

July 17, 2011

Love is not Boastful or Arrogant

1 Corinthians 13:4

BI: No matter how gifted we may be, a boastful or arrogant attitude will nullify the impact of our ministry.

Who would have thought that this passage which so many of us profess to know so well, would have packed the punch that it has to our souls. I can hardly remember a time when I studied a passage of Scripture that proved so convicting, encouraging, and empowering as the one that we have been studying now these three weeks.

We have been learning about what it means to love. We have learned that to love is not so much a feeling as it is an action. To love is to give. "To love is to give whatever I have that you need because God wants me to." This has been an especially powerful and encouraging text because through it the Lord is teaching us that everyone in the body of Christ - without exception - has the capacity to make a significant impact upon the church and the world even if we have not been given one of the more spectacular gifts, and even if we're not even sure what our spiritual gift is. The power is not so much in the spiritual gift as it is in the biblical love by which we minister to one another. The power of effective ministry is the power of biblical love.

Do you want to know how to make a powerful impact on your marriage for the glory of God? Learn how to love. Do you want to really influence your children to serve and follow Christ? Learn how to love. Do you want to become effective at evangelism and community ministry? Learn how to love. The world has put forth many strategies and theories about how to live a life of significance that makes a mark on the world. But God's way is the "more excellent way." It is the way of biblical love.

So far what we have learned about biblical love is that love is Patient (i.e. "long-suffering"). A loving person does not permit himself to become easily frustrated. Frankly, this is the part that has hit me hardest as it has exposed how quickly I become irritated at others. Pray for me on this, because this is an area where your pastor needs to grow and change.

Second, we learned that love is kind. A loving person actively moves into the life of another for the purpose of blessing, giving, and meeting needs. In fact, true biblical love has the uncanny ability to respond to animosity with generosity. Third, we learned that love is not jealous. A loving person is content with what God has given her and even believes she has an overflow of relationships and resources by which to bless other people regardless of how rich or poor she may be.

Today I want to lead us into an examination of the 4th and 5th facets of this spiritual diamond called love. So let's jump right in.

IV. Love does not Brag

1. Now if you haven't been hit yet by this study, get ready because I don't think a single person should be able to make it out of here this morning without an acute aching of soul under a weight conviction and longing for the significant change.

2. The word for "brag" here means to boast. Alexander Strauch writes a person who frequently brags has "a sinful preoccupation with himself. Braggarts crave attention. They want others to praise their abilities, knowledge, success, and even their suffering for God. Because they desire recognition, they speak too highly and too much of themselves, although they may have nothing significant to say" (*Leading with Love*, p. 51).

3. I'm sure you've met this person. In fact, I'm confident you've met this person in church. He is the one who loves to tell you about the places he's been, the people he has met, and the accomplishments he has achieved. Or she is the woman who thinks her kids are the brightest, most talented and awe-inspiring children on planet earth... And probably some other planets too. These kids make straight A's, they play multiple instruments, they can leap tall buildings in a single bound and on occasion they have even been known to fly!

4. You come away from conversations with such people thinking, "Oh brother. I hope I don't have to talk with that person again anytime soon. Why? Because boasting is incompatible with loving. You know what boasting is? Boasting is an attempt to extract admiration from another person against their will. That's not love. That's lust! Lust says, give me admiration! Say that I'm important! Admire me! Stand in awe of me! Worship me! That's not love. To love is to give for the benefit of another person. Boasting doesn't help anyone. It doesn't build up anyone. That's why it is often called "empty boasting."

5. Graham Scroggie writes of empty boasting, "There is no other kind of boasting. The very nature and essence of a boast is emptiness. Boasting is always an advertisement of poverty." (Ibid).

6. Listen, people of God (like you and me) need to learn that nothing can be more inglorious than talking about your own glory. Because the reality is, we have none! Any glory that we have belongs to Christ. So in reality, boasting is the equivalent of self-enthronement in the place of God. Boasters are glory thieves. We rob God of the glory due to Him when we attempt to take it for ourselves.

7. Beloved, this is such an important truth to understand as we seek to combat the unlove that we discover in our hearts. The fact is, God created us to glorify Him. We were made for His glory. We exist to proclaim the excellencies of His glory. But sin; sin makes us glory thieves. I have been tremendously helped by Paul Tripp on this issue. In his book *Instruments in the Redeemers Hands* he writes:

There is probably not a day when we do not plot to steal glory that rightfully belongs to the Lord. When we compete with one another for glory, we fail to experience the unity that can only be found when we join together to live for him.

At the bottom of a broken marriage, a shattered family, or a forsaken friendship you will always find stolen glory. We crave glory that does not belong to us, and

we step on one another to get it. Rather than glorifying God by using the things he has given us to love other people, we use people to get the glory we love. Sin causes us to steal the story and rewrite it with ourselves as the lead, and with our lives at center stage...

We do not suffer well, because suffering interferes with our glory. We do not find relationships easy, because others compete with us for glory. We do not serve well, because in our quest for glory, we want to be served (p. 34-35).

8. You see, this is why we find it difficult to love God and other people as we should. Sin has caused a significant change in our hearts. We who were created to glorify God, now live to glorify self. And we don't have to look very far to see clear evidence that this is true.

9. As I have said, you have already met the boaster. He is the man who glories in his past accomplishments. He is the child who glories in how fast he can run or swim. She is the woman who wants you to admire her home, her looks, or her children. She is a Sunday School teacher. He's a deacon, or perhaps an elder, and at times (when I am honest with myself) he is me.

10. Frankly, some of us are pretty slick when it comes to boasting. Brent and I were talking about this on the way to lunch this week and he introduced me to a kind of boasting that I had really never considered before. It's called the "humble boast." What is a humble boast? It's when you try to demonstrate how humble and godly you are by sharing about a time when you really blew it and how God graciously brought you to repentance. The idea is this: to show how great a *saint* you are by openly confessing what a *sinner* you are.

