

The Love God
Calls Us To

Walking Out 1 Corinthians 13



PAUL HAINLINE

NobleMind Press

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Paul Hainline

*“But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these
is love.”*

— 1 Corinthians 13:13 (NASB)

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First Edition — NobleMind Press

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INSCRIPTION & DEDICATION

Inscription & Dedication

* * *

Inscription Page (*facing page, verso*)

This copy of

The Love God Calls Us To Walking Out 1 Corinthians 13

is given to

[name]

by

[signature]

[signature]

on

[date]

* * *

For You (*recto, facing the inscription*)

I do not know your name yet, but the person who handed you this book does. Your name has been written on the page across from this one, and a name has been signed below it. The book is yours. Take that personally. It was meant to be.

You are about to walk through 1 Corinthians 13 — the chapter the world has heard a thousand times at weddings and read carefully almost nowhere else. You are being asked to think about what it actually means. That is rarer than you know. Most people who quote the chapter never do it.

You should know two things before you begin.

The first is that this book is not a substitute for the chapter it walks through. It is a companion. The Word of God is the authority. This book is one believer trying to walk you through what he has seen there, in the hope that you will see more of it than he has. The verses are what matter. The book is borrowed light.

The second is that what is described in this chapter will outlast everything else in your life. The work, the relationships, the seasons that feel enormous — all of them will pass. The love described in 1 Corinthians 13 will not. It is the eternal nature of God Himself, and you have been invited to learn what it looks like — and to begin practicing it now, whatever stage of life you are in.

Take your time. Read it slowly. Argue with it where you need to. Bring it back to the Word and let the Word answer.

And when you have finished it, put it on a shelf and keep it. You may not need it again this year. You may not need it again for ten years. But someday — possibly on a day you cannot yet imagine — you will need it. And it will be there.

PREFACE

Before You Begin

This is a book about 1 Corinthians 13 — the chapter the world has come to call *the love chapter*, and most often quotes at weddings.

It is not a wedding book.

The passage was not written to a happy bride and groom standing at an altar. It was written to a fractured, gift-proud, scorekeeping church in a Greek port city that had let love go off the rails on every front Paul could name. He had just finished telling them, in chapter 12, that the spiritual gifts they were quarreling over were given for the building up of the body. He would, in chapter 14, return to the same gifts and try to bring some order to a chaotic worship service. Between those two chapters of correction stands 1 Corinthians 13, which is not a poem about love. It is the diagnostic Paul wrote to a church that had forgotten what love looked like.

That is the chapter this book walks through. Fifteen attributes — *love is patient, love is kind, love is not jealous*, and on through *love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things* — taken up across fourteen chapters. An opening chapter on the *if I have not love* stakes Paul lays down in verses 1–3, and a closing chapter on the eternal weight of love in

verses 8–13, frame the fourteen chapters of attributes between them.

(Two small notes on the chapter structure. First: *“love does not brag and is not arrogant”* — which many readers will have memorized as a single phrase — appears here as two separate chapters, because Paul uses two distinct Greek verbs for two distinct failures. The verse holds them side by side; the book takes them one at a time. Second: *“love does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth”* appears here as a single chapter, because Paul wrote it as a deliberate antithesis — the *not this* and the *but this* defining each other. The verse pairs them; the book honors the pairing.)

The aim is plain. To let the chapter say what it actually says. To hear it in its first setting, addressed to a first-century church with first-century problems. And to feel, by the end, that the love Paul is describing is both impossibly high and actually possible — high because no one but Christ has ever loved this way, and possible because the same Christ who loved this way has gone to work in His people to produce in them what He alone has perfected.

How each chapter works

Every attribute chapter does the same thing, in the same order, so you can find your bearings quickly.

The verse from 1 Corinthians 13 opens the chapter. The text comes first; the discussion follows.

The Greek word Paul reached for is named, briefly, where it adds something to the English. This is not a seminary book and it never asks you to know Greek. But sometimes the original word carries a weight the English softens, and at those points the original word earns a sentence.

The Corinthian failure is then named — what was actually happening in that church that prompted Paul to address this particular attribute. This is the part most modern treatments of 1 Corinthians 13 skip. They lift the chapter out of its setting and read it as a free-standing piece of love poetry. But Paul did not write love poetry. He wrote a letter to people he was correcting, and every attribute he names is something they were specifically failing at. Knowing what they were failing at sharpens what we are now being asked to do.

The vertical foundation is then drawn. Each attribute Paul names is also, without exception, an attribute of God Himself. *Love is patient* — and so is God, with us, every day. *Love does not take into account a wrong suffered* — and neither does the Lord, with the sin of the man covered by Christ. The horizontal call to love becomes possible only because the vertical foundation is in place. The book never separates the two.

The modern application comes last. What does this attribute look like in a friendship, in a family, in a classroom, in a church? Concrete, specific, named. Not lists of tips. Pictures of what the attribute actually looks like in motion.

And at the end of every chapter, a single reflection prompt under the header *THINK*. One prompt, not five. Not designed to

be answered in thirty seconds and walked away from. Designed to follow you into the next day.

THINK

A short word on the prompt at the end of each chapter, because the prompt is doing more work than it looks like it is doing.

Most study guides give the reader several questions and let the reader choose which one to engage with. This book does not. Every chapter ends with one prompt, written to land at the center of gravity of the chapter, and the reader is invited to sit with it long enough for it to do its work.

Reading without thinking is reading that passes through you. The prompt is the place where the chapter is asked to stop passing through and start setting up house. If you treat the prompt as optional decoration, the book will entertain you and leave. If you treat it as the most important page of the chapter, the book may actually change something. Take the prompt seriously. Sit with it. Bring it back the next day. Talk it through with someone if that helps you. The Word is meant to be worked, not merely read.

Who this book is for

The book is written for two readers at the same time.

The first is the believer — the man or woman already in Christ Jesus, already walking in the obedience of faith, who wants to grow in the kind of love Paul describes here. To you, every chapter is a call to walk out what you have already received. The standard is high, but the standard is not new — it is the same standard Christ has been pressing into the lives of His people since the day the church began.

The second is the reader who does not yet belong to Christ. You are not an afterthought in this book. The gospel surfaces naturally throughout, because the love Paul describes can only be lived by those who have received it from its Source, and the chapter loses its force if that connection is not made plain. You will encounter the gospel several times in these pages, not as an aside but as the foundation under the text. When the phrase *obey the gospel* appears, Appendix A lays out the pattern Scripture itself sets down for how a sinner responds to the good news of Jesus Christ. Neither audience is asked to wait while the other is addressed. The chapters do both at once, the way 1 Corinthians 13 itself does. The believer is asked to walk out the love being described. The reader who does not yet belong to Christ is invited to come and stand inside the country where that love is the air.

How to read this book

Slowly. One chapter at a time. Resist the urge to read three at a sitting; the chapters are short on purpose, and they reward being given time to settle.

Read the Scripture passage at the top of each chapter before the chapter itself, even if it is familiar to you. Especially if it is familiar to you. Familiarity is the enemy of careful reading.

Bring the book back to the Word, not the Word to the book. If something in these pages seems to lean on Scripture for support, open Scripture and check. The Word is the authority. The book is one believer's attempt to walk you through what he has seen there, and any sentence in this book that does not stand under the

weight of the verse it leans on should be discarded without ceremony.

And do the work of study, not just reading. A man can read the Bible his whole life and never study it. The Berean Christians, when Paul preached to them, *received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so* (Acts 17:11). Examining. Not glancing. Not skimming. Examining. The Word repays that kind of attention more than any other book ever written, because it is the only book ever written by the very God whose nature and works it describes.

A final word before Chapter 1

There is no preface that can prepare a reader for what 1 Corinthians 13 is going to ask of them. The chapter is short. Thirteen verses. Fifteen attributes of love named at the heart of it. You could read the whole thing in three minutes. But Paul wrote it knowing it would do its work over decades, not minutes, and the work it does is the slow remaking of a person into the image of the One whose nature this kind of love describes.

You are about to begin. Take your time. Sit with the verses. Argue with the chapters where you need to. Bring it all back to the Word. And when you have finished — when you have walked through every attribute and reached the closing chapter on the love that outlasts everything else — you will know two things you may not know now. You will know that the love Paul describes is far higher than anything the world has ever called love. And you will know

that, by the grace of God in Jesus Christ, it is the love you have been invited to learn to walk in.

That invitation is the reason this book exists.

The More Excellent Way

But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way.

If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.

1 CORINTHIANS 12:31; 13:1-3 (NASB)

Before Paul writes the verses the world will one day quote at weddings, he writes three sentences that level a Christian to the ground.

If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I am noise. If I have prophecy, knowledge, and faith to move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away everything I own and let my body be burned at the stake for the gospel, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.

Three sentences. Three of the most impressive things a believer can do — speak in tongues, possess revelation, give until there is nothing left to give — each weighed and found weightless

without love. That is where this chapter begins. Not at *love is patient*, the familiar warm opening of the love poem. At three statements that destroy a Corinthian believer's most carefully built theology about what makes him spiritual.

We will get to *love is patient*. But we cannot get there until we walk through the doorway Paul puts in front of it, and that doorway is one of the most uncomfortable openings in the New Testament.

Where this passage sits

To understand why Paul writes these sentences here, you have to understand what he has been writing about up to this point.

The church in Corinth was a mess. Paul does not put it that way — he loves them too much — but the letter itself is a series of corrections, problem after problem after problem. In the first four chapters he addresses the factions tearing the congregation apart: *I am of Paul*, one group said; *I am of Apollos*, said another (1:12). In chapter 5 he addresses a man living openly in sexual sin while the church looked on and felt sophisticated about it. In chapter 6 he addresses believers dragging one another into pagan courts. In chapters 8 through 10 he addresses arguments over food sacrificed to idols, where knowledge was being prized over love and the strong were wounding the weak. In chapter 11 he addresses the Lord's Supper, which the Corinthians had managed to turn into an occasion for division — the rich eating well while the poor went hungry. In chapter 12 he addresses the spiritual gifts, which

the Corinthians had elevated into a ranking system that exalted those who had the showy gifts and despised those who did not. And in chapter 14 he will return to the gifts and try to bring some order to a worship service that had become a competition.

Sitting in the middle of all that correction, between chapter 12 on the gifts and chapter 14 on the gifts, Paul writes chapter 13.

He does not write it because he wanted to compose a poem.

He writes it because the church he loved had managed to acquire most of the impressive gifts and had simultaneously lost the one thing without which the gifts are not even worth having. They had eloquence without love. They had knowledge without love. They had sacrificial gestures without love. And what Paul does, in the three sentences that open chapter 13, is hold up a mirror in which they can see that everything they were most proud of was, by the only measure that mattered, nothing.

That is where this passage sits. It is not a love song. It is a verdict.

A still more excellent way

The last verse of chapter 12 is the bridge into chapter 13:

But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way.

I CORINTHIANS 12:31 (NASB)

The Greek phrase translated *a still more excellent way* is *kath' hyperbolēn hodon* — literally, a way according to excess, a surpassing way. The word *hyperbolē* is where we get our English

word *hyperbole*. It does not mean better in the sense of slightly preferred. It means surpassing in the sense of beyond comparison. The way Paul is about to describe is not one option among several. It is the way that surpasses every other way.

What is the way? Love. The way that surpasses tongues, prophecy, knowledge, faith, sacrifice, and martyrdom. The way every believer is called to walk, regardless of which gifts he has or has not received. The way that does not depend on how the gifts have been distributed in the body, because love is the road every member of the body is on — or should be on — together.

This is the first thing the Corinthians needed to hear, and it is the first thing many believers still need to hear. The Christian life is not, at its core, about the gifts you have or do not have. It is about the way you walk. And the way Christ has set out for His people to walk is the way of love.

Three statements that level the ground

Now Paul takes the gifts the Corinthians prized most and runs them, one by one, through the filter he has just named. The structure of all three is the same: *If I have X, but do not have love, I am/it is...* The conclusion in each case is devastating.

The first — tongues without love is noise.

If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:1 (NASB)

Tongues was the showcase gift in Corinth, the one that drew attention, the one that seemed to mark a believer as especially spiritual. Paul takes that gift and pushes it to its imaginative limit — *the tongues of men and of angels*. Even if you could speak the language of angels, even if your speech reached the very limits of created communication, without love you are not a vessel of God’s word. You are a metal pot being struck. You are a cymbal in an empty room. The sound is loud. The substance is nothing.

The image is not subtle. A noisy gong and a clanging cymbal are not musical. They are interruptions. Paul is saying: the showcase gift, exercised without love, is not music to God. It is noise.

The second — knowledge and faith without love leave you as nothing.

If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:2 (NASB)

Notice how Paul stacks this one. Not just prophecy — the gift of prophecy *plus* all mysteries *plus* all knowledge *plus* all faith *plus* mountain-moving power. Paul is piling on every spiritual asset he can think of, every gift that would mark a man as a giant in the Christian life. And then he says, without love, *I am nothing*.

Not *I have less than I could have*. Not *I am missing one ingredient*. *I am nothing*. The Greek is *outhen eimi* — literally, *nothing I am*. The man with every gift and no love is not a

discounted version of a great Christian. He is, in the only accounting that matters, zero.

That is hard to hear. It is also, when you sit with it, one of the most clarifying sentences in the New Testament. It means that the brother sitting next to you in worship who cannot quote a single verse but who loves his wife and his children and his neighbors with patient, kind, scorekeeping-free love is, by Paul's measure, more than the celebrated teacher whose knowledge is encyclopedic and whose heart is cold. The kingdom of God runs on a different currency than the kingdoms of men. Love is the currency. Everything else is paper without backing.

The third — sacrifice without love profits nothing.

And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.

I CORINTHIANS 13:3 (NASB)

Surely *this* must count. Surely the man who gives away every penny he owns to feed the hungry — surely the man who walks into the fire rather than deny the name of Christ — surely *that* man cannot be empty.

He can.

Even sacrifice — even the most spectacular act of self-giving the human imagination can devise — even martyrdom itself — is empty without love. The act looks identical from the outside. The same money changes hands. The same fire burns. But before God, who sees the heart, the same act performed without love and performed with love are not the same act. One is genuine love laid

down for another. The other is a transaction — perhaps for praise, perhaps for self-justification, perhaps for the secret feeling of being a hero. The act is identical. The currency is not.

Three statements. Tongues. Knowledge. Sacrifice. The three things the Corinthians thought made them spiritual giants. And Paul, before he has even told them what love is, tells them what the absence of love does to everything else they were proud of.

It reduces it to noise. It reduces them to nothing. It profits them not at all.

The way Christ walked

How did Paul come to think this way?

He thought this way because the One who saved him on the road to Damascus is Himself the love that he is now describing. The more excellent way Paul commends to the Corinthians is not a way he invented. It is the way Christ walked first.

The Son of God did not come into the world wielding the impressive gifts. He could have. He had every right to. Instead He took on flesh, lived in obscurity for thirty years, gathered fishermen, taught patiently, healed quietly, and walked toward a cross He could have refused.

Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.

JOHN 15:13 (NASB)

The cross is the more excellent way given a public demonstration. There Christ Himself laid down His life for those He loved —

love pushed as far as love can be pushed, by the One who alone could push it that far.

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

ROMANS 5:8 (NASB)

That is the source of the way Paul is calling the Corinthians to walk. Not a moral principle they were supposed to figure out on their own. Not an ethic that the church was being asked to develop. The love Paul describes is the love of God Himself, demonstrated at Calvary, now being asked to flow through the people who have received it.

And that is why the gifts, taken alone, are not enough. The gifts are means. Love is the end. The gifts were given so that the body might be built up in love. To exercise the gifts without love is to take what God gave for the building up of the body and use it for the puffing up of the self. That is exactly what Corinth had done. And it is exactly what the church in every generation is tempted to do.

What this means for you

If you are reading this book, you may not have spoken in tongues. You may not believe you have the gift of prophecy. You may not have moved a mountain by faith, and you may never give away your last penny, much less be burned at the stake.

That does not let you out of the chapter.

The Corinthian gifts were extreme cases for a reason. Paul reaches for the most impressive things he can name because if those are nothing without love, then everything less impressive is also nothing without love. The eloquent prayer in the believer with a cold heart. The careful theology in the student who can quote chapter and verse and treats his siblings with contempt at the dinner table. The visible service in the believer who is secretly contemptuous of the people he is serving. The faithful church attendance in the man who is privately keeping a ledger against his brother.

All of it. Without love. Is nothing.

This is the leveling truth that opens 1 Corinthians 13, and it is the reason the rest of the book matters. Love is not the advanced material of the Christian life, reserved for those who have already mastered the basics. Love is the basics. It is the elementary lesson and the senior thesis and everything in between. It is the measure by which every other lesson is graded. And until the Christian sees this — until he has felt the weight of these three sentences and understood that without love he is, in God's accounting, nothing — he is not ready to learn what love actually looks like.

The next fourteen chapters of this book walk through 1 Corinthians 13:4–7, attribute by attribute, with the help of all the Scripture that supports them. The closing chapter takes up verses 8 through 13 — the eternal weight of love, the reason love is the greatest of the three Christian virtues, the only one of them that lasts into the country we are walking toward.

But before any of that, this chapter has to do its work. It has to take down whatever you came in proud of, and lay it next to

Paul's three sentences, and ask whether what you have built was built on the foundation Paul has just named.

If the answer is yes — if Christ has been the source of your love and the gifts have been His tools — then welcome to the book. The rest of it will sharpen what is already there.

If the answer is no — if you are honest enough to admit that some of what you have built has been about the building of yourself rather than the building up of His body — then welcome, too. The rest of this book is written for you. You are about to be shown the way more excellent than what you have been walking, and the One who walked it first stands at the head of the road, ready to teach you.

Either way, this chapter has done its work. The ground is level. The standard is named. The way is set out.

Now we begin.

