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Sermon Notes

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## **Love's Relentless Positivity**

### **1 Corinthians 13:6-7**

One of the greatest gifts of the gospel is the security of God's unconditional love. God set his love on us in eternity past, before we were born and had done anything, good or bad. God says to us "I have loved you with an everlasting love." (Jer. 31:3)

We are also taught that the greatest display of God's love for us was when we were at our worst:

***Romans 5:8 God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.***

At that very time, when we were enemies of God, when we were repulsive to his holy eyes, when we were rebels and darkened in our minds and hearts, Christ died for us.

So also now, God continues to love us in Christ not because of what we are but because of his unconditional love for us. Even the best of us on our best days on earth are immeasurably short of the glorious perfection he requires for entrance into his perfect heaven. Even when we've been sanctified daily for decades, there is still much corruption in us. But God loves us in Christ, and he loves us for what we WILL BE, not so much what we are. Someday, we Christians will all be perfectly conformed to Christ in glory... and God sees that future as clearly as if it were reality right now.

That kind of unconditional love gives us incredible security... an immovable base on which to stand

*Psalm 40:2-3 He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. <sup>3</sup> He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God.*

Now, 1 Corinthians 13 is not about God's unconditional love for us in Christ... it is about our love for one another. It is human love for other human beings. Not only that, it is human love for other FLAWED and IMPERFECT, even SINFUL human beings. That is why we are told "love is patient" ... you don't have to be patient with perfect people. "Love is not easily angered; love keeps no record of wrongs." We won't need either of those in heaven... for no one will make us angry, and no one will do any wrong. This "love chapter" is designed for the HERE AND NOW... for loving other Christians who are as yet imperfect.

But our love for each other is absolutely patterned after God's unconditional love for us in Christ. We are to love each other as Christ has loved us:

*John 13:34-35 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. <sup>35</sup> By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."*

As such, we are called in the verses we're going to look at today to the most rugged kind of love:

*1 Corinthians 13:7 Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*

This is an unsinkable love... a love that sticks with very flawed, imperfect people who are still sinning every single day. It is a love that is **relentlessly positive** and hopeful about what the grace of God will do with such a person.

It is like a buoyant cork that never gives up on a person. And that love is instrumental in enabling flawed sinners to never despair, but to keep fighting their sins and triumph over them.

## I. Love Does Not Rejoice in Evil (vs. 6)

### A. The End of a Long List of Negatives... What Love Is NOT and Does NOT Do

1. Love does not envy... it has no jealous or angry feelings over the blessings that belong to other people; conversely, love delights in the blessings God gives to others and seeks to maximize them
2. Love is not boastful... it does not lord its blessings over people who do not have them; conversely, love sees all of our own blessings as given by God's grace so they can bless others
3. Love is not proud... pride is the root of all manner of sin; conversely, love is fundamentally HUMBLE... deeply aware of our status before God, we then consider others better than ourselves and more important than ourselves
4. Love is not rude... it doesn't break rules of social grace—behaving inappropriately, talking loudly, shoving forward, taking the biggest piece, interrupting, using foul language, dressing inappropriately... ill-mannered; conversely, love has a polished and graceful pattern of behavior appropriate to every circumstance
5. Love is not selfish... relentlessly committed to self-interests disconnected from God and anyone else—that fleshly drive to feed self, self-pleasures, self-interests... conversely, love essentially expands our own delight to include pleasing God and other people... love finds personal pleasure in how God wants us to bless others
6. Love is not easily angered... hair-triggered, irritable, provoked at the drop of a hat; conversely, love has a very long, slow fuse, and love never gets angry based on selfish interests
7. Love keeps no record of wrongs... constantly aware of the sins others have committed against us, resentful, bitter, never forgiving, seeking revenge; conversely, love has a gracious willingness to cover the sins others commit against us, to forgive all wrongs in light of God's amazing grace to us in Christ

8. So...now we look at the last of this string of negatives

#### B. Love Does NOT Rejoice in Evil

1. This has to do with the basic wiring of the heart... when the Holy Spirit works saving grace, he lines our hearts up with God's
2. It is impossible to put into words how much God loves righteousness and hates evil
  - a. God made a beautiful universe, with perfect angels and humans
  - b. Sin entered the world and has destroyed much of that beauty... and the destruction is still continuing
  - c. So God has a perfect hatred for all wickedness, and is adamantly opposed to it
3. Jesus Christ is a perfect reflection of this hatred of evil and love for righteousness

***Hebrews 1:9 You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy."***

4. So, when we are converted, our hearts are basically aligned with this disposition... we are attracted to righteousness and we hate wickedness... though not perfectly in either case
5. Now, Paul here reverses the order, and addresses the negative first
6. If we love others, we will HATE all wickedness in reference to them

