

Sermon 9-13-20 Love never fails  
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For the past eight weeks we have been looking at Paul's description of the unconditional love God wants us to live out in our relationships with those around us. Today we finish up our series by trying to bring it all together. But first, by way of review, let me read what Paul has to say about love:

**If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.**

**Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. – 1 Corinthians 13:1-8**

This may be the final sermon of our "Love is" series, but Paul reminds us that the work of love is only beginning. Paul is clear in saying that without love it doesn't much matter what we say, what we do, what we give, what we accomplish. Without love even our faith does not matter. Jesus said much the same thing when he explained that love is the greatest commandment. Indeed, the law and all the prophets are summed up in two commands: Love the lord with all your heart, mind, soul and strength and your neighbor as yourself.

Yet, looking back at the sentences I have written, I notice that I have mostly used love as a noun. Love may be a noun but love is not just a noun. Love is also a verb. Which means that what really matters is not that we know what love is, but that we do what love demands. Which is why I have tried to make this series practical. It is why I have shared techniques and action steps designed to help us live out God's kind of love.

I hope you have been doing just that, putting what you have learned into practice by doing what love demands. As James advised:

**Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. – James 1:22**

Which is why my goal this morning is to look at a few more descriptors of love and then conclude by reminding both myself and you of the importance of living love out in practical ways.

Paul's next descriptor of love is interesting in that he contrasts what love is not against what love is. Paul goes on to tell us that:

**Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth. — 1 Corinthians 13:7**

The words are familiar, but what do they mean? Practically what does it mean that "Love does not delight in evil but rejoices in the truth"? To be honest, though I have read those words a hundred times at weddings, I have never really given them much thought.

Interestingly enough, the words delight (love does not delight in evil) and rejoices (but rejoices in the truth) both come from the same root word in Greek, *chairō*, which means to rejoice, to be

glad, to be joyful. What's more, the kind of "delight" or "rejoicing" this word is refers to is not the polite type of **rejoicing we generally do in church**. You know, a slight smile, a little nod of the head, perhaps an understated, golf clap. No, chairo describes a full-throttle, heart-racing, **not-holding-anything-back kind of rejoicing!** It is the kind of rejoicing you do when your favorite team comes from behind at the last second to win the game. It is the kind of joy you see when after years of work and sacrifice you finally **graduate from school**. It is the joy you feel when your baby boy or girl is born and the doctor says that they are **perfectly healthy**. It is the joy all heaven feels when a lost sheep or coin or sinner is found. Love not only rejoices in the truth it celebrates it with cheers and a standing ovation.

But notice also what love does not rejoice in. Love does not rejoice in evil, adikia. Adikia refers to injustice or unrighteousness of heart and mind. It refers to evil, wickedness, and wrongdoing. What does to rejoice in evil mean? It is more than accepting evil. It seeks to justify evil and make wrong appear to be right. It is what Isaiah condemned Israel for when he wrote: **Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness, who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. – Isaiah 5:20**

Wow, how many times have I heard evil called good in recent days?

Of course there is nothing new in that. Think about who Paul was writing to. He was writing to the church in Corinth. Corinth was the Las Vegas of his day. It was a center of idol worship and rampant sexuality. What happened in Corinth was supposed to stay in Corinth. But of course it did not. When you read through Paul's letter it quickly becomes obvious that some of the recently converted Christians in Corinth were having a hard time shaking off their old sinful habits. Paul addressed those habits in his 16th chapter. He listed sins like: sexual immorality, drunkenness, gluttony, greed, pride, injustice, jealousy, strife, gossip and division, prostitution and prejudice, just to name a few.

Love does not delight in doing and participating in evil. Nor does love delight when others do evil. God's kind of love does not applaud, cheer, celebrate, or approve when other believers do evil.

You ask, would someone really do that? Delight when others do evil? The Jesus followers at Corinth did. There was a guy in Corinth who Paul called out for his sin. Oh, he did not use the guys name, but there is no doubt that everyone knew who Paul was referring to when he said: **It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that even pagans do not tolerate: A man is sleeping with his father's wife. And you are proud! – 1 Cor. 5:1,2**

Love does not delight when others do evil. It takes a brother or sister aside, and corrects them in love.

Nor does love delight when evil or injustice happens to other people. Love never rejoices when people are mistreated, when evil wins out, or when God is dishonored. Love does not take satisfaction in another person's misfortune. It never gossips about another's problems. Love does not delight in evil.

Instead, love rejoices in the truth. Love does not sweep sin under the rug. Love does not try to find ways to get away with bad behavior. Love does not put up with injustice. Instead, it treasures truth, celebrates good behavior, and promotes right living. In short, it loves people even when loving is hard.

Love loves truth. Love cheers, applauds, and celebrates truth. This is important. I have heard too many people of late say things like “It was only a small lie.” Or, “Sure they may have lied but they wanted what was right.” No, no, no. It is never right to lie in the name of good. Because in the end it is truth that pleases God. God cares more about love and truth than he does about winning. No victory ever justifies lies. Period. For love does not delight in evil. It rejoices in the truth. Love champions the truth in love even when it hurts. Even when it loses.

Paul goes on to say:

**Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. - 1 Cor 13:7**

One commentator I read said, that Paul was never a better wordsmith than when he crafted this sentence. In the original Greek all four words end with the same sound creating a poetic rhythm. Paul wrote: **Panta stegei, panta pisteuei, panta elpigei, panta upomenei.**

Paul began this list with love bears all things. The Greek word Paul uses here is “roof.” It means to “protect by covering over,” just as a roof provides a protective covering from the elements. God’s kind of love protects. It strengthens what is weak, shields what is vulnerable, and forgives what is confessed.

