

Introduction

Today, I'm preaching the eighth sermon in a series of sermons from 1 Corinthians 13 titled *Be a Star*. Henry Drummond was an evangelist who assisted the great Dwight L. Moody. Listen to what he said about love: **"You will find as you look back on your life that the moments when you have really lived, are the moments when you have done things in a spirit of love."** That's a penetrating insight. It's when we really love that we really live.

That insight has a practical application and it's this. Our everyday lives provide us with numerous opportunities to really love and thus to really live. Verses 4-7 verses reveal 15 such opportunities or as I'm saying it in this series, 15 ways that agape love manifests itself. I'm going to preach about the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth of those ways today in verses 6 and 7.

Does Not Rejoice in Unrighteousness

The tenth way that agape love manifests itself, according to verse 6, is that it **"does not rejoice in unrighteousness."**

The word "unrighteousness" refers to moral failure. It's a person being or doing something wrong. A college friend of mine, for example, was fired from several jobs because, quite frankly, he's abrasive and rubs people the wrong way. That's the kind of unrighteousness Paul's talking about here. It's a state of being or a behavior that is dissolute.

The fallenness of human beings of course makes that a common occurrence. Suppose I asked you to make a list of twenty people, acquaintances or not, whom you know have a moral failure of some kind in their lives. All of you could easily do that. The fact is that nothing is as pervasive in human life as unrighteousness is.

Verse 6 implies how most people respond to it. They rejoice in it. They're glad to hear that something's wrong with someone or that someone has done something wrong. William Barclay writes about just

that in his commentary on this verse. He refers to **“the malicious pleasure which comes to most of us when we hear something derogatory about someone else.”**

We know by experience what he’s describing here. We hear about someone’s moral failure and while we feign sorrow, are actually glad to hear it. For one reason or another, we get satisfaction or joy from it. We relish it. Maybe we’re jealous of the person, or dislike him, or have been hurt by him. Or maybe his moral failure vindicates us in some way or makes us feel better about ourselves. A Christian once confessed to me that she enjoyed gossip immensely. When I asked her why she did, she replied, **“Hearing bad things about others makes me feel like I’m not so bad.”** It was a candid confession that many of us, if we were honest, could probably make.

But agape love, according to verse 6, doesn’t rejoice in unrighteousness. It’s grieved by it instead. Think about it. Because we love people, we want them to be their best. It hurts therefore when we hear the worst about them. It makes us sad that there’s something wrong with them or that they’ve done something wrong.

Now, it’s apparent to us all how noble it is to be grieved by people’s moral failures. It’s just as apparent how ignoble, how shameful, it is to rejoice in them. So, what do we do if that’s the case? The answer is pray. What I’m talking about here is intercessory prayer, asking God to do or give things to others. In this case, the others are those in whose moral failures we’re rejoicing.

What we do then is this. When we hear about someone’s moral failure, we pray for him on a regular basis. We know that moral failure is sin and that sin destroys now and forever. So, we get on our knees and pray. We ask God to have pity on him. We ask Him, through the Holy Spirit, to enlighten and convict Him. We ask Him to make his mind clear and his heart sensitive. We ask him to manipulate the circumstances so he’s more likely to repent, and so on. You can see what we’re doing here. We’re praying thoughtfully and appropriately as the nature and

effect of the person's sin dictate we should.

That kind of prayer changes things – if not the person we're praying for then certainly us. In one of the best books ever written, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, William Law tells about a "holy priest" named Ouranius: **"The rudeness, ill nature, or perverse behavior of any of his flock . . . raises no other passion in him than a desire of being on his knees in prayer to God for them. Thus have his prayers for others altered and amended the state of his own heart. This devotion softens his heart, enlightens his mind, sweetens his temper, and makes everything that comes from him instructive, amiable, and affecting."** Notice that. His prayers **"altered and amended the state of his own heart,"** specifically the way that he thought and felt about sinners.

That gets to the very core of what I'm saying. When we hear about someone's moral failure and rejoice in it on the one hand or despise him for it on the other, we need to pray – for our sake even more than his. Intercessory prayer is a spiritual discipline in that context. It's a spiritual exercise that enables the Holy Spirit to transform our minds and hearts and make them right.

Rejoices with the Truth

Agape love manifests itself in an eleventh way, also in verse 6. It **"rejoices with the truth."**

The word "truth" means what is so. It refers to things as they truly are. What Paul says about that seems to be linked with the previous statement that agape love **"does not rejoice in unrighteousness."** That implies that the truth he's talking about is in regard to the moral failures of others. I know a Christian for instance, who is the most critical, caustic, and cutting person I've ever met. He constantly maligns people. It's not pleasant but that's the truth about him.

