

## **Love is Not....**

February 8, 2009

Today we begin our second sermon looking at the true nature of Love. We must begin by taking just a moment to review the first portion of this important chapter. The chapter is not about romantic love, although it is read at a lot of weddings! It is written here in this letter to the church in Corinth because they are fighting about which of the spiritual gifts and which of them as members and ministers is more important to the life of the church. Paul wanted to remind them that the most important thing in the Christian theology and practice was love. The Christian Message is that God So Loved the World that He sent his Son Jesus to come and be the savior of the world. And That we ought to love one another.

Paul goes on beautifully to say that even if we are angelic in our speaking ability, if it is not doing in love it accomplishes nothing. We might have the faith needed to move mountains, or have great knowledge and know all kinds of cool things...but if we don't have love, what good is it. Love is really the heart of who we are as human beings, because we are made in God's image...and God is love.

Love is not a feeling that overwhelms us. No. love is something that we choose to do, it is a matter of the will and the mind as much at the heart and the emotions. The emotions rise and fall like the tides...with our physical strength and health, our age and all sorts of factors. But we can choose to overcome them, live and love through them and make love stronger and better for it. Ask someone who has been well married for 50 years...they will tell you that there are seasons in every marriage, ups and downs, but through it all their love grows deeper and stronger and better.

**Love is patient**...the word here is slow to anger..literally slow burning. Love does not fly off the handle and say things that it will regret later. How hard it is to take back those harsh words that cut so deep. We may say we are sorry and even forgive one another, but the wound is still there for a long time to come. It is so much better to never cut in the first place. Love is patient...long suffering.

**And Love is kind.** Love is full of small act of grace and little acts of tenderness and fun. Simple things you do just because you care. Nothing big. Not to be noticed. No recognition, no acknowledgement. Just because. Love thinks of the other person and looks for ways to make them smile and to make their day better...to lighten their load and show them that you care for them. Whether it is helping out in some way around the house or putting a flower on the seat of their car before you leave for work in the morning, a note in their lunch box, or their coat pocket, or a chocolate on their pillow...something small, fun and caring. Love is kind.

But there is a lot confusion about what love is and isn't. In ancient times and in ours. The Apostle Paul has quite a list here, which I believe is not exhaustive, but is merely exemplary of the kinds of things love is not. Here goes some of them:

Love does not:

### **Envy**

The loving person does not covet what the other person has nor do they begrudge them their successes. Said positively, the loving person wants the best for their beloved and rejoices when they succeed.

This really flows from a sense of self worth and security. If the other person is really insecure, they will be jealous or envious and really not want the beloved to do better than them. Remember those

“books” on catching a man that teach that you have to let the man win at sports, cards, etc. to build up his ego...what fun is that for you as a woman if the guy is so insecure that you can't have any real fun?

This sense of security and self worth flows from being loved unconditionally and completely; as God loves us in Jesus Christ. This is the absolute example of the Agape or selfless, giving love. God loves us completely and absolutely and hold nothing back. This love heals our hearts from the brokenness of the harshness and hurts of the world. When we have known ourselves loved completely, we can completely love. And are not envious or jealous.

**Love does not boast**...in itself, we should add. It is ok to boast appropriately in your beloved. To build them up is good! to puff yourself up is bad. Again, this flows from a sense of insecurity. Love needs to focus outward, not inward. If love is focused on itself, it is not really true love. Love wants what is best for the other person.

**Love is not Proud.** In fact, this literally is “love is not puffed up”. We all know people who are “ full of hot air”. That is what this verse is talking about...now I have to be careful here...for that is a preachers flaw...being full of hot air!

The loving person does not feel the need to be superior in all situations. it is ok for them to let you be the best, and to be proud of you for your accomplishments. Just this week I was talking to someone about what I call the “Wicked Witch Syndrome”, you know...where the person says “mirror, mirror on the wall, who's the fairest of them all” and if it is not them, they have to take that person out...for they have to be the number one person at all costs and everyone else is seen as competition. They have to tear that person down by whatever means necessary so they can still be the fairest.

Love is not proud, but humble. Love does not have to be number one...does not have to be the fairest in the land.

**Love is not rude.** This is a simple one. but you would be surprised how often people are rude. Rude as they drive. Rude as they are in line at the grocery store. Rude in restaurants. I remember telling our girls that when they went on dates to look carefully at how they fellows treated the waitresses, for it is a clue into their character. They would treat their dates well...but how they treated other drivers and how they treated the waitresses would tell them who they really were.

**Love is not self seeking.** It does not have to have its own way. Love does not have to have it my way...it is not burger king all the time. Of course in any relationship there is give and take...but love allows for that. How many times do we see supposed loving relationship where one person is completely lost into the other person's will... Love is not self seeking...

True love seeks to love as Christ has loved us...with a self giving love that seeks the best for the other person as well as for themselves.

**Love is not easily angered.** This is important. It does not say that love does not get angry at all. Anger is human and normal, and sometimes anger is appropriate. Anger can be a good motivator. Some things should make you angry. Sometimes when I talk to people and hear what is going on in their lives and hear that they are not angry...I wonder "why not?" Are you waiting for someone to give you permission to be angry? Ok, here it is! And don't worry, God is big enough to take your anger...look at the Psalms. 1/3 of them are Lament Psalms, which express anger at God. God can take it.

But we are not to be easily angered. Not hot heads. When we get angry, we should examine it, why are we angry. Is it justified? Is it for the right reason? The Bible says "be angry, but sin not. The anger of humanity rarely satisfies the righteousness of God" We are often angry for petty or selfish reasons. So, examine your anger, and if justified,

work it through. Use it to move forward ...to change things, to begin anew. But remember the verse I shared last week...James 1:9, "Let everyone be quick to listen, slow to anger, and slow to speak". Or as my dad used to say, 2 ears, 1 mouth...listen 2x as much as you talk.

**Love does not keep score**, (it does not keep a record of wrongs done). Love let's things go. Wow. Loves forgives and forgets. What love can withstand the constant chipping away of time by the weight of mistakes carried forward? The longer you go, the more weight you carry. You have to forgive, and you have to let things go.

Paul uses an accounting term here, Love erases the ledger sheet. Love only seeks to remember the good, the true and the beautiful. How, you ask, do you forgive and forget?

It is not always easy. The smaller the infraction, the easier it is to forget, obviously. And some are so large, that at times they shipwreck a relationship and sadly for some it can never be put right. That is determined couple by couple...case by case with a lot of prayer, work and tears.

But you can choose how you remember something. You are in control, remember, of how you remember things. If every time you remember something you consciously and intentionally talk to yourself about it using certain language, telling yourself the story so you will remember the grace, forgiveness and reconciling love...in time that is what you will remember and this will be behind you. It may sound weird, but self talk does work. This is how people create false memories that they come to believe as true (telling a story over and over again until they begin to believe it as true themselves)...and it is how they reinforce true memories...choosing which part of the memory to focus on.

**Finally, love does not delight in evil, but delights in the truth.**

Love is not concerned with what is wrong in the relationship, but with what is right. This is sort of the old is the glass half full or half empty idea. Love always looks for the good, not the bad. When love looks at you, love sees the best, the good, the hopeful, the truthful...

Love is not blind, but consciously chooses where it wants to focus its energy and its vision. What do you choose to look at? Where do you choose to put your focus...love does not delight in evil, but delights in the truth.

My prayer for you today comes from the letter to the Philippians' closing chapter...

***“ Finally, my friends, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.”***

Philippians 4: 8-9