

The Characteristics of Agape-Love B

1 Corinthians 13:4-8

Intro

1 Corinthians 13 is called “The Love Hymn” of the Apostle Paul. Paul unpacks for us 15 characteristics of love – what love is and what love is not.

Two Sundays ago the first message was on the first 3 characteristics of love:

- 1/ Love Practices Being Patient
- 2/ Love Practices Kindness
- 3/ Love Does Not Envy

Last Sunday the message was on the next 6 characteristics of love:

- 4/ Loves Does Not Boast
- 5/ Love is Not Proud
- 6/ Love is Not Rude
- 7/ Love is Not Selfish
- 8/ Love is Not Easily Angered
- 9/ Love Keeps No Records of Wrongs

Today we are going to look at the last 6 characteristics – a total of 15 characteristics of agape-love.

10. Love does not delight in evil, or rub it in

Love never takes satisfaction from sin, whether our sin or that of others. To delight in evil is to justify sin. Doing wrong things is bad enough in itself; bragging about them makes sin even worse.

Isaiah 5:20

“Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness.”

It is all too characteristic of human nature to take pleasure in the misfortunes of others. Something perverse seems to make most people more anxious to hear the bad news than the good news.

Newspapers show us this reality. Bad news sells; good news does not.

Love has no part in that. It does not exploit or gloat in evil. Love takes no joy in evil of any kind. This is tough in a society where our media glorifies many kinds of evil. Many TV shows, movies and the internet convince us to laugh at sin - essentially to delight in evil.

Christians are not immune from such things because they find them entertaining. Delighting in evil is wrong first of all because sin is an affront to God. We cannot imagine taking delight in a tragedy that befalls a friend or loved one; yet when we delight in sin, we are delighting in that which offends and grieves our heavenly Father.

One of the most common forms of rejoicing in sin is gossip. Gossip would do little harm if it didn't have so many eager listeners. This sin, which many Christians treat lightly, is wicked not because it uncaringly reveals the weaknesses and sins of others **but** because the heart of gossip is delighting in evil.

11. Love rejoices with the truth, and is happy when truth wins out

After mentioning 8 negative things that love does not do, Paul now lists 5 positive things that love does. Love rejoices with the truth.

Love does not focus on the wrongs of others. Love looks for the good and hopes for the good. It rejoices in those who tell the truth and live the truth.

Integrity and honesty are very important in any relationship. When someone is sincere and truthful it gladdens the heart, it makes us feel good. Truth builds trust in a relationship, it strengthens and draws us closer one to another.

Truthfulness is an essential core value in the Christian life. Love rejoices with the truth. Love rejoices when people repent and deal with the truth in their lives. Love does not rejoice in the lie or the wrong, because its primary focus is to build up and not tear down.

12. Love always protects, supports, bears

Agape-love “*bears all things,*” or “*always protects.*”

Love bears all things by protecting others from exposure, ridicule or harm. Genuine love does not gossip or listen to gossip. Even when a sin is certain, love tries to correct it with the least possible harm to people.

Love is supportive and protective. On the other hand, we need to understand that love at times requires confrontation. The most loving thing to do for the abusive or alcoholic spouse is not to cover up for him or her. Nor to believe his or her empty promises to change. But it is to insist that they seek professional help. Remember that love rejoices with truth.

Love never protects sin but protects the sinner from inhuman or cruel revenge.

Example: Jesus and the woman caught in adultery (John 8:3-11). Jesus protected and forgave the adulterous woman. Love forgives and protects. But He also said to her go and sin no more.

Love feels the pain of those they love and helps carry the burden of the hurt. True love is even willing to take the consequences of sin of those they love. Jesus took the consequence of our sin because He truly loves us.

Isaiah 53:4-5 “*Surely our grief’s He Himself bore and our sorrows He carried;...He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him.*”

We are encouraged by Scripture to be fervent in our love for one another and we are to forgive the offenses of others. “*Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins*” (1 Peter 4:8).

13. Love always trusts, & believes in

Love is not suspicious or cynical. It believes in the good of the one who has done the wrong — that the wrong will be confessed and forgiven, and the person be restored to a rightful relationship. Love is a harbour of trust, when trust is broken, love’s first reaction is to help and restore the relationship.

This does not mean that love is gullible. Love is always ready to give the benefit of the doubt. Love assumes the best and extends trust.

A word of counsel to the parents: our children are built up and strengthened when we encourage them and believe in them. In the family we should be each other’s biggest fans. We should believe in each other even when no one else does.

14. Love always hopes

Even when belief in a loved one’s goodness or repentance is shattered, love still hopes. When its faith

is weakened it holds on to hope. As long as God's grace is operative human failure is never final.

Example: Jesus would not take Peter's failure as final. He prayed for him (Luke 22:31-32), though He knew that Peter would deny Him three times. Jesus restored Peter in rightful relationship with Him.

The parents of a backslidden child, the spouse of an unbelieving marriage partner — all hope in love that the child, or the spouse will be saved and restored.

Love refuses to take failure as final. When our hope becomes weak, we know our love has become weak.

Example: The father of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). He would constantly look for his son to return and was ready to forgive and receive him back. Love hopes and looks for the good in people. Love looks to the future with eyes of hope. Love expects the best from our spouse and children. Rather than discourage, love lifts the other's spirit, dreaming of what God has for them in the years to come.

15. Love always perseveres and never gives up

Love remains true in the most adverse circumstances. Love never quits. Love refuses to take failure as final. Love holds fast to those it loves. It endures all things at all costs. It stands against overwhelming opposition and refuses to stop bearing, to stop believing or to stop hoping. Love will not stop loving.

Example: Jean Vanier, founder of the L'Arche communities, told the following story about persevering in our practice of unconditional love:

"I know a man whose wife has Alzheimer's. He was an important businessman—his life was filled with busyness. When his wife fell sick he said, *"I just couldn't put her into an institution, so I kept her. I fed her. I bathed her."* I went to Paris to visit them, and this businessman who had been very busy all his life said, *"I have changed. I have become more human."* I got a letter from him recently. He said that in the middle of the night his wife woke him up. She came out of the fog for a moment, and she said, *"Darling, I just want to say thank you for all you've doing for me."* Then she fell back into the fog. He told me, *"I wept and I wept."*

Sometimes Christ calls us to love people who cannot love us in return. They live in the fog of mental illness, disabilities, poverty, or spiritual blindness. As we serve them, we may only receive a little gratitude. But just as Jesus has loved us in the midst of our spiritual confusion, so we continue to love others as they walk through a deep fog - whether emotional or spiritual. (Source: Stanley Hauerwas & Jean Vanier, *Living Gently in a Violent World*, 2008, p. 66)

Conclusion

The supreme measure and example of love is God's love. **"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son."** Love is sacrificial. It is sacrifice of self for the sake of others. That is what God did for us when He sent His only Son to die for us. That is what God does when He extends to each of us salvation which is received through faith alone in Christ.

Love is not just a feeling but a determined act of the will that results in determined acts of self-giving. Love is the willing and joyful desire to put the welfare of others above our own. It leaves no place for selfishness. Agape-love is the greatest of all loves – it's God's love.