

Refusing to be Pig-headed People

Will True Love Please Stand Up – Part IV

I Corinthians 13:4b

Introduction

I enjoy the history of words and expressions. Because of this, over the years, Marsha has bought several books for me on the subject.

As I studied the expressions Paul used for the way love does not act, it was obvious that he described for us a very unattractive behavior. He is nearly crass in his descriptive verbs. One thing is for certain – he tells it like it is. In fact, the descriptive term that came to my mind was “pig-headed and stubborn”.

When was the last time you looked in the mirror and said to yourself, “Man, you can be so pig-headed.”?

What does this expression mean?

According to one of my wonderful volumes on word histories, this expression dates back to the Middle Ages and the Southeast Asian country that is now known as Indonesia.

There is a legend of a king who had incredible powers over the forces of nature and life and death. This king could supposedly enter a meditative state and while in that state, actually have his servant lop off his head and then put it back on without ever disturbing him.

When the king wanted to show off his power to all his dignitary friends, who were, of course, awed by his obviously unique power, he would have his servant lop off his head with a very sharp sword. Then, they would all watch as his head mysteriously reattached itself to his shoulders.

One day, however, the servant cut off the king’s head with a little too much force and his head rolled into the river and washed away. The servant was frantic and did not know what to do. He saw a nearby pig and thought, “That will work,” and used the pig’s head instead.

This is obviously not a good bedtime story for little Junior, in case the dads are thinking this is a great story!

When the king came to, he was upset. I can understand why. He had his servant killed and then moved his royal residence to a high tower where he lived the rest of his life. He declared an edict that when anyone was around the tower they were never to be allowed to look up. They had to keep their eyes on the ground lest they look upward and see the pig-headed king.

Over the course of the next few centuries, this phrase eventually came to refer to anyone before whom others must grovel. This is someone that others must never question, but instead, must just stay quiet and keep their eyes on the ground so no one will get hurt.

It became an expression for prideful condescension where all others must recognize that the king – pig-headed that he was – was far above anyone else. He was, after all, the king. Even though in reality, he was just an extremely unattractive and unhappy man.

Paul is about to reveal the unattractive side of people. He is about to reveal pig-headed people – those convinced of their superiority. These are people before whom others lower their eyes and keep quiet.

Paul uses language that we immediately understand. There are no loopholes in this; no question marks. No one in Corinth or in Cary can read this text and say, “Huh? What’s he mean by that?”

I have chosen to entitle this study today as practically as I can. I am calling it, “Refusing to be Pig-Headed People”. Even without knowing the history of this phrase, we just know it is not something we want to be. “Refusing to be Pig-Headed People” might just give us the down-to-earth wording that we will not soon forget.

In our last session, we began with the first two action verbs in a list of fifteen. Remember that these are not adjectives, they are verbs. We translated them, beginning in I Corinthians 13:4a, “Love exercises patience; love demonstrates kindness”.

Now Paul begins to rattle off eight negative statements about love; about “agape”. They are down to earth and in your face. There is nowhere to hide.

What Love Does *Not* Do

Turn to I Corinthians chapter 13 and let us look at the first few statements Paul makes about what love does not do.

1. **First, love does not burn with envy.**

We find this in I Corinthians 13:4b.

... love ... is not jealous ...

One author said there are only two classes of people in the world – those who are millionaires and those who “wanna” be.ⁱ

There are those who have and those who “wanna” have.

Jealousy, or envy, as your text might be translated, comes from the Greek word that means “to boil; to be fervent”.ⁱⁱ

The problem is, this person is boiling over about something someone else has and they are fervent in their desire to have it too.

This particular word becomes all the more seriously deviant in that it refers not only to wanting what someone has, but wanting what someone has so that person cannot have it.

This is jealousy at the deepest, most corrupt, destructive level.ⁱⁱⁱ

This kind of jealousy shows up in I Kings chapter 3 when two women show up in Solomon’s court to settle a dispute. They both claimed that a baby boy was theirs and that the other woman’s baby

had died during the night. These women were living in the same house and had babies within three days of each other. One of the women’s sons was accidentally smothered in the night. She took the other woman’s three-day-old baby and exchanged it for her deceased baby while the other woman was still asleep. The true mother knew the difference immediately upon waking, of course, and demanded that her baby be returned. The other woman lied and said she was the one trying to steal her son.

What a mess. This was before DNA testing. No court could settle the dispute. Since these women were both prostitutes, there were no fathers around who witnessed either birth. With no witnesses, there was no way to solve the case. As a result, it escalated up the judicial ladder until they actually stood before Solomon.

Solomon had no idea who the mother was either, but he had insight into the human heart. He knew that one of these women was potentially driven by jealousy. He also knew that true jealousy did not care anything about the baby, but only that the other woman not be allowed to have a son while the jealous woman went without.

