

October 15, 2006 by Steve Brandon



Beyond All These Things

Colossians 3:14; 1 Cor. 13:1-7

As we continue our study of Colossians this morning, we will be looking closely at Colossians 3:14. My message last week was entitled, "Put on Christian Virtue." When using this term Christian virtue, I am simply referring to those character qualities that are appropriate for Christians. Paul lists eight of them in verses 12-14. As we read these verses, I'm sure you will be able to point them out.

Colossians 3:12-14

So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.

Those eight virtues that I'm referring to are "compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, forgiveness, and love." The reason why we are called to behave in this way isn't simply that God told us to do these things. No. The reason why these things are to be evident in our character is bound up in what God has done for us. First of all, if you look back there in verse 12, you will see that we have been "chosen of God." In other words, it is God that took the initiative in our salvation to grant to us eternal life, solely by His grace and kindness. Fundamentally, God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be objects of His affection and love. Second, we have been made "holy." We are made holy through the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us through faith. Through faith, we are made holy because the righteousness of Christ is given to us, because our sin was given to Him. Third, we are "beloved" of God. This simply means that we have been the objects of God's love. It's not because of anything in us, and it's not because of anything that we have done. But, simply because God has chosen to set His love upon us. And so, as those who have been "chosen of God, holy and beloved," we are to put on these eight Christian Virtues." In other words, we are to put them on because of who we are and because of what God has done for us.

This week, I had every intention of continuing on in our exposition of Colossians by proceeding on to verse 15. And yet, I just couldn't go on. Try as I might, I simply couldn't let this passage go. We are going to linger here a bit longer as we consider these ideas. Four words have compelled me to stop and not go on this week. They are the first four words in verse 14, "Beyond all these things." Your translation may say "Above all things" (ESV, NKJV), or "Over all these virtues" (NIV). These words are like a bright neon lights that are flashing our attention upon something that's important.

These words are calling us to place our attention upon the last of these virtues as being the crowning virtue of them all. This is the virtue of love. "Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity" (Col. 3:14). I have felt the need this week for us to stop and to consider the excellency of love above all other Christian virtue.

My message this morning is entitled, "Beyond All These Things." And of course, I'm talking about love. It's love that is the most important of all of these Christian virtues. It's not that compassion isn't important. It's not that kindness isn't important. It's not that humility and gentleness and patience aren't important. It's not that forbearance and forgiveness isn't important. They are. It's simply that above all of these other virtues, love stands as the highest of all Christian virtues. Love surpasses all other virtues.

To give you an idea of how love surpasses all of these virtues, I want you to think of a beauty pageant in which these eight virtues are competing against each other for the crowning of being named, "Miss Virtue." Imagine eight contestants in this pageant. They are eight virtues: Miss Compassion and Miss Kindness and Miss Humility and Miss Gentleness and Miss Patience and Miss Forbearance and Miss Forgiveness and Miss Love. And now, imagine that we are judges, who are evaluating them under two categories: beauty and talent. As we look at all of them, we are struck by their charm and beauty. Each of these contestants have a manner about them which is very beautiful to behold. But one of them stands out beyond all of them. Without question, Miss Love is the most attractive of all of these virtues.

And then, when it comes to the talent portion of the beauty contest, again, we find Miss Love to be more versatile and talented than all of the other contestants. When Miss Compassion shows off her abilities to express a heart that pities other in their distress, Miss Love would come among and shows how she extends good will to all, not only to those who are defenseless and in need of great help. When Miss Kindness shows off her abilities to help others in gracious acts of benevolence, Miss Love comes along and puts forth motive in doing so, which is a genuine, deep down concern for another. When Miss Humility comes and demonstrates how she considers others as more important than herself, Miss Love comes along and shows how she is able to actively promote the welfare of others. When Miss Gentleness demonstrates the tenderness of her care toward others, Miss Love surpasses her by showing how she can be gentle and firm, according to the need of the moment. When Miss Patience displays her abilities to wait for others without complaint, Miss Love shows how she can actively help in the situation to make it run smooth for all involved. When Miss Forbearance displays an amazing ability to overlook those things that are irritating in another person, Miss Love shows how she isn't merely passively enduring the difficulties, but is actively helping others so that others might not have to endure similar difficulties. When Miss Forgiveness shows how she can let go of sinful offenses against her, Miss Love shows how she actually pursues those who have wronged her and are considered to be her enemies.

