Selfless Love

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[0:00] age and joy. Well, today we're going to continue our walk through 1 Corinthians chapter 13, which is known as the love chapter. We're going to be looking specifically in verse 5 today. But as we get started, I just wanted to focus first on a podcast that I recently listened to. And it was a podcast that they were talking about philosophy. Now, I'm certainly not someone who's very versed in philosophy. I didn't study philosophy. I don't know much about Plato and Socrates and Aristotle and the likes. But on the podcast, they were discussing these philosophical questions that have arisen over time. Questions like, how do we know what reality is? And how do we interpret it? And they were talking specifically about one question, which is this kind of age-old question is, how do we know a chair is a chair? You know, if you were to think of a chair, you could probably describe a chair, that it has four legs and it has a seat and a seat back, maybe two arms. But is a chair simply defined by its features?

If you took the back off of a chair, does it cease to be a chair? If the chair has three legs instead of four, is it no longer a chair? Maybe you have food and you place food on the chair and then sit on the floor to eat the food. Is it no longer a chair? Has it been transformed into a table now? Is a chair simply just this collection of atoms? Or does a chair exist at all? Or simply the idea of a chair? There has been philosophers and people that discuss concepts like this. Maybe this really interests you. Maybe you find this puzzling why anyone would think about this. But the thing is, we spend a lot of time also thinking about the subject of love much like this. There has been many people who have asked, what is love? If you ask that question of a hundred different people, you're probably going to get a hundred different answers. Is love in emotion? Is it a behavior? Is it an action? Is it a means of interacting with our surroundings?

Well, in this chapter we see that Paul is trying to clear this up for us. In this chapter, in verses four through six, we see him describing, he gives us four or fifteen descriptions of love, four of which we will look at today. All of which he presupposes are rooted in Christ. And so these are really simple, very succinct aids to help us as we think about accepting Christ's love and showing that love to others. And so we're going to look, like I said, at verse five today. That includes four of those descriptions. We're going to back up though and read those verses that bookend this verse. So let's read together 1 Corinthians 13 verses four through six. Love is patient. Love is kind. It does not envy.

It does not boast. It is not proud. It does not dishonor others. It is not self-seeking. It is not easily angered. It keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth.

It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres. Will you pray with me? Lord, as we look at this passage, we desire to know your love more deeply.

[3:38] We pray that you open our eyes and that you soften our hearts. May we learn from your word today. May we feast on it, that we may experience your love more deeply and have a desire to show it to those around us.

This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Now, to be honest, as I prepared, was starting to read through this passage and prepare for this sermon, I kind of thought that this may be an easy passage to preach. It's a pretty rather short verse. It's rather straightforward in nature, and I really didn't think it was going to take much effort to do. But as I dug into this text, I realized just kind of how foolish of an initial thought that was, because as we look at these different descriptions of love, each one could certainly be a sermon of its own. Each one could certainly be a book, if not volumes of books that stand alone.

But I want to look, as we focus on this passage, at each one of these 15 characteristics individually, and hopefully they'll have the same effect on you as it did me. I, in preparing this, was really overwhelmed with this sense of guilt, of being able to see these blind spots in my life to be

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challenged in such a way that I hope you will be too as we go through this passage. Because the wonderful thing about this passage is that it's very practical in nature. Paul is not delving into hard-to-understand theological issues here. He's dealing with real-world everyday problems, and this is the problems that the church was facing at the time in Corinth. As we've heard the last couple weeks, they were facing conflict and pride and envy. There were lawsuits among them. This was running rampant.

And so, though they were a young church, though they had Christ in them, they were not acting Christ-like. Though many of them may have been saved, they were still struggling in their sanctification.

