

Superlative Qualities of Love

by Stephen Olford

The sermon emphasizes the importance of personal mastery of love's activity, including generosity, modesty, and humility, as demonstrated in 1 Corinthians 13.

Duration: 52:15

Scripture: Matthew 18:21

Topics: "Love"

Description

In this sermon, Stephen Olford shares highlights of recent news and updates. He mentions a veritable revival and attributes it to the faithful prayers of the listeners. Olford discusses the importance of love and how it should be shown through kind actions towards others. He also talks about the progress being made in finding a location for their center for preachers. Despite some delays, he is confident that good news will be shared soon.

Transcript

Greetings to you from Heather, David, and our faithful staff. This is Stephen Alford speaking, and I'm recording, as always, from my study, and trying to recall some of the highlights of the news of the past few months. I'm sorry that this tape is a little tardy, but that's due to my schedule, especially being away for so long, but it's on its way now.

You've been praying, and I've been preaching, and I owe you an update. Now, first of all, while we're finding and finalizing a place to locate our center for preachers, and it's been a rather delayed and difficult decision for our board and our team, progress is being made. Soon I feel sure I'll be able to send you some great news.

But this whole matter of delay is an interesting one. I was greatly encouraged just recently, talking to my good friend, Dr. Adrian Rogers, who, as you know, is here in Memphis and has a fine church. In a sermon he preached, he pointed out that when God brought the children of Israel out of Egypt, they immediately faced three obstacles.

First, a dead end. Secondly, detours. And thirdly, dry wells.

I like that. The dead end, of course, was the Red Sea. And until God made a pathway through that wall of water, they couldn't go anywhere.

They were on God. Then once they were over, they faced detours. They zigzagged, if you follow the story carefully.

And you wonder whether or not they were being guided by God, but indeed they were, for the pillar of cloud went ahead of them. And then, to add to that, there was thirdly, the dry wells, or bitter wells, however you like to put it. When the people came to find water, they grumbled and they moaned.

But God brought them through that too. And somehow or other, I feel that is so characteristic of guidance in all our lives. It's been true throughout history, and it's still true today.

But I believe we're on our way, and as I said earlier, we'll be able to give you good news soon. However, all through this time, I want to tell you from my heart that I've seldom known such an anointing upon the ministry. Wherever we've been, God seemingly has just been pouring out His Spirit in full measure.

Let me just give you a few examples. Of course, you've heard about Amsterdam. I told you that last time.

And then, of course, our trip in Britain, which was probably one of the most fruitful times I've ever known in that good old country that is going through such bleak and terrible times at the present hour of history. But still, there are some bright lights, and we experienced something of that. Then, over here, we had a tremendous time at First Baptist Church Atlanta.

And you'll be reading about that shortly in our Stephen Olford newsletter that you'll be receiving in a matter of a week or so. Then, just recently, David and I went down to Beaumont, Texas, First Baptist Church there, to launch the ministry of the Reverend Jim Wilson. Jim, of course, is the son of T. W. Wilson, who is the colleague of Billy Graham.

I've always followed Jim's ministry with much interest and sought to coach him and pray for him, and I helped him when he was in Delaney Street Baptist Church in Orlando, Florida. But this was the beginning of a new ministry, and David and I shared in the opening of a Bible conference there, and God moved mightily. I'll never forget that Sunday night when, I would say, most of the church came forward in the invitation, not only to seek salvation and many to reaffirm their faith in Christ, but so many of them to show their stand by their new pastor as he goes forward in what I believe will be a very significant ministry there.

It was a thrilling time, too, on the Monday morning to speak to a bunch of preachers there and to sense the responsiveness of those men. And then, just recently, we did something very similar in another part of the country altogether. In Wilmington, Delaware, there is a church known as Brandywine Valley Baptist Church.

I've known this church for many years, and our good friend Bob Strayton, who was with me at Calvary Baptist Church for so many years and really took care of our television ministry as well as my soloist, had asked me to recommend a new preacher for them, or pastor. They had been without a pastor for some time, and I named a dear brother of mine called Harry Kilbride, with his lovely wife June. He comes from England.