The result is that Miss Love reigns as champion of the Miss Virtue contest. This is the idea here in verse 14. Paul writes, "Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity." In competing with these virtues, we see how love can do everything that compassion

and kindness and humility and gentleness can do, but goes beyond all of them as she seeks the genuine welfare of others.

This morning, as we seek to set our minds upon love, I want you to turn to 1 Corinthians 13, which is often called the "Love" chapter. ^[1] It's read at many weddings. But, in reality, it was directed to a church, not merely to a husband and a wife. It's very applicable for us this morning. I want to help put some flesh on what it means to love. Consider the first three verses.

1 Corinthians 13:1-3

If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.

In these verses, Paul highlights some abilities that certain people in this world have. These abilities enable them to do tremendous good for others. And yet, when these things are done without love, the one who exercises these wonderful gifts and helps people in the process, is said to be nothing. Look at verse 1. The idea here is that of an **skilled speaker**, who is able to move people with his oratory. He can make them laugh. He can make them cry. He can move their hearts to action. But, without love, he might as well be a "noisy gong or clanging symbol" that moves people to irritation, rather than to action. The idea in the first half verse 2 is that of an **intelligent person**, who knows everything there is to know. He has memorized the dictionary. He has read every encyclopedia article and can quote from them freely. He has read the entire internet. Beyond mere facts, he knows of the mysteries of this world. Others can come to him and ask of him any question under the sun, and the appropriate answer will be given. He can counsel people perfectly, telling them exactly what it is that they need to know or need do to solve their dilemma. But such gifts without love makes this person to be nothing.

The idea in the second half of verse 2 is that of a **man of faith**. The one described has so much faith that he can say to a mountain, "Move from here to there" and "it will move" (Matt. 17:20). Because of the magnitude of this person's faith, "nothing [is] impossible" (Matt. 17:20). He can build orphanages through faith and prayer. He can cast out demons by faith and prayer. He can bring great revival to the land because of his faith. But, such faith without love makes this person to be "nothing." In verse 3, we see a similar thought. Here we read of one who has a **great concern for the poor** people of this world. He gives of his possessions completely to feed the poor. I think that you can read into this that he also continued to work hard and give all of his earnings to do his share in conquering the problem of world hunger. But, without love, such a person is "nothing."

At the end of verse 3, we see another **great sacrifice** being made. Paul writes, "If I surrender my body to be burned." Probably, the idea here is that of being a Christian martyr. In the days of Paul, Christians were burned for holding on to their faith in Christ. In so doing, those being burned could boast of their great faith and sacrifice to Jesus. But, Paul says, without love, "it profits me nothing." These words identify for us the importance of love in all things. Great gifts and abilities are nothing without love. Great sacrifice and philanthropy are nothing without love.

This is why Paul told the young pastor, Timothy, "The goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith" (1 Timothy 1:5). If you would ask Paul, what is it that you want to be the result of your teaching? He would say, "I want people to love one another." I want them to love with a heart that is pure before God. I want them to love with a conscience that doesn't condemn them. I want them to love with a faith that has placed all of its hope and trust in Christ Jesus. The prominence of love in the teaching of Jesus is clear. He said that the whole law is summed up in the word, "love." When asked what the greatest commandment in the law was, Jesus replied, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets." (Matt. 22:37-40) Do you want to summarize the ethical teaching of the entire Old Testament? You can do it with five words: Love God and Love Others. Romans 13:10 says that "Love is the fulfillment of the law." Galatians 5:14 says "the whole Law is fulfilled in [this] one word" -- love. James, the brother of our Lord, said that you "fulfill the royal law" when you are loving your neighbor as yourself (James 2:8).

In all of this discussion about love, the question can easily be lost. What is Love? In the first three verses of 1 Corinthians 13, we see what love is not. Love isn't found merely in speaking good words to one another (verse 1). You can speak in angelic, flowery language to others, and yet still not have love. Love isn't found merely in knowing everything in this world. You can know everything that there is to know, and not have love. Love isn't found in faith. Your faith in God can be large, and yet, still not have love. Love isn't found in giving to the poor. You can give away everything you have and live among the poorest of the world, giving your all to them, and yet, still not have love. Love isn't found simply in giving your life for other people. You can do this and still not have love.