* * *

THINK

Take an honest inventory of what you have built in your Christian life — the gifts you have exercised, the knowledge you have acquired, the acts of service you have offered, the things you would name if someone asked what makes you a Christian. Run all of it through Paul's filter: *If I have ___, **but do not have love, I am ___***. Fill in the blanks for yourself. Sit with the answer. If the answer troubles you, do not rush to fix it. Stay with it long enough for the Word to do its work. The remedy is coming. But the diagnosis has to land first.

Love Is Patient

Love is patient...

I CORINTHIANS 13:4 (NASB)

The Greek word Paul reaches for is *makrothumeō*. It is built from two pieces. *Makros* means *long*. *Thumos* means *temper* — or, more literally, *anger, passion, the heat that rises in a man when he is crossed*. Put the two pieces together and Paul's word is, in flat English, *long-tempered*.

We have no single word for it, but we have its opposite. *Short-tempered* is universally understood. The short-tempered man has a fuse that lights and reaches the powder in a hurry. He goes off. He erupts. The smallest spark sets him in motion, and everyone in the room knows to step back.

A long-tempered man is the opposite. His fuse takes its time. The spark lands and he does not move. The provocation comes and he absorbs it. He is not numb. He is not slow-witted. He has the same fuel inside him that a short-tempered man has — the same anger, the same justified reaction available — but something in him does not light. Or lights only after a great while, and not without good reason.

That is the word Paul puts at the head of his list. Before *kind*, before *not jealous*, before *bears all things*, the first thing he says

love is, is *long-tempered*. If you cannot get this one right, the rest of the list does not have a foundation to sit on.

What was happening in Corinth

To feel the force of why Paul names this attribute first, you have to remember that he is writing to a church that could not wait for each other to eat dinner.

The Corinthians had been gathering for the Lord's Supper, and the gathering had become chaos. Two chapters before he writes the love chapter, Paul addresses what was happening:

Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper, for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk.

I CORINTHIANS II:20-21 (NASB)

The wealthier believers were arriving first and eating their fill. The poorer believers — the slaves, the working men whose work ran later — were arriving to find the table empty and their brothers already drunk on the wine. Paul's instruction to fix it is one sentence:

So then, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another.

I CORINTHIANS II:33 (NASB)

Wait for one another. Four words. The simplest instruction in the letter. And it was so obvious, and so unfollowed, that Paul had to write it down.

That was the Corinthian church. A church that could not wait for each other to eat. A church where the gift-proud were impatient with the gift-less, where the strong were impatient with the weak, where the knowledgeable were impatient with the ignorant, and where, when the most sacred meal of the church was set on the table, no one would even hold a plate until the slow brother walked in the door.

The same impatience was on display in the chapter just before this one. The Corinthians had received a wide range of spiritual gifts, and rather than wait their turn or yield the floor, they were clamoring all at once. By the time Paul gets to chapter 14 he is laying down rules for orderly speaking — two or three at most, one at a time, and let the others discern. Rules he should not have had to write, except that the gift-proud could not wait for the gift-less, and the believer with the loud gift would not pause to make room for the believer with the quiet one. Impatience in the worship service was the same disease as impatience at the supper table, breaking out at the place where the church was supposed to look most like itself.

Now you can hear what Paul is saying in 13:4. *Love is patient.* You said you had love. Your meetings show otherwise. Whatever else you have learned, you have not learned to wait. And until you learn to wait, the love you claim to have is not the love I am writing about.

The God who is long-tempered

The reason Paul can demand patience of the Corinthians, and of us, is that patience is the way God Himself has dealt with His people from the beginning.

When the LORD passed before Moses on the mountain and named His own character — the most concentrated place in Scripture where God Himself names the moral attributes of His own being aloud — patience was in the second clause:

Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth...”

EXODUS 34:6 (NASB)

Slow to anger. The Hebrew is *erek apayim* — literally, *long of nose*. An ancient Hebrew idiom for the slow burn. The picture is of nostrils that take a long time to flare. Hebrew’s way of saying what Greek would later say with *makrothumeō*. The same idea, translated across two languages over a thousand years apart, applied to the same God: long-fused. Slow to ignite. The fuel of righteous anger is present, but it takes time to reach the powder, and most of the time the powder never goes off at all.

That self-description of God is repeated more times in the Old Testament than almost any other description He gives of Himself. Numbers 14:18. Psalm 86:15. Psalm 103:8. Psalm 145:8. Joel 2:13. Jonah 4:2. Nahum 1:3. Israel learned the phrase the way a child learns his father’s voice — by hearing it again and again, in

every kind of weather, until he knew it was the truest thing about the One who said it.

And the New Testament makes plain that this divine patience is not a feature of an old covenant that has now passed. It is the very reason any of us is still here:

The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

2 PETER 3:9 (NASB)

The end has not come yet. The Lord could have ended history yesterday. He could end it today. He has not, because His patience is making room for sinners to turn. Every breath you have taken is a gift His long fuse purchased.

And to make sure no one missed the personal application, Paul wrote about it in his own case:

Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.

1 TIMOTHY 1:16 (NASB)

The man who writes *love is patient* in 1 Corinthians 13:4 is the same man who once stood by approving as Stephen was stoned, who hunted believers from house to house in Jerusalem, who breathed threats and murder against the church. And the Lord he was hunting did not strike him down. The Lord waited. The Lord was *long-tempered* with him on the road outside Damascus, met

him, knocked him down, and called him by name. Paul knew the patience of God from the inside. When he wrote that love is patient, he was not theorizing.

What patience is, and what it is not

Before we go any further, we have to clear away a misunderstanding that ruins this attribute in most modern hands.

Patience is not passivity. Patience is not weakness. Patience is not a personality trait that some people are born with and others are not. Patience is not the disposition of the man who has no spine to react with, and patience is not the resignation of the man who has given up on his situation ever changing.

Patience is the active restraint of a justified reaction.

Look at the picture Scripture paints. God is *slow to anger* — which means there is anger to be slow with. God's fuse is long, but His fuse is real. The reactions He is restraining are not imaginary. The sin is real, the offense is real, the wound to His holiness is real, and the judgment that could justly fall is real. And yet — for now, for our sake, for as long as His mercy continues to make room — He waits. The reaction is being held. The reaction is not absent. It is restrained.

That is the patience we are called to. Not the absence of feeling. Not the absence of a justified reaction. The restraint of one.

The person you live with said something tonight that cut you. You felt it. The reaction is real. Your mom, your dad, your sibling, your friend, your classmate, the brother in the church

who has wounded you for the fourth time this month — none of these encounters lacks justification for a sharp response. Patience does not mean you did not feel it. Patience means you felt it and did not light.

A long-tempered Christian is not a man with no temper. He is a man whose temper is long. The fuel is the same fuel any short-tempered man would have. The fuse is what is different. And the fuse, in the believer, is being made longer by the same Lord whose own fuse extends to the end of history for the sake of sinners.

What it looks like

Patience looks like a high-school student who has been asked the same question by his younger sibling for the fifth time today and answers it a sixth time without sighing.

It looks like a teenage girl whose closest friend has canceled on her three times in a row this semester with a half-sentence excuse — and who, when the next text comes through with another suggestion, holds her resentment back and answers her warmly anyway.

It looks like a teenager sitting with a grandfather whose mind has started to slip, who has just been accused of taking something he never touched — and who, instead of defending himself, says he is sorry the thing was lost and changes the subject, because the grandfather will not remember the accusation in an hour, but he will remember being argued with.

It looks like a teacher who has explained the same point to the same student in the same class for the third time, and who is preparing, without resentment, to explain it a fourth.

It looks like a teenager kneeling down to tie a little brother's shoes because the little brother's hands are not yet quick, and the bus is coming, and the teenager could have done it in three seconds and saved everyone the trouble — but instead the teenager guides the small hands through the loops once more, slowly, because the little brother will need to learn this, and patience is the only thing that teaches it.

It looks like a teenager whose father has just come through the door tired and short, and snapped at him about something small — and who, knowing the father is exhausted, does not snap back, does not roll his eyes, does not retreat behind a closed door. He answers calmly and lets the tone go.

It looks like a high-school boy on a project team with a classmate who works far slower than he does, and who, instead of taking over and finishing the work himself, sits down beside the slower student and walks him through it, because the grade matters less than the brother.

It looks like a teenager whose teammate, after a botched play, has whipped around and snapped at her in front of the whole bench — and who, instead of snapping back, hands her the water bottle and waits for the next whistle.

It looks like Christ.

That is who taught patience to His people. He sat with twelve disciples who misunderstood Him repeatedly. He explained His parables more than once. He let Peter make the

same mistake several times. He answered the same question from different angles when the same heart needed to hear it differently. He bore with Israel through forty years of grumbling in a wilderness He did not have to put up with for one day. He has borne with the church for two thousand years now. And He bears with you and me, His current generation, exactly as long as His Father has ordained, so that the people His Son died for can be gathered in.

The patience He showed His disciples on the road is the patience He shows you today. The patience He showed Saul of Tarsus is the patience He shows the slowest learner in any Bible class. The patience He has shown the world for two millennia is the patience by which you and I are reading these words instead of standing at the judgment.

The world's impatience, and ours

The world's love is impatient. It has always been so, and the present generation has only sharpened it.

The world ends a friendship over an inconvenience. The world quits a hard class at the first low grade. The world ghosts a relationship the moment it stops being fun. The world scrolls through people instead of waiting on them, and a generation has grown up not knowing how to wait at all.

That impatience reaches into the church. The Christian who cannot wait for an answer to prayer, and concludes the answer is no. The Christian who cannot wait for a brother to grow, and writes him off as unteachable. The Christian who cannot wait for

his own sanctification, and decides the gospel must not be doing its work in him. The Christian who cannot wait for a slow elder to think through a hard question, and bypasses the elders to do what he wanted to do anyway. All of it is the same disease. The fuse is short. The reaction lights and goes off. And whatever is built next is built on the rubble of what patience could have preserved.

A Christian who is becoming patient is becoming, by that much, more like the One who saved him. There is no other way for it to happen, because patience is not a virtue we naturally possess. It is a virtue we receive from being long borne with by the God who has been long-tempered toward us, and we learn slowly to extend to others as we have received it.

So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

COLOSSIANS 3:12 (NASB)

Put on patience. It is something you put on, the way you put on a coat in the morning — deliberately, every day, knowing the weather of the day will demand it. It is not an inheritance you receive once. It is a garment you reach for daily, because every day you will encounter someone whose pace, whose weakness, whose repeated failure, will offer your short-tempered self the chance to ignite. And every day, the long-tempered Lord whose name you bear will offer you, in His Word and in the renewing of your mind through it (Romans 12:2), the option to put on, instead, the long fuse.

A note for the reader who is not yet in Christ

You are reading this chapter because patience interests you, or because someone you love handed you this book, or because the title pulled you in. Whatever brought you here, see one thing before you turn the page.

The world will tell you patience is for the weak. The world is wrong. Patience is the strongest restraint in the human heart. It is the harness on the wildest horse. The man or woman who can absorb an insult and not return it, who can be wronged and not strike back, who can wait — really wait — for what is right rather than seize what is convenient, is stronger than the man who explodes. The world has it backwards. The fuse is power. The fuse is not weakness. And the fuse comes from one place: the One who has been long-tempered with you for every year of your life so far.

He has waited for you. Every day you have been on the earth has been a day His patience purchased for you. Every breath has been borrowed from a Lord whose long fuse is the only reason you are not already standing at the great judgment. That patience is not infinite. It is doing its work now — making room for you to turn, before the day His patience gives way to the verdict that has always been just.

The chapter you are reading is not first about how to be patient with the people in your life. It is first about a God who has been patient with you, and who is waiting for you to come home. The walking out — yours to do — comes only after the coming home. You cannot live this patience until you have first received it.

Where this leaves us

Patience is the first attribute in Paul's list because it is the floor every other attribute stands on. A man who cannot wait cannot be kind for long. A man who cannot wait cannot avoid jealousy for long. A man who cannot wait cannot keep a ledger closed, cannot believe well of his brother, cannot hope through a hard season, cannot endure to the end. Patience is the foundation. The rest of 1 Corinthians 13 is the house that sits on it.

We will spend the chapters that follow walking through the house.

But before any of that, the floor has to be there.

* * *

THINK

Name one person in your life right now whose pace, weakness, or repeated failure most tests your patience. Not the stranger in traffic — that is amateur. The person you live with, work with, share a name with, see at church every week, who you have every justified reason to react to. Now sit with this question: *What does it tell you about your understanding of God's patience toward you, that you have so little for them?* The answer is not a verdict. It is a starting place. The Lord who has been long-tempered with you for every day of your life is willing to grow that same long fuse in you, one provocation at a time. The next one is probably already on its way. What will you do with it?

Love Is Kind

...love is kind...

I CORINTHIANS 13:4 (NASB)

The Greek word Paul reaches for here is *chrēsteuetai*. It is a verb built from the adjective *chrēstos*, which means *useful, good for something, kind in the active sense*. In ordinary Greek, a *chrēstos* tool was one that did its job. A *chrēstos* slave was one whose work was good. A *chrēstos* person was one who could be counted on for genuine, practical good. The word does not mean *nice* in our modern thin sense. It means *good at being good to people*.

Chrēsteuetai — the verb Paul uses here — appears nowhere else in the New Testament. He pulled a rare, almost-unused word from the older Greek to do exactly the work he needed it to do in this list. *Love acts in the chrēstos way*. Love is the kind of thing that gets up and does good for someone. Not feels good about them. Not means well toward them. *Does good to them*.

What was happening in Corinth

If patience was missing in Corinth because the wealthy could not wait for the slaves to arrive for the Lord's Supper, kindness was missing because of something subtler and uglier: the *strong* were wounding the *weak*, and they were doing it on principle.

The whole of 1 Corinthians 8, 9, and 10 is Paul addressing what the Corinthians had done with the question of meat sacrificed to idols. The mature believers — those with *knowledge* — had figured out that an idol is nothing, that meat sold in the market was just meat, and that they were therefore free to eat without scruple. They were correct. Paul agrees with them on the doctrine. What he will not let them get away with is the way they were carrying their doctrine.

...Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies. If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know; but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him.

I CORINTHIANS 8:1-3 (NASB)

The strong, armed with their correct understanding, were eating freely in front of weaker brothers — believers newly converted out of paganism, for whom the smell of idol-meat brought the temple back into the room — and these weaker brothers were stumbling. Paul's verdict was withering:

For if someone sees you, who have knowledge, dining in an idol's temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols? For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died.

I CORINTHIANS 8:10-11 (NASB)

Read that slowly. The strong had been *right* and still managed to *ruin* a brother for whose sake Christ died. That is what knowledge without kindness does. It uses its rightness as a

weapon. It looks down at the weak from a height the weak cannot yet climb to, and it eats its meat in front of them, and it is technically allowed to. And it ruins them.

The same unkindness was at work in the chapter on spiritual gifts a few pages later. The believer with the showy gift was using his gift to elevate himself, not to build up the brother whose gift was quieter. The eye was looking at the hand and saying, in effect, *I have no need of you* (1 Corinthians 12:21). That is exactly the absence of kindness this verse forbids. Kindness in the gift-giver toward the gift-less would have looked like the strong using his visible gift to make the brother with the invisible gift visible. Instead, the strong used the gift to make himself visible and left the brother in the shadow he was already in.

Now you can hear what Paul is saying in 13:4. *Love is kind.* You were right about the meat. You were ruinous about the brother. You were spiritually gifted, and you used the gift to puff yourself up rather than to lift the brother sitting beside you. Whatever else you have learned, you have not learned that the truth has a manner, and the gift has a duty. The doctrine has a hand to it. And the hand you have been using has been hurting people. The love you claim to have is not the love I am writing about.

The God who is kind

Paul did not learn kindness as a virtue floating free of God. He learned it as the very character of the God who saved him. The Old Testament returns again and again to the Hebrew word

chesed — usually translated *lovingkindness* or *steadfast love* — to describe the way God deals with His people. It is the unfailing, unrelenting, unsurprised goodness of God toward those who do not deserve it. It is the kindness that walks back into a relationship the other party has broken, and quietly fixes it again, and again, and again.

The New Testament names the same character in the Greek *chrēstos*. And it gives the doctrine its sharpest application in a sentence Paul wrote to the Romans:

Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?

ROMANS 2:4 (NASB)

The kindness of God leads you to repentance. That is what Paul names as the engine. Not the wrath. Not the threat. Not the argument. The *kindness*. God's persistent, unearned goodness toward sinners is what He uses to melt them and turn them toward Him. The wrath is real, but the wrath does not, by itself, draw anyone home. The kindness draws. The kindness is what God uses to do the work that wrath alone could never do.

And this kindness was not abstract. It came in a Person:

But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy...

TITUS 3:4–5 (NASB)

The kindness of God appeared. Paul does not say it was thought about, or felt, or promised. It *appeared* — in Christ Himself, who came in the flesh and ate with sinners, touched lepers, wept at gravesides, washed feet, and went to the cross. The kindness of God is not separable from the Son in whom it was made known.

That is the kindness 1 Corinthians 13:4 is calling believers to. Not the thin politeness of a culture that says *be nice* and means *do not make anyone uncomfortable*. The kindness that imitates the Christ whose own kindness reached down to where we were and lifted us out.

Patience absorbs; kindness gives

There is a reason Paul puts patience and kindness back to back at the head of his list. The two of them form a pair, and the pair is the whole shape of how love treats other people. Patience is the negative side. Kindness is the positive side. Patience absorbs. Kindness gives.

Patience says: *I will not strike back, even though I could.*
Kindness says: *I will do good for you, even though I do not have to.*

Patience is the restraint of a justified reaction. Kindness is the initiation of an unrequired good. Patience is what love does *not* do. Kindness is what love *does*.

You can be patient without ever being kind. We have all known people like this. They never lose their temper, never raise their voice, never strike back when wronged — and they also never reach out. They are not warm. They simply absorb. That is half of

love, and it is not the whole. Paul does not let the believer settle for half.

