Tomorrow marks Valentine’s Day. Couples –engaged or married—will exchange cards or gifts of endearment. Some lucky ladies will receive a beautiful bouquet. Perhaps there will be a romantic dinner with candles on the table. Men and women will express their love for one another with celebrations perhaps a bit more subdued in the middle of this pandemic. But as enjoyable as all these activities are, we as followers of Jesus Christ need to ask ourselves if romantic love encompasses all that God’s word teaches about the subject. What is love? What does Jesus have to say about this? To answer that question we will turn to a familiar part of scripture that is often used in marriage ceremonies although Paul does not mention marriage in these verses.

# 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (ESV)

***4****Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant****5****or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;****6****it does not rejoice at wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth.****7****Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*

The first observation that we can make from these scriptures is that true love or “agape” is other centered or self sacrificial. This is in sharp contrast to infatuation which is self centered.

Many years ago a man wrote into Dear Abby asking for advice. Dear Abby is an American advice column founded in 1956 by Pauline Phillips under the pen name "Abigail Van Buren" and is carried on today by her daughter, Jeanne Phillips, who now owns the legal rights to the pen name. This man wrote he was having an affair with two different women but insisted that he still loved his wife and asked what he needed to do. He signed his letter, “Too much love”. Abby’s response was succinct and to the point. She replied, “The difference between human beings and animals is morality. You should be contacting a veterinarian.” This man should have signed his letter, Hedonistic Henry. He had no real love for his mistresses or for his poor wife. Clearly, this man’s actions were entirely self-centered with no regard for any of these women. Abby’s reply hit the mark. The man was behaving like an animal with no sense of morality.

Look at Jesus’ teaching on love.

# John 13:34-35 (ESV)

***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.****35****By this all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.”*

Jesus said he was giving them a new commandment to love one another while he was quoting Lev. 19:18. How could he say that this was a new commandment? The answer to that question is found in the qualifier— “just as I have loved you”. Jesus set the bar very high—in fact at the divine level—by his life and ultimately by his death on a Roman cross. That is *agape* or divine love. Not only is this the proper way to relate to one another but our actions are also a powerful witness to our neighbours and friends. When they see the love that we exhibit, they recognize that we not only talk the talk but also walk the walk.

Jesus’ commands to love others was not limited to fellow believers. He must have deeply shocked his Jewish listeners when he commanded them to love their enemies.

**Luke 6:27-28 (ESV)**

***27****“But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,****28****bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.*

You can imagine those standing nearby listening to Jesus’ teaching. If he had said love your fellow Jews but hate the Gentiles especially these Roman oppressors, heads would have bobbed in agreement but instead he was probably greeted with puzzled looks and furrowed brows.

As a disciple of Christ we strive to love even those who hurt us. That distinguishes us from the world, and is a wonderful witness to our faith.

Several years ago my wife and I underwent training to help out with the Abbotsford Restorative Justice and Advocacy Association. One of the guest speakers was a woman who several years prior had been the victim of a house invasion by three young men who had beaten her and her mother and father with baseball bats causing the death of her mother and multiple fractures to her and her father. The police investigation revealed that one of the attackers was her brother accompanied by two of his buddies. Their goal was to kill the parents and their daughter so that the family estate would be inherited by the murderous son who would then share the proceeds with his two criminal friends. These men were tried and found guilty of murder and attempted murder. Some time later this young woman became a Christian and knew that she was obligated to forgive these men including her brother. She did visit all three in prison and forgave them in person although she was quick to point out that the relationship with her brother was never restored; however, she did obey Jesus’ admonition to love and forgive her enemies. We all have a choice to make. We can choose the natural path and hate our enemies or to love them. We should not allow hatred to lodge in our heart.

Yes, we love God and our husband or wife and our children but the command to love one another goes beyond the obvious to love those that insult us, hurt us in person or by their words, scam us over the Internet, impugn us in social media, cut us off in traffic and this list goes on from relatively minor offenses to even attempted murder. What we are called to is faithful, self-sacrificing act of the will to everyone. This does not excuse the actions of our enemies or mean that we will ever become bosom buddies.

Back to 1 Cor. 13:4 *Love is patient and kind.*

In these words we see Paul admonishing us to realize that love is not some quick fix but is expressed over the long haul. Love is patient and kind today and tomorrow without end. And aren’t we glad that God exhibits that kind of love to us? Can you imagine what it would be like if he said, “Okay, I forgive you for the sins that you did today, but my patience is running out. The next time you mess up you are finished!” No, God is patient and kind to us. As we grow in the very nature of Jesus himself we, too, need to exhibit patience and kindness to those around us.

