

June 5, 2016 by Steve Brandon



Love One Another

Various

About 60 times in the New Testament, we have the "One Another" commands. These are commands of things that we ought to do with "One Another." Like: honoring one another (Romans 12:10); accepting one another (Romans 15:7); greeting one another (Romans 16:16); being at peace with one another (Mark 9:50); being patient with one another (Ephesians 4:2); being kind and compassionate to one another (Ephesians 4:32); forgiving one another (Ephesians 4:32).

This summer, we are taking one of these commands each week, and understanding it, and pressing its application to our hearts. My heart and vision for this series is that we would live like New Testament churches were called to live, which is the essence of the heart of God.

We have looked at three commands already. The command to encourage one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11). The command to pray for one another (James 5:16). And last week, the command to serve one another (1 Peter 4:10). This week, we are looking at the command to love one another.

This command to love one another occurs many times in the New Testament. In fact, I counted them and came up with 16 times. Sixteen times the New Testament exhorts us to "Love One Another." That's more than 25% of all of these "One Another" commands.

And on top of that, there are some of these "One Another" commands that are couched in the context of love. For instance, last week, we looked at serving one another. One of the verses that we considered was Galatians 5:13 which says this, "through love serve one another." Or, as Ephesians 4:2 says, "bear with one another in love." Or, Hebrews 10:24, "Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works." So, we are approaching a third of all of the "one another" commands which explicitly mention "love."

This only makes sense when you remember that the command to love is the greatest of all commandments. Remember when Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment is? He responded with these famous words, ...

Matthew 22:37-40

And he said to him, "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 first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

Jesus said that you can take all of the commandments of the Law and the Prophets, and you can boil them down to two: Loving God and Loving others. In other words, you show me a command in the Bible, and I'll bet you dollars to donuts that I'll be able to trace the command back to either an expression of love to God or an expression of love for others. It really is that simple.

This brings us really to the question: What does it mean to love? In the Greek language, there are four different words for love. Eros, which describes a sexual love. Philos, which describes the love of friends. Storge which is a familial, parental love. And agape, which describes divine love.

The first love (eros) has been described a "take" sort of love. The second love (philos) has been described as a "give and take" sort of love. The third love (storge) is very rarely used in ancient works, used only to describe relationships within the family. And, the fourth love (agape) has been described simply as a "give" sort of love. And when we talk here about loving one another, we are talking about agape love. We are talking about self-sacrificing love. We are talking about a love that is devoted to the well-being of the other person, not yourself.

This is the call to us this morning. To "love one another" with a self-sacrificing heart and with an interest in the well-being of others. Such a love is unknown to the world. Such a love is sure to attract the attention of the world. Indeed, this is what Jesus said.

Let's begin this morning in John 13. This chapter begins "The Upper Room Discourse," where Jesus gives his final instructions to his disciples before his crucifixion. It begins with Jesus washing the disciples' feet (John 13). It ends with Jesus praying his high priestly prayer (John 17). During this discourse, Jesus said, ...

John 13:34-35

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

It is helpful to catch the context of these words. Jesus had just finished washing the disciples' feet. A lowly task, to be sure, but a task that is indicative of the love that Jesus had for his disciples. When Jesus had finished washing their feet, he said, ...

John 13:12-15

"Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.

Jesus modeled true leadership: servant leadership. And he left this model for us to follow:

John 13:15

For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.

Note that Jesus even washed the feet of Judas. We know this because of verse 21, ...

John 13:21

After saying these things, Jesus was troubled in his spirit, and testified, "Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me."

By the time we get down to verse 30, Jesus dismissed Judas to go out to betray him. And then come these words (in verses 34-35).

John 13:34-35

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Here is Jesus giving to his disciples, "a new commandment." Now, the commandment to love wasn't new at all. Jesus said these things after he had given the greatest commandment: Love God and love others (Matthew 22). So, it's not that Jesus was here putting forth a new concept of love.

No. The command to love was given to Moses when the law was given. "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). The command to love wasn't anything new. What was new was the standard of that love, the depth of that love.

Jesus calls us to love in the same way that he loved. And how deeply did Jesus love? That's what the gospels are all about.

The gospels describe the depth of the love of Jesus. The gospels describe his compassion. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like a sheep without a shepherd (Matt. 9:36).

The gospels describe his deeds of love. Touching the unclean and healing the leper. Healing the paralytic by the pool (John 5). Feeding the thousands (John 6). Giving sight to the blind (John 9). Raising the dead (John 11).

The gospels describe how incredibly patient he was with his disciples. He was teaching them of his death, and they argued about who was the greatest (Matthew 20:17-28). They slept in his hour of greatest need. They all deserted him. But Jesus loved them.

The gospels describe how Jesus gave his life as a sacrifice. A little later in John 15, Jesus said this: "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). And, of course, that's what Jesus did. He laid down his life for his friends. He laid down his life for us.

And as Jesus was placed there upon the cross, it was an example of his love for us. Jesus had prepped the disciples that his act of love was an example for how we ought to love.

John 13:34

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

Now, of course, we can't do everything like Jesus did. Of course, we can't heal like Jesus healed. We can't multiply food to feed the thousands like Jesus did. We can't raise the dead. And we can't die for each other's sins.

