

Man genuinely desires to be thought of as a good person. A quick glance at the daily obituaries makes this point fairly easily. It is highly unlikely you will ever come across an obituary in which the dearly deceased is remembered for their white teeth or the car they drove. When we get to the end of our lives, what will matter most is the person we have become, and the way we touched the lives of those around us. One of the important questions that every individual will answer about the way they lived their life is, "Was I a good person?" Jesus answers the question in this way. A good person is one whose life is filled with agape love; it is a life that loves family, friends, and near-neighbor as God loves.

As we work our way through the thirteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians there is probably no argument about the fact that love is the greatest commodity, and the highest good of one's life. At the end of this chapter Paul states, "The greatest of these is love" (1 Corinthians 13:13). In 1 Peter 4:13 it says, "Above all things have love." As well, when the Bible describes God it says, "God is love" (1 John 4:8). Of all the qualities and attributes that have could be used to describe God, love is the clearest definition and the very personification of God. One might say that if Paul was painting a portrait of love in 1 Corinthians 13, it was Jesus sitting for that portrait. What is revealed in this passage is God's way of loving, and those who are friends and followers of Jesus are called to imitate God, and love as he loves.

When man was created, he was created in the image of God, and love was his by possession. All these characteristics belonged to him. But when man stood separate from God the image of God was marred, and this choice of a self-oriented existence produced a loveless life. Paul began his discussion in the first three verses of the chapter by talking about the priority of love. Now in the second section of the chapter he details out the perfections of love. Starting in verses 4 through verse 7 we find 15 qualities of love in action. These qualities of love describe who God is, how he acts, and what man is meant to be like.

As a review, the first quality in verse 4 ("Love suffers long") literally means love is patient with people. It doesn't have a spirit of retaliation, but is absolutely and totally forgiving. Secondly, we find that love is kind, and the literal word is "useful." If patience takes all things from people, then the flip side of patience is kindness which pays them back only with good deeds.

1 Corinthian 13:4-7 – (4) Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. (5) It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. (6) Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. (7) It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

The Meaning of "Envy"

The third characteristic of love in this beautiful passage is: Love is not envying. There is another word for envy used in the Scriptures, and that is jealousy. There are basically two kinds of jealousy. One is superficial in nature, while another is deep down, rotten to the core, a stinking form of jealousy. Shakespeare called it the green sickness, Solomon called it rottenness of the bones (Proverbs 14:30), and an old Latin proverb says that jealousy is the "enemy of honor" and the "sorrow of fools".

The superficial form of jealousy says, "I want what you have." When we see what others have we respond by saying, "Oh, I wish I had that." "How come he gets a new car, a new house, a better job?" We are frustrated by the fact that we drive an old jalopy, while our neighbor is driving a shiny new car. We ask ourselves, "Why did I get the short end of the stick?" "I want what he has." This is one type of jealousy. But that's not the deepest, most corrupt form of jealousy. In the first case, you want what another has, but in the second case you resent the individual having it. William Barclay said envy is, "meanness of soul." That is deep jealousy where it's not just that you want what another has, but you despise them for having it.

The root word in the Greek means "to boil." Envy is this inner boiling, seething, and steaming over somebody else's success or beauty. And this is precisely what the community in Corinth was doing. In the current human condition, it is often very difficult to rejoice over somebody who does exactly what you do, but they do it better than you. If love does not envy; when it sees somebody who is prosperous, who's popular, who's powerful, rich, beautiful or gifted, then love is glad for them and love rejoices. This will be true no matter who it is.

A Case Study in "Envy"

There was a king whose name was Saul who had a son named Jonathan. Jonathan was next in line for the throne. Along comes a fair-haired, Hebrew singer by the name of David. Not only a singer but a lion tamer, a giant killer, handsome, articulate, poetic, a supreme musician, with all kinds of abilities. He could be a very unpopular fellow, it is hard to stand so much talent in one person. And you know what? Saul hated him for it? He hated him because of his abilities and he hated him because of the threat David was to the throne. And so Saul, in a fit of fury, grabbed his spear and tried to pin David to the wall, to do away with his rival.

