

The Qualities of True Love, Part 4

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13:7

Code: 1867

For our Bible study this morning, we are again in the book of 1 Corinthians, where we've been for many, many months. We find ourselves again discussing the perfections of love in the 13th chapter of 1 Corinthians, and the response that I've had from many of you has been so very, very gratifying, and I know many of you have really been blessed. And God has touched your lives, and there has been much, much response to this understanding of love that the Holy Spirit has shared with us here, so I am excited about sharing further with you this morning.

Now, as we look at again our section for study, chapter 13 verses 4 through 7, the perfections of love, I want to introduce it and approach it this morning from a negative viewpoint, if I can. Sin has effects. I doubt whether any of us would even bother to argue that it doesn't. We know that it does. We know that it has effects by virtue of our understanding of Scripture and of our understanding of our own circumstances. We recognize that when sin is in our lives there are certain things that take place as a result of that. We recognize that the Bible talks about the consequences of sin. And I suppose we could divide its consequences into the most obvious two categories. First of all, sin has a great effect on the soul of a man or a woman. It affects your relationship with God. Really, when you sin, or live in a state of unconfessed sin, you forfeit blessing. You take yourself out of the place of being blessed by God and you put yourself in a place of the loss of joy so that there is a soul sickness that occurs. There is a languishing of soul that occurs when a believer is sinful. But secondly, sin also has a rather dramatic effect upon the physical body. Sin will have results in terms of pain and illness.

A good illustration of this would be David. In 2 Samuel chapter 12, we have the record of a rather terrible sin. David violated Bathsheba and then as a secondary act, he made sure that her husband was in a position of losing his life, which really was the equivalent of murder. So he was involved not only in immorality but in murder. And as a result of that, here was a child of God who was entertaining a sinful situation. He not only suffered the soul sickness that came, the terrible blight on his soul, the sense of alienation from God and the anxiety of that sin as he realized he had forfeited the place of blessing, but there came, too, a rather dramatic impact on his own physical body. And if we would look for just a moment at Psalm 32, we would see how David reacted to the physical-illness that came as a result of his sin.

In Psalm 32 verse 2 and following— or actually verse 1 and following, he's talking about his sin and how wonderful it would be if he could get out from under it. And the effects of his sin that he mentions in verses 3 and 4 are in the physical area. He says, "When I kept silence"— that is, "when I failed to

acknowledge my sin, when I failed to confess it, to deal with it before God, my bones became old through my roaring all day long.” Here was actually physical pain, physical consequences, the aching of his bones, deep-down physical pain. And then in 4: “Day and night, God’s hand was heavy on me, my moisture is turned into the draft” or “drought of summer.” The life juices are dried up. Things happened to his blood. Things happened in the secretion of various glands. The fluids that accommodate the muscles were not operating, perhaps, properly so that there was a creation of certain tension in his muscles. That’s the Hebrew significance of that concept of moisture. And so here is a tremendously great physical impact as a result of David’s sin.

Now, that leads us to this obvious conclusion. For a Christian or a child of God, sin constitutes trauma emotionally. No question about it. It creates emotional anxiety. It creates emotional alienation from the one anchor that the Christian has. And as a result of that emotional trauma, there can result a debilitating illness and even fatal illness. The emotional center of the brain is a stem from which fibers, nerve fibers, run to every organ in the body, and because of such intricate connection to the brain, turmoil in the emotional center of the brain can create impulses that can cause any number of physiological problems. In fact, physicians tell us that usually these problems are created along three lines, physically. One, the emotional center causes a change in the amount of blood flowing to a given organ, which can become debilitating to that organ. Two, the emotional trauma can create an effect on the secretion of certain glands, which also can affect bodily function. And thirdly, the changing of the tension of certain muscles.

So that what we see, then, in sin is a two-fold effect; it is spiritual and it is physical. Sin can affect the body. It makes you sick. In Proverbs 15:17, it says, “It is better to eat vegetables.” And that’s tremendous concession. I mean, as a boy, I never thought it was good to eat vegetables— I’m still not too convinced, but anyway— David— or Solomon says, “It is better to eat vegetables with love than a stalled ox with hatred.” In other words, a stalled ox is the fatted calf. You take an ox, you put him in the stall, and you fatten him up for the slaughter— filet mignon in modern English. It’s better to have cauliflower with love than filet mignon with hate. In other words, the illness that can result from the heart anxiety that sin creates makes you sick so you can’t enjoy the best of meals. Again, reiterating the physical element in sin.

