

# Holy Love

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I invite you to take your Bibles and turn with me to the book of 1 Corinthians, 1 Corinthians chapter 13, and today we come now to verse 6. We're making lots of progress now and we come to verse 6 and I want us to look at the next aspect, the next virtue of what true love is. We are in a verse by verse study of the book of 1 Corinthians, and as we have come to this chapter on love, we have slowed down to give more careful consideration to each aspect of what genuine love is and it would be very difficult for us to find a more practical and a more relevant passage of Scripture for us to address. The priority of love in our spiritual lives cannot be overstated, as the greatest commandment is that we love God with all of our being, and the second is like it, that we love our neighbor as our self. He'll go on to tell us in this chapter that faith, hope, and love are the greatest, but the greatest of these is actually love and so the time will come in eternity when even faith and hope will give way and no longer be because we'll be in the immediate presence of God. There'll be no faith and no hope then for it will all be realized. But even then, love will continue to grow and deepen and enlarge within our hearts and souls throughout all eternity and we'll have an even greater love for God and an even greater love for one another. And so whenever Paul seeks to address really the very essence of true spirituality, he is always in one way or another addressing this subject of love. I want to say again, this is not peripheral. This is primary. This is not subsidiary. This is at the very heart and soul of true godliness in what the Lord desires to do in our lives.

And so I want us to look now at the beginning of verse 6. We have looked at verses 4 through 5 to this point, each of these individual aspects of love, and now we want to look at the beginning of verse 6. The title of this message is "Holy Love." Notice how verse 6 begins. "Love does not rejoice in unrighteousness." In any study of the attributes of God, we understand that the holiness of God is the very essence of who he is. The angels in heaven are crying out this morning, "Holy, holy, holy." Every attribute of God is marked by his holiness. God's truth is holy truth. God's power is holy power. His wrath is holy wrath. And his love is holy love. Every part of God's being is marked by his holiness. His Son is his holy Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. God's Spirit is the Holy Spirit. God's word is the Holy word. We could say that the sum and the substance, the beginning and the end, and everything in between regarding the character, the being, the essence of God is his holiness therefore, when his love is lived out in our lives, it is always a holy love. True love is holy love. It is a love that is morally pure. It is blameless. It is flawless. True love

is unmingled with selfishness and self-centeredness and ego. True love loves all that is holy and only that which is holy. True love rejoices in all that is good and only in that which is good.

Holy love can unfortunately become contaminated by the flesh and corrupted by sin and when this occurs true love, holy love becomes introverted within us and it becomes turned upside down, and when holy love within us becomes unholy, everything becomes backwards. With unholy love, a person strangely actually loves what is unholy. When holy love becomes contaminated and corrupted, it actually rejoices in unrighteousness. Such a person loves the very opposite of what he or she should love. In such a heart, everything is reversed. Everything is turned upside down. Everything is turned around. And a person, rather than loving what they should love, they are either apathetic or repulsed by what they should love and what they should reject, they find themselves drawn to. This is hard to imagine and yet this is what happens in our own hearts and lives when we walk according to the flesh, we find ourselves rejoicing in that which we should not rejoice in and we find ourselves apathetic towards that which should thrill and enthuse our hearts, and the reason is, is because we have become carnal and we are walking according to the flesh and we are not walking according to the Spirit. We find ourselves loving what we should hate and we find ourselves hating what we should love and our entire spiritual life is turned on its head upside down.

This is precisely where the church at Corinth found itself. It was hating what it should love, it was loving what it should hate, and that is why Paul has to say in this text love does not rejoice in unrighteousness, and the reason was is because that is exactly what they were doing, they were rejoicing in unrighteousness. And the premier example of this is found in 1 Corinthians chapter 5 and in verses 1 and 2, when they actually were taking sick pleasure in sin that was being manifested in their membership, and rather than mourning and grieving over this sin, they actually were tantalized by it, and the entire reason is because they were carnal, they were fleshly, they were walking, not according to the Spirit.

So as we look at this descriptive of love at the beginning of verse 6, "love does not rejoice in unrighteousness," I want you to consider this with me now under three headings and the first is the requirement. As Paul states this, he is setting forth the spiritual requirement for everyone who is walking according to the Spirit. Love does not rejoice in unrighteousness. The word "not" signals that this is the last of eight virtues of love that begin with the negative "not." This is the last of those and he says, love does not. There are things that love does not do and love does not rejoice in unrighteousness. This word "rejoice" means to be happy or to be glad over something, to take pleasure in, to delight in or to celebrate over. And he says, true Christian love does not find pleasure in unrighteousness. The ESV uses the word "wrongdoing." The NIV, the word "evil." The King James, the word "iniquity." It is literally the word unrighteousness. It is the word for righteousness with a negative prefix, a-, which negates the meaning and makes it the very opposite.