He was a schoolmaster, but being a tremendous pastor down in the south of England, but was very anxious to come to a ministry over in this country, and he happened to be over here, and he candidated, and they've called him. And what a fabulous, fabulous weekend we had. On the Friday night, of course, was a big welcome banquet at which I spoke, and there was some good fun.

And then Saturday was a very special time of interaction with my good brother on the ministry situation here in this country. In the evening, there was a concert in which two people took part who were rather significant. One was a musician, and the other a soloist, and both were part and parcel of Harry Kilbride's father's church in Bradford, England.

The musician was John Innes, who plays for the Billy Graham Crusades all over the world, and the soloist was Barbara Wilson, and she has a beautiful voice. Both these were converted in that church, and John Innes was actually led to Christ by Harry Kilbride before Harry was even converted. There were only boys at the time, but subsequently, while in the Air Force, Harry was saved at Haringey Crusade in that great initial crusade that Billy Graham had many years ago.

Well, it was a wonderful evening, and then came the Sunday morning when I preached the installation sermon and dedicated not only the pastor and the deacons, but the church as they heard the word of God. There was such a moving of spirit. I doubt if there was a dry eye in the place.

It was one of the highlights of any such installation service I've been at for many years. And then, in character, we had another wonderful weekend. This time, it was in Pennsylvania.

There was another sort of dedication, not so much of a pastor as of a new church called Mount Vernon Mennonite Church in Oxford, Pennsylvania. Jim and Mim Herr, who are members of our team here, Jim is on our board, had invited me together with their pastor to be part and parcel of the dedication of this beautiful, beautiful church. I somehow feel that it just represented what I called compactness and completeness, elegant simplicity, everything you needed for a church in the most scenic spot, overlooking a wonderful lake with all the autumn flowers and autumn colors.

Beautiful, beautiful place. And God met us there in a most precious and wonderful way. Once again, the place was absolutely packed, even though it was a very rainy weekend.

And both morning and evening, God rent the heavens and came down. In the morning was the dedication of the building. In the evening, the dedication of the body.

And once again, the response was simply overwhelming. And we just sensed that God was there in mighty power. The next morning, I spoke to a group of ministers from various denominations with their wives, and it was an opportunity to really bear down on what we mean by the ministry of the word, feeding the flock of God.

Just before that, by the way, we had a series of meetings here in Memphis at the Mid-South Bible College. It was a tough assignment, really, because I'd come back from busy, busy days of preaching, and this was Monday through Friday. Each morning for an hour, the chapel was given over to me.

But it took me back to days when we had the revival at Wheaton and Moody and Providence, Rhode Island and Nyack Bible College, and now seminary as well. Monday was a tremendous morning, but as the week just developed, the Spirit of God broke through and I think that we must have been on our knees one morning for several hours. And then the classes turned into prayer meetings and times of testimony and confession.

And out of the school to witnessing on the streets, there was a veritable revival, a moving of the Spirit of God. And I just praise God for what took place there. And remember, that is all the result of faithful praying, of people like you who are listening to this tape right now.

I could go on and give you even more highlights, but I don't want to be too long. We've got a very heavy rest of the year, and actually I'll be sharing something of that in our last tape of the year that'll be upcoming. Let me move on from news to notes.

As I mentioned a little earlier, you'll be receiving shortly what we're calling now as the Stephen Oldford newsletter. This will take the place of encounter. It'll carry news, notes and needs, just like I'm giving you now, but this will be actually in the form of a letter.

And of course we'll go to more people than this tape goes to. You and Count of 300 Fellowship and a few friends are the ones who receive the tape. But the newsletter goes to our whole constituency.

The tape of the month has been a joy to prepare and send to you. But we really would like to know before the end of the year what you think of it and whether we should continue it or just cut back to our newsletter which will go out on a regular basis. It takes time to sit down and think through the news and notes and needs and make this tape.

And I do it because I think so much of you people on the Encounter 300 team. But I'd like to know whether or not you have time to listen to it, whether or not you appreciate it, whether or not you want it continued. I wonder if you could let us know just on a postcard, a letter or even a telephone call.

Then I want to say again what I've said many times, but so many people are asking this question, especially you folk who are close to us. Is Manor in the Morning, the little booklet on the devotional life, available? The answer is yes. At one time Moody produced that and used to sell several hundred thousand every year and then they stopped producing booklets.

