

Part I: Growing in



1 Corinthians 13:4-8a

THRIVE! Growing and Changing in the Christian Life

Prepared by: Matthew S. Black

Sunday, April 10, 2016, 10:30am at Living Hope Church of Roselle, Illinois

livinghopechurch.net

“Joy is love exalted; peace is love in repose; long-suffering is love enduring; gentleness is love in society; goodness is love in action; faith is love on the battlefield; meekness is love in school; and temperance is love in training.”

– D. L. Moody

If you don't have a Bible, there should be one in the seat in front of you. Open your Bible to **1 Cor. 13** The title of our message this morning is “Growing in Love.”

Introduction

The year was 1974. It was my birthday—May 22nd. My parents had no ultrasound done, so they had no idea if they were going to have a boy or a girl. What a joy it was when my sister was born. My dad had been wanting a girl after his first six sons. Number seven was a girl. But wait a minute! There was another surprise. Not only did he get his girl. He got a bonus. He got me.

My twin sister and I were 2.5 months premature. We were born at St. Francis Hospital in Blue Island Illinois. At the age of an hour old we took a ride in a helicopter and were airlifted to Loyola University Medical Center where the doctors saved our lives. We had some serious problems. I would need heart surgery. They would need to wait until I was almost three years old, but eventually I had open heart surgery.

My parents say I'm almost normal, but I'm not sure that my wife would agree!!

We are talking about loving as Christ loved this morning, and I believe we all need something more than surgery this morning. We need a spiritual heart transplant. We need the heart of Jesus Christ.

We are looking at what love is. And we cannot know love unless we know Christ and God for *God is love. God so loved the world that he gave...* (John 3:16). Love is not like a doormat or a dictator, but is a heroic self-sacrificing act that always puts others first. Husbands are told to

love their wives “*as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her*” (Ephesians 5:25). Self-sacrifice is the ultimate definition of love.

Five Minutes to Live

Someone has said that if we discovered that we had only five minutes left to say all we wanted to say, every telephone booth would be occupied by people calling other people to stammer that they loved them. Selfless love is our priority.

The Greatest Thing in the World

When Paul named the greatest things in this world and the next, he said, “the greatest of these is love.” Love is the greatest thing. It is that one thing that makes us most like God. “God is love.” To love is to be like God.

Holy Scripture

1 Corinthians 13:1-13, “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³ If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

⁴ Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

⁸ Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰ but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. ¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. ¹² For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

¹³ So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”

This is the Word of the Lord.

Love is not an option:

- Husbands are to love their wives.
- Wives are to love their husbands.
- Believers are to love God.
- Believers are to love their enemies.
- Believers are to love their neighbors.
- Believers are to love one another.

Love is About Growing in Christ

Paul is focusing specifically on Christians as they function in the Body of Christ. 1 Cor. 12-13 are all about spiritual gifts, and our function in the Body of Christ. And so love is the goal of our Christian growth. Paul presents love as it relates to growing and changing in Christ.

WHAT LOVE IS...

I. Love is **patient**, Love gives people **time** to grow.

Love's Timetable

Wouldn't it be wonderful if God changed our character into Christlikeness overnight? Wow! That would be amazing. But He has chosen to do it over time.

The context of 1 Corinthians 12 and 13 is spiritual gifts and growing to be like Christ. That takes time doesn't it.

It's no surprise that Paul's first Love is patient. Have you ever prayed for patience? It means to "suffer long." It has the idea of having a "long fuse" or to be "long-tempered." It is the exact opposite of our expression "short-fused."

If you're patient, you're slow to anger, you endure personal wrongs with gentleness, without retaliation. You bear with others' imperfections, faults, and differences. You give them time to change, room to make mistakes without coming down hard on them.

Ability to be Inconvenienced

John MacArthur said it this way: "Love's patience is the ability to be **inconvenienced** or **taken advantage of** by a person over and over again and yet not be upset or angry."¹

How do you act when you've been inconvenienced or wronged? We like to say we need to have "thick skin and a big heart." That's patience. Love is big-hearted, giving people room to grow and change.

