and you have every right. It’s normal to be sensitive and to feel some pain. But for that sensitivity to issue in irritation, upset, anger, uncontrolled conduct is not Christlike. And I really believe, people, that one of the number one reasons for mental illness and physical illness, particularly in our society, is that we’ve got everybody crowding out everybody for their rights. And you know that doesn’t do any good for your stomach or a lot of other parts of your body. That’s bad. With everybody fighting for his rights instead of everybody looking for privileged opportunity to perform duties of love.

Well, I’m not saying that you don’t need to get provoked about some things. As I said last week, some Christians better get provoked or they’ll never do anything significant against the devil. But at the same time, there’s no sense in getting mad at each other. To be angry, to be out of control because of what people do or say about you would poison love.

Granville Walker said, “Love is the only cure for irritability, for irritability is only another manifestation

of self-centeredness, and love that takes a man outside himself and centers the focus of his attention on the wellbeing of others is its only cure." The sooner you learn that the thing that matters is everybody else, the less problem you're going to have with what happens to your rights. So love is not upset, not irritated. It never gets angry.

Let's look at number 9 and we'll start really where we should start this morning. Number 9 is in verse 5, the end of the verse: "Love thinketh no evil." You know something about love? This is what the word means here. The word literally "thinketh no evil" is the Greek word *logizomai*. And that word, it's an accountant's word, it literally means "to keep a mathematical calculation." It is the word that is used in a ledger of a bookkeeper. And the reason you write things in a bookkeeper's ledger is so that you won't forget them, right? Because they're essential things. And what he's saying here is love never keeps books on the evil done to it. Love never keeps a running record of everybody's offense. The idea is holding somebody accountable for some wrong or evil or injury. Love just forgives and forgets.

Chrysostom, the early church father, had a beautiful thought on this, he said, "Love is like a spark that falls into the sea and is quenched. When an injury falls upon a loving Christian, it is drowned just as surely." And that's the way it ought to be – drowned in the sea of love.

Now, to illustrate the idea here, you simply need to look at the word *logizomai*. I mention the word because some of you will be looking it up, but the word is the very verb that is used in the New Testament to speak of the pardoning act of God. So as God has not kept any books on our sin, so are we not to keep any books on the evils of others. In fact, the word *logizomai* is translated in the New Testament with this English word: imputed. And it is used in many passages. Look with me for a moment at Romans chapter 4 and verse 8. In Romans chapter 4 and verse 8, we read this: "Blessed is the man" – of course, this comes out of Psalm 32 – "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." Now listen: "Blessed is the man" – in 1 Corinthians 13 language – "of whom the Lord keeps no record of evil."

People say, "Well, someday when we get to heaven, we're going to face the record of our evil." No, there is no record. "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord keeps no record of evil." There is nothing written in the book. In the book that talks about John MacArthur, you open it, it says one thing: "Righteous." It's closed and put in the file. No record. Why? The Lord does not mathematically add up our sin. He does not keep an accounting of sin. That's a great truth. I'm happy about that, aren't you?

Second Corinthians 5:19, to-wit: In response to verse 18, "That God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." Now watch: "Not imputing their trespasses unto them." In other words, to those who come to Christ, God does not keep a record of evil. God keeps no accounting. God thinks no evil of them. Boy, that is a fantastic reality. God never accounts evil to a believer. You say, "Well, what is on the ledger?" As I said, Romans chapter 4 tells us, verse 6: "Even as David also describes the blessedness of the man unto whom God does impute" – what? – "righteousness." Righteousness. Over in verse 22 of Romans 4, "And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness." In James 2:23, the same thing, "Abraham believed God and it was imputed to him as righteousness." In other words, God only keeps account of righteousness, never evil. Now that's a fantastic concept. God has no resentment.