And so, Paul is spelling it out for them here in this passage. He's making it very clear what love is and how we act lovingly toward others. He makes it clear that we are to act different from the world. If Christ's love is in us, if Christ is in us, then his love is in us, and that's something that we should desire to show others. And so, Paul's not talking in the abstract here. He's not talking about vague emotions and feeling. He's talking about love as action. And so, in these 15 descriptions, these are really 15 action verbs that Paul uses to teach us in this passage. And so, in doing so, in using these action verbs, he's really personifying love because we know there is one person who never sinned, who always loved perfectly. So, Paul is actually describing for us the characteristics of Jesus. And so, it would be appropriate then that every time we see love in these few verses, you could insert Jesus' name and it'd be a true statement to say, Jesus is patient. Jesus is kind.

[6:35] And so, for us as believers, if we are abiding in Christ, we should also share these same characteristics as well. So, as we think about these four characteristics today, we need to recognize and test ourselves to be able to see, can we insert our name for love and it be a true statement? Can I say, Keith is not rude?

Keith is not self-seeking. Keith is not easily angered. Keith keeps no record of wrongs. You know, I'm afraid if I went to Rachel and said this, these things with a straight face, she'd probably laugh in my face or think I was delusional in some way.

Because these statements are often not true. And I would imagine that is the case for most of us here. So, as we look at this passage, I hope that we can be encouraged as we look at them one at a time this morning. So, this is the outline itself. We're going to be using the text and these four points as we look at what love is. And so, the first one, love does not dishonor others.

This verb in the Greek means to be ill-mannered or to be rude, to act unbecomingly. It's not a word that's used much in the New Testament, but Paul himself actually used it earlier on in 1 Corinthians when he's talking about how a man may react or interact with a woman. He says, if anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his betrothed, if his passions are strong and he feels he ought to marry, then he needs to get married. And so, it's this idea of acting in an unacceptable, inappropriate manner. Acting in a way that it can be offensive or indecent to other people.

Now, you know, Rachel and myself, our family, we came to Edinburgh through a missions agency. And that process of getting approved and being sent was a rather lengthy process that involved an application process, an assessment process, and a training process. And a lot of that time focused on cross-cultural ministry, how to do that well, in order that we wouldn't offend those who were different from us. So, we had a lot of these simulated exercises that we had to go through. We actually did ministry in what is known as the most diverse square mile of the United States, a little town outside of Atlanta, Georgia, which is a refugee resettlement community.

[9:03] And in there, we did ministry for several days. And we were assessed during that period to see how we reacted to people that were different from us. Could we assimilate well? Or were we abrasive and offensive whether we meant to be or not? And so, unfortunately, for many of us, when we are taken out of our normal context and placed into a different culture, this can happen. Probably Americans may be the worst at it. That whether we're tourists or going on business or going on ministry, we have this superiority complex. It's about thinking that our way is the best way.

And so, we don't really care whether we offend others or not, or at least are not cognizant of whether we do or not. And so, this training was important to us because we recognize that being rude is one of the easiest ways to turn someone off to the gospel. Think about it. If someone is rude to you, you automatically shut off. You know, you don't want to hear what someone has to say if they're saying it in a rude way or they're acting rudely towards you. Think about if you go to a nice restaurant. You really want a nice meal, but your waiter is just rude. He's not friendly. He doesn't smile. He doesn't really pay attention to when you ask for something. He doesn't get your order

