

Capturing Love's Attention

Will True Love Please Stand Up – Part VII

I Corinthians 13:6

Introduction

It has been said that a person's true character is revealed in what makes him laugh and in what makes him weep.

What is it that causes you to rejoice? In fact, take five seconds and think about the last time you really laughed. What was it about? Was it a joke someone told that made you laugh? Was it a scene on television or something you read?

What puts wind in your sails? What do you get really excited about – besides the upcoming football match between Payton Manning and Tom Brady? That might make you laugh and cry in the same hour.

Now, take another five seconds to remember the last time you were really sad; perhaps you even cried. What was it about?

What is it that upsets you – and you end up talking about it to the first person you run into? Is it politics? Is it the housing market? Perhaps it is the latest episode of violence in the Middle East or some other world development.

If the test of true character is what captivates our emotions, how would you describe the character of our culture? What captivates the interest of students in your school; the average man or woman on the street? What are they talking about?

I find it interesting, if I can cut right to the chase, that our culture is captivated by the unconstructive, harmful, depressing, damaging, frightening aspects of people's lives. The tabloids have been at it for years, without a blush of embarrassment. Our culture is literally entertained by the seamy side of life.

I went to the grocery store this past week to test my theory. I ended up buying several tabloids. I first looked all around to make sure no one from our church was there. I was worried the checkout lady would say, "Hello, Pastor Davey . . . I didn't know."

The headlines of one tabloid screamed, "Prince Harry Addicted". There were undeniable pictures of him snorting liquor. The byline read, "Scandalous photos the Palace doesn't want you to see."

Underneath this was the shocking headline, "NASCAR is Rigged! Fans are Being Cheated." Hard to believe!

At the top of the tabloid were big letters that read, "Nancy Reagan secret diaries reveal the woman she hates the most."

Another tabloid had the headline, "David Hasselhoff Flees Rehab and Gets Drunk".

Next to this was the headline, "Hard-partying Tara Reid Hospitalized for Nine Days".

Then, next to this was, "Dr. Phil Saves His Own Marriage".

Yet another tabloid heralded, "Angelina Jolie Turns Back on Brad." The byline read, "Walks out at 3 a.m.; binge drinks despite his pleas to stop".

Nobody reads this stuff!

Tell that to David Pecker, the CEO who already has a billion in assets from his tabloid industry.

Even ridiculous stuff gets sales. I happened across a couple more headlines of obviously true stories: "Woman Delivers Own Baby While Skydiving". I am sure that happened. Another headline that frankly really disappointed me as a

musician: “Researcher Determines the Deer and the Antelope Never Played Together.” That sure ruins a great song.

I came across this news headline with obvious political overtones, “War in Heaven According to the Archangel Michael Who Reports: Female Angels Led By the Powerful Hillaria.”

Listen to these headlines:

- Four charred bodies found in fire blaze;
- Scandal rocks Oprah Winfrey school;
- Student’s death caused by staph infection;
- Starving exotic cobras found in storage unit;
- Collapsing hill reveals stone age secrets;
- Pit Bulls kill cancer boy’s pet horse.

These are not tabloid headlines. I pulled these off CNN this past week.

The world eats this stuff up. The failure and fall of people; the frailty of people; the sinful, perverted, foolish behavior of people; the latest tragedy – it is all the rage.

Watch the news tonight. Count the negative, depressing, tragic, embarrassing news items against the positive, constructive, productive news stories.

Are there not a thousand good things happening around our world? Of course there are. But the human mind and heart is actually more interested in the dark side of life.

For the believer, we should be challenged with the question, “What is it that captivates our interest? What is it that captures our emotions?”

According to the apostle Paul, the answer to this question reveals whether or not we have true love for God and for each other.

We are about to discover that true love does not walk in the gutter. True love does not live on salacious news; does not long for the latest news of sin or sacrilege.

The next thing Paul does in I Corinthians 13, as he describes genuine, lofty, God-like love, is to reveal to us what captures true love’s attention. Notice I Corinthians 13:6.

[Love] does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth;

Love Does Not Delight In Anything Wrong

Let us take apart the first phrase of I Corinthians 13:6,

[Love] does not rejoice in unrighteousness . . .

We could translate this, “Love does not delight in anything wrong.”

To delight in wrongdoing or sin is to respond to sin in at least three different ways. Let us look at these ways.

