

Sermon 48: 1 Corinthians 13:6: The Principles of Love

OUTLINE

Love rejoices in holiness
Love rejoices with the truth

INTRODUCTION

The word 'love' has come to be nearly meaningless in our present unprincipled age. Living in a Post Christian world where we have given away the truth of God and His word as a perfect guide for our lives, the word 'love' has lost its moorings. Here is a crass example, there was a group that ceased its activities in 2016 called NAMBLA, the North American Man Boy Love Association, a group that advocates for pederasty and pedophilia and doing away with the age of consent. That is a use of the word 'love' that goes in the opposite direction to biblical teaching. But the drift in the meaning of 'love' is more subtle than that. A new sinful trend in relationships is polyamory, multiple loves. One estimate is that in the US 17 million people are in a 'polyamorous relationship.' A Men's Health article¹ last year listed various types of polyamory: Hierarchical polyamory where a couple both have a primary and secondary partner; non-Hierarchical polyamory is when you don't have any primary relationships but more than one. Kitchen table polyamory is opportunistic polyamory; my favourite was parallel polyamory, this is defined as a man having a wife and a girlfriend who don't know about each other's existence, the Bible calls that adultery, and on the list goes. I am sure it makes you angry as it does me that people try to make sin look respectable by giving it a fancy label and put it in a taxonomy. And this is just another example of how the word 'love' is being redefined to suit favorite sins. 'Being loving' today is shorthand for an unprincipled support for all manner of sin and self-deceptions. 'You can't help who you love' is a platitude used as an excuse for all sorts of ungodly relationships. Our modern definition of love is a big mess.

All of what Paul says about love in 1 Cor. 13 is needed today, but it seems to me that we are in desperate need of the teaching of v6, 'it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.' We can clearly see that Paul does not see love as a tyrant that dominates us and drives us into sinful activity but principled in two key areas, love is holy in that it does not rejoice in wrongdoing; and love agrees with the truth, it is not a law unto itself. Love agrees with God's law and God's truth. These will be our two points, love rejoices in holiness; love rejoices with the truth.

Love rejoice in holiness

'It does not rejoice at wrongdoing.' You will notice that Paul uses a set of verbal opposites to make his point. But this set is curious, you would expect it to say, 'it does not rejoice at wrongdoing; but rejoices in right doing,' because surely that is the logical counterpoint. But Paul sets truth against wrongdoing. This is not a mistake by Paul by shaped by biblical thinking about the nature of truth. Ordinarily we would associate truth with ideas, thoughts, philosophies, abstract principles, words and teaching. But a quick read of the book of Proverbs will quickly demonstrate that 'truth' is practical, that biblical wisdom is truth lived

¹ <https://www.menshealth.com/sex-women/a39412505/types-of-polyamory/> accessed 5/1/2025

out to live life well in the fear of God. Likewise the bible's emphasis on faith without deeds being dead underscores that true faith in the truth will always result in right action and not just stay in the abstract in the intellect. So already we have our first application, right thinking and right living are linked, you can't claim to be in the truth if it is not being lived out in your life, having right opinions without right living is otherwise known as hypocrisy. In fact we live in an age where there is a huge disconnect between opinion and action. We live in the information age and there are so many influencers on line who are sharing their opinions, you can have the most advanced and nuanced opinions on the latest thing that has been happening by who you follow on line, and your life can still be a sin filled mess. There are many sinful experts.

You will notice that Paul uses the word rejoice in both parts of this verse. Which raises the question for us, what does love love; what does love delight in; what brings love joy? This love you will remember is not a broad and inclusive definition but love as a fruit of a work of grace in the heart that is shaped by God's love and truth. This is a love that flows from a heart that has seen the truth of what sin is, the wrong of its own sin, that has mourned its personal sin and endeavours to live a life of daily repentance rooting that sin out and waging war against it; this is a love that flows from the influence of the Holy Spirit so that it loves what God loves, and whose conscience is tuned by experience to what does and does not grieve the Holy Spirit. This is a love that informed by God's holiness that loves what He loves and hates what He hates and so does not rejoice in wrongdoing.

This is a list describing love, but fitted to the Corinthian situation, why does Paul say to the Corinthians that love does not rejoice at wrongdoing? What in the Corinthian situation makes it look like they are not upholding God's standards of holiness? The most obvious thing is chapters 5-6. Paul rebukes the Corinthians for their tolerance of sexual immorality in their midst and instructs them to apply church discipline. It seems that they were not only lax with this sin in their midst but they were falling into the sin which characterized their town and Paul warns them, 6v9-11, 'Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.' You will remember that he has to talk about their view of liberty reminding them that not all things are helpful; he had to give them a theology of the body showing how sexual sin is a sin against our body, and that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. This toleration of sexual sin and justifying of sexual sin is the opposite of love.