Listen, God has been offended. Have you ever offended God as a Christian? Have you? I have. All

the time. But you know something? He doesn't say, "Boy, I'm sick of that, MacArthur, and I'm going to start writing stuff down if you don't shape up." No, He doesn't say that. He keeps no account. Absolute forgiveness. That's because He loves us, right? God so loved us that He doesn't keep account of our sin, He just forgives it all and keeps on forgiving it and keeps on forgiving it and keeps on forgiving it. But resentment keeps on keeping books about it. And so often we do that, we keep books and we brood over the record, and we read it and we reread it and we take the molehill of somebody's offense and turn it into a mountain of hostility. But God is love and God only writes one thing in His accounting book and that's "righteous."

A writer tells that in Polynesia in some of the islands, he found some natives who spent a lot of their time warring and fighting. And it was customary for every man to keep the reminders of his hatred. And so suspended from the roof of the hut, all the way around the hut, are articles, and every one of those little articles represents something about somebody that causes them to hate that somebody. You say, "That's incredible," and yet – can you imagine that in our society? Everybody's house decorated with stuff like that? And yet it's not untrue to say that most of our minds have some of that hanging in it. That's not something we'd like to admit, but I'm afraid it's true.

Love never makes memories out of evils. Love fast forgets and sees past a person's sin to their potential, the fact that God loves them. Love hesitates to believe any rumor, love always forgives, love never keeps account of wrong, it never gets irritated, as we saw, and it never is resentful. That's love. Do you love like that? That's the way Jesus loved, that's the way we're to love.

Then Paul gives the last of the eight negative aspects in his list here. Notice it: "Love rejoiceth not in" – what? – "in iniquity," verse 6. "Love rejoiceth not in iniquity." The word "iniquity" simply means "unrighteousness." It is the word that talks about sin. Love never rejoices in sin. Now, we could talk about this a lot of ways because there's many, many different ways that people rejoice in sin. One would be: Some people rejoice in their own sin, thinking they're getting away with it. "Boy, you know what I did? I did this." You know, you ever hear people brag about sin? I was in the barber shop this week and a guy came in and sat down, and he just was kind of a seedy-looking character, but anyway, he came and sat down. And the barber says to him, "Whenever I see you, I always think of two things." He said "hi" first, you know. "Whenever I – I think of two things: beer and cigarettes." And he laughed, "Yeah, that's me, beer and cigarettes. But you forgot one more." And he said, "What?" "Women." See?

And I was sitting there while he was clipping away. This guy said, "And that's the most important," see? And off he went. For one half hour, some kind of conversation about all these women he's picking up in bars and all of this stuff that's going on and I'm just sitting there in dead silence, just – and, you know, the higher my hair is getting, the more exposed my ears are becoming. I'm not too sure how long I can handle all this, you know? And Mark, my eight-year-old son, is sitting there like this. He keeps looking over at me, checking me out, you know.

Finally, after a long period of listening to this man rejoice in his iniquity, it just sickened me. People were laughing but I couldn't laugh because I can't rejoice in that. The only thing I could feel for the man was pain because I know the consequence. Finally, the guy who was cutting my hair said, "What do you do?" It was obvious by my dead silence for about 20 minutes, you know. I said, "Well, one thing I don't do is talk like that." And I said, "The other thing I do is I'm a minister." You know, and then the scissors went "Boing-oing-oing" like this. "Oh – oh," he said.

You know, I just felt grieved in my heart because I can't rejoice in iniquity, even that man. But let me tell you something interesting. That's one way to rejoice in iniquity, just brag about your sin. You say, "Well, certainly Christians would never do that." Oh, yeah, they did. You know who did that? The Corinthians. Read the 5th chapter. Oh, yeah. They were committing fornication, incest, and they were proud of it, right? First Corinthians 5:2, they were literally boasting about it, shooting off their mouth about it.

Always reminds me of the story of Ernest Hemingway. There was an article – *Eternity* magazine ran some series about him, and there was an article in there where he had said that "You can sin and get away with it," and he said, "The old idea of the prudishness of sin, the Victorian, fundamentalist's viewpoint that there are consequences is so much baloney. Hemingway is living proof you can sin and get away with it." And, boy, he really loved it and lapped it up. And ten years later to the very day that article was written, he took a bullet and blew his brains out. You rejoice over sin only so long. But there are people who want to do that, they think that's the thing to do, it proves them masculine, it sort of gives them an invincibility. They're bigger than God, see? It's like a God complex. That's one way.