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correct. He's absent for long periods of time. How are you going to feel about that meal? Whether or not the food is good, that interaction with your server is going to negatively impact your experience. You're going to think twice before you ever want to return to that restaurant. And that's because banners, our politeness is so foundational in our relationship. It's something, it's one of the first things we teach our children, right? To behave, to make good eye contact, to not interrupt.
And so the same thing is true for us as adults in the church. We need to be characterized by our politeness, by our winsomeness, by our graciousness, not only to outsiders, not only to visitors in the church, but also to one another. And so this doesn't mean that we can't disagree at times, or we can't ever have differing opinions. But when we do, we can be respectful. We can be courteous of one another. And this really goes for all of church life, whether we're handling church business, whether we're involved in ministry, whether we're talking about community groups, or simply talking outside after the service. There is a need for politeness within the church because the church will be destroyed, our unity will be destroyed by rudeness. Our testimony will be damaged by our rudeness. And so on the other hand, we see though that love binds us together in perfect harmony, it says in Colossians 3.13. So love doesn't try to hurt feelings. Love isn't overly sarcastic or abrasive. It doesn't mean-spirited or indecent. Love doesn't return in kind. When someone is rude to you, our first impulse is to want to be rude back, right? That's not how love operates. Love returns, returns evil for good. And so Jesus, we see, he did plenty to ruffle the feathers of religious leaders in his day. He was breaking from the common customs that people observed around him, but he didn't do so in a rude manner. He wasn't acting unbecoming when he was trying to teach and instruct those around him. It says in Isaiah, even when he was oppressed and afflicted, he didn't open his mouth. Like a lamb that was led to slaughter as a sheep before his shears of silence, so he did not open his mouth.
And so when we think about loving others, we need to think about honoring them. It means dying to our desires to express our opinions and our views and ourselves in general in a way that is offensive or may be taken as offensive to others. And so that leads us then to our second point. Love is not self-seeking. True love is ultimately selfless. When we think of being selfish, that's really grounded and rooted in a lovelessness. And so what Paul's saying here, he's not saying don't love yourself.
Obviously, that's something that comes naturally and that is good for us to love ourselves. But as Jonathan Edwards, he puts it this way, he says, love is not contrary to all self-love, but only an inordinate self-love.
[13:39] So our love for self should not be all-consuming. Our love for self should not trump our love for Christ or our love for others. No doubt all of us have spent way too much time on Zoom this past year, and we're probably tired of conducting business and maintaining relationships by looking at people in little two-inch squares on our computer screen. But there is a phenomenon that has developed as a result of this always being on Zoom, or at least been realized. And it's this propensity to stare at our image of ourself when you're on Zoom. I realized this early on when we, over a year ago, when we had to start all these Zoom meetings, that I realized I was really looking at myself more than I was looking at anybody else. And I wondered, is it just because I'm really vain or is other people experiencing this too? And soon enough, these articles started popping up and people started saying the same thing, trying to question why is it that we keep looking at ourselves on our computer screen when there's so many other people around us. And so some of these articles kind of address the psychology of why we might do this, and there were various different conclusions. Some said, well, it's because we get this sense of being overwhelmed by all the stimuli around us that we just want to focus on ourselves. That helps us focus better. Others said, well, it's because of this desire to present ourselves well, that we want to be cognizant of the way that we look, the expressions we make, and the gestures we make. There's another psychologist who said this, though, which I thought was very telling.

He said, our power of attention has evolved to automatically pay attention to information about ourselves. How true is that statement? This phenomenon really is a perfect example of how many of us operate on a daily basis, that we are continually focused on ourselves, that we are consumed by our own desires and our own preferences and our own agenda and our own wants, that we disregard everything else around us. We become so consumed by our own desires and maintain this excess concern for ourselves, that the needs of those around us are barely a blip on our radar.

