

“does not take into account a wrong suffered,” NASB; “keeps no record of wrongs,” NIV). The literal expression is that love “does not reckon the evil.” The sense is that love does not dwell on, does not rehearse, does not think on wrongs done. (This doesn’t mean that evil is never to be addressed; clearly Paul himself does that. But love does not keep a tally of wrongs suffered hoping to have the score settled one day.)

When we move on to verse six, Paul presents both sides of the coin: love does not rejoice at wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. Because of the way that Paul puts these phrases together, the contrast between “wrongdoing” and “truth” probably has in view something like “sin” and “Gospel.” Whether in our own lives or the lives of others, real love does not celebrate sin but makes much of what the Gospel does and where the Gospel brings change.

How do these thoughts flow together? Perhaps this way: To love . . .

Is to not keep track of wrong suffered at the hands of others . . .

Because love doesn’t celebrate wrongs, either done or suffered . . .

Because love only celebrates when the Gospel wins out.

Thinking about the passage:

When your thoughts turn to others, what fills your mind and heart? What they have done to you, done to hurt you, how they have sinned? Or does your heart and mind run along Gospel tracks, watching for and making much of how Jesus, through the Gospel, changes lives and changes people?

If you find a “record book” of wrongs suffered in your heart, take time to talk to the Lord about it. Ask Him how He would like you to deal with those accounts. Tell Him that you would like to have His love replace your resentment . . . whatever it takes.

DAY FIVE

Reading for today: 1 Corinthians 13:4-6

Insights and aids:

It is so easy for most of us to reduce the Christian life to rules. We can read about the kind of life that Jesus provides for us and invites us into and we can immediately run to, “So what do I do?”

Of course there is a sense of the *kind of life* we are being re-created to live; there is a “doing” in this life. But at the core of the Gospel is a transforming work of the Spirit so that we end up “being” the kind of

people who would live the kind of life God intends.

That is the way to read 1 Corinthians 13:4-6. It is less a set of rules to follow and more a description of the kind of life we are being brought into. Think of the passage as a mirror for your soul. Looking into the passage you can see what your reflection looks like . . . or doesn’t.

Not because Paul’s words are inadequate but because “familiarity breeds contempt,” try and put into fresh language what Paul is describing in these verses. And then look into the verses . . . and see if you can see you.

Is what you see flowing out of you . . . ?

Real, enduring graciousness with others?

Purposeful, benevolent activity for the good of others?

Are you free from wanting what others have, free from wanting others to hear from you how good you are, free from needing to parade your virtues?

Is your living an outflow of appropriate expressions of love?

Are you free from having to have your own way, free from growing bothered by others when they don’t let you have your way, free from rehearsing when and where others didn’t give in to you?

Do you celebrate all that the truth of the Gospel is accomplishing and simply choose to ignore what is hurtful and wrong?

These ways of expressing what Paul is saying might not be exactly how you would put it. That’s fine. Find a fresh way. Find a way to reflect on Paul’s words as if they were an expression of the life that you are invited into and not merely or simply some things to do.

Thinking about the passage:

After you have put Paul’s words into your own words and after you have reflected on what he really is saying, spend some time meditating. That is, turn the ideas over in your mind. Move from phrase to phrase, idea to idea. Let your thoughts marinate, in a sense, in the ideas and words Paul wrote. Don’t run too quickly from thoughtful reflection. Don’t try and get “a thought for the day” but let your mind and heart be carried along by the simple, Spirit-inspired truths penned by the apostle.

After a little while, talk to the Father. Tell Him what you have felt and sensed and experienced in meditating.

Soaring language, memorable expressions, expressive phrases—all this and more is found in this section of 1 Corinthians 13. But Paul wasn’t writing a greeting card sentiment or a “saying” for a plaque for your wall. Paul was addressing the trouble in Corinth (and in many churches) by clearly picturing what life in community looks like: Love!

June 19, 2011

Weekly
Reflections on
the Scriptures

DAY ONE

Reading for today: 1 Corinthians 13:1-4

Insights and aids:

In most relationships there is bound to be a little tension. You want to have a loving, appropriate, reciprocal relationship. But at times, your heart isn’t in it; for some reason or another, you just “aren’t there.” And it is easy, in those moments, to just go through the motions.

Part of what is reflected in the opening three verses of this chapter is that going through the motions is not enough! We can’t substitute doing “nice things” or even doing “spiritual things” for really loving others. Spirit-prompted worship, the exercise of prophetic gifts, and even undertaking to meet the needs of others at personal cost do not amount to anything at all if all of that is not rooted in sincere, genuine, affectionate love for others.

The Corinthians were wanting to live “spiritual.” But they were missing the essential ingredient: Love. So Paul calls their attention to the priority of love in *how* we live in relationship with one another.

As we read his description of love, do not think that Paul has simply adopted a random collection of words to describe love. He has the Corinthians in mind and what he has to say about love reflects the problems in the Corinthian church he is addressing.

Let’s just look at the first two ways Paul speaks about love. Love is *patient* and *kind*.

Paul had at least two words at his disposal that could have translated “patient.” One is typically used to speak of being patient *with regard to circumstances* and conveys the sense of “standing up under” hardship. The other word—the one Paul used here—is typically



the word used to speak of patience *with regard to people* and it conveys the idea of “being long-suffering.” Thus, patience here is referring to lovingly enduring with people regardless of how one might suffer because of them.