But the other way is to kind of rejoice over somebody else's iniquity because you don't do it and it makes you sort of quasi holy, you know? I mean I often think that – well, take the newspapers for example. The salability of the newspapers is predicated on the recounting of iniquity, right? I mean it's the *Los Angeles Unrighteousness*, it's the *Herald Iniquity*, basically. I mean, that's it, you open it up and so-and-so left his wife and rape and so-and-so committed a crime and so-and-so murdered and there's hanky-panky in the White House and this over here and that over here and corruption over here and corruption over there. And we Christians have a tendency to say, "Tsk, tsk, tsk, there they go again." And, you know, and here we are in our sanctimonious shell. What we're really doing is convincing ourselves that we're really holy because we don't do that and it's kind of nice that somebody does because it gives us a standard to compare ourselves with. That's rejoicing in iniquity.

I've seen it happen in a case of divorce. Two people will get a divorce – two Christians sometimes – and they don't have any grounds for it. I mean there's no scriptural grounds such as fornication. They just get a divorce. And then one partner realizes eventually – they get to studying the Bible – that the only biblical grounds would be fornication but there wasn't any. So they're stuck. They can't get remarried. So then they begin to hope that the other person will commit adultery. Oh, I've had that happen more times than I'd like to talk about. And you can almost detect a – you know – "Well, I don't know, you know, I don't know that they have." And then when they do, or they think they do, you'll hear somebody call on the phone, "Listen, I just found out that he does – he's committing adultery." See? "I'm free now." See? It's almost like they've been praying, "Lord, help him to commit adultery."

You say, "Has that really happened?" Yeah, that happens. It's happened many times that I've seen in my ministry, where you get that down-deep wish that adultery would happen so you'd have legitimate grounds to remarry. That's just one illustration.

You can rejoice over evil by wishing someone would sin or by being glad someone does so you look better. Or by just enjoying the fact that you sense a certain invincibility when you sin. I've even heard Christians say to me, "Well, I've been doing that sin a long time and God never done anything about it yet." Well, God's wheels grind slow but they grind small, Bible says. You can't rejoice in iniquity if

you love. You know why? Number one, because iniquity affronts God, and if you love God, you don't want Him to be affronted. Is that right?

What do you think Psalm 69:9 meant when David said, "The reproaches that fall on you are fallen on me"? He meant when you're dishonored, I'm in agony. You can't rejoice in sin that affronts God – no way. You look around you today at our society and the kinds of things our society does for entertainment, the kinds of things that are tolerated by our society, the flaunting and outright overt sin in our society, and a Christian who rejoices in that or who tolerates that doesn't understand what it means to love God because that is so very offensive to the holiness and the purity of God that if you really loved God, that would just make you feel cold inside, no place for rejoicing.

So there's no thought of rejoicing over evil. Secondly, not only in relation to God, but how could you rejoice over sin when you know the consequence? That's what I kept thinking about this man in the barber shop. Instead of laughing at his jokes, they – to me, they were like nails in his coffin. All I could think about was the man is hopeless. If God doesn't come into his life and he doesn't meet Christ, he's a damned man because of his sin. So there is no way for a Christian to rejoice in sin. You see, that's why the believer is so anxious to correct sin. People say, "Well, if you love everybody, how can you discipline people?" Because loving them is hating their sinfulness.

Let me show you an illustration: Second Thessalonians chapter 3 verse 5. And I want you to see the context here. Says this: "And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God." We'll stop there. Boy, what a beautiful statement. He says, "And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God." He says, "I want you to be characterized by love." Now, let's see love in action, verse 6, "We command you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ withdraw yourself from every Christian that walks disorderly and not after the tradition which he received of us." Verse 14, "And if any of them obey not the word, by this epistle note that man have no company with him that he may be ashamed and count him not as an enemy but admonish him as a brother."

