

Love Is Not

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[0 : 00] So, Lord, hear us as we come to your word now. Hear our cry and speak to us from your word, from the book, from the book of God.

Use your sick, unworthy servant to proclaim the perfect, glorious Jesus. How you use such weak instruments beyond our understanding.

But you do. Now use your servant and bless your people. All under the sound of my voice, whether here or electronically across the waves, Lord, may they hear and see Jesus and be brought to him. May we celebrate Christmas by celebrating Christ. In his name we pray. Amen. Amen.

Hear now the word of the Lord. Love is patient and kind. Love does not envy or boast.

[1 : 07] It is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way. It is not irritable or resentful. It does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.

Love bears all things. Believes all things. Hopes all things. Endures all things.

Love never ends. That is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Please be seated. Thank you. Thank you. Praise team so much. At Christmas, we say the God of heaven and earth came seeking.

Seeking what he would find. He knew exactly what he was seeking. You see, the magi, the shepherds, and even Herod were not the only seekers in the Christmas story.

[2 : 14] God in love came seeking a people for himself in the birth of Jesus. He came seeking his own way. Because he is holy.

Therefore, his way is the only right way. He can be trusted to do what is best. His love is best.

Because his love, his way, saves.

Only he can do that. Love came down at Christmas, yes. And so we've been seeking this Advent season to understand what that love is.

And what it looks like. But to do so, we have to be clear. Not only what love is. But also what love is not.

And so here we are in that great chapter 13 of 1 Corinthians. The love chapter. The rebuke chapter. Because he's telling us, you're not like that.

[3 : 17] I love you like this. But you are not like this. I'm going to work on you. So you begin to look more like this.

But you ain't there. So we're at the last of the love is not or does not list. And we're going to look at that this morning. What love is not.

Now keep in mind, remember our working definition of love here. Agape, that Greek word from the New Testament. New Testament was written in Greek. And that Greek word that so many Christians love.

Church is a name, but agape. It's love. And it speaks of a, this is important. This is what love means here in the Bible. It is a selfless love that seeks what is best for the other.

It is action and giving. It is, it is, it is God's love poured into our hearts.

[4 : 15] That's 1 Corinthians 13. It is God's love poured into our hearts. It is the spirit of Christ. If we put his name in the text, it makes sense.

Jesus is patient. Jesus is kind. Jesus does not envy, et cetera. This is the love of Christ for us and to be realized in us.

And this passage shows us the sad truth that we are all less loving than we think we are. Which is why we need Jesus. And which is why we need this text at Christmas.

Because Christmas is love. First thing I want you to know is that Christmas love says, it's not always about me. That's what verse 5, second part of verse 5 is talking about.

Literally, it says, love does not seek its own way. You see, self-centeredness is in our DNA as people. Our culture is obsessed with one thing, self.

[5 : 23] And it all began in the Garden of Eden. When Adam and Eve decided that they needed to achieve their best lives now, we will be like God, outside of God and his law.

They thought they could achieve what they wanted, what they most wanted in life, without God. Sounds familiar. They failed to embrace the truth, though.

They were already like God as much as creation could be. They were already like him. Instead, they ended up, watch this, when you seek your best life without God, you end up, what they did, demeaning themselves by making themselves the center of their universe, and they lost God's fellowship.

And it's sunk so far to today, to such an extreme, that we now, watch this phrase, we have the right to self-identify.

Self. You see what happens? We keep focusing on ourselves. It's the downward spiral. You live for me, and I live for me.

[6 : 35] So we're in agreement then. Sinclair Ferguson, his book, Love Came Down at Christmas, says, In the absence of any transcendent significance to life, creating, loving, and fulfilling the self fills the vacuum.

In other words, when there's nothing greater, transcendent, something above and beyond you, that's not human or man-made, something greater than you, if there's nothing up there, if there's nobody there, if there's nobody who created all this, if it's all an accident, then what happens is, we have to look for significance, satisfaction, and security.