And so love does not rejoice in unrighteousness and this could be taken in one of two ways, it does not rejoice in unrighteousness in my own life or it does not rejoice in unrighteousness in the lives of others. And given the context here, which is the body of Christ, I think it becomes very clear that what he is saying is that love does not rejoice in iniquity or wrongdoing or evil that is found in the life of someone else. Now what Paul is saying is love finds no pleasure in someone else's failure. Love finds no pleasure in someone else falling into sin. Love does not rejoice in the faults of another; regardless of what that person may have ever done to you or to me, we would never rejoice if they were to fall into sin. Love is not entertained by the wrongdoings of others. Love never laughs at the sins committed by another person. And the reason for this, as we've already said, is that true love is holy love and holy love can never rejoice at that which is unholy. Holy love can never rejoice at that which is unholy. To rejoice in unrighteousness in another person is in reality to demean them. It is to mock them. It is a form of hating them. I cannot truly love another person and rejoice in their self-destruction by sin, such as a total contradiction in terms and not what true love is.

Now, we rejoice, we are tempted to rejoice in the unrighteousness of another person in three different ways. One, we may have a morbid interest in their sin. We may find the sin of another person to be scintillating, to be interesting, to be stimulating. Unholy love wants to know all the grisly details of another person's failures. It is interested in the gory specifics of what sin has done in another person's life. But true love has no morbid interest in their self-destruction.

Why would someone be tempted to rejoice in the unrighteousness of another and want more information and want more detail? Well, there are many different reasons that could be given. One, because their failure makes us feel better about ourselves. By their being brought down, it makes me feel brought up. And of course, nothing could be further from the truth because we're only comparing ourselves with someone else and at that point, someone who has fallen into the gutter rather than comparing ourselves to the perfect holiness of Jesus Christ. And there are other reasons, because their failure gives us, we feel, a license perhaps to commit the same sin. They did it, so it must be all right for me to enter into it. Or because their fall helps us justify our own wrongdoings because their fall is entertaining to us. It is intriguing to us. Or because our flesh loves to learn little tidbits of gossip, because we feel self-righteous about not having committed the same sin, or because it will give me an advantage over that person who has committed that sin. They now, in some ways, are further behind me in line of spirituality, and it promotes me by their demise.

Now the flesh comes up with all kinds of sick carnal excuses and reasons whether they are verbalized or not regarding why we would be tempted to rejoice in their unrighteousness. Now there's a second reason that we would be tempted to rejoice in their unrighteousness, so that we could pass on this knowledge of their sin to others. It makes us feel more important about ourselves that we now have this knowledge about their unrighteousness and we become the broker of this knowledge and we become the conduit of this knowledge that by which we make others aware of their sin. And so therefore, when we are in this middle position, there is a sense of control that we now have by

having this knowledge and there is a sense in which we can rejoice in their unrighteousness. But true love does not want to expose the sin of others. True love wants to cover it up. Granted, there are times when we must tell another person about yet another person's sin, they may in some way be involved or affected, there may be consequences that come to them, or it may involve a discipline issue. Granted, there are times, but on the whole, we should be more concerned about covering up the unrighteousness of someone else, not further exposing it. When Noah's sons saw the nakedness of their own father because of love for their father, they covered up his nakedness. They did not attract others to come in and observe this. No. Holy love desires to cover up the sin of others. It is unholy love, which is not love at all, it is love in name only, unholy love gossips and slanders and derives a sick pleasure in telling someone else and so therefore rejoices in being able to pass on that which they have no business doing.

But third, there is yet another way in which we rejoice in unrighteousness, and it is when we fail to be grieved over the sin of others. And this was the sad reality in Corinth. They failed to be brokenhearted over the sin of another brother in their midst, and by their failure to mourn over the sin of another, that they were in reality experiencing a passive rejoicing in that sin. 1 Corinthians 5, verses 1 and 2 reads, "It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife." That would refer to a stepmother. It says, Paul writes, "You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst," and then in verse 6 he says, "Your boasting is not good." They did not mourn over this sin in their midst and to the contrary, they actually boasted in it, perhaps boasted in their tolerance, perhaps boasted in how unaffected they are by the sin of someone else around them, boasting contrary to what Paul will say later in this very letter that bad company corrupts good morals, and they felt that they could rub shoulders with people involved in all kinds of gross indulgent sin and that it would have no effect upon their spiritual lives. They boasted in their own self autonomy that they could be unscathed by associating with other such loathsome sinful individuals.