Beginning in verse 4, we see **fifteen characteristics of love**. For the rest of my message, I want to simply go through these characteristics. As we do so, it's my aim that these words will help us to see what love is and help us to know how it is that we can demonstrate our love toward one another. Because of all the Christian virtues that we need to exhibit in our lives, love is the chief attribute among them. So, let's look at the first characteristic of love.

1. Love is patient.

We might easily think of patience as merely that characteristic of a person who is able to stand in line at the post office without complaint. We might think that patience is that ability to wait day after day for the package to come in the mail. But, in biblical usage, the idea here of patience is that you refuse to retaliate when wronged. Literally, this word means, "slow to wrath." It has the idea of enduring affliction from others who are doing you much harm and provoking you to anger. Yet, your anger is not coming to the surface. Rather, you are enduring their harsh treatment. The one who is patient will hold his anger "when wronged" by others, either by what they say or what they do (2 Tim. 2:24). The one who is patient will hold his anger when he endures suffering at the hands of others (2 Cor. 1:6).

Oh, what an example we have in the life of Jesus. Time after time after time, the religious leaders sought to trap Him with his words, asking Him questions that would make Him stumble in what He said (Matt. 22:15). They accused Jesus of being Beelzebul "the ruler of the demons" (Mat. 12:24). At one point, they attempted to throw Jesus over a cliff, that they might stone him to death (Luke 4:29). And how did Jesus

respond? He responded in patience. Rather than retaliating toward those who hated Him, instead, He lovingly sought to help them and restore them. "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling" (Matt. 23:37). Is this not love? Refusing to retaliate when enduring harsh treatment.

2. Love is kind.

This has reference to the demonstration of good will that you have toward another person. You show your kindness when you do good deeds for another person. You show your kindness when you say nice and pleasant words to another person. While patience endures the mistreatment of others passively, kindness will take it a step further and will return goodwill for their mistreatment of you. Kindness will "bless those who persecute you" (Rom. 12:14). Kindness will "never pay back evil for evil to anyone" (Rom. 12:17). "If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, [kindness will] let him have your coat also" (Matt. 5:40). If anyone "forces you to go one mile, [kindness will] go with him two" (Matt. 5:41). This is what God does. God is kind to the world causing "His sun to rise on the evil and the good" (Matt. 5:45). God is kind in sending "rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matt. 5:45). Though the world has hated God and rebelled against Him, it still hasn't prevented Him from being kind. Jesus said that His heavenly Father, "is kind to ungrateful and evil men" (Luke 6:35).

Nowhere is God's kindness especially demonstrated than it is our salvation. Why did God save you? Because He was kind. In Titus 3:4-5, we read, "When the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy." We know that the Bible teaches us that we are born as enemies of God. We are "children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3). We deserve the eternal punishment of God upon our souls. And yet, God didn't return our evil toward Him with evil. Rather, He was kind toward us. Do you want to be kind? Be like God and "love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return" (Luke 6:35).

3. Love is not jealous.

This term "jealous" is the first of a few characteristics that indirectly describe love, by describing what love is not. The first two were positive expressions of what love is. The next eight characteristics will all give you a picture of something that love never does.

Love is not jealous. Jealousy occurs when you see something in another person that you wish that you really had. It may be social status such as one's reputation or job. It may be special talents, for example running a football or playing a violin. It may be relationships (like a marriage relationship or a special mother/daughter relationship). It may be physical possessions (like a house or a car). Your jealousy will be manifested in one of two ways. First, you may simply want what they have. Second, you may turn and actually hate another person because of what they have, because you want it. You will set your heart on bringing them down.

Jealousy will often bring out the worst in others. Joseph's brothers were so jealous of the relationship that he had with his father, they sold him into slavery (Acts 7:9), and thereby seeking His ruin. Daniel's fellow governmental rulers were jealous of his extraordinary abilities and trapped the king to throw Him into the Lion's den (Dan. 6). Jealousy brought down Jesus Christ. It was precisely because of envy that the scribes and Pharisees handed Jesus over to Pilate to be condemned and crucified (Mat. 27:18). They reasoned among themselves, "What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs. If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation" (John 11:47-48). The reason why love isn't jealous is because the one who loves rejoices in the well being of others. If others have social status or talents or relationship or possessions that they can enjoy, rather than being angry and self-centered about wanting them, the one who loves will rejoice that they have these things.