Remember those phrases, right? Look for it in ourselves. And we're good at that. The problem is, it just isn't enough for you.

It can't be enough. Because you're too weak to fulfill yourself. It's interesting that one of the most beloved singers in our nation's history, a man by the name of Old Blue Eyes, Frank Sinatra, had one of his greatest songs, his greatest hits.

It was called, My Way. It crescendos. I wish I could sing, because that man could sing. I did it my way.

[8 : 03] You know, he knows, I mean, he hit that note, y'all. It was beautiful. But he did it his way. That's not God's way. Listen, let's get even more recent.

Gone back a few years, but still more recent than Sinatra. My favorite singer of all time, Whitney Houston. When I listen to her sing, I still weep, because she's gone. She lended her magnificent voice to one of the most beautiful songs as a kid that we sung, that I sung, and she brought it back. You remember what it was? The greatest love of all. Do you remember how it goes? Learning to love yourself is the greatest love of all.

And we all sang that with gusto. We sang it. But notice what it says. The greatest love of all is learning to love myself.

My way. And we're all fighting with that in our own hearts. Because we believe the greatest love of all is to love yourself.

[9 : 12] Our culture really has bought into that so much today. It's all about loving you, taking care of you, being your best. I mean, it's so focused on ourselves.

I wonder how we even have a nation anymore. When you insist on your way, you end up not loving others very well, especially if they disagree with you.

One of the ways we do this sounds so cute. I love this phrase. Actually, I love to hate it, actually. We say, it's easier to ask for forgiveness than to ask for permission.

My way. Of course, it's easier because you don't have to consider other people's desires or opinions or lives.

It's all about you. It's just another way of being unloving and seeking your way. It's more loving to slow down and ask people's opinions and get their thinking.

[10 : 28] It's more loving to listen and ask questions. But no. I got to move ahead. I got to move ahead. I got to get this done. We got to move on. So I'll ask for forgiveness.

After you've done it your way. And it's crept into the church. My will be done. My will be done.

Not thy will be done. My will be done. Listen, saints. When we insist on our own way and are not getting it, watch the text. We become irritable and resentful.

Come on. That's verse 5, right? It does not love now, does not insist on its own way. It is not irritable or resentful. That's it. When you don't get your way, you naturally will become irritable and resentful. Irritability is excitable or agitated anger. One pastor calls it not merely a way of complaining, but actually a way of hating. If not dealt with, if my irritability, I'm talking about Kevin Smith now, if my, and I can be irritable, if my irritability is not dealt with, it will then progress to the next thing, which is being resentful.

[11:52] And that word resentful is deep because the word logic is in that Greek word there. And it's thoughtful or logical reckoning of evil done to you.

I've been wronged. But it adds something else with a view to revenge. To be truly resentful means you want payback.

You done me wrong, you're going to get yours. It's the old Klingon proverb. I know, I'm a Trekkie. I make no bones about it.

Yes, I am. I watch all of them. But that Klingon proverb is one of my favorites. Revenge is a dish best served cold. Kepler.

Your kingdom and will has collided with someone else's kingdom and will.

[12:56] And now you're irritable and you're resentful. That's what happened with Adam and Eve again. They became irritated and resentful towards God as the devil led them to believe that he was holding out on them.

He knows you'll be like him. And then you'll get a piece of his action. I can see him whispering in their ears and he's holding us back from our full potential.

We could be like him. We could get some of the glory for ourselves. They thought God was treating them badly. Their pursuit of their own kingdom collided with God's pursuit of his truth, rightful glory. And they knew something about God. Here's the thing that some people don't know. Listen to me. God won't budge. They knew. They knew God was not going to budge on this.

So they tried to do an end run around him and go for the fruit themselves. You know, they had the devil. I was like football. The devil was the fullback. He hit the hole.