They failed to grieve over this man's sin and the truth is that if we truly love someone and they fall into sin, we will never rejoice. We will do the opposite. We will be shattered for them. We will be broken. We will be grieved for them because of their unrighteousness. Such grief over sin is an expression of true love for that person. Consider the heart of a mother whose son or daughter has fallen into sin and how that shatters and breaks the heart of a mother to discover that one of her children has become ensnared and entangled in sin. Such a mother would never rejoice that her own child has been now entrapped in sin but would be weeping and grieving over this tragedy that has come upon the one whom she so deeply loves. Even so it is with us in the family of God between brothers and sisters in Christ and when we learn that one has fallen into sin. Now there should never be a smug self-righteousness within any of our hearts, but instead we should weep with those who weep and feel something of the hurt and the harm that has come to this person's life.

Isaiah the prophet felt the very same way when he saw the sins of God's people around him. In Isaiah 22 and verse 4, Isaiah says, "Therefore I say, turn your eyes away from me, let me weep bitterly. Do not try to comfort me." Isaiah says, "Leave me alone. I must weep. I must cry. Do not come and put your arm around me. This is a time for me to cry and a time to weep," as he was looking around at the sins of God's people in the day in which he ministered. Ecclesiastes 3 says there is a time to laugh, but he also says there is a time to weep and the time to weep is when we have a loved one who has fallen into unrighteousness. Jeremiah the prophet said the very same when he looked around the landscape of his day and he saw the sins of the people of God and how they had become imprisoned in the chains of their own sins. Jeremiah said, "Oh that my head," in Jeremiah 9:1, "Oh that my head were waters and my eyes a fountain of tears that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people." Jeremiah acknowledged that his eyes would be as a fountain of water just bubbling forth with tears day and night as he looked and saw the sins of God's people around him.

This is how the Corinthians should have been in their love for one another. When one became entangled in sin, rather than gloating over it, they should have grieved over it. Rather than just passing it by, they should have been brokenhearted. Think of the Lord Jesus Christ in Luke 19 and verse 41. When he approached Jerusalem towards the end of his earthly ministry, we read that he saw the city and wept over it. He would go on to say, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets. I would have gladly gathered you in as a mother hen gathers in her chicks but you were unwilling and you would not come to me." Our Lord was broken-hearted over the unbelief of God's people in this their day of opportunity.

True love weeps over the sins of the one loved, desiring their best, identifying with them, not pulling away from them, but standing with them in their hour of tragedy. Matthew Henry, the great commentator, the great Puritan commentator writes, "The sins of others are rather the grief of a charitable spirit rather than its sport or delight. They can give it no entertainment. It is the very height of malice to take pleasure in the misery of a fellow creature." In other words, love never laughs at another's sin. Love is never entertained or amused by the sin of another. Another old commentator writes, "He who loves is greatly troubled at the profaneness and immorality of men in the world. and the sins of professors cut him to the heart." A loving heart is a sensitive heart. A loving heart is one sensitive to the holiness of God and can never rejoice in that which is unholy.

This is the requirement, and this is what God requires of each and every one of us. It should mark how we respond to one another when we are made known of situations in one another's lives. It should draw us to the side of one another in order to weep with those who have fallen into sin of some kind and to never with a smug self-righteousness stand at a distance from them and cast stones at them, but instead to say, "There but for the grace of God go I," and to feel a sense of pity and compassion for the one who is ensnared in sin. Second, I want us to consider the reasons why, we would ask why does love not rejoice in in unrighteousness? And I want to give you four reasons why love does not rejoice in unrighteousness. The first is that rejoicing in unrighteousness offends God's holiness. How can we ever take pleasure in that which is the total contradiction of

God's own perfect character? How can we ever rejoice in that which is a violation of God's own holiness?

Let me give you some verses. Psalm 5, verses 4 through 6. The writer here is David, and David writes concerning the character of God, he writes, "For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness." If God does not take pleasure in wickedness, then how could we ever take pleasure in wickedness? And by the way, this really says something to us regarding our forms of entertainment and our forms of amusement. How could we ever be amused or entertained by that which grieves the heart of God? But the next verse in Psalm 5, now verse 5 says, "You hate all who do iniquity. You destroy those who speak falsehood; The LORD abhors the man of bloodshed and deceit." Because God is holy, he hates all sin, so must the one who is full of love hate all sin.

