

Study in 1st Corinthians 13 - Part 8

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[0 : 00] 1 Corinthians 13, verses 6 and 7.

1 Corinthians 13, verses 6 and 7. Where we're told that charity rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth.

And it beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, and endureth all things. Especially verse 7.

Charity bearing all things, believing all things, hoping all things, and enduring all things. I want this morning, as the Lord enables us to conclude, looking at the nature of Christian love with you. We've seen its importance and we've seen its nature also. And Paul brings that to a close with verse 7. And in the rest of the chapter he tells us about the excellence and the permanence of love.

[1 : 24] And I want to look at that with you next time. Because love is greater than even faith and hope. But I want to finish, as I said, looking today with you at the nature of Christian love.

And we're told, first of all, in verse 6, that love does not rejoice in iniquity, but it rejoices in the truth. Now, love does not rejoice in iniquity.

And we could take that, I suppose, in a narrow sense and in a more general sense. Love doesn't rejoice in iniquity in this sense, that it doesn't rejoice when, say, an enemy or someone who is opposed to you, or someone who is even persecuting you, when he falls into wrongdoing himself. You don't glory in that. You don't triumph in it. And you don't exult in it. Rather, you should feel pity. And you should feel sorrow.

And the book of Proverbs reminds us, and I'll be referring to this book later too. Do not rejoice when thine enemy falleth. Let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth.

[2 : 44] Lest the Lord see it, and it displease him, and he turn away his wrath from him. Now, the implication there is that his wrath will go upon you instead of upon him.

So we are never to rejoice at sin in someone else's life, and the misfortune that that sin has brought him into. We're never to rejoice in that. It's also true that in the more general sense, we're not to rejoice in iniquity.

Our life shouldn't derive any satisfaction from sin in anyone else's life at all. It shouldn't be a source of entertainment, a source of gladness, a source of happiness.

And I think that becomes important in the general sense when you consider even perhaps where you may derive some of your entertainment from. I know many people seem to be enslaved to what is usually referred to as soap operas.

Now, I've no doubt that some may be worse than others. But as far as I can see, they are just a constant diet of sin. And a constant diet of one adulterous and immoral relationship after another.

[3 : 59] And how any Christian can derive his satisfaction from watching these things is beyond me. And the Christian should never rejoice in iniquitous behavior like that, or make it a means of his entertainment.

Because inevitably, it will desensitize you to sin. You may think, well, it's only something that's on a television screen. Well, sooner or later, it will have its own impression upon your soul.

And it's bound to make you less and less sensitive to those kinds of sin in the world around you. So, sin of that kind should never be the source of our entertainment.

Rather, we're to rejoice in the truth. Now, I think truth here has a more general meaning. Sometimes in the Bible, you find truth as a specific meaning, like telling the truth.

But at other times in the Bible, you'll find that the word truth has a general meaning. To mean almost righteousness. For example, when John speaks of walking in the truth, he doesn't just mean telling the truth there.

[5 : 09] He means walking righteously as God would have us walk in all areas of life. And I think that's the way in which it's meant here. We're not to rejoice in sin, but to rejoice in uprightness.

And to rejoice in what is good, what is healthy, what is conducive to well-being. You remember what Paul says to the Philippians. He tells them, whatsoever things are good, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are holy, whatsoever things are of good report, and so on, think, he says, on these things.

Let your rejoicing be in these things, not a rejoicing in evil. And, of course, when you ponder many newspapers, too, it seems that they find a delight in bad news.

They seem to find a rejoicing in iniquity. There's very little of what is good, and what is healthy, and what is pure reported. It's not that it's not there, it's just that it doesn't seem to interest so much.

And that, of course, is a sad thing. Love doesn't rejoice in sin or in unrighteousness. Love rejoices in uprightness and in truth.

[6 : 23] But let's turn especially now to verse 7 here, where we're told four things about love, that it bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things.

Now, first of all, it bears all things. Now, it's interesting that this word, bear, in the Greek, carries two different meanings, and they're both related.