[14:05] He opened up the hole. And they went around God. They thought they were going around God. And they got to the tree. Woo-hoo! Score! Touchdown! Wrong. Penalty flag on the play.

Illegal procedure. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yes. I'm having a football moment. Forgive me. They took matters into their own hands.

Let's get ours, baby. And it didn't work out too well. Can I ask you a question? Are you irritated and resentful about God's ways? Especially with you.

I've met people over the years. And I've had my own struggles on occasion, too. God's way. Now, that can't be right. And then you start talking about how man wrote the Bible.

That's when you know you got a problem. They start saying, man wrote the Bible. And people, because they don't like what it says. I didn't like what it said. When I was a kid, I never, where I grew up, it was always on the house.

[15:08] We said, the white man wrote the Bible. So, I ain't got to live that. I ain't walking with no white Jesus.

It was all wrong, of course. Jesus went white. And white men didn't write the Bible. They weren't white either. What's your excuse?

Has he not performed for you the way you wanted? Ferguson, again, says, by irritability, by whatever name we call it, whether caused by other people or our circumstances, is at root irritation with God for the way he is providentially governing our lives.

Whatever you are irritable about, whatever is driving you to be agitated with anger and resentful, ultimately, you're telling God, you're not doing what, you're not handling things right.

You got to get, you got to get your act together. I told you what I wanted. And you didn't come through. That's ultimately where you go.

[16:20] You have no choice because God's in total control. Our culture says, love yourself. The gospel says, love God and neighbor. Our culture says, indulge yourself.

The gospel of Jesus says, deny yourself. The culture says, find yourself. The gospel says, lay down your life. Is the Christian unhealthy then?

Because are we crazy? Are we unhealthy? Of course not. We deny ourselves. We lay down our lives because we have experienced the greatest love of all.

The freeing, transforming, healing love of God in Christ Jesus. You see, it is in that love that we find ourselves, indulge ourselves, and rightly love ourselves.

It's only in that love that I can love right. I can love you right. I can love creation right. I can even love me right without making me the center of the universe. We become our best selves when we stop making ourselves and our will the center of the universe.

[17:27] You see? It's what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5. The second, he remembered the 1 Corinthians, he wrote one letter, then he wrote another letter. And that's the second, he says, this is one of my favorite passages.

2 Corinthians 5, 14 and 15. Yeah, it's up there. For the love of Christ controls us. That's that phrase right there just blows me away. The love of Christ controls us because we have concluded this, that one has, Jesus, Jesus now.

One has died for all, therefore all have died. He died for all, watch this, that those who live might no longer live for themselves.

But for him who for their sake died and was raised. The good news is that the love of Jesus is so powerful, it has the ability to control us.

If we surrender to him, it has the ability to control, constrain, and move us in the right direction so that we recognize that we must live for someone, but it's no longer us.

[18:36] We must live for the one who died for us. We've been living for ourselves all the time.

We are good at that. What I need is more help in living for him. And you need that help too. You see, when we're living for Christ and his kingdom glory, there's no room for seeking your own will, irritability, and resentment towards God or other people.

Because we're being transformed by that love, that divine love that won't let you go, that divine love that moves you to return, not to return evil for evil, but to return good for evil.

You see, that's what happens. When your kingdom collides, you feel like you've been done wrong and you want to get back. Resentment comes. Resentment says revenge. I've got to get mine. I've got to pay you back. I can't let you do that to me because I'm somebody.

Now, listen, there's some truth in all of that. Now, don't get me wrong. There's some truth there. You shouldn't be treated with disrespect. People shouldn't be able to just run over you like that. That's why we have laws. You know?

[19:53] But most of the time, it's not about law. It's about ego. Most of the time when you are run over or you're disrespected, it's not about someone breaking a law.

It's about someone breaking your law. And so Romans 12 comes in. To the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feeding. This is when the love of God constrains you.

