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| Series: All Things Rise | Reference: 1 Corinthians 13:8-10 | Title: Love's Occupation | Date: 04.07.2019 |
| Website Writeup: <i>What does love do? How is it shown? Where does it originate from? What is it? These are the questions addressed in today's sermon.</i> | | | |

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We begin today speaking of love's occupation from 1 Corinthians 13:8-10 where it says, *"Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part & we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears."*

LOVE NEVER FAILS...The process of spiritual formation is never-ending. We operate under human limitation, on a constant upward learning scale, in reliance on the Holy Spirit, eventually being brought to completeness in Christ (Ph 1:6). A learning scale of understanding God's deep passionate love for us!

People have two fundamental needs in that process of spiritual formation...**firstly**, to *know* they are loved by God is foundational. And **secondly**, is the need to express, or show love to others; a heart overflowing with God's love for others!

Both are fundamental in order to thrive. Removing one skews the other. To only desire to be loved is a prideful endeavor creating narcissism, neediness & self-infatuation. To only give of yourself constantly, without drawing from the well of God's love for you creates controlling neediness, dependent on human limitations; which is an endeavor to find love in all the wrong places. Either is an unhealthy existence.

We could camp there for quite awhile...think about a baby born - mom dies in childbirth, dad simply absent. We've all heard of the effects of a child's development when they can't bond with parents. In the formative years, a child's identity is reinforced & strengthened by being intimately loved & known by mom & dad - and in that relationship baby learns to reciprocate love, growing to full maturity. To be known & loved by God settles our souls into total peace.

The need to be loved & know it at our core is fundamental. We can't love well without being rooted & confirmed in God's love for us first. God is love. His love is fundamental to human existence. Love's more than feeling & feelings need not accompany love. Love is action. Decision. Commitment. Not driven simply by emotion, we operate out of being known & loved by God - secure in Christ, overflowing his love to others no matter what.

"Biblical love has God as its object, motivator & source. Gal. 5:22 says love is a fruit of the Holy Spirit & isn't directed toward the things of the world (*the lust of the eyes, the*

lust of the flesh, or the pride of life - 1 John 2:15-16). The ultimate example of God's love is Jesus, who said, *"I give you a new commandment: that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you should also love one another"* (John 13:34 HCSB; cp. 15:12). We remember, Eph. 2 says, *4 "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions..."* In other words, even when we didn't deserve it.

The definitive statement on love according to Paul begins earlier in 1 Cor. 13, where he states, rhetorical ability, preaching, knowledge, mountain-moving faith, charity towards the poor, or even martyrdom, are nothing without *agape love*.¹ This is the *love* chapter, the one read so often at weddings. We do it disservice to view it only in light of marriage, it is broad, encompassing all of Christian life.

"First Corinthians 13:4-7 lists several characteristics of this love. First, it's long-suffering...a quality which doesn't seek revenge, but suffers wrong from others in order to act redemptively towards others.

Second, love is kind - sometimes translated as gracious, virtuous, useful, manageable, mild, pleasant, benevolent - the opposite of harsh, hard, sharp, or bitter.

Third, love isn't envious (covetous), it doesn't jealously desire what it does not possess.

Fourth, love doesn't promote itself; as 1 Cor. 8:1 says, it's not puffed up. Paul says in Phil. 2:3, *"In humility consider others as more important than yourselves."*

Fifth, love doesn't behave in an unbecoming fashion. 1 Thessalonians 5:22 states believers are to avoid even the appearance of evil. Which is also reflected in Eph 5:3, *3 But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people.* Improper because they're not life-giving, they steal life & the freedom we have in Jesus.

Sixth, love doesn't seek its own things. Paul once sent Timothy saying, *"I have no one else like-minded who will genuinely care about your interests; all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ"* (Phil. 2:20-21).

Seventh, love isn't easily provoked (irritated, exasperated, made angry). For example, when Jesus was hit, He didn't retaliate, but said, *"If I have spoken wrongly, ... give evidence about the wrong; but if rightly, why do you hit Me?"* (John 18:23).

Eighth, love believes the best about people; it *"thinks no evil"*, it *"does not keep a record of wrongs."* Love overlooks insult or wrong (Prov. 17:9; 19:11; cp. Eph. 5:11). We bear with people in love.

¹ David Lanier, "[Love](#)," ed. Chad Brand et al., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 1054-1055.