It can mean to carry something, and it can mean to cover something. Now, you may say, well, how can the same word cover those two things?

To carry something, and to cover something. Well, just by the way, people who are fluent in two languages can understand this kind of thing. You'll see how a word can cover two distinct things in one language that maybe it doesn't cover in another.

The word carry, of course, only carries one thing for us in English, I suppose. That's to bear or to carry. But in the Greek, it covers two. To carry and to cover.

[7 : 36] The reason that it takes both meanings is this. It came originally from a container containing liquid or something, and the container would be made of skin.

That would be stretched out, and it would contain the liquid. So, you see, it was containing by covering. And that's why the same word branched out and carried two different ideas.

To cover something, and to carry, to contain something. Now, both these things are quite important here. And I think both ideas are in what Paul is saying.

Love carries everything, or love covers everything. First of all, it carries everything. You know how Paul himself speaks of bearing each other's burdens, or carrying one another's burdens.

That is part of the law of love. Part of the law of Christ. Bear one another's burdens, he says, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

[8 : 39] No, love will carry things. It's willing to carry your brother's load, and to carry your sister's need. And it means to identify with people, to listen to them, to try to help, to care, and to understand.

Being willing to carry. It carries everything. And that's an important part of Christian love. But then again, it also has the idea of cover, or covering your brother's sins.

Now, of course, the Bible speaks of covering your brother's sins. But, I'm quite sure that for many people here, when you hear that expression, it immediately makes you think of something that's not right, or something that's not healthy, to cover your brother's sins.

But, just before I explain what it means, let's be clear that the Bible does speak of it. And I'll bring you three quotations from Proverbs. First of all, Proverbs 10, 12.

It says this, Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all sins. Now, that should be fairly straightforward.

[9 : 53] It tells us that when there is enmity, or hatred, between people, there is a tendency to stir up strife, to cause as much difficulty as possible. But, love covers sins.

Somehow, it tries to put them out of the picture, or to put them out of the way. Love doesn't want strife, or disorder. And then again, Proverbs 11, 13, tells us this, A tale-bearer reveals secrets, but a man of a faithful spirit will conceal a matter.

There again, it's straightforward. A tale-bearer reveals secrets. Something that's going to be destructive, something that's going to do harm, a tale-bearer just reveals it and shares it.

But a faithful spirit will conceal it. It knows that it won't do any good to put this thing abroad. It's only going to cause trouble, perhaps for a lot of people, and so it conceals the matter.

The last quote is this, He that covers a transgression seeks love, but he that repeats a matter separates the best of friends.

[11 : 10] And sadly, we often see that happening, that when a thing is repeated, good friendships are sometimes broken, and unnecessarily broken.

But love seeks to cover a transgression. Now these are important texts, and they're in God's word. And it's important to understand what they mean.

First of all, what they don't mean. When the Bible tells us to cover our brother's sins, it doesn't mean that you lie about them. Because that in itself is a sin.

You're not required to lie about what happened, or to be deceitful about what happened. The Bible never requires that of us.

What it means simply is this, that whenever possible, you conceal a sin or a shortcoming in someone else from others.

[12 : 05] Whenever possible, you do that. Even if it is an enemy, or someone who is bitterly opposed to you, you conceal it from others. You don't broadcast it. Now it only stands to reason that you should treat your brethren like this, because I suppose, well not only do you want to be treated like that yourself, but you actually treat yourself like that.

How many of you would make a point of going out onto the street corner every morning, or every evening, and reading out a list of everything you had done wrong, of all your thoughts, or all broadcasting to everybody what you are like that day?

No one behaves like that. Why should we then behave like that with respect to someone else's sin, or someone else's shortcoming? We should cover the matter and conceal the matter.

And I think one of the best examples of this in the scripture we find in Noah's family. Now we looked at this some time ago in the prayer meeting, but of course there are many here who aren't there, and I just want very briefly to bring it up.

