

Love Is and Is Not

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- [0 : 0 0] We turn once again to Christmas is love and we're looking at 1st Corinthians 13 and working our way through the good portion of this chapter.
- Let's pray. Hallelujah to you, Lord, most high. Worthy is the lamb that was slain.
- Glory to God in the highest. We can't say enough about you, oh God. Oh, may we spend the rest of our lives declaring your wondrous praise with our lips and with our lives.
- Equip us for that. Grow us up. For, Lord, we do tend toward the immature side. We're like babies. We need you to grow us up.
- We need you to deepen us, strengthen us. Oh, thank you for Christmas. What a great time for us to be able to meditate upon that which is most important, the coming of your son.
- [1 : 1 4] So, Lord, speak to us now. We pray our worship has been pleasing in your sight thus far. May we continue to worship you in spirit and in truth in the preaching and hearing of your word.
- May we hear not just with our ears, but with our hearts. May we leave this place transformed and changed because we've met with God. So, Lord, use your servant.
- May he preach above his head. May he preach your truth. May he preach your son. Glory, glory, glory. Jesus, Jesus is the reason for this season.
- He is Lord. He is everything. May we see Jesus. In his name we pray. Amen. 1 Corinthians 13. Let's begin verse 4.
- Love is patient and kind. Love does not envy or boast. It is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way.
- [2 : 1 9] It is not irritable or resentful. It does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things.
- Love bears all things. Believes all things. Hopes all things. Endures all things. Love never ends. That is the word of the Lord.
- You may be seated. Amen. Thank you, sir. Thank you, Christy.
- This week I came across a website that I had never heard of before. Lots of them I had never heard of. Don't get me wrong. But this one was devoted to acts of kindness.
- It's called agiftofkindness.net. It says it is dedicated to Captain Sir Tom Moore, who lived a long and fulfilled life that was brimming with joy, deep sorrow, love, loss, hope, positivity, and kindness.
- [3 : 3 3] He is quoted as saying many times, above all, be kind. It doesn't cost you a penny. He was a British man and really beautiful website.
- If you just look at it, it's really fascinating. People post on that site all manner of kind deeds that they have either experienced or some that they have done.
- And I had to ask myself the question, why is that needed? Why did someone think we should have a website? Why is it devoted to acts of kindness? I thought about it.

This is my opinion. I think our world and even sometimes our churches have become less loving and therefore less kind. and people are seeking something wholesome.

People are looking for something that says life is not all bad. That there are good people out there and that there are people doing, in this case, acts of kindness.

[4 : 40] But the Bible says it is bad. I know people don't like the negative. It is.

Negatives exist. Paul uses negative to tell us what is. Bible says things are bad. That's why love came down at Christmas.

If things aren't bad, we wouldn't need Christmas. There'd be no Christmas. We need an infusion of this love this Christmas.

You see, when Christians are more submitted to Christ's love, then the world will experience what I call an epidemic of loving kindness. Better than a website.

We need an epidemic. But the question is, are you infected? Have you become infected yet? How's your love like?

[5 : 41] Remember, these are all verbs in this passage. Love is patience. Love is kind, etc. So Christmas love, we saw last time, is biblical love.

It's not just what you say. It is more what you do. We saw last time that meant having patience with difficult people and in difficult situations.

Always remembering the truth that we ourselves are difficult people. But Jesus expresses patience towards us every day.

And now we have one more description of what love is. And then we will move into what love is not.

And as I said, the is not helps us better understand what is. First of all, Christmas love is expressed in doing good to others.

[6 : 40] Love is kind. Kindness can be defined as goodness. It is warm, generous, thoughtful, and helpful.

Treating others better than they deserve. As such, kindness actually begins with God. I think of one of my favorite psalms, Psalm 63, verse 3.

The psalmist says, Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. That phrase, steadfast love, is also translated loving kindness.

Loving kindness. It's an expression of God's covenantal love. A love that he made, a relationship he entered into with humanity, whereby he takes the responsibility to bless us as we trust him.

David is praising God in that psalm for his faithfulness to Abraham, to Moses, to Israel, and to him. God has kept his covenant.