But what about the son, Jonathan? He stood in line for the throne and had as much to lose as his father. We don't know anything in particular about Jonathan. We know he and his armour bearer wrought a great salvation for Israel, but that's

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about it. We don't know anything about his musical ability or his articulation or anything else about him. We know this one thing from the Scripture, and it is this, Jonathan was never ever jealous of David, even though he stood to lose as much as Saul. First Samuel 20:17 says: "He loved David as he loved his own soul." What was the difference between father and son? It was love. You see, Saul was jealous and Jonathan was not, and love cannot be jealous because jealousy is hatred without a cure.

The Meaning of "Boasting"

The word that says to us love is not boastful literally comes from a word that points to a root meaning windbag. It describes the the hot air that comes out of the mouth of a proud, conceited person. Incidentally, it's a unique word in that it is used only in this verse in the entire New Testament. Love is not a windbag. Love is not always shooting off its mouth about its own accomplishments. Love does not speak an arrogant, baseless chatter that is designed to make me look better than you.

You know, being a braggart is an effort to make other people feel bad about what you are or what you have, and in this way it is the flipside of envy. If "Love envies not," then love does not brag. If envy is wanting something that other people have, then bragging is making people want what you have.

In this way boasting is geared to hurt those around you. It is geared to wound somebody else, and to make you stand out while making the another person look inferior. It's easy to do because everyone has at least one thing in our lives that we can do fairly well. Whatever it is, you'll find it and let a few folks know. But this is nothing but blinding self-centeredness. It is simply the desire to make somebody else envy.

Jesus Wasn't a Windbag

The Scriptures tell us, whatever we do, whether in word or deed should be done for Jesus' sake, not our sake. As you begin to train yourself in this area, you will experience a life in which you have placed some distance between the habit of always talking about yourself.

If you look at the pattern of Jesus' life, you see that he never bragged about himself. If anybody had anything to brag about, He did. It's incredible to see Jesus' humility when you study the gospel of John, a book that seeks to present Jesus' deity. You see the way He backs away and almost disclaims anything. Listen to what he says. in John 12:49, "For I have not spoken of myself." How many of us can say that? How many of us can come to the end of one day and say, "God, I have not spoken of myself"? Only love can save us from flaunting our knowledge, abilities, education, gifts, and

ourselves; and prevent a life in which we really come off as fools. When the fact is readily known to the watching world that we really are nothing.

Training To Not "Inwardly Boil" or Be a "Windbag"

The world's voices shout at us all day long: "You are no good, you are stupid; you are ugly; you are worthless; you are despicable, you are a nobody" – unless you can demonstrate otherwise. These voices are so loud and so persistent that it is easy to believe them. Here in lies the great trap, it is the trap of self-rejection. When we come to believe the voices that call us worthless and unlovable, then success, popularity and power are easily perceived as attractive solutions. From this skewed perspective of self everyone becomes a threat and this inner boiling and external boasting is the means we use to cope with our brokenness.

To make any progress we must train ourselves to keep unmasking the world we face for what it is; manipulative, power-hungry, and, in the long run destructive. The world tells you many lies about who you are. Every time you feel hurt, offended, or rejected, you must dare to say to yourself: "These feelings, strong as they may be, are not telling the whole truth about myself. The truth, even though I cannot feel it right now, is that I am a chosen child of God, precious in God's eyes, called Beloved in the Father's eyes, and held safe in his everlasting embrace." He is a father who waits and longs for our return to him, regardless of how far we have strayed.

In addition, we have to look for people and places where this truth is spoken consistently and where we are reminded of our deepest identity as chosen by God. Gathering with others can be a great reminder of this truth. The limited, sometimes broken, love of those who share our humanity can often point us to the truth of who we are: precious in God's eyes. This is why we have to keep listening to the many men and women in history who, through their lives and their words, call us back to this truth.

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