Patience Waits

Patience waits for a godly outcome. Patience is how love *reacts* in order to bring peace of Christ to a negative situation. When you don't get what you want, how do you react? A lack of patience will turn your home into a war zone. Patience waits and refuses to give in to sinful anger.

A Refusal to Retaliate

Chrysostom, the early church Father, said, "It is a word which is used of the man who is wronged and who has it easily in his power to avenge himself but will never do it." Patience never retaliates.²

Understand that patience is not just "white-knuckling" your emotions in order to hold back the rage or storm that really wants to come out. No, patience is joyfully submitting to Christ for the good of another person. Jesus submitted to death on a cross, so we are to joyfully submit to Christ knowing the outcome will be good.

¹ MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1984). *1 Corinthians* (p. 338). Chicago: Moody Press.

² Ibid.

Patience is Not Indifference

One must be careful to distinguish patience from indifference. Patience bears with an offense, but indifference ignores it altogether. When an offense takes place that is harmful or destructive to oneself or to others, it must not be entirely overlooked. Paul, for instance, loved the Corinthians. He patiently bore with them and worked with them slowly and carefully to edify them and honor Christ.³

The Supreme Example

The supreme example of patience, of course, is God Himself. “God is love” (1 Jn. 4:8). It is God’s patient love that prevents the world from being destroyed. It is His patience and long-suffering that allows time for men to be saved (2 Pet. 3:9).⁴

Consider our Lord as an example of perfect patience. While the Lord Jesus Christ was hanging on the cross, after He had endured all that He had endured, He said this about His killers: “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34a). Christ could have cursed his killers on the cross, but instead he blessed them when they hurt Him. He asked His Father not to hold this against them.

Exhaust the Patience of God?

Robert Ingersoll, the well-known atheist of the last century, often would stop in the middle of his lectures against God and say, “I’ll give God five minutes to strike me dead for the things I’ve said.” He then used the fact that he was not struck dead as proof that God did not exist. Theodore Parker said of Ingersoll’s claim, “And did the gentleman think he could exhaust the patience of the eternal God in five minutes?”⁵

II. Love is **kind**, Love **helps** people grow.

Giving Till it Hurts

On the positive side, Christian love is **kind** (verse 4). Someone described kindness as “giving until it hurts.” Growing in Christ is a lot of work. No one can do it alone. That’s why we need to be kind and serve our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

Love has no clock. It’s not just 9-5. It’s 24-7. You have to help your brothers and sisters at 1 in the afternoon and sometimes 1 in the morning.

Paul reminds us of this Christlike attribute of kindness, because we are so prone to be neglectful of others.

Definition: To Be Useful

The word translated “kindness” here means “to be **useful** or profitable, to furnish what is needed.” **Love puts the needs of others first.** To be kind is to make life easier for the other person and to serve them from your heart. It is the same word that Jesus uses when he says, “My yoke is EASY [same Greek word for kind] and my burden is light.” Kindness, like Jesus,

³ Pratt, R. L., Jr. (2000). *I & II Corinthians* (Vol. 7, p. 230). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 338.

⁵ *Ibid.*

gets into the harness of life's problems with the other person and does all they can to lift those burdens. That's kindness.

Kindness takes many forms. In general, it is soft and gentle. Occasionally, however, kindness must take the form of a careful rebuke designed to bring about a good result.⁶

WHAT LOVE IS NOT...

III. Love is not **jealous**, Love isn't **jealous** over others' spiritual gifts/positions.

No Jealousy Over Gifts / Positions

A person growing in Christ isn't going to be jealous of other people's spiritual gifts. The word means to eagerly desire, and it is used both positively and negatively in the Bible.

Positively, it's good to be jealous for God's glory and the good of others, but Paul is using it negatively. The jealous person wants what others have, he wants things for himself. He is too selfish to applaud others' success; he desires to have all the attention.

We have the temptation to flaunt our spiritual gifts and be jealous and possessive over ministries.

Jealous Over Ministries in the Church

We are prone to be possessive and jealous. I might lead music. Someone else has a gift in music. It's easy to get jealous when I can't use my gift every Sunday. Love is such that it is not jealous of other's gifts getting more attention or taking our place or position in the church.

