

1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-5

INTRODUCTION

The opening three verses of this chapter focused on the emptiness produced when love is absent. In the verses that we are looking at (vs. 4-5) we discover a very comprehensive description of biblical love. Paul lists many of the facets of biblical love in these verses and the interesting thing is that in the Greek each one of these aspects of love is a verb.

This is telling us that Paul is not interested in giving us a description of what love is, as much as telling us what love does. True love is seen and biblical love is seen as well. Biblical love is always active love, it does not simply feel patient but it practices patience. Likewise it does not simply have kind feelings but it actually does kind things.

This active love which is biblical love is of course seen in the Lord Jesus who not only tells us that He loves sinners but demonstrates that love in dying in the place of sinners, He acts upon his love. We cannot truly begin to understand biblical love until we begin to apply it in our lives. Paul in writing about love to the Corinthians is not simply instructing them but He is seeking to change their living habits. He wants them to carefully and honestly measure their lives against the characteristics of love and that's what we should do as well as we look at some of the characteristics of biblical love.

1. LOVE IS PATIENT (v 4)

Love practises being patient or long suffering the Greek word literally means being "long tempered." The word is common in the New Testament and is used almost exclusively of being patient with people rather than with circumstances or events. Love's patience is the ability to be inconvenienced or taken advantage of by a person over and over again and not be upset or angry.

One of the early church fathers said "it is a word which is used of a man who is wronged and who has it in his power to avenge himself but will never do it." Patient love never retaliates. This type of patience is a virtually only seen in Christians. For as far as the Greek world was concerned this type of patience was seen as weakness for in that world, vengeance was seen as a virtue.

But Christian love is the very opposite its primary concern is for the welfare of others, not itself and it is much more willing to be taken advantage of than to take advantage. The patient person like the Lord Jesus refuses to pay back evil with evil but instead is willing to turn the other cheek when he is taken advantage of.

God is incredibly patient with mankind and it is a good job He is otherwise He would have judged us long ago. Even though men and women continue to reject and ridicule him He continues to be long suffering towards us. Now that blasphemous play that is being shown around the country at the minute (Jerry Springer the Opera) makes me very angry but just imagine how angry God must be yet He is long suffering with all who act in that play and all who produce it and all who go to watch it or allow it to take place in their theatre. The reason, of course, why God is long suffering is because He is loving, his love for sinners means that He wants sinners to repent and come to know his love through the salvation He offers through faith in Jesus Christ.

If we have come to know this salvation then we will know this love of God, which has been poured into our hearts through the work of the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). In fact the very evidence that we have the Holy Spirit in our lives is the fact that we will demonstrate biblical patience for the fruit that the Spirit produces in us is patience (Galatians 5:22). Therefore if as Christian people we are going to show God's love we must demonstrate this through our patience with people. The way

that we can increasingly do this is by daily being filled with the Spirit which means a daily submission to God's way and rule in our life.

The more the Holy Spirit influences our lives then the more patient we will become. If we are not as patient as we ought to be then we need to ask God to help us willingly to surrender our way to God and follow God's way through the leading of His Spirit as He applies God's word to our lives. There is no excuse for our lack of patience; it only demonstrates how resistant we are to the work of the Holy Spirit in our life.

2. LOVE IS KIND (v 4)

Patience is about being willing to put up with others but kindness is about being willing to give continually to others even to our enemies. The word "kind" means to be useful, serving and gracious. It is active goodwill. It not only feels generous but it is generous. It not only desires the welfare of others but works for it. This is what the Lord Jesus means when He tells us that we are to love our enemies (Matthew 5:40-41), He means that we are to be kind to them we are to be generous in our love to them. Now surely in the world in which we live we have an unlimited opportunity to show such kindness and such kindness is so rare that it will be noticed by our unbelieving world.

Our model here once again is God. Now Romans 2:4 tells us that God is kind and He longs that his kindness to us will lead us to true repentance. Now if God is kind so that we might repent then surely the kindness of Christians to the unbelieving world is one way of calling the world to repentance.