11. Jeremiah was right. "The heart is more deceitful than all else and desperately sick. Who can understand it? (Jer. 17:9). And Jesus' warning to the disciples seems especially appropriate here. "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven" (Mat. 6:1).

12. Now please don't misunderstand. I am not saying that we shouldn't confess sin to one another. There needs to be more of that, not less! I'm simply saying that we need to have our radar up on our own motives all the time. Why do we say the things that we say? Is it to glorify God and help others grow and change? Or is it simply to extract admiration from others against their will. And by the way, that usually doesn't work. When we try to extract admiration from people, the response is usually not admiration but mild revulsion instead. Nobody likes a braggart. The reality is, however, that all of us are tempted to do it!

13. Consider the apostle Paul. God gave him the unique privilege of experiencing divine revelations of Almighty God Himself. He apparently was caught up into the third heaven and heard things from God that he was forbidden to repeat? You think Paul was tempted to brag about his experience? Apparently God thought so, because Paul says God gave him a "messenger of Satan to torment him to keep him from exalting himself" (2 Cor. 12:7).

14. No one in this room should think that he isn't tempted to brag. We all are. From time to time every one of us struggles with this kind of unlove. We are all hard-wired to exalt self. So here are a few pertinent, guiding Scriptures to consider.

15. Proverbs 27:2 says, "Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger and not your own lips." We should meditate on this verse and have it ready on our hearts and on our tongues when we find ourselves tempted to boast.

16. Here's another one. Paul writes to the believers in Rome, "I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment" (Rom. 12:3).

17. Now we need to be careful here. Paul is NOT saying that we should never talk about ourselves or allow others the opportunity to ask about our needs, interest, and desires. For example, Paul and Barnabas (Acts 14-15) needed to come back to their home church and give a report about what God had done through their ministry. It's important to talk about what God is doing in us and through us for His glory. We just need to make sure that we are doing it for the glory of God and the good of others when we do.

18. We need to remember Paul's own example when he said, "But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal. 6:14).

19. Oh beloved. Let's not be boastful people. Making an impact on the world for God will never come by exalting ourselves. If God wants to exalt us He will do it at the proper time, in the proper manner, and probably by the lips of someone other than ourselves.

20. Love does not boast. But let's take a few minutes to look at one more facet of this spiritual diamond called love.

II. Love is not Arrogant:

1. Paul says, "love is not arrogant." you can see why Paul put this term right after boasting. The word "arrogant" literally mean "puffed up", inflated, or full of hot air. Instead of being full of love, the arrogant man is full of himself.

2. This was a significant problem in the church of Corinth. Much of the conflict in that church was owing to a spirit of arrogance that prevailed among them. Apparently some were acting as if they were the source of their own talent, gifts, and abilities. You know; "self made men."

3. Turn with me to 1 Cor 4. Let's read verses 6-7.

4. Do you see the term "puffed up" in verse 7. That's our word. It's arrogance. These men and women were so full of themselves that they were not willing to be governed by Scripture even when someone was correcting them with the truth.
5. Paul asks then three questions that we need to ask ourselves whenever we begin feeling a little arrogant. He writes (v.8) "Who regards you as superior?" In other words, "who made you different from anyone else?" You think you're in a class all by yourself, that no one else is as gifted, intelligent, or talented as you!
6. This is the heart of arrogance. But the person who is focused on loving other people for the glory of God will not let himself be ruled by such an attitude.
7. Notice the second questions (v.7), "What do you have that you did not receive?" The obvious answer is "nothing." James 1:17 says, "Every good and perfect gift comes from above coming down from the father of lights." But an arrogant person does not think this way. He doesn't think of himself in terms of being a beneficiary of the talents, gifts and abilities he has. He thinks he produced them in himself, by his own effort. Or at least that's how he acts.
8. The third question comes next (v.7), "If you did receive it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?" There's that word "boast" again. They boasted about themselves because they were full of themselves and arrogant.
9. I realize these truths cut us as with a sharp knife. But isn't that is what the word of God is for? As the author of Hebrews puts it, "The word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb. 4:12).
10. The amazing thing to me is that God still desires to use the likes of us to magnify His glory. He is at work in our lives to change us into the image of Christ.
11. Consider this: Jesus lived to glorify His father. Unlike us, He really is God and worthy of the worship of every human being who came in contact with Him when He was on earth. But the stunning thing is that he never demanded or manipulated people into glorifying Him. He never sought to extract admiration from people against their will.
12. Jesus was the living example of what it means to love. And even though He really was God, His was a love that did not boast and was never arrogant. Concerning Him, John MacArthur writes:

Jesus was God incarnate, yet he never exalted Himself in any way. "Although He existed in the form of God, [He] did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond servant, and... being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself" (Phil. 2:6-8). Jesus, who had everything to boast of, never boasted. In total contrast, we who have nothing to

boast of are prone to boast. Only the love that comes from Jesus Christ can save us from flaunting our knowledge, our abilities, our gifts, or our accomplishments, real or imagined” (from MacArthur NT Commentary, *1 Corinthians*, p. 342).

13. Well, that leaves us with plenty to pray about and work on this week, doesn't it. How is God calling you to change because of these truths? What specific things can you do to apply these truths to your life. What element of false worship or obstacle to pure worship needs to be put off? How do our minds need to be renewed? What needs to be put on in likeness to Jesus?

14. As we wrestle with these things this week, let's be sure to remember that No matter how gifted we may be, a boastful or arrogant attitude will nullify the impact of our ministry. May we be diligent to learn to love as Christ loves.