Now, look at verse 4 says about that. Agape love rejoices with the truth. It doesn't say "in" the truth, in the bad thing that the person is or

does. It says "with" the truth, meaning it rejoices in knowing that truth about him so that it's able to help. The words "knowing" and "helping" reveal what this aspect of love does. It's two things.

First, it recognizes the moral failures of others.

Recognizing requires that we examine and assess their character and conduct. Many Christians have an aversion to that. I've heard many say that we shouldn't judge others, that it's not our place to. But I disagree and so does Chuck Swindoll. Referring to the faults and failures of others, he writes: **"Being a loving Christian doesn't excuse us from reporting the hard thing. The river of love must be kept within its banks. Truth on one side, discernment on the other."** He's right. Anyone who is Biblically literate and has good sense is competent to judge what moral and immoral character and conduct are. And when we love people, we do just that. We care enough to examine and assess their character and conduct. We do so prayerfully, asking the Holy Spirit's help, and carefully, becoming as informed as we can become.

There's a second thing we do if we love people. We respond to their moral failures. Paul tells us in Galatians 6:1 what that response is. We restore them in a spirit of gentleness. Restoring them involves doing one or both of two things.

One is that we declare their moral failures to them. We condemn them in other words. We tell them what's wrong with them. In Matthew 7:1-2 though, Jesus makes clear what usually happens when we do. They condemn us right back. We tell them what's wrong with them. Instead of thanking us and changing, they tell us what's wrong with us right back. A mother told her daughter that rap is vulgar and she should stop listening to it. The daughter told her right back that *Desperate Housewives* is filthy and she should stop watching it. There's always that risk but we sometimes have to take it in order to help people.

Restoring people involves a second thing. For their sake or the sake of justice, we discipline them. We make them pay for their moral failures. Or we let them pay, let them suffer the inevitable consequences

of what they are or do. People sometimes can't be restored unless we do one or both of those and so we do it. Thus, parents I know quit paying for their son's college. They told him they'd start again when he quit partying and drinking and got serious about his studies.

That then is what it means to rejoice with the truth. We recognize the moral failures of others by examining and assessing their character and conduct. We then respond by attempting to restore them.

Bears All Things

There's a twelfth way, in verse 7, that agape love manifests itself. It "**bears all things.**"

The Greek word translated "to bear" means literally "to cover." It eventually came to connote two things: to hide or conceal by covering and to endure. Commentators disagree as to what Paul intended to say. Some contend it's that agape love endures all things. Others that it covers all things. I believe it's the second of those. Since the last line of verse 7 says that agape love endures all things and since "to cover" was the original and literal meaning of the word, I go with that. I think Paul intended to say that agape love covers or conceals all things.

If Paul's thought in this line flows logically from his thought in the previous two, it's clear what "all things" refers to. It refers to the faults and failures of others. A person gets pregnant out of wedlock. Another is fired for missing work. And still another is picked up for drunken driving. Those are three of the "all things" of this line.

And agape love covers them. That's our instinctive response isn't it when we love people. We naturally want their faults and failures not known. And absent compelling reasons for doing otherwise, we act so that they won't be known.

This aspect of love addresses one of the most urgent of all relational issues, which I'd like to introduce by asking you a question.

What is America's favorite pastime? It's isn't baseball or football. As popular as they are, there's something far more so, gossip. When I

say gossip, I mean saying something bad about someone to someone for no constructive reason. Gossip is America's favorite pastime. Just note television news shows, gossip websites, magazine covers, or the normal conversations of those around you. Why do you think the *Nancy Grace Show*, for instance, is so popular? It's because she's a gossip and her audience enjoys hearing the faults and failures of the ones she exposes.

But why is it that so many people speak and listen to gossip? The simple answer is, according to verse 7, that they don't love.

Consider this. A woman I knew years ago was told that her neighbor's son got his girlfriend pregnant. She was drawn to that news and eagerly reported it to others. Ironically enough, several months later, her son got his girlfriend pregnant. But she was repelled by that news and reported it to no one. What's the difference? Why did she expose the one fault and conceal the other? It's because she loves her son but not the neighbor's son. Speaking or hearing bad things about people we love is revolting to us. So we don't. Speaking and hearing bad things about people we don't love is enjoyable to us. So we do.

But that's abhorrent isn't it – to enjoy speaking and hearing bad things about others. It's an unloving and despicable thing to do. So, don't. All of us, in fact, should establish and live by this rule. I will not listen when people say bad things about others and I myself will not say bad things about others. There are exceptional circumstances when we should do both but the exceptions only prove the rule. Under normal everyday circumstances, agape love covers all things.

Conclusion

I'd like to close the way I began. Remember what I said. It's when we really love that we really live. That means not to rejoice in unrighteousness is to really live. To rejoice with the truth is to really live. And to cover all things is to really live. So, really live! Really love!