Solomon said to bring a sword and divide the child in half. The true mother responded predictably, saying, “No, Solomon, let her have the baby. I’d rather the boy live than be allowed to be his mother.”

The jealous mother also acted predictably, saying, “Suits me just fine – bring a sword.”

This woman did not really want the baby – she did not care about the baby. What she wanted was for the other woman not to have something she could not have. That was all that mattered. In fact, in I Kings 3:26, she said to the other woman in front of Solomon, who was almost ready to swing the sword,

... “He shall be neither mine nor yours; divide him!”

Then Solomon wisely said,

... “Give the first woman the living child, and by no means kill him. She is his mother.” (I Kings 3:27)

Can you imagine jealousy burning so greatly concerning what another has and what you do not have that you would be moved to such cruelty just so they could not have it anymore?

This is the burning of jealousy that causes a man to kill his former wife who plans to marry another man. He cannot have her, and that other man will not have her either.

This was the *poison behind Cain!* He burned with jealousy toward his brother Abel, whose sacrifice was acceptable to God. This led to the first recorded murder in human history.

This was the *jealousy over Daniel's promotion* awarded by the king that led men to plan his execution at the mouths of lions. They could not have Daniel's promotion, so they would make sure he could not have it either.

This is the *jealousy of Joseph's brothers* who sold him to slave traders so that their father would no longer be able to favor him. They could not have Jacob's favor, so they would make sure Joseph could not have it either.

This was *Pilate's admission* in the record of scripture that the Pharisees delivered up Jesus for crucifixion because they envied Christ's ministry. It had nothing to do with blasphemy or claims to Messiahship or miracle working power. Mark's gospel records,

For [Pilate] was aware that the chief priests had handed Him over because of envy. (Mark 15:10)

The Pharisees literally burned with envy – jealous over Christ's authority and ministry among the people – to the point that they wanted to put the competition to death.

Do Christians envy other Christians? Do churches envy other churches? Do Bible study leaders envy more gifted Bible study leaders? Do singers envy more talented singers? Is there competition in the name of Christ?

Ladies and gentlemen, "agape" is living without competing. This love is demonstrated when someone is glad that another person has something they want and do not have. This means that true love is contentment with what God has given us.

Someone sent me this rather humorous, tongue-in-cheek poem several years ago that demonstrates the fickleness of jealous love.

*Sam's girl is rich and haughty,
My girl is poor as clay;
Sam's girl is young and pretty,
Mine looks like a bale of hay;
Sam's girl is smart and clever,
My girl is dumb, but good.
Now would I trade my girl for Sam's girl?
You bet your life I would.*

What would you long to trade with someone you envy? You might envy the health of another Christian, or their job, or their physical appearance, or their spiritual gifts and talents, or their spouse, or their children, or their position, or even their personality.

Ultimately, the jealous person destroys themselves – they fracture their own peace of mind and sense of purpose. Why? Because their eyes are not on Christ, the author and finisher of their faith; their eyes are on one another.

It was to the Corinthians that Paul wrote,

When you compare yourselves with one another, you are not wise. (II Corinthians 10:12 paraphrased)

Remember, Paul is not telling the unbeliever in I Corinthians 13 to love without envy, he is telling the believer. This obviously means a believer can live a jealous, petty, envious, bitter life.

It was James who warned the believer,

. . . if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. (James 3:14)

In other words, "Admit it! Don't try to get around it!"

James goes on to write,

For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. (James 3:16)

Jealousy is incredibly destructive. And ultimately, we destroy ourselves.

Nathaniel Vincent writes,

How much of the [pit] is there in the [spirit] of an envious man? The happiness of another is his misery; the good of another is his affliction. He looks upon the virtue of another with an evil eye and is as sorry at the praise of another as if that praise were taken away from himself. Envy makes him a hater of his neighbor, and is his own tormentor.^{iv}

Now we know how wise was John the Baptizer as he responded to his disciples when they came to him and said, "Master, our followers are leaving us and beginning to go after Christ."

John effectively responded, "We could only hope as much,"

"He must increase, but I must decrease." (John 3:30)

True love does not burn with jealousy over something someone has or is. True love is love without competition.

2. Secondly, love does not go around shining a spotlight on oneself.

Paul goes on further in I Corinthians 13:4b, to say,

... love does not brag ...

True love does not live to brag. The one who loves with “agape” is not the subject of his own conversations. The one who brags is merely proving he is really in love with himself.

By the way, this word is used nowhere else in the New Testament. It refers to one who talks a lot about himself.^v

One author added this insight. Jealousy is wanting what someone else has. Bragging is trying to make others jealous of what we have. Jealousy puts others down; bragging builds us up.^{vi}

This was the trumpet blowing of the Pharisees. They would not do anything unless it was going to be published, along with their photo, in the “Jerusalem Gazette”.

