

“Love Does Not Impute Evil”  
(1 Corinthians 13:5d)

Introduction: The last time we were in the 1 Corinthians 13, we saw that the love of the Spirit of God in the heart of a believer has the tendency to quench the fire of anger. The Spirit will not allow us to harbor resentment in our hearts. Certainly, there are those who have hatred smoldering in their hearts, like the embers of a fire, ready to burst into flames at anything that another may say or do. But the Lord tells us that this kind of anger is sinful, and a person whose life is characterized by it, who is constantly angry and who isn't trying to put that sin to death, stands in need of the new birth. This love is so important, it is so much of the essence of Christianity, at its very root, that if a person doesn't have anything of the kind of love which Paul speaks of here, then he is not a Christian at all. If we are truly converted, if we have received the grace of God, we should be able to find this love in our hearts most of the time. There are times when it may grow so small because of our sin that we may not be able to see it. But normally this should not be the case. Every Christian has the Spirit of God living in them. Jesus says, as a well of water springing up into everlasting life (John 4:14). And this water had the ability to quench the fire of our anger.

We also saw that the root of sinful anger can be traced to the underlying sins of pride and selfishness. Someone who is prideful can't stand to have anyone outdo him in any way. He very selfishly wants his own way at all times; he wants to control everything, and he gets angry when he isn't able to. But pride and selfishness can also give birth to another serious sin, one that is also very common in the world, and sadly in the church as well. What I want you to see from this passage this evening is,

***The love which the Spirit of God works in the heart of a Christian will not take any wrong into account. That is, it will not think the worst of others, or hold grudges against them for the things they do.***

Remember, that as we look at these different characteristics of Christian love, it not only shows us what should already be in our hearts, at least in some degree, but it also shows us what we should be striving for, as we continue to press on towards Christ-likeness.

**I. Love does not think the worst of others, nor harbor resentment against them.**

- A. What the Lord first warns us against here is judging people too harshly when there really isn't any reason for it. What are some of the ways that we might do this?
  1. Sometimes we're too quick to write others out of the kingdom of God.
    - a. We consider them to be guilty until proven innocent, instead of innocent until proven guilty.
    - b. On the one hand, we need to be careful not to think that someone is really a Christian if there isn't really enough evidence to show that they are. Sometimes if we see people doing things like going to church, praying over their meals, or telling others that they are Christians, that we conclude that they are Christians. You know people, as well as I do, who may do these things, any yet are not converted. Certainly any Mormon who takes his religion seriously will do these things. But if they take their religion seriously, then we know that they're not saved. A man might just as easily be saved by following the teachings of Islam.
    - c. But on the other hand, we need to be careful not to reject a person's profession because we see a few pieces of evidence that they might not be saved. Everyone struggles with some sin. We mustn't forget that Job's friends thought that he was a hypocrite because of what he was suffering. But they found out in the end that that wasn't the case at all.
    - d. The things we see in their lives that might look inconsistent might be less serious than the things we wrestle with. But while we tend to think the best of ourselves, we so often think the worst of others.
    - e. We also tend to write people out of God's kingdom if they don't agree with us on every doctrine of Scripture, even those that aren't as important, or if they act differently than we do, or if they have a different kind of religious experience than we do. We need to realize that the Spirit of God very often works in a very different way in each of His children. If they are different than us, it doesn't mean that they're not saved.
  2. So often we are so quick to see the bad things about people, rather than the good things.
    - a. Sin can make us miss their good qualities and exaggerate their bad ones, or it can make us see some bad things that aren't really there.