4. Love does not brag.

Your translation here might read, "Love does not boast" (NIV), or "Love does not parade itself" (NKJV). Literally, the idea behind this word is that of a windbag, that is constantly talking about himself, putting himself in the best of light, parading for all to see. The idea here is that love will not vocally call attention to one's own abilities or possessions or works or accomplishments. The reason is because the one who loves isn't interested in promoting himself. Rather, the one who loves is interested in hearing about others.

Have you ever been around somebody who constantly speaks about himself? Have you ever been around somebody who always talks about his own accomplishments and his own possessions and activities? It gets old, doesn't it. People like that are not loving. Rather, in all of their boasting about themselves, they are actually seeking to provoke others to jealousy, because of the envy they are trying

It is impossible to boast about yourself and love others at the same time. Boasting is only promoting yourself. Love seeks to promote others. I love the way that Paul puts it in Romans 12:10. It says, "Outdo one another in showing honor." In other words, have a contest among yourselves and see who is the best at lifting up others, and not yourself. That's love! Honoring others!

5. Love is not arrogant.

This characteristic of love is related to the previous one, "love does not brag." It's not a synonym, however. "Bragging" is a sin of the mouth that lets everybody know how great you are. "Arrogance" is a sin of the heart, that believes deep down inside how great you are. Literally, this word describes the one who is puffed up and proud. This arrogance might express itself in any manner of ways. It might express itself in words, like our previous characteristic addressed. It might express itself in attitude toward another person. The arrogant person will look down upon others, and possibly even refuse to talk with them. It might express itself in an unwillingness to serve. "That task is below my abilities." "I should stand up front and teach. I don't need to get on the ground and wipe the dirt off the floor. That's for somebody else to do."

Bragging is quite easy to remove from your life. You simply need to realize the things that you shouldn't talk about. But, arrogance is very difficult to remove from your life, because it deals with the core of your heart.

All of us are proud of heart. Let's learn from Jesus. If anyone had an opportunity to boast and be arrogant, it was Jesus! He was God in the flesh! His miraculous power upon the earth was greater than all. He probably could have jumped from the pinnacle of the temple and be rescued by angels before He hit the ground (Matt. 4:5). And yet, what did Jesus say? "Whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to

serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:43-45). What did Jesus do? He washed the dirty feet of the disciples, which was too low a job for all of them to do (John 13), thereby demonstrating his love and humility for them to do likewise.

6. Love does not act unbecomingly.

Some translations here say, "Love is not rude" (NIV, ESV). This gets to the core of this word. Love is so concerned with others, that it will seek not to offend another person through selfish behavior. This is at the root of our manners. We foster good manners because it communicates love toward other people. We wait to eat our food until all are served to demonstrate our love for them. We don't interrupt conversations. Instead we demonstrate our concern for what another is saying. We say "please" and "thank you" to put forth our appreciativeness for the kindness and generosity of others. We open the doors for other people, because we want to give them the honor of walking through the door first.

This was Jesus. In all social settings, He was never rude in His behavior. Oh, certainly, He often spoke the truth, which angered His listeners. But, never was His speech or His actions ever to be accused of being rude. He spoke with love toward other people.

7. Love does not seek its own.

Love seeks what is good for others, not what is good for you. The idea here of not seeking your own is that the loving one doesn't have to be first in line. The loving one doesn't have to be the leader. The loving one doesn't have to receive the credit. The loving one isn't selfish. This characteristic gets to the heart of the truest meaning of love as any other characteristic on the list. The one who loves displays an intense interest in others. The one who loves will seek the welfare of others. The one who loves is happy when another gets the honor. The one who loves is filled with joy when another succeeds.

This is what Jesus did when He dwelt among us. During His life, His aim was to help people. He preached the words of life to people. He healed those who were sick. In His death, His aim was to help people. Jesus knew that when He went to the cross to die, it was for the sins of His people. He died as a sacrifice for others. He didn't seek His own. The call comes back to us. 2 Cor. 5:15 says, "He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf." His life was an example of selfless service for others. As believers in Christ, we are called to imitate His example.

8. Love is not provoked.

This word is describing the person who is easily offended or easily angered.