Why does love not rejoice in sexual sin? Holy love in general is concerned that God is glorified through obedience and praise; and that their neighbor is served according to their highest good in God. Today unbelief rejoices in sexual sin, in self-expression, in celebrating unnatural sexual relationships in pride month, it runs marriage down, or redefines it to suit its desires. Pornography, hook ups, only fans, prostitution, full nudity entertainment, reassignment surgery are all markers that our world does not have the love that Paul is describing. Love mourns that God as Creator is denied as people self-create; that God's obvious wisdom for how we are to live is scorned for self-destructive self-direction; love mourns that marital fidelity that reflects the love between Christ and His church

is a favorite target for satan to overwrite. Love also seeks its neighbors highest good. Love cannot rejoice in the self-deception and self-destruction of young boys and girls being sexualized and falling prey to transgender ideology. Love does not rejoice in the 73 million abortions every year, 200 000 every day that result from sexual sin. Love does not rejoice in the violation of the purity of young people's mind through what is called entertainment. And on and on we could go.

We need not limit wrongdoing merely to sexual sin but all sin. Love does not rejoice in sin in the church, in fact the opposite, it mourns and prays over sin in their fellow believers. A common application of this point is that love does not gossip. News bearers love a good scandal, they love to create a sensation around bad news and be the center of attention as everyone gobbles up their gossip. Love does not rejoice when someone sins and heavy consequences fall upon them. Love does not delight in the downfall of the sinner waiting with a juicy 'I told you so' when people are at their lowest. Love commends holiness and as the best way to be happy; and love condemns sin not out of sense of superiority or scrooge like attitude that does not want other people to be happy. No, it has tasted the goodness of God's holiness and the wisdom of His ways and wants this for others to the glory of God. Love seeks holiness not only in the world, and in the church but in itself as well. True love is not only following the latest trend in denouncing social evils but is intent on personal holiness. Love declares war on sin wherever it is found.

As I was studying this a question occurred to me: if love does not rejoice in sin, then how can God who is love love sinners? Many think that because God is love He can't help Himself, there is no problem with God loving sinners. But we know in the gospel that sin bring upon us God's righteous judgement. God who is love loves the sinner not by overlooking or redefining or approving of their love but by sorting out our sin problem by paying for the debt Himself. I find this convicting because I am all about denouncing evil, calling a spade a spade, there is not enough recognition and discernment of what is evil and Christians entertain themselves with evil and are not positioned against it. So is God but He does something about it; He acts; He sacrifices; He seeks out the lost sinner. His not loving evil, and being holy does not result in Him merely disapproving of sin, but doing all that we need to save us from it. Love wants to see people saved from sin; helped to overcome bad addictions; walking in the liberty of God's law; knowing the satisfaction that comes from seeking God's will and not our own.

Love rejoices with the truth

'But rejoices with the truth.' Love and truth are not always friends, but here we see that love which is a work of grace in the heart agrees with truth. In fact Paul has a curious turn of phrase, love 'rejoices with the truth.' In other words, when truth rejoices, love concurs. In other words, unlike our modern day where internal feelings create our truth, where desire is king, and all morality and truth must bow to feelings. No, Paul says there is such a thing as objective truth, truth is not defined by our feelings, love agrees with and conforms itself to the truth. We live in an age where we follow our feelings, where we trust them as inerrant guides, Paul reminds us that true love conforms itself to God's truth. Too often we see love without truth, where we see all manner of sins justified in the name of love. Or alternately we see truth without love, where the truth is weaponized against those it is supposed to serve, but here we see the necessity of truth and love being united. Another pastor put it this way, "Truth without love is

imperious self-righteousness. Love without truth is cowardly self-indulgence.”² Love is principled in that it agrees with truth, anything that we call love that does not conform to God’s truth is not worthy of the name. We live in an age where sentiment, whether we like someone decides whether what they say is good or bad, rather than testing all things and being discerning and thoughtful. Paul in Romans 1 talks about unbelievers suppressing the truth in unrighteousness, 1:18; and exchanging the truth for a lie, 1:25. It is a mark of biblical faith that we embrace all of the truth and do not suppress it. Biblical love is not all heart and no head, but a balanced mix of head and heart. Love doesn’t just tolerate truth it delights in truth recognizing that truth is what we need and what our loved ones need most.

