

Paul's Hymn of Love

by J. Oswald Sanders

The sermon emphasizes the supremacy of love in the Christian life, highlighting its characteristics and importance for living a life that honors God.

Duration: 22:18

Scripture: Exodus 14:13, Matthew 6:33, Romans 12:21, 1 Corinthians 13:1-8, 1 Peter 4:8

Topics: "Love"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of love and patience in our lives. He uses examples from the Bible, such as Peter's question about forgiveness, to illustrate the need for patience and forgiveness towards others. The speaker also discusses the significance of love as the motive behind our actions, stating that even the greatest sacrifices are meaningless without love. He concludes by highlighting the characteristics of love, particularly its ability to refrain from certain actions, and encourages listeners to cultivate a patient and loving attitude in their lives.

Transcript

...kept no record of wrongs. Christ did not delight in evil, but rejoiced with the truth. He always protected, always trusted, always hoped, always persevered.

Christ never failed. And there you have a perfect picture of the life of Christ. Dr. Graham Scroggie, in referring to this passage, said, this picture of love is not the dream of an artist, it is the work of a photographer, and the subject is Christ.

It is a perfect picture of Christ. But I'd like to read those same verses, and read them a little differently, and I trust you'll follow with me. I am very patient.

That's a good beginning. I am always kind. I never envy anyone.

I never boast. I'm never proud. I'm never rude.

I'm not self-seeking. I'm never angered. I don't keep any record of wrongs done to me.

I never delight in anything that's evil, but only with that which is true. I always protect other people, always trust them, always hope for them. I always persevere.

I never fail. Now I think you'll agree with me that when you take the perfect picture of Christ, and then bring your own life alongside, there is often quite a discrepancy, isn't there? And Paul here is speaking about spiritual gifts. Chapter 13 comes between verse 12, which is speaking about the spiritual gifts, and chapter 14, which is speaking about the way in which they're to be worthily exercised.

But in the middle he interposes this chapter, and says you can have any spiritual gift you like, but unless the motivation behind its exercise is love for God and love for your fellow men, it avails nothing. First of all, he speaks about those spiritual gifts, the supremacy of love over those spiritual gifts. He speaks about the heavenly gifts.

I speak with the tongue of men and of angels. We've got marvelous rhetoric. I engage in ecstatic utterance.

But he says if love is absent, you're just a noisy gong, a clanging dissonant cymbal. He uses strong language about it. Then he goes on to speak of the supremacy of love over certain intellectual gifts.

The gift of prophecy, if I speak with, the gift of prophecy. And that was one of the greatest gifts. I understand all mysteries.

I have all knowledge. And I have a faith that gets wonderful answers to prayer and can move mountains. He said I can have all those gifts, and yet if love is absent, I am a spiritual non-entity.

I am nothing. Now those terrible absolutes of scripture are rather staggering. If I'd been writing that, I'd have said now if you can have all these gifts, but unless love is absent, you'll be a little less effective than you would otherwise be.

But that's not what the Spirit of God says through Paul. He says you are a spiritual non-entity. You don't count.

And that's tremendously challenging. Then he goes on and he speaks about the limit, drawing the limit in material sacrifice. I can give all, dole out all my goods to give to the poor.

And yet if love is not the motive actuating the gift, I gain nothing. No credit in heaven for it. This is very challenging as to our giving.

It's motivation that imparts value, spiritual value to the gift. It's not the amount of the gift. It's the motive behind it.

And if love is the motive behind it, however small the gift then in God's sight, that is something very precious. But if that's not the motive, I gain nothing. He goes one further.

He says you can go to the very limit in offering your body to be burned, and yet without love that is futile. Well, there it is. He speaks about the supremacy of love over all these things.

And then he goes on to speak about the characteristics of love. And he personifies love. And it's very interesting to notice that most of the things he says about love is not what it does, but what it refrains from doing.

It is not this, it is not that, it doesn't do this, it doesn't do that. We are people in the Western world especially, we are great activists. But here it's quality of life and quality of love that the Holy Spirit is

speaking about.

And the first thing he mentions is love is patient. King James says love suffers long. It's rather striking that the suffering of love is the first thing he speaks about.

And of course the greater the love, the deeper the suffering. Love has a tremendous capacity to suffer. And love is very patient.