[7 : 51] God has kept his promises to his wayward people. And that is because of his loving kindness. We don't get what we deserve.

God expresses goodness to people who are not always good. God has kept his covenant. David says that kind of love from God is better than life.

Oh, yes, it is. How could he say that? Because it is God's loving kindness that brings salvation, which is life. Probably the most beautiful expression of God's kindness in the New Testament is found in Titus 3.

You can debate me on this, but I think Titus 3 is one of the tops. Titus 3, 4, and 6. It says, But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, at Christmas, he appeared.

He saved us. Not because of works done by us in righteousness. No. But according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ, our Savior.

[9 : 12] Christmas is the appearing of God's goodness and loving kindness in Jesus to bring us this salvation. Wow.

Wow. And it didn't just appear. The kindness of God, the goodness of God that brings salvation didn't just appear.

It actively worked in our lives. And we see that. And the places like Romans 2, 4, as well as Titus 3, where Paul writes that is the kindness of the Lord that leads us to repentance.

He puts it this way. Well, do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Notice we see both aspects of God's love that Paul talks about in 1 Corinthians 13.

We see God's active and passive, his patience and his kindness. It takes hold of us, he's saying. The patience and kindness of God takes hold of us in Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit and brings us to a destination.

[10 : 37] That's what leads means in Romans 2. He takes hold of us and brings us to a destination, and that destination is in Christ, in salvation.

You were over here in the kingdom of darkness, trapped. And then God's love and kindness and patience got on your trap.

That dog knows how to hunt. Sniffed you out. Grabbed hold of you because you weren't coming. You weren't going to come.

You had ignored his patience. You had ignored his kindness, and God said not so. He grabs you and then brings you where you need to be.

Safe in his kingdom, in his embrace. Hallelujah. You are embraced by God's love and kindness to you. You who deserve the most severe judgment, you are embraced by his kindness.

[11 : 43] Now watch this. When you are embraced by God's kindness, loving kindness, that produces kindness in you. And the more you understand his kindness to you every day, you will then grow in expressing it.

How do you see the kindness of God to you last week? Maybe even today. How has God been generous to you?

How has he helped you? Do you see his goodness? Do you see his kindness? It's all around you if you have eyes to see it.

And if you look for it and see it, it will make an impact on your heart. It will change you. And listen, listen, it will change us so much that our new city values that we take for granted and that we say we believe that come from Scripture will leap off the page into our lives.

We say we want to be instruments of grace, justice, and mercy. That doesn't happen through a seminar or through a training. That happens as the love of God permeates your soul.

[13 : 02] Because that's all that really is, is loving people. I love Micah 6a, one of our favorite texts for our church. He has told you. I like God's, the prophet says, He has told you, oh man, what is good.

What does the Lord require of you? But to do, not think about, not talk about, do justice. To love kindness and to walk humbly with your God.

Think about it. If God's patience and kindness led you to repentance, couldn't he do the same thing through you? To lead somebody else?

To repentance? In the interesting book, love this book. I had just, my wife and I had a chance to have dinner with her one time.

We had a fundraiser, Rosario Butterfield. Her book is called Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert. She tells the story of herself.

[14 : 05] She was an English professor and lesbian and a great advocate for the LGBTQ generation. And he, she ran into a Presbyterian minister named Ken Smith.

And I think his wife was Barbara. I can't remember. Forgive me. I think it's Barbara. And, um, an unlikely pairing. And she eventually became a Christian and married a Presbyterian pastor, if I'm not mistaken.

I know she's a pastor. I think he's a Presbyterian. A Reformed pastor. And now she's a mother. And God changed her life. You know what she says in that book?

It was the kindness of Reverend Smith and his family, his wife, that brought her to Christ. It wasn't their rhetoric. It wasn't them telling her how being gay was horrible and you're in sin and you're going to burn.

It wasn't that. But, um, kindness, loving kindness used by, and keep in mind, that loving kindness, they told her the truth about Jesus.

