

Covenant



Spiritual Roots How Do I Love Others

SR 203 Lesson 2 Text

The following are excerpts from articles in "Hebrew Word Study" by Skip Moen

I Corinthians 13 (The Way of Love)

13:1 "If I speak with human eloquence and angelic ecstasy but don't love, I'm nothing but the creaking of a rusty gate. 2 If I speak God's Word with power, revealing all his mysteries and making everything plain as day, and if I have faith that says to a mountain, "Jump," and it jumps, but I don't love, I'm nothing. 3-7 If I give everything I own to the poor and even go to the stake to be burned as a martyr, but I don't love, I've gotten nowhere. So, no matter what I say, what I believe, and what I do, I'm bankrupt without love. Love never gives up. Love cares more for others than for self. Love doesn't want what it doesn't have. Love doesn't strut, Doesn't have a swelled head, Doesn't force itself on others, Isn't always "me first," Doesn't fly off the handle, Doesn't keep score of the sins of others, Doesn't revel when others grovel, Takes pleasure in the flowering of truth, Puts up with anything, Trusts God always, Always looks for the best, Never looks back, But keeps going to the end. 8-10 Love never dies. Inspired speech will be over some day; praying in tongues will end; understanding will reach its limit. We know only a portion of the truth, and what we say about God is always incomplete. But when the Complete arrives, our incompletes will be canceled. 11 When I was an infant at my mother's breast, I gurgled and cooed like any infant. When I grew up, I left those infant ways for good. 12 We don't yet see things clearly. We're squinting in a fog, peering through a mist. But it won't be long before the weather clears and the sun shines bright! We'll see it all then, see it all as clearly as God sees us, knowing him directly just as he knows us! 13 But for right now, until that completeness, we have three things to do to lead us toward that consummation: Trust steadily in God, hope unswervingly, love extravagantly. And the best of the three is love." (The Message)

LOVE DOES NOT SEEK ITS OWN DESIRES

The implication is that love seeks the well being of others – love chooses to place the interests of another ahead of itself. The offer of love is the offer of self-denial, of one who suffers loss for the sake of another. In other words, love does not take care of itself. It is not self-serving. On the contrary, love exposes itself to maximum risk by giving up what would otherwise serve its own purposes for the sake of another, *regardless of the outcome*. Love does not open itself to risk after calculating the probabilities of return. Love does not seek

a return. It seeks (God seeks) to reconcile through sacrifice. The ground of the Incarnation is simply this: that God loved. And Christ responded to that love by offering Himself. As Paul says, Christ did not count equality with the Father something to be held on to, but rather Christ willingly, joyfully, relinquished His very being to become a sacrificial slave in our place. Love is about giving up who we are for someone else. It's about surrendering to God, not out of obligation but out of joy for the love that we have already received. So John says, we love because He first loved us.

LOVE IS NOT PROVOKED

Love is the passive agent here, not bringing about an action but reacting to something. We saw in the idea of "long suffering" that love accepts what comes to it as the purpose of the hand of God. Here we find an extension of this same concept. Love deflects the action of another in the social world of men, an action that would otherwise produce a tension, a sharpened barb, an irritation, a stirring toward anger. Love turns away animosity, not by actively resisting but by passively accepting without retort. But it is more than endurance.

Perhaps we can understand this subtlety if we draw ourselves a picture of Love's response in conflict. Imagine a courtroom. A man stands accused. The prosecutor rails against the defendant, painting him as seditious, a liar, a shame, a malicious and evil man bent on destroying societal mores. The argument is heated, vindictive and spiteful. It is intended to bring the jury to a point of climatic aggravation when they will call for punishment of the accused. The scene is electric, vibrating with hatred focused on a single end – revenge.

But the accused says nothing, offers no defense, no rebuttal. The accused does not try to justify, explain or proclaim innocence. He absorbs what is thrown upon him, gathering the insults and indignities into himself without a single attempt to rebuke his accusers. Then he speaks, and in his speech he turns aside the revenge of the crowd, he deflects all of the motion toward hatred – "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

LOVE DOES NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT A WRONG SUFFERED

Paul just connected *agape* to mercy ("love is not provoked"). Now he connects *agape* to the other central characteristic of the covenant God – grace. Mercy is the act of removing or overlooking a deserved punishment. Mercy is the thought of not following through when someone's actions would provoke justice. Mercy declares amnesty. But mercy implies a prior action, the action of forgiveness. That is grace. Grace is God's decision to provide undeserved help. It is the immeasurable gift of redemption for those who deserved destruction. Mercy is amnesty. Grace is pardon.