1. First, true love does not enjoy sinful actions in others.

It is easy for someone to say, if questioned, “Of course I don’t delight in sin. I have a love for Christ and holiness and want nothing more than righteousness to win the day” – and then to sit down and watch some show that promotes, encourages, and describes evil in such a way that they are silently cheering sin on.

My sons and I rented a movie, when they were home this past summer, about bank robbers who were going to pull off a heist. At the end of the movie, as the robbers got away with the heist, it occurred to me, and I said to my sons, “Hey, guys, do you realize we were actually rooting for the bad guys? We were cheering on the criminals, “I hope they get away with it . . . Watch out, the cops are just around the corner . . . Whew, they made it. All right!”

The most popular magazines, books, television programs are those that glorify sin; that literally rejoice in unrighteousness.

Part of our problem is that by constant exposure, our discernment level is dulled or blunted. We excuse the music or movies or books or magazines that promote fornication, or laugh at immoral things, or exalt money and materialism.

This is the challenge of “agape” love – how is this for a radical challenge – when we allow ourselves to be entertained by things promoting sin, we are rejoicing in unrighteousness.

Let me tell how far we have come in the wrong direction. Paul wrote to the Ephesians, in Ephesians 5:8-11,

. . . walk as children of Light

(for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), . . .

Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness . . .

(The word for “participate” is from the word “koinonia,” which means, “to come alongside; to have a part in”.)¹

In other words, “Don’t participate in or even come alongside deeds of darkness.”

Paul goes on to say in Ephesians 5:12,

for it is disgraceful even to speak of the [sinful] things which are done . . . in secret.

Paul refers to these secret deeds as “shameful,” which is the same word translated “filthy” in Titus 1:11 (KJV).

Imagine this standard of genuine love: “Don’t have anything to do with shameful deeds done by the disobedient in secret.”

Imagine applying this standard and then think:

- How many movies would you have to walk out of?
- How many TV shows could you watch?
- How many songs could you listen to on your favorite radio station?
- How many videos on YouTube could you watch?
- How many pages of MySpace could you look at?
- How long would you be able to listen to talk radio in the morning?

The average Christian would never consider that they are happy about sin! They would quickly say, “I’m not rejoicing in sin!”

Frankly, when we understand that Paul’s statement reflects such a high standard that the American church has so abandoned that if we saw someone attempting to apply this text we would think they were out of date. We would probably call them a Pharisee – a prude.

If we really want to love God with genuine love and want to love one another with genuine love, we will not allow any attachment to or willing pleasure in sinful things.

To rejoice in unrighteousness is to take delight in the sinful actions of others.

2. Secondly, true love does not applaud sinful behavior in others.

This is obvious, right? Since sin is offensive to God, we would never applaud or approve of anything that is offensive or grievous to God if we truly love Him.

Imagine knowing that your child has a peanut allergy. They get sick whenever they eat peanuts and can even become ill if they smell peanuts too closely.

- Can you imagine, as the parent of this child, cooking with peanut oil and knowingly giving it to the child?
- Can you imagine, when you pick this child up from school, eating chocolate covered peanuts and offering some to the child?

- Can you imagine persisting in packing this child’s lunch box every day with a peanut butter and jelly sandwich?
- Can you imagine even waking the child up in the morning by waving a peanut butter cookie under their nose?

How utterly unloving this would be.

Yet when we delight in sin; when we cherish and participate in sin, we are delighting in that which offends our heavenly Father. It brought about the death of His son. It dishonors and grieves the Holy Spirit. When we enjoy sin and justify sin and applaud sin, either in our life or in the lives of others, we prove our insensitivity and lack of true love for God.ⁱⁱ

According to Paul, the approval of sin is the final evidence of a culture’s utter and irreversible corruption.

In Romans 1, Paul catalogues the downward digression of a culture in their refusal to accept the creative handiwork from God, but instead worship creation; they plunge into moral and sexual deviancy in their bisexual and homosexual lusts; they are, Paul writes in Romans 1:29,

. . . filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil . . .

At the end of this paragraph, in Romans 1:31-32, Paul writes,

without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful;

and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.

In other words, Paul talks about those who not only practice sexual immorality – both heterosexual and homosexual – but who go one step further and give hearty approval to those who practice it.

Can you imagine what this means today?

The hearty approval of sexual deviancy is now to the degree that the public school system in this county allowed and encouraged children last year to hold a moment of silence in honor of the homosexual and lesbian community. It is now an annual event.

Can you imagine what this says about our leaders? Most of the presidential candidates in this election year have made it clear that they believe homosexual couples should receive every right and

privilege of married couples. They made sure they went on record on this.