[15 : 23] They didn't hold back. They, they didn't say Jesus accepts her. No, they told her the truth of the gospel and the need for repentance. And, and, but they loved her and they had it for dinner and they got to know her and they heard her story.

And it was beautiful. And it, and God used it. Jesus was in the mix. His loving kindness led her to repentance. Our harsh rhetoric of anger and disapproval doesn't lead people to repentance.

Our political views do not lead people to repentance. Kindness though. Hmm. Amen. We must speak the truth in love and that love will be seen in our patience and kindness generated by the spirit of God in us.

One Latin writer whose name I will not try to pronounce. He said, you, you can accomplish by kindness, which you cannot by force. Now, now, now one serious situation is able to dry up the kindness of love in your heart.

If it's not dealt with. It's one simple word. Pain. Pain will dry up loving kindness in you.

[16 : 51] Pain that you carry like you carry your wallet or your purse. Pain that you just can't let go of. Or sometimes pain gets to be so comfortable, we just, we just keep it with us.

It becomes a friend. A friend you don't really think, you really don't want, but a friend nonetheless. Pain turns us inward to protect ourselves.

And at that point, if we don't deal with it, we become angry and cynical and kindness goes out the window. It's hard to be kind to people when you're turned inward to protect yourself.

Pain. No, yeah. Pain causes bitterness. And it defiles. And I think it's hard.

At this time of year, it can easy, the pain can really be overwhelming. That's not an indictment. That's just true. Other pains of loss can just take over our hearts.

[18 : 00] And it kind of pushes kindness out. And the only way I see out of this is to run to Jesus and repentance and faith. And confess to him that you've allowed your pain to turn your love cold.

To ask for healing. Lord, I need your kindness and your patience to lead me back to repentance. To lead me back to wholeness and healthy.

Because I'm dying inside. I'm hurting. I'm hurting. Receive his love and acceptance. Confess.

Maybe your hardness of heart to those you have infected. And to those you have attacked. Because that will dry up kindness. Undealt with pain.

And I speak from experience. Now these next words, we move from what love is into what love is not.

[18 : 58] And I think these next words are actually related. These next pairings. I don't think Paul just chose words. I think they're related to each other. There's something in common. A couple of theologians noticed this.

They are, one says, they are, they all relate to how we handle the good things that happen in life. Envy is a sinful response to the success of others. While boasting, arrogance, and rude behavior are sinful responses to any success we have of our own.

So let's take them as culprits. And we'll do this quickly. Christmas love does not have a competitive spirit. Does not envy or boast.

Do you find it difficult to be happy for your brothers and sisters in Christ or neighbors who have something that you do not have and want very much? Envy literally has to do with burning or boiling.

It speaks of a resentful and burning desire for what someone else has. One teacher said it this way. Covetousness wants what the other guy has.

[20 : 08] Envy is angry that the other guy has it. Envy is really a form of hostility.

Envy is the desire to see our rivals lose what they have. And so envy and jealousy are like two sides of the same coin.

They're very much related, slightly different, but very much related. Jealousy is intolerance of rivalry. It is, it is, it is right to be jealous if someone is trying to come between you and your spouse.

If you're not jealous, you don't love your spouse. Pain is simple. God even describes himself as jealous because his people is his bride.

And anyone who tries to come between him, his love for his people, he says, I am a jealous God. Oprah got it wrong, but God bless her. See, envy, it's this desire, it's a painful desire in our hearts.

[21 : 16] And Paul corrected the Corinthians about this. In 1 Corinthians 3.3, he says to them, For you are still of the flesh, for while there is jealousy, same type of word, and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?

You see, Paul is now using language that relates directly to the Corinthians experience and even to our own, I'm sure. So now he's going to, he's coming, he's a good pastor.

He's applying the word to their life, not to people out there somewhere. He's applying the word to his church. And that's what we all must do. Envy or jealousy is the green-eyed monster, right?

John Ferguson says, it doesn't begin as a monster, but as a tiny flea that gets under your skin and causes you to itch.

But as it burrows deeper and you scratch it, it gets infected and poisons your whole system. See, envy just be, envy's just a little thing at first.