Love does not keep score, says God. And who are we to say otherwise. How many times have we said to someone we claimed to love, "You did this" or "You were wrong" or "You made me do this"? How many times have we kept track of the personal affronts, the indiscretions, the unsympathetic acts? A record of wrongs. Yet God says that love does not count a wrong suffered. Love is first forgiving before the wrong occurs. And if God forgives us, how can we allow our love to be tainted by pluses and minuses? Emotional bank accounts are not found in the institution of love.

LOVE DOES NOT REJOICE IN UNRIGHTEOUSNESS BUT REJOICES WITH THE TRUTH

Applying this to the description of love, we see that Paul says that love and truth are intimately bound to each other – and that this binding is the reason for great joy. Love celebrates this intimate connection. On the human plane, the fact that love and truth are connected is obvious, although not always practiced. Anyone who has ever been in love with another person knows that love involves intimacy – not always physical intimacy, although that is also part of the celebration of God's wonderful crafting of love and truth – but always intimacy – shared trust, commitment, respect and more – placing the well being of another before ourselves. Love between us depends on truthfulness. One cannot love or be loved if the relationship is based in lies.

LOVE BEARS ALL THINGS

Love does not bear anything. In fact, it does just the opposite – it stands up and acts, pushing aside the evil that it faces and wrapping arms of protection around us. There is a fine line here between the idea of putting up with everything and covering everything. God's love has no limits. It is capable of covering all our sins. But it never once puts up with any sin. It reaches to the utter depths of my depravity and shouts a resounding "No! I will not let you go." It is not the passive, disconsolate resignation to withstand unloving acts of another. It is power, reaching out to the unloved and embracing them no matter what the circumstances or history. Love wraps sin in its blanket, brings the sinner to its heart and whispers forgiveness. Love covers everything in an act of incredible mercy. "Love bears all things" is a statement of God's redemptive act in the death of Jesus. This is its home. We may emulate the act by extending the same covering to others and, at the same time, acting powerfully against sin, but we are only mirrors of the true sense of this word. God did it first. Mercy is who He is.

LOVE BELIEVES ALL THINGS

If we translate this phrase literally Paul says, "Love's belief is fully complete". In most translations the phrase was translated "Love believes everything." But does that mean that love just takes in all the claims that we might make, that it accepts every fact or supposed fact? Of course not! This is a statement about the character of divine love, the foundation of existence, the basis of all Truth. So it simply cannot be washed over as if Paul were saying that love is so magnanimous, so capable of turning a blind eye, that it just embraces everything that we might believe – a sort of divine whitewash job. The translation, though accurate, misses the point. Paul is saying that God's love believes all that is needed to be fully what it was intended to be – that God left out nothing when He based the foundation of existence on Love.

LOVE HOPES ALL THINGS

It is not that love is filled with hope about the future alone. It is that love can be filled with hope because it recognizes, and is subservient to, the Creator of the future – the Almighty God. Love is not blind. True love is grounded securely on the author of Being. Love hopes because love knows God is just, pure and righteous. This sort of hope has nothing to do with present security. What hope implies is that there is a promise that absolutely will come to pass, guaranteed by the Creator Himself.

LOVE ENDURES ALL THINGS

Now he concludes with the notion that love is willing to wait. But there is more than just standing by idling in anticipation of God's fulfillment of promises. Here, love's patience is connected with the previous two phrases – hoping and believing. Love is not passive in waiting. Love **stands firm** (take a look at I Peter 5:12). It bears. It suffers. It never, never, never gives up. The sense is courageous endurance, active patience, bearing the wound, accepting the strokes of a world out of sorts with its Creator, knowing (believing and hoping) the righteousness of God. Once again, the focus is not on circumstances but on character – and supremely on the character of God. It is the mark of God's people that they stand fast on His word. God shows us the character of Love in endurance. From the garden forever forward, God endures. Love endures all things.

LOVE NEVER FAILS

Paul finds only a single word to draw all this together. That word is *piptei* from the verb *pipto*. It means 'to fall'. What Paul says is this: Love **never** falls. In the context we often translate this by the familiar phrase, "Love never fails". But, again, there is a bit more here than is rendered in English. The New Testament uses this word in two senses, literal and figurative. The literal sense is obvious. Walls fall down, rain falls from the sky, crumbs fall from the table. The figurative sense is more complex. Sometimes the notion of 'fall' is attached to sin. While it is not used in connection with specific sins, the idea conveyed is that we may fall by abandoning God's grace in guilt. There is an implication of apostasy here.

Paul finds the figurative use of *pipto* appropriate because he knows that it embraces the notion of a relationship that is broken. Now he asserts the final claim of Love – that Love will never fall. Nothing will ever break the relationship anchored in Love, especially because the true character of Love is found in the character of the divine Lover. Later, in his letter to the Romans, Paul amplifies just how solid this connection is in that famous passage, "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Love is not going to pass away. It is not going to fall behind, fall apart, fall by the wayside, fall astray. Love is here to stay – forever.