So when Paul writes to the Corinthians and tells them to love and tells them that love is the thing they need, it isn’t just for the healing of the soul but it no doubt had great consequence for the body. Let me show you why I say that. Look back at chapter 11 of 1Corinthians. In chapter 11 and verse 29, in reference to the way in which they were partaking of the Lord’s table, in a manner that was definitely sinful, Paul says in 11:29: “For he that eats and drinks unworthily”— in an unworthy manner— “eateth and drinketh judgment”— or chastening— “to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body.” In other words, if you eat this way, you’re going to get chastened. “For this reason, many are weak and sick and many sleep.” They had had sickness, severe illness, and they had had death.

Now, it isn't so much, I don't think, the idea that when anybody did this, God came down and supernaturally, miraculously killed them or gave them a supernatural illness. But what happens here is in the Corinthian assembly you have a whole bunch of people living in sinfulness. And sinfulness has physical ramifications. So that when the apostle Paul in chapter 13 is saying to them, "Love each other," he is not simply saying, "This is a soul issue," he's saying, "This is a body issue as well." For the wholeness of your assembly, for the wholeness of your own body, for the wholeness of all of these things, you need to love.

Now remember— and this is the key point that I want to use to tie the thing that I've just said with the things I'm going to say— remember, all sin is a violation of love— all of it— all of it. So that he is simply saying, "You are sinning, so you are sick spiritually, so you are sick physically, and here is the answer: Love, and all of these things will disappear." You say, "Well, John, what do you mean that love will eliminate all sin?" Look at Matthew chapter 22. Matthew 22 verse 34, "When the Pharisees had heard that He had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together." They were always trying to prove themselves better than the Sadducees. They figured if the Sadducees had got flattened by Jesus, they'd move in and flatten Jesus and they'd gain a little of the upper hand in their society, so they came along and they prompted one particular lawyer to ask Jesus a question: "Master, which is the great commandment in the law, the most significant one?"

Of course, they had the idea that you had to keep the law to be saved, but they were smart enough to realize that that way nobody's going to get saved because nobody can keep the law. So they decided that— at least some of them did, that if you could just find one good law and keep that one law, you'd be all right. And so they were simply saying, "Which is that one law?" And Jesus said, "Here it is. Thou shalt"— what's the next word? — "love." And here we're introduced to the concept of love in relation to this law. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment and the second is like it, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, and on these two commandments hang all the law and prophets."

Now listen. If you love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, if you love your neighbor properly as yourself, you will never sin because you will do nothing to violate God, you will do nothing to violate your neighbor. That takes care of it. Love, then, fulfills it all.

In Romans chapter 13— familiar word in verse 8. He says love one another; he that loves another has fulfilled the law. It says, "Thou shalt not commit adultery, not kill, not steal, not bear false witness, not covet," and if there's any other commandment, it can be briefly comprehended in this one saying: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, love works no ill to its neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law. You don't need a commandment that says, "Thou shalt not kill your neighbor" if you love your neighbor. You don't need a commandment that says, "Don't covet" if you love the person who possesses what you don't have. So you see, both of those passages say this: To simplify all of living,

love God, love your neighbor, and you won't have to worry about anything else.

Now, the Corinthians were equally loveless. Like David, they had chosen to violate each other— they were loveless. And their lovelessness was actually the common ingredient in every sin. For example, we started in the book of 1 Corinthians and we started reading about their division and their factions. And the reason they were fighting with each other was lovelessness. They had split into parties over philosophy. They had fallen into little spiritual groups over different human teachers. And there was friction and anxiety and carnality and strife and division because they were loveless. Their lovelessness is further seen in the fact that they committed immorality and were sexually violating each other. Their lovelessness is seen in the ugly kind of pride and conceit that in chapter 4 Paul discusses when he says you're anything but a servant, you think you're something great. They were in love rather with / /themselves than with God and others.

Their lovelessness is seen in their suits. They were constantly suing each other. The reason they did that was because they were loveless. The reason there were problems in the home, chapter 7, because of the lack of love. The reason they were stepping all over the neck of the weaker Christians in chapters 8 to 10 was simply a lack of love. The reason they violated the Lord's table, because they were indifferent to love, they were indifferent to the communion and the fellowship of one another, they were indifferent to God and His Son. The reason they had made hogs of themselves at the love feasts was because they didn't love each other enough to save some food for the people who didn't have anything.