When we are kind to those who hate us and are hostile to us then is that not a wonderful testimony to the power of the gospel to change the lives of sinners. Therefore it is an appeal to the recipient to repent and experience the love of God that enables people to be so kind to others.

But this kindness must be seen in the church and in our home life. Christians will be kind to one another, which means doing kind things for one another, being helpful to one another, being prepared to give of our time and energy for one another even when it is inconvenient to do so. In the home it means children will be kind to their Parents and parents to their children and husbands and wives will be helpful to one another. Once again this kindness is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. So the only way to demonstrate this kindness is to continually put to death those sins that seek to raise their heads in our lives and to daily keep in step with the leading and guiding of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:24).

A Christian who is not kind is a Christian who is selfish and is sinful and therefore they must repent and put sin out of their lives so that they will live by in the power of Holy Spirit which will be demonstrated by a life of kindness.

3. LOVE DOES NOT ENVY (v 4)

This is the first of eight negative descriptions of agape love. Love does not envy this is because love and envy are mutually exclusive. Where one is the other cannot be. Envy has two forms; one form says I want what someone else has. So it might be a house or a car or it could be health like others or financial security like others or simply that we want to be praised like others etc.

This form of envy is bad enough but there is another form that is probably worst. This form says I wish they didn't have what they have, this envy is more than just being envious of what others have but it is actually desiring evil for someone else, it is envy at a deeper more corrupt level. One of the hardest battles that we fight as Christians is envy.

There is always someone who is better off than we are or who has something more than we have and the temptation is always there to wish we had what they have or to wish that they didn't have it at all.

The root meaning of the word "envy" is to have a strong desire and it is the term from which we get our English word zeal. The word is used both in a favourable and unfavourable way in the bible but it is clear that the meaning in the context here is unfavourable. When love sees someone who is popular successful beautiful or talented it is truly glad for them and never envies them.

Envy is a destructive sin, which leads to even more sin. Think of Joseph in the Old Testament his brothers were envious of him so they wanted to kill him but in the end settled for selling him as a slave. Envy led to doing Joseph great harm. We must never give envy a foothold in our lives or in the life of the church for it will lead to untold sins and division and will be a great hindrance to our own witness and to that of the church. Churches have been torn apart because of envy, which always displays itself in destructive ways; it always does harm to churches and individuals.

Therefore we need to ask God to help us display true biblical love in all our relationships for if that happens then we will rejoice when others are successful or have more than we have and we will genuinely be glad for them when blessings come into their lives.

4. LOVE DOES NOT BOAST (v 4)

When a loving person is successful he does not boast about it. The Greek word translated to boast is used nowhere else in the New Testament and it means, "to talk conceitedly." Love does not parade its accomplishments but simply and quietly praises God for all blessings. Boastfulness is really the other side of envy for envy wants what someone else has but boasting is trying to make others envious of what we have. Envy puts others down, whereas boasting builds ourselves up. It is hard to listen to a boastful person and we can so often be critical of such people but yet I'm sure that if we could stop and listen to ourselves we would be shocked at our own boastfulness. Now the Corinthians loved to boast they were spiritual show-offs they were constantly vying for public attention. They wanted the most public offices in the church and they longed for the most public gifts and loved to show off in front of others. They cared little about the feelings of others or harmony within the church all they cared about was promoting self through their boasts.

Boasting is a sin that puts ourselves first and therefore everyone else including God must be less important than us. Of course it is impossible to exalt oneself which is what boasting does without putting others down. Once again our great example here is the Lord Jesus. If ever anyone had anything to boast about it was him. He was God in human flesh, he was perfect yet we read that he humbled himself and constantly put others before himself, he had everything to boast about yet he never once did. In contrast we have nothing to boast about for we are sinners but yet we are so prone to this sin of boasting. How do we conquer this sin? The answer is biblical love for when we are dominated by agape love we will not boast. This love is the fruit of the Spirit so once again it comes down to the Holy Spirit being at work within us so that the love of Christ will flow from us to others which will lead to us not only being patient and kind but it will stop us being envious and boastful.