And many people have ordered these booklets from Moody and they've been told it's no longer in print. Friends, it is in print. We produce it and we've just got a new supply.

So if you'd like to order Manor in the Morning, just drop us a line and we'll do the rest. Then I want to say something very, very important and I shall say more of this on our next tape. It concerns our radio ministry.

As of the end of this year we're coming off the air here in the United States of America. We've been on 27 years and 27 glorious years and I don't regret one of them. And we may come onto the air again a little later down the road, but I feel it's time to regroup, rethink our program and especially cut back on some of the costs.

Stations are charging more and more, even the network like Moody Network and others are costing us more than we can afford at this present time. However, and this is important and please make a note of this, we are not coming off the air as far as the third world is concerned. The whole of Europe and Britain and four-fifths of the earth's surface will still be covered by the preaching of the word.

No way could I deny my brothers in the third world what I've not only saw with my eyes but heard with my ears at Amsterdam and in our recent visit to Scotland and Ireland and England where people literally live by every word that proceeds out of our mouths, so to speak. Here we're stepping on one another's toes for airtime and I feel that we're well taken care of, but when it comes to the third world and overseas I have no qualms in my heart. So we still need a lot of support for that but we're continuing our missionary radio ministry overseas and thank God we found ways and means of doing that in a much cheaper or shall I say less expensive way.

So you'll be hearing rumors about this all over the place that Stephen Olford is off the air and what's taken place, have we capitulated, are we bankrupt, that's a lot of nonsense. This is a calculated decision that we've made and we believe it's the right one for the time being. So much then for notes.

Just quickly one or two matters of need. Of course we are continuing our drive for capital funding. We thank God for people who've made wonderful pledges and commitments to help us when the right property has been found.

Please continue to pray about this and to involve yourself in it. Perhaps our more urgent need is the current funding. We need money to continue the ministry and we need you.

We need your prayers and your support. Pray also about some staff changes that we're making. We need some more gifted people who can really manage our operation especially when David and I are on the road.

Pray about that. Most of all pray that we may be given divine wisdom, divine patience, and above all divine favor. Oh that God may continue his blessing in the ministry of the word.

Well it has been great to visit with you. God bless you. As always we say it and mean it.

We love you and what you mean to us you'll never be able to tell. In a few moments you're going to listen to another introduction to that very wonderful chapter of 1 Corinthians 13 1 through 13. You've heard one message.

Here is the next one called superlative qualities of love. The superlative qualities of love. And we'll be closing the air with the last study on this subject which is very appropriate as we think of Christmas when love came down.

May God bless this message to you and warm your heart as you listen to it under the title of the superlative qualities of love. Dear Lord we thank you for this opportunity to visit with my beloved brethren and sisters who are listening right now to this tape. I thank you for every one of them and for what they mean to us in terms of the reflection of the Lord Jesus as well as their support and prayers.

Bless them and their families and now as they listen to the exposition of your word. May the spirit of God take what has been recorded already and make it come alive with power and blessing. We ask it for your dear name's sake.

Amen. We've looked at the gifts of the spirit and we're now studying together the grace of the spirit. Now you'll never find the quality of love defined in scripture.

Seldom will you find it described as such. But time and time again the qualities of love are demonstrated. This is as it should be for love is always active either in its creative aspect or its redemptive aspect.

It is fitting therefore that these verses should show us love in action. Where there is no activity of love in a believer's life there can be no priority of love in that believer's life. For love can only be known by the actions it prompts.

So let us address ourselves to a consideration of love's activity and discover the measure in which the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given unto us. Now if you have read through this passage you will have noticed that there are 14 aspects of the activity of love set forth in this

glorious poem. And while a little study is required to understand the sequence of this double seven we're going to take two aspects of it.

The first is what I'm going to call the personal mastery of love's activity and then secondly the practical ministry of love's activity. First the personal mastery. I must be mastered by love before I can minister in love.

There must be the personal mastery of love and then the practical ministry of love. Let's look then at the first, the personal mastery of love's activity. Before love can be practical in its outworking it must be personal.

And so we have here first of all love's activity, mastering your life, mastering my love in a personal fashion. And I want us to go right through all these various sentences concerning the personal mastery of love. Will you look at verse four.