Love finds no joy in unrighteousness (wrongdoing, injustice), but rejoices in the Truth. God's Truth & Love are inseparable. Feelings aren't facts, although they may feel like it. Jeremiah said, ⁹ *The heart is deceitful above all things* (Je 17:9). It can lead us astray, so we measure all things against the revealed Word of God, guidance of His Spirit & counsel of His Church.

So, we don't allow affinities or desire to usurp God's truth, it wouldn't be loving & would deny people true freedom. Love without truth lies & truth without love kills. Or, as Timothy Keller puts it, *"Truth without love is imperious self-righteousness. Love without truth is cowardly self-indulgence. Both are selfish."*

Paul concludes that love bears all, believes all, hopes all & endures all things. *Love never fails. As Solomon said, ⁷ Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot sweep it away. (So 8:7)*

Paul uses the phrase *"the bond of unity"* in Col. 3:12-16. He admonishes the Colossians to put on hearts of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance & forgiveness. Above all these they are to put on love, which is the bond of maturity. Love ties them all together; an image of rods bound together, resulting in more strength. So, true strength is found in loving strongly, not in retribution.

To John, love is the test of authentic discipleship. The Jews centered their faith around the confession of the Shema: *"Listen, Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is One. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength"* (Deut. 6:4-5) and *"You shall love your neighbor as yourself"* (Lev. 19:18b; cp. Matt. 19:19; 22:39; Rom. 13:9; James 2:8).

According to John, this was *"an old command that you have had from the beginning"* (1 John 2:7). On the other hand, John was writing a new commandment to them (1 John 2:8-9). *For John, love isn't just a requirement for fellowship, but a test of salvation. As he says in 1 Jn 3:10, ¹⁰ This is how we know who the children of God are & who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not God's child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother & sister.*

If we have a genuine relationship with God, that relationship is made manifest by walking in Truth & Love with others. ¹⁴ *We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death. ¹⁵ Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him. ¹⁶ This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers & sisters. ¹⁷ If anyone has material possessions & sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? ¹⁸ Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions & in truth. (1 John 3:14-18)*

And as we've said already, John admonishes believers not to *"love the world or the things that belong to the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him"* (1 John 2:15).

Jesus even taught that believers are to love their enemies (Matt. 5:44; Luke 6:27, 35). Although believers are permitted, even commanded, to hate evil (Ps. 97:10; Prov. 8:13), we're not to hate the sinner. And to insist that, in order to accept a person, the Christian must accept sin is unscriptural. Rather we are to reprove the sinner.² Loving admonishment of someone living in sin in order to push them towards God's love & freedom for them, is the best for them, although it may be uncomfortable at the time. Richard John Neuhaus said, *"Where orthodoxy is optional, orthodoxy will sooner or later be proscribed (prohibited)..."* To make orthodox belief from the Scriptures optional is to act in unloving ways, it's love divorced from Truth, which is damaging.

We were **MADE TO BE LOVED** precisely because God Himself is love (1 John 4:8 - *8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.*). And this loving God is also a Creator god. Everything He created is both a result of His love & somehow made in order to know His affection. Everything in this universe must run with the flow of God's created order, or suffer painful splintering as a result.

Let's take a few moments & look at two people who knew the Father's love & were able to share it in very real ways...

JOSEPH KNEW LOVE - First there is Joseph, his father's favorite son - the story begins in Genesis 37. You remember Joseph & the coat of many colors his father gave him. Wearing that coat brought out the jealousy of his brothers, who hated him for it. They concocted a plan to be rid of him. Yet, instead of killing him, they sold him to a band of nomads headed for Egypt. Then they went home & told their father he'd been killed by a wild animal.

Long story short, after a lot of suffering, Joseph rises to become a ruler in Egypt, yet his family knows nothing of this. But when a famine hits the land, Joseph's family makes their way to Egypt to survive. Upon arrival they're met by Joseph, but don't realize it's him, although he does. Joseph would've been very justified in the world's eyes to imprison his brothers, or worse. But he doesn't. Acting in selfless love, he showers them with food, land & a new life, showing them total compassion. He gave them the love they never showed him.

Think on how Joseph reflected the principles of love found in 1 Co 13...his own brothers threw him in a well, then sold him into slavery! But his attitude was that what happened was to God's Glory. *He says to them, ⁵And now, do not be distressed & do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. ⁶For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next*

² David Lanier, "Love," ed. Chad Brand et al., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 1054-1055.

five years there will be no plowing & reaping. 7 But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth & to save your lives by a great deliverance. 8 "So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. (Ge 45:5-8)

What character & fortitude shown in this act of love to those no one would've blamed him if he'd treated them in ill ways. Think now on the people who've done you wrong. I know some of your stories, some are horrific, some simple. But how often do we react out of some humanistic sense of justice & retribution, when in our time of need, God saved us in Christ despite our very much deserving otherwise.