Jesus gave us a perfect picture here of love. In the upper room, celebrating the Passover meal with His disciples, He knew that Judas would betray Him. Rather than speaking poorly of him or being angry with Him, Jesus simply told him, "What you do, do quickly" (John 13:27). Jesus was arrested late at night by a band of thugs, identified by a kiss. Rather than running away or responding in anger, Jesus meekly pointed out the injustice of what they were doing, "Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest Me as you would against a robber? Every day I used to sit in the temple teaching and you did not seize me" (Matt. 26:55). While being tried illegally, late at night, many false witnesses came to testify against him (Matt. 26:49-50). Rather than defending Himself, Jesus chose to remain silent before His accusers, speaking only when they required it of Him (Matt. 26:64). When standing before Pilate, Jesus remained unprovoked, saying nothing regarding the false charges against Him (Matt. 27:14). When stripped of His clothes and mocked and beaten, Jesus never once retaliated against any of the soldiers (Matt. 27:27-31). While on the cross, many who passed by to see Him die, were insulting Him, even those who were being crucified with Him (Matt. 27:38-44). Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). Peter described it like this: "While being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats" (1 Pet. 2:23). That's perfect love. When being arrested unjustly, when being accused deceitfully, when being beaten and tortured without a cause.

Let me ask you, Are you easily offended? If someone does something that you don't really appreciate, are you provoked to anger against them? Church family, that's not loving. Love is not provoked.

9. Love does not take into account a wrong suffered.

This world is full of hurting people. People hurt us all the time. We will hurt others as well. These things are the result of living in a fallen world. We are all sinners and will hurt each other. Love has a short memory and is able to take those hurts and overlook them. This is what God has done in Christ Jesus for all who believe in Him. Our sins and offenses against God are many. We have inflicted harm upon God. Ultimately every sin that we ever commit inflicts hurt upon God. And yet, amazingly, through the cross, God is able to overlook our sin. Now, He doesn't simply sweep our sin under the rug and pretend that it never existed. On the contrary, He dealt with the sin, by punishing Jesus in our place. But, since Jesus has been crucified on the cross for our sins, God no longer takes into account the wrongs that He has suffered at our hands. He treats us as if we were as pure and holy as Jesus. We are called to do the same with others.

This is hard! But, love has never promised to be easy. It is hard to love others. But, the key is the cross. When others hurt you by what they say or by what they do, the loving one will simply hand it over to God. If an unbeliever hurts you, realize that it isn't for you to take vengeance upon the person. Rather, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay" says the Lord (Rom. 12:19). If it's a believer in Christ, realize that Christ died for the very sin that you are harboring against that individual. If God has forgiven it through the cross because of His love, so also should you forgive it as well, trusting that the cross will cover their sin as well.

For the sake of time, let's take the next two phrases together, ...

10. Love does not rejoice in unrighteousness.

11. Love rejoices with the truth.

These two descriptions are really just two sides to the same coin. At first glance we can look at these things and simply say, "Well, of course we don't rejoice in unrighteousness." There is seemingly no reason why I would enjoy it when others fall into sin. I know God hates it. I know that I fear what comes upon those who sin in full light of the knowledge of God. But, there is a way in which we can often fall into rejoicing in unrighteousness. It's called gossip. In the Christian world, we have become quite skillful at gossiping without feeling it's wrong. All you need to do is disguise it as a prayer request. And then, you are free to share all you want of the unrighteousness of another person. Oh, you would never do those things yourself. But, you need to hear all about it, so that you can "pray." On the outside, there might be this veneer of care

and concern for this other person. But, often, on the inside there is the a secret joy in being able to hear about the dirt of others. And this is rejoicing in unrighteousness.

Love does not rejoice in unrighteousness. Rather it will rejoice with the truth. Here, "the truth" isn't so much talking about the objective truth of the gospel. In this context, the "truth" is held in opposition to "unrighteousness." Love rejoices when the truth is lived. It speaks about those who live the truth. It encourages those who live the truth.

The last four characteristics of love come in rapid fire. In so doing, Paul speaks hyperbole. That is, he over states the point to make a point. "Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." We ought not to take these things as absolutes. To bear all things is impossible. To believe all things is gullible. To hope all things is fanciful. To endure all things is not viable. However, the point is well taken: love will go to great extremes to protect, believe, hope, and help others. We're talking about believing the best, hoping the best, enduring until the best comes. Let's take a look at these ideas.