The world would have us believe that love diminishes with time. Some people believe that love is something that just happens to us. “We fall in love” but it is something that we will equally fall out of. And, sadly when the emotion is infatuation it will fade. It was never true love to begin with. And I suspect that most adults (including myself) are grateful that they never married their teenage heart throb. The infatuation that we experienced would never have survived the challenges of married life.

Real love grows with time. If you were able to sit down and talk to couples that have been married for several years, you would find confirmation that their love for each other was shaped in the trials of health, finances, job loss, and child rearing. Their love for each other after decades of marriage has matured and grown deeper. And that is why it is so painful to lose a mate after 59 years of marriage as one of the men in our congregation did last summer. We grieve deeply when our mate dies because we loved deeply.

When we see love as identified as being patient and kind, we immediately think about our fellow human beings, but do we do we ask if our love of God is patient and kind? “What”, you say, “do I need to show patience towards God?” Absolutely, consider a couple of verses from Psalms.

**Psalm 37:7 (ESV)**

*Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices!*

**Psalm 40:1 (ESV)**

*I waited patiently for the Lord; he inclined to me and heard my cry*

There are many times in our Christian walk when we are challenged to wait patiently for the Lord to act. Men, you may have experienced job loss and wondered how you will support your wife and children. I was laid off after a corporate merger after 23 years of service to one employer and it took two years before my employment situation stabilized. Ladies, you may be praying for healing for a sick child. Parents, you may have a prodigal son or daughter that you have been praying for their conversion for decades but with no apparent progress. I have seen that with my three adult children. All of us have prayed for what we believe is best for us and our loved ones, but the answer sometimes has been “no”, or “grow” instead of “go”. We have to learn to trust God in all our circumstances.

# 1 Corinthians 13:4-5 (ESV)

***4****Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant****5****or rude …*

Paul lists some traits of love that point to strength of character. These are the “not” characteristics—not envious, boastful, arrogant, or rude. We may have exhibited these qualities in our pre-conversion life but as we are led by the Holy Spirit and are gradually molded into the very image of Christ. We shed what the bible calls the old man and gradually our very being is beautifully shaped into the Christ’s character. It would be unthinkable to imagine Jesus as being envious, boastful, arrogant, or rude.

When we show these traits, we are declaring a discontentment with our selves, our situation in life, and what we have. This is the opposite of *agape* love which is other centered. If we are envious, boastful, arrogant, or rude, we are focused inward. As someone once said the smallest package in the world is someone wrapped up in himself. We all have known arrogant people. We know that they are truly full people—full of themselves that is.

**Obadiah 3 (ESV)**

*The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rock, in your lofty dwelling, who say in your heart,  “Who will bring me down to the ground?”*

When pride has infected our heart, we have a condition that only a divine cardiologist can solve. The patient has an infection that has poisoned their spirit, so they are deceived. He has a contentious spirt that believes that he is better than others. Note that this is the same spirit that Satan exhibited millennia ago leading to his rebellion against God.

**Ezek. 28:15-17 (ESV)**

***15****You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created, till unrighteousness was found in you.* ***16****In the abundance of your trade you were filled with violence in your midst, and you sinned; so I cast you as a profane thing from the mountain of God, and I destroyed you, O guardian cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire.* ***17****Your heart was proud because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor. I cast you to the ground; I exposed you before kings, to feast their eyes on you.*

Sometimes our love of perfection leads to touchiness. I remember when Barbara and I were engaged in Toronto. A couple of my friends—or at least I thought they were friends—cautioned Barbara about marrying an engineer. “Engineers are too rigid in their thinking,” they said. “They demand perfection in their work and that spills over into their private life. Be careful, Barbara.” Actually there is a grain of truth in what they said. Canadian engineers wear a small ring made of stainless steel on the small finger of their working hand as a constant reminder of their duty to protect the public in their work, but I am not fully convinced that our dedication to public safety spills over into our personal life. You’ll have to ask my wife about that. But, in any case, if you are addicted to perfection, it can lead to cantankerousness since this is an unreasonable expectation in dealing with flawed human beings.