[22 : 21] But man, if you start scratching it, I, oh, I'll never forget it. It was, it was bad. And I, I had to go, I went through this a few years ago.

And, um, one of my dearest friends got his doctorate. And when he got his doctorate, he blew up. I mean, everybody wanted him, everyone wanted to hear him, right?

Everyone invited him to come preach and teach. And he's preaching on stuff that I taught him. And wrote a book about it. And, and, and I'm sitting, and I'm, and, and that, oh, green-eyed, come on.

You know what I'm talking about, don't you, brother? I know you do. That green-eyed thing jumped, that itch, that flea got under my skin. And I, and I'm saying, Lord, it ain't fair.

The Lord had to shake me up a little bit. Come on, come here. I know what it means to be envious of a people's success.

[23 : 24] Pastors struggle with it in many ways. Everybody struggles with it. And see, what happens is envy, and now remember, he says there's, notice, notice, he talks about boasting.

Love does not envy or boast. See, there's a connection here, I believe. Because, see, the person who is envious of another person is someone who really wants to boast in their own accomplishments.

See, I, I, because I see how he's getting all that attention. And I want the attention. I want to be the one talking about my book.

And where I've been, who I've been with. Boasting or bragging comes when envy isn't being dealt with. Boasting is the heap praise on yourself.

It draws attention to you and not Jesus. We see each other in the body of Christ as rivals with whom we are competing. We want to boast about and be known for our gifts and contributions to the church or whatever.

[24 : 35] And our culture encourages us to get our brand out there. Now, of course, there's rightful advertising for one's business. Amen. And we should seek to do our best in our service to Christ and his church because sloppy is not godly.

But if we are driven by envy or jealousy, we will want to brag on ourselves to get what we think we are due that others have.

And that's envy. Speaking in tongues was their big deal in Corinthians. What's your big deal? What's, what do you, what drives you?

Where do you feel the most envious? Does somebody have something you want? You know what the antidote is? Love. Loving them.

It's, it's, it's, it's, it's, it's, it's, it's seeking to do good to them in some self-sacrificial way. It's, it's reaching out to them in kindness.

[25 : 44] That's the antidote to that. It's, it's, it's, it's, it's recognizing that what you have, you have been given by God. And what you do not have is according to his plan.

It's rejoicing in your brother or sister or neighbor's success. If it's good success, if it's good for them and good for others, rejoicing in it.

Thanking, praying, thanking God. For this success. Do you understand that Jesus was crucified because of envy? Mark 15.

The crowd came up and began to ask Pilate to do as he usually did for them. He released a prisoner. He answered them saying, do you want me to release for you the king of the Jews? Watch this.

He even knew it. He perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priest had delivered him up. They wanted his popularity. And they couldn't get it.

[26 : 52] Why? Because they were not righteous. Envy destroys your spiritual life. Jesus was righteous.

Jesus is righteous. He was righteous. As God in human flesh, he was due to people's respect, praise, and even their worship. It is only through faith and satisfaction in Jesus that gives us the ability to rejoice with those who rejoice even when we don't have what they have.

It's okay. Last thing I want you to notice is Christmas love does not give in to a prideful, conceited spirit. In other words, it is not arrogant or rude.

Arrogance means to blow up, to puff up, to make conceited. You're a big windbag. It's to have inflated ideas of one's own abilities and one's own importance.

Without me, this would never have happened. And Paul again tells the Corinthians they've been experiencing this.

[28 : 00] 1 Corinthians 4, 6. I applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another.

He says it again in 1 Corinthians 8. I won't go through there right now, but we've got to move on. But what he's telling us is that love is not like this. Love is not full of hot air.

Love has substance. It's like believing that because you attend New City Fellowship, even for years, that means that you are now good at racial reconciliation, justice, and mercy.

No, it doesn't. These things are the outworkings of love. It is as we practice these loving deeds, then we know that we know.

Otherwise, we're just hot air. Do you regularly, with humble self-sacrifice, intentionally serve and interact with people around you, especially those who don't look or vote like you, who are not part of your tribe?