You can also try to be kind without first being patient, and it never lasts. The man who has no patience explodes at the people he was trying to be kind to the moment the kindness is not appreciated. Kindness with a short fuse is not really kindness; it is performance, with the performer waiting to be paid. The kindness that lasts grows out of patience, because it is the same root putting out two branches.

That is why Paul names them in this order. *Love is patient. Love is kind.* The restraint comes first because nothing else can grow on rubble. Once the believer is no longer reacting, kindness can begin to act.

What it looks like

Kindness looks like a teenage daughter who, when her mom or dad walks in from a hard day at work, hands them a glass of cold water or a snack before being asked.

It looks like an older sibling who, on her way home from a shopping trip, picks up a small thing her younger brother has been wanting, not because he earned it, but because she remembered.

It looks like a teenager who, walking past a younger child sitting alone at the lunch table, sits down and starts a conversation, not because the younger child is interesting, but because the younger child is alone.

It looks like a high-school boy who notices the girl in his class being teased by a louder boy in the hallway, and who steps in beside her, quietly, and walks her to her next class without making a scene about it.

It looks like a high-school girl who texts a classmate she barely knows after hearing the classmate is having a hard week — *thinking about you, praying for you* — and asks nothing back.

It looks like a neighbor who, when the elderly woman across the street comes out to check her mail, walks her box up the driveway for her without being asked, and does not stay to be thanked.

It looks like a believer who, when the slow learner in the Bible class is still struggling with the same question three weeks later, opens his own notes and walks the question through again, gently, as if it had never been asked before.

It looks like a student who pays for the lunch of the kid behind him in the cafeteria line who forgot his money, and walks off before the kid can thank him.

It looks like a friend who notices that something is wrong and asks once, without prying, and waits.

It looks like Christ. The One who saw the woman at the well and offered her water she did not know existed. The One who saw Zacchaeus up a tree and invited Himself to dinner. The One who stopped a whole crowd to find the woman who had spent twelve years and her last coin on doctors and reached out for the hem of His robe. The One who, hanging on a cross, looked at a thief and promised him paradise. Story after story in the Gospels shows

kindness initiating where it was not required to initiate. He owed those people nothing. He gave them what they did not earn.

The world's kindness, and ours

The world's kindness is transactional. The world is kind to the people who can return the favor, kind when there is a camera in the room, kind to those who agree with it, kind to those whose kindness in return is expected to be prompt. Strip those conditions away and the world's kindness disappears, because the world's kindness was not kindness in the first place. It was investment. The world does not give without expecting return.

Christian kindness is different at the root. It is kindness because the One who showed it to us first did not expect return, and could not have been repaid if He had. *While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us* (Romans 5:8). That is the foundation under every act of Christian kindness ever performed. The Christian who is kind is doing it because he has received a kindness so total that to withhold his own would be to forget where he came from.

That is why Paul is so hard on the strong Corinthians who were *right* about the meat and *cruel* about the brother. The strong had forgotten that the only reason they were strong was that someone had been kind to them when they were weak. They had received the kindness of God in Christ, and then turned around and used their knowledge as a club on the very people for whom Christ had died. They were not being unkind by accident. They were being unkind by *forgetting*.

The Christian who finds himself unkind to a brother is, in some real way, in the same position. Somewhere along the way he has forgotten the kindness he was shown. The remedy is not to grit his teeth and try harder. The remedy is to return to the cross and remember. The man who remembers what Christ did for him cannot, for long, treat his brother the way he is treating him. The memory of the cross is what fuels kindness in the believer. When the kindness runs dry, the believer goes back to the well.

A note for the reader who is not yet in Christ

The kindness of God has already touched your life many more times than you know. Every meal you have eaten, every friend who has stood by you, every parent who has fed you, every stranger who has done you an unexpected good — all of it has been the kindness God extends to every human being whether they acknowledge Him or not. The sun has risen on you and the rain has fallen on you the same as on those who love Him (Matthew 5:45). That is kindness.

But there is a deeper kindness still, and it is the one that matters most. The kindness of God *appeared* — in His Son, who came into the world for sinners, and who is right now waiting for you to come home. The kindness that has kept you in the world is one thing. The kindness that has prepared a way out of judgment, through the obedience of His Son, is another. The first you have received without asking. The second you must receive on its own terms.

Romans 2:4 was written for you specifically. *The kindness of God leads you to repentance.* It is not the wrath of God that will move you. It is His kindness. The good things you have known in your life — and you have known some, even if you would not say so quickly — were not random. They were small messages, dropped along a path you may not have known you were walking. The path leads home.

When you obey the gospel, you do not become a recipient of kindness for the first time. You become a man or woman who can finally see the kindness for what it has always been. And you become, by that same act, a vessel for it to flow through to others. Kindness in the believer is not generated. It is received and passed along.

Where this leaves us

Patience and kindness, together, are the floor of the building Paul is putting up in this passage. Everything else in 1 Corinthians 13:4–7 — the not-jealous, the not-bragging, the not-arrogant, the not-seeking-its-own, the bearing and believing and hoping and enduring — sits on this floor. Without patience, the believer cannot stop reacting long enough to do any good. Without kindness, the believer who has stopped reacting has not yet begun to love.

A man can become more patient over a year and not be more loving, if his patience is only restraint. A man who becomes more kind in the same year, who reaches for the unrequired good, who initiates small graces that no one will notice and no one will repay,

that man is being made into the image of the One whose kindness appeared in the form of a servant and went to a cross.

That is the work this attribute is calling you into.

* * *

THINK

Think of one person you will see this week whom you do not naturally feel kind toward — the difficult coworker, the demanding parent, the friend who has been a drain, the brother in the church whose voice grates on you. You owe them nothing extra. You have not been unjust to them. Patience would already be enough; the rest of the world would call patience excellent. Kindness asks more. *What is one unrequired good you can do for them this week, expecting nothing back, with no audience and no record?* Now do it. Not because they have earned it. Because you have received a kindness that was infinitely beyond your own earning, and the only honest response to that is to pass it along.

Love Is Not Jealous

...love...is not jealous...

I CORINTHIANS 13:4 (NASB)

The Greek word Paul reaches for is *zēloō*. It is the verb form of *zēlos* — a word that, by itself, can go either way. Used well, *zēlos* is the heat of zeal. The man who is *zealous* for a good cause pours his energy into it. Used badly, the same heat is envy — the rising resentment a man feels when someone else has what he wanted. Same word. Same temperature inside the chest. Only the direction of the gaze decides which it is. The zealous man is looking at the work in front of him. The envious man is looking sideways at his brother.

Paul has just used the word in its good sense at the end of the previous chapter, closing his discussion of spiritual gifts with the line “*But earnestly desire the greater gifts*” (12:31, NASB). The verb there is the same root — *zēloute*, *be zealous for*. Then he writes the love chapter, and the third thing he says love is, is the opposite use of the same word. *Love does not zēloō*. Love does not envy. Whatever zeal you were just told to have, do not let it curdle into the wrong kind of zeal — the kind that watches your brother get the gift you wanted and resents him for it.

What was happening in Corinth

If patience was missing in Corinth because the wealthy could not wait for the slaves at the Lord's Supper, and kindness was missing because the strong were wounding the weak with their knowledge about meat, *jealousy* was loose in Corinth because the spiritually gifted had built a hierarchy out of God's gifts and were measuring one another on it.

Paul spends all of 1 Corinthians 12 on the problem. The believers there had received a wide range of miraculous gifts — tongues, prophecy, healing, words of knowledge, discernment of spirits, and others. Rather than receive each gift as God's distribution to His one body, the Corinthians had ranked the gifts and ranked themselves. The showier the gift, the higher the rank. Tongues was at the top, because tongues was the gift you could not miss in the assembly. The quieter gifts — service, helping, administration — sat at the bottom, because they did not draw attention. And the believer with a quieter gift found himself looking sideways at the believer with a louder one and wondering why God had given more to him.

Paul's correction is patient and long. He spends the whole chapter on it. The two sentences in the middle of the chapter that hit the envy directly are these:

*And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you";
or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."*

1 CORINTHIANS 12:21 (NASB)

That is the rebuke aimed at the gifted. *You with the visible gift, do not look down at your brother whose gift is small.*

But verses 25 and 26 turn the same rebuke around and aim it at the one who feels small:

...so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

I CORINTHIANS 12:25–26 (NASB)

If one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Read that slowly. Paul is not saying *if one member is honored, the others tolerate it*. He is not saying *the others endure it*. He is saying *the others rejoice* — the same word that describes the honor itself. The believer who has been given the small gift is not commanded to swallow his disappointment in silence; he is commanded to be genuinely glad that his brother has been given the large one. That is the death of envy. The hand does not envy the eye. The hand is glad the eye sees.

Then Paul lands the bridge:

But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way.

I CORINTHIANS 12:31 (NASB)

Earnestly desire. The verb is *zēloute* — burn for the better gifts. And then, immediately, *a still more excellent way*. Because *zēloute* without love becomes *zēloō* in 13:4. The same fuel can fire either engine. The way without love is the way that burns sideways, at

your brother. The more excellent way burns forward, toward what God has actually placed in front of you.

Now you can hear what Paul is doing in 13:4. *Love is not jealous*. You said you had love. Your jockeying over gifts shows otherwise. The one who has been given little envies the one who has been given much. The one who has been given much looks down on the one who has been given little. Both of you have forgotten that you are members of one body, and that the body is the Lord's. The love you claim to have is not the love I am writing about.

The God who never envies

Here we have to be careful, because Scripture says many times that God *is* a jealous God:

...for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God... — Exodus 20:5 (NASB)

For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God. — Deuteronomy 4:24 (NASB)

So the believer reads 1 Corinthians 13:4 — *love is not jealous* — and reads Exodus 20:5 — *I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God* — and the two seem to contradict. They do not.

The word covers two different things in English, and Scripture uses it for both. The first is *covenant jealousy* — the guarding, protective jealousy of a husband for his wife. When God says He is jealous, He means He will not share His people with idols, the way a faithful husband will not share his wife with

another man. That kind of jealousy is honorable. It is one of the proofs that God's love for His people is the love of a covenant Lord, not the loose affection of a stranger. The whole book of Hosea is God's covenant jealousy written out the long way.

The second is *envy* — the resentment of another's good. That kind of jealousy is the kind 1 Corinthians 13:4 forbids, and it is a kind God never has. God is the source of every gift. He has nothing to envy:

Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.

JAMES 1:17 (NASB)

The Father of lights does not look sideways. He cannot. There is no good He does not already have, and there is no good in any of His creatures that did not first come from His hand. The God who hands out the gifts cannot be jealous of the people receiving them. He is glad. He is the source of their gladness. *If one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it* is not just Paul's instruction to the church; it is the very thing the God who set the gifts in place is doing toward the member He honored.

So when Paul tells believers *love is not jealous*, he is calling them into the disposition of God Himself in this matter. The Christian who is not envious of his brother is showing — in the small currency of his own heart — the same character the Father has on a scale the universe cannot contain.

Patience absorbs, kindness gives, freedom from envy rejoices

Patience and kindness, as we saw in the last two chapters, are a pair. Patience absorbs the wrong. Kindness initiates the unrequired good. The third attribute, *not jealous*, sits beside them and does a third thing. *Freedom from envy rejoices in the good of another.*

Where patience says, *I will not strike back at you*, and kindness says, *I will do good for you*, freedom from envy says, *I am glad about what God has given you, even though He has not given the same to me.*

It is the hardest of the three for most believers, and it is the test that exposes whether the first two were genuine. A man can absorb a wrong out of cold pride — *I will not stoop*. That is not patience; it is contempt that has learned to hold its tongue. A man can do an unrequired good out of vanity — *they will see how generous I am*. That is not kindness; it is performance. But no man envies his brother for show. Envy is what is in the heart when no one is watching, when the friend's good news comes by text and there is no audience to perform for, when the only person who knows your reaction is you and God. If the inside of you, in that moment, is *glad*, patience and kindness have a foundation underneath them. If the inside of you is *bitter*, the first two were probably costumes.

What it looks like

Freedom from envy looks like a teenage girl who, when her best friend gets asked to the school dance and she does not, congratulates her without a single second's pause and means it.

It looks like a high-school junior who, when the starting position he had worked for all summer goes to another player, walks over to that player after the announcement and tells him he is glad for him, and then practices harder.

It looks like a senior who, when the scholarship she was hoping for is awarded to a classmate who also applied, finds the classmate in the hallway and tells her congratulations before the classmate has time to brace for an awkward conversation.

It looks like a teenager who, when his best friend gets the car, the job, or the freedom he's been wishing for himself, throws himself into celebrating with him, because his friend's happiness is now his happiness, even though his own situation hasn't changed yet.

It looks like a student worker or club member who, when the leadership spot or officer role she wanted goes to someone else, walks up to the new leader and asks how she can help them make the club or the project succeed.

It looks like a Christian who, when another believer in the congregation begins to be used by God in a way he had hoped to be used, opens his hands and his prayer life to ask for the brother's success rather than his own.

It looks like a sibling who, watching their brother or sister receive an award or a burst of praise from their parents that they

did not get, is genuinely proud of them, without running a silent mental tape comparing who gets treated better.

It looks like a student who hears about a classmate from middle school whose family just moved into the biggest neighborhood in town, and who, instead of making a cynical comment or feeling small, can say honestly, *I am really glad for them.*

It looks like Christ. The One who, when John the Baptist's disciples came to Him with John's question, sent them back with the answer — and then turned to the crowds and praised John as *more than a prophet* (Matthew 11:9), without a flicker of the rivalry the world would have expected between two such men. The One who, hanging on a cross between two criminals, gave paradise to the one beside Him who had nothing to give back. He owed no one anything. He never once begrudged another the good that was His to give.

The world's envy, and ours

The world has built much of its economy on envy. Marketing tells you that you deserve what the man next to you has, and that you should not rest until you have it. The newer phone. The bigger house. The better-looking partner. The image of the better life. Whole industries exist to make you discontent with what God has given you, by holding up what He has given someone else.

Social media has industrialized the same machinery. The believer scrolls past photographs of vacations he has not taken,

weddings he has not been invited to, children who look happier than his, marriages that look easier than his, and the small fuel of *zēlōō* lights in his chest a hundred times a day. Most of him does not even notice. The fire has been so steady for so long it feels like the temperature of the room.

The Christian is called out of all of it. He cannot afford to live with that fire burning inside him. It is not love. It is the opposite of love. It is the thing Paul names, three traits into his list, as the thing that proves the love a believer claims is not yet the love God is calling him to.

The way out is not to scroll less, though scrolling less may help. The way out is to remember what God has actually given you, and to receive it as enough. He has given you life. He has given you a body. He has given you, if you are in Christ, the forgiveness of every sin and a place in His household forever. He has given you the gifts He chose for you, in the measure He chose, for the place He has set you in His body. He has given you Himself. Anything more is grace upon grace. Anything less — any good your neighbor has that you do not — is a gift from the same Father, and it is not deducted from yours. There is no shortage in the storehouse of God. Your classmate making the varsity team is not your failure. Your friend getting invited to the group chat is not your isolation. Your peer's academic success is not your stupidity. They are different gifts from the same hand, to different people, and the right response to all of them is the rejoicing of one member of the body for another member's honor.

A note for the reader who is not yet in Christ

If you have not yet obeyed the gospel, the math of God's grace is news that should change how you hear this chapter.

You may have spent much of your life under the assumption that the people who are doing well — the friend with the easy faith, the sibling with the stable marriage, the classmate who seems to have everything together — are doing well at your expense. That if there is only so much blessing to go around, their share is the share you did not get. That is not how it works. God's storehouse is not a fixed pie that runs out when too many people show up. The God who fed five thousand from a boy's lunch is not running out of anything, and He is not picking and choosing between you and the brother you have been comparing yourself to.

Coming to Christ does not mean you have caught up to people who were ahead of you. It means you have entered a family in which the categories of *ahead* and *behind* no longer apply. The church kid who has grown up in the pews and knows every answer has no structural advantage over the person who obeys the gospel today — both sit at the exact same table of grace in the end. Christ paid the same price for both of them and gave the same Spirit to both of them and prepared the same place for both of them.

The first move toward losing the envy that has cost you so much is to come into the household where the math no longer works the way the world has trained you to think. Hear the gospel — that Christ died for your sins, was buried, and was raised on

the third day (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). Believe it. Repent of the life you have been living without Him. Confess Him as Lord. Be baptized into His death and raised to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3–4). Then look around the family you have entered, at every brother and sister whose gifts and graces are not the same as yours, and learn the new arithmetic. None of theirs comes out of yours, and all of theirs and all of yours come from the same Father, and there is more where every one of them came from.

Where this leaves us

Three traits in, the floor of love is laid. Patience that absorbs the wrong. Kindness that gives the unrequired good. Freedom from envy that rejoices in the good of another. The believer who has these three has stopped being a problem for the people around him and has begun to be a help. The believer who has none of them, no matter how much he claims to love, is still living in the same room he was in before he claimed it.

The next attribute moves from the inside of the heart to the outside of the mouth. The believer who has stopped envying his brother's gift is now ready to be told what to do about his own. *Love does not brag and is not arrogant.* The disease that breeds envy in the small-gifted breeds pride in the large-gifted, and Paul will not let either one of them live.

That is the work this attribute is calling you into. Watch your brother get what you wanted, and rejoice. Watch the friend you have prayed for get the answer to a different prayer than the one you have been praying for yourself, and rejoice. Watch the gift you

did not receive land in the hand of someone who did, and rejoice. The believer who can do that is being made into the image of the One whose hand handed out every gift, and who has never, in all of eternity, looked sideways at any of His children with anything in His eye but love.