#### C. What it means to rejoice in wickedness

1. The word "rejoice" is a strong one... as though there is a true pleasure in it, a delight, a strong attraction to it

***Isaiah 5:20 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.***

2. In our natural unregenerate states, that's what our hearts are like... attracted to dark things, finding a secret delight in them
3. In this context, it has to do with the sins and wickedness we see or hear about in other people
  - a. The daily news services streamed to our devices bring us an unending stream of wickedness in other people... reports of their crimes and lusts and sexual acts and greed and immorality and filthy language and rebellion against authority
  - b. Lost people LOVE to hear about wickedness in others... they delight in the news of a leader's closet sins being exposed, or those of a movie star or athlete... it gets prime billing
  - c. It's like our souls are nasty CARRION BIRDS... like the turkey vultures we see by the side of the road—when we see a large gathering of those big, ugly, black birds, we know there is some rotting carcass nearby; those birds have a TASTE for that rotting meat; so also maggots or flies
  - d. Repulsive as it is, there is even some of that still in OUR HEARTS as well... we love to hear of the sins of others, even in the juicy details
4. Sometimes it shows up in people WANTING others to fall; we love to see their comeuppance... the successful man or woman with a dark secret... now they don't talk so proudly, now they are just like the rest of us
  - a. Sometimes people gain an advantage from the sins of others
  - b. Maybe now that the office affair or the embezzlement or the pilfering has been exposed, that employee is taken out of the running for the promotion
  - c. Politics feeds on this kind of filth... with both Democrats and Republicans (and Independents) hiring investigators to go through their opponent's personal records or social media feeds or background in college to find some NASTY DIRT that will eliminate them from the race

5. The most common form of rejoicing in wickedness is GOSSIP

***Proverbs 26:22 The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to a man's inmost parts.***

Churches are riddled with gossips who find artful ways of telling of the sins of others... often cloaked in a “prayer request”

6. Why do people love it? So they can feel better about themselves and their own sins. Also it gives them an excuse for judgmentalism and feelings of moral superiority; non-Christians love the sins of Christians because it exposes them as hypocrites and calls into question the validity of Christianity itself... so they celebrate with great energy the fall of Christians into sin

D. What is So Wrong About Rejoicing in Wickedness?

1. It forgets what wickedness does to the heart of God... and how much damage wickedness does every day to his world
  - a. God has overwhelming GRIEF when he sees sin in the world
  - b. Jesus wept over Jerusalem's sins and the consequences that would come
  - c. Godly people grieve whenever any of God's laws are violated

Lot in Sodom:

***2 Peter 2:8 (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)***

2. Human to human, rejoicing in wickedness underestimates what that sin is doing to the person
  - a. If we really love someone, we will want them to be free from all sin
  - b. We will see sin as spiritual poison, and will yearn to see the other person free from that bondage

- c. If in church discipline cases there is some sin exposed in someone, it should cause overwhelming grief in the church

***1 Corinthians 5:2 And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this?***

There should be no smugness in love at a time like that; no secret rejoicing in that person's downfall... only a deep sorrow and a desire that the person should repent and be restored and saved

## II. Love Rejoices With the Truth

### A. This is the Flip Side of Not Rejoicing in Wickedness

1. The essence of a heart of love to another person is to deeply yearn for their blessing... and the ultimate blessing is righteousness in the sight of God
2. We DELIGHT in seeing that other person PROSPER spiritually
3. Notice Paul does not choose the exact opposite word to "wickedness" which would be "righteousness"...
4. But Paul says love "rejoices with THE TRUTH"

### B. What is "the Truth"?

1. Not just factual truth, BUT the truth of Jesus Christ and the gospel

***John 14:6 Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.***

***John 17:17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.***

2. The truth of God's Word at work in another person's heart

***1 Thessalonians 2:13 And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.***

3. Christian love DELIGHTS to see the gospel make progress in another person's life
4. Like God himself at someone's salvation

The cycle of lost parables in Luke 15... the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son (Prodigal Son)... all three end in a big celebration

***Luke 15:5-6 when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders <sup>6</sup> and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.'***

***Luke 15:7 I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.***

***Luke 15:8-10 "Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? <sup>9</sup> And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' <sup>10</sup> In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."***

***Luke 15:23-24 Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. <sup>24</sup> For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.***

That's what love does... it rejoices whenever the truth of God and his gospel wins in someone else's life

5. SO also in a truly Christian relationship, if someone loves you they will want to see you make progress in Christlikeness... they will REJOICE at new habits of bible study or of a sinful habit being put to death or of a bold step made in evangelism

Illustration: My discipler Tim Schuman was that way... very good at celebrating the way I was growing in Christ over the first year of my Christian life... like the crowds along the road at the Boston Marathon... family members and friends holding signs and yelling at the top of their lungs to cheer someone up



Heartbreak Hill... in the Christian life, in a healthy Christian church, we will CHEER EACH OTHER ON in the race for holiness

Now Paul turns to a statement of four aspects of love that we should see toward other people

*NASB 1 Corinthians 13:7 [Love] bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*

I could group these together under one heading: **Love's relentless positivity**... love is buoyantly optimistic, despite the long journey of the daily effects of sin in the person's life

The fact of indwelling sin and that sin habits are so incredibly difficult to break is where these four assertions shine!