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And so the problem, as Edward says to this selfishness, is that it contracts our heart. It confines our heart to itself. And so how do we see this play out in the church? I think I often see it in how people desire to be involved in the life of the church. Many of us may not want to be involved in ministry because it's just inconvenient. You may not care to serve in junior church because it's going to take you out of this service. Maybe you don't want to interact with international students because it's just, it's awkward or uncomfortable for you. Maybe you don't want to meet with someone who's lonely and isolated because relationships can be messy. Maybe you're not generous in your giving to the church because you want to hold on to your money and use it for something else. Maybe you don't want to be involved in community group because it's going to interfere with your free time in the middle of the week. Whatever it may be, when we view everything through this prism of self, we're going to make our decisions based on what is best for us. So if something is inconvenient or uncomfortable, we're simply not going to do it. On the other hand, Edward says that love enlarges our heart and extends it to other people. So if we're truly loving, we're going to seek the good of others. This is what Paul says himself in 1 Corinthians 10. He says that his ministry, he's not focused on himself, he's seeking the good of others. Why? So that many may be saved. And so as we think about seeking the good of others, it's not only physical needs of others, but also the spiritual needs of others. Galatians 6 10 says, therefore, as we have every opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially those who belong to the family of believers. And so this is really the command that's given to God's people way back in the beginning when God chooses Abraham to bless his line. He says for the people of Israel to be a blessing to the nations. And we see this too when the Jews are brought into captivity in Babylon.
What does God instruct his people through the prophet Jeremiah? He says to seek the good of the city. And so ultimately the Christian life is about dying to self. Dietrich Bonhoeffer says, when Christ calls a man, he bids him to come and die. Jesus himself said, if anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. If anyone comes to me but does not hate his own life, he cannot be my disciple. And so if we are going to be loving, we must follow in Christ's example. Because though we were enemies of God, it says that Jesus made himself nothing. He took on the very nature of a servant and humbled himself and was obedient to death, even death on a cross. [18:57] And so Christ's love for us wasn't wrapped up in this abstract feeling or emotion. We see Christ's love for us was grounded in action. He disregarded his own ease, his own comfort, his own honor and wealth in order to be despised and become poor and outcast for our sake. And so really Christ changes the way that we should think about love. Christ said to his disciples in John 13, he says, a new commandment I give you to love one another as I loved you, so you must love one another.

And you may think, well, this wasn't really a new commandment. I mean, the people of Israel knew that they were supposed to love other people. There's, I mean, been told time and time again to love your neighbor as yourself. But we see here how Jesus has changed this. He says, not only are you to love others the way that you love yourself, but love others as I have loved you. He's essentially raising the bar here. And so we too are to exhibit this divine love that's rooted in Jesus. And when we express this love to others, it's naturally going to turn our attention from us to them. And so then moving on to our third point, love is not easily angered. This Greek verb here is described as a sudden outburst. It's a means of being upset and irritated and quick-tempered. The same verb is used to describe Paul in Acts 17 when he goes to Athens and he looks out on the city and sees all these idols. He says that he is greatly distressed. But ultimately we see that the reason for his distress is quite different. He's distressed and upset and irritated because of the offense against God. We see countless other times this righteous anger that God shows, or even Jesus himself shows, when he drives out the money changers from the temple. This is not what that verse, this verse here is talking about. This is, this is an anger comes not when God is offended, but when we personally are offended. And so we see here, Jonathan Edwards, again, he kind of describes for us two different kinds of anger that we need to guard against. He says that there is an anger that comes that is unsuitable in degree, and there is an anger that's unsuitable in continuance. And so as an example, Rachel's family has a lake house in Alabama. So us, we as a family would spend a lot of time at the lake in the summertime. In fact, last weekend was Memorial Day weekend back in the

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States. That's kind of where it falls in the calendar, kind of serves as a kickoff to summer. So all her family was together. Her aunt and uncle have a house next door. There's lots of cousins, lots of grandchildren always running around. And so we kind of, we were, we were bummed out not to be there this year, being able to spend time with others, spend time in the water and eat good food. And one of the essential things though, one of the essential elements for, for lake life would be, would be fire. Because we use fire at least for two main reasons. One would be to shoot off fireworks.

[22:05] The 4th of July is a big time that the family comes together. We buy all these fireworks. We have this old floating dock that we tie off in the water that we only use for July 4th, where we set up all the fireworks on the dock. We, we swim it out in the water and we shoot off the fireworks in the middle of the lake for the kids to see from the shore. We also use fire for, for cooking and not just your, what you may think of a barbecue when you grill a burger, but actually smoking meat. This is one of the things that Rachel's dad loves to do is to get up early, to start the smoke or get it to a nice, low, steady temperature and put on the meat that's going to smoke all day. The ribs, the chicken, the wings, the pork shoulder, whatever it is that we'll then enjoy that night. And so these two forms of fire really illustrate this, these two forms of anger that we may experience in our lives. This anger that's unsuitable in degree is these fireworks that have a very short fuse that get launched into the sky and explode in a hot, loud explosion. Maybe you have experienced that kind of anger before.