This means that true love loves to speak the truth and hear the truth. ‘John Newton once said of reproof: our natural temptation is to say what we should not say, or to not say what we should say. One is cruel arrogance, the other cruel cowardice, and neither is love.’³ It is true that at times love needs to be considerate and be silent. But too often we use love as an excuse for not saying something when we should. Parents are too scared to not be liked by their kids so they don’t talk them about their bad behavior. But love recognizes that the bruise of a friend is more faithful than the kiss of an enemy, that love overcomes a self-interested fear to say hard things when needed. If love sees a friend falling away in spiritual things, if they see them being badly influenced by the wrong friends, Prov. 23:5, ‘Better is open rebuke than hidden love.’ Col. 3:16, ‘Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom.’ And of course if we have a loved one that does not believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior, armed with love and truth we will want to speak the truth to them. Pastors and teachers of the word of God need to be loving enough to teach all the truth of God’s word and not only teach the fun and easy parts that everyone likes to hear. We must be willing to talk about hell and judgement and sin and repentance, in a loving fashion. Our world today bullies us into silence in the name of love. Because they do not believe that God is real, that His word is true, that there is a norm for right and wrong and that lies and sin should be confronted and exposed, there is a general attitude that encourages silence; but biblical love rejoices with the truth and it speaks that truth. It is the truth that sets a person free, we cannot be silent and ashamed if someone’s life depends on it. This is why parents because we love our children should as part of our parental love bring our children up in God’s truth. This means making sure that your kids are at church, that they have their own bible and are encouraged to read it daily; that there are family devotions where mom and dad pray and explain the bible to their kids. If love delights in truth then how can love deny their children God’s truth?

Love is also willing to hear the truth even if it is uncomfortable, it has the attitude of Ps. 141:5, ‘Let a righteous man strike me—it is a kindness; let him rebuke me—it is oil for my head; let my head not refuse it.’ ‘Tell me lies tell me sweet little lies’ is a nice sounding song but terrible theology. Because of our love for others we are honest and candid, and we expect the same from others. If a husband or wife is approached by their spouse as they address a concern about their lives, love will not create a hostile environment that punishes all who dare to speak about our faults. It will listen first and not rush to self-defense and excuses. Jesus prayed, ‘sanctify them by your truth, your word is truth,’ we want

² <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/speaking-truth-in-love> accessed 5/1/2025

³ <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/speaking-truth-in-love> accessed 5/1/2025

to be sanctified therefore we are hungry for the truth. This means that love loves going to church and sitting under the preaching of the word, it hungers for God's word and reads it at home.

Love therefore speaks out against lies and false teaching. Some people are just cynical and love to be contrary and show how clever they are as they criticize others; but love because it knows the importance of the truth; because it knows the danger of false teachers; because it takes the call to test all things seriously will also be outspoken against error.

Love also labours to speak the truth in love. I think that we run the risk of truth without love. We are living in a moment that is being called a 'vibe shift' where leftist notions are being jettisoned, where politically correct approaches have been rejected; where big government pushing leftist approaches are no longer holding all the power. With the rise of alt right media and various other influencer platforms the democratization of information has led to those who were once the underdogs now holding the prominent position. I just have a question for us as Christians who usually hold to a middle right political line, generally speaking. Would you say the tone as the truth is being told on political, economic and medical issues is loving? As new info comes out of the true origins of Covid; the effectiveness of Ivermectin; on a shift from the medical world upholding reassignment surgeries to a change in direction, take these and a thousand difference issues. How would you describe the tone around these matters, whether it's the left gloating over the right or the right over the left, I think we would all agree that the nature of public discourse would not be described as speaking the truth in love. This is the world we live in, how do we as Christians be committed to truth and love in an environment like this? Firstly, as important as some of these matters are the primary truths we are to be committed to and speaking about first and foremost are not these matters but that which the Lord has entrusted us with, the words of life, we are ambassadors with a message already. In the first place I think that we have been dictated to about what is most important and we are not sticking to the central truths we have been entrusted with, we are getting distracted and dying on hills we have not been called to die on. Secondly, too much of our tone is picked up from our culture, if you spend time with an angry man you will learn his ways. As we go out into an unbelieving world that needs the truth to set them free are we imitating the world as it speaks truth at their opponents making a protest like stand and being seen to be taking a stand; or are we speaking to the unbeliever person to person, listening because we care, and viewing them as an individual not just another opinion. Do we engage as Jesus did with the woman at the well, or are the tones of our conversation more like sardonic and satirical tones of Matt Walsh's What is a Woman? I think we can all agree that we have lost the ability to engage with one another because everyone is boxing the other, reacting to the other, cancelling the other and meaningful discussion where we can get to the gospel is breaking down. I think that it is both easier and harder to talk about the Lord today than at other times. It is easier because the moral relativism of the recent transgender revolution is demonstrably a failed project and many are realizing that we need a moral code that protects society because we are on a path of self-destruction. From this perspective we have an opportunity. But on the other hand this is also some of the most difficult times to speak about God. Everyone is primed with badly modelled and ready responses to cancel a conversation where it appears that you are confirming their worst fears about you being some bigot or judge. We have to labor both in truth and in love at a time like this.

Let us bring this to a conclusion. 1 Cor. 13:6 is a very relevant text for us today, in an age where love has lost its definition, we need the Bible's perspective that love is principled, love delights in holiness, and it delights in the truth.