

Text: I Corinthians 13:7 (Pew Bible, pg.1137)

Title: “Love Always...”

INTRODUCTION

Open your Bibles please to I Corinthians 13:7. As you're turning I want to encourage you to continue to pray about our upcoming season of revival called Greater Things. We are approaching our 100th anniversary as a church. I remember something our late, beloved Pastor Emeritus, Dr. James Coggin said in a message he preached here one Sunday. He talked about the importance of unity in the church, and he illustrated it by talking about his own body, which had been stricken with illness. He noticed that when his body was weak, and the parts of his body were not united in health, he found that his voice was weak. And he went on to say that when the body is weak, the voice is weak; and when the body is strong, the voice is strong. With our bodies, the older we get the weaker our voice becomes. And the same thing happens with a church. In many cases the longer a church has been around the weaker its voice becomes.

That will not happen for our church. We want our voice of witness and worship in this community to be stronger than ever. And the best way to insure that will be true for the generations to come is to unite ourselves in seeking God for revival. So September 11 – November 6 we will be united in one worship experience to seek the face of God for revival.

Next Sunday we'll have a prayer guide available to help us be in agreement as we pray for the revival that I believe God wants to send. Joshua told the Israelites, “Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you.” Greater things are yet to come; greater things are still to be done in this city.

Now let's turn our attention to the Word of God. We've been studying and memorizing I Corinthians 13:4-8 this summer. Let's review vv.4-6:

1 Corinthians 13:4 - Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

1 Corinthians 13:5 - It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

1 Corinthians 13:6 - Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

1 Corinthians 13:7 - It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

ILLUSTRATION – Oftentimes people will sign a letter, or a card or an email with the words “Love Always...(your name).” And the Apostle Paul, writing to this important, but struggling church repeats those words “love always” over and over.

“Always” means “at all times, in all circumstances.” The power of this love is that it works at all times and in all circumstances.

As I have mentioned repeatedly in this series, all these qualities of love are rooted in the character of God and in the message of the Gospel. God loves us at all times and in all circumstances.

Over and over the love of the Lord is called the “steadfast love of the Lord.” I Kings 10:9 speaks of God’s “eternal love” for His people.

Jeremiah 31:3 - The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: “I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness.

God showed His love for us in that while we were still sinners, still shaking our fists in His face, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). What amazing love!

Someone has observed that you could rightfully insert “God” or “Christ” in each place where the word “love” is used and it would be equally true. The Bible says that “God is love.” So you can insert His Name where the word “love” is used. “God is patient, God is kind,” and so on, all the way down to our verse.

These qualities of love here in v.7 are listed in ascending order. Think of them as a fail-safe system of love. When one isn’t effective, there’s a back-up system in place.

ILLUSTRATION – I remember reading one time about the Space Shuttles, which are now all retired. They were amazing vehicles. To insure that each flight was successful and safe the onboard computer that controlled everything on the flight had four back-ups. If one didn’t work exactly right, there was another one to back it up. And if that one didn’t work exactly right, there was another one to back it up. If one program failed, another is ready to step up and take over.

Now the next verse says that love never fails. But there are times when one aspect of love is stretched to its limit; and when that is the case, there’s a back-up.

So the power of Christ’s love in us gives us strength to love others, no matter what the circumstances, and no matter how far it is stretched.

Just look at what it says:

1. LOVE ALWAYS PROTECTS.

“Protect” is a word that meant a roof or a support. It’s the picture of a covering. Love supports and protects others from exposure to ridicule or harm. Love doesn’t protect sin, but it does protect the sinner.

Love keeps out resentment like a roof keeps out the rain.

William Barclay says, “Love can cover anything, in the sense that it will never drag into the light of day the faults and mistakes of others.”

Unfortunately, that is the opposite inclination of our sinful selves. We often delight in exposing the faults and weaknesses of others. John MacArthur says, “Man’s depravity causes him to rejoice in the depravity of others.”

Love never justifies or compromises when it comes to sin. But love never exposes for the sake of shaming someone.

Proverbs 10:12 - Hatred stirs up dissension, but love covers over all wrongs.

Proverbs 17:9 - He who covers over an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends.

1 Peter 4:8 - Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.

Peter knew this first-hand. He had experienced this kind of patient, covering love from His Savior.

ILLUSTRATION – The Israelites were reminded of this quality of God’s love in the Ark of the Covenant. On top of the ark was something called the “mercy seat.” It was the covering. The blood of the atoning sacrifices was sprinkled on the mercy seat or the covering. It painted a powerful picture of the covering of sin accomplished by the sacrifice. And it pointed to the ultimate covering of sin that would occur when Jesus died on the Cross for our sins.

ILLUSTRATION – There was a time in British history when England was not ruled by royal kings or queens, but by the Lord Protector, Oliver Cromwell. There’s a romantic love story that comes from those days. During Cromwell’s rule a young soldier was convicted of a crime and sentenced to die by execution. The soldier was engaged to a young lady and his fiancé went to Lord Cromwell and begged him to commute the death sentence, but he refused. He announced that the execution would take place when the curfew bell was rung in the town as dusk approached.