Maybe a peer offends you or a spouse upsets you or a child disrespects you and you just lose it. You blow things out of proportion. Things are exaggerated. You make the worst out of the situation. And it certainly doesn't help the situation when that happens, right?

This other form of anger though, this, this, this anger that's unsuitable in continuance is like that fire that's used in that smoker. It's not an explosion. It's actually pretty low, steady temperature, but it's this anger that we can't, that can't be quenched. When someone offends you, instead of blowing up, you just let it kind of burn within you. It rages down deep so that you begin to despise and resent someone who has offended you. And ultimately, neither forms of these anger are helpful in resolving the conflict, right? They only perpetuate the strife that we have. And so we see throughout the Bible, especially in the book of Proverbs, this warning against anger, how it destroys our lives. In Proverbs 14, 29, it says, whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly. Proverbs 15, 18, a hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger quiets contention. Proverbs 19, 11, good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense. Now, these Proverbs provide us with good instruction, but it goes beyond just providing moral instruction for us. It really points us to the character of God. If we remember back at the passage that we just read at the beginning of the service from Exodus 34, when the presence of

God comes down to Moses on top of Mount Sinai, and he says, the Lord, the Lord, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness and rebellion and sin. This is a description of God that's used throughout the Old Testament. We are reminded over and over again of the graciousness of God. Though we were once alienated and hostile in mind, we have been reconciled through the blood of Christ, that even now, even though we are still prone to wander, we have a God who is long-suffering and forgiving. It is his joy to restore us and preserve us. And so as we experience this great love of God, let us turn from anger in our lives to peace. And then lastly, love keeps no record of wrongs. This verb that's used is really an accounting term. You can think of it as an accountant who takes out his ledger and is making meticulous notes about every time anyone has ever offended him or anything, any bad quality that someone may have that they don't like. It's really this manner of holding a grudge. It's this unwillingness to forgive.

It's this bitterness that we hold within us, this desire for revenge perhaps. And so this is really quickly becoming one of the favorite pastimes within our culture, I feel like. This desire and this interest almost in finding ways to be offended by people. Rather than to forgive and forget, we simply want to convict and condemn those around us. Even this past week, you might have heard a story about the English cricketer who was in his first English test debut. And on that day of his first match, this news was released of these disparaging remarks he had put on Twitter over eight years ago. And it was much the joy of people to release that information at that time in order to kind of bring him down. And not to excuse his behavior, but what was the desire in spreading that

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information was to just convict, to disrupt, to embarrass. We all, many of us want to rise up as these social justice warriors, as if it's our job to hold others accountable for their actions.
[27:28] But there's a big difference between encouraging good behavior and refusing to forgive bad behavior. And that's unfortunately often what we do. We hold grudges against one another. We hold this account, this running tab of how people have offended us so that when people offend us again, we can bring up those past instances as well. But the problem is when we keep records of wrongs, we're not thinking the best of people. We're actually thinking the worst of them. We want to judge them rather than show them grace. And so how do we correct this behavior? Well, again, it's looking at the character of God. Ephesians 4.32 says, be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other just as Christ forgave you. Colossians 3.13, bear with each other and forgive one another if anyone has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

