

Message 2

The Virtues of Love

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 13:4-7

I. In 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 Paul gives us the definition of love:

- A. The whole description of love in this chapter pertains to a living person; if we read this description, we will realize that love is Christ Himself.
- B. This description actually shows us a fine humanity, the humanity of Jesus, which is lived out in the meal offering church life—Lev. 2:1, 5, and note 5¹.

II. The definition of love includes fifteen virtues, which are the divine virtues of God's life—1 Cor. 13:4-7, and note 4¹:

- A. "Love suffers long. Love is kind"—4a:
 - 1. The suffering in verse 4 is not suffering related to afflictions but to suffering the mistakes of others; we do not need love when we suffer afflictions, but we need love when others mistreat us.
 - 2. That love suffers long means that love is very patient; the building up of the church requires this kind of patience and kindness.
 - 3. "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ also forgave you"—Eph. 4:32.
- B. Love "is not jealous"—1 Cor. 13:4b:
 - 1. Jealousy is in our nature; it may also be present in the church life.
 - 2. A sister may be jealous of another sister because she receives many Amens from the saints when she prays or prophesies; some brothers may be jealous when they see that another brother has been appointed into the eldership; this is a reason why one of the hardest things is to appoint the elders.
 - 3. To allow jealousy to come in damages and tears down the building; in the divine disposition of love there is no ground for any kind of jealousy.
- C. "Love does not brag and is not puffed up"—4c:
 - 1. To brag is to boast of one's self in a way to damage others; it is a kind of boasting which depreciates others and puts them down; love certainly does not brag.
 - 2. To brag is also to make a display for a show of how much we know or can do; love does not have this kind of disposition; rather, the Lord Jesus is hidden, meek, and gentle, never making a show—Matt. 6:1-18; 11:29; John 7:18.
 - 3. To be puffed up is to do things in an atmosphere of self-attainment; love as the divine disposition never does things in this way; instead, although we may do many things to minister to the church, we consider that we are nothing, and we create no atmosphere of having accomplished anything—1 Cor. 3:5-7, and note 7¹.
- D. Love "does not behave unbecomingly and does not seek its own things"—13:5a:
 - 1. To not behave unbecomingly means to not offend by rudeness.
 - 2. "Let no one seek his own profit, but that of the other" (10:24); "Even as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own advantage but that of the many, that they may be saved" (v. 33).
- E. Love "is not provoked and does not take account of evil"—13:5b:
 - 1. Regardless of what people may do to us, we should never be provoked or irritated; people are easily provoked because of the shortage of love.
 - 2. To "not take account of evil" is to not focus on the faults of others; it is not that we do not know of the faults of others but that we do not let their faults create problems within us.
 - 3. That love "does not take account of evil" indicates that love does not keep a record like a bookkeeper; this means that if you love others, you will not keep a record of their mistakes.

4. To forgive is to forget—Matt. 18:21-22; Heb. 8:12:
 - a. Although God is omniscient and omnipotent, He is able to forget; He simply cannot recall our failures and transgressions; once He forgives them, He forgets them—v. 12; cf. Isa. 38:17; Micah 7:19.
 - b. In the local churches the problems always concern this matter of forgiving; we need to forgive all and to forget all; by forgetting all the frictions, failures, and offenses, we become new, and the church becomes a new church—Matt. 18:21-22; Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13; cf. Eph. 5:27.
- F. Love “does not rejoice because of unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth”—1 Cor. 13:6:
 1. The totality of unrighteousness is Satan, and the totality of truth is God; love as the expression of the divine life does not rejoice over Satan’s unrighteousness but rejoices with God’s truth.
 2. Love is never happy when others do wrong; however, some may be glad when they see a brother doing wrong; they may say, “Do you see, I already predicted that he would do something like that.”
 3. To rejoice with the truth is to be gladdened by goodness, not our own goodness but that of others.
- G. Love “covers all things”—7a:
 1. Love is always slow to expose others’ shortcomings.
 2. The Greek word for *cover* is the same as the word for *bear* in 9:12; this word means not only (1) *to contain, to hold (as a vessel)*, and (2) *to cover (as a roof) others’ mistakes*, but also (3) *to shelter and protect by covering (as a roof)*.
 3. To cover is love; to uncover is not love—Prov. 10:12b; 17:9; James 5:20; 1 Pet. 4:6:
 - a. Covering brings in blessing, but uncovering brings in a curse—Gen. 9:22-27.
 - b. We need to shepherd others according to God, with a love that covers all transgressions—1 Pet. 5:2; Prov. 10:12b.
- H. Love “believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things”—1 Cor. 13:7b:
 1. Love is always eager to believe the best about others.
 2. We should never say that someone is hopeless; to speak in this way indicates that we are not in the divine disposition.
 3. Love is always hopeful; when we love others with the divine disposition, we are patient and hopeful for them.
- I. We need to realize in a practical way what love is and check with ourselves according to 1 Corinthians 13 concerning the practice of love as the divine disposition; if we have the proper practice of love, all the things in this chapter will be ours.

III. If we consider the fifteen virtues of love listed in these verses, we shall realize that love is nothing other than God Himself; only God has all these virtues—1 John 4:8, 16:

- A. Life is God’s essence, and love is God’s expression; in Himself God is life, but God expressed is love; this is the reason that in 1 Corinthians Paul charges the believers to grow in life—John 14:6; Col. 3:4; 1 John 4:8, 16; 1 Cor. 13:13; *Hymns*, #13.
- B. If we are short of life, short of love, this means that we are short of God and need to grow in life.