What is it that gives a mother the patience with her children? It's the fact that she loves them. They just about drive her mad, but yet she is able to be patient sometimes. Perhaps not always, but there it is.

It's love that makes a person patient. And when we are impatient, the reason is because love is lacking. And this is something we need to seek from God.

Peter, I think, was a fellow who had given rather a bad time by his colleagues. He seemed to lay himself open to being teased, and apparently he'd had rather a bad day one day, and he came to the Lord. He said, Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Would it be all right if I forgave him seven times and then let go on the eighth? And I think the Lord would smile at Peter and say, well Peter, it's good for you to forgive him seven times, but I suggest you try seventy times seven and then come and ask me again.

Most of us can manage to last out seven times, but what did the Lord say? That's not sufficient. Seventy times seven. Always patient.

Love is patient. Love is kind. Isn't it a benediction to have kind people around one? Isn't it nice to work with them? What is kindness? A kind person is someone who is always willing to be at the disposal of other people.

Who is always looking for an opportunity of doing a kindness to others. In Acts 10.38 it says of our Lord that he was anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power. And what was the result of that anointing? Does it say he preached marvellous sermons, he performed spectacular miracles? No, it doesn't say that.

It says he went about doing good. Being kind to people. Seeking opportunities to serve them.

And that's what love is. Love is kind. Always looking for an opportunity to serve other people.

Now are we like that? Am I like that? Are you like that? Are you always looking for an opportunity to help and serve and be kind to other people or do you live in your own little circumscribed circle? This is something that should challenge us. Kindness is a wonderful quality of our Lord. And he wants it to be manifest in his children.

Love is not envious. You see, these are absolutes. Love is never envious.

If we are envious of others, well there's some love lacking somewhere. Love doesn't envy people who are more gifted. Or people who are richer or have more goods or are more attractive or more successful.

Love does not envy. Love rejoices in the advancement of somebody else. Love doesn't bite her nails because somebody else is preferred.

Now you say that's supernatural. I agree it's supernatural but we Christians are supposed to be supernatural people and we've got a supernatural God. I suppose if anybody had reason to be envious and jealous it was John the Baptist.

He had been the very center of the religious life of Israel. People were coming from north, south, east and west to be baptized, confessing their sins, and he was the very center of the religious life of the nation. And then suddenly a rival appears.

And gradually John sees his congregation going to the church around the corner. And I've yet to find the pastor who enjoys that taking place. But this is what happened.

And did John the Baptist become jealous and envious? The very reverse. He said, this my joy is fulfilled. I love to hear the bridegroom's voice.

He must increase, I must decrease. No trace of jealousy or envy because a rival had appeared. And here it's no wonder that our Lord said, among those who are born among women there hath not risen greater than John the Baptist.

Love is not boastful. Love is not ostentatious of its gifts. Isn't it easy to do that when you're gifted? So easy to boast about it.

So love doesn't show off. Love doesn't make a parade. Love doesn't, love can hear of the attainments of other people without doing one better.

Isn't it easy to do that? Somebody tells a good story, well you've got a better one. Somebody's had a bad operation and you've had a worse one. And it's quite easy for us to go one better all the time.

But love is not like that. Love is modest. Love is unassuming.

Love doesn't belittle anyone else to increase its own stature. Love is modest. Love is not arrogant.

Is not proud, conceited, puffed up. And you know and I know that pride is a very essential part of our fallen nature and how subtle it is. We think perhaps we've dealt with pride on one level and then we find it's on another.

There was a man who was talking to his friend one day and he said to him you know I've got many faults and I'm very conscious of them but there's one thing I'm glad about and that is that I'm not proud. Well his friend said well I can understand that in your case. He said what do you mean in my case? He said well you've got so very little to be proud about.

He said oh haven't I? I've got just as much to be proud about as you have anyway. You see you didn't need to prick very deep to find that while on the surface he thought he had dealt with pride like that. Well love is not proud.

One of the things about our Lord was that he was the one of all men who had every reason to be proud. And what did he do? He humbled himself and became obedient to death. That's what love does.

It was love that enabled him to humble himself and take on himself not the nature of a king but the nature of a servant. Love is not proud. Love is not rude.

There is an etiquette about the Christian life. Love is courteous. Our Lord was the most courteous gentleman who ever lived.

You never find him being rude. Sometimes the word that's translated woman in the King James gives the impression that he was rather curt and so on. But the modern translations have got it more correctly where he said for example to his mother, dear lady, that's what he was saying.

