

1 Corinthians 13 (4-7) pt.5 – Love Does Not Boast

In 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, Paul uses 15 words to describe love in action. In this sermon series we are examining each of these 15 facets of love. And it is wonderful to see what the true beauty of biblical love looks like. However, understanding what love looks like should convict you of your sin, because this looks like Jesus, but it doesn't look like you. But the beauty of the gospel is that Jesus Christ has met the standard of love for you. And that should inspire you to confess your sin and to strive to become more like him as an ongoing act of worship with your life. You see Jesus, and his love for you, and then the Holy Spirit can and does empower you to love like Jesus does.

Love does not boast. Boasting is the exaltation of self. Pride is the root, boasting is the fruit. Pride is the reason, boasting is the result. It is drawing attention to yourself, looking for recognition. It is the verbalization of pride, but it can also be demonstrated through other visible manifestations, like social media. Boasting is seen with overt and ostentatious displays of power, success, wealth, or physical appearance. But love is not a show off. Love does not parade itself around, seeking recognition, looking for its own glory. Love does what it does, not to be praised by others, but to build up others. Love doesn't act in order to draw praise to itself, but to bring praise to God.

Love looks to build up others, not yourself. If envy wants something that someone else has, boasting (or bragging) is making someone want what you have. Bragging is a sign of immaturity and insecurity. The more loving you become, the less boasting you need to do. You might be boasting because of envy or jealousy. You see someone else's status, or possessions, or position, or popularity, or whatever. And you are worried that you don't measure up. You want to feel valued, connected, important. So, you prop yourself up in an attempt to demonstrate that you are in the same class as this other person, that you deserve this status, popularity, or whatever. This is something children must grow out of or they won't be healthy adults. And it is something that Christians must guard against if they ever want to mature, and look like Jesus.

Love looks to boast in God, and not in yourself. In the OT, the Hebrew root word for praise means to boast. Christians are to praise God for who he is, to boast on him. That's what you're doing when you sing, speak, teach, and proclaim the wonderful, wonderful majesty and eternal perfection of God. He has revealed himself, and his glory, and he wants you to show love for him by praising him. In fact, God saved you so that your whole life would be shaped by bragging about God. 1 Corinthians 10:31 says that *whatever you do, do all to the glory of God*. The truth is that your main aim in life should be to glorify God. This is right, and this is worship, and this is good for your soul. John Piper – God is the one being in the universe for whom self-exaltation is the most loving thing. Anyone else who exalts himself distracts us from what we need, namely, God.

You cannot boast in the Lord and brag on yourself at the same time. A form of bragging is when you perform religious acts to impress other people, which Jesus warned us about (Matthew 6:1). Bragging is demonstrating devotion in order to be known to people. Blessing is demonstrating devotion in order for Jesus to be known to people. That is to be the goal. Galatians 6:14 – *But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world*. Sometimes people might feel as if they are boasting only in the Lord when they are actually, even if unintentionally, taking some of the glory from God. But love doesn't say look at me, or even look at what God is doing through me, it says look at Jesus.

You've seen or heard what is called "humblebragging". This is when someone makes a seemingly modest, humble, or self-deprecating statement, but their actual intention is to drawing attention to something they are proud of. It is a disingenuous boast covered with a manufactured modesty. Like someone saying, "I am so clumsy, I almost dropped my new diamond bracelet down the toilet." Or, "There is little old insignificant me talking to this or that famous person." C.S. Lewis said, "A man is never so proud as when striking an attitude of humility."

Paul is not simply saying that love doesn't boast as some general statement. The Corinthians were steeped in the sin of boasting. They were spiritual showoffs, whose worship was marked by chaos, not Christlikeness. Paul is looking right at the Corinthians and contrasting their attitudes and actions over against what Jesus is and how he wants you to be. He makes this obvious right from the first chapter of this letter. 1 Corinthians 1:26-31 – the Corinthians had a boastful attitude, they were proud and bragging about their salvation. They thought it was something about them that caused God to save them, and they were proud about it. Paul points out that most of those God chooses are those whom the world wouldn't choose. In Ephesians 2:8-9, it says that when it comes to salvation, we are saved by grace through faith, "*so that no one may boast*". In Romans 3:27-29, it says our boasting is excluded because we are saved apart from what we do or who we are.