The Danger of the Insulated Church

Listen, we are all expendable. We should want others to grow in their gifts. The danger for our church is that we would become insulated.

There is a temptation to become so jealous over my ministry that I never let anyone else function as I function in the Body of Christ.

This could apply to teaching a class. If you are the only one that teaches a class, you should start training an assistant. Don't be jealous or possessive. Let someone else teach. Train someone else to do your job in the Body of Christ.

This kind of jealous protectiveness will slowly kill a local church body. I've seen it happen. Jesus says, "I will build my church." And he will. But there are plenty of jealous church members who are trying to kill the church by being overly protective.

Jealousy is Destructive and Dangerous

Jealousy is defined as "A strong feeling of possessiveness, often caused by the possibility that something which belongs, or ought to belong, to one is about to be taken away."⁷ When someone is addicted to their own importance, they become jealous, and that's dangerous.

- Jealousy is so powerful that it led **Joseph's 11 brothers** to sell him into slavery and leave him for dead.

⁶ Pratt, *ibid.*

⁷ Manser, M. H. (2009). *Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies*. London: Martin Manser.

- Jealousy led **King Saul** to hunt down and try to kill David over and over again. Saul had a thirst to protect his own position and his own gifts.

Jealousy is destructive. James says that jealousy is often the source of quarrels and conflicts (James 4:2). **James 3:16**, “where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.”

In the family, a husband might be jealous for respect, or to be treated a certain way. A person who is jealous is easily insulted. They are always wanting to be treated better. “Why can’t you treat me like... so and so treats her husband?” Or the wife says, “Why can’t you treat me like this man treats his wife?” Why can’t you be this or do this or be that?

Jealousy wants “what’s mine”

Love is not jealous for “my ...rights, things, opinions, ideas, way, etc. at all cost” in the Body of Christ. Love puts others first and zealously wants them to succeed. Indeed we ought to be happy and eager to sacrifice ourselves so that others might succeed! We ought not to think of ourselves but of others!

The Cup of Jealousy Has No Bottom

The cup of jealousy has no bottom. It can never be satisfied. If you have a covetous, envious heart, then you need to rest in Christ. Only Christ can satisfy your needs.

Only when you know Christ can you be jealous in a good way. We need to be jealous for the glory of God and jealous for the good of others. Godly ambition is fine, but selfish ambition is destructive.

Sinful jealousy is nothing more than selfishness. But to be jealous for God’s glory and for another’s good is a virtue. Listen we are not important. Let’s not be protective of our glory and usefulness and position. Let’s help others serve. Let’s glory in God, not in our own giftedness.

IV. Love is not boastful or arrogant, Love doesn’t boast at one’s own growth or gifts or think one is more important.

Not a Windbag!

Love is not boastful. The word for boastful (*perpereuetai*) could be translated to “be a wind-bag”⁸ or to “**parade** oneself” through your words.

I kind of think of the Macy’s day parade. A braggart is like one of those gigantic inflated balloons. Sometimes we **inflate** our own worth with boastful words. What windbags we can be.

Sometimes, we confuse spiritual **growth** with spiritual **pride**. There are those Christians who think they are the standard, and they boast.

As struggling Christians, we have the potential to become “wind-bags” of our own spiritual greatness. We boast too highly of ourselves; we **inflate** our own value.

They make themselves the gurus. If you are a spiritual leader, beware of being a spiritual windbag!

⁸ Riddlebarger, Kim (2013-07-02). First Corinthians (The Lectio Continua Expository Commentary on the New Testament) (Kindle Locations 5452-5453). Tolle Lege Press. Kindle Edition.

Dr. Jeff Davis, Retired Air Force Major

One of the godliest men that I know is one of the humblest. He has many attainments – he’s a graduate of the FBI Academy; a retired Air Force major; and has an earned doctorate in leadership. I got to spend some time with him last month, and as I got up early the next morning I snuck into a corner his house where I walked in on him shining my shoes. I watched him as he literally spit shined my shoes. No shoes of mine ever looked so good.

My friend Jeff never speaks of his accomplishments. He just serves in the shadows and boasts of others accomplishments.