* * *

THINK

Think of one person whose good news has been hard for you to hear lately — the friend whose engagement landed before yours, the classmate whose grade came in higher than yours, the coworker whose promotion went past you, the brother whose marriage looks easier than yours, the sister whose child obeys without the fight yours puts up. You owe them nothing extra. You have not wronged them. The world would call you generous for keeping your envy hidden. Freedom from envy asks more. *Pray for that person right now — not for them to be less, but for God to bless them MORE than He has so far. Then, this week, find one specific thing about what God has done in their life that you genuinely admire, and tell them.* The envy will not survive the prayer or the sentence. And the heart that has just been freed of envy in one place is the heart God will use to free others, in time, in every other place it is still hiding.

Love Does Not Brag

| ...love...does not brag...

| 1 CORINTHIANS 13:4 (NASB)

The Greek word Paul reaches for is *perpereuetai*. It appears nowhere else in the New Testament. The word almost sounds like what it describes — *per-per-eu-e-tai* — a stuttering, on-and-on quality, the sound of someone whose conversation keeps coming back to himself. The Greek noun behind it, *perperos*, named the kind of man classical writers had been making fun of for centuries: the vain blusterer, the boastful soldier, the man who could not stop telling you what he had done.

Paul takes that word and turns it on the church. *Love does not perpereuetai*. Love does not run its mouth in the direction of itself. Love does not work the conversation back around to its own gifts, its own work, its own importance. Love does not need an audience for what it has done, and it does not need a microphone for what it knows.

The placement in Paul's list is deliberate. He has just told the Corinthians that love does not envy — does not look sideways at the brother who has more. Now he turns and tells the other half of the same room that love does not brag — does not look down at the brother who has less. The envious man is the gift-less believer who resents the gifted one. The braggart is the gifted

believer who runs his gift like a trophy in front of the gift-less one. Both have forgotten the same thing. Both are about to be told what it is.

What was happening in Corinth

The Corinthians were boasters. Paul knew it before he was three chapters into the letter.

The first thing he confronted was the way they were lining up behind their favorite teachers as if those teachers were prize horses. *I am of Paul. I am of Apollos. I am of Cephas. I am of Christ.* The names were being collected and worn like banners. Behind each banner was a believer who thought himself a little better for following the teacher he had attached to. Paul's verdict came fast:

...so that no man may boast before God. But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, so that, just as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord."

I CORINTHIANS 1:29-31 (NASB)

By His doing you are in Christ Jesus. That is the line that drops the floor out from under every Corinthian boast. They were not in Christ Jesus by their own cleverness. They had not chosen Paul or Apollos or Cephas because they had the spiritual taste to recognize who was best. They were in Christ Jesus because God had done it. The teacher they were following was a servant God

had used to bring the message to them. To boast about the teacher was to boast about a tool God had handled.

Then a few chapters later Paul tightens the same screw:

For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?

I CORINTHIANS 4:7 (NASB)

That is the question that ends bragging in the believer who is willing to sit with it. *What do you have that you did not receive?* The intelligence you boast about — you did not earn it; you were born with it. The opportunity you boast about — you did not create it; it was opened to you. The spiritual insight you boast about — you did not generate it; the Word taught it to you. The gift you boast about exercising — the Spirit handed it out, sovereignly, to whomever He chose (1 Corinthians 12:11). There is nothing in your hand that was not first placed there by Someone Else. To brag about any of it is to act as if it appeared by your own doing. It did not.

That same disease was loose in chapter 12. The believer with the showier gift was not just envied; he was also bragging. The gift had become the platform for the man. The tongue-speaker spoke louder, longer, more frequently than was useful. The prophet made sure the congregation knew who had received the word. The healer kept careful private records. By the time Paul gets to chapter 14, he is laying down rules to bring order to a worship service in which everyone wanted to be heard and no one wanted to defer. The same gift God had given to build up the body had

become a microphone in the hand of the receiver. *What do you have that you did not receive?* hit the Corinthian braggart squarely.

Now you can hear what Paul is saying in 13:4. *Love does not brag.* You have been collecting your teachers like badges. You have been holding your gifts up like trophies. You have been running your spiritual life as a performance, and the performance has been to your own credit. Whatever else you have learned, you have not learned that everything you have is borrowed. The love you claim to have is not the love I am writing about.

The God who does not boast

The God of Scripture talks about Himself constantly. He names His own attributes aloud. *I am the LORD. I am the LORD your God. I am holy. I am gracious and compassionate. Apart from Me there is no Savior.* If the standard for bragging were “talks about Himself a lot,” God would fail it on every page.

But the standard for bragging is not how much you talk about yourself. The standard is whether what you say is true and whether the saying inflates beyond what is real. A man brags when he claims more than he is. He invents. He exaggerates. He gestures toward credit he does not own. God does none of those things, because God *is* what He says He is. The most God could ever say about Himself would still be an understatement. When the LORD declares His own glory, He is not bragging; He is being accurate. There is nothing larger than Himself to compare Himself to. The truth about God can only be spoken by Him, and when He speaks it, the universe is simply hearing what is.

That distinction matters because the One in whom there is nothing to inflate is also the One who modeled, in His coming, the deepest humility this world has ever seen:

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-8 (NASB)

Read it slowly. The One who could have boasted of everything boasted of nothing. He emptied Himself. He took the form of a servant. He came into a corner of a backwater province under a Roman occupation. He grew up the son of a carpenter. He gathered fishermen rather than scholars. When He worked miracles, He often told the people He had healed to keep quiet. When demons announced who He was, He silenced them. When the crowds wanted to make Him king after the bread on the hillside, He withdrew.

Christ did not need a platform. He had the universe. He chose, instead, to walk through this world without doing what bragging does — without inflating, without claiming credit He had not earned, without using the conversation to push glory back toward Himself. He spoke of the Father constantly:

He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who is seeking the glory of the One who sent Him, He is true, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.

JOHN 7:18 (NASB)

That sentence is, among other things, one of the most concentrated diagnoses of bragging Scripture contains. *He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory.* The braggart is not just running his mouth. He is hunting glory. He is taking what should go to God and pulling it sideways toward himself.

Paul learned the same lesson from the same source. By the time he wrote to the Galatians, he had emptied himself of every Pharisee credential he had once kept like a trophy, and he summed up where the believer's only legitimate boast lives:

But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

GALATIANS 6:14 (NASB)

That is the only boast Christianity has ever sanctioned. The boast that says, *I am nothing; Christ is everything; He went to a cross to make me His; that is the entire story.* The believer who has boasted of the cross has nothing left to boast of in himself. The believer who is still boasting of himself has not yet been crucified to the world.

Patience, kindness, freedom from envy — and now, silence about self

The first four attributes in Paul's list form a sequence that is not accidental.

Patience absorbs the wrong I have suffered. Kindness gives the good my brother did not earn from me. Freedom from envy rejoices when my brother is given what I was not. And freedom from bragging keeps quiet about what I myself have been given.

The first three deal with what is in my heart toward my brother. The fourth deals with what comes out of my mouth about myself. They belong together because they fail together. The braggart is almost never patient with the brother who interrupts his story. He is almost never kind to the brother whose accomplishments threaten to shrink his own. He is almost always envious of the man whose story he cannot match. The braggart's vices travel as a pack. Take down one, and you start to take down the rest.

That is why Paul puts *does not brag* here, right after *does not envy* and right before *is not arrogant*. He is walking the believer through the cluster. The envious heart is one symptom. The bragging mouth is another. The arrogant self-estimation underneath both is what we will turn to next. But for now, the believer is being asked to look at his own talk and answer one question. *Where in my conversation is the work being done to make me look bigger than I am?* If the answer is *nowhere*, the believer is closer to the love of 1 Corinthians 13 than he knew. If the answer

is *almost everywhere*, he has more company than he knew, and he has work to do.

What it looks like

Freedom from bragging looks like a high-school student who got into the college she had been working toward for two years, and who does not bring it up unless someone asks, and who, when they ask, answers in one sentence and turns the conversation back to them.

It looks like a high-school athlete who scored the winning point in a game and, when his classmates congratulate him in the hallway on Monday, names two teammates by name and shifts the credit before the conversation can rest on him.

It looks like a student who has read more of his Bible than anyone in the small group, and who, in discussion, holds back the verse he could quote so that another member can be the one to find it, because the goal of the small group is the growing of the others, not the showing off of him.

It looks like a teenage boy on a first date who, instead of running through the highlight reel he has prepared about himself, asks the girl across the table what her week was like and listens to the answer.

It looks like a teenage girl who, instead of carefully curating the version of her life she posts online, posts less, and lets the friends who actually know her see the ordinary days too.

It looks like a student working on a group project whose ideas actually saved the assignment, and who lets the teacher's

praise land on the whole group on Monday without jumping in to say, *actually, that was my idea.*

It looks like a teenager who spent his entire Saturday mowing the lawn, cleaning his room, and doing extra chores, and who, when his parents get home, does not instantly run through the inventory of everything he did to get a pat on the back. He did the work for the Lord, who already saw it, and that is enough.

It looks like a believer who, when his prayer for a friend is answered, does not tell the friend *I have been praying.* He thanks God and keeps walking.

It looks like a Sunday school teacher who has poured weeks of preparation into a lesson and who, when the lesson lands and a student is moved, does not collect credit for the moving. He moves on to next week.

It looks like Christ. The One who, when the crowd on the hillside was ready to crown Him King after the bread had been multiplied, withdrew to the mountain alone (John 6:15). The One who, after raising a girl from the dead, told her parents to tell no one (Mark 5:43). The One who, after healing a leper, said *see that you say nothing to anyone* (Mark 1:44). The One who did the works the world has called greatest and lived as if those works were not for the glory of His own name but for the glory of His Father's. His pattern was clear: conversation after conversation worked around to the One who sent Him, and the credit for what was done in His ministry kept on returning to the Father who had sent it.

The world's bragging, and ours

The world has always rewarded the braggart. It promotes him at work. It elects him to office. It hands him the camera. The man who can present himself with the most polish, the most confidence, the most carefully edited resume of his own accomplishments, has always done well in this world, and he is doing well at this moment on corporate stages and social media platforms.

What is new in this generation is that everyone now has a platform. The phone in the hand of every teenager is, among other things, a stage. The photograph posted is a small performance. The caption is a small advertisement. The day-by-day record of the better self is a long, slow brag with a beautifying filter on top. Most of the people doing it do not think of it as bragging. The water is the temperature of the room. But Paul's question still cuts. *Where, in what you have been showing the world, is the work being done to make you look bigger than you are?* If the answer is honest, it is convicting.

The Christian is not called to delete every account, though for some Christians that may be the right call. The Christian is called to read his own posts with the same question Paul put to the Corinthians. *What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?* The smile in the photograph — God gave you the face you wear. The trip — God gave you the legs that walked it and the money that paid for it. The friend in the picture — God gave you that friendship. The achievement you are subtly announcing — God

gave you the gifts you exercised and the door that opened in front of you. None of it is yours, in the sense the bragger wants it to be his. All of it is given. Bragging about any of it is, in the strictest sense, a lie about who handed it to you.

The way out is not silence; God did not give us mouths to keep them shut. The way out is to redirect. To speak about the Father instead of the self. To name the kindness that has been shown to you rather than the cleverness with which you received it. To put the camera on someone else more often than on yourself. To be, in the conversations you have, the person who leaves the room having said more about other people than about himself, and who walks home wondering whether anyone there will even remember he was present. That kind of Christian is being formed into the image of the One who walked through this world without needing a stage.

A note for the reader who is not yet in Christ

The bragging that has cost you the most is probably not the kind you can see in others. It is the kind you can hear in yourself, in the small inflations and small embellishments you make to keep your account of yourself looking better than it is.

You may have been hearing this chapter and thinking of someone you know who needs it. Most of us, when we read about bragging, picture someone else. That is part of what bragging does — it convinces the braggart that he is the realistic one in the room and the others are the showoffs. The Word is asking you to put the question on yourself instead. *Where in your own conversation is*

the work being done to make you look bigger than you are? The honest answer is humbling, and the humbling is meant to lead you somewhere.

It is meant to lead you to the only place where the account of who you are has finally been told truthfully. At the cross of Christ, the inflated self meets the One who knew it without flattery. There is no version of you better than the version He died for, and the version He died for was the version that included every brag you ever made about yourself in the hope of being more than you were. He went to that cross knowing all of it. The exchange the gospel offers is the exchange of your dishonest record for His honest one — the trade of the resume you have been polishing for the righteousness He has already lived.

The gospel is that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). Hear it. Believe it. Repent of the life you have been building for your own glory. Confess Him as Lord. Be baptized into His death and raised to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3–4). Then look at the credit you have been hoarding and let it go. There is no credit left to keep, because everything you are will be by His doing, and the only boast you will have left will be the boast Paul kept: the cross.

Where this leaves us

Patience, kindness, freedom from envy, and freedom from bragging now stand together at the front of Paul's list. Patience absorbs. Kindness gives. Freedom from envy rejoices in the good

of another. Freedom from bragging keeps quiet about what is mine. The believer who has these four has stopped using his relationships, his gifts, his accomplishments, and his mouth as instruments of self-promotion. He has begun to use them for what God gave them to be — instruments of love.

But Paul is not done. The bragging of the mouth is fed by something inward, something that does not need a microphone to do its work. The next attribute names it directly. *Love is not arrogant*. If bragging is the outward inflation that runs out the mouth, arrogance is the inward swelling that produces it. Some braggarts have learned to keep the inflation off the tongue and have convinced themselves they have grown — when, in fact, they have only become quieter about the same inward sin. The next chapter asks the believer to look further in, past the mouth, into the heart that pushes against the back of his ribs and says *I am more than this brother beside me*. That is the next thing love will not do.

That is the work this attribute is calling you into. Walk through this week. Listen to yourself. Notice where the conversation drifts toward your own credit, and let it drift somewhere else. Notice where the photograph you are about to post is going to do bragging work, and post something less, or nothing at all. Notice where you are tempted to say *I have been praying for you*, and just keep praying. The believer who can do that is being made into the image of the One whose greatest works were done with His Father's name on them and His own kept quietly out of view.

THINK

Take an honest inventory of the last conversation you had with someone who knows you well. *Where in that conversation was the work being done to make you look bigger than you are?* Maybe it was a story you steered yourself into. Maybe it was an accomplishment you mentioned that did not need mentioning. Maybe it was the comparison you made that was meant, just a little, to put you ahead of someone else. Now sit with this question: *What would you have lost if you had said it differently?* The answer is almost always *nothing*. The credit you were collecting was credit that did not really exist. The brother you were quietly outranking would not have noticed you had not. And the next conversation you have will be there in front of you in a day or two, with all the same temptations and a fresh chance to talk like a Christian instead of a Corinthian.

Love Is Not Arrogant

...love...is not arrogant...

I CORINTHIANS 13:4 (NASB)

The Greek word Paul reaches for is *physioutai* — from the verb *physioō*, meaning literally *to puff up, to inflate, to blow up like a bellows or a bladder*. The picture is mechanical. Someone has put air into something, and the thing now looks bigger than it actually is. A balloon is large until you stick a pin in it. Then it is what it always was — a small piece of rubber with nothing inside. The arrogant man is the same. The substance has not grown. Only the air has.

Bragging, which we looked at in the last chapter, is the air coming out of the balloon — the inflation escaping through the mouth in the form of self-promoting talk. Arrogance is the air *staying in*. It is the inflated condition itself. Some braggarts have learned to keep their mouths shut and have convinced themselves they have grown into humility. They have not. The mouth has merely been disciplined. The balloon is still full. Paul names the inward swelling here so the believer cannot escape the verse by becoming a quieter version of the same man.

What was happening in Corinth

Physioō is one of Paul's Corinthian-specific words. He reaches for it again and again in this letter, because he could not get past a chapter without finding the Corinthians puffed up about something new.

By chapter 4 he is dealing with their inflation over the teachers they were following:

Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, so that in us you may learn not to exceed what is written, so that no one of you will become arrogant in behalf of one against the other.

I CORINTHIANS 4:6 (NASB)

The believers had decided that following the right teacher made them spiritually superior to the believers following the wrong one. *Arrogant in behalf of one against the other.* The inflation was being done on someone else's behalf — *I am of Paul* was the badge, but the swelling was the man who wore it.

A few verses later Paul names them again, this time inflated about their independence:

Now some have become arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I shall find out, not the words of those who are arrogant but their power.

I CORINTHIANS 4:18-19 (NASB)

They had decided that Paul was finished with them. He was not coming back. They could now run the church the way they

wanted to run it. They were puffed up about being free of their teacher. Paul informs them, drily, that he is coming, and he is going to look past their talk and into their actual power. The inflation will not survive his arrival.

By chapter 5 he is using the word about a much darker matter:

You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst.

I CORINTHIANS 5:2 (NASB)

A man in the congregation was openly living in sexual sin — sin so blatant that even the pagans of Corinth would have condemned it. And the church was *puffed up about it*. They were proud of how tolerant they had become. They were proud of how they were not narrow-minded like other congregations. Their pride had bent so far that it could find a reason to celebrate a sin God hates. Paul's correction is brutal. *You have become arrogant and have not mourned*. The right response was grief. The actual response was inflation.

Then in chapter 8 Paul names the engine that was pumping the air:

Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies.

I CORINTHIANS 8:1 (NASB)

Knowledge makes arrogant. Or, more literally, *knowledge puffs up.* It is the same Greek verb. Paul could have written this sentence as the headline over the entire Corinthian letter. The Corinthians had knowledge. They knew an idol was nothing. They knew the food was just food. They knew the gifts were genuinely from the Spirit. They knew their teachers. They knew they were saved. They knew, they knew, they knew — and the knowing was puffing them up the whole time, because they had not yet learned that knowledge without love is balloons. Air with no substance to it.

By the time Paul gets to 13:4, the Corinthians have already had this word swung at them five times. *Physoō* is what was wrong with them, and Paul has been telling them so since the early chapters. Now, sitting in the love chapter, he uses the same word once more, this time as part of the description of the thing they are missing. *Love is not puffed up.* Whatever else you have been doing, love has not been doing it. The thing in you that thinks itself a giant beside your brother is the same thing that has been inflating you about the teacher you follow, the independence you have claimed, the sin you have tolerated, and the knowledge you have gathered. The love I am writing about deflates all of it.