Ladies and gentlemen, this is the height of publicly “rejoicing in unrighteousness.” Paul said, in Romans 1:31, this is actually unloving. Promoting sinful behavior is as unloving as disregarding a food allergy.

The bigger problem is that although people can go to heaven with food allergies, they cannot go to heaven with an unrepentant heart, cherishing their practice of sin.

John the apostle wrote during the days when the Roman Empire glorified sexual experimentation; when the elite Roman citizens considered bisexuality balanced. This is becoming all the more popular in our day – we can watch a television show now in which a bisexual woman chooses her lover from among a group of young men and women. John was writing to Christians who lived in a day like ours. In fact, his was far worse, but we are catching up.

In the first century, believers lived under the leadership of men like Nero, who married both a man publicly and several women. They lived when the foundations of home and virtue were being dismantled and dissolved through repeated divorce and adultery.

John wrote to this generation,

Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous . . .

the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning.

(I John 3:7-8)

In other words, when a culture arrives at the point at which, as Isaiah said, people will call evil things good and good things evil (Isaiah 5:20), John wrote, “Don’t be deceived; the standard of God’s holiness has not shifted.”

Right is still right and wrong is still wrong, according to the inspired record of scripture.

To applaud unrighteousness does not make unrighteousness right. To denigrate and scoff at purity does not make purity wrong.

If we truly love God and others, we will not practice sin. We will not wave sin under anyone’s nose; we will not offer them a bite of sin; we will not keep sin around the house; we will not store it on our computer.

We will confess sin and flee sin and hate even the smell of sin. If anything, the church needs to be revived in her holy aversion to sin.

In fact, according to I Corinthians 13, we cannot really love God and one another without a disdain for sin.

This is true, is it not?

Have you ever heard of a man proposing to his girlfriend, “Sweetheart, I want you to marry me because I love you and three other girls. I hope you won’t mind if I keep seeing them.”

Not a chance. True love decides to abandon any other affection like that; it will have a disdain for anyone who gets in the way.

This is what Paul is saying. We cannot have true love for God and three of our favorite sins too – it is Him or them.

John says, “Don’t be deceived into thinking God will happily get along with your unrepentant sin.”

As Paul describes true love, “True love isn’t captivated by sin; it doesn’t rejoice in sin.”

In other words,

- first, true love does not enjoy sinful things;
- secondly, true love does not applaud sinful behavior.

3. Thirdly, true love does not delight in repeating sinful deeds.

I agree with one author’s commentary on this text as he wrote,

One of the most common forms of rejoicing in sin is gossip. Gossips would do little harm if they did not have so many eager listeners. This sin, which many Christians treat lightly, is wicked not only because it uncaringly reveals the weaknesses or sins of others, and therefore hurts rather than helps them, but because the heart of gossip is rejoicing in evil. The essence of gossip is gloating over the shortcomings and sins of others, which makes gossip a great sin itself.ⁱⁱⁱ

What is it about our nature that loves to hear stuff that starts with the words, “Hey, have you heard about so and so . . .”?

These words are never followed up with, “He’s reading through the Bible in one year!” or “He has started praying every morning. Wow!” or “She is such a great mom.” or “Have you heard about her latest answer to prayer?”

This kind of news never travels.

One author wrote, “It is one of the strange traits of human nature that very often we prefer to hear of the misfortune of others rather than of their good fortune.”^{iv}

If we truly love each other with “agape” love, then we will not take pleasure in the faults and failures of others. In fact, remember it was Peter who wrote,

*. . . love covers a multitude of sins.
(I Peter 4:8b)*

A gossip seeks to uncover a multitude of sins.

The truth is, we delight in gossip not only because of our corrupt hearts, but because it makes us feel a little better than the other person who fell or failed.

An anonymous author wrote these powerful words,

I have no respect for justice. I maim without killing, I break hearts and ruin lives. I am cunning and malicious and gather strength the older I am alive. The more I am quoted the more I am believed. My victims are helpless. They cannot protect themselves against me, because I have no name and no face. To track me down is impossible. The harder they try, the more elusive I become. I topple governments and wreck friendships. I ruin careers and cause sleepless nights and heartaches. I make innocent people cry in their pillows. I make headlines and headaches. Even my name hisses. I am called Gossip and I am nobody’s friend.