This is when you're not seeking your kingdom. You have to be first, your will or the highway. This is what happens when you're being delivered from that by the love of Jesus.

If your enemy is hungry, feeding. If he's thirsty, give him something to drink. And don't put hemlock in it. Thank you. For by so doing, you will heat burning coals on his head.

That's not literal. He's saying that his conscience will be burned. When someone has done you wrong and you turn around in the name of Jesus and do them well, it can be a moment of collision for them.

[20:56] In their own conscience. Now, how they respond to that, you have no control. Sometimes people respond to conscience by humbling themselves. And sometimes they harden themselves.

You can't control that. But it's still God at work doing something to their conscience. You see, if Reichen said it well, love does not ignore iniquity, but is painfully aware of whatever evil has been done.

You know it. You see it. You're not closing your eyes to evil done to you. Nevertheless, rather than returning evil for evil, it seeks to overcome evil with good. Watch this phrase. Love absorbs evil without calculating how to retaliate.

What a phrase. I got a call filled. I'm talking about that. That's a good one. Absorbs evil without calculating how to retaliate. But can I tell you, Jesus does something better than that.

Jesus, watch this. In love, he absorbed our due punishment. It was not evil for God to punish us.

[22:04] It was not evil for God's wrath to be poured out upon us. That was called, that's justice. Jesus absorbed God's wrath against sin on his cross.

He, you are guilty, but he absorbed your sentence of eternal death. Therefore, you are now forgiven of your sins by the Father. That's a good thing. Forgiveness removes wrath.

You, if you are a child of God, if you have surrendered to the love of Christmas, the love of Jesus, if that has impacted your life, so much so that you are being transformed. You're not the same.

You see things happening. People who know you see you and say, man, something's happened to that guy. Something's happened to David. Something's happened to Oliver. Something's happened to Jim. We see it.

You see it. And, and, and, and, and, and, and, and, because you've been forgiven by the living God. People may not forgive you, but God has forgiven you. That makes a difference.

[23 : 00] Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes.

Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes.

Yes. Yes. Yes. That is. And yes. Yes.

God is love. And he sends his son at Christmas to show us what love really is. And Jesus comes and he grew up, y'all.

He grew up. The baby Jesus is not a baby anymore. He grew up and became the God man, not the God child, the God man. And died.

[23 : 57] You've been forgiven. Now in that love, watch this, in that love, you and I can absorb evil without giving way to bitterness, irritability, and resentment.

It's his love that keeps me from going after you. And you going after me. It's his love that says, hold it now, who's in control here?

Just like God, we don't overlook real significant evil done to us. Sometimes you got to call the cops. Sometimes you got to let the law or whatever rules apply, take.

But it doesn't mean you hold the grudge. We don't let evil overcome us so that it takes our hearts hostage and warps us. That's what happens when you allow irritability and resentment because your way was not done your way.

It will take over you and warp you. We can forgive in love because we've been forgiven by the greatest love of all, which is not the love in yourself. It is the love of God in Christ Jesus.

[25 : 09] Lewis Smead said something. This is not on the screen, so listen carefully. This is beautiful. He said, love lets the past die. It moves people to a new beginning without, listen, without settling the past.

Love does not have to clear up all misunderstandings. That's Kevin Smith. I want to clear it up. Let's get down. Let's start here and work our way. No, love, love don't have to do that.

Love prefers to tuck all the loose ends of past rights and wrongs in the bosom of forgiveness. And pushes us into a new start.

Man, that's good stuff. I got to read his book. Love doesn't seek its own way. It's not about you.

Well, last thing. Christmas love finds joy in the right things. Verse six. It does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.

[26 : 16] You know, you can't have Christmas without joy. You just can't. It's not true Christmas. You can have, you know, the Christmas culture highlights with toys and gifts and everything.

You can have all that. But not real Christmas. You can't have it without joy. But this is a very strange statement. This is weird to me. Why would he say love does not rejoice in wrongdoing?