If the person you were loving were radiantly perfect, already glorified, shining in their resurrection perfection, these words wouldn't mean anything... they wouldn't fit at all. You don't have to bear anything, believe anything, hope anything, and endure anything with a perfect person...

But it's specifically because of indwelling sin that these words are needed in earthly love relationships with Christians – in a family or in a church.

Paul said in Romans 7, **"The very thing I hate I do, and the good I want to do I do not do."**

THAT is what makes all human relationships on earth difficult... SIN... and in Christian relationships, it is the residual habits of sin that make marriages and parent-child relationships and sibling relationships so difficult; it is indwelling sin in the lives of church members that make all local churches so imperfect and challenging

Look at the four words... two of the overtly **negative**: love BEARS all things and ENDURES all things... what do we BEAR and ENDURE in each other but SIN?

And even the two **positive** words: love BELIEVES all things and HOPES all things seems to have to do with sin as well... believes the best about someone, hopes that they will change eventually

But Paul's point here is that love is buoyant and hopeful and resilient and endlessly positive!! Love NEVER FAILS!!

### III. Love Bears All Things

#### A. First, a Word about "All Things"

1. Clearly Paul does not mean that love just glosses over sin or accepts it... churches still have to discipline sin; adultery still can result in divorce; crimes still have overwhelming consequences
2. Paul has just made it plain that love rejects all manner of bad behaviors: envy, boasting, arrogance, rudeness, selfishness, anger, resentment, wickedness
3. Love believes all things certainly has nothing to do with false doctrine or non-Christian religions
4. In "all things," Paul is speaking about things that are reasonable to deal with in the lives of other Christians or that will come along in the life of a church
5. Perhaps the word means "in all kinds of circumstances"

#### B. Love Bears All Things

1. To "bear with" = cover it, put up with it, carry it along... like bearing a weight
2. The idea is something that is making your life difficult, like a screeching noise coming from a neighbor's car, like fingernails on a blackboard
3. Amoral and moral...
  - a. Amoral annoyances = someone's habits, patterns, the way they laugh; snoring; hygiene; the way they approach life— conversational patterns; needs... bedridden, constantly needy

- b. Moral: sin patterns... interrupting, sinful anger, procrastination, bad habits, messiness, overeating, watching too many sports; overspending

### C. Forgiveness is Like CARRING SOMEONE ELSE'S LOAD

***Isaiah 53:4 Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows***

So when we are in a Christian love relationship, we carry each other's loads... we BEAR ALL THINGS; it's a form of the first thing we said about love: LONGSUFFERING... patience

Also the willingness to cover something:

***Proverbs 10:12 Hatred stirs up dissension, but love covers over all wrongs.***

Love Bears with All Manner of Difficulties... it doesn't throw in the towel easily or quickly

## IV. Love Believes All Things

### A. Love is Not Suspicious or Cynical

1. The "judgment of charity"
2. Local churches work on a basic assumption that people are what they claim to be... if someone claims to be a Christian and walking with the Lord, a healthy church will give everyone the benefit of the doubt
3. We don't assume there are deep dark secrets, a double life, skeletons in the closet
4. Christians are well aware of the universality of sin, and that every single person has a sin nature... but we accept all people's professions at face value

### B. Love Accepts Someone as "Innocent Until Proven Guilty"

1. So, if there's any doubt about a person's guilt or innocence, love will see the person as innocent until there is clear evidence... and love is clearly rooting for the person to be vindicated

2. If there is evidence that the person did it, love will try to understand the motives why and give credit for the best possible motive
3. Unlike Job's friends... who believed the worst, though they had NO EVIDENCE WHATSOEVER

**[Eliphaz] Job 22:5-10** *Is not your wickedness great? Are not your sins endless? <sup>6</sup> You demanded security from your brothers for no reason; you stripped men of their clothing, leaving them naked. <sup>7</sup> You gave no water to the weary and you withheld food from the hungry, <sup>8</sup> though you were a powerful man, owning land-- an honored man, living on it. <sup>9</sup> And you sent widows away empty-handed and broke the strength of the fatherless. <sup>10</sup> That is why snares are all around you, why sudden peril terrifies you*