In Psalm 11, beginning in verse 4, we read, "The LORD is in His holy temple; the LORD'S throne is in heaven; His eyes behold, His eyelids test the sons of men. The LORD tests the righteous and the wicked, And the one who loves violence His soul hates." All sin is an affront to the holiness of God and God reacts violently against all unrighteousness. God never rejoices in unrighteousness, neither should we.

Habakkuk 1 verse 13, "Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, And You can not look on wickedness with favor." God is so holy and so pure that he can never look upon the unrighteousness of his creatures and ever put his stamp of approval or favor upon it. Neither can we.

Psalm 45 verse 7, "You have loved righteousness," the psalmist says of God, "You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness." The two are polar opposites and the one necessitates the other. The one who truly loves righteousness must hate wickedness. The doctor who loves health hates cancer. The one who loves peace is repulsed by war. The one who loves righteousness must by necessity hate wickedness.

So the first reason that we cannot rejoice in the unrighteousness of another person, even if that other person has done us harm, is because that unrighteousness is a violation of the holiness of God, and God hates that unrighteousness, therefore, we must never rejoice in that which God rejects. Second, rejoicing in unrighteousness mocks God's Son. How can we ever rejoice in that for which Jesus died upon the cross? How can we ever rejoice in sin when it was sin that was laid upon the Lord Jesus Christ and he suffered and bled and died in agony upon Calvary's cross? It was our unrighteousness that was imputed to him and he bore within his own body. How could we ever be cavalier towards that which Jesus died for upon the cross?

Listen to Isaiah 53 beginning in verse 4 again. Listen to what he bore and carried upon Calvary's cross. "Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. The LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on him." And then in verse 12, "He Himself bore the sin of

many." How could we ever rejoice in any unrighteousness that was laid upon Christ at the cross. He bore the full heavy weight of our sins and how could we rejoice in that which crushed our Savior.

When I was in my high school ministry many, many years ago, we used to sing a chorus, "Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble. Were you there when they crucified, my Lord?" We should always tremble when we look upon the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ and see Jesus bearing our sins, dying in our place. It was an awful and horrific death. It was a gruesome and gory death that he suffered upon Calvary's cross. No wonder Paul says love does not rejoice in the unrighteousness that nailed Jesus to the cross and that unrighteousness for which he suffered in his own body.

There's a third reason why love does not rejoice in unrighteousness and it is rejoicing in unrighteousness grieves God's Spirit. Whenever we as a believer sin, it grieves the Holy Spirit of God within us and it grieves the Spirit whenever we do rejoice in someone else's sin. Ephesians 4 verse 30 says, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God." To grieve the Holy Spirit means that we cause him to mourn and to lament and to be sorrowful. When we sin, the Spirit is saddened and is pained. The Spirit is not an it. The Spirit is a he. The Spirit is a person. He bears all the marks of personality and among those marks of personality is not only the mind of the Spirit and the will of the Spirit, but the emotions and the affections of the Spirit as well, and the Spirit of God who indwells us is grieved when we rejoice in unrighteousness.

We read the same in Isaiah 63, and in verses 9 and 10, it says, "In all their affliction He was afflicted." It speaks of the solidarity of God with his people and when they are afflicted, he is afflicted. When they are crushed, he is crushed and feels the weight of their of their sorrow. And then in verse 10, "they rebelled And grieved His Holy Spirit." When the people of God rebelled in the wilderness, it was a deep agonizing pain in the Holy Spirit of God.

So it is when we rejoice in the fall of another, when we rejoice in the unrighteousness of a brother or sister, it grieves the Spirit of God when we take pleasure in their demise, and there's a fourth reason, rejoicing in unrighteousness harms God's people. Whenever we rejoice in unrighteousness, we are rejoicing at that which brings great harm to that person. Let us remember that there are always consequences to sin, even under grace. There's loss of joy, loss of peace, loss of spiritual power, loss of spiritual insight, loss of integrity, loss of reputation, loss of spiritual influence, perhaps loss of qualification for ministry. It might even lead to the loss of a marriage, the loss of a job. There might even be the loss of physical health. There might even be the loss of one's life in a sin that a believer would commit unto death. Now there is always harm that comes to a person in one way or another when they push on into prolonged sin. How could we ever rejoice about that? How could we feel better about that? And in fact, when we rejoice in it, there is a sense in which we become a conspirator with them, a participant with them, and there is a loss that we always suffer when we rejoice in another person's moral failure. We are brought down to their level and there is a sense of loss of joy and peace that we have.