Meaning of “Boast”

To be **arrogant** is to be puffed up and self-focused. It speaks of someone who has a “big head.” Love doesn’t get its head swelled, it focuses on the needs of others. Among Christians, the worst pride is *spiritual* pride. Wesley says that if we are possessed by love, we are “*our souls are humbled to the dust*”!

We all have “wind bag” attitudes from time to time. “I’ve got it all figured out.” Love never says that. Love does not brag or boast.

Have you ever been in a difficult discussion with someone, and when you were in a corner, you began to paint yourself as the most spiritual person on the planet? You say things like: “I would never do that!” That is not love. That is boasting.

Love is not Arrogant

Boasting comes from an attitude of *superiority* over others; It is usually combined with a feeling of contempt or disregard for another. This is why Paul continues and says, “love is not arrogant.”

This word “arrogant” (Gr. *phusioo*) means to inflate, blow or puff up. In the N.T. it is used figuratively of pride or self-conceit. This could be translated as follows. “Love does not put on airs.” “Love does not cherish inflated ideas of its own importance.”

A Low View of Oneself

To be like Christ in His love, means you have a very low view of yourself. To love means not to overvalue yourself by concentrating on your spiritual growth, your respect and position, your abilities and gifts.

What Makes You Special?

1 Corinthians 4:6-7, “none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another. ⁷For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?”

We may want to boast in men or in systems of theology. We ought not exalt the hammer, but exalt the architect!

As Paul says, **1 Cor. 3:3-7**, “For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?⁴ For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not being merely human?⁵ What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each.⁶ I planted, Apollos

watered, but God gave the growth. ⁷ So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.”

We are All Expendable

We are all expendable. We should not boast or be arrogant. Everything we have is a gift. Let's not have an inflated view of our gifts or usefulness to the Body of Christ. Paul says love is not “puffed up” like that (**verse 5**).

You realize everything you have is a gift from God. “To whom much is given much will be required.” To love means you realize you are no better than any other sinner saved by grace. Any gift or position is from God, so we should not take glory for ourselves, but give glory to God!

V. Love is not rude, Love act rude or unfittingly, but tries to lovingly “fit” with the rest the growing Body of Christ.

Love Does Not Needlessly Offend

The word “rude” means to act unbecomingly, and unfittingly— to act with disdain for someone else, even to the point of disgracing or embarrassing someone.

Love is not rude, but works hard at always saying or doing the appropriate or fitting thing. Love is considerate of other people and is considerate of others at all times.

Body Life

No member of the body can have disdain for another member. “By this shall all people know you are my disciples, by your love, one for another” (Jn. 13:35).

We are to **accommodate** and be courteous to one another as **Eph. 4:15-17** says, “we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”

Every Member Matters

In the Body of Christ, every member matters. There is no place to offend needlessly. Love has good manners. It is courteous, polite, sensitive to the feelings of others and always uses tact. The reason we are not courteous, of course, is that we are thinking only of ourselves and not of others.

A Husband Lacking Manners

I read of a husband who was generally lacking in manners. He never opened the car door for his wife. “She doesn't have two broken arms,” he would say. After many years of marriage, his wife died. At the funeral, as the pallbearers brought her casket out to the hearse, the husband was standing by the car door. The funeral director, who knew the husband by name, called out to him and said, “Open the door for her, will you?” He reached for the car door and then, for one second, froze. He realized that he had never opened the door for her in life; now, in her death, it would be the first, last, and only time. A lifetime of regret came crashing down around him. Love is not rude.

We Grow at Different Rates

As we grow in Christ, sometimes people grow at different rates. Don't be rude to people who don't have the same standards or rate of growth as you do. Don't be rude or scolding because people are not where you are at. Be polite. Use words in loving, strategic ways that will edify each other in love. Rudeness never helped anyone grow in Christ.

VI. Love is not **selfish**, Love lays aside "my rights" for the good of the Body.

Paul says, Love does not insist on her own way. This has the idea of laying aside my importance and my rights for the good of others.

Selfishness is destructive, because we are a Body and we need each other. If I am a hand and I stick something in my heart, that is destructive.