You see, lovelessness characterized at the core every single sin they were committing. And so when Paul gets to this place, he is really saying love is the answer to everything. It will bring to you spiritual wholeness and it will bring to you physical wholeness. And I can promise you, it's an exciting thing to say, but if your life is full of love, you're going to be healthy spiritually and the chances are, unless God has some very, very specific purpose for you, the promise is you're going to be healthy physically. And that's why the Bible calls us to love again and again and again. There's no Christianity without love, there's no church without love, there's no ministry without love.

First Timothy 1:5 is a verse we ought to remember. It says this: "The end of the commandment"— in other words, the reason, the objective, the sum of it all, the point of it all, the end of the commandment— "is love out of a pure heart." First Timothy 1:5: "The end of the commandment is love out of a pure heart." God is trying to get us to love.

In 1 Corinthians 16:14— we'll get to this verse in the future as we study— says this: "Let all your things be done with love." Let all your things be done with love. Proper theology is no substitute for love. Activism and service is no substitute for love. Selective affection— that is, attraction to certain people, is no substitute for widespread love. Immaturity, ignorance is no substitute and it is no excuse for love. First Thessalonians 4:9 says you don't need to be taught of love because God has taught you

how to love. Romans 5:5 says He's put His love in your heart.

God wants Christians to be happy. God wants Christians to be healthy in their soul. God wants you to know what it is to be blessed and not feel His chastening, even in the area of physical illness that comes about because of the trauma of willful sin. And the real key to all of it is to learn to love. This is the indispensable reality for the Christian. God is love, and if God is to be seen in us, it is going to be when we are love as well.

Now, it is so important that we love that the New Testament just keeps hammering away at it. For example, Colossians 3:14 says, "Put on love." First Corinthians 14:1 says, "Follow after love." Philippians 1:9 says, "Abound in love." Hebrews 13:1 says, "Continue in love." First Thessalonians 3:12 says, "Increase in love." First Peter 4:8 says, "Be fervent in love." Philippians 2:2 says, "Be consistent in love." Hebrews 10:24 says, "Provoke each other to love." Second Corinthians 8:8 says, "Be sincere in love." And on and on it goes. This has always been the pinnacle of life. It's the pinnacle of wholeness for the Christian. And the healthy, happy, positive, glowing, useful Christian is the one who loves.

You say, "Oh, that's great, John, but how does it work? How does love function?" Well, look at these verses again, 1Corinthians 13:4-7, and we'll see. I've tried to say all along love is not an emotion, and I hope you're getting that, but love is action. And here he has given us love in action, expressing the behavior of love. We've studied the first 11. We're going to look just at the final four this morning, and this is the perfection of love. The first three verses, we discussed the prominence of love; verses 4 to 7, the perfections of love; verses 8 to 12, the permanence of love; verse 13, the preeminence of love. We'll be getting to those two in the future.

Now, remember the first 11 that describe love? If we are to love, we ought to know what it means to love. Let me just run them by you very briefly. Verse 4, "Love suffers long." We found that that meant love is patient with people. "Love is kind." That means it's useful to others, its highest privilege is to serve. And perhaps those two are the title and the rest of the 13 are sort of subtitles for love. Number three, "Love envies not." Is never jealous. It desires nothing but to give. "Love vaunteth not itself." That is, it is not boastful. It isn't always shooting off its mouth in order to make others feel inferior. "Love is not puffed up." That is, it inwardly has not an exaggerated opinion of itself. Sixth, "Love does not behave rudely." It never acts selfishly in behavior. It considers what is essential to the happiness of others.

"Love seeks not its own." This is really the key to all of it. Love is totally unselfish. It is the very opposite of self-centeredness. Eighth, "Love is not provoked." And that means love doesn't get upset, irritated or angry. Ninth, "Love thinks no evil." We saw that that was an accounting term. Love doesn't keep books on offenses that have been done against it, it forgives and forgets. It never makes memories out of wrongdoings. Tenth, "Love rejoices not"—verse 6 now— "in iniquity or

unrighteousness.” Love has no pleasure in hearing or repeating unrighteousness. It never is happy about sin, its own or anyone else’s, because sin wounds God and certainly wounds the one who commits it and the others against whom it is committed. Eleven– the end of verse 6– “Love rejoices with the truth.” Love rejoices when the truth is lived, and love rejoices when the truth is taught.