Love's generosity. Love's generosity. Love envieth not.

Now envy is the feeling of ill will to those who are in the same line as ourselves. Envy expresses itself in covetousness and dissatisfaction. Love however is the very opposite of this as you notice.

Love envieth not. The Lord Jesus wonderfully exhibited this generosity of love when his disciples vied with one another as to who should have the greatest place of authority amongst them. We read there was a strife among them which of them should be accounted the greatest.

But you remember the Savior stood amongst them and he said, I am among you as one that serves. Or more literally, I am among you as one who is a slave. Here they were vying one with another who should have the highest place in that discipleship group.

Who should be the chairman or who should be the secretary or who should have the place of authority and importance. The Savior taking the lowest place said, I am among you as one that serves. How much Christian work is spoiled by this loveless spirit of envy.

We do well to test ourselves constantly with a question. Does the superiority or success of another in the same line as myself stimulate envy or joy? Whatever others are doing, can I always say I am among you as one that serveth? Love's generosity. Secondly, love's modesty.

Again, verse four, love vaunteth not itself. Look at that word vaunteth for a moment. Love vaunteth not itself.

To vaunt oneself is to parade one's imagined superiority over others. In simple language, it's just showing off, showing off. Someone has said that folk admire the peacock for the grandeur of its plumes until they're driven away by the discordant notes of its voice.

How modest was the Lord Jesus in all his words and actions. Concerning his words, he could say, my doctrine is not mine, but him that sent me. And again, the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself, but of my Father that dwelleth in me.

Here surely love was truly modest. Jesus never showed off. Love's generosity.

Love's modesty. But akin to that, number three, is love's humility. Look again.

Love is not puffed up. Again, verse four, to puff oneself up is to manifest pride and self-esteem. The Corinthians were not only parading their gifts, but were puffed up with their own ideals and sense of importance and knowledge.

And without doubt, Paul was indirectly rebuking those believers at Corinth. For this bounting, uncrucified self-life. And he says love is not puffed up.

How different is the life of the one who personifies all these aspects of love's activity? We read that he made himself of no reputation, but humbled himself and became obedient even unto the death of the cross. There is a fable told of two swans who are having a conversation with a bullfrog. Have you ever seen the hidden beauties of my pond? Asked the frog.

No replied the swans. Then follow me, said the frog, and dived into the pond, taking the two birds on a sightseeing tour. When the swans came to the surface again for breath of air, they asked the bullfrog, have you ever seen the beauties of our countryside? No, said the frog.

Would you like to? Yes, I would, but I can't fly. And then said the frog, if you were to hold in your beaks a stick and I could hang on with my mouth, you could fly and carry me over the countryside to see the wonderful beauties of God's handiwork. The swans accepted the suggestion and away they went on their tour.

And they swayed down and moved over dale and vale until at one point they came very low, flying over a little village. And as they came down low enough for anyone to see, two ladies who were shopping around the town suddenly stopped and happened to look up and see this fantastic sight. One declared, look at that.

Isn't that clever? I wonder whoever thought of that. And the frog said I didn't drop down. Well, does the scripture say a man's pride shall bring him low? Love's generosity, love's humility, love's modesty.

Number four is love's courtesy. Love doth not behave itself unseemly. Examine that verse five for a moment.

Love can never be rude for it's foreign to its nature. Love is always polite and politeness has been described as love in the little things of life. Let us never forget that courtesy is not merely a matter of birth, but a matter of the spirit.

It has been well said that what breeding does by training, love does by instinct. We're not being irreverent when we say that the Lord Jesus Christ was the greatest gentleman who ever lived. For a gentleman is a man who does things gently, lovingly, with a view to pleasing others.

A gentlewoman is likewise a person who lives for the pleasure of others. Speaking of his father, the Lord Jesus could say, I do always those things that please him. Love's courtesy.

Beloved Christian friends, one of the greatest lacks in our religious life today is courtesy. The cruel, hard world outside, which follows the philosophy of dog eat dog, is making its incursions into the life of the church. And instead of exhibiting the courtesy and chivalry of the love of Jesus manifested through our mortal bodies by the Holy Spirit, we're so crude and so rude and so uncouth.