So these reasons are rooted and grounded in the very character and holiness of God himself and in the cross of God's Son and in the personality and love of the Holy Spirit, as well as the reality of the effects of sin in a believer's life. Whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap, Galatians 6 says. Well, finally, the repentance. How do we not rejoice in unrighteousness? The Corinthians needed to repent and to return to rejoicing in what is righteous, not rejoicing in what is unrighteous, and two things that I think need to be said. One is, in order for there to be a true repentance, which is more than merely the confession of the sin, but for one's life to be turned around, there must be a rejoicing in the Lord. We cannot rejoice in unrighteousness and rejoice in the Lord at the same time. One displaces the other. One rejoicing displaces the other rejoicing. And when we rejoice in the Lord regarding who he is and what he is doing, there is less room in our hearts to rejoice in unrighteousness. When we rejoice in the Lord, holy love flows from our hearts and there is a decrease of rejoicing in unrighteousness.

Philippians 4 verse 4 says, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!" To rejoice in the Lord means we rejoice in his holiness and we rejoice in his righteousness, and as we rejoice in those attributes of God we find in our own hearts an inability to rejoice in unrighteousness while at the same time I'm rejoicing in God's righteousness and God's holiness. For us to truly repent we must be saturated with a high view of God and at the very center of that is the purity and the moral perfection and the blamelessness of God that all of his ways are perfect, and as I am preoccupied and absorbed with the perfect character of God, it becomes a resistance in my own heart to be rejoicing in that which is unholy and ungodly. In what ways do you need to grow in knowing the holiness of God and the righteousness of God even more? Surely a study in reading through the Scripture and your eye being attuned to the attributes of God, specifically these that deal with his moral perfections, will always elevate our own love for one another and we will find the love that we have for others being that which is pure and holy.

There's one other that I would mention to you as we would desire to rejoice in that which is right and good and holy, and that is not only to rejoice in the Lord, but to rejoice in the word. To rejoice in the truth of God's word, that points our heart in the right direction, that brings our hearts under the right influence. There is a sanctifying power in the word of God and the more that the word of God is in us, it brings its purifying effect into our lives and we find our hearts more and more made in alignment with the heart of God. We find ourselves loving what he loves and rejecting what he rejects the more that we are in his word. And we find a hint of that at the end of verse 6, which we will look at next time together but the second half of verse 6 says, "but rejoices with the truth," and the truth is found in the word of God. The greatest counter to rejoicing in unrighteousness is to rejoice in the truth. Again, one rejoicing displaces the other rejoicing. The proper pursuit of rejoicing in the truth replaces and substitutes in our hearts and removes from our hearts the improper rejoicing of unrighteousness. How powerful is the word of God in our lives. If you take nothing more from this message than this final statement, it is this: the sanctifying, purifying power of the truth of God's word in our lives; it performs its work from the inside out as it purifies us and causes us to rejoice in those things that causes God to rejoice in what he sees in our lives.



So let us plunge more fully and deeply into God's word, knowing that it will cause us to rejoice in that which is pure and godly. As I bring this message to a close, I want to remind all of us that God is a holy God. and that God does not rejoice in unrighteousness, and specifically, God does not rejoice in your unrighteousness, nor in mine. If you find yourself here today as an unbeliever, you find yourself here today outside of Christ, you must know that God is not indifferent towards your sin, that God does not rejoice in your sin, that God hates your sin and that God abhors your sin because God is a holy and pure and just God. But God has holy love for sinners and God has demonstrated this love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. He has sent his Son into this world to die upon the cross and upon that cross God in holy love took that which he hates in sinners, our sins, and transferred them to his Son whom he loves and Jesus Christ upon the cross bore our sins in his body upon that tree, and there upon the cross, Jesus became sin for us, and he shed his blood, and he made the only atonement for our sins. All who are in Christ are greatly loved by the Father, but those who are outside of Christ, the wrath of God abides on you. Those who are outside of Christ are in their sin. Those who are outside of Christ are the object of God's wrath and vengeance.

If that is where you find yourself today, you are in a very dangerous place with God. You are not in no man's land, you are opposed by God and the object of his wrath. I urge you to run to Christ today, to flee to Christ, to come to Christ by faith, to receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, to come out from under his wrath and enter into the arms of his love which is exclusively found in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ. Commit your life to him. Believe upon Jesus Christ. Call upon him and you will receive his grace, his mercy, and his forgiveness. But let us be reminded that God is a holy God and he has vengeance for those who are outside of Christ. While the gospel is offered to you, while you hear of the love of God in Christ in your very ears this moment, I urge you to turn to Christ, to believe upon Christ, to not put this off, to not procrastinate any longer, but with a sense of urgency, believe upon him this very moment.