All right, there are the eleven that we’ve talked about. Now comes the crescendo in verse 7– look at it. These are the final four elements of love, and it’s just kind of like Paul is really flying by now as he gives these, and they really kind of gather up some of the others as well, as he peaks out in a crescendo of definition of love. “Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Then he caps it off by saying, “Love never fails.”

Now, let’s look at these four in verse 7. They’re hyperbole; that is, they are statements of exaggeration. Love bears all things– all things– all things– all things– four times. We have to understand that when he says “all things,” he doesn’t mean “all things” in a universal sense. Love certainly has to make some discrimination. We have to try the spirits to see if whether they’re of God. We don’t believe the devil, do we? It doesn’t mean all things in the general, total, universal sense. What it means is all things within the limitations of proper biblical boundaries, proper Christian discrimination, proper Christian sensibility. All things that come into the divine framework.

Now, these four are ascending, and we’re going from one to the next and they’re probably more closely tied than any of the other 11. They just really go together. Now, watch as we go. Let’s look at the first one. Number 12 of the 15, “Love bears all things.” Now, this is a tremendous word, and I want you to see the depth of it. It’s a glorious truth. The word “bear,” although it is used in various shades of meaning in the New Testament, primarily means “to cover with silence.” To cover with silence. Or if you want one word, “to suppress.” To suppress. That’s the basic meaning. It doesn’t mean that love puts up with anything and love can be shoved around because it doesn’t have any dignity, but what it does mean is that love out of a regard and a respect and an honest concern for the real value of another person, love will do everything it can to cover up and suppress the sin of that person. Genuine love is reluctant to drag a scandal in front of anyone. When it says it “bears all things,” it’s not in the sense of “Oh, I’ll put up with that some more” or “I’ll endure this trial,” it means it is disposed to cover over the ugliness in someone else’s life.

You know, you can illustrate the fact that this is a normal human behavior pattern by looking at yourself and your own children. It is normal for depravity to want to uncover everybody’s evil. There’s no question about that. Go to the newsstand and check out the latest magazines. *True Confessions*. Secrets of Mr. So-and-so, the secret marriage of So-and-so and So-and-so. And all the books. I’m telling you, the bookstores are jammed with exposés. You see, depravity is always looking to find the skeleton in somebody else’s closet because it gives a sense of self-righteousness– always.

Your children are a good illustration— so are mine, just so you realize I'm on the same wavelength you're on. They come into the world depraved, and one of the first manifestations of their depravity is the eagerness with which they want to tell on their brothers and sisters. And that's one thing you have to discipline out of them. Ours will come in and say, "Do you know what Matt's doing?" And I'll say, "I don't know what Matt's doing and I'm not interested." That's one way to deal with it. And then when they're gone, I go find out what Matt's doing.

One of them will run down the stairs: "So-and-so's jumping on the bed." You know, that's typical. Why? Because depravity is always trying to uncover somebody else so it can gain a sense of self-respect and righteousness and look good in your eyes. You know, it's kind of sad, but some people never grow out of that. Some people spend their whole life tattling. You know, I always question people who are married and all they can do is talk about the errors and the faults and the sins of their partner. I question whether they know the meaning of love because love throws a blanket over somebody else's faults. That's what the word means.

The Corinthians didn't know the meaning of that. They were exposing anybody. Chapter 6, if somebody offended one of them, they dragged them into court and sued them publicly before a pagan judge. But love throws a kindly mantle over the faults and weaknesses and sins of others.

First Peter 4:8, Peter put it this way— it's beautiful— he said, "Love covers a"— what?— "multitude of sins." Love is a big, huge blanket that runs around throwing itself over people's faults, not exposing them. Proverbs 10:12 says, "Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all sins." Have you ever noticed how easily you dismiss the faults of those you love? Think of the person you love the most, and they do something wrong. "Ah, well, there's so much good about them. I mean everybody makes a mistake." Now think about the person you don't like— don't think too long, it'll be a sin. Or imagine that you didn't like somebody— that's better— and they do something wrong and you love it, see. Because you really wish it. But love dismisses the sins of the one it loves, and the one it doesn't love, pounces on them, see. Love will warn, yes, and love will exhort and love will rebuke and love will discipline, but love will cover, not expose.