[29 : 22] Love keeps us from pride. We see this in Jesus, our Savior, who, on John chapter 13, he washes his disciples' feet.

He takes the low line. He becomes the slave of his disciples. And he's the opposite of arrogance and pride and boastful.

He's the opposite of that, of rudeness. He washes their feet. When nobody else would do it, he does it. You see what happens when these things take hold of you, it leads to being rude.

The pride and, you know, it's hard to be kind to people when you're proud.

It just comes out. J.B. Phillips says love has good manners here. Rudeness is an aspect of our lives that comes out when we are captivated by arrogance.

[30 : 30] We really think we're better. Rudeness forgets that all people are created in the image of God. And that at Christmas, the second person of the blessed Trinity came and took the very image of God upon himself.

The image in the image of man. To be one of us. Just think if he had been proud. Just think.

He would never have come for us. Born in a manger. As a matter of fact, just taking on humanity was blech. But then being born into a manger.

The opposite of pride. And the way he was treated by those. And yet, he never struck back. He never attacked. The opposite of rudeness.

And we excuse rudeness today by claiming authenticity or speaking my truth. And all we're doing is being rude to one another.

[31 : 37] Racism, classism, arrogance, all kinds of social ills are often a lack of love revealed in being just plain rude.

And Jesus is not like that. In 1 Peter 2.23, it says, When he was reviled, he did not revile in return.

When he suffered, he did not threaten. But continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. Remember what I said? Just put Jesus' name in each one of these spots.

And you get a picture of who he is here. He is the epitome of love. What's the antidote to everything we've been looking at this morning? What's the antidote to this thing that grabs hold of us that makes us envious and boastful and arrogant and rude?

What is the antidote? It is rejoice with humble contentment in what Jesus has won for you. Everything that you have, you have been given by God.

- [32 : 48] Your intelligence, your talents, your successes, your assets, your health, your good looks, and certainly your salvation. All of it has been given to you by God because as James 1.16 and 17 says, Do not be, watch this, do not be deceived, beloved brothers.

Don't get tricked. Listen, why? Because every good gift and every perfect gift is from above coming down from the Father of lights. Don't get it twisted, he said.

Don't miss this. Every good gift in your life, not some, every good gift has been given to you by God himself.

You have a Father who loves you. You have a Savior who's come for you. Every good gift. And then he gives the greatest gift. And it's the gift of himself.

Your greatest asset. Come on. Your greatest asset is not in your bank account. Your greatest asset is not where you live. Your greatest asset is not the people in your life.

- [33 : 55] Your greatest asset is Jesus. It is God with you. That's Christmas. Emmanuel. God with you is your greatest asset.

And if you have him, you lack nothing. Because with him comes every good and perfect gift. With him comes all spiritual blessings in the heavenly realms in Christ.

If you have Jesus, what you need will be provided. And he will do it well. And Jesus, you can receive his good gifts with humility.

Because you know you don't deserve him. But you know you're loved anyway. If you will find your ultimate satisfaction, significance, and security in his gift of love to you, you'll be freed up to do good to others.

You'll be freed up to rejoice in other people's blessings, even if you don't have it yourself. You'll be freed up to live in humility and not have to puff yourself up all the time like a peacock preening.

- [35 : 15] Look at me. Look at me on social media. Look at me. I'm great. I eat good. I go places. I'm with this one. That's all. We're going to explode.

You don't have to do that. I don't have to impress you. I don't want you to impress me. Too much work. I'm hard to impress. All right.

Come on. Yeah. No. You can rest. You can rest in his love. Amen. And acceptance.

Stated. Reichen ends with a nice statement here. I think it's helpful. Phil Reichen. He says, stated positively, these closely related terms call us to generosity, humility, and courtesy.

A lifestyle of considering other people more important than ourselves. Than ourselves. And I will say that only happens as you grow more and more satisfied with Jesus.

- [36 : 27] Because love came down at Christmas for you. Father, oh, deliver us from lack of love.

Help us, Lord, to receive your love more deeply. And by the power of your Spirit, reflect your love more carefully.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.