- b. If they don't agree with us on some issue, we conclude that they're ignorant. If they insist on their own position, then we conclude that they're prideful or selfish. If they don't seem to feel the seriousness of their sins, we think that they're not humble. If they come from a bad background, we're quick to think that they haven't really changed.
  - c. Others might be able to see the good, but all we can see is the bad. This especially happens when someone offends us. When our love for them dies down in our hearts, it causes criticism and suspicion to rise.
3. So often we are too quick in attributing evil motives to the things others say and do, rather than good motives.
- a. Sometimes we do this when there's no reason to.
    - (i) Jealousy can make us think the worst of others. It can also make us think that others are secretly talking about us or plotting against us behind our backs.
    - (ii) Sometimes we hear bad things about someone that may or may not be true, but we're so quick to believe that it's true that we pass it on without looking into it. We forget that the devil is a liar and a slanderer, and he often works overtime trying to divide us by telling lies about us. But so often we are quick to listen to his lie and slow to be persuaded by the truth. Even worse, sometimes we even find ourselves hoping that the bad report really is true.
    - (iii) But this is so contrary to the what the Lord calls us to be, so much so that the Lord says that the one who practices this will not be with Him. The psalmist asks the question, "O Lord, who may abide in Thy tent? Who may dwell on Thy holy hill?" and he answers, "He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness, and speaks truth in his heart. He does not slander with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbor, nor takes up a reproach against his friend" (Ps. 15:1-3).
    - (iv) So often we find that just the opposite is true in the church, and that those who are in it fulfill more what Solomon writes in Proverbs 17:4, "An evildoer listens to wicked lips, a liar pays attention to a destructive tongue."
  - b. But not only are we quick to receive evil reports about others, we are also quick to think the worst of what they do.
    - (i) Even if we have every reason to think the best about someone, so often we think the worst.
    - (ii) This especially happens when they have done something we don't like. Prejudice is so often the reason we find evil motives, when evil motives are not there.
4. We need to be careful then not to judge someone else's heart too harshly. But this raises a problem: sometimes we are called upon to judge the things others do. How can we do this and avoid falling into this sin?
- a. How can the judges of our law courts avoid this sin? They must judge impartially, according to the evidence, and according to the law. Of course that raises a problem if the laws of our land are not just. But if there is a conflict between the law of the land and the Law of God, then the judge, if he is to judge righteously, must rule in favor of God's law.
  - b. But how can we avoid this sin? How can we keep from judging people too harshly? Should we give us making any evaluations at all? If we did this, we would have to stop thinking.
    - (i) The Bible does not tell us that we can't judge someone when there is clear evidence that they are guilty. It is not wrong for us to say that someone is wicked and without Christ, if they continually do wicked things. Paul writes, "The sins of some men are quite evident, going before them to judgment; for others, their sins follow after" (1 Tim. 5:24).
    - (ii) The things that some people do clearly testify against them and is enough to condemn them even before the day of judgment. We're not guessing what's in a man's heart when the things they do clearly show us.
    - (iii) First of all, we need to realize that not all judging is evil.
  - c. But it can become sinful when our judgment goes beyond what the evidence shows us.
    - (i) If there is every indication that a person is a Christian, but we overlook that evidence only to capitalize on the wrong things they do, then we have sinned.
    - (ii) And when we condemn someone before all the facts are in, we have sinned. Solomon writes, "He who gives an answer before he hears, it is folly and shame to him" (Prov. 18:13).

- d. It is also sinful when it makes us happy that someone else is involved in sin.
  - (i) When we come to the conclusion that someone is really not a Christian, or has really done something terribly wrong, it shouldn't make us happy, but sorry. If you love your children and someone comes to you with undeniable evidence that they have done something very wrong, it doesn't make you happy but very sad. In the same way, if you love your neighbor, and even your enemy in the way Christ calls you to -- as yourself --, you should have the same reaction.
  - (ii) But we don't do this. More often we are quick to condemn, and to be glad that they have done something wrong, and it shows us that we really are inclined to think the worst of others.
  - (iii) Love dictates to us that we should be very slow and cautious in passing judgment on someone, that we must go no further than the evidence will allow us to, and that we must always be quick to think the best when we are able.
  - (iv) And when the evidence compels us to think the worst, love will not allow us to take pleasure in it, or to be quick to tell others about it, unless we are bound by duty to do so.
  - (v) So first, love will not allow us to think the worst of anyone unless there is good reason to do so.

B. Secondly, love will not harbor resentment and hatred against another when they really have done something wrong to us.

1. Jesus said that it is unavoidable that offenses should come (Matt. 18:7). As long as we are in the world, people will sin against us. But what we are warned against here is the sin of not forgiving someone when they do and allowing bitterness to fester in our hearts against them.
2. We are clearly warned against this in the Scripture.
  - a. Paul writes, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor be put away from you, along with all malice" (Eph. 4:31).
  - b. The author to the Hebrews writes, "See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled" (Heb. 12:15).
  - c. And John warns us that if we continually harbor resentment in our hearts against others, that we are far from the love of Christ. He writes, "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him" (1 John 3:14, 15). And he also writes, "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen" (4:20).

## II. Paul tells us that the love which is from the Spirit of God is just the opposite of a judgmental and resentful spirit. Love "does not take into account a wrong suffered."

A. Love is not quick to condemn others.

1. When we love someone-- really love someone -- it makes us very reluctant to think evil of them.
  - a. We are so often slow to recognize and acknowledge the sin that is in our own hearts, because we love ourselves so much. If we loved our neighbors in the same way as we should, we would do the same for them.
  - b. Why is it that we hesitate to accuse our children, or our best friend, or our husband or wife of evil motives? It's because we love them and want to think the best of them.
  - c. It's when God's love is either burning very low or absent all together from our hearts that we are quick to judge.
2. But God's love will also help us in this area in that it will help to put to death the pride in our hearts that is often the cause of this judgmental spirit.
  - a. When we are quick to judge others, it shows that our hearts are full of pride; we think that we're better than our neighbors, and so we feel justified in condemning them.
  - b. But Jesus rebukes this kind of behavior in Matthew 7, when He says, "Do not judge lest you be judged. . . . And why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite!" (vv. 1, 3-5).
  - c. Paul warns of the same thing, where he writes, "Therefore you are without excuse, every man of you who passes judgment, for in that you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things" (Rom. 2:1).

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- d. If we were more aware of our own shortcomings, we would not be so quick or so happy to condemn others because we would be condemning ourselves. When we do this, it shows that we have set ourselves up as judges, as though we were above the law, and everyone else was below us. But James writes, “Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother, or judges his brother, speaks against the law, and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge *of it*. There is *only* one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor? (4:11-12.).
  - e. God is the only rightful Judge, and the thought of our exalting ourselves to His level ought to hold us back from condemning our neighbors. Love will not be quick to condemn others.
- B. But secondly, love will also help us to resist harboring any bitterness in our hearts over the wrongs that have been committed against us.
1. Love does not take into account a wrong suffered, but will leave the matter to the judgment of God.
    - a. When David was pursued unjustly by Saul who was trying to kill him, he said, “May the Lord avenge me on you; but my hand shall not be against you” (1 Sam. 24:12).
    - b. And when Zechariah, the son of Jehoida the priest, was being unjustly put to death by Joash, as he was dying he said, “May the Lord see and avenge!” (2 Chr. 24:22).
    - c. The Scripture exhorts us, “Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord” (Rom. 12:19).
  2. Love can also pray for and seek the salvation of those who have wronged us, even though we leave them ultimately to God’s justice if they don’t repent.
    - a. Stephen prayed for his executioners that the Lord would not lay the charge of his murder to their account (Acts 7:60).
    - b. Our Lord, when He was dying, prayed for those who crucified Him, that the Father might forgive them (Luke 23:34).
    - c. The Lord told His people, “You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart; you may surely reprove your neighbor, but shall not incur sin because of him” (Lev. 19:17).
    - d. We can still love others and pray and hope that they will repent, but if they don't, we can be satisfied leaving the matter in the Lord's hands.
  3. And so let us be exhorted by this passage this evening to love our neighbor as we love ourselves.
    - a. James writes, “Let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak *and* slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God” (James 1:19-20).
    - b. Let us stop judging one another and harboring resentment in our hearts against each other. How many times have we been wrong about what we have judged? I heard a story once about a woman who came to church one day and, seeing a friend of hers, greeted her. After she said this, the woman she was speaking to turned her nose up in the air and walked away. The first woman was so offended by this that she didn’t speak to that woman for several years. But one day circumstances forced them together and she finally asked her why she turned her nose up at her. The woman answered, “Is that why you’ve been angry with me all these years? I had a cold that day and had to raise my nose and quickly find a tissue.” Sometimes we are very wrong in our evaluations of others actions and the motives behind their actions. We need to be careful, because we might make enemies out of those who are truly our friends.
    - c. Instead, let us forgive one another, whoever has offended us in any way, remembering that the Lord tells us that we must, if we ever expect to be forgiven ourselves.
    - d. Remember the parable of the ten thousand talents, where the unforgiving slave was handed over to the torturers until he should pay back the last cent, because he was unwilling to forgive a fellow slave his debt. The Lord said at the end of this parable, “So shall My heavenly Father do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart” (Matt. 18:35). Forgiveness is not optional, it is necessary. And if we don’t forgive others, we can’t expect God to forgive us. But if we can forgive, it shows that God has put His love in our hearts, and that our sins are covered by the blood of Christ. May God help us all to forgive and show that His love is in our hearts. Amen.