Now, he says this: "You find somebody who's a believer, you put him out, you cut your fellowship off, you don't have anything to do with him." Why? That's part of letting the love of God come into your life because love hates sin and love goes to the sinner and says it isn't right. And love purifies the fellowship and removes the sin that might taint the remainder of the people.

So when somebody comes along and says, "Well, your church disciplines. Don't you think that's less than loving?" I say, "That is loving." That is loving. Love doesn't tolerate evil. Love doesn't rejoice in sin. Why? It affronts God and it brings punishment on the sinner. And it's true also that what this verse really hits at – and you might bypass it if you weren't careful to think about it – is that it hits at the idea of gossip because it just gives no room for even recounting evil things. I've often thought that if we never gossiped about the faults and sins of others, I wonder how much of our conversation would be silenced. I mean what would we do? If we didn't read the paper and report the evil all over the place, if we didn't talk about the failures and faults and sins of the people around us, what would we talk about? And yet this, next to James 3, is probably the most stringent indictment in the New Testament relative to gossip. Love rejoices not in iniquity. And if it doesn't rejoice in it, it isn't happy to hear it, and it won't be happy to pass it on.

Some people say, "Well, it's the truth. It's just the truth. I mean I know this to be a fact. This – I'm not guess – this is the truth." Listen, that doesn't mean you have to say it. You know, today we hear that. "Tell everybody the truth. Got to have that openness." Sensitivity training, all that stuff, spill your guts,

say the truth. Love doesn't rejoice in somebody's evil and so love doesn't go passing it around. Why? Why would you pass around something that affronts God? Why would you pass around something that wounds and injures and chastens the sinner who did it? Why? If you were loving to God and loving to that individual, you wouldn't.

There was a country newspaper editor in the United States who got tired of people who were always writing the paper and saying, "You don't report the news with enough honesty, you're too biased, you're always too kind." So he decided to respond to such complaints. He announced in the issue of the following week that he would tell the whole truth about everybody and everything. Well, the people were so eager to get the paper, it sold out immediately, and I have a little deal here that gives some of the articles that were in the paper. I'll just read you three samples.

"Dave Konkie died at his home last Friday evening and there was a big funeral Sunday afternoon. The minister said it was a loss to the community but I doubt it. The community is better off without him. The doctor said he died of a heart attack. Nonsense – whiskey killed him."

Another article: "The Wednesday Literary Club met at the home of Mrs. So-and-so. The program stated they were going to study Shakespeare's play, *Much Ado About Nothing*. Well, they didn't. The lady who was assigned to present the paper had never read the play and so they had no program. But they made up for it by gossiping about every member that wasn't there and the whole afternoon was really like the play: much ado about nothing."

Then there was another article – I like this one. "Winifred Jones and Jim Smith were married Saturday at the Methodist parsonage. The bride is a very ordinary girl who doesn't know any more about cooking than a jackrabbit and never helped her mother three days in her whole life. She's certainly not a beauty by any means and has a gait like a duck." You want honesty, you got honesty. "The groom is an up-to-date loafer. He spends most of his time hanging around the pool hall, he has been living off his old folks at home all his life. He's not worth shucks. It'll be a hard life for both of them."

So much for the paper. Another letter was written by a woman who had decided not to lie when asked to give a recommendation for someone who had worked for her. This was her recommendation: "The bearer of this letter was in our employ for one month. We engaged her to do light housework and she couldn't have done it any lighter. We found her extremely careful to break only our best dishes and glassware. She was neat about the house, always hiding the sweepings under the rug where they wouldn't be seen. In serving meals, she exhibited good training by never putting her thumb in the soup when it was too hot and never spilled it except on the company. Her cooking was exceptional. In fact, we took daily exception to it. We will always be grateful for her stay, it was so short."

Something to be said for a little veiled honesty, isn't there? You see, love isn't looking to parade everybody's evil. Love doesn't laugh and make scorn. Love hides those kinds of things gently. Love rejoices not in iniquity.

I kind of like the definition of gossip that says this: "Gossip is vice enjoyed vicariously." But love doesn't do that. Love hates the sin. Love hates the way it hurts God and the way it hurts the sinner.