It came time for the execution and the helper at the church pulled the rope to ring the bell, but the bell didn’t ring. Time and time again he pulled on the rope but the bell simply wouldn’t ring. What had happened was that the young lady had climbed up into the bell tower, and wrapped her body around the clapper inside the massive bell. So every time the rope was pulled the woman’s body crashed up against the inside of that huge bell. Time after time this happened until they stopped trying to ring the bell.

Cromwell demanded to know why the bell was not ringing. His soldiers went to investigate and found the young woman cut and bleeding from being knocked back and forth against the great bell. They brought her down, and, as the story goes, Cromwell was so impressed with her willingness to suffer in this way on behalf of her love that he dismissed the soldier saying, “Curfew shall not ring tonight.” That’s what Christ’s love accomplished for us in the Cross.

Love always protects. Then it says...

2. LOVE ALWAYS TRUSTS.

Even when our efforts to protect don't seem to work, then we fall back on the fact that love always trusts.

This doesn't mean that love is gullible, or that it blindly accepts everything it hears. But love is always ready to believe the best. It gives the benefit of the doubt. Love considers one innocent until proven guilty. Love will ascribe to others the best possible motivation.

Love isn't cynical. It isn't suspicious. It trusts that the best possible outcome will result in the lives of those we love. When there is sin, it trusts (believes) that the wrong will be confessed and forgiven, and the sinner restored.

ILLUSTRATION – There's a negative example of this in the book of Job. Remember after Job went through the horrible series of disasters in his life, his so-called friends were convinced that it was all caused by Job's sin. They didn't believe in or trust Job.

Someone has said that "love is a harbor of trust."

ILLUSTRATION – The Apostle Paul's own experience had shown him the value of this. Shortly after Paul (then Saul) was converted he attempted to connect with some of the churches. Obviously there was some skepticism in the churches because, before he was saved, Saul had been the chief persecutor of the church.

Acts 9:26 - When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple.

Acts 9:27 - But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus.

You know, one of the greatest practical expressions of this component of love is intercessory prayer. Love is our ability to keep praying for someone... to keep believing God for someone.

So love always protects. But when that isn't enough, love always trusts. But when that isn't enough...

3. LOVE ALWAYS HOPES (I Corinthians 13:7).

Someone has said that "the rope of love's hope has no end." I love that. In Christ, no person is a hopeless case.

Love retains the hopefulness that God will intervene. The bountiful and rich promises found in God's Word are enough to cause us to be hopeful for the people around us, no matter what they do.

ILLUSTRATION – There's a powerful illustration of this in the little NT letter called Philemon. If you're not familiar with the story, Philemon is about Paul's relationship with a wealthy friend named Philemon and slave by the name of Onesimus. Onesimus had run away, perhaps stealing from his

owner. Onesimus finds his way to Rome, where the Apostle Paul is a prisoner. Paul shares the Gospel with Onesimus and the slave is saved. Now Onesimus needed to do the right thing and go back to his master to make things right. So Paul writes this letter to Philemon.

Philemon 10 - I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains.

Philemon 11 - Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me.

Love always hopes in God that the best is still yet to come for everyone.

But there are times when even that hope is stretched like a rubber band to where it might possibly break. When that time comes, there's a back-up.

4. LOVE ALWAYS PERSEVERES (I Corinthians 13:7).

This word “perseveres” is one of the great words in the NT. It literally means “to remain under a load.” The word for “perseveres” was a word that was often used in a military sense to describe an army holding on to an important position, no matter what it cost.

It is a resilience that refuses to be crushed. When your efforts to protect and support others in love are not enough ... when your loving trust in others is shaken ... when there seems to be no hope that a change will come or the relationship restored ... then love just keeps loving. It perseveres. It overcomes hangs on through all difficulties.

Gospel love simply will not stop loving.

ILLUSTRATION – I have a friend who lives in another city who has been a great example of this aspect of love. He and his wife have been through some unimaginable pain as their youngest son was killed in a car wreck as a teenager, then an older son committed suicide leaving a young wife and small children behind. These waves of tragedy became too much for my friend's wife. She soon spiraled downward into deep depression and ultimately into addiction. I talked and prayed with my buddy as he struggled to know how to help his wife. It seemed that nothing he did helped. He felt helpless watching her go down and down ... but his love persevered. When she couldn't hold on, he held on for her. And today, through the grace of God, their lives and their marriage are stronger than ever.

CONCLUSION

Where does this love come from?

Romans 5:5 - God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

That means that when Christ comes to live in you by his Holy Spirit He deposits this love in your heart so that you can begin to love others as He loves. And how does Jesus love?

His love protects. I think of the woman who was caught in the act of adultery. The religious leaders wanted to expose her sin and to stone her. Jesus protected her with His love.

His love trusts and believes. I see Jesus before His main man Peter, who had failed Jesus time after time. See Jesus saying to Peter...

Luke 22:32 - I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."

His love hopes. Jesus has the hope, the confidence, that the work He has begun in us will be brought to completion. He looks up in a tree one day and sees Zacheaus, one of the most despised men in his town. He reaches out to Zacheaus and goes to his home for a meal. In hope, Jesus saw the potential of God's grace to work in this man's life.

His love perseveres. See Jesus on the cross, to the very end still loving those who crucified Him. He prayed, "Father, forgive them, they don't know what they are doing."

You never know love until you know Jesus.