Beautiful characteristic of love— give you a good illustration of it, the best illustration I could think of: the cross of Jesus Christ. Love has a redemptive quality. You know, God loved us. God didn't sit up in heaven with the Trinity and say, "You know, those human beings are gross. What do you angels thing about them?" "Oh, yeah, especially that MacArthur one. He is bad." And they didn't have an eternal discussion about us. We are not the subject of heavenly gossip. Isn't that nice to know? He is the covering for our sin. You see, God is not in the business of exposing. Ultimately, He's in the business of covering. Rather than sit in righteous resentment and gossip with the Trinity and the angels about the sins of men, God just came to a cross, threw a mantle over man's sin, and bore their sin in His own body.

Now, let me tell you something about love. Love throws a mantle over sin because love has a redemptive element. Love is always after redemption. Love wants to redeem, it wants to buy back. Love is not judgmental, love is not condemning, love is redeeming.

Listen to this. "He carried our griefs, He bore our sorrows. He was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities. Our chastisement was on Him." Isaiah 53, that is love. Now, let me tell you something. Love will actually go beyond throwing a blanket. Love is so empathetic that love will feel the pain. Love will actually endure the agony. Love will bear it. Love will feel the pain when a brother or sister sins and I love that person, I hurt. I don't want to expose. I'm willing to bear the pain, and then love will redeem and forgive. The redemptive character of love is willing to take and throw a blanket over sin, to feel the pain of that sin, and I'll go a third step, it is willing to take on the consequence of that sin. True love is. On the cross, God didn't just throw a mantle over sin, He didn't just feel sympathetic about it, He did what? He bore our sins in His own body. Genuine love is never quick to exploit or expose or gloat or condemn. It throws a blanket over sin, carries the burden of it, even takes the blame for it, even accepts the punishment.

In Cromwell's time, a soldier was condemned to die by execution. He was to die at the ringing of the curfew bell. He was engaged to be married to a beautiful young girl. The girl pleaded with the judge. With tears, she pleaded with Cromwell to spare his young life, all in vain. All the preparations were made for the execution. The city awaited the signal from the bell at curfew. The sexton, who was old and deaf, threw himself against the rope, as he had for years, he pulled it and pulled it and pulled it, and he didn't know it, but no sound came out. The girl had climbed to the top of the belfry, reached out, caught, and held onto the tongue of the huge bell at the risk of her life, and as he rang it, she was smashed against the side, but the bell was silent. At length the bell ceased to swing, and she managed to get back to the edge and came down, descended wounded and bleeding. Cromwell was waiting, and everybody was waiting at the place of execution, and he wanted to know why the bell had not rung.

And the girl arrived and told him the story, and a poet recorded it for all time, and this is what he said, "At his feet she told her story, showed her hands all bruised and torn; and her sweet young face still haggard with the anguish it had worn; touched his heart with sudden pity, lit his eyes with misty light, 'Go, your lover lives,' said Cromwell. 'Curfew will not ring tonight.'"

Here's somebody who was willing to go where love goes. Throw a mantle over sin, feel sympathy for sin, and take punishment for sin— somebody else's. That's redemptive love. It is always, always the quality of love, that love suppresses someone else's sin, sympathizes with someone else's sin, suffers for someone else's sin if it can.

To what extent do you bear the pain to cover someone's sin? It's a fair question. Do we really cover other people's evil? Love does. Love bears all things. And there's a second, let's ascend a little more. Number 13, verse 7: "Love not only bears all things, love"— what?— "believes all things." This is great. Love bears all things and then love believes all things. Instead of suspecting, instead of being eager to denounce the offender, instead of saying, "Oh, well, probably got exactly what he or she deserved, this is probably the way it should have worked out" and "Well, he's gone so far now, he'll probably never change," love believes in the best in someone else. It sees the wrong, it sees the weakness, it throws a mantle of silence over the weakness, it suppresses the sin, and then it believes the best.

Love doesn't go through life cynical. Love doesn't go through life suspecting, suspicious of everybody and everything. And suspicious that every time somebody does a wrong thing— "Oh, that proves it, they were rotten to begin with." Love isn't cynical and suspicious. Love always believes the best. You know, you see this particularly, I think, in the heart of a mother. Sometimes a son, a daughter, drifts away from the Lord. We were in Ohio with some dear people that we came to be acquainted with who took us to this conference, and they were telling us about a daughter who had drifted away, who was a source of great heartbreak. And they recognized her sins, they recognized the faults, they recognized all the problems, but they had thrown a mantle of love over her because they cared so much. And they said, "She'll come back. We believe with all our hearts she'll come back to the Lord."