Love's courtesy. 5. LOVE'S DIVINITY Love seeketh not her own. In other words, love is not selfish but selfless, not self-centred but self-forgetting.

Love never seeks her own advantage. Dr. G. Campbell Morgan has rightly said, perhaps this is the profoundest word about the self-emptying capacity of love in the whole of the book. This is why we've called it love's divinity.

For only the divine nature can empty itself in the interests of others. Paul could significantly say of the Lord Jesus, even Christ pleased not himself. With us, alas, alas, it's like the church at Philippi, concerning which the Apostle Paul had to say, all people in your church seek their own.

It's after number one. And they've forgotten the divine order, God first, others second, and self last. Love's divinity, love's divinity.

6. LOVE'S CIVILITY Love is not provoked. I want you to notice that, please. You say you're not reading it rightly, Pastor.

I am. Love is not provoked. You'll notice that the authorised version reads, is not easily provoked.

The revisers, however, have rightly omitted the word easily, for it's not there. Your Greek New Testament hasn't it there at all. The phrase easily provoked has been the excuse for many a person getting into a bad temper.

But love gives no excuse for bad tempers. Love never gives way to provocation, exasperation, or irritation. She is never touching.

Dr. F.Y. Fullerton once wrote that the crowning glory of our Lord was that he was never impatient. How exasperated he could have been amidst the pressures of his busy program, but he never answered back, in spite of the many unpleasant things that were said of him by friends and by foes. His friends said, he is beside himself.

His foes added, he hath a devil, he is mad, why hear ye him? But he remained unprovoked. Love's civility. Oh, courtesy and civility are like twins, and how rare they are in the Church of Jesus Christ today.

I am convinced that if they were more evident, it would be one of the most attractive aspects of our Christian behavior to men outside of Jesus Christ, who look at us and say, but what's the difference? I see no difference between myself and those who call themselves Christians. Do you know what shook the first century world? The love of the brethren, one for another. And it was said of one historian that as he summed up the characteristics of that primitive Christian church, he had to say, see how these people love one another.

I wonder what that same historian would have to say about our day. I have a feeling he would write, see how these Christians fight one another. Love's civility.

Number seven of the first group is love's integrity. Verse six, love rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth. Moffat's rendering is helpful here.

Love is never glad when others go wrong. She is gladdened by goodness. I think the outstanding illustration of this activity of love is revealed to us in the story of John 8. Do you remember how those critical religious leaders of our Savior's day brought a poor woman on one occasion into the temple

courts? There she was with disheveled hair, starry eyes, and frightened look.

And they pointed the finger at her and said, she has been caught in the act of sin. Moses and the law said, stone her. But what are you going to say? Do you remember how the Savior, on what appeared to be the horns of the dilemma, with absolute grace and composure, bent over and began to write as though he heard them not in the dust of that temple court floor? When he rose again from his stooped posture, he looked into the faces of those religious leaders and he said, he that is without sin.

The, underline that in the Greek, the article the, the sin of which you accuse her, first cast a stone at her. Being convicted in their conscience from the first even unto the last, they fired out and couldn't touch her. The Savior bent over again, but when he rose this time, majestic sweetness sat enthroned upon his glorious brow, and without a grace and compassion he looked at the woman and said, woman, hath no man condemned thee? She said, no man, Lord.

Then he said, neither do I condemn thee. Go and sin no more. He'd looked through to that woman's rotten, sordid life.

He'd seen the repentance, utter repentance of that broken life. And he'd seen the response of faith, so he spoke the word of deliverance, neither do I condemn thee. The Son of Man came not to condemn the world, but to save the world.

I give you my deliverance. Go and sin no more. And he would have never said that to a weak, mauling like that woman, if he hadn't imparted the very grace to live victoriously from that time onwards.

Love's integrity, love's integrity, that was love's integrity, acting first in truth and then in grace, with severity on the one side, cutting through the religious bigotry and conceit and arrogance and hidden sin of those religious leaders like a knife, like a fire, love's integrity, and then with grace, where there was a broken life, waiting to receive deliverance and salvation, love's integrity. So we have seen the personal mastery of love's activity in generosity, in modesty, humility, courtesy, divinity, civility, and integrity. Oh, to be mastered by divine love in order to act in love! But swiftly let us move to our next seven.