The same inflation was on display in the gifts. The believer with a tongue did not just speak loudly; he silently thought himself more spiritual than the believer with no tongue. The believer with prophecy did not just deliver the word; he held the word as evidence of his own standing. The believer with knowledge did not just possess the knowledge; he carried the possession of it as proof of his rank. Paul's question from the same

letter cut through all of it. *What do you have that you did not receive?* (1 Corinthians 4:7). The gift had been given. The receiver was not the source. The air the receiver had been pumping into himself was air he had no right to put there. *Knowledge puffs up. Love builds up.* The Corinthians needed both halves of that sentence read to them.

The God who is great and serves

Here we come to the deepest contrast in the chapter, and it is not subtle.

The arrogant man inflates himself because he has nothing he can rightly claim as great. He pumps air in because there is nothing substantial in him. The puffed-up Corinthian was inflated about gifts he had received from Someone Else, and the air was the difference between the smallness of what he had earned and the largeness he wanted to appear.

God is the opposite case. He has every legitimate claim to greatness — every one. He is the Creator. He is holy. He is sovereign. He is eternal. He is righteous. He is the source of every good and perfect gift (James 1:17). There is nothing about Him that needs inflating, because there is nothing about Him that is not already as large as anything can be. And the God who has every reason to fill the room with His own glory is the same God who came to earth, knowing exactly what He had, and descended:

Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God, got up from supper, and laid aside His

garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself. Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.

JOHN 13:3-5 (NASB)

Read the *therefore* that is silent in this passage but is the whole point. *Knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands...* Christ knew His own authority precisely. He knew where He came from and where He was going. He knew, in that upper room, exactly what He had. And what He did with that knowledge was the inverse of what the Corinthian believer was doing with the much smaller knowledge of his much smaller gifts. The Corinthian was puffed up. Christ took a towel.

Greatness, when it is real, descends. Inflation, when it is fake, has to keep pumping. The believer who has not learned which one he is doing is going to spend a lifetime alternating between the two and wondering why it is so exhausting. The Christian who has watched Christ knowing everything He had and using the knowledge to wash feet has been given the picture that closes the question. The greatness of God expresses itself downward. The inflation of man tries to express itself upward. They are opposite motions.

Paul knew it. By the time he wrote to the Philippians he was setting it down as the standard for the church:

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not

regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself...

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-7 (NASB)

The One who could have gripped His glory let it go. He did not need it to be safe. He was the safety. And the believer who carries the same Spirit is being called into the same motion. Whatever the believer has — whatever knowledge, whatever gift, whatever recognition, whatever position — is held the way Christ held the Father's gift of all things. *Knowing what He had*, He laid aside. The believer is being asked to learn the same posture.

That is why Peter, looking back at the same Lord, could write:

...and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.

I PETER 5:5 (NASB)

God is opposed to the proud. The puffed-up believer is not just missing love. He is on the wrong side of the One whose grace he needs. Every breath of arrogance is taking him further from the only Source of the grace that could deflate him. The believer who feels himself swelling has, by the same swelling, made it harder for the help to reach him. The remedy is named in the next phrase of the same verse. *Grace to the humble.* The man who comes down receives the help God is willing to give. The man who stays up is opposed.

Bragging is the symptom; arrogance is the disease

The last chapter looked at the mouth. This chapter looks at what the mouth has been venting.

A man who has been bragging and has been corrected for it can teach himself to be silent. Many a Christian has done exactly this. The brag has been disciplined. The mouth has learned not to inflate in public. And the man is now sure he has dealt with the sin — when, in fact, he has only moved it. The pressure that used to escape through the mouth is now pressing against the inside of his ribs, intact, growing larger because it has nowhere to go.

That is the cruelty of arrogance as a category. It can live inside a man who has been outwardly humble for years. It expresses itself in the silent verdict he passes on his brother, in the slight he barely registers, in the small refusal to ask a question of someone he considers beneath him, in the way he is sure his interpretation of the verse is the right one and does not need to be tested. He does not say any of it aloud. He has stopped saying it aloud. But the man who lives inside him is the same man who used to say it, and the verses Paul has just walked us through are aimed at that man.

That is why Paul names the disease right after he named the symptom. *Love does not brag* takes down the mouth. *Love is not arrogant* takes down what was pushing the mouth. Both attributes have to land for the cure to take. A Christian who has gotten quiet about himself but is still puffed up inside has only become a more dangerous version of the man he used to be —

dangerous because he is now invisible to himself, his arrogance hidden under the appearance of growth.

What it looks like

Freedom from arrogance is harder to picture than freedom from bragging, because it is the absence of an inward state rather than the absence of an outward act. The pictures come in small signs — the kind of small signs that make visible what would otherwise stay hidden.

It looks like a high-school student who, walking past the kid who always eats lunch alone, sits down with him — not because the sitting will be noticed, but because the silent assessment that this kid is not worth knowing was a verdict the student decided he had no right to pass. The verdict was the arrogance. Sitting down was the verdict reversed.

It looks like a teenage girl whose silent inventory of the other girls she sees at school each day used to come back with the verdict *I would never wear that, I would never date him, I would never settle for what she has settled for* — and who, this week, notices the verdict, names it for what it is, and decides she does not have the standing to render any of those judgments.

It looks like a boy on the basketball team who, when paired in practice with a weaker player, plays the drill at full intensity instead of coasting, because the silent thought *I am better than him and I do not have to try* was a thought he refused to act on.

It looks like a student in a Bible class who, when his teacher says something he is sure is not quite right, does not roll the

verdict around in his head for the rest of the lesson. He listens to the next sentence. He brings his question to the teacher after class, in private, with the openness of a man who might be the one who is wrong.

It looks like a teenager whose family has been in the same congregation for three generations, and who is treating the family that just walked in last month with exactly the same warmth he gives the elders he grew up with, because the silent assumption *we belong here more than they do* is a sin he has caught himself in and put down.

It looks like a high-school boy on a date who is paying close attention to what the girl across from him is saying, because the silent thought *I could probably do better than her* is a thought he refused to let live, and the refusal opened his ears to actually hear her.

It looks like a teenage girl who, when one of her friends posts a picture from a party she was not invited to, does not feel the small swell of *they would have been better off including me*. That swell was the arrogance. Its absence is freedom.

It looks like a student who grew up in the church, who knows every Bible trivia answer and church camp song, and who, when a new kid in the youth group asks a clumsy or basic question about God, does not roll his eyes inwardly or make a joke about it later. He offers to help him find the verse. The new kid's understanding will grow with time. The arrogance, if not killed, will rot the church-kid's faith long before it teaches the beginner anything.

It looks like Christ. The One who, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, knelt before twelve men whose feet were dusty from the road and washed them. The One who, when asked who was the greatest in the kingdom, set a child in the middle and said the kingdom belonged to those who became like the child (Matthew 18:1–4). The One who emptied Himself, took the form of a bond-servant, and was made in the likeness of men. He had every legitimate claim. He laid them all down. The arrogant believer cannot say he is being asked to do more than the Lord did. He is being asked to do far less than the Lord did, and the Lord is the One offering to do it through him.

The world's arrogance, and ours

The world has been pumping its own air for a long time. The whole story of the human race, beginning in Genesis 3, has been one long inflation. *You will be like God.* That was the first lie, and it took. The race has been chasing the same lie ever since — *I am more than I am, I deserve more than I have, I see more than my brother sees, I know more than my teachers know, I am higher up the chain than the people around me have noticed.* That has been the air filling every empire and every small classroom from the beginning.

What is striking in this generation is how the inflation has been normalized into a personality. The self-help market sells it. The motivational speaker preaches it. The platform celebrates it. The therapist sometimes encourages it. The cultural air is full of the idea that the right response to your own worth is to inflate it

further — to claim more, to assert more, to refuse the small place. The young Christian growing up in this air can be forgiven for assuming that the air is the truth. It is not. The air is the lie that has been lifted from Eden and warmed up for a new audience.

The believer is called out of all of it. He is called into a way of being that begins with the small place — *what do you have that you did not receive?* — and stays there. He is called into the posture of Christ in the upper room, knowing what he has and putting it to use under the people around him rather than over them. The reversal of arrogance is not a campaign of self-loathing. It is the simple, daily acknowledgment that everything the believer is, he is by gift. The acknowledgment, repeated until it becomes the air the believer breathes, is the deflation God is patient enough to do in the people who let Him do it.

A note for the reader who is not yet in Christ

If you have been reading this chapter at any distance, hear one thing.

The arrogance Paul is naming is not a small church-house failing of believers who think too much of themselves. It is the same arrogance the Bible calls *pride*, and pride is the sin under every other sin you have committed. Every refusal to obey God has rested on the silent inflation that says *I know better than He does about this part of my life*. Every dismissal of His Word has rested on *I will decide what I will receive from this book*. Every postponement of repentance has rested on *I have time, I am not in the danger He claims I am in*. Pride is the door every other sin

has come through. And until pride is dealt with, none of the other sins can be.

The good news is that God has already dealt with pride at the only place where it could have been dealt with. At the cross, Christ — the only one in the universe with any legitimate ground for inflation — took on Himself the weight of every inflated claim every sinner had ever made, and bore the judgment those claims deserved. The puffed-up self that has been running your life met its match in the One who refused to puff up at all and who paid for your puffing on a cross. *God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.* The humble are the ones who have come down off the platform of their own self-assessment and stood under the cross of Someone else's assessment of them. They are also the ones who receive the grace that begins to undo the arrogance from the inside.

Hear the gospel — that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). Believe it. Repent of the long inflation that has been your life. Confess Him as Lord. Be baptized into His death and raised to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3–4). Then begin to learn the descent that has always been the Christian's walk. The air will not all go out at once. But the One who knew what He had and took up the towel is willing to teach you, slowly, the same posture. He has done it for a hundred generations of believers. He will do it for you too.

Where this leaves us

Patience, kindness, freedom from envy, freedom from bragging, and freedom from arrogance now stand together at the front of Paul's list, and they form a quiet sequence that the believer is meant to recognize. Patience absorbs the wrong. Kindness gives the unrequired good. Freedom from envy rejoices in the good of another. Freedom from bragging keeps quiet about what is mine. Freedom from arrogance refuses to inflate the man underneath the mouth. The believer who has these five has had the inside of his life addressed. He is no longer reacting, no longer cold, no longer envying, no longer inflating, no longer puffed up. The interior is being made quiet.

The next attribute moves back outside. *Love does not act unbecomingly*. If arrogance is the inflation, unbecoming behavior is what the inflated man does when his pride pushes through into conduct that should embarrass him — the rude word, the cutting tone, the crude joke, the small disrespect aimed at someone who does not deserve it. Bragging was the inflation escaping through the mouth as self-promotion. Unbecoming conduct is the inflation escaping through the manners as discourtesy. Both are arrogance with the door open. Paul will name them all, one at a time, until the believer who has been honest about himself has had every door shut.

That is the work this attribute is calling you into. Catch yourself in the silent verdict you are about to pass on the brother across the room. Catch yourself in the small swell of *I would never have done it that way*. Catch yourself in the assumption that you

are the realistic one and the others are confused. Catch yourself in the air. And then bring it to the One who knew exactly what He had and washed feet, and ask Him to teach you the descent that has always been the way of His people.

* * *

THINK

Name one person you have been silently above for years. Not someone you have been openly rude to — that would be easier to deal with. Someone you have decided, without saying so, is beneath you. Maybe a classmate whose interests seem trivial. Maybe a relative whose life you have quietly judged. Maybe a brother or sister in the congregation whose questions strike you as slow. Maybe a coworker whose taste seems beneath yours. Now do one small act of service for that person this week — something you would not normally do, something they will not see coming, something done without telling anyone you did it. *And as you do it, ask the Lord to make plain to you what the silent verdict you have been passing on this person has cost you in your walk with Him.* The answer may surprise you. The deflation may begin there.

Love Does Not Act Unbecomingly

| ...love...does not act unbecomingly...

| I CORINTHIANS 13:5 (NASB)

The Greek word Paul reaches for here is *aschēmonei* — from the verb *aschēmoneō*, which means *to act in a way that lacks proper form, to behave indecently, to do what does not fit the occasion or the person*. The root word *schēma* means *form, figure, the outward shape a thing properly has*. The *a-* in front of it negates the word. *Aschēmoneō* is to act *without the proper shape* — to behave in a way that does not fit what you are or where you are or who you are with.

It is not a word about feelings. It is a word about *conduct*. Earlier in Paul's list he has named the inward attributes — patience, freedom from envy, freedom from arrogance. Now he turns the camera outward. *Love does not act unbecomingly*. Love does not say the crude thing, does not make the cutting joke, does not behave in the way that brings shame on the believer who does it and on the family of God he is a part of. Whatever else love is, love has a *shape* — and that shape is not the shape the surrounding culture would invent for it.

What was happening in Corinth

If patience was missing because the wealthy could not wait for the Lord's Supper, and kindness was missing because the strong wounded the weak, and humility was missing because everyone in Corinth had become puffed up about something — unbecoming behavior was missing because the Corinthian church had stopped recognizing what it even meant to act like a Christian in public. They were doing things, and tolerating things being done, that even the pagans of Corinth would have found shameful.

Paul's first illustration comes in chapter 5. A man in the congregation was sleeping with his father's wife — his stepmother:

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.

I CORINTHIANS 5:1 (NASB)

Read that carefully. The pagans of Corinth — who were not famous for their restraint in any direction — would not have done this. The conduct was unbecoming even by the cultural standards of a Roman port city. And the Corinthian church not only had this sin in its midst; the believers were *puffed up about it*. They were proud of how tolerant they had become. Whatever the line of decency was, they had crossed it and put a flag on the wrong side.

In chapter 6 Paul names the next public failure. The Corinthians were dragging one another into pagan courts — believers suing believers in front of unbelievers, the unwashed laundry of the church laid out for the entertainment of the world.

Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous and not before the saints?

I CORINTHIANS 6:1 (NASB)

This is *aschēmoneō* in a different costume. The Corinthians were embarrassing themselves and the name of Christ in front of the very people they were supposed to be bearing witness to. The world was watching the church handle its own life, and what it saw was Christians behaving worse than the pagans they sat next to in the courtroom.

In chapter 11 the disorder reached the Lord's Supper itself. The wealthier believers were eating their fill and getting drunk on the wine before the poorer believers arrived. What was meant to be the most reverent moment in the life of the congregation had become an occasion for division and shameful conduct.

Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper, for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing?

I CORINTHIANS 11:20–22 (NASB)

Shame those who have nothing. That is Paul's verdict. The Corinthian gathering had become a shame-producing event for the very brothers it was supposed to gather and serve. The Lord's Supper itself had become unbecoming.

And by the time Paul gets to chapter 14, the same disorder had infected the worship service. Everyone was talking at once. The gift-holders were using their gifts to draw attention to themselves rather than to build up the congregation. Outsiders walking in would conclude the believers were *mad* (14:23). Paul's correction is a long laying-down of order — two or three speakers at most, one at a time, let the others discern. He closes the chapter with a single sentence that is the positive form of 13:4's *love does not act unbecomingly*:

But all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner.

I CORINTHIANS 14:40 (NASB)

Properly and in an orderly manner. That is *aschēmoneō*'s opposite stated plainly. The Corinthians had a worship service in which the conduct of the believers exercising their gifts had crossed the line into shamefulness, and Paul had to write rules for what should not have needed rules. The gift-platform misuse was the visible end of the inflation we looked at in the last chapter. The puffed-up believer with the showy gift was acting out his arrogance in a public assembly, and the assembly was paying the cost.

Now you can hear what Paul is saying in 13:5. *Love does not act unbecomingly.* You have permitted sin in your midst and called your permission generous. You have hauled one another into

pagan courts and called it your legal right. You have made the Lord's Supper a private feast for the wealthy. You have made worship a competition of gifts. None of this fits what a church is. The love I am writing about would not allow any of it.

The God whose every act fits His being

God's nature is the deepest opposite of *aschēmoneō*. Whatever God does, He does fittingly — fitting to His holiness, fitting to His justice, fitting to His mercy, fitting to His purposes. There is no ungainly moment in the life of God. No discordant act. No conduct out of step with His being. The very word *holy* — *qadosh* in the Hebrew, *hagios* in the Greek — carries the idea of *set apart, distinct, fitting only to Him*. God is wholly becoming because God is wholly God.

When the Son took on flesh and came into this world, the religious leaders accused Him of behavior they considered unbecoming. He ate with tax collectors and sinners. He let a sinful woman wash His feet with her tears in a Pharisee's house. He touched lepers. He healed on the Sabbath. He drove the money-changers out of the temple with a whip. He spoke with a Samaritan woman at a well in the middle of the day. By the standards of the religious leaders of His own people, He was doing things a holy teacher should not be doing.

He was not. What looked unbecoming to the Pharisee was the fitting behavior of a Savior whose mission was the rescue of sinners. The eating with tax collectors fit His mission. The touching of lepers fit His mission. The conversation with the

Samaritan woman at the well fit His mission. The cleansing of the temple fit His mission. Christ did many things that violated the cultural decorum of His day, and not one of them violated the decorum of His Father. He acted in perfect *schēma* — in perfect form, in perfect fittingness — every moment of His earthly life. His every act fit who He was, because His every act was the expression of who He was.

That is the standard the church is being called into. The *schēma* of the Christian is not the *schēma* of the surrounding culture. What is fitting for the believer is not what is cool, what is in, what is what everyone is doing, what the room will reward. What is fitting for the believer is what corresponds to who he now is — a child of God in Christ Jesus, set apart for His use, representing His name in a world that is watching.

Paul lays the standard down to the Ephesians as plainly as he ever puts anything:

But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.

EPHESIANS 5:3–4 (NASB)

Which are not fitting. That phrase carries the same idea as the *schēma* in *aschēmoneō*. Filthiness, silly talk, coarse jesting — these do not fit a saint. They are not in the shape of the new man. They belong to the form a believer used to wear and has been called out of. To put them back on is to act *aschēmoneō* — to act without the proper form a saint should have.