This person is in love with their own image. They are show-offs and boasters. They never run out of material because they are full of themselves.

We cannot be full of ourselves and full of “agape”. There is no room in our hearts for both.

The truth is that a braggart does not recognize that they are actually advertising their own true emptiness, their shallowness of spirit, and ultimately, their own pride.

When Paul wrote this text to the Corinthians, they were involved as spiritual show-offs, attempting to best each other with the sensational public gifts. They were after the prestigious offices. They all wanted to have the microphone when they met for worship. They were trying to out-do one another and one-up each other in the assembly. The result was carnality and chaos.

Earlier, in chapter 4 of this letter to the Corinthians, Paul rebuked the foundation of their bragging when he wrote,

... What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it? (I Corinthians 4:7)

In other words, if whatever we have and are is the gift of God’s grace, should we not be boasting about the grace of God and not about ourselves?

It is no wonder that Paul said,

... God forbid that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ ... (Galatians 6:14 NKJV)

This is the only sensible response to the awareness that whatever we are, God made us, and whatever we have, God gave us.

I love the way Moffat translated this phrase when he wrote, “Love makes no parade [of itself].”^{vii}

Here were the Corinthians – petty, boastful, proud. They were all living in their own little towers, demanding that when anyone got near them, they were to lower their eyes out of respect and honor.

In reality, they were in the process of becoming pig-headed people. This was nothing less than sheer, pig-headed, devilish pride.

Think about it – it was pride that made the devil the devil.^{viii}

Paul is making it very clear that to love others as Christ loves us:

- do not live to have what others have;
- do not become your favorite topic of conversation.

3. Thirdly, love does not strut around with an air of superiority.

Paul goes on to add, in I Corinthians 13:4b,

... and [love] is not arrogant

Your translation may read,

... [love] is not puffed up (KJV)

This is a great description.

In other words, “Don’t act with arrogance.”

It is interesting to me, yet sad, that the Corinthians had such an obvious problem with arrogance that six of the seven times this verb appears in the New Testament, it appears in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians.^{ix}

J. B. Phillips translates it well, “Love does not cherish inflated ideas of its own importance.”

This is the man in Luke chapter 18, who prayed,

... “God, I thank You that I’m not like other people ...” (Luke 18:11)

This is a pig-headed man. He is up in the tower and everyone below can never see his greatness.

One author summarized this terrible attitude well when he wrote,

Arrogant people think they are better than other people; they think they know more

than they actually do; they consider themselves holier than others and imagine themselves more gifted than they really are. They are blind to their own glaring sins, personal weaknesses, and doctrinal errors.³

Arrogance blinds the eyes to truth.

This is the same word Paul used to judge the Corinthian church for not disciplining the unrepentant man from the assembly who refused to stop his sexually immoral relationship with his stepmother. The man continued his incest and the church members thought they were being exceptionally loving to include him and ignore his sin. Paul wrote, in I Corinthians 5:2a,

You have become arrogant . . .

This word “arrogant” or “thusiow,” in the Greek, is the same word that is used in I Corinthians 13:4.

Paul is saying, “You are not loving, you are arrogant. You are not tolerant, you are proud of your defiance.”

In the same way, the church today that believes its tolerance toward sin and unrepentant sinners is a badge of openness and love is actually self-condemned for arrogance.

I pulled out of the newspaper this past week and read an article related to the continuing Episcopalian issues with homosexuality. A meeting had been called with many of the bishops and church leaders. The article said that the Archbishop of Canterbury himself even attended, urging the American liberal bishops to make concessions for the sake of unity.

Unity, by the way, they believe must be kept in spite of the fact that homosexual men may be ordained to church leadership. Unity must be preserved while same sex couples are having their unions blessed with official prayers.

The Archbishop, in his attempt to keep the church unified, pled with the liberal bishops to, and I quote, “exercise restraint” in approving another gay bishop.

How about exercising discipline? How about exercising righteous living for church leaders? How about warning of God’s divine opinion regarding sodomy? According to Paul, in Romans 1:27, these men are,

. . . committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

How about standing up for the words of God regarding man’s relationships and judging any

immoral sexual lifestyle whether it is heterosexual or homosexual as both sinful and forgivable?

For this Christ died!

There is a call for the Episcopalians to exercise restraint.

Ladies and gentlemen, we do not exercise a little restraint regarding sinful behavior. There is no such thing as moderation in sinning.

Paul writes to the church in Corinth, and to the church at large in America – not just to the Episcopalians, but to the Baptists and the Methodists and the Non-denominationalists – and effectively says, “You think you’re loving by tolerating sin? You’ve actually become arrogant (“thusiow”).”

“Thusiow” means, “infatuated with one’s own intellectual gymnastics.”

This is someone who is actually in love with their own defiance. They are in love with their own autonomy from God’s word. They have done nothing less than elevate their view above God’s view.