Let us turn to the seven aspects of the practical ministry of love's activity. The first was the personal mastery of my life, now the practical ministry of my life in terms of the love of the Lord Jesus. We have seen the love acting in personal life, but here now are the next seven, and I want us to run right through them again, starting at verse four.

As you will notice, there are a double seven, fourteen of them. The first one we are calling is love's patience. Love suffereth long, verse four.

Here is the long-suffering which waits rather than flares. Once again, how beautifully this is revealed in our Lord's answer. When Peter asked him, How often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times.

And the Lord laughed at him. I can't help feeling there was a smile in our Saviour's face when he said to him, Till seven times? And then with tender satire he said, I do not say seven times, but four hundred and ninety times, or seventy times seven. Love suffereth long.

How often should I forgive my brother? Just seven times? That's a complete number. That's giving him a chance. No, said the Saviour.

Four hundred and ninety times. Seventy times seven. Or endlessly, until you've won your brother.

Love's benevolence. Love is kind, verse four. Love is always ready to consider others with a view to extending good.

Have you ever noticed how much of Christ's love was spent in doing kind things for people? Think, for instance, of the occasion when he called his disciples to rest for a while. Taking them on that boat over on the lake, they talked and they prayed and they relaxed. But as they reached the other side, you remember that their privacy was broken into.

A great multitude gathered, begging for bread. The disciple said, Send them away, Lord. We've enjoyed such fellowship with you.

We've relaxed. We've laughed together. We've talked together.

We've prayed together. We wanted this to continue. Send them away.

And the Saviour said, Give ye them to eat. Give ye them to eat. Love is kind.

Love is kind. Then followed that glorious miracle of the feeding of the five thousand. Look again at verse five.

Love's lenience. It's patience. It's benevolence.

It's lenience. Love thinketh no evil. Love does not keep an account of evil done.

Love does not reckon up her grievances. In this sense, love is a poor mathematician. The word thinketh there is an accountant's term, if you please, an actual accountant's term.

Just as an accountant adds up, and so gives you the total of that which he's added up, so the accountant who knows real love in this sense does not add up. He doesn't account. He doesn't think up.

He doesn't add up grievances against him or against her. How easily the Lord Jesus could have reckoned up the evils that were done against him on that fateful and memorable day as he walked the Via della Rosa to Calvary. He was led from Gethsemane to Gabbatha, and then from Gabbatha to Golgotha.

And they spat at him, and they struck him across the head, driving those cruel thorns into his brow. They plucked the hair from his face that already lacerated him with those thongs of nails and bones. But even as they drove those nails into his hands, and the dull thud of a hammer through his flesh sounded around the hillside, he said, Father, Father, forgive them, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

Have you a memory for wrongs committed against you? Or have you fervent love which will cover a multitude of sins? Let it be said as we move through this passage that every time we talk about love in this fashion, I want you to notice that love never compromises with sin. We're not talking about sin. We're talking about the sinner.

We're not talking about evil in a believer's life as such. We're talking about the believer himself. While love has no time or place for sin or for evil, and cuts down on it without a justice and holiness such as was demanded upon the person of our Lord Jesus Christ when he assumed our sin, the sinless one made sin for us, yet when it comes to the sinner as such, or to a believer as such, love, love is lenient.

That's why Paul says in Galatians chapter six, if a brother be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, consider such an one, and restore such an one, remembering your own weakness, remember your own frailty, remembering that you could have fallen just as well but for the grace of God. Love is lenient. Yes, yes.

Number four, love's silence. Love beareth all things. Love patiently and silently endures when it has to suffer without breaking down or telling others what it has to bear.

Recall how Jesus silently endured when subjected to the accusations of false witnesses, and especially when interrogated by Pilate. We read, he answered to never a word so as much that Pilate marveled greatly. Have you ever met this kind of psychosis, this obsession of people who love to go around always recounting what they suffer? It's a repudiation of the release of love within a believer's life.

Look at number five, love's innocence. Love believeth all things, verse seven. The idea behind this clause has nothing to do with credulity.