From the inflation, the conduct

The last chapter named the inward sin of arrogance — the puffed-up condition that does not need a microphone to do its work. This chapter names what that condition does when it pushes through into behavior.

A puffed-up man is not just inwardly inflated. He acts inflated. He says the rude thing because he has decided, silently, that the person across from him is beneath him. He makes the cutting joke because he has decided, silently, that the brother who will be cut by it does not matter as much as the laugh will. He participates in the snide huddle at the lockers because he has decided, silently, that he belongs to the group with the right to render verdicts on the kid walking down the hall. The arrogance is the engine. The unbecoming behavior is the exhaust.

That is why Paul names them back to back. *Love is not arrogant* takes down the inward swelling. *Love does not act unbecomingly* takes down what the inward swelling produces when it gets to the air. A Christian who has worked on the arrogance but has not yet seen the conduct it has been driving will find unbecoming behavior coming out of him for years — in the cutting word he did not mean to say, in the laugh he gave at the wrong joke, in the small disrespect he showed a person he had not realized he was looking down on. The inward and the outward have to be addressed together. Paul addresses them in sequence so the believer cannot leave half the job undone.

What it looks like

Freedom from unbecoming conduct looks like a teenage girl who is part of a tight group of friends at the lockers, and who, when the group leans into a whisper about a classmate walking past, steps out of the huddle and walks on. The leaning-in was unbecoming. The walking on was *schēma*.

It looks like a high-school boy who is in a locker room where the talk has just turned crude about a girl in the class, and who does not laugh and does not join in, even though the silence will cost him standing in the room. He does not have to give a speech. The silence is enough. The silence is the form.

It looks like a teen who is dating someone he genuinely cares about, and whose conduct in the relationship — physically, emotionally, in what he says about her to others, in what he asks of her in private — is conduct that would be honorable if her father were watching every minute. Because the Father is.

It looks like a teenage girl who is being pursued by a boy who is asking her, over time, to do things her conscience tells her are not right, and who recognizes that the asking itself is the disqualifier. A boy who would press her past her own honor is not a boy who should be in her life. The recognition is *schēma*. The breaking off is the conduct that fits a daughter of the King.

It looks like a student who has been invited to a party where, every weekend, the conduct of the people there crosses lines a Christian cannot cross — drinking, drug use, sexual atmosphere, things a believer should not even be named in connection with. The student says no, and keeps saying no, and is content to be the

one in the friend group who is not at the party. The not going is the form. The not explaining at length is also the form.

It looks like a teen who, before posting something online, asks the question Paul put to the Ephesians — *is this fitting?* The crude joke that would have gotten a laugh in person does not get posted, because what is in private is now in public, and the form has changed with the audience.

It looks like a young man who has been raised in a Christian home and who speaks to his mother and father, in front of his friends, with the same respect he speaks to them in the kitchen. He does not lower the form to look cool. He does not lower the form ever. The friends will notice. Some of them will respect him for it. The ones who do not are friends he can do without.

It looks like a teenage girl who refuses to repost the gossip she just read about a classmate, refuses to add to the pile, refuses even to “like” the post that started it. The verdict the internet is rendering on that classmate is not her verdict to render. She does not need to be in the pile.

It looks like a Christian young person who, when an adult in the congregation does something that strikes him as foolish or inconsistent, does not roll his eyes, does not make the comment to his friends after worship, does not catalog the failing for later use. He prays for the adult. He keeps walking. The respect he shows is the form. The contempt he refuses is the form.

It looks like Christ. The One who, when a woman known in the city as a sinner wept at His feet in a Pharisee’s house and the host silently judged her unfitness to touch a holy man, refused the host’s verdict — turned to him instead, named the love this

woman was showing that the host had not, and sent her away in peace (Luke 7:36–50). The One who refused to play the game of public humiliation even though He was the only one in the room with the standing to render it. The One whose every conduct, in every moment of every day, was the perfect *schēma* of a Son sent by His Father into a world that did not know how to behave.

The world's unbecoming, and ours

The world is no longer ashamed of much. The cultural baseline of decency has been moving for two generations, and most of what would have shamed a roomful of adults forty years ago no longer shames anyone. The crude joke is on television. The vulgar picture is on the phone of every teenager who has not had a parent set the limits the teenager would not set for himself. The mocking of the weak is the dominant style of public conversation. The dressing down of strangers is sport. The treating of the human body as a commodity is now an industry several billion dollars deep. The Christian growing up in this air can be forgiven for not knowing, anymore, what *fitting* even means.

It means what Paul says it means. *As is proper among saints*. The standard is not what the room laughs at. The standard is not what the platform celebrates. The standard is not what the friends are doing. The standard is the form of a saint — a person set apart by God for His use — and that form has not changed because the surrounding air has changed.

The believer is called to be visible in this. Not loud. Not preachy. Visible. The young person whose conduct in school, in

the locker room, in the hallway, in the dating relationship, in the online space, is *fitting* in a way the surrounding teens have stopped seeing, will be a witness without ever having to give a sermon. Some of his classmates will think he is strange. Some will respect him without saying so. A few may eventually ask him why he lives the way he does. That is when the gospel can be spoken, and not before — because the conduct has to do its preaching first.

The Christian who tries to give the witness without the conduct is a man trying to sell wine he does not own. The conduct authenticates the message. *Aschēmoneō* in the believer's daily life empties the gospel he says he believes. *Schēma* — the form of a saint, kept in small things, day after day — gives the gospel a body it can be heard in.

A note for the reader who is not yet in Christ

If you have been reading this chapter and feeling the weight of it, hear one thing.

The conduct that fits a Christian is not the conduct of a person trying harder. It is the conduct of a person who has been made new. The polish on the outside cannot last unless the change on the inside has happened first. The young person who tries to clean up his behavior without coming to Christ will find that the cleanup wears off, because the engine driving the unbecoming behavior is still inside him, and engines do not stay quiet when they have not been replaced.

The gospel is the engine replacement. *Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures* (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). The man or woman who hears that, believes it, repents of the life they have been living without Him, confesses Him as Lord, is baptized into His death and raised to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3–4), and remains faithful to Him, has been given a new heart and a new Spirit (Ezekiel 36:26–27). The unbecoming conduct, over time, comes off. The fitting conduct, over time, comes on. The change is not instant and it is not without struggle, but the One who works it has done it in every generation of believers since the church began, and He will do it in you.

Begin where the gospel begins. Hear it. Believe it. Repent. Confess. Be baptized. Then live the new life He has put in you, and you will discover that the *schēma* of a saint is not a costume you put on but a body you have been given.

Where this leaves us

Patience, kindness, freedom from envy, freedom from bragging, freedom from arrogance, and now freedom from unbecoming conduct have all been laid down, and the believer who has walked through them honestly has had each one asked of him in turn. That is no small list. And we are not even halfway through.

The next attribute looks inward again, at a posture so common in the human heart that most of us do not even notice it. *Love does not seek its own*. If unbecoming conduct is the visible

misuse of the believer's behavior toward others, seeking-its-own is the silent orientation of the believer's whole life toward himself — the engine that has been quietly running in the background of every other failure. Paul will name it next. The believer who has been honest so far will not enjoy that chapter, but he will recognize what is being named, and the recognition is the first move of the cure.

That is the work this attribute is calling you into. Watch your conduct this week — what comes out of your mouth in the locker room, what you laugh at in the group chat, what you post, what you tolerate being said about a classmate, what you do on the date, what you say to your parents in front of your friends. Catch the unbecoming. Name it. Refuse it. And keep refusing it, day after day, until the *schēma* of a saint becomes the shape your life naturally takes. The Lord whose every act fit His being is willing to grow the same fittingness in you.

* * *

THINK

Identify one piece of conduct in your week — one thing you do, one thing you laugh at, one thing you post, one thing you say — that you know does not fit a Christian. Not something dramatic. Something small enough that you have stopped noticing it. The crude joke you let go in your group chat. The eye-roll you give a parent in front of friends. The way you talk about a teacher behind her back. The picture you reposted that mocks somebody who did not deserve it. *Now sit with this question: if Christ were physically standing beside you the next time the same opportunity comes, would you still do it?* He is standing beside you. He has been the whole time. The question is whether the conduct that fits His presence has been the conduct you have been showing. The next opportunity is probably already on its way. What will you do with it?

Love Does Not Seek Its Own

...love...does not seek its own...

I CORINTHIANS 13:5 (NASB)

The Greek phrase Paul reaches for here is *ou zētei ta beautēs* — literally, *does not seek the things of itself*. The verb *zēteō* is the ordinary word for seeking, looking for, going after — what a man does when he wants something. The object is *ta beautēs* — *the things that belong to itself*. Love does not go hunting for its own.

Other translations push the phrase one direction or another. The NIV says *is not self-seeking*. The ESV says *does not insist on its own way*. The NLT says *does not demand its own way*. They are all reaching for the same heart: love does not orient its life around itself. It does not arrange its days to maximize its own comfort, advance its own interests, secure its own advantage. The Christian who has been deflated of arrogance and washed of unbecoming conduct still has to be addressed at this deeper level — the silent orientation of the whole life. The previous attributes addressed what the believer was doing. This one addresses *what the believer was for*.

What was happening in Corinth

The Corinthians had built a Christianity that was for them.

The factions of the first four chapters — *I am of Paul, I am of Apollos, I am of Cephas* — were factions of self. Each believer was attaching himself to the teacher he had decided would give him the most prestige. The lawsuits in chapter 6 were exercises in self-seeking — believers dragging each other into pagan courts to get what they wanted. The meat-for-idols dispute in chapters 8 through 10 was self-seeking on both ends: the strong wanted their freedom to eat what they pleased; the weak wanted their consciences accommodated by everyone around them. The Lord's Supper had become, as we saw, the wealthy seeking their own fill while the poor went hungry. And the gifts had become platforms for the self-display of the gifted.

In the middle of all of this, Paul made the standard plain in a sentence the Corinthians could not have missed:

Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor.

1 CORINTHIANS 10:24 (NASB)

That is the verse the Corinthians had been ignoring. Paul wrote it in the meat-for-idols context, but the principle was for everything they had been doing wrong. *Let no one seek his own good.* It is not that the believer is forbidden any concern for himself; it is that the believer's first reach must be for his neighbor. And the Corinthians had been reaching, every time, for themselves.

A few sentences later Paul offered his own life as the example:

...just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but the profit of the many, so that they may be saved.

I CORINTHIANS 10:33 (NASB)

Not seeking my own profit but the profit of the many. Paul was the apostle. He had the most to claim, the most to defend, the most to make of his own position. And what he did with his life was hand it away in the direction of the people he was trying to bring to Christ. The Corinthians had the same Lord, and they were behaving as if the Christian life had been arranged for their own benefit.

The disorder showed itself in the worship service most sharply, because the worship service is where the inward orientation of the believer becomes most visible. Paul named the principle for the gifts in chapter 12:

But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

I CORINTHIANS 12:7 (NASB)

For the common good. That is what the gifts were for. Not for the self-promotion of the receiver. Not for the spiritual advancement of the gifted in the eyes of the congregation. *For the common good.* And the Corinthian gift-holder was treating his gift as his own property, his own credential, his own platform. He had taken a gift given for the body and pulled it sideways toward himself. He was seeking his own with the very gift God had given him to seek his brother's.

Now you can hear what Paul is saying in 13:5. *Love does not seek its own.* You have been seeking your own teacher, your own court verdict, your own freedom, your own fill at the Lord's table,

your own platform in worship. The love I am writing about would seek what is mine only after, and only inside, the seeking of what is yours. The Christianity you have been practicing has been a Christianity built around yourself. That is not what I am calling you to.

The God who emptied Himself

Christ is the inverse of seeking-its-own taken all the way to its furthest point. The Son of God, who had every legitimate claim to every honor in the universe, walked through this world with a settled orientation away from Himself and toward the people He had come to save.

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-8 (NASB)

Did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped. That is the heart of not-seeking-its-own as a doctrine of the divine life. Christ had the right to insist on every privilege of His own. He laid the insistence down. He emptied Himself. He took the form of a servant. He moved through this world looking, every moment, for the good of the people the Father had given Him.

The Gospels are full of small examples of this. He withdrew from a crowd that wanted to make Him king because crowning was the world's idea of what He needed and not the Father's (John 6:15). He let Himself be interrupted by a woman with an issue of blood on the way to a more important errand for a synagogue ruler, and gave her His full attention before continuing on (Mark 5:24–34). He let children be brought to Him when His disciples were trying to protect His schedule, and laid hands on them and blessed them (Mark 10:13–16). He bent down on the night He was betrayed and washed the feet of twelve men, one of whom was about to sell Him, and one of whom was about to deny Him three times. He went to a cross He could have refused.

In every one of those moments, He could have sought His own. He could have been crowned. He could have kept walking past the bleeding woman. He could have brushed past the children. He could have refused the towel. He could have called twelve legions of angels (Matthew 26:53). He did none of it. He sought, every time, the good of the people in front of Him, even when the cost was paid out of His own life.

That is the orientation the believer is being called into. *Not seeking your own profit but the profit of the many.* Not because the believer is now invisible to himself. Not because his own needs no longer matter. Not because Christianity is a long campaign of self-loathing. But because the love God has poured out into his heart through the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5) now flows the same direction the love of Christ flowed — outward, toward the neighbor, at whatever cost. The Christian who has tasted that

kind of love cannot, for long, organize his life around himself, because the love itself is reorienting him.

From the inflation, the orientation

The last chapter named unbecoming conduct as what the inflated man does when his arrogance pushes through into behavior. This chapter takes the same picture one layer deeper. The inflation is not just an inward swelling, and not just the bad conduct it produces. It is an entire *orientation* — a settled facing of the life toward the self.

A man who is oriented toward himself does not have to consciously seek his own. He seeks his own by default. Every decision he makes runs through the same filter — *what is in this for me?* — and the filter is so automatic that he no longer notices it. He decides what church to attend by what he gets out of the sermon. He decides which friends to keep by what they cost him versus what they give him. He decides how to spend his money, his time, his energy, by some quiet calculation of return. He has been doing this all his life, and he has rarely been aware of it, because the self-orientation is the temperature of the room he has always lived in.

Paul is telling that man — and us — that the Christian life requires a reorientation. The room has to be set on a different axis. The default has to be changed. The believer is not asked to think less of himself; he is asked to think of himself less. The two are different. The first produces a hollow man. The second produces a Christian who has found, by experience, that the joy of a life

poured out for others is the joy his self-oriented life had been promising and could never deliver.

What it looks like

Freedom from seeking its own looks like a high-school student who has been studying for a calculus test and whose friend, the day before the test, texts her in a panic because he is hopelessly behind. She closes her own notes and walks him through three hours of the material, even though it costs her the grade she was hoping for. The grade was for her. The walking-through was for him. She has just learned what *love does not seek its own* looks like in a chapter she does not yet recognize she has been living.

It looks like a teenage boy on the basketball team who, in a tied game with seconds left, has the open shot and instead passes to the teammate with the better angle, because the goal is the win, not the highlight. He does not see his name in the headline. He sees his team win.

It looks like a young man in a dating relationship who, when the question of where to go to dinner comes up week after week, defaults to the place she wants more often than the place he wants — and who, when the question of how the relationship is going comes up, listens to her answer before giving his own. The seeking-his-own would have been the default. The not-seeking-his-own is the discipline he is learning, and the relationship is being built on it.

It looks like a teenage girl who, at a youth-group service event, takes the harder job — the one nobody else wanted, the one that means working in the back instead of being seen in the front — and does it well, and does not mention to anyone afterward that she did it.

It looks like a young woman who chooses to spend her Friday evening at the home of a friend whose mother has just died, sitting with her, instead of going to the party she had been looking forward to all week. The party will happen again. The friend's mother will only die once, and the friend will only need her in this way one time.

It looks like a teenager who notices that his younger sibling has been struggling with something — a class, a friendship, a small fear — and who, without being asked, spends time helping. The cost is his time. The return is invisible. The seeking-not-his-own is in the noticing without needing to be asked.

It looks like a high-school student in a small group who, when the discussion question comes around, holds her answer back to make room for the quieter girl across the room to be the one who speaks. The quieter girl would not have spoken if the louder one had gone first. The not-seeking-her-own was the choosing of silence so that someone else could be heard.

It looks like a believer who has been wronged by a brother in the congregation and who, instead of seeking the satisfaction of being publicly proven right, goes privately to the brother and works the matter out before any other believer knows it ever happened. The vindication would have been for him. The reconciliation is for the body of Christ.

It looks like Christ. The One who, on the night before His crucifixion, washed the feet of the men who would scatter from Him within hours. The One who, on the cross, looked at the soldiers gambling for His clothes and prayed *Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing* (Luke 23:34). The One whose entire life was a long campaign of seeking the good of those who had given Him nothing back, who would never be able to give Him anything back, and whose only claim on Him was that He had chosen to love them before the world began.

The world's self-seeking, and ours

The world has built much of its philosophy on self-seeking and given it admirable names. *Self-fulfillment. Self-actualization. Self-care. Living your truth. Following your dreams.* The cultural vocabulary of the last fifty years has been a long campaign to convince the human heart that its first and highest calling is itself. The therapist sometimes says so. The motivational speaker says so. The advertising says so. The friends say so. The platform celebrates the man who has built a life entirely around what he wants and tells him he is brave.

The Christian is called into a different vocabulary. The believer's first calling is the love of God and the love of his neighbor — the two great commandments on which all the Law and the Prophets hang (Matthew 22:37–40). His life is oriented around those two loves, and any third commandment that interferes with them is not a commandment from God. The young Christian who has been catechized by the surrounding

culture into self-seeking has been catechized into a faith his Bible does not teach. The reorientation is going to take time, and the surrounding voices are going to keep telling him to stop. He will need to keep going.