This is like in the days of Elijah of old, the church needs to restate the clear choice of distinction. It can have Baal, a God that allowed all sorts of sexual perversion, or it can have God – but it cannot have both.

Paul told the church in Corinth, “You can have fellowship with this immoral incestuous man or fellowship with God. Do not be arrogant enough to believe you can have both.”

You can have that hidden affair with a woman you work with, or you can have God, but you cannot have both. The Bible is clear that unrepentant adulterers go to hell when they die. (Hebrews 13:4)

You can swindle and cheat and lie as a way of life, or you can have God, but you cannot have both. (I Corinthians 6:10)

Young people, you can have sexual activity outside of marriage, or you can have God, but you cannot have both. (Revelation 21:8)

They say, “But I love God.”

No they do not – they love themselves.

Paul put it this way, “True love for God and others isn’t arrogant. It doesn’t proudly walk in a way that God disapproves.”

Those who choose sin and sinners over salvation and fellowship with Christ do not know what true love is. True love – “agape” love – seeks to rescue

sinner from sin and ultimate destruction, not pat them on the back and say, "Everything's okay."

True love seeks to find those who will worship God in spirit and in what? Truth.

Conclusion

What has Paul said about true love?

1. First, "agape" is the kind of love that does not act with envy.
2. Secondly, "agape" is the kind of love that does not brag about itself.
3. Thirdly, "agape" love is the kind of love that is not inflated with its own opinions.

These three, in a variety of ways and in varying degrees say the same thing – true love is truly surrendered humility to Christ and His word.

True love is refusing to live in a tower – or on a pedestal, for that matter.

These three descriptions are a warning for those who want to escape the tower and come back down to earth where pig-headed people are turned into big-hearted servants; for those who will accept the servanthood of "agape".

One of the most effective missionaries that we are still reading about today was William Carey, the Father of Modern Missions. He would serve in India, translating parts of the Bible into thirty-four different languages. He became one of the world's foremost linguists.

Before entering the ministry Carey had been a shoe cobbler. In fact, before entering the ministry in the late 1700s, he had taken over his father-in-law's shoe repair shop. While in his shop repairing shoes, he taught himself Italian, French, Dutch, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew.

Guys who can do that really irritate me. Wait, that sounds like envy. Let me back up, and confess.

Once, at a large gathering of dignitaries and other well-known people where William Carey was in attendance, an upper class snob sneered at Carey and said, "I understand that you, Mr. Carey, once worked as a shoemaker."

"Oh, no sir," Carey replied, "not a shoemaker, only a shoe cobbler."

William Carey would not even claim to make shoes – only to mend them.

The opposite of "agape" is pride. The opposite of being pig-headed is being big-hearted. The ingredient that goes into a big heart first and foremost, is the ingredient of true humility.

This week, check yourself to see if you are developing the fruit of "agape". From these three verbs, ask yourself these questions:

- Whose opinion do you value the most – your own, or God's?
- Is your lifestyle modeled after God's word, or what you think is best?
- How often will you listen to someone go on and on about their life, without interrupting with news about your own?
- Does your neighbor's house or car or boat make you feel irritated, or are you glad for them?
- Do the accomplishments of other believers cause you to rejoice, or simmer with resentment and feelings of being overlooked?
- How often will you talk about yourself this week – your problems; your achievements; your plans?

I like the way one author put it, "Will you walk into a room with the attitude of 'Here I am,' or instead, 'There you are.'?"

Ladies and gentlemen, "agape" does not belong in a tower or on a tall pedestal. It works best down among the ordinary people and the daily things of life. It becomes the evidence of surrendered humility before God.

Martin Luther, the reformer, once said, "God made the world out of nothing, and when we become nothing, He can make something out of us."

I will tell you – one of the things God creates is a person who desires to live out, in the realities of daily life, the evidences and activities of true love.

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ⁱ William Barclay, 1 Corinthians (Westminster Press, 1975), p. 120.

ⁱⁱ Fritz Rienecker and Cleon Rogers, Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament (Regency, 1976), p. 432.

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- ⁱⁱⁱ John MacArthur, 1 Corinthians (Moody Press, 1984), p. 340.
- ^{iv} Nathaniel Vincent, quoted by Alexander Strauch, Leading with Love (Lewis & Roth, 2006), p. 48.
- ^v Rienecker and Rogers, p. 432.
- ^{vi} MacArthur, p. 341.
- ^{vii} Alan Redpath, The Royal Route to Heaven: 1 Corinthians (Fleming Revell, 1960), p. 164.
- ^{viii} C. S. Lewis, quoted by Strauch, p. 59.
- ^{ix} David E. Garland, Baker Exegetical Commentary: 1 Corinthians (Baker Academic, 2003), p. 618.
- ^x Strauch, p. 56.