That presents, in one sense, the passive side of love. The other side is expressed in the next word: kind. This word itself appears only here in the New Testament, but the related noun appears a few places. This word speaks of what is *good and gracious, benevolently appropriate*. Thus, kindness here refers to responding to others in a purposeful, benevolent way.

Although most English translations render both of these words in such a way that they read like adjectives, they are both verbs. Paul is describing how love lives in relationships.

Thinking about the passage:

Although Paul may not have necessarily been listing these characteristics in order of importance or priority, there is some sense that patience and kindness are an appropriate lead in. In what sense are these two qualities foundational for all real love?

Which quality of love—patience or kindness—flows through your life more regularly? Why? Which of the two finds a bit more resistance in you? Why?

Talk to the Lord about the difference between *doing loving things* and genuinely *loving others*. Let Him point out to you how He would like to expand your understanding and experience of love.

DAY TWO

Reading for today: 1 Corinthians 13:4

Insights and aids:

What kinds of problems had arisen in Corinth? What have we seen in the letter to this point?

We have encountered evidence of division and disharmony. We have listened as Paul addressed in-fighting and relational abuse.

Back in 3:3 when addressing the divisiveness that arose from preferring one messenger of the Gospel over another, Paul mentioned the “jealousy” (ESV, NASB, NIV; “envy, NKJV) that was driving the division. Here, in 13:4, Paul insists that real love does not envy, is not jealous, using the same word.

The root idea of the word is “to boil!” So the sense is something like “boiling over to have one’s way.” That is not what love is like.

The next word Paul uses to describe real love is rare; it only appears here in the New Testament. Paul says that love “does not boast” (ESV, NIV; “does not brag,” NASB; “does not parade itself,” NKJV). The one who loves does not “act like a windbag”—to put it colloquially. Perhaps this “boasting” is reflected in the attitude of some in Corinth who wanted to make much of their status or their giftedness, wanting others to think much of them. Paul says that love is not like that at all.

The last word in this verse is translated “arrogant” (ESV, NASB; “proud,” NIV; “puffed up,” NKJV). The root idea is, literally, “to inflate.” So, the idea here is to be self-inflated; Paul has charged the Corinthians with being just that earlier in this letter (see, for example, 4:19; 5:2; 8:1). And, again, Paul says that such an attitude does not characterize genuine love.

Perhaps there is a way to see how these three expressions hang together. Love is not envious, boastful, or arrogant. Perhaps the sense is something like: Someone who really loves:

Is not intent on wanting to be what he or she is not.

Is not intent on making much of what he or she is.

Is not intent on thinking of himself or herself as if he or she was “all that.”

Thinking about the passage:

Describe, in your own words, the kind of person Paul is describing in 13:3-4. Who do you know that lives this kind of life?

Paul is offering more than just a list of things to do; he is describing the attitude of heart that exists in someone who genuinely loves. What goes on in a person’s heart that hinders him or her from loving this way? What gives rise to envy, boasting, and arrogance?

Even small doses of such things can hinder love. Talk to the Lord about what goes on in your own heart. Discuss envy and boasting and arrogance with Him. Ask Him to do what He will to root such character qualities out of your heart.

DAY THREE

Reading for today: 1 Corinthians 13:5

Insights and aids:

We continue through Paul’s description of love. He tells us that love is not “rude” (ESV, NIV; “does not behave rudely,” NKJV; “does not act unbecomingly,” NASB). Our English word “rude” is not a bad choice, but it might not convey to our minds all that

Paul was envisioning. In chapter seven Paul uses the word to refer to behavior that might give rise to shame and in 12:23 he uses a related adjective to talk about the “unpresentable” parts of the body (not that such parts, in themselves, are shameful but that to expose such parts to public view might well be).

Paul next uses a phrase rather than a single word to tell us what love is not like. He says, it “does not insist on its own way” (ESV; “does not seek its own,” NASB, NKJV; “is not self-seeking,” NIV). This is not so much about seeking what is right or not, but having one’s own interests foremost in mind. This attitude was evident in Corinth and was addressed by Paul in writing about how they were taking the Lord’s Supper (see 10:24, 33). Thus, one who loves does not have his or her personal interests in mind.

Let’s pick up one more phrase from 13:5: Love “is not irritable” (ESV; “is not provoked,” NKJV, NASB; “is not easily angered,” NIV). It is not that one who loves takes a long time to get angry, the sense is that one who loves cannot be brought to an angry reaction. The one who loves won’t go there.

Thinking about the passage:

From time to time we all find ourselves acting rudely, or trying to get our way, or reacting in an irritated way. How do we justify such responses? What do we tell ourselves (and others) to legitimize such behavior?

What do you hear the Lord saying, through Paul, about such behavior? What is the Lord pointing out in your own soul?

Remember, Paul is not giving us a list of “things to do,” but holding up a mirror to our souls and helping us see what really is there (in light of what comes out in the way we respond and react to others). What are you seeing in your own life and heart?

DAY FOUR

Reading for today: 1 Corinthians 13:5-6

Insights and aids:

What happens when someone does you wrong? What stirs in your soul? What feelings arise? What do you want to do? How do you want to respond?

It is at such hard moments, when we are faced with some betrayal, some injustice, some sorrow, that we can really learn what is in our souls. And the next few characteristics Paul touches on bring that clearly into focus.

And the end of verse 5, he writes that love “is not resentful” (ESV;