You know why they believe that? Because they love her and love has to believe that. Love has to believe it because love cares too much not to believe it. And what love wants so bad, it turns into faith, you see? That mom and dad want that girl back so badly and they love her so much that their wish becomes a belief. That's how hard love pulls, see. But when somebody goes wrong and you say, "Ah, they revealed their true character," proves you don't love them, because love doesn't let go like that. There's the wife of a husband who 25 years, 30 years has never come to Christ, and she's always saying, "He'll come someday." And you know, when she says that, what I know? She loves him, and her love for him makes her wish that he'd come, and her wish is so strong it turns into a belief that he will.

Yes, love sees wrong and love sees weakness and love rebukes it and love deals with it, but not to expose it. Love throws a mantle over it. And if you're going to make a mistake about somebody's character, do a favor to yourself and the Lord and everybody else, err on the side of love. Make a mistake in the fact that you trusted him too much, you believed in him. One of the things that we've tried to integrate in our ministry here is the fact that all of our staff and the working and the elders and everything, it's all based on one thing: We believe in you. We believe you're totally dedicated to Christ. We believe you're diligent. We believe you're the best kind of person and so on that basis, we trust you. And if somebody doesn't fulfill that trust once in a while, it's all right, we err on the side of love, and that's how to be healthy and happy. And most of the time, it puts people under a kind of emphasis that makes them want to give the best they have.

The Corinthians, they were anxious to suspect, be cynical, believe what is bad, assume nobody was ever telling the truth. Be like Job's friends, "We know what your problem is, Job. You're evil. You're a bad egg, Job. Face it, 'fess up. That's why you have all those problems." And Job listened to all of that palaver about as long as anybody could. He knew in his own heart he wasn't, and finally there's a statement in— I think it's 21:27, "Behold I know your thoughts and the devices you wrongfully imagine against me." He says, "You know, I've had it with you guys, all you do is think evil about me." And what does that prove? They didn't love him because if they'd have loved him, they'd have said, "But he's a good man. Oh, maybe he's made mistakes here and there and maybe he's sinned but he's good. There's something redeemable about him. I don't understand why"— that's not the way they thought.

Look at this one, Matthew 9. Notice— you want to know how the Pharisees felt about Jesus? This is probably as clear an indication as you'll ever get. Jesus had met a man sick of the palsy, in Matthew 9, and saw that he was a great believer, and He said, "Son, your sins are forgiven," gave him salvation, no doubt physical healing as well. And certain of the scribes said within themselves, "This man blasphemes." Now, this is interesting. Jesus heals a man and says, "Your sins be forgiven," they said— inside they said, not out loud— "This man blasphemes." Well, why did they say that? Well, because they had a predetermination that He was evil. You say, "Is it evil to forgive sins?" No. "Is it evil to heal the sick?" No, but they had a predisposition that He was evil so whatever He did had to be evil. They were cynical and suspicious. And I love the next verse: "Jesus knowing their thoughts said, 'Why think ye "evil" in your hearts?'" Boy, that must have been something. They didn't even say it. He answered the thing they were thinking. He says, "Why think ye 'evil' in your hearts?" That was the indictment of the scribes.

They had an evil attitude toward Jesus, which was proof positive that they didn't love Him because if they'd have loved Him, they'd have thought the best about Him. When you love somebody, you think the best, and even when something goes wrong, you think the best. I say to my wife again and again, "Honey, I know our kids are going to turn out terrific. I know they're going to turn out great. I believe they're going to be the best kids when they get to be adults." You know why I think that? I have to think that. I believe that. I believe that because I wish it. I wish it because I love them. That's how love works.

But you see, in the case of hate like this, even when they couldn't find a fault in Him, they kept looking for them because they hated. You start hating somebody and you'll start finding faults. You start loving somebody and you'll start covering. Just the difference. Love is a harbor of trust for those who are doubted by everybody else. So love believes. And as soon as somebody wants to get it right again, boy, love is Galatians 6:1, love is Johnny-on-the spot to restore the fallen brother.

To give you an illustration of love, just think about Jesus and the disciples. They weren't anything too hot, frankly. The ones that are the most well-known in the New Testament— Peter, James and John— were sinful. Peter was a notoriously faithless character who continually fell on his face. James and John had a pride problem, and a sort of a pseudo spirituality. Sent their mother along to ask if they could have the chief seats in the kingdom. Now, the rest of the guys, we don't know anything about, to speak of much. They were sinners, too. Jesus could have scratched His head and said, "Father, I don't know what to tell You, but this whole deal isn't going to work out. I got 12 losers. If You think I ought to come back to heaven and turn this whole thing over to them, I'll do it, but it's a little spooky."