The way out of self-seeking is not to deny that you have needs, and not to pretend that your own interests do not matter. The way out is to *put them in their proper place*. In Christ, your needs are met. Your future is secured. Your worth is established. Your name is written in the Lamb's book of life. The God of the universe is on your side, knows you by name, and has gone before you in every direction. Once that is true of you — and the gospel makes it true of you the moment you obey it — the obsession with self that has been driving your decisions can finally relax its grip. The fight to advance yourself can give way to the freer thing of advancing others, because there is no longer anything in your standing with God that depends on the advancing of you.

A note for the reader who is not yet in Christ

If you have not yet obeyed the gospel, you are being asked to do something this chapter has been describing the whole way through. You are being asked to stop seeking your own.

The Christian life begins with the laying down of the self that has been running your life so far. *Whoever wishes to come after Me must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me*, Jesus said (Luke 9:23, NASB). *Deny himself*. The self-seeking life is the one you have been living. The Christian life begins when you say, in plain words to the Lord who has been waiting for you,

I am no longer going to live for myself. I am going to live for the One who loved me and gave Himself for me.

The good news is that the laying down of the self-seeking life is not the loss most people fear it will be. The self-seeking life had been promising you a happiness it cannot deliver. The trade is your shrinking life for the larger life Christ has waiting. *For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it*, He said (Luke 9:24, NASB). The math is upside down by the world's reckoning and right side up by the kingdom's. The man who has spent his life chasing himself ends with nothing. The man who has laid his life down for Christ ends with everything Christ has.

Hear the gospel — that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). Believe it. Repent of the long campaign of seeking your own. Confess Him as Lord. Be baptized into His death and raised to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3–4). Then begin to live the reoriented life He has put in you, and you will discover that what you had been seeking your whole life was waiting for you on the other side of the very door you had been afraid to walk through.

Where this leaves us

Patience, kindness, freedom from envy, freedom from bragging, freedom from arrogance, freedom from unbecoming conduct, and now freedom from seeking its own — that list of the love Paul is describing now stands together, and the believer who

has walked through them honestly has had the inside of his life inverted. He is no longer reacting at the surface, no longer cold, no longer envying, no longer inflating, no longer puffed up, no longer crude, and no longer organized around himself. The orientation of the life has been turned outward, toward God and toward the neighbor, and the orientation is the thing every other attribute has been pressing into.

The next attribute is what happens at the moment the reoriented life is crossed. The believer who has stopped seeking his own is still a man with desires, still a man with preferences, still a man whose plans can be interrupted. What happens when someone — a brother, a parent, a friend, a stranger in traffic — gets in the way? The natural reaction is to flare. The provocation comes, the temper rises, the sharp word forms. Paul names what love does in that moment, and the answer is: nothing. *Love is not provoked.* That is the next chapter.

That is the work this attribute is calling you into. Watch your decisions this week — the small ones and the large ones. Notice the filter that has been running automatically — *what is in this for me?* Notice it, name it, refuse it once, and reach instead for the question Paul put to the Corinthians at the head of his correction of their self-seeking — *what is the good of my neighbor here?* The asking, repeated until it becomes the air you breathe, is the reorientation God is patient enough to do in the people who let Him do it.

* * *

THINK

Pick one decision this week that you would normally make automatically, based on what serves you best. The restaurant you would pick for dinner. The seat you would take in the car. The friend whose call you would answer first. The errand you would do for yourself before doing the one your spouse or parent asked you for. *Now decide it the other way — for the good of someone else, deliberately, without telling them you did.* And notice what happens in you. The first time you do it, the self that has been running your decisions will object. The second time, it will object less. By the tenth time, you will be living a small distance further out of the room you have been living in your whole life, and into the room the Lord who emptied Himself has been calling you to all along.

Love Is Not Provoked

...love...is not provoked...

I CORINTHIANS 13:5 (NASB)

The Greek word Paul reaches for here is *paroxynetai* — from the verb *paroxynō*, which means *to sharpen, to incite, to stir to anger*. The English word *paroxysm* — a sudden outburst of emotion or activity — comes from the same root. The picture Paul is drawing is of a man whose anger has been sharpened to a point so fine that the smallest touch sets him off. Love does not live in that condition. Love is not the kind of person whose temper is on a hair trigger.

A word about translation. The NASB has *is not provoked*. The older King James added the word *easily* — *is not easily provoked* — and put it in italics to mark it as the translator's addition. The Greek does not say *easily*. But the *easily* is doing real work, because Paul himself was once *provoked* — *paroxysmos*, the related noun — by the idols of Athens (Acts 17:16), and that provocation was righteous. The believer can be moved by what should move him. A Christian whose blood does not stir at real wickedness has not become spiritual; he has become numb. What Paul forbids in 13:5 is not the holy anger that has a place in the believer's life. What Paul forbids is the petty irritability of a man who flares at the small wrongs of daily life — the friend who is

late, the spouse who forgot, the child who repeated the same mistake, the driver who cut him off, the brother in the church whose comment hit a sore spot the brother did not even know was there. *That* hair-trigger is what love has put down.

What was happening in Corinth

Paul had been writing all letter to a church that was sharpened to a point.

The Corinthians flared. They flared at one another over which teacher was the best (chapters 1–4). They flared in the courts, suing each other in front of pagan judges (chapter 6). They flared in their gatherings, with the wealthy taking the supper before the slaves arrived (chapter 11), the gifted talking over the less-gifted in worship (chapter 14). They flared at Paul, the very apostle who had founded their congregation, deciding that they had outgrown him (4:18–19). They flared at the weak among them, eating meat in front of brothers whose consciences were not yet free (chapter 8). Whatever was sharp about the Corinthians, it stayed sharp because they were unwilling to lay the sharpness down.

Underneath every one of those flares was the same engine we named in the last chapter — the engine of seeking-its-own. A man who is oriented toward himself will be provoked the moment his orientation is crossed. The teacher he attached to is criticized — he flares. The neighbor who owes him does not pay — he flares. The gift he was about to use is delayed because someone else's gift takes the floor — he flares. Provocation in the believer is the alarm

bell of a self that has been touched. The Corinthians' alarms were going off every hour, because the self they had been organizing their lives around was being touched every hour by the brothers around them.

Paul never quotes 13:5 back to them inside the body of the letter, because 13:5 *is* the body of the letter, restated as a doctrine of love. The whole correction Paul has been writing — *do not divide, do not sue, do not despise the weak, do not lord your gift, do not eat ahead of your brother* — is the same correction said in eight different costumes. *Stop flaring at one another. The love I am writing about does not.* The Corinthians needed to be told.

The God who is rightly slow to anger and is rightly provoked at the right time

Here the theological balance is precise, and it is worth slowing down for, because a careless reading of *love is not provoked* can produce a Christian who has confused holy anger with petty temper and lost both.

God is described, throughout Scripture, as *slow to anger*. We met the phrase already in the chapter on patience — *erek apayim*, long of nose, the long fuse. That long-tempered God is the same God who, again and again in the Old Testament, was *provoked* — the word used is the same *paroxynō* family in the Greek translations of the Hebrew — by the idolatry of His people:

...how often they rebelled against Him in the wilderness and grieved Him in the desert! Again and again they tempted God, and pained the Holy One of Israel.

The Hebrew there does not use the same word as 1 Corinthians 13:5 — Hebrew has its own vocabulary for divine anger — but the idea travels. God’s anger is real. His patience is not the absence of anger; His patience is the slowness of His real anger, and the slowness is for our sake, *making room for sinners to turn* (2 Peter 3:9). When the slowness has been pressed too far and the rebellion is not repented of, the anger arrives, and the anger is just. God’s anger is not the hair-trigger temper of a small-souled man. God’s anger is the right response of perfect holiness to actual wickedness, held back for as long as His patience can hold it, and finally released only when the holiness can wait no longer.

Christ embodied the same combination in His earthly life. He was *moved* — *paroxynō*’s cousin verb is used of His indignation at the disciples for keeping children away from Him (Mark 10:14, NASB renders it *He was indignant*). He was indignant in the temple when the house of prayer had been turned into a marketplace, and He drove the money-changers out with a whip of cords (John 2:13–17). He turned on Peter and said *get behind Me, Satan* when Peter, well-meaning, tried to talk Him out of the cross (Matthew 16:23). Christ was capable of holy anger. He used it. He used it at the right times, against the right things, for the right reasons. He was not numb.

And in the moments when He had every right to flare at petty offense — when the soldiers spat in His face, when the high priest had Him struck on the cheek for answering plainly, when the crowd that had just shouted *Hosanna* now shouted *crucify Him*, when Pilate handed Him over to be beaten — He did not

flare. He stood. He answered when answering served the truth, and He kept silent when silence served the truth, and the *paroxynō* that any other man would have shown He did not show, because the love that does not seek its own is also the love that does not flash with temper at what touches it. Peter watching Him learned the lesson and later wrote it down:

...and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously.

I PETER 2:23 (NASB)

Did not revile in return. That is the standard. Not silence in the face of evil — Christ spoke clearly when speaking clearly served the Father. But no return of reviling. No matching the heat of the room. No giving the abuser the satisfaction of the flare he was hoping for. The Lord whose patience is the longest in the universe was also the Lord whose hair-trigger temper never existed, because there was no self in Him for the trigger to defend.

From the orientation, the flare

The last chapter named the silent self-orientation that has been running underneath the believer's whole life. This chapter takes up the predictable outcome of that orientation. A man who is oriented toward himself will be provoked the moment the orientation is touched. Take away the self-seeking, and the provocations begin to lose their power. Leave the self-seeking in

place, and no amount of self-control can keep the flares from happening.

That is why the cure for petty irritability is not, in the end, more anger management. Anger management treats the symptom. The disease is what the anger is defending. The Christian who has spent years trying not to flare and is still flaring is a Christian whose self has not yet been laid down. The provocations are touching something, and the something is still alive in him. The remedy is not to muzzle the temper. The remedy is to let the Lord do, in him, the deeper work of unseating the self the temper has been guarding. When the self has come down off its throne, the temper has nothing to guard, and the flare-ups quietly stop on their own. *Not seeking its own* and *not provoked* are not coincidentally adjacent in Paul's list. The first is the cause; the second is the effect.

What it looks like

Freedom from being provoked looks like a teenage girl whose friend has just canceled plans for the third weekend in a row, and who, instead of firing off the resentful text she had drafted in her head, sends back *all good, love you, we'll catch up soon*, and means it. The text was for her. The reply was for her friend.

It looks like a high-school boy in a basketball game who gets fouled hard by a player who has been talking trash all evening, and who gets up, hands the ball to the referee, and walks to the line to shoot his free throws as if the trash talk had not happened. The

walking on is the form. The next conversation he will have with that player, at the end of the game, will be a calm one.

It looks like a teenager whose parent has just said something embarrassing in front of his friends, and whose first move is not to roll his eyes, not to snap back, not to walk away in a huff. He laughs, he answers the question, he carries on. The friends will respect him for the laugh more than they would have respected him for the eye-roll.

It looks like a high-school student whose teacher has just accused her, unfairly, of something she did not do, and whose response is the calm sentence — *that was not me, but I can see why it looked that way; I am happy to help you find out who it was*. The teacher does not get the satisfaction of the explosion she was bracing for. The injustice gets corrected without anyone losing their temper.

It looks like a young person who reads, on her social media, a comment from someone she does not even know, criticizing something she posted, and who deletes the impulse to respond, leaves the comment alone, and goes back to her homework. The comment was the trigger. The not-pulling was the discipline.

It looks like a teenage boy whose dating relationship has just hit the first hard conversation, and whose girlfriend has said something that hurt, and whose first move is not to defend himself, not to fire back, not to win the argument. His first move is the silent breath, the slowing down, the question *what is she actually asking me?* The fight that another boy would have started, he has not started. The relationship is being built on what he has refused to do.

It looks like a teenage girl whose younger brother has, for the fifth time, broken something of hers, and who, instead of the explosion her brother is bracing for, says quietly *it is okay, it was just a thing, we can fix it*. The brother has been bracing for a flare he has experienced often enough to count on. The not-flare is a small, daily gospel.

It looks like a Christian in the congregation who, when a brother says something theologically clumsy in Bible class — something that, on a different day, would have set him off — sits with it, asks a clarifying question, and does not need to be the one who corrects it loudly in front of the whole class. The correction can come later, in private, in a tone that builds rather than burns.

It looks like Christ. The One who, when Peter cut off the ear of the high priest's servant in the garden, picked up the ear and put it back, and turned and rebuked Peter, and went to the cross (Luke 22:50–51; John 18:10–11). The One who, when Judas walked into the garden with a kiss and a band of soldiers, did not turn on him with the wrath any other man would have shown, but called him *friend* (Matthew 26:50). The One who, hanging on the cross between two criminals, looked at the soldiers gambling for His clothes and prayed *Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing* (Luke 23:34). Every provocation that ever touched Him was real. None of them flared in Him into the *paroxynō* the world would have considered understandable. He stood. He kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously. And the salvation of every soul who has ever been saved came through a Savior who did not let Himself be sharpened.

The world's quickness, and ours

The world has been speeding up for a long time. The pace of daily life has accelerated, the pace of conversation has accelerated, the pace of reaction has accelerated. The phone is the most efficient delivery system for provocation the world has ever invented. The angry comment, the cruel reply, the misread tone, the misunderstood photograph — all of it arrives every hour, and the cultural air of this generation is the air of people who have been trained to react fast and react hot.

The Christian is called out of all of it. The believer is called to be the slow one in the room — slow to speak, slow to type, slow to assume, slow to take offense, slow to flare. James, who knew his Lord on this point, wrote it as a standing rule for the church:

But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.

JAMES 1:19–20 (NASB)

The anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. That is the sentence the believer can pin to the inside of his ribs and read every morning. The flare-up that felt so satisfying in the moment did not accomplish anything God was trying to do. The text that was so cleverly worded made nothing better. The argument that was so cuttingly delivered won nothing worth winning. *The anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.* It achieves only the satisfaction of the self that was protesting being touched, and

the satisfaction lasts only as long as it takes for the next provocation to arrive.

The way out is not to feel less, and not to be numb to wrong, and not to pretend the offense did not happen. The way out is the way Christ took. *Keep entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously.* The believer who is being provoked can hand the matter to the Lord who actually has the standing to judge it, and stop trying to be the judge himself. The handing-over is what creates the space for the flare to die. The man who has handed the matter over has nothing left to protect.

A note for the reader who is not yet in Christ

If you have spent your life flaring at small provocations and have started to suspect that the flaring is not making your life better, hear one thing.

The flaring is doing what your heart has been telling it to do. It is defending a self that has been on the throne of your life for as long as you have been alive. The self does not want to be touched, and it has trained your nervous system to react with heat whenever it is. The flares are not your problem. The throne is your problem. Until the right King is on the throne, the wrong king will keep flaring every time His kingdom is challenged.

The gospel is the change of throne. *Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures* (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). The man or woman who hears that, believes it, repents of the long reign of the self, confesses Jesus as Lord, is baptized into His death and raised to walk in

newness of life (Romans 6:3–4), and remains faithful, has had the throne taken back by its rightful occupant. The flares do not stop the same day; the old habits take time to unwind. But the Spirit who has been given to you (Acts 2:38) is the same Spirit who taught Paul not to revile in return, and He is patient enough to teach you the same restraint.

Hear it. Believe it. Repent. Confess. Be baptized. And then begin the slow walk of the believer whose throne has been given back to its true King and whose flares are quietly losing their fuel.

Where this leaves us

Eight of Paul's traits have now been named, and the believer who has walked through them honestly has had the surface of his life addressed, the interior of his heart addressed, the orientation of his life addressed, and now the reaction of his temper addressed. The work being done is going all the way through.

The next attribute Paul names follows directly from this one. The believer who has not flared at the wrong is also the believer who can refuse to *record* the wrong — to keep a private ledger of every offense, ready to be brought out the next time the same person crosses him. *Love does not take into account a wrong suffered.* That chapter has already been written and stands at its place in the book. Read it knowing that what comes before it is the work this chapter has been describing: the refusal to flare in the moment, which makes possible the refusal to keep the record afterward. A man who has not exploded at the wrong is in a

position to forgive it. A man who has exploded is in a position to remember it, with interest, for years.

That is the work this attribute is calling you into. The next provocation is on its way — a sibling, a parent, a friend, a classmate, a brother in the church, a stranger online. You will feel the sharpening. You will feel the temper rise. Catch it. Hand the matter to the One who judges righteously. Take the slow breath. Speak the calm sentence, or speak no sentence at all. And do it the next time, and the time after that, and the time after that. The Lord whose own provocations were the worst any human being ever endured, and who did not revile in return, is willing to grow the same restraint in you, one provocation at a time.

* * *

THINK

Bring to mind one person who reliably provokes you. Not a stranger — someone you live with, work with, see at church, who knows just where your trigger is and seems to touch it almost daily. *What is being defended in you when you flare at this person?* The honest answer is almost always *a self that does not want to be touched in this particular way.* Now sit with this question: *what would change in you, and in them, if the next provocation arrived and you did not flare?* The Lord who held His own peace in front of the men who killed Him is willing to hold the peace in you the next time this person arrives. The next time is probably already on its way. What will you do with it?

Love Does Not Take Into Account a Wrong Suffered

Love...does not take into account a wrong suffered.

I CORINTHIANS 13:5 (NASB)

The verb Paul reaches for here is *logizetai*. It is not a poetic word. It is not even a particularly religious word. It is an accountant's word. *Logizetai* is what you do when you write a number in a ledger — when you record a debit, when you enter a credit, when you keep a running tally of what is owed and by whom. Paul uses this word repeatedly elsewhere, often in financial or judicial settings, and most heavily in Romans, where the accounting concept is at the center of his argument about how a sinner can be declared righteous before God. He uses it here, in the middle of one of the most exalted chapters on love ever written, to say something startling: love does not run the books.