You'll remember that when Noah was an old man after the flood that he became drunk. We're not told why or how. Of course love will think the best of it, but he became drunk, and he lay in his tent uncovered.

[13 : 25] His body was exposed. And when his grandson particularly, Canaan, when he saw it, and Ham too, his father, they didn't cover their father.

They went out and exposed what had happened to themselves. But when the other two sons, Shem and Ham, when they, Shem and Japheth heard about it, they went in and very carefully they took their father's clothing and they put it, they held it against their shoulders, one on one side and the other and they walked backwards over their father, letting the clothing drop as they walked backwards to cover their father's nakedness.

They would not look upon it, they were sorry for it, they were saddened by it, and as far as they were concerned they would bring it to the Lord and that would be the end of the matter.

Maybe they would have mentioned to their father and spoken to him privately or quietly about it, or maybe they would know that he would know and they would just leave it with the Lord.

But when Noah awoke the spirit of the Lord came upon him and he rebuked Canaan and Ham and he blessed Shem and Japheth.

[14 : 52] Now there, to my mind, you have a tremendous illustration of what it means to cover one another's sins and not to rejoice in iniquity too. because it's quite clear that Canaan actually rejoiced in what he had found.

And there are people who rejoice, especially if a Christian falls, the world can rejoice. Sadly too, some people who profess can rejoice. But they can rejoice when he falls.

It's as though you're waiting for a fall and you're hoping for a fall. And when the fall comes, you can hardly contain yourself. Now it's quite possible that Canaan had no sympathy with his father's religion, that he was very opposed to it.

Maybe Canaan was even angry with the flood, angry at the destruction, angry at all that it had brought about in the world, angry at God's judgments. And so he was angry with anyone who represented God.

And he went aboard and emblazed the matter as far as he could. Now, when you see a person taking that kind of delight in someone else's sin, watch out.

[15 : 58] Because it could be your sin that he rejoices in next. And it could be your sin that he blazons abroad. Now, look at the contrast with Shem and Japheth.

They were saddened and grieved that this was so. And in that way, the very covering physically that they put in the father seemed to be a kind of emblem of the spiritual covering of the sin.

No doubt they mourned for it. They were sad that their father, after so many years of faithful, consistent witness, had been overtaken in a fault. But they didn't consign him to some kind of spiritual dustbin.

They didn't write off his life as though that it never meant nothing. But they bore him up and they took it to the Lord in prayer. And for Noah, it was a transgression into which he fell.

And as far as we know, he did not fall into it again. So love bears everything in the sense of carrying things and in the sense of covering things.

[17 : 01] And you remember that. It never does good to repeat matters of this kind. Never. And connected with this is the second thing, that it believes all things.

Love carries and covers everything because it believes all things. Now, what does this mean? Well, this is the opposite of what you would call a suspicious spirit.

And a suspicious spirit is always looking for the worst in people. It's always looking for hidden motives, ulterior motives, and it seems to think the worst of everything.

Now, again, this text doesn't tell us to be gullible. And to be gullible, of course, is just to be foolish. That's to be refusing to see things that are plain and obvious in front of you.

The Bible doesn't tell us to be gullible, but it does tell us to be slow in believing evil about somebody and to be more ready to believe good.

[18 : 09] And you should never really believe evil about someone unless you are compelled to do that. unless you're compelled to. If not compelled to, then believe the good and believe the best.

Now, these things make a world of difference in terms of our relationship one with another. They may seem, to many of you, they may seem obvious. To some of you, they may seem trivial.

But in the Corinthian church, these things obviously were not obvious, and they certainly were not trivial. It was the root of all the discord that was going on. despising one another's gifts, looking down on one another, disordered at the Lord's table, disordered in public worship, everything seems to be wrong.

And the apostle, if I'm not, unless I'm mistaken in the matter, right in chapter 13 here, he's bringing them to the heart of what's wrong, that their love has watched cold, it's become cold.

You'll remember what the Lord said to the church in Ephesus, that doctrinally it was right.

Doctrinally it was right.

[19 : 24] And in many things it was right. But that its love had turned cold. He says, I know your works and your labor.

I know your patience. And I know how you cannot bear them which are evil. I know how you have tried them who say they are apostles and are not.

And you have endured and you have had patience and you have labored for my name's sake and have not fainted. Nevertheless, I have something against you because you have left your first love. Remember therefore from whence you have fallen, repent and do the first works or else I'll come to you quickly and remove your candlestick out of its place except you repent.

Now there's the beginning of the thing. I decline in love and it was here too. I wonder if it's in your heart or mine. Just this decline in love towards the Lord's people.

[20 : 23] Ready to believe the best. Now whenever you hear something, you've always got a choice. Either you can take it in the best way or in the worst way. You can either assume there's a good motive or assume there's a bad one.

Always assume the best unless you're compelled to assume otherwise. And even then Paul tells us that we should hope all things.

It bears everything, it believes all things, and it hopes all things. Now what does that mean to hope all things?

hope all is. Well I think it means this that we refuse to give up on things and especially we refuse to give up on our brethren, our brothers and our sisters.

Now this can be a very searching thing. Even when you have come to believe the worst sadly, hopes all things reminds you that with God nothing is ever hopeless and nothing is ever impossible.

[21 : 36] Even the restoration of somebody that you might feel beyond it. Hope will always look towards something better happening. Now that really tries us because it tries all of us because sometimes maybe someone in his behavior to you reaches a point where you're almost glad to say right that's it, no more to do with that person at all.

But we have to be very, very careful about how we say that kind of thing. It's one thing to say yes, well I have to be obviously very careful and I have to keep a distance.

But it's another thing to say that you're going to stop in your prayers for that person or even in your conversation for that person to try in a spirit of love to bring him or her round to a better state of mind.

Now if they won't hear it, well there's not much that you can do about that. But what you can do about is always to maintain that spirit and desire yourself because you hope all things.

Hope for the best. That's not a groundless thing but it's grounded firmly upon the power of God and how he's able to actually change people's hearts and lives.

[22 : 55] That's the hope we have after all for the world. Isn't it? Our hope when we take the gospel to unconverted people and our reason for preaching it is that your heart can change.

That your life can change. That God can take you as you are whatever your past and whatever your present. That he can change you and give you a new resolve and a new heart to love and to serve himself.

If that wasn't so, I tell you of all occupations, mine would be the most ridiculous. God is powerful enough to do just that.

And we pray and we preach seeking to persuade men to come to the Lord Jesus Christ. How much more we should be like that with those who are our brethren.

Whatever may have come into that cup and portion and however long ago since it may have happened, well, you're not to give up hope. even if that person to all intents and purposes doesn't look like being a Christian anymore, you're not to give up hope in that respect, to keep praying, to keep trying, because love hopes all things.

[24 : 11] Doesn't this bring before us the powerful nature of true Christian love, the powerful nature of it? And when you see it really active in the heart of a Christian man, woman, or child, you know, it is a really powerful force.

It's a powerful force in your own heart and a powerful force in the world. It's also linked, I think, with what he says here lastly, that love endures all things.

Love endures all things. This almost takes us back to the beginning. You remember the first one in verse 4 was that love suffers long.

It long suffers people and it is kind. Here, right at the end, the last thing, the last quality of love that he brings before us is that love endures everything.

But it's a little bit wider than long suffering. When love endures everything, what it means is that it keeps going, it keeps active, and it keeps persevering under all kinds of wrong.

[25 : 27] Now, you know as well as I do that when lots of things go against you, and especially when people that you may be loved or esteemed go against you, the tendency is almost sometimes to give up.

There's a tendency to give up, or a tendency to retreat, or a tendency to opt out, to find another something, just go away and forget about it.

Well, the difficulty with doing that kind of thing is that there are Corinthian churches all over the place, and you'll find that all congregations and all churches have this kind of thing.