But you know, Jesus knew the sins of the disciples like nobody else and yet He believed the best about every one of them, didn't He? And He said, "They can do it." And He gave them the task and sent them into the world to do it and they did it. You know what I think? I tend to think you make the best out of the people you believe the most in. He believed the best of them and He put His whole plan on that basis and they carried it out. You say, "But John, what happens if you throw a mantle over their sin and then you say, 'But I'm going to believe there's good there and love is redemptive and it's going to get straightened out and you're going to come back, I'm believing that,' and they don't? And you find your faith kind of begins to fade and you say, 'Well, I thought they'd come.'" You say about that wayward son or daughter, "Well, I thought they would but it's been 15 years." Or about that husband, "I thought he would but, boy, I just don't know anymore. I don't know if I believe it anymore." Then what does love do?

The third one listed in verse 7, "Love"— what?— "hopes all things." Hope is the long line, the long cord that they never get disconnected from. It's long. You say, "As long as the grace of God is operative, human failure is never final." And the thing that I always go back to is the promise: "Is anything too hard for God?"

I think back a few years, some people that we disciplined in the church had very sinful situations and they've gone. There was a great desire in my own heart because of love to throw a mantle over their sin and never talk about it or discuss it or anything except with those who prayed. And then there was a great desire in my heart to believe that something would change, they'd be back, they'd come back. I just believed that and believed that. And I guess maybe in a couple of cases now, my faith has gotten a little small, and so you know what I do now? I hope that. I hope it. And it's like they're out on a long rope and every once in a while that rope pulls at my heart and I pray for them. And I hope. And I keep hoping.

You see, love is hopelessly— if we can do a play on words— optimistic. It never stops hoping. You say, "God is still God and He can do it, and I've got to hope in that." Love refuses to take failure as final. God wouldn't accept it from Israel, Jesus wouldn't accept it from Peter, and Paul wouldn't accept it from the Corinthians. "I will not tolerate failure as final." And many a loving wife has held onto a husband with nothing but that rope of hope. And many a parent to a child, and many a friend to

another friend, just holding onto hope. When all your faith gets clouded in, you have to hold on to hope. But you know, it's amazing— sometimes we make the worst judgments at that time and think they're the best. Don't give up on hope. Love doesn't. You might say, "Well, I've lost faith in them totally, they're out of it, there's just no way, no hope, I give." Love doesn't.

That's like going to a village beneath the Matterhorn in Switzerland and having people say, "This is the most beautiful— you've got to see the Matterhorn on a sunny day." And you arrive and it's fog. And you sit on the ground and say, "Liar, there's no Matterhorn. I'm right here and there's no Matterhorn." And you think in the foggiest moment you've made the clearest judgment. But love doesn't do that. When all of faith gets clogged up and fogged in, love still hangs onto hope. When doubt and despair steal faith, love still has hope.

There's a dog in an airport in a large city. He's been there for over five years. Somebody was telling me about it this week. His master and he were traveling somewhere, and his master got on the plane without him. He's been there over five years. He waits in the same corner. People at the airport give him water and food every day— and he hopes. If the love of a dog for a master— whatever love that kind of love is— if the attachment from a dog to a master could allow that kind of faithful hope, certainly love could produce it in us if we really loved. Love, you see, doesn't run, bail out, leave as soon as the first mistake is made, the first sin is committed. Love waits and waits. And there are enough promises in the Bible to make hope work.

You say, "But John, if you bear all things and you believe all things and you hope and the rope gets further and further out and further out and further out and you just are losing hope, then what?" Okay, then the last one, verse 7: "Love endures all things." When it has borne and it has believed and it has hoped and it's still disappointed, it hangs in there anyway because the next verse says it: "Love never"— what?— "fails." That sums it up. It never dies, you can't kill it. Now, the term here, "love endures" in verse 7, the 15th in the list, it is a military term, and it has to do with being positioned in the middle of battle in a very violent situation. It isn't that love can handle little minor annoyances. No, no. It means love is standing there against incredible opposition and still loving.

It is Stephen lying on the ground and his life being crushed out with stones and saying, "Father, lay not this sin to their charge." He wanted to throw a mantle over the sins of his people. He believed, he hoped, so he preached with the belief that some would listen, and he hoped that they would come to Christ. And when he'd run out of faith and he'd run out of hope, all he had left was endurance and they crushed him. And as they were crushing out his life, he was simply enduring, wasn't he? Because he loved them and so he said, "Don't blame them for this, Father."