More than that, Paul said, love believes all things. Love gives the benefit of doubt. It is slow to believe any damaging news concerning a loved one. It believes the best about people. That is not to say that love is naive or gullible. Rather, love always considers others innocent until proven guilty, never guilty until proven innocent.

Love believes in people. There is great power in believing in a person. Right or wrong what others believe about us influences what we think and who we become. Tell me enough times that I’m stupid, and I will begin to believe you. Yet, tell me enough times that I’m smart and I might agree.

Robert Rosenthal (a professor of psychology at the University of California) demonstrated this in a famous classroom study. He and an elementary school principal tested a group of students. They then told their teachers that some of the students had done extremely well on the test. They led the teachers to believe that a few of their students had exceptional learning ability. What the teachers did not know was that the names of the “exceptional” students had been chosen entirely at random. They were no different than the other students.

However, because the teachers thought those students were “exceptional”, they treated them differently. In fact, by the end of the year, the students the teachers thought were smarter became smarter. They scored ahead of their peers by as much as 15 to 27 points on an IQ test.

Moreover, the teachers described those students as happier, more curious, more affectionate, and having a better chance at success in life. The teachers believed those students were exceptional and treated those students as exceptional and the students, in turn, began to behave as if they were exceptional. Imagine what might happen, if we as a church family, chose to believe and act as if our brothers and sisters were exceptional.

Love hopes all things. The word used here means to look forward with confidence to that which is good and beneficial. To “hope all things” means that we never consider another person to be

a lost cause. It means that we never give up on each other, even when we see someone fall. It means we don't give up on people even when logic tells us they are a lost cause.

Love endures all things. The Greek word used here, *hupomeno* describes continuing to move forward even in the face of resistance or active opposition. In secular Greek *hupomeno* was a military term used to describe an army holding a vital position at all costs. Every hardship and every suffering was to be endured. When applied to God's kind of love, Paul is saying that godly love is able to sustain any assault. It is a love that doesn't quit or give up.

All of this reminds us that the love spoken of in 1 Corinthians 13 is not a fleeting romance or a fading feeling. Instead, godly love always perseveres. It hangs in there during good times and bad. It endures the challenges of life and remains steadfast. It's like Paul said:

**Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. - 1 Cor 13:7**

That is the kind of love we are to show to others. More importantly that describes God's love for us. God's love for us bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. And if you have made even half as many mistakes as I have that is good news indeed.

Can it get any better than that? Yes, it can. I picture Paul pausing as he was penning his letter, looking back at what he had said, and thinking, "It just needs one more thing. Something to pull it all together." Which was when he wrote: "Love never fails."

Love never fails. The word that we translate never is another compound Greek word. It literally means not ever, at any time. And the verb we translate fails is the Greek word "pipto". It was used to describe houses that collapsed, flowers that withered and decayed, and those who died suddenly. Paul is saying, God's kind of love will not ever at anytime collapse, or wither, or suddenly die. God's kind of love is eternal.

Governments will fail, fortunes will run out, churches may close, even relationships may end, but God's kind of love never does. God's love never fails.

If I am honest that is hard for me to trust. I don't know about you but in my experience love too often falls short. Even on those rare occasions when I do get it right and I am patient, kind, and forgiving it often does not work out like I hoped. Sometimes it feels, at least on the surface, like love has failed. I sometimes struggle with what it means that love never fails. I have loved addicts who lost the battle with their addictions. I have prayed with prisoners who went back to jail again and again. I have watched as close friends fell into sin. My first marriage failed. I loved them all. I believed the best of them all. I stood by them all. And yet my love seemed to fail. So what does it mean that love never fails.

We are talking about the love depicted in movies, certainly not the love made famous in *Princess Bride*, thank you Ric for this illustration:

[https://youtu.be/\\_bY0fdgplSc](https://youtu.be/_bY0fdgplSc) (0:44 to 1:00)

To be honest, I am not sure. But after wrestling with this, this is what I think it means. I believe first of all that it means that God's love never fails. None of us are ever perfect in our love. We all make mistakes. We fall short. Too often our love is dependent on the receiver and how they react. But not God. We read that God's love is the same yesterday, today and forever. How can that be? It is because God's love is not dependent on us, love is who God is not a reaction to what God finds in us.

Which means that God loves us even when we don't feel lovely; when it feels like we are all alone and no one else loves us; even when we have failed and cannot understand how anyone, let alone God, could ever love us. Others may promise love and fail us, but not God. God's love never fails. Never, ever under any circumstances.

From which it follows that our love doesn't fail either. You say, "Wait a minute Kim. I can't buy that. I have seen love fail plenty of times. Others, who I cared about, who I risked loving failed in loving me. And if I am deeply honest I have failed in loving others. So what do you mean by saying our love never fails? It does. I have experienced it."

Could the problem be that we are often too shortsighted in our vision? Could the problem be that we are too focused on our own experience and not God's plan? Could it be that the success or failure of love, godly love, has nothing to do with the others response? God's love did not fail when his people rejected him and crucified him. In fact, I cannot think of anything that has done more to transform the world than the supposedly failed love of Jesus. When we love with God's love it is always a witness to who we serve whether others respond or not. It may even touch lives, transforming others bit by bit, even when we cannot see the results. I know that Christian friends and family members witnessed, prayed, and loved me for years before I came to Christ. Many of them no doubt felt like their love was failing. I believe that when I love with God's love it never fails to change me and that it will inevitably change others. The results may not be what I envisioned or hoped for, but it is not about me. It is about building on the foundation of rock which is the love of God. Love never fails means that no act done in the name of love is ever wasted, whether we see the results we hoped for or not.

For it is a love about which Paul said:

**Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. – 1 Corinthians 13:4-8**

And I do not know what I can add except to say, the word of God for the people of God. Mic drop, amen.