Granville Walker said, “There are times when silence is yellow. Times when we ought to stand on our feet and, regardless of the consequences, challenge the gross evils of the time and times when not to do so is the most blatant form of cowardice. But there are other times when silence is golden, when to tell the truth is to make many hearts bleed needlessly and when nothing is accomplished and everything is hurt by a loose tongue.” He’s right, of course. You see, love never rejoices in iniquity. It never rejoices in what offends God and breaks God’s heart. It never rejoices in what harms the sinner. And so, it never likes to hear it, let alone pass it on.

You say, “Well, what does love rejoice in?” Verse 6 tells us, the 11th characteristic of love. I love this one. “Love rejoiceth with the truth.” “With the truth” is the best way to translate that. Love rejoices with the truth. It doesn’t rejoice in unrighteousness, but with the truth. Now, that’s an interesting comparison. Why does he compare those two? Why doesn’t he say, “Love rejoices with righteousness”? Because it is clear that righteousness is predicated on what? Truth. You can’t be righteous until you behave yourself in accord with God’s truth.

Now listen. Two things I want you to see: Love only rejoices with truth as taught and as lived. Keep it in mind. Love only rejoices with the truth as taught and lived. Love can’t rejoice with error. Love can’t rejoice with false teaching. Love can’t tolerate wrong doctrine. And yet you hear people say today, “Well, we don’t want to make an issue out of what they believe, we just want to love them.” You see, this is what stimulated what is commonly known as the ecumenical movement. This is what has stimulated all kinds of people getting together under the name of love but when – people will say to me, “Well, we just want to love everybody.”

I talked to a Christian leader, well-known, and I said, “But how can you compromise yourself with people who do not believe the Word of God in the way we know it to be true?” “Well,” he said, “we are instructed in the Word of God to love them.” My answer is this: “But love rejoices” – what? – “with the truth.” And that is the basis upon which love can work. I can’t put my arms around and love somebody who teaches things other than what the Bible teaches. And nor can I put my arms around and love somebody in the truest sense who lives a life that does not behave itself according to the truth. Love will rejoice when truth is taught. It will rejoice when truth is lived. It will not rejoice when those are absent. And, believe me, the slightest compromise will take the joy out of love. I may love you but when you teach error, I will not rejoice. I may love you but when you live error, I will not rejoice. The slightest compromise robs that joy.

In 2 John, that important epistle, we find an interesting helpful illustration of this. Here’s what it says. In verse 6 – and again, it’s in the right context here, “And this is love” – here we are with love again. “This is love, that we walk after His commandment.” Now listen: This is love, not a feeling, not an attitude, but obedience to the truth, that what you have heard from the beginning, you walk in. This is love: obedience, living the truth. Love isn’t disregarding the truth. Love isn’t saying, “Oh, well, it doesn’t matter what you believe” or “It doesn’t matter how you live. We love everybody anyway.” No. Love walks after the Commandments.

Well, you say, “Well, if somebody varies a little bit, what about that?” Verse 7 moves right into that. “Many deceivers are entered the world, they confess not Jesus Christ coming in the flesh.” In other words, they throw doubts on the incarnation in some way or another. “This is a deceiver and an antichrist. Look to yourselves that you lose not the things which you have wrought but you receive a full reward.” He’s saying you can lose your reward by fooling around with such. These people who transgress and don’t abide in the true doctrine of Christ, they have not God, and verse 10, “If they

come to you and don't bring the true doctrine, don't receive him into your house, don't bid him God speed, for whoever bids him God speed partakes in his evil deeds."

Now, he's just talking about love here but he's saying love is no excuse for indiscriminate behavior in regard to truth. Do you see? Love operates in the area of the Commandments, and love responds toward the people who teach the truth. So love rejoices in those who teach the truth and those who live the truth. But love doesn't rejoice indiscriminately at anybody and anything who just happens to throw the name God or Jesus around. And the Bible, you see, is very stern in dealing with sin in behavior. It's very stern in dealing with sin in doctrine.