It's Jesus, Jesus on a cross, bearing, throwing a mantle over their sins, believing, knowing that out there, there were those that would believe, and enduring in the end while they spit on Him with the words, "Father"— what?— forgive them." You see, love never dies. You can't kill it. It never fails. Even

when the love for that rejecting child goes year after year after year and you get back hatred and bitterness and rejection, you never stop loving; you endure. That's the crescendo of love. Love bears all hurts and wounds— that's what Paul said in this verse— and sins and disappointments. And it covers them with a blanket of silence. And then it feels sympathetically and then it feels redemptive and then it even bears the pain, if it can. And after it is borne, it believes. Love goes on believing the best about somebody, the very best about them. It's never cynical and it's never suspicious in spite of the way it's been wounded.

And when love's believing is betrayed, then love turns to hoping because God is still God and He still rules and He can do anything. And even when hope grows thin and all hope seems lost, love endures. It endures the deep hurt that seems so final with a triumphant confidence that the God who gives His children peace is still on the throne. You see, love is never overwhelmed. It cares too much to give up. It will die caring. It will die being spit on and say, "Forgive them." That's love.

But tragically, in the Corinthian church, there wasn't any love. They were like the church that Reinhold Niebuhr spoke of when he said the church was like Noah's ark. If it weren't for the storm outside, we couldn't stand the stink inside. That's like the Corinthians, but that isn't the way God wanted it. He wants us to be characterized by love, He wants the church to be a community of love. He wants to see these things in operation.

Well, you say, "John, I know now that love is important. It's important because of the fact that it brings spiritual wholeness and physical wholeness. It's important because it's a characteristic of our Lord Jesus Christ and we are to manifest Him. And I see what it is now, I see what it does and how it behaves, but how can I get that going in my life? I mean how can I begin to see that in my life?" Let me give you five things, and I'll close— I'm just going to list them. These are the five keys to loving. Now, if you get these things going, you're going to experience this love.

Number one, acknowledge it is a command. Acknowledge it is a command. Acknowledge that loving is commanded, that it isn't something you can pick and choose about, that it isn't an option. Acknowledge it is commanded by God that you love. So we're not dealing with something that's whimsical here, we're dealing with something that is absolute. Romans 13:8-10. It is an absolute. You are commanded to love.

Secondly, acknowledge you have the power already. Acknowledge that you have the power already. Romans 5:5, "The love of Christ is shed abroad in your heart." It is not only a command, but it is a possible command because you have the power.

Thirdly, acknowledge it is the norm. Acknowledge that this is only normal, basic, bottom-line, human, Christian activity. First John chapter 4 verses 7 to 10 tell us that God is love and so should we be. It's the norm. So you acknowledge it is commanded, it is possible, it is normal.

Fourthly, acknowledge it is the Spirit's work. That's so you don't try to conjure it up in canned form. Galatians 5:22, "The fruit of the Spirit is love." So acknowledge it is the Spirit's work.

Now, when you really have gotten down to brass tacks and you've acknowledged that it's a command, you've made a commitment, "All right, Lord, it's a command, I'm committed to love," get on your knees sometime today and say, "God, I'm committed to love." Second, "God, I acknowledge I'm able to love." "God, I acknowledge it's just normal to love," and "God, I acknowledge I am able to love in a normal way to fulfill the commandment only in the energy of the Spirit."

And then the fifth: practice. That's it. Practice. Did you know that even Jesus learned obedience, the Bible says? Practice. Start at your house, put all these 15 characteristics into action, and the world will look at us and they'll say what God wants them to say: "Oh how they love one another." And that will exalt Christ. Let's pray.

Father, thank You again this morning for loving us. And we pray that we would love each other in an equal way as You have loved us. If there's anyone here who has not experienced Your love because they do not know the Son, may this be the day they come to know Him. If there are Christians here who do not love as they ought to love, may they make the commitment to love because they are able, because it is normal in the energy of the Spirit. May they begin today to practice, and may the rest of us continue to do it daily, that we might know the fullness of blessing, that we might know victory over sin, for to love is to exclude sin, and so live that we may give glory to Yourself. And we'll thank You for our time together today in Christ's name, whom we love, who loves us, and because of whom we love each other. Amen.

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