But, we can hold the hands of the hurting. We can sacrifice of what we have to give to others. We can sympathize with those who have lost loved ones. We can be patient with those who see things differently than we do. We can give of our time to serve others.

And can you imagine the effect that a community filled with such people would have on the world? Jesus did. He said (in verse 35), ...

John 13:35

By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

We read about this love in the book of Acts.

Acts 2:42-47

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

And thousands were being saved. And the unsaved, who dared not to join them, still "held them in high esteem" (Acts 5:13). And priests were becoming obedient to the faith (Acts 6:7). They were "turning the world upside down" (Acts 17:6).

Because, the preaching of the apostles was having an effect upon the people. They were turning from their sin. They were turning to each other in love. And the world knew that they were disciples of Jesus. Such a testimony continued beyond the book of Acts.

The early church conquered through love. For three hundred years, the early Christians faced a tremendous amount of persecution. Many of the early Christians died for their faith.

And yet, it was their continual devotion to "Love One Another," that ultimately prevailed. Their love for one another transformed the "Roman Empire," into the "Holy Roman Empire," a Christian empire.

Tertullian, the early church father, reported that the Romans were amazed when they looked upon the behavior of the Christians, this persecuted, pathetic people. He said that the Romans would say, "See how they love one another! ... how are they ready even to die for one another!" [\[1\]](#)

Philip Schaff once described how it was that Christianity eventually triumphed over the Romans, who had attempted to destroy it. He said, ...

"No merely human religion could have stood such an ordeal of fire for three hundred years. The final victory of Christianity over Judaism and heathenism, and the mightiest empire of the ancient world, a victory gained without physical force, but by the moral power of patience and perseverance, of faith and love, is one of the sublimest spectacles in history, and one of the strongest evidences of the divinity and indestructible life of our religion." [\[2\]](#)

Or, as we sing, ...

Lead on, O King eternal,
till sin's fierce war shall cease,
and holiness shall whisper
the sweet amen of peace.
For not with swords loud clashing,
nor roll of stirring drums;
with deeds of love and mercy
the heavenly kingdom comes.

Christianity is a religion of love. Christianity is a religion of mercy, because we follow our Lord Jesus who was full of love and mercy. We don't conquer with swords. We don't force people into confession. We don't threaten death to those who don't convert, as the tenets of Islam would advocate. Our plan is much different. We are called to "Love One Another." And as we love one another, the world will know that we are his disciples.

John 13:35

By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

And as the world sees what discipleship to Jesus means, it becomes attractive to some, and they bow the knee in willing submission to King Jesus. As Peter Scholtes wrote, ...

We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord
And we pray that our unity will one day be restored

Refrain:

And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love
Yes they'll know we are Christians by our love

We will walk with each other; we will walk hand in hand.
And together we'll spread the news that God is in our land.

We will work with each other, we will work side by side
And we'll guard each man's dignity and save each man's pride

And the simple question of application is this: "As people look at your life, does your love for other stand out? Do people see your love for others, and conclude that you are a disciple of Jesus?" Jesus said that your love will make this known.

John 13:35

By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

This is inside the church. And this is outside the church. Non-Christians should see your life of love and see Christ in you. Christians should see your life of love and see Christ in you.

And so, church family, I exhort you to love one another. This isn't the sort of command that you can get around, and ignore as unimportant. These words come from the lips of the Lord Jesus, himself.

Paul was clear about this as well. In Romans 13:8, he commanded us to "love one another." Peter pushed the application of love. "Love one another earnestly from a pure heart" (1 Peter 1:22). "Above all, keep loving one another earnestly" (1 Peter 4:7). Here, "earnestly" means "stretchingly." John (in his epistles) exhorts us to love one another 6 times. [\[3\]](#) So, how are you doing?

At this point, it would be good for us to spend some time thinking about love. What is it? What does it look like? So, turn with me in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 13. This is often called the "Love Chapter." 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. Consider the first three verses.

1 Corinthians 13:1-3

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain 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 a 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 make 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 great commitment. He has such a great concern for the poor people of this world that 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 deliver up 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 dedication and sacrifice 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. May all we do at RVBC stir us to love one another.

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 in sacrifice. You can give your life for other people and still not have love. And if you don't have love, you are empty.

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. To the extent that

these are true in your life, you are, "loving one another."

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 does not envy.

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 envious. 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.

Envy 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).

Envy 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 envious 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 boast.

Your translation here might read, "Love does not brag" (NASB), 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 boast." It's not a synonym, however. "Boasting" 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. Arrogance may cause us to say, "That task is below my abilities." Or, "I should stand up front and teach." Or, "I don't need to get on the ground and wipe the dirt off the floor. That's for somebody else to do."

Boasting 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 is not rude.

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 insist on its own way.

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 irritable.

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 irritated?" 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. Love is not irritable.

9. Love is not resentful.

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 wrongdoing.

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 wrongdoing 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 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 will, 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.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

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; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love 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).

Envy 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 unrespectful 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

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.
And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

Love one another.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on June 5, 2016 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] Tertullian, Apology 39.7

[2] Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church, Vol. 2, p. 8

[3] 1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11, 12; 2 John 5