- C. Love "Believes the Best" about Someone... does not immediately listen to hearsay and rumors and gossip
- D. Ultimately Believing the Best About the Lord's Grace in Each Other's Life
  1. The final word about all Christians will not be their sin but God's grace

**Romans 5:20** ... *where sin increased, grace abounded all the more*

2. We believe therefore that even the most stubborn sin patterns can be put to death... we expect and trust that God can work in that person's life so that they will be much more like Christ ten years from now than they are
3. In marriage, in parenting, in pastoring, in discipling sinners... we believe all things are possible for him who believes in Christ... even the deepest sin patterns can be conquered

E. This Confidence Allows Us to Address Sin Redemptively

**Galatians 6:1** *Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently.*

**Luke 17:3-4** *"If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. <sup>4</sup> If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him."*

1. We just don't give up on people
2. The church does not shoot her wounded
3. Barnabas and John Mark (Acts 15)... Paul wanted to give up on him; Barnabas didn't... he wanted to give him another chance

Barnabas means "son of encouragement" ... always ready to put an arm around someone and believe that God can restore him

Paul gave up too quickly on Mark

***2 Timothy 4:11 Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry.***

#### V. Love Hopes All Things

- A. Love is Fundamentally Optimistic About What God's Grace Can Do
- B. Even When Our Belief About Someone is About to Run Out, we still can hope of what God can do in their lives
- C. Love "hopes for the best"... sees always the possibility of a glorious outcome for the one it loves
- D. Picture God's Amazing Hopefulness
  1. The Father of the Prodigal Son, day after day at the end of the driveway, looking off at the horizon, thinking today might be the day he'll come home

***Romans 10:21 concerning Israel he says, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people."***

#### VI. Love Endures All Things

- A. The Greek Word refers to a soldier holding a key position at all costs... never giving up, no matter how bitter the cost

The French soldiers, World War I at Verdun: "They shall not pass!"

The 20<sup>th</sup> Maine, Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain... extreme left of the Union line on the second day at Gettysburg... refused to give in

and allow the Confederates to gain the flank and roll up the line

- B. So Love Refuses to Give Up... at this point, beyond day to day bearing with sin, beyond believing all things about that person, beyond even hope that things will ever get better... there is this one thing: LOVE ENDURES ALL THINGS... love never stops loving
- C. So Many Tragic Stories Unfolding in this World of Sin Day After Day
  - 1. Parents of drug-addicted kids or kids wandering lost in sexual sin or spiritual apathy
  - 2. Marriages almost fatally wounded by sexual sin; the couple wants to work it out but its incredibly hard to forgive and to show grace
  - 3. Pastors working painfully and tirelessly in a dying church, grateful for even the smallest evidences of grace at work in the lives of people
- D. Love "Endures All Things" is sometimes all people have
  - 1. When all other lights go out, this relentlessly hope-filled love endures
  - 2. It never fails... never gives up

***1 Corinthians 13:8 Love never fails.***

Like God says of constantly sinning Israel in the sad book of Hosea:

***Hosea 11:8 "How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? ... My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused.***

VII. How Do We Live This Out?

- A. Go to the Cross Yourself
  - 1. If you are not a Christian, this is where everything must start
  - 2. Look to Christ as the Savior for all your sins... the amazing grace of God at work in your life

3. Confess that you are a sinner and that you need a Savior... call on the name of the Lord and find his mercy and grace
  4. If you are already a Christian, this will also be the source of your relentless love for the difficult sinners in your life
  5. Remind yourself of the 10,000 talents... how much God has forgiven in your life... and that you continue to sin daily and need his grace every moment
  6. This honesty and humility will enable you to “bear all things, believe all things, hope all things and endure all things” with others... because God is doing that with you!
  7. Realize also that other people often have to do that with you
- B. Take the Difficult Person to the Lord in Prayer
1. Perhaps there is someone in your life whose sins are pushing you hard, taxing your patience
  2. Perhaps it is a child—maybe young, maybe not... maybe a teenager
  3. You are seeking to point your son or daughter to Christ and to the Bible, but day after day they are breaking your heart
  4. Be mindful of the limitless strength that comes from the love of God... go to that strength with these verses and pray
  5. “Lord, so and so is pushing me hard day after day. Their sins are making my life so hard. I want to ‘bear all things, believe all things, hope all things... even endure all things.’ But my own sin is getting in the way. I find myself getting impatient, carnal. I am yelling or showing my sinful anger almost every day. More and more, Lord.
  6. Would you please renew my strength? Give me hope. Give me a vision for what your grace can do in this person’s life. Give me a plan for how to act, what to do, to be a part of what you’re doing in this person’s life!”
  7. This kind of praying will renew your love, and it will be based on God’s powerful grace at work in your own heart