

Christian Love: Living It Out In Loveless Times

1 Corinthians 13:4-5

“What Love Looks Like: Jesus”

I want to let you in on a transformational truth: love has nothing to do with us. Hear again: love has nothing to do with us. It is a one-way street, from heaven on down! God is love and we love because He first loved us. Here’s how it looks Scripturally:

1John 4:7-12

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

So, there it is, beloved. Our vertical relationship with God facilitates and intersects with our horizontal relationships—like a cross! If you’ve ever wondered why you can’t manipulate or manufacture agape love—it’s because God the Father, God the Vine, is the only Source of this love. Apart from intimate connection with Jesus, our lives within the Body of Christ will not bear the fruit of love. Apart from Him, we can do nothing of eternal impact (John 15:5).

With that in mind, our passage today really serves as a picture of love in action, and a handy means of measuring our personal love quotient—in other words, how we are doing at loving our brothers and sisters in Christ.

1 Corinthians 13:4

(KJV) Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,

(NIV) Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

You could easily substitute God for the word love in these verses. God is supernaturally patient with us:

2Peter 3:9

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

With the Holy Spirit’s enabling, being patient with a difficult or unlovable fellow Christian should be a breeze, right? Well, unfortunately, the Holy Spirit is seated inside the flesh—a carnal frame that may create some problems with producing patience. Therefore, by faith and our will, a clear choice must be made to love:

Galatians 5:16-17

So, I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.

Remember, beloved, that the Body of Christ is our training ground for eternity. The local church is where God's Word is tried and tested through our obedience (James 1:22), and is how our Christ/love character is developed by God. So if you are planning an exit strategy from your least favourite brethren—think again! God wants to grow you up in Christ's love.

***QUESTION FOR MEDITATION:** Have you ever wanted to exit permanently from your church? What situation or person caused you to feel this way? How would God's Word and obedience to it change your perspective about turbulence and conflict in the church—and more importantly your response to it?

***STUDY POINT:** Conduct a personal study of the Acts 2 church. What were the predominant elements that you see in the early church? How does it differ from our modern church? Write down specific action steps you could implement right away in your own walk with Jesus that would better emulate the early church.

Love is kind. The Greek sense of the word kind describes more than a paste-on Sunday morning smile or a pat on the back. Kind means ready to help in practical ways. In other words, asking a brother or sister if there are real, tangible ways that you could help them—and then following through. Simple, right?

The second part of 1 Corinthians 13:4 sharply contrasts the first part with three negative character traits that should never characterize any Spirit-filled believer:

Envy:

EN'VY, v.t. [L. invideo, in and video, to see against, that is, to look with enmity.]

1. To feel uneasiness, mortification or discontent, at the sight of superior excellence, reputation or happiness enjoyed by another; to repine at another's prosperity; to fret or grieve one's self at the real or supposed superiority of another, and to hate him on that account.

The world—and its blood-stained history—may have the corner on envy, but this murderous heart attitude has no place in the church. We need only look at humankind's first murder in Genesis 4:1-25—the Cain and Abel account—to see how easily our fallen flesh deceives. Church splits and implosions abound, we have a lot to answer to God for.

Boasting:

This verse immediately comes to mind:

Ephesians 2:8-9

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.

We would boast about our salvation, wouldn't we? But God didn't allow for such a theft of His glory. Salvation is so completely out of our human reach, boasting would never be a possibility. Thank you Lord for that!

So, we can then reason that our supernatural abilities—our spiritual gifts, our ministries—are, like salvation, gifts from God. How can we then boast, except in our great God who graciously bestowed these gifts to us for His own glory?

In God's upside down paradigm, only He gets the glory! This is good news for anyone who has come to the end of themselves, for whom all other options have run out.

1 Corinthians 1:27-31

But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: "Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord."

Pride:

Proverbs 6:16-19

These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.

God's hate list here begins with pride. Note how the rest of the despised character qualities listed here are but the bad fruit of pride. This is a big one, folks. We could do a whole study on pride, but it should be enough for us to know that God hates it.

I do want to share this verse, which is a pride-killer:

Philippians 2:3

Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.

1 Corinthians 13:5

(KJV) Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;

(NIV) It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

In other words, love does honour others. Let's define honour:

HON'OR, n. on'or. [L. honor, honos.]

1. The esteem due or paid to worth; high estimation. A prophet is not without honor, except in his own country. Mat 13.

2. A testimony of esteem; any expression of respect or of high estimation by words or actions; as the honors of war; military honors; funeral honors; civil honors.
3. Dignity; exalted rank or place; distinction.

But let me break down this verse in a different way:

DISHONOUR+SELF-SEEKING=EASILY ANGERED, EASILY OFFENDED AND UNWILLING TO FORGIVE.

This is obviously a me, myself, and I attitude. No humility, no forgiveness, no blessing.

So, here is what love looks like: Jesus...

HONOUR (AS WE HAVE DEFINED IT) + OTHERS-FOCUSED=

James 1:19-20

My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.

Quick to listen. Slow to speak. Slow to become angry. With this kind of humility and heart attitude, offences don't stick so readily to our minds and memories, and the big ones God handles through our simple obedience to His Word:

Matthew 18:15-20

"If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector. "Truly I tell you, what-ever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. "Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them."

I say this soberly: God laid His wrath against our sins and the record of our wrongs on the cross of Christ. We have no Biblical right to stay angry or offended at another brother or sister in Christ for any reason without first running to make it right.

Isaiah 53:5-6

But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Amen.

~ Reverend Darren McClelland