He wasn't saying woman. But dear lady. He was always courteous and respectful.

And women should be tremendously glad of the example of our Lord Jesus in his attitude to women. He never belittled, he never demeaned, he never patronized. He was always courteous.

And there is an etiquette about the Christian life that we Christians ought to keep before us. There's no excuse or zeal for defending the faith, to be rude and crude and attack other personalities. Love is not rude.

Love does not insist on having its own way. Love seeketh not her own. I suppose that's one of the most difficult things for us to do.

Because it's inbred in us to seek our own way. We want our own way. What is the current thing? To do our own thing.

We don't want anything. Now what about our Lord? What example did he set? He said I seek not my own will. That's the example.

I seek not my own will. He didn't seek his own. If he sought his own interest, he'd have stayed on his throne in heaven.

He would never have come down to earth. Paul got exasperated in one case and he said every man seeks his own and not the things that be of Christ. He must have had a bad day with people all looking after their own interests.

And when you come to think of it, what is the temper of the world today? Everybody seeking their own rights. The emphasis is on rights and so few wanting to discharge their responsibilities. But if you examine the life of our Lord, you'll find that from the very moment he rose from his eternal throne and came down to earth, it was one constant surrender of his rights.

One after another, until at last he surrendered his right to life itself and died the day from the cross. Love does not seek her own. Paul says let every man seek not his own but another person's welfare.

When we do that, why, we will find that that is one of the very blessed manifestations of love. Instead we so often cling to our rights instead of yielding them in the interests of Christ and the gospel. Love is not irritable.

Love is not exasperated. You say, but the Lord Jesus was angry. The Bible says he was angry.

Yes, it does. And it tells us to be angry too and not to sin. Why was our Lord angry on the two or three occasions it's mentioned in the New Testament? He never was angry because of anything people did to him.

They could pull the hair off his cheeks. They could put a crown of thorns on his head. They could scourge him.

They could spit in his face. He never got angry. Why did he get angry? He got angry in the notable occasion when his father's house, which was intended to be a house of prayer, had been turned by the rapacious priests into a den of thieves, a thief's kitchen, so that the Gentiles were excluded from the only place where they could come and worship the true God.

And when Jesus saw that he was angry and he took a scourge of whip of cords and drove them out until at last the last of them had gone. The money changers had taken their tables and their money away and he was standing there alone in his moral authority. Oh yes, he was angry because his father's house had been desecrated and the Gentiles were being deprived their opportunity of getting to know the only true God.

You see, Christ's anger was sinless because it was selfless and our anger will be sinless only when it is selfless. Love is not irritable. We all enjoyed Francis Ridley Havergill's wonderful hymns, Take my life but let it be consecrated Lord to thee and so on.

But a sister says that when she was a young woman she had a very explosive temper and every now and again there would be an explosion and she would be very distressed and she would go and confess it to the Lord and seek his forgiveness and only to go and do the same again. And one time there had been a more than usually bad explosion and her sister said she went into a room and threw herself down on the floor and wept and confessed, Lord is it to be like this always? Am I going to just keep on sinning and repenting and then going doing the same thing again? And while she was on her knees a very unusual verse of scripture was brought before her mind by the Holy Spirit and the verse was this, the Egyptians whom you have seen today you will see no more forever. Well if you can see a connection between that and a bad temper you've got more insight than I have.

But as she thought of it she wondered when were those words spoken? To whom were they spoken? Those were the words which God spoke to Moses when the Israelites who had just been delivered from Egypt and from Pharaoh and were now in the wilderness and now Pharaoh was pursuing them to capture them and take them back into bondage again. And she saw the connection and she said, Lord are you saying to me that this temper of mine which has held me in bondage for so long, that this temper of mine can be changed so that this temper that I've seen today I'll see no more forever? And it seems as though the word of the Lord came back to her, yes, no more forever. And there on her knees Francis Habegel claimed the fulfillment of that in her life.

Her sister said never again till the day she died did my sister ever lose her temper. And she said the tone of her poetry changed. For example she wrote this, I never thought it could be thus, month after month to know the river of thy peace without a ripple in its flow.

Yes, we've got a supernatural God. Why don't we expect him to do supernatural things in us? We limit him by our past experience, not by his mighty power.

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