True love is a refusal to rejoice in unrighteousness. It does not:

- enjoy sinful or unfortunate actions in others;
- applaud sinful or unfortunate behavior in others;
- delight in repeating sinful or unfortunate news of others.

Love Delights In Everything Right

Now Paul flips over the coin in his next descriptive phrase by writing in I Corinthians 13:6,

. . . [love] rejoices with the truth;

If we put the two concepts together, we could translate this verse,

Love does not delight in anything that is wrong; it delights in everything that is right.

Leon Morris paraphrases, “Love is happy wherever the truth is.”^v

The apostle Paul often referred to the truth in a variety of ways. He:

- refers to the truth of God (Romans 3:7);
- called Christ the minister of truth (II Corinthians 6:7);
- refers to the truth of the gospel (Galatians 2:5);
- tells that the unbeliever suppresses the truth of creation (Romans 1:18);
- says the unbeliever exchanges the truth for a lie that nature is worthy of reverence and worship (Romans 1:25);
- challenges the believer to submit to the truth, even when it is uncomfortable (Galatians 4:16), as he writes, “Have I become your enemy by telling you the truth?!”

In other words, when Paul writes in I Corinthians 13 that love is rejoicing with the truth, he sees love as deeply concerned with the advancement of the Gospel and anything related to Christ.

If we truly love someone, we are going to desire that they walk with Christ and according to His truth.

The guy that tells his girlfriend, “If you love me you will give yourself to me,” does not really love her because he is asking her to abandon the truth – love is not love apart from truth.

The guy who says, “I love God, but I really don’t care about sharing the Gospel with people,” is deceived.

This is like saying, “I love my wife and children, but I never want to talk about them and I really don’t care if they ever come up in conversation.”

To truly love the truth is to walk in the truth and talk about the truth and be interested in the truth.

The captivating interest of love is the truth.

The apostle John wrote to a friend named Gaius – notice how often the word “truth” comes up,

For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you are walking in the truth.

I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

(III John 1:3-4)

True love then, is grieved when people follow after lies and it rejoices when they walk after truth.

Conclusion

Let me close by reading a letter written by a woman in her fifties. She has chosen to walk in the truth of God's word and genuinely love her husband, despite the challenges. Every day she rejects unrighteous decisions and chooses to walk in the truth. She writes,

I met him when I was 19, married him at 20, and we were separated when I turned 22 because he was arrested and convicted of a violent crime. He had failed himself, his family, his wife, and his future. But, he was my husband. I was sad, disappointed, mad, and frightened, but I loved him.

I stayed with him through weeks of trials, his years in jail, and now decades in prison. I [believe] in the covenant of marriage and in God before whom we stood as we took our vows.

I am now 50. He is 55. I see him four hours every weekend and I talk to him on the phone twice a week for twenty minutes. I am not deceived or a martyr. I am not uneducated or desperate. I am a wife. I work, have a mortgage, a nine-year-old car, two dogs, and bills just like everyone else. It is hard sometimes to imagine that I am only one wife of over two million men behind bars. I have not made many friends at the prison. I keep that part of my life separate, but it is always there – always a part of every decision and choice I make. Somewhere in

here I think I'm supposed to say I believe my husband is innocent, that the system didn't work and we're victims of whatever, but that isn't the point. Yes, I get angry at the situation. I have grieved the loss of many of the normal things others have done, like having children and vacations abroad. This is not the life I would have expected for myself 30 years ago and it isn't one I recommend to others. But, it is my life.

At 50, I have come to the conclusions it is not the life I have that defines me, it is the way I choose to live that life. I choose to live it being faithful. This brings me peace; allows me to have joy, and keeps me aware of my husband. My faith has given me the foundation to live this life, not just survive it – faith in God who has not abandoned me.

We will not find this woman's story in a tabloid, or in some news report. This is not nearly as exciting as pit bulls and royal scandals and who is cheating on whom. Then again, the world is not captivated by demonstrations of "agape".

Oh, that we, as followers of Christ, would be captivated by true love.

How do we know if we are? We will not applaud or pursue or repeat anything having to do with sin – we will applaud and pursue everything having to do with the truth.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 10/28/2007 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ Fritz Rienecker and Cleon Rogers, Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament (Regency, 1976), p. 538.

ⁱⁱ John MacArthur, I Corinthians (Moody Press, 1984), p. 350.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid., p. 350.

^{iv} William Barclay, 1 Corinthians (Westminster Press, 1975), p. 122.

^v Leon Morris, Testaments of Love (Eerdmans, 1981), p. 248.