Well, let's look at it on the positive: "Love rejoices with the truth." You know what love does? Instead of parading the evil of somebody, love finds the good and talks about that. I love to be around people like that. They help me so much. I want so much in my life to be a plus person, not a minus person. A minus person is somebody who goes around subtracting from people's reputations. I want to be a plus person who just adds. And there's always something to add. There's always some – I mean if Jesus could see some potential in Peter, he was definitely a plus person. You know, most of us would have fired Peter long before that. Jesus could see in the life of a harlot who washed his feet with penitent tears, a plus, when the Pharisee could see nothing but a minus. Jesus could see in a half-breed Samaritan a plus. Jesus was a plus person. He added to people, He didn't subtract from people. Love is a plus. Love is a positive. It encourages goodness. It finds the best and exalts it.

I hope you teach your children that. I hope your children grow up learning to be plus people. I hope they grow up learning that the thing you say about somebody is the good thing about them. And you know children will bloom in the sunshine of the spirit that encourages and helps them, builds them up.

There was a dear Scottish minister who all his life loved the simple people in Scotland, and one day he died, and it was said of him after he died by someone, "There is no one left in our village to appreciate the triumphs of ordinary folks."

I hope there's somebody in your house to appreciate the triumphs of ordinary folks. Love does, you know. It looks for the truth and the true behavior. And it rejoices, and by rejoicing when there's good behavior, it encourages that good behavior. If all you ever do is depreciate, depreciate, depreciate, that's the kind of response you'll get. If you build and they find that you are lifting them up when truth exists, then they'll want that and seek that. Love always rejoices in the truth. Well, I hope in your life, as in my life, the Spirit of God has been able to bear the fruit of love and that you see that love working its way out in these manners.

Now, there are four things left in verse 7 and they're left for next week because we're not going to try to get them today. But let me remind you of this, what we've seen this morning. Love is so selfless that it never gets irritated or upset. It is so concerned about the welfare of somebody else that it never keeps books on evil done. It is so zealous for the holiness of God and the health of a person that it never rejoices in unrighteousness. And it knows that the standard of joy is always the truth, so it rejoices when the truth is taught, truth is lived. Love is not for the half-hearted, you know. Love is not for the sentimental. Love is the most tough, difficult thing there is. It isn't for weaklings, it's only for strength. It takes the most discipline, the most commitment, and the most faith of anything I've ever discovered in the Bible, to live by love.

I'll close with a story. Dr. Sweeting, president of Moody, told the story of the great prime minister of England, William Gladstone. This is what he said: "While facing one of the great crises of his political life, Gladstone sat writing at two o'clock in the morning the speech with which he hoped to win a great political victory in the House of Commons the next day. At that hour of two o'clock, there came to his door the mother of a poor, dying, crippled boy in a tenement not far away. She begged the servant to speak to Gladstone. Servant relayed the message that she wanted him to come to the tenement, to bring a message of hope and cheer to her hopeless boy who was dying. She had heard that Gladstone might have something that could help him. Without hesitation, the great Gladstone left the preparation of this most vital speech, and he spent the rest of the night with that little boy, leading him to a knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Staying until dawn, he closed the eyes of the dead child and went home, he says, with his heart flooded with the peace of God. Later that morning, he told a friend, 'I am the happiest man in the world today.'"

Why was it so? From the sacrifice of the whole national politic of England and perhaps the world, Gladstone had stopped to show the love of Christ to one little dying boy in a tenement in London. And a few hours later, he made what the biographers have said was the greatest speech of his life. And he won his victory. That is selfless, people. That is selfless. And love is selfless. Are you?

Lord, thank You again for a clear Word to us about love. We're beginning to see – I'm beginning to see, I pray the rest of the family here at Grace is beginning to see, what You're after. Help us to see Jesus' perfect pattern of this love. Help us to see all these qualities, if only in veiled glimpses in our life, at least enough there to see what they're like and help us to pull the veil away and let them go, that we might be fully born to love, to Your praise, as Jesus loved. We pray in His name. Amen.

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