**Phlns. 2:3-4 (ESV)**

***3****Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.****4****Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

Although the word “love” is not mentioned here, I don’t think the apostle Paul would object to reading that into these two verses from his epistle to the Philippians. Here we see him contrast selfish ambition or conceit with an admonition to count others to be more significant than ourselves. Although it is normal to look out for our own interests, we should not limit our concern to ourselves but also be concerned about others. Do you hear an echo of Jesus’ command to love our neighbour as ourself?

**1 Cor. 13:5 (NIV)**

 ***5****It (love) does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.*

It seems the natural tendency is to remember every offense done to us. If I asked every adult listening to this message if they can remember any offence they experienced last week, last month, last year or even in their youth, I suspect I would be inundated with a long list of offences. But the admonition in Greek is “does not count up wrongdoing” or as the NIV translation says, “it keeps no record of wrongs”. If we are not careful in our marriage, we can cause a lot of harm if in the midst of a disagreement we bring up every wrong or fault that our spouse ever did. We all need to avoid any statement that begins with “You never…” or its twin, “You always…”

Let me share a personal example from my marriage to my late wife, Carole. As I recall we had been married for several years when she brought up some dumb, insensitive thing that I had done shortly after our marriage. I didn’t remember it, but she certainly did. What was I to do? I apologized and asked her forgiveness, but I also asked her to stop bringing up my blunder.

What if God had some gigantic database of all our wrongs and then used it at every opportunity to replay in 4K colour and stereo exactly what we have done wrong? Now that is a frightening thought is it not? But there are a couple of scriptures that make it clear that that is not how God relates to us.

**2 Cor. 5:18-19 (ESV)**

***18****All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation;****19****that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.*

We have been reconciled to God through the redemptive work of Christ. He no longer counts our trespasses against us.

For further proof that God does not keep a database of all our sins look at this encouraging scripture from the prophet Isaiah.

**Isa. 43:25 (ESV)**

***25****“I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins.*

Perhaps you have seen a document released by some government agency to a freedom of information request. Invariably portions of the transcript are redacted or blacked out. Isaiah tells us that God redacts our transgressions or blots them out. God is not a divine scorekeeper carefully logging all our sins and mistakes. That frees us up to grow and mature in Christ. We can move forward knowing that our saviour is rooting for us all the way through this life.

There is one more scripture which I consider one of most encouraging in the entire bible.

**Rom. 8:1 (ESV)**

*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*

Now how encouraging it is to know that as follower of Jesus Christ there is no condemnation hanging over my head! My sins past, present and future are forgiven in the blood of Christ shed for me and for all who accept in faith his sacrifice for them. I am grateful for his incredible grace towards me, and I will be for all eternity.

**1 Cor. 13:6 (NLT)**

***6****It (love) does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out.****7****Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.*

We see that love, truth and joy are all interconnected. Genuine love celebrates what is true. It has nothing to hide. It endures all things or as the NLT has it, “endures through every circumstance”.

**1 Cor. 13:7 (ESV)**

***7****Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*

Paul teaches that love bears all things, i.e., it is willing to think the best of other. This does not mean that we are gullible, but we are wiling to think the best of others rather than the worst of others. We are willing to give them the benefit of the doubt until we learn otherwise. For example when our spouse is mad at us, we do not interpret that to mean that they are against us. Rather they are emotionally engaged in whatever situation gives rise to their anger. Real love can rise above conflict and move forward.

When we “hope all things”, we look forward and are generally optimistic about the future. We do not look backward. It is easy to look back and rehearse the mistakes that we all make but with an attitude of “hoping all things” we have a focus on moving forward.

“Endures all things” teaches us that we hold on no matter what in our Christian walk. All of us will experience hardship and pain in life but the difficulties of life do not stop love. We must be steadfast in our faith no matter what difficulties we face. We persevere. As the old saying has it, “When the going gets tough, the tough get going.” Disappointments in life are inevitable but we look for the best in the other person even in the face of their failings. After all, don’t we want others to see the best in us despite our failure to live up to their expectations? We are committed to following Jesus despite fear, pain, and sorrow.

**Conclusion**

Let’s look at this passage from 1 Corinthians a final time but in a different translation.

# 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (NLT)

***4****Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud****5****or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged.****6****It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out.****7****Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.*

Can we distill this teaching into one memorable sentence or two? How about this:

**Love is more than a fleeting feeling. It is the conscious choice to care in every circumstance.**

\*\*\* Closing Prayer \*\*\*

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