I mean, isn't that common sense? I mean, really? Isn't that kind of weird to you? Of course we don't rejoice in wrong. We say it's wrong. Wrong is wrong.

We're not happy about wrong, are we? That word can be translated injustice or unrighteousness.

We're not happy. Do you get happy about that kind of thing? I guess the question is this.

Whose standard of right and wrong or justice are we working with here? Because if we're working with God's, we may be surprised. Romans 1. This is on the screen so you can turn.

[27 : 16] Romans 1, 20 to 32. This is the end of that chapter. It's a powerful chapter. How he winds, rounds out. He's talking about the wrath of God being revealed because of our unrighteousness.

It's being revealed now and people are paying for it in their own bodies and different things. But here's how he ends that chapter. Verse 28.

Since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. You kept rejecting.

We kept rejecting God. And God says, okay, I'll let you have what you want. Watch this. They are filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice.

They're full of envy. That was one of our love passages. Murder, strife. Just heard about murder. Two teenage boys shot, drive by in Alabama.

[28 : 13] It was on my news feed this morning. Killed a 12-year-old girl in Alabama. Murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. Now, they are gossips? How did that get in there?

And slanderers? Those don't belong there. This is bad stuff here. Haters of God. Insolent, haughty, boastful. Inventors of evil.

Disobedient to parents. How did that get there? Foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die.

Now, he says that he means everything he just said deserves death. They not only do them, watch this, but give approval to those who practice them.

Give approval to those who practice them. Do we rejoice in wrongdoing? The answer is we do.

When we give approval. That's what he's talking about.

[29 : 14] God gives us over. If we keep rejecting his love, he just says, okay, I'll let you have what you want. And we end up destroying ourselves even more.

We're doing it right now. The culture, we're destroying ourselves more. C.S. Lewis said, thy will be done can be the most terrible words in the universe.

If spoken by God himself. If God says, thy will be done and points to you, it's over. You don't want him to say that to you.

You don't want him to give in to you. And yet, he says in Romans, he even includes things like, I just blows my mind. It's part of Jerry Bridges' respectable sins, sins we tolerate.

Slander and gossip made the list. How'd that make the list? Lord, is that bad? Yes, it's that bad.

Gordon Fee said, love absolutely rejects that most pernicious form of rejoicing over evil.

[30 : 19] Gossiping about the misdeeds of other. Even, it is not gladdened when someone, it is gladdened when someone else falls. That's what gossip is.

Spreading unfavorable information about someone else. Even if it's true. Or not true. Slander is when we are, slander is when we ascribe wrong motives to people, even though we can't see their hearts or know their circumstances.

We blow people's sins out of proportion and make that person appear to be more sinful than he or she really is.

Slander. Can I ask you about your online posts? Are you guilty of gossip and slander? Not love.

Gossip and slander online.

Do you pass around negative information about people, even if it's true? Do you pass it around?

How do you know it's true?

[31 : 28] We're so easy to pass around negative stuff and we don't even know if it's true. We slammed one another online so easily and we, you never saw it happen.

You might not even know anybody who saw it happen. But it's news. Family.

We're rejoicing in evil. And that's not love. Isaiah warned us, woe to those who call evil good and good evil.

Who put darkness for light and light for darkness. Who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. Yet God says we should rejoice in the truth.

Our joy doesn't come in gossip, in slander, any of those other things we saw there. Envy, in Romans. That's not where our joy comes from.

[32 : 28] He says our joy, love, says we rejoice in the truth. And this implies that we know that the truth is Jesus. It implies that we know John 14, 6 is real.

Jesus said, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. I am the truth. John 1, 17. The apostle wrote, for the law was given through Moses.

Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. To rejoice in truth means we have come to see who Jesus truly is.

And Christmas is not just a time to get presents and have family gatherings. It is that. Amen to that. No problem. But if that's all you got, you don't have Christmas. Christmas, the truth of Christmas is unwrapping the gift that God is giving.