It is rather the absence of suspicion. Some people are always suspicious, but the love-mastered believer always puts the best construction on things. On one occasion, when the Lord Jesus was sitting in the house of Simon the leper, a woman who was a sinner came in and stood and wept at his feet, and began to wash and wipe the master's feet with her very tears.

The immediate reaction of the hard-hearted Pharisees was, this man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that touches him, for she is a sinner. But the Savior defended her by putting the very best construction on her act of gratitude and love. And he said, wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, this also which this woman hath done shall be told for a memorial of her.

What a rare activity of love is this today. Love beareth all things. Love's innocence.

There's something very beautiful and very wonderful about the innocent characteristic of love that doesn't go around with suspicion, but quietly, quietly rests in the omniscient guard to reveal what is wrong and where sin actually dwells, leaving it to him who judges all things righteously. Look at number six, love's reassurance. Love hopeth all things.

Love hopeth all things. My, this has been a challenge to my own heart, this number six here at verse seven. Love is always optimistic and undiscourageable.

When others have long ago given up, love hopes on. The Lord Jesus never gave up hope for the most depraved of people. Of him it could be truly said, a bruised reed shall he not break, and a smoking flax shall he not quench.

How necessary it is then to reproduce this quality of love in our Christian work, how easily we could give up because of initial discouragement. The Lord, the Lord give us a love which is perennially optimistic. But now we come to the crown of them all, love's perseverance.

Again, verse seven, love endureth all things. This activity of love is the crown of all that's gone before, for it represents love's victory. The writer to the Hebrews tells us that for the joy that was set before him, the Lord Jesus endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of God.

The apostle knew something of this triumph of love, for he could say, you remember, in this very epistle, being reviled we bless, being persecuted we suffer it, being defamed we entreat. What a wonderful portrayal of the activity of love is this. And so we have seen this double seven with the personal mastery of love's activity, and then the practical ministry of love's activity.

To what extent is love's patience, benevolence, lenience, silence, innocence, reassurance, perseverance evident in your life? Or evident in my life? When Dr. Doddridge asked his little daughter, who died so early, why everybody seemed to love her, she answered with a weak little voice, but a light in her eye, I cannot tell unless it is because I love everybody. Seneca, the moralist, once said, love in order to be loved. Have you ever thought of this, my friend, love to be loved? Love, you see, is reciprocal.

When you love, people love you. When you don't love, people can't love you, because love calls to love. Professor Henry Drummond, in his sermon on 1 Corinthians 13, says, it is better not to live than not to love.

But I can't stop there without saying this. Someone says, but this is way beyond me. This is supernatural.

Sure it is, for God alone is love. Well, how can I know this love in my life? Well, Paul, in that amazing passage in Galatians 5 and 22, says, the fruit of the Spirit is love. And then he goes on to show love expressing itself in a number of ways, just as we've been seeing in this song of love.

He says, love is joy, that's joy, that's love smiling. Peace is love in repose. Long-suffering is love under trial.

Gentleness is love in Christian behavior. Goodness is love in practical service. Faith is love on the battlefield.

This is the victory which overcometh the world, even our faith. Meekness is love in success. Self-control is love in control.

The fruit of the Spirit is love. And there can be no fruit without the life of the Spirit, and then the growth of the Spirit. Do you know the indwelling of the Holy Ghost in your life? Do you? Have you honestly been born again? Ah, we can live our Christianity by proxy.

We can copy so many things that appear to be Christian, but are really not Christian. Do you know the Holy Ghost in your life? And if you do know the Holy Ghost in your life, is he so filling your life by the development of your character and your capacity through the Word of God, through the fellowship of the saints, through the means of grace, that as the Spirit is filling, so the fruit of the Spirit is being manifested and exhibited in your life? Let me ask you, is there a personal mastery of love in your life? Is there a practical ministry of love in your life? In a word, is the Lord Jesus, who is the portrait of this glorious picture we have seen in terms of love, living again in you? It is better not to live than not to have love. Love is the way.

Love is God's way. Love must be your way today. Let us pray.

Savior, we pray that thou wilt wonderfully take thine own blessed truth, and by the working of the Holy Spirit in his life-giving power, produce in us and express through us the love of the Lord Jesus, because we ask it for his dear name's sake. Amen.

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