In Matthew 18, Jesus tells the parable of the unforgiving servant. And he describes this king who wants to settle his accounts with some of his servants. So he brings one servant in who owes him 10,000 bags of gold. And when he tells the servant to pay up, the servant says he can't. The king decides to sell he and his family into slavery. But what does the servant do? He begs for mercy. He begs for patience. And the king has pity on him and decides to cancel his debt and let him go. But then that same servant turns to his fellow servant just after another servant who owes him just 100 gold coins and strangles him and demands to be paid. That servant also begs for mercy, but is not given any. And that servant, the first servant, throws him in jail. And you probably know how this ends, that the master hears of what the first servant did and brings him into his presence and says, you wicked servant,
I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had mercy on you? And in anger, the master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured until he should pay back all he owed. Jesus concluded, this is how my heavenly father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother and sister from your heart. And so regardless of how badly or how frequently you have been offended by others, we must be willing to forgive completely and unconditionally, recognizing God's great forgiveness toward us.
And so oftentimes, though, we harbor this resentment because we don't think someone's deserving of our forgiveness or they've never asked for forgiveness. So we think that's an excuse to hold this grudge.
That's not how love works. Whether someone is worthy of our forgiveness, whether they have requested it or deserved it, we need to extend it freely. Because ultimately, this bitterness that we carry around for one another, it really is a form of self-torture that grows within us and becomes a much bigger problem than the original offense ever was. And so as we close, having looked at all four of these descriptions of love, I want us to remember that Paul isn't just giving this instruction to us so that we can live better, more polite, more patient, more forgiving lives.
[31:01] Like we've seen, he's ultimately reminding us of the character of God and the work of Jesus. If you're a believer, your debt has been paid in full.

Our sin has been credited to Jesus and Jesus' righteousness has been credited to us. Though we were rebels deserving of death, we have been reconciled and presented as holy and blameless before the Father.
And so that's what Paul is talking about. When we have experienced that love, then that allows us to show that love with others. When we have tasted the perfect, the perfect unconditional love of the Father, we will be eager to show that love to others.
We can be patient because God has been patient with us. We can be selfless because of Christ's selfless act toward us. We can be forgiving because we have been forgiven much. But for those who may not be believers, there's something else to remember in addition to God being loving.
It says in James 4.12 that he is also a lawgiver and a judge, the one who is able to save and to destroy. And so though God is long-suffering, he is also just.
[32:14] And it's very clear that those who reject God will receive punishment for their sins, which is death. But we have been given an offer that rather than face the wrath of God, we are welcomed in to accept his love.

It is freely given to each of us through the blood of Jesus. And so if we are to experience this love, it is something that we must receive from Christ that is offered to us and is only then that we may extend this love to others as Paul desires.

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Will you pray with me? Lord, we thank you for your great love for us, a love that is limitless, a love that is undeserved.
Lord, we thank you that you embody each one of these characteristics, that you are not rude, you are selfless, you are patient with us, and that you are forgiving.
Lord, help us to understand that greater, to experience your love more fully, and then desire to show that love to others. We thank you for this reminder of the gospel.
[33:34] We thank you that you loved us so much to send your son, Jesus, to die for us. And may we show our appreciation through our love for you and love for others.

And this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Now we're going to sing our last hymn together, or at least listen to our hymn being sung, which is how deep the Father's love for us.
Amen. Amen. Amen. How deep the Father's love for us, how vast beyond all measure, that he should give his only Son, to make a wretch his treasure.
How great the pain of searing love, the Father turns his face away, as wounds which mar the chosen one, turn many sons to glory.
Behold the man upon the cross, my guilt upon his shoulders.
[35:20] Ashamed I hear my mocking voice, fall out among the scoffers.

It was my sin that held him there, until it was accomplished.
His dying breath has brought me life. I know that it is finished. I will not boast in anything, no gifts, no power, no wisdom, but I will boast in Jesus Christ, His death and resurrection.
Why should I gain from His reward? I cannot give an answer, but this I know with all my heart, His wounds have paid my ransom.
I know this is the T jacket for me and now. For as we should give youlor Toate you name, will you stand with me to receive our benediction today?
[37:06] Take it from Hebrews 13. And now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever.

Amen. Amen.

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