5. LOVE IS NOT PROUD (v 4)

Paul is listing all the things that love is not but that the Corinthians are. The Corinthian believers thought they had arrived at perfection and Paul has already written to them about this matter (4:6-8, 10 & 18). Everything good that had come to the Corinthians came as a gift from God and, therefore, they had no reason to become proud.

Yet they had become very conceited and proud about their knowledge of doctrine but more importantly in the context they were proud of their spiritual gifts. They were so perverted in their thinking that they had even become proud of their sin (5:2) probably accepting sin under the guise of freedom. When they should have been repentant they were proud.

However true biblical love is not like that, it never becomes proud. I think that John the Baptist is a good example here for us to follow. When Jesus began his public ministry he soon overshadowed the ministry of John the Baptist yet there was no hint of pride for John declared that he was not worthy to tie the sandals of Jesus (John 1:27). It is so easy to show our pride when someone else takes the limelight or someone else gets the praise for something that you have done. It's so easy to show our pride when others are pushed forward instead of us.

But a person who is demonstrating the love of Christ in their life will never become proud, they will humbly accept all that comes their way whether that is praise or lack of praise for such a person knows that God is the rewarder of those who seek him. A proud person is big headed and causes contention in the church but a loving person is big hearted and encourages service in the church.

6. LOVE IS NOT RUDE (v 5)

Rude is a good translation of this word for the principle here has to do with poor manners with acting rudely. The word means "what is not according to proper form and thus anything disgraceful dishonourable indecent." It is a general term with a wide meaning. A person who forgets his manners is a person who does not care enough about others to be polite courteous and grateful.

A rude person cares little about the feelings and sensitivities of others; they can be careless, sometimes overbearing and often crude.

The Corinthian believers were examples of rude people. Nearly everything they did was rude even when they came together to celebrate the Lord's Supper they were self-centred and offensive to others. They simply did not wait on others and ate the food and drank the wine without any consideration of others. So much so that some even got drunk while others had none.

It was the same in the public worship services when they tried to use their spiritual gifts to undo one another so that disorder and chaos reigned. They did not think about order or structure or even reverence all that mattered was their gift.

I have seen Christians be rude in witnessing to others. They do not listen they simply are so intent on sharing the gospel that they do not think about the person they are witnessing too and sadly untold damage is done. I have a principle when doing door to door work that no matter how rude people are to me; I will always treat them with politeness.

I admit it is sometimes hard but love never acts in rude ways. It always treats people with respect and care and in honourable ways.

7. LOVE IS NOT SELF SEEKING (v 5)

This is probably the key to loving in Christ's way for human nature is such that it always wants its own way. What lies behind envy, boastfulness, pride and rudeness is our own selfishness. Now the Corinthians were models of selfishness for they did not share their food with others at the fellowship meals, they sued their fellow believers in order to get their own way and they indulged in all sorts of sexual immorality.

When it came to the gifts of the Spirit they were only concerned about their gifts and their rights to exercise them. They were preoccupied with themselves but love is preoccupied with the interests

of others. As always Jesus is our perfect model for he came not to be served but to serve. He lived for others and he died for the benefit of others, he always sought the welfare of others and never his own.

This is seen on the cross when he could have commanded a legion of angels to come and rescue him but instead he chooses to suffer and die so that we could be forgiven and could one day go to heaven.

Only God can convert someone's heart so that instead of focusing and living for self we begin to live for and focus on others even at our own expense. When Christians love like this; families are transformed communities are transformed and churches are transformed. Only Jesus Christ by the power of His Spirit can enable us to live like this, so that we are not self-seeking but seek only the glory of God and the good of others.

We need to pray that God might make us people who love like this, a people who will seek to resist the temptation to have our own way and a people who will always live for the welfare of others before our own welfare.

I don't have time to deal with the other two characteristics in verse 5 so we will leave them until next week. But if you are like me you can see how far we are from loving others in this way. Therefore we must repent of our failure and seek God's grace and power to love like Christ.

So that we will be patient and kind to others and so that we will not be envious of others or boastful or proud of our own achievements or rude and key to all of these things is not to be self-seeking.

May God change and transform us by the love of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit

Amen