12. Love bears all things.

The idea here isn't so much that love will take everything in and endure through the difficulties. That's true, but that's picked up in the last phrase of this verse, where it talks about "enduring all things" (verse 7). The idea here, though, is that love will cover over all things. Particularly, love will cover over the bad spots in the lives of other people. Or, as the NIV says, "Love always protects." A husband who loves his wife won't talk about the bad things that his wife does. A parent who loves his children won't speak to everybody about the bad things that they do. Neither should we speak about the dark side of another believer to others. When we sin, we deal with it between the offended parties. When sin has been committed, it should be discussed and confessed as sin. But once forgiveness has been sought and granted, love would see no reason ever to bring that offense to light again. Because, it has been wiped clean. It has been dealt with. It has been covered. There is no reason to bring it into account again. Proverbs 10:12, "Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all transgressions."

13. Love believes all things.

The idea here isn't so much that love will be gullible and believe everything that everyone says. Rather, this phrase might easily be interpreted, "love believes the best." Love will see others through rose colored glasses, that put a pretty tint upon everything. So, suppose you hear something bad of someone you know. The first inclination of love will refuse to believe the bad. Rather, love will say, "Surely, there is some other explanation for what I have heard. I simply can't believe that about others." Love will make up excuses for other people to explain their actions. As you learn more, love will continue to give the benefit of the doubt to the person in question. Love will believe the best and not the worst.

Job's friends come to him and see the evils that have come upon him. They instantly believe the worst: Job has committed some sort of sin and God is punishing him for the sin. "Let's find that sin." For 30 chapters, Job's friends look for his sin. That's not believing all things. That's not love. Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar weren't good friends. They didn't believe all things. Rather they searched and prodded for the evil because they were sure they could find it.

14. Love hopes all things.

In other words, love is optimistic. Regardless of the extent of the difficulty that is faced. Regardless of the severity of the wrong done. Regardless of the trust that has been betrayed, love has a hope that it all will get worked out someday. Love will set its heart upon the future. Love will think the best of the future. Sure, things may look grim now, but surely, it will turn out better.

15. Love endures all things.

The stark reality is this: things break in life. Those who were once easy to love, at some point become difficult to love. This phrase here points to love in the tough times. Even when things look bleak, love will stand firm. Love won't lose faith. Love will refuse to give up. Love will continue on. No pain is too great for love to bear. No difficulty is too large for love to endure. No news is too disappointing for love to swallow.

Well, we have covered 15 characteristics of love. Unfortunately, we have heard these words so many times that they almost come across as a nice poem. These words even seem to have a nice cadence to them. "Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

We may hear a nice sounding rhythm and flow to these words. But, those in Corinth would have heard it differently. They would have received these words as a rebuke. See, the church in Corinth wasn't being patient. Rather than waiting until the entire church assembled for the feast, they went ahead and began eating. (1 Cor. 11:33). Rather than slowly working out their difficulties, they were taking each other to court. They weren't being kind. They used their liberty in Christ to hurt each other, rather than to demonstrate their love for one another (1 Cor. 8-10). Jealousy marked them. They were jealous over the giftings of others. They all wanted the glamorous gifts (1 Cor. 12). They were proud and arrogant and rude and selfish. They boasted of their favorite teacher in the church (1 Cor. 4). They fought over their favorite teachers (1 Cor. 3:3). They were easily provoked and held grudges against others. Some were suing each other in a worldly court (1 Cor. 6). There were some clear divisions in the church (1 Cor. 11). They boasted of their unrighteousness and didn't like the truth. They were proud of the immorality that existed in their church (1 Cor. 5).

They weren't bearing all things, believing all things, hoping all things nor enduring all things. They doubted the resurrection (1 Cor. 15). They were wavering in their faith (1 Cor. 16:13-14). The women were disrespectful of their husbands (1 Cor. 11). In a word, the Corinthian church wasn't loving. They were an immature church who needed the most basic of instruction on the sorts of things that the church needed to be set back upon a right path.

They were filled with strife and divisions and fightings and immorality in the church. Paul took this opportunity to rebuke them about how unloving they had been toward one another. But, should they extend love toward one another, the church would unite together. And so, we

have come back full circle. We have come back to Paul's teaching in Colossians 3, verses 12-14.

Colossians 3:12-14

So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.

In light of all that God has done for us in choosing us and making us holy and setting His love upon us, may we put on Christian virtue. "Beyond all these things [let's] put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity." This is my prayer for Rock Valley Bible Church: "May we put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity."

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on October 15, 2006 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] I am indebted to the wonderful sermon series that Art Azurdia preached on 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, entitled, "What's Love Got To Do With It?" which can be found at <http://www.spiritempoweredpreaching.com>. I recommend these messages to all.