It's embracing the gift of God. It's embracing the love of God. It's embracing the Son of God because he has come to rescue us.

[33 : 31] Love came down at Christmas and we embrace that. That's what, that's the truth that we must embrace now and forever. Truth is not an enemy of God, scientific, historical, morals,

whatever.

Truth, if it's true, it reflects him. In particular, we are to rejoice even where, especially where moral truth is seen. Listen, Christians, we're sometimes, we're just too negative about everything. Give people props when they do right. They may not believe in Jesus, but they did right. Amen. Then lead them to Jesus. Amen. Amen. Rejoice in Jesus. As Paul says, rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I say, rejoice.

So, love is, this is what love is and is not. Love doesn't seek its own. Love isn't about you. It's about my will being done. Love doesn't lead me to be irritable and resentful to others.

[34 : 40] Love sets me free. Love helps me love. Love those around me and sets them free because love forgives. Love doesn't gossip and slander and rejoice in all manner of wrongdoing.

It doesn't rejoice when you get yours. I knew it. I knew it. Love rejoices in the truth, especially the truth that's in Jesus.

Love is freeing. Love helps us become like the one we love. The love of Jesus. Become more like him. So, divine love, brothers and sisters, causes us to seek first not our own kingdom, but the kingdom of God.

Our own petty kingdoms get washed away. Why? Because we've been overcome by our greater love. Greater love than self.

Greater love than my way. Being overcome by the love of God in Jesus. And that fills us with joy. Even when things aren't going the way we would like.

[35 : 50] Even when you're missing people. Jesus can still be the joy of your life. Remember your king. He's come for you.

He's come for all of us who will trust him. Speak this truth. Speak it out loud. Love has come. Live it. Let irritability and resentment be destroyed in your life. Can I ask you, what evil is God calling you to absorb?

What memory is God inviting you to release? What person is he calling you to love? Start praying for him now then.

Because one of the most loving things you can do for someone is pray for them. Not that God would get him. But that God would show him his love. His mercy and transforming grace.

[36 : 51] Family, this is... My family, we were in Lenox Mall a couple days ago. In Midtown, Atlanta. I love malls at Christmas.

Beautifully decorated. But that mall is expensive, y'all. I'm walking by Rolex and... Was it Tag Heuer? How do you pronounce that? Tag Heuer? Never watch guy.

Tag somebody. I'm such a nut. I'm seeing all these expensive things and I'm... You know, they all have their own logos. Special logo.

You know, you know that's a Rolex because it's got the logo on it. You know, it's kind of like a birthmark, you know? You got a birth... We all got birthmarks that's unique to us, right? You know? So, I keep thinking that God...

God has a birthmark on his people. He's got a logo, if you would, on his people. It's called love. You see...

[37 : 50] You see... If you exhibit his love, that authenticates you as one of his children. However, if you're not, you could be a knockoff.

Cheap imitation. What are you? This Christmas, what are you? Have you really experienced the love of Jesus?

And that love is causing you to love others the way he's saying? Not perfectly, but you're seeing it happening. Don't slouch on this. This is examination time.

Are you a knockoff? Or are you the real deal? Do you bear the birthmark? Of the love of Jesus. Amen. Father, come.

Help us this Christmas. Help us to love. Help us to love your way. Not the way the culture says, but Lord, your way. Help us to seek first your kingdom and not our own way.

[38 : 57] Deliver us from envy and slander and gossip. And deliver us, Lord, from being rude and irritable and resentful.

Deliver us, Lord, from rejoicing in wrong. May we call it out. But when we do so with deep humility, if we have to call it out. But more than that, help us to be rejoicing in the truth and speaking of the truth, especially the truth in Jesus.

May we be giddy with his truth this Christmas and can't keep our mouths shut. For Jesus' sake we pray. Amen.
Amen. Thank you.