Selfishness (putting my needs above others) destroys relationships because we become incapable of seeing others' needs and desire. My consuming desire to fulfill my every need will always lead to my own self-destruction. I need relationships in the Body of Christ to grow.

Two Tombstones

Selfishness never helped anyone grow in Christ either! I understand that the inscription on a tombstone in a small English village reads,

*Here lies a miser who lived for himself,
and cared for nothing but gathering wealth.
Now where he is or how fares,
nobody knows and nobody cares.*

In contrast, a plain tombstone in the courtyard at St. Paul's Cathedral in London reads:

*Sacred to the memory of General Charles George Gordon,
who at all times and everywhere gave his strength to the weak,
his substance to the poor, his sympathy to the suffering,
his heart to God.⁹*

It's Not About You!

If you are going to grow in Christ, you must realize that the Christian life is not about you! **It's all about Jesus.** It's about the community of saints, where Jesus, not you or me, is head. Jesus is our Head. Jesus is our King of kings and Lord of lords.

Growing in the Body of Christ means we need to relinquish the idea of ourselves being at the center. There are many members in the Body of Christ.

1 Cor. 12:14-20, "For the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵ If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? ¹⁸ But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he

⁹ MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1984). *1 Corinthians* (p. 344). Chicago: Moody Press.

chose. ¹⁹ If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.”

It’s not like we’re one big eyeball rolling down the road. Maybe you are a hand. It’s not like we’re one gigantic hand creeping down the street. You get the idea. That’s grotesque. That’s how ugly selfishness is.

You Can’t Do it Alone

We can’t seek our own. We need to remember we are part of a great big Body of Christ where there are many different Body parts that ought to fit together in harmony.

You can’t grow in Christ on your own. You need the whole Body.

Transition: We’ll close with number 7.

VII. Love is not irritable, Love is not put off by the hang ups and quirks of others as they grow.

We All Have Hang-ups

Does anyone here not have hang-ups and quirks? Love realizes that each of us is unique. A foot is different from a lung. But both are needed. Because we are all so different, we can all seem really quirky to each other.

But love realizes that God makes each of us unique, and we don’t need to be irritable with each other.

If we get our focus off of Jesus our Head, we can become irritable. The idea here is that love is not easily injured or offended. Psalm 119:165 (KJV) —“ Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them.”

Touchiness

Are you touchy or defensive? That is the opposite of Christlike love. There is a difference between sensitivity and touchiness. It’s important to be sensitive to the needs of others, but touchiness is self-centered and from the pit. This irritability can come across in having a pity party for yourself, or just being irritated with another person.

Love is not Moody or Touchy

Love is not touchy, or moody. Love is not hypersensitive or easily hurt. Love is not sharpened to wrath or aroused to anger. The battle cry of one who is easily irritated is-“Don’t you get it?! **I am the one that matters.**” This person cares for no one but self. This person is upset by anything that is said or done that infringes on their agenda, forces a schedule change, or puts a bad light on their character. Excuses for anger:

- It’s just a weakness.
- It’s just letting off steam.
- It’s just the way I am.
- It’s their fault. I’m the victim.
- It’s the only way I can get results.
- They pushed me over the line.
- I was born this way. I inherited it.

Do others have to “walk softly” around you for fear of an explosion?

Conclusion

We’ll get to 7 more attributes of love next week. But let me remind you that this love is supernatural. You cannot produce this on your own. This is God-sized love.

The love of God must melt down the unlovely heart in man, and beget in each of us the new creation – a new person who is patient and humble and gentle and unselfish. And there is no other way to get it. There is no mystery about it. We love others, we love everybody, we love our enemies, and more than anything else, *we love our God, because He first loved us.*¹⁰

The Greatest of These is Love

When all the great eternal things are lined up side by side in eternity, whether it be faith or hope or love, God says the greatest of these is LOVE. That’s why Paul says in the very next verse (14:1), “Pursue love.” When we pursue love, we are growth in Christlike character.

¹⁰ Drummond, Henry (2011-01-01). The Greatest Thing in the World, Experience the Enduring Power of Love (pp. 16-17). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.