This is the grave danger. People always feel that by leaving something, that they can find something more pure, or something better. Now, it's one thing to leave a church that has gone false in its doctrine.

It's one thing to leave a church that is denying the gospel. It's another to leave a church that has defects and blemishes, however great they be, and however much they seem to affect you, the misconduct of someone, or whatever, it's another to leave for that.

[26 : 37] You'll find that that cannot really be alleviated. It always seems to crop up somewhere else, because people are in every church, and people, as they say, are the same.

There's also, of course, a tendency to say, well, if I can't beat them, I'll join them, and if they're putting around this about me, well, I'm going to put around this about them, or I know this about them, so I'm going to let it go.

Now, love endures, and it's a military word, it's an army word in the Greek, and it means to sustain an enemy assault. And of course, it's not easy to sustain an enemy assault, but to endure means that you're sustaining it, and that you keep doing good yourself, and that you try to conquer evil by doing good.

No, it's exhausting. It's spiritually exhausting, and without prayer, and without the help of God in your life, you won't do it, but by the grace of God, you will.

You know, the grace of God conquers everything. It conquers everything. We see it even in the Lord Jesus Christ. This word endurance comes up with respect to the cross.

[27 : 56] We're told that Christ endured the cross and despised the shame. Now, there's more to that than meets the eye.

If you say that Christ endured the cross, it doesn't just mean that he suffered it. That's how you would think it. He suffered the cross. But the word endurance has this positive idea of doing something good as well, not just bearing under an evil, but doing something positive.

When Christ endured the cross, despising the shame, that meant that he suffered the cross and still continued in the path of obedience and in the path of love.

A mansion, for example, lying in the midst of sufferings and the sufferings even coming from the thieves, one on each side, both of them were told, casting the same in his teeth, insulting him, blaspheming him, until one of them appears to have a change of heart.

No, it's not much of an appearance. He just turns to the other thief suddenly and says, why do you keep saying that? He says, we're suffering here for what we've done but this man, I don't see that he's done anything wrong.

[29 : 13] And he just prays, Lord, remember me when you come in your kingdom. And in the midst of the agony and the grief that the Lord was bearing, in midst of the temptations of the devils of hell and all that Satan could assault him with, and in spite of what this man had cast in his teeth for hours before this, for up to three hours before this, the Lord turns and he says, today I tell you, you shall be with me in paradise.

Christ endured doing good. Father forgive them for they know not what they do. He endured doing good and to endure, of course, is to triumph.

If you endure, last of all, your triumph and your righteousness, as the psalmist tells us, will shine like the noon day. And Paul also says this to Timothy, no, Timothy was a man who was very much on the verge of giving up, very much on the verge of it, because of the difficulty that he was finding in his own task.

And Paul says this to him, remember, he says, that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, according to my gospel, wherein I suffer trouble, as though I was an evildoer, even unto bonds. Now, Paul was used to being chained, as though he was a criminal. But he says, the word isn't bound, I'm chained, but the word isn't. Therefore, he says, I endure everything, for the elect's sake, that they may also obtain the salvation, which is in Jesus Christ, with eternal glory.

[30 : 58] If we suffer, we shall reign with him. If we deny him, he will deny us. If we believe not, yet he abideth faithfully, he cannot deny himself.

Now, there's all the word of a difference between denying him and believing not. Believing not means that you're stumbling. It means here that you're lacking in faith. But he doesn't forsake us just because we're lacking in faith.

If we deny him, yes, but he keeps with us and he bears with us. And so Paul says, I endure everything for the elect's sake. I endure everything.

And he had a lot to endure. You'll remember maybe in Philippians chapter 1, he tells us a strange thing. He says that he's in prison himself. And some people, he says, are preaching Christ, supposing to add affliction to my bonds.

But he says, I still rejoice that Christ is being preached. Now, have any of you wondered what on earth the apostle was speaking about there? How could someone be preaching supposing to add affliction to his bonds and Paul rejoices in it?