That is the picture. A book with a column down the left side for every person you know, and beside each name a careful tally of every wrong they have done you. Every harsh word. Every betrayal small or large. Every promise broken, every favor unreturned, every slight you remember and the ones you would remember if anyone asked. Most of us cannot picture this book because we are not used to thinking of ourselves as keeping it. But we keep it. The

ledger is real. We balance it daily. And we are usually surprised when someone else can see it on our faces.

Paul is writing to a church that had let the ledger run wild.

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To feel the force of what Paul is saying in verse 5, you have to remember what he has already said earlier in this very same letter. The Corinthians were not theoretical scorekeepers. They were active ones. In chapter 6, just seven chapters before he writes the love chapter, Paul addresses what was happening in their congregation:

Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous and not before the saints?

I CORINTHIANS 6:1 (NASB)

The Corinthian believers were dragging one another into Roman courts. They were taking the ledger out of their heads, putting it on official documents, and handing it to pagan judges to settle. Paul is appalled — not primarily because they were losing the cases, but because they were taking them at all. A few verses later he asks the question that exposes the whole posture:

Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded?

I CORINTHIANS 6:7 (NASB)

That is the question love asks. Why not absorb the wrong? Why not close the ledger? Why not bear the loss?

The Corinthians could not answer that question, because they had not yet understood what love does. They were running

the books on each other so loudly that pagans were the audience for it. And when Paul, a few chapters later, sits down to describe love for them, he reaches for the accountant's word and says: *love does not take into account a wrong suffered*. The Corinthians did not need a poem about love. They needed a balance sheet returned to zero.

The same scorekeeping was loose in the worship service too. The believer with the smaller gift was keeping a running tally of every time he was overlooked, every time the louder gift took the floor, every time the assembly seemed to honor someone over him. The believer with the larger gift was keeping his own books — who had interrupted whom, who had failed to defer, who had not given his gift the platform it deserved. By the time Paul gets to chapter 14 he is laying down rules to bring order to a worship service that had degenerated into competing ledgers, each believer keeping his own private accounting of how he was being treated by the rest. The scorekeeping in the courts was a louder version of the scorekeeping in the assembly. Both had to go.

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The reason love can close the ledger is that someone else closed ours first.

The same Greek verb *logizetai* shows up in another of Paul's letters, in a very different context. In Romans 4, Paul is making the argument that righteousness is credited to us not by our works but through faith in Christ. He quotes David from Psalm 32:

Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account.

ROMANS 4:8 (NASB)

Same word. The exact verb Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 13:5 for what love does not do — that is the verb he uses in Romans 4:8 for what God will not do to the believer covered by Christ. The Lord does not enter our sin in the ledger. He does not run the books on the one who is in Christ Jesus. Not because the wrong was small. Not because the wrong did not happen. The cross of Christ stands as the eternal evidence that the wrong was infinite and real. But the debt has been paid by Someone Else, the ledger has been closed, and God will never reopen it.

That is the foundation under verse 5. The believer is asked to do toward others what God has already done toward us. Not to pretend the wrong did not happen. Not to call evil good. Not to deny that the hurt was real. But to refuse to enter it in a book that someone else has already settled.

*Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other,
just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.*

EPHESIANS 4:32 (NASB)

The Christian who keeps a ledger has forgotten his own balance. The man who has been forgiven much and presents a bill to his brother for fifty cents is the man Jesus described in Matthew 18 — the unforgiving servant, the one for whom the king's mercy did not actually take root. Because if it had, the small debt of his neighbor could not have survived in the same heart that knew the size of its own forgiveness.

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Let us be honest about what closing the ledger does not mean.

It does not mean forgetting. The Bible never asks us to manufacture amnesia, and it does not promise that we will. It says God remembers our sin no more:

For I will be merciful to their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.

HEBREWS 8:12 (NASB)

But that is the language of judicial removal, not psychological erasure. God is not pretending He cannot recall what He has forgiven. He is declaring that He will never bring it forward against us. *Will not bring it forward* is what “remember no more” means. It is a courtroom verdict, not a memory lapse.

That is what we are asked to extend as well. We may remember what was done to us for the rest of our lives. The ledger entry may still be in our minds tomorrow morning. What love refuses to do is bring the entry forward. Love does not present the bill. Love does not work the old wound into a new conversation. Love does not reach into the back of the file cabinet during the next argument and pull out something settled three years ago.

It also does not mean that wrongs have no consequences. A man who has stolen from you may be forgiven and still not be the right man to handle your money. A husband who has been violent in his home may be forgiven, and his wife still right to take the children and find safety. Forgiveness is the closing of the ledger; it is not the dissolving of wisdom. The two can stand together, and in many hard cases they must.

What forgiveness does is release. The one who forgives releases the offender from the personal debt. The accountant

closes the book. The judge of the private courtroom — and we all run private courtrooms — steps down from the bench and walks out the door. The matter is now between the offender and God, and God will handle it perfectly, either at the cross of Christ or at the great white throne. Either way, it is no longer ours to hold.

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What does this look like in practice?

It looks like a teenage girl whose closest friend has hurt her in three small ways this semester, and who has not kept a list — has not rehearsed any of them, has not brought them up sideways, has not let any of the three become evidence in the next disagreement. It looks like a brother who has forgiven a sibling for a real wrong and does not reach for it when the sibling comes to him later asking for help with something else. It looks like a teenager caring for a difficult parent or grandparent whose past failures could fill a book, and who has, by deliberate choice and by years of having his mind renewed through Scripture, replaced the book with the simple question *what does this person need from me today?* It looks like a friend who absorbs an unkind word and does not file it away to use later.

In a school classroom, it might look like two students working on a project together after a real disagreement — not pretending the disagreement did not happen, but no longer guarded against each other, no longer scoring, the past genuinely behind them and the work in front of them. That image is worth sitting with, because most of us will spend our lives in proximity to people we have already had reason to score against. The

question is not whether we will be wronged. We will be. The question is whether we will keep the book.

It looks like a high-school boy who, after his girlfriend has said something thoughtless and apologized, refuses to bring it back up six weeks later in a different argument. He felt it. He remembered it. He chose not to use it. The ledger is closed because the relationship is worth more than the entry.

It looks like a teenage girl whose best friend posted something hurtful about her online a month ago, and who, when the friend comes back genuinely sorry, lets the page close — and then refuses to let her own mind reopen it every time her phone buzzes. Forgiveness in the head is the easy part. Forgiveness in the hand that reaches for the phone the next time is where the ledger actually gets closed.

The world keeps the book. The world's love is conditional, transactional, and ruthlessly bookkept. The world severs friendships over debts that should have been written off, ends dating relationships over balances that should have been closed, and raises a generation that can recite every grievance against its parents but not a single thanksgiving. The world's love runs the ledger until the ledger runs out, and then it walks away and tells itself the relationship simply was not working. That is not love. That is accountancy in disguise. And it is the air every one of us has been breathing since we drew our first breath.

Christian love breathes different air. It breathes Calvary:

...having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

That was the moment when the eternal Son of God presented at the Father's bench the certificate of debt of every person who would ever trust in Him, and instead of being paid it was nailed. That is the ledger we have already received. The Christian who refuses to close his brother's small ledger has not yet understood the size of his own.

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A word for the reader who is not yet a believer.

You have a ledger too. Yours is longer than you would like to admit, and you are not the only accountant. Someone else has been keeping the books on you as well, and that someone is God Himself. The ledger God keeps on you is not the trivial running tally of the wrongs your neighbor has done you. It is a full and exhaustive record of every thought, word, and act of your life, weighed against a perfect standard you did not set and cannot meet. That book exists. It will be opened.

The gospel is this: God has provided one way, and one way only, for that book to be closed. His Son Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). The man or woman who obeys this gospel — and if that phrase is new to you, the specific pattern Scripture lays out is gathered together in Appendix A — receives what Paul described in Romans 4:8: a Lord who *will not take into account* the sin recorded in that book. The ledger is closed. The accountant lays down his pen. You are free.

If you have not obeyed the gospel, this chapter is not first about how you treat your neighbor. It is first about the ledger over your own head, and what Christ has done about it.

If you have done that — if you are in Christ — then the question of this chapter is the question of every chapter in this book. *Will you extend to others what you have received?* Will you close the small ledger because the great one has been closed? Will you write *paid in full* in red ink across the page that holds your brother's name, the way it has been written across the page that holds yours?

That is what love does. It does not take into account a wrong suffered. It cannot, because the One it serves has not taken into account our own.

* * *

THINK

What ledger are you still keeping? Who has a balance against them in your accounting that Christ has already cleared in His? What would it cost you to close that book this week — not to forget, not to pretend, but to lay down your pen and refuse to bring the entry forward again? And what does it tell you about the size of your own forgiveness that the page is still open?

Love Does Not Rejoice in Unrighteousness, but Rejoices With the Truth

...love...does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth...

I CORINTHIANS 13:6 (NASB)

Verse 6 of 1 Corinthians 13 is a single sentence with two halves, balanced against each other. *Does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth.* Paul did not give them separate verses, and he did not give them separate chapters in our book either. The two halves are the same teaching said from two directions, and to take either half without the other is to miss what Paul was saying.

The first half is the negative. *Does not rejoice in unrighteousness.* The Greek verb is *chairei*, the ordinary word for being glad, for taking pleasure in something. The object is *adikia* — *unrighteousness, wrongdoing, what falls short of what God requires.* Paul is forbidding a particular kind of pleasure: the pleasure a believer can take in wrong being done — in the wrong done by another, in the wrong exposed in another, in the wrong that finally catches up with another. The word the world has invented for this pleasure, because the world has practiced it long

enough to need a name, is *schadenfreude* — joy at another's harm. The believer is being told that joy of that kind has no place in him.

The second half is the positive. *But rejoices with the truth.* The verb here changes. It is *synchairei* — the same root word *chairei*, with the prefix *syn* attached, meaning *with*. Love does not just rejoice over the truth; love rejoices *with* the truth. Love is on the same side as truth. They are partners. Where truth is honored, love claps. Where truth is hidden or twisted or covered up, love grieves. The believer is not just being asked to avoid the wrong pleasure. He is being given a new pleasure to learn — the pleasure of standing alongside what is true, even when standing alongside it costs him.

The chapter is doing both halves together because they are one teaching. The man whose pleasures still include the small satisfaction of his brother's downfall has not yet been given the larger pleasure of the truth winning regardless of who delivered it. The Christian who has tasted that larger pleasure no longer needs the smaller one.

What was happening in Corinth

The Corinthians had been rejoicing in the wrong things.

The most appalling example came in chapter 5. We have looked at it before; it surfaces here because it touches the very nerve verse 6 is naming. A man in the congregation was sleeping with his father's wife. The sin was so blatant that even the pagans of Corinth would have been embarrassed by it. And the church was *puffed up* about it — proud of how broad-minded they had

become, proud that they had not made the man uncomfortable, proud that they were free of the old narrowness that would have removed him from their midst.

You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst.

I CORINTHIANS 5:2 (NASB)

You have not mourned instead. The right response to the unrighteousness in their midst was grief. The actual response was inflation. They were taking pleasure in a wrong. They had crossed from tolerance into celebration of a sin God hates, and the celebration was the costume their pride had put on. *Love does not rejoice in unrighteousness* is the sentence aimed at exactly that posture. Paul wrote it knowing the church reading it had just been doing it.

In chapter 6 the same disordered pleasure showed itself differently. Believers were suing other believers in pagan courts, and the suing required a certain hunger for the brother to *lose*. The Christian who hauls his brother into court is not, in his secret heart, hoping for a just outcome. He is hoping for *his* outcome. He is hoping the brother will be publicly proven wrong. The verdict will be a small unrighteousness if it goes the way he wants it to go and the brother is innocent — and he is praying for that verdict anyway, because the satisfaction of being vindicated is more important to him than the truth of the case. Paul confronts this directly:

Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded?

I CORINTHIANS 6:7 (NASB)

Why not rather be wronged? That sentence reorders the believer's loves. The wrong outcome — the one that costs you something — is preferable to the right outcome that you have hunted at the cost of your brother. The Corinthian believer who is content to win in court at the price of his brother's loss has rejoiced in unrighteousness without ever calling it that, and Paul names it before they can dress it up.

The same disordered pleasure showed itself in the gift settings of chapters 12 through 14. The believer who envied his brother's gift secretly hoped the brother's gift would fail — that the prophecy would land flat, that the tongue would be uninterpreted and shame the speaker, that the teacher would stumble in his teaching. None of that was said out loud. None of it had to be. The Corinthian who could not rejoice in his brother's gift was the Corinthian who would quietly enjoy his brother's collapse. Paul does not write the line *love rejoices when your brother fails* not into the chapter — he names the deeper version instead. *Love does not rejoice in unrighteousness.* That covers it.

What was happening in Corinth on the positive side

Paul is also calling them — calling all of us — into the positive pleasure of rejoicing with the truth.

The Corinthians had been doing the opposite of this too. They were ranking truths by who delivered them. The truth from Paul they accepted. The truth from Apollos they ranked higher. The truth from a brother whose gift they had envied they discounted, even when the truth he spoke was the very word the assembly needed to hear. The truth that conflicted with what they had already decided they were going to do they pushed aside. They were, in plain words, *not* rejoicing with the truth. They were rejoicing with their own preferences, and calling the rejoicing devotion.

The positive form of verse 6 was already laid out, before chapter 13, in the apostle's own life. Paul could write to the same Corinthians:

For we can do nothing against the truth, but only for the truth.

2 CORINTHIANS 13:8 (NASB)

The believer who is on the side of the truth has no agenda other than that the truth be heard. He does not have to be the one who said it. He does not have to be the one credited with it. He does not have to be the one whose interpretation turned out to be right. He has been freed of all of that, because the only thing he cares about is the truth landing where God means it to land. The Corinthians had not yet learned this freedom. They were still ranking truths by who got the credit for them, and the ranking was costing the whole congregation.

The God who never rejoices in unrighteousness and is Himself the truth

The two halves of verse 6 are aimed at the believer because they are first true of God. He does not rejoice in unrighteousness. He rejoices with the truth. Both halves describe the very character of the God we have been called to imitate.

The first half is stated plainly in the prophets:

“As I live!” declares the Lord GOD, “I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?”

EZEKIEL 33:11 (NASB)

I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked. That is the cleanest single statement of love-does-not-rejoice-in-unrighteousness Scripture contains. God’s justice is real, and the death of the wicked is real, and God is not going to spare any wicked man from what his wickedness has earned him. But God Himself takes no pleasure in the spectacle. The judgment that has to come does not delight Him. He is grieved by it. The believer who has been quietly hoping for some particular sinner’s downfall — the public figure he despises, the family member he has long since written off, the bully from years ago — is taking a pleasure his God does not take. The God of the universe stands over the death of the wicked and grieves; the believer who stands beside Him cannot stand grinning.

The second half — *rejoices with the truth* — is true of God in an even deeper way, because Christ is Himself the truth:

Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life...”

JOHN 14:6 (NASB)

The truth is not, in the end, a list of propositions. The truth is a Person. And the Spirit Christ sent into the world is *the Spirit of truth* (John 14:17), who guides the believer *into all the truth* (John 16:13). When the believer rejoices with the truth, he is rejoicing alongside the Spirit who is doing the work of making the truth land. He is no longer a free agent with his own commitments to defend. He is on the team that the eternal God has been running since the foundation of the world. The pleasure of standing with the truth, against whatever stands against it, is the pleasure of being on the same side as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The apostle John knew this pleasure and named it twice, plainly, near the end of his life:

I was very glad to find some of your children walking in truth, just as we have received commandment to do from the Father. — 2 John 4 (NASB)

I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth. — 3 John 4 (NASB)

I have no greater joy. That is the joy verse 6 is calling the believer into. The greatest joy a Christian can have is the joy of the truth winning — in his children, in his congregation, in the brother

across the room he has prayed for. That is the pleasure the Spirit has been growing in him. Where unrighteousness is celebrated, the believer grieves. Where truth is honored, he rejoices. The two responses are one heart, oriented the same direction as the God who made it.

From the ledger, the pleasures

The last chapter took up *love does not take into account a wrong suffered* — the believer's refusal to keep the running ledger of his brother's offenses. This chapter takes up what the man who keeps no ledger does and does not enjoy.

The ledger-keeper is the man who is always one offense away from being right. He is collecting evidence for the case he intends, one day, to bring. The natural step beyond ledger-keeping is what verse 6 forbids: the small pleasure of seeing the brother *actually* fall in a way that justifies the ledger. The Christian who has been refusing to keep the ledger but has not yet been deflated of his pleasure in the brother's failure has only done half the work. The records are not being kept, but the satisfaction is still being taken. Paul wants both habits gone — the keeping *and* the satisfaction.

And the positive — *rejoices with the truth* — is the opposite habit. The man whose ledger has been closed and whose pleasure in his brother's failure has been laid down is now free to enjoy his brother's successes, to enjoy his brother's growth, to enjoy the truth winning even when it wins through a brother he never would have picked to deliver it. The closing of the ledger frees up the heart to take pleasure in things it could not take pleasure in

before. Verse 5 cleared the ground. Verse 6 plants what now grows on it.

What it looks like

Freedom from rejoicing in unrighteousness looks like a high-school student whose classmate, the one who has been outscoring her on every test all year, has just been caught cheating — and who does not text three friends about it, does not post a knowing emoji, does not even let herself enjoy the small thought *I knew it*. She grieves. She prays for the girl. She tells no one.

It looks like a high-school boy whose girlfriend has just broken up with him and is now visibly miserable, and who does not let himself enjoy her misery, does not post anything about it, does not engineer little moments where he can be seen as the strong one and she as the broken one. He grieves the relationship that ended. He hopes she finds her footing. He keeps walking.

It looks like a teenager whose long-running rival on the basketball team has finally injured himself and is going to miss the season — and who, instead of quietly enjoying the open spot, sends a text the next morning: *just heard about your knee, hate it for you, praying for a fast recovery*. The rival reads the text twice, