

# Seven Things Love Doesn't Do

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Text: I Corinthians 13:4-5

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful.

## Introduction:

We continue our study of I Corinthians 13 by examining the second part of Paul's definition of love. This second section of his list of fifteen verbs describing love's action consists of seven things that love does not do. We may first observe that the first five are all things that the Corinthian's are doing. As we have already noted, love is what is seriously lacking in the life of the Corinthian Church. In other words what Paul is saying here is audience specific.

We should also point out at the beginning that the list is not comprehensive but suggestive. These are not the only things that love doesn't do, but they are some of the things that the Corinthians are doing that are contrary to love. They are not all the things that are contrary to love, but they give us a starting point to understand the kind of things that are. We might compare what Paul says about the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5. In both case at the end of the list he uses the term "and such things". What he is suggesting by that is that the lists could go on; he has exhausted neither, but has given us enough examples that we can continue on our own. So as we look at these seven things that love doesn't do, we should be aware that the list could be much longer. We are not looking at all of the things that love doesn't do, but rather a suggestive list in order that we might clearly understand the kind of things that love doesn't do. With these two observations in mind let us examine each of these seven negative actions.

## I. Love does not envy

The word here translated envy can have a good meaning, but Paul is undoubtedly using it here as he uses it in Chapter 3 verses 3-4 where he writes: "For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, I follow Apollos, are you not being merely human?" The word translated jealousy in this passage is the same as the word translated envy in our text. What he is talking about is being in competition for vaunted positions, seeking a following, wanting

people's applause and attention. Such an attitude is contrary to love, and contrary to Christ who came not "to be served", but to serve.

## **II. Love does not boast**

This is not Paul's normal word for boasting, but a rather rare word which means to "behave as a braggart", or to be a "windbag". However, before saying more about this specific word and the braggarts and windbags of Corinth, we would do well to remember Paul's general attitude toward boasting. It is an important concept in his teaching. Basic to his understanding of grace and salvation is the fact that we are all saved entirely by God's grace completely apart from any meritorious works that we might contribute hence, "in Christ" we are on equal footing. Nothing that we might brag about outside of Christ has any weight in Christ. For example at the conclusion of his most detailed explanation of how we are justified in Romans three he concludes with these words in verse 27: "Where *is* boasting then? It is excluded".

All who understand the grace of God know that any human boasting would be completely incongruous with our standing in Christ, but at least some of the Corinthian believers had not grasped this concept. We can easily read between the lines of this letter that some thought themselves superior in wisdom, knowledge, and spirituality to the Apostle who had brought them the Gospel and to other believers, but Paul says that their boasting is simply a sign of their carnality and immaturity. Thus, he gives them the following advice: "Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise" (3: 18). Stop bragging, he says. The only thing any of us have to brag about is the grace of God.

## **III. Love is not proud**

The word Paul uses here literally means to be "puffed up". It must have been especially characteristic of the Corinthians, because Paul uses it five times to describe their behavior, and uses it only one other time in all of his letters. For example in 4:18-19 he writes: "Some are arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power." Perhaps the most telling passage is 8:1 where he says: "Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that "all of us possess knowledge." This "knowledge" puffs up, but love builds up". What he says here is that proud, puffed up behavior is the exact opposite of loving behavior. Later in chapter 14 the term to "build up" will be of key importance. The goal of love is to build up its object. When we act in love we always do good for the object of our actions. The person puffed up with pride

cannot seek the good of others because he is too preoccupied with seeking to satisfy his own ego.

#### **IV. Love is not rude**

The King James “doth not behave itself unseemly” is probably more accurate than the “is not rude” of several more recent translations. The problem is that we no longer use the word “unseemly”. What it means is “indecently”. Unseemly behavior is behavior that crosses moral boundaries. The word can also mean that which defies social standards, or that which is rude or ill-mannered, but given the context of the Corinthian Church, it appears that Paul is using it in the stronger sense. There is, without a doubt, plenty of rude behavior in Corinth, but several things that he deals with in this letter goes beyond the rude to the immoral. Examples of this immoral behavior would be the lawsuits and frequentation of prostitutes of chapter 6, or the behavior of women during church services and the abuse of the poor at the Lord’s Supper of chapter 11. In the end love is neither rude nor immoral. Thus Paul concludes this section with the words: “Let everything be done decently and in order” (I Corinthians 14:40). The word “decently” here comes from the same root as “unseemly” or “indecently” in our text. Whatever love does, it is never rude or indecent.

#### **V. Love is not self-seeking**

This fifth thing that love does not do takes us to the heart of divine love. Love is not self-seeking. It is not self-centered, but other orientated. This is the essence of God’s love demonstrated in Jesus Christ, and the central idea of Christian ethics. Earlier in chapter 10 Paul had laid down the positive principle: “Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor” (10:24). He says this in the context of eating food that had been offered to idols. He says that there is no particular harm in doing this other than that it might offend a brother or sister and cause them to fall. So, he says, your first consideration in what you do should be that it does no harm to anyone else. Later, in the same chapter, he reinforces this idea by his own example when he states: “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved” (I Corinthians 10:31-33).

If Paul can use himself as an example in this it is because he is following the example of Christ. His greatest exposition of this idea is in Philippians 2 where he writes: “Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look

not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:3-5). It is the other-centered love of Christ that is always our model and our motivation. Christian behavior has been indelibly and permanently marked by the example of the one who did not come “to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). Hence, love is never self-centered; it never selfishly seeks its own good.

Chapter fourteen will reveal that this is the chief problem of the present passage. The Corinthian Christians, in their exercise of spiritual gifts, were not seeking the good of the church; they were not seeking to build up the body, but rather seeking some personal gain or satisfaction to the detriment of others.

## **VI. Love is not irritable**

This quality of love corresponds to its first quality. It is longsuffering. It does not get irritated at the first sign of rebuff. It is patient. Peter says of Jesus: “When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly” (I Peter 2:23). This is the picture of “not easily provoked”, or “not irritable” that we need to meditate upon to grasp what Paul means here. Love can avoid irritation because it is firmly rooted in a profound confidence in God. It does not need to defend itself or right every wrong because it entrusts itself to “him who judges justly.”

## **VII. Love keeps no records of wrongs**

This last of the seven negative qualities of love has been translated in various ways. Given the predominant use of the word in Paul’s writings the best translation would seem to be the one I have given. “Love keeps no records of wrongs.” The word that I have translated “keeps no record” is an accounting word. Paul uses it on several occasions in speaking of justification. For example, in Romans 4 he says that Abraham’s faith was “accounted to him as righteousness”, and in II Corinthians 5:19 he says: “that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.”

God does not keep a record of our sins. In Christ they have been forgiven. They have been taken away “as far as the east is from the west” never to be held against us. So love does not keep a record of the faults and failings of others to be brought up at the appropriate time to gain an advantage against another.

As we said at the beginning, this list is not comprehensive, but suggestive. These are the sort of things that love does not do. We could undoubtedly add others, but this should be sufficient to get us on track.

You don't hear this expression much anymore, but some of us remember our mothers saying: "That's ugly, don't do it." Maybe that expression is a good summary of what Paul is saying in these seven things that love doesn't do. Love doesn't do anything ugly. There is nothing ugly in love.