[32 : 10] Well, there's perhaps a couple of ways in which that's true. I'll bring before you just two ways in which it's true. Some people may have been just so opposed to the apostle Paul that they were telling why they were opposed to him.

In other words, because he was a Christian man or because he was following this Christ. And Paul says, well, almost by default, they're actually proclaiming the gospel. By drawing attention to me and to my sufferings, by default, they are preaching Christ.

There's another thing too. Some people could just have been opposed. Maybe they were claiming to be Christians themselves.

But they were so opposed to the apostle that when they were preaching, they were only somehow trying to add to his discomfort or trying to add to his grief. Even though they claimed to be Christians themselves.

Paul says, their attitude to me, he says, I can look beyond. But I am glad that one way or another the name of my master is being proclaimed. Whether it's done truthfully or in pretense, he says, Jesus is being proclaimed.

[33 : 26] That's real endurance for you. That's real bearing all things. That's real believing and hoping and enduring. That's endurance. I don't know if we have a more remarkable example apart from the Lord himself than we have in the apostle Paul.

He could just carry, as it were, whatever it was, in love, hoping the best, believing the best, and enduring everything. And there really is our example.

Now, I said at the beginning of this, I still want to look with you at the excellence of love, because we're told in these profound verses that we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then shall I know as I also am known.

Now abideth faith, hope, charity, but the greatest of these is love. I want to look at that with you. But I want to conclude the nature of love by saying this. We sometimes wonder, you know, what we may need for real growth and grace.

And I wonder if the apostle here is drawing us towards many areas of life in which we are spiritually very defective. Spiritually very defective.

[34 : 37] See, the church in Ephesus was strong in certain areas, but in this, it had certainly become cold. What about ourselves?

I have certainly met people that I would consider in all humility, I hope, to be perhaps, this may sound arrogant, I hope it's not, but that they were less sound on some areas, but certainly greater in this, certainly greater in this.

In other words, perhaps, let's say there were something like Pentecostals or something of that matter, I would consider that there was an error there in what they thought, but when I look at them and when I see their life and their Christian charity and the walk that they have and the grace that they have and so on, I say to myself, well, that matters a great deal, that matters a great deal, and it's one thing for us to say, you know, that we may have this right in our heads, but is it right in our hearts?

And I hope to God that the faith that we believe in our church is not one that sits, and in our congregation, and in your heart and mine, I hope that the faith that sits in your head doesn't just sit there as something that you glory in knowing, and that somehow makes you superior to other less gifted people in knowledge, perhaps, but I hope and pray that it enters into our heart, and makes us live for Christ in this way, a life of the cross, a self-denying life like the Lord Jesus Christ had, that's a Christian life at the end of the day, a Christian life, people will never in the last analysis be impressed by what we know, but by what we are, and by what we do, and that's the great challenge for yourself and for myself, feel conscious that I ought not to have said that person knew Lesel was more defective than myself, but I hope you all understand what

I mean when I say that, and may the Lord enable us to take all these things to heart, let us pray, let us pray, our gracious God, we are conscious that in many things we have great need of being built up in our most holy faith, and very often when we block the channels of grace ourselves, we find that we become stunted in our growth, and that these things appear in our lives, and it requires great trials and tribulations to pass through in order for us to come to a better state of mind.

[37 : 31] Help us, O Lord, to pray for love in our conduct above everything. Grant us, Lord, that we would have the Spirit of Christ towards those who are within and towards those who are without the church.

Enable us never to rest content with what we know, but to strive by the Spirit to be transformed in the inner man, that we might be renewed according to the image of Christ.

we confess before thee our many sins and our shortcomings in these things, and pray that thou would teach us how we ought to walk before thee.

Bless our worship together, and bless Mr. MacLeod as he is away at communion at this time, and do thou grant liberty and unction to himself, even as they gather at thy table, and forgive all our sins, for Christ's sake.

Amen.