In past weeks we've been speaking of living for God's Glory by living out God's Mission. We want to be a church given fully to holiness & purity. Pursuing Truth, Love & God's glory - Kingdom-Minded - applying Scripture well, not living in duplicity of lifestyle & attitude while claiming to be of Jesus.

We want to live in obedience to Jesus' teaching & commands (to follow Jesus). To live as Jesus did, in word & deed, awakening others to their own spiritual journey (to live as Jesus did). To be the hands, feet & voice of Jesus in the Eastern Main Line & beyond (to manifest Jesus). That takes 100% devotion to Jesus & His call.

God's moving, bringing joyous conviction - allowing people to '*belong before they believe*'. Come as you are, but leave transformed, since there's no freedom without repentance. Be praying this continues, since we want to be useful as the hands, feet & voice of Jesus.

Pray He continues to lead us to reflect Christ in all that we are. Pray against confusion, fear, indifference, pride, un-forgiveness, shame & duplicity. We want freedom to focus everything we are on Jesus. And part of that is to live lives of love, which means we too must act in forgiving ways towards others who've done great, or small harm to us, realizing God will do something even through our painful stories.

Would you take a moment & go into a prayerful posture with me? Bring to mind those who've wronged you (long pause). Offer these stories right now as a sacrifice to God, leaving your pain & desire for revenge at the foot of the cross. If we reside in bitterness, anger & un-forgiveness, we reside outside the love of God. We want to reflect Jesus even towards our enemies. Towards those who've caused us pain. Let's allow Jesus to heal our souls, bringing forgiveness & love back to our lives, in order to be free & reflect his love to the world. Say the words to God right now silently to Him, "Lord, although my emotions say otherwise, I want to reflect you in my pain. I choose to forgive this person(s) who's hurt me."

AMEN!

In doing this, you reflect **JESUS** who, like Joseph, also **KNEW LOVE**. Jesus was also a favorite son. He also had His Father's love & was also rejected by His own brothers. He was beaten & instead of being left for dead, or sold to traders...He was taken away &

killed for all the wrongdoing of the world - God's justice poured out on His own Son. Like Joseph, Jesus can say more so, this happened according to the Father's will, in order that many would be saved during this time of great human drought!

He can say that, since death couldn't hold Him. After He was raised up, He came back to the very people who rejected Him. Instead of looking for retribution, or payment, He came back speaking 'Peace' in John 20:19, the very first thing he gave to the disciples the guys who fled him in his great time of need. On that cross he forgave, as he hung there gasping for breath - *'Father forgive them, for they know not what they do'*. (Lk 23:34)

You might say that about those who've harmed you...Father, forgive my mother for abandoning me, she didn't know what she was doing. Father, forgive my uncle for molesting me, he didn't know what he was doing. Father, forgive those with racist ideology, they don't know what they're doing. Father, forgive my son for spurning direction & squandering his education & opportunities, he didn't know what he was doing. Father, forgive my wife for cheating on me, or my husband for his porn addiction, they don't know what they're doing.

And they don't, do they? They're not cognizant of the damage they're inflicting on you, themselves, or others. They're living outside of the love of Christ, not free, but captive to sin. Bound. Unsatisfied. Lost. That's truth, governed by the love & justice of the cross! Truth bringing peace & freedom to our troubled souls & strengthens us to be agents of Gospel change in the world in the hands of God.

Just like Joseph from a well, or a prison, or Jesus from a tomb, everyone who awakens to the Father's love can expect the power of resurrection to be at work in them.

Because...LOVE NEVER FAILS.

We have two fundamental needs in spiritual formation... to know we're loved by God in Christ bringing security to our souls. And secondly, we live with the need to express, or show that love to others; to reflect the heart of God out of what's been done for us!

Living in love is to live in truth, freedom, strength & the power of the Spirit. It makes us able to seek God's Glory through living out God's Mission. It enables us to follow Jesus, to live as Jesus did, and the manifest Jesus to others.

I just want to leave you with one last thing today. A verse the National Director, Phil Strout got while praying, Jeremiah 6:16...This is what the Lord says: "Stand at the crossroads & look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls."

Which is what we are saying today. You may be at a crossroads. Look. Ask for the old ancient path. The Good Way. And walk in it to find rest for your soul