Look at 1 Corinthians 1:29 and see the little phrase "so that". Now look at vs.26, and see that God does the calling, look at vs.27, and see that God chose, again in vs.27, God chose, and then in vs.28, God chose. Now in vs.29, you see that God chose *so that* no human being might boast in the presence of God. He chose the weak to shame the wise. He didn't choose the lovely so people would look at them. He chose the unlovely so that they would look at him.

Look at vs.31, and see the phrase "so that" once again. Now look at vs.30, and see that you are in Christ because of God. You can't say that it was your decision to put yourself in. And see that if you have some wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, well remember that those are all gifts you got from God. You didn't earn them or deserve them. The honor and privilege you get from being a child of God is because of Jesus, not you. Boast in him, not in yourself.

Taking pride because of your salvation is corrected by a proper understanding of sovereign grace. It is a humbling truth, it crushes your pride. The only contribution you made to your conversion is your sin. Some say God votes yes, the devil votes no, and you make the deciding vote. But who does that glorify? No, salvation is all of grace so that all the glory goes to God alone. And no, I don't know why God chooses some and not everyone, but I don't have to know. I can trust that he knows what he is doing and I can look at the cross and know that he is good. You can't think that you wear the Jesus jersey because you were good enough to earn a spot on the team. God didn't call you to salvation because there was something good inside you that wasn't inside someone else, or because there was something great that you could do for him that someone else couldn't. Or that you were somehow better, smarter, or wiser than someone else who didn't choose God's offer. No, it wasn't anything that sprang from you that caused God to save you. As Ephesians 2:8 says even your faith is a gift of God. As Philippians 1:29 says it has been granted to you that you should believe in him. You can't earn, or merit salvation. And your choice to put your trust in Jesus was all of grace. As Romans 9:16 says, salvation depends not on your human will, but on God, who has mercy. God saved you despite the fact that you're just as undeserving as anyone else. Praise his name!

Jeremiah 9:23-24 – *Thus says the LORD: “Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.”*

Our culture is obsessed with status, success, and the need to measure up, to show off, and to project your self-image. Boasting and bragging are all around you in the media, magazines, movies, radio, Internet, TV, sports, politics, families, friends, and churches. It is causing an epidemic of emotional stress and self-harm among people of all ages, including Christians. You see people trying to cope and to compensate by making a statement of self-worth with their body, their marriage, their children, their accomplishments, their giving, and even with their sacrifices, and their suffering. The human need to feel valued, connected, and important, when not met by a relationship with God, results in an insecurity that can take on a bragging element in almost any form. People today are bragging about how many victim boxes they can check off, and tell you that you have no right to speak to their situation unless you are as oppressed as they think they are. That’s twisted. Boasting can twist you into a tool that is anything but love. But the more loving you are, the less boasting you’ll do. You must be careful not to be self-promoting in your spiritual life. You must guard your heart and your tongue from making you the center of your own conversation, the hero of your own story. You have to be tenacious against this tool of the world, the flesh, and the devil. And you must immerse yourself in the realization that your significance, sufficiency, and security are found in your relationship with Jesus Christ.

The Corinthians were proud about their salvation. But they also were proud and bragging about their spiritual leaders. Look at 1 Corinthians 3:21-22. People were siding with either Paul, Peter, or Apollos, and taking pride that their man was better than the other men. And some teach that the Corinthians wouldn’t even have elders of their own, but would align only with the famous men. This was the competitive envy they were involved in. You see it with the celebrity culture, as if people are riding the coattails of the famous. I go to this church or that church, we do this or that, our pastor is so and so. Of course, you should appreciate, honor, and respect your leaders, but don’t associate with someone just to elevate yourself. Oh wait, here that again. That is so unlike the world. The gurus of success and self-esteem tell you to associate with people greater than you and you will become great like them. Of course, Jesus is greater than them all. Yes, it is good for your soul to associate with spiritually mature people. But Romans 12:16 says, “*Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly.*” In other words, spiritually mature people can be lowly in the eyes of the world, and you shouldn’t look for your identity in people, the Christian’s true identity is in Christ.

The Corinthians were proud and bragging about their salvation. They were proud and bragging about their spiritual leaders. But they were also proud and bragging about their spiritual gifts. Look at 1 Corinthians 4:7 – Paul asks three rhetorical questions to put their pride in its place. *For who sees anything different in you?* Paul is being sarcastic here. The Corinthians thought that they had a superior spirituality because of supposedly “superior” gifts. But Paul is saying that no one regards you as superior. You aren’t as great as you think you are. *What do you have that you did not receive?* Any spiritual gift you have has been graciously given by God. You can’t brag about a free gift of grace. *If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?* You talk like your gift and your use of your gift is all about you, instead of all about God. The Corinthians were all excited about pursuing what they thought was superior spirituality by the use of spiritual

gifts. But Paul wanted to show them the more excellent way, the Jesus way, which is to pursue love in the use of spiritual gifts.

The Corinthians were proud and bragging about their salvation. They were proud and bragging about their spiritual leaders. They were proud and bragging about their spiritual gifts. And they were proud and bragging about their sanctification, and their ability to resist sin. Look at 1 Corinthians 5:6 – boasting filled the whole congregation. They thought that they could just let a man sleep with his father’s wife in open rebellion to God and that letting him be in the church would have no bad effect on them. They thought their tolerance meant they were graceful and spiritually mature. But Paul once again puts them in their place.

Look at vs.2. Pride was the basis for their tolerance. Some might think that letting people be and not confronting them with their open defiance and sinful lifestyle is taking the high road of love. They may call you judgmental. Some may think that not administering church discipline is being humble. But Paul calls it the exact opposite, and he says it is pride.

While it is certainly true that a church is not simply a showcase for saints but a hospital for sinners, the truth is that those who come to a hospital are there to get well. They admit they have a sickness and want to be rid of it. The question at a hospital is, can you fix what is wrong, and not can I show off my sickness. The church is supposed to be about portraits of grace. Those portraits are still being painted, of course, but allowing God to paint them. People in a hospital expect to get operated on. Look at vs.7-8. You cannot claim Jesus as Passover Lamb (vs.7) and deny him as purifying Lord (vs.8). Yes, everybody sins, but not everybody lives an openly defiant and rebellious life. That’s not what the Bible calls grace, that’s what the Bible calls licentiousness. And grace is not a license to sin. A person who won’t submit to church discipline is guilty of that and a church who doesn’t discipline is also guilty of that. It isn’t loving to let sin have its way in the church.

And you shouldn’t let sinful people have their way in your life. Yes, you should spend time with people who aren’t Christians, but not to the exclusion of spending time with on fire believers. Yes, you should develop relationships with unbelievers so as to lead them to Jesus. But if you spend all your leisure time with people who are not pursuing Christ, it will have an effect on your walk with the Lord. It is prideful to think that you don’t need time to worship and fellowship with God’s people. It is prideful to think that you won’t be affected by immersing yourself in a sinful atmosphere. 1 Corinthians 15:33 Paul says *Do not be deceived: “Bad company ruins good morals.”* Psalm 1:1 says *Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers.* Who is influencing you?

Now you’ve seen all these different types of boasting that were evident in the Corinthian church, and you’ve seen how they can become part of your life or a church’s life. So how do you keep that from happening? Look to build up others, to serve others, and not yourself. Live to boast in God. Make glorifying God the main aim in your life. Don’t look for personal praise. Remember you are what you are only by the grace of God. Guard your heart and your tongue from making you the hero of your own story. Realize that your significance, sufficiency, and security are found in your relationship with Jesus Christ. Don’t look for your identity in people. Pursue love in the use of spiritual gifts. Watch out for bad influences. The more loving you are, the less boasting you’ll do. Love doesn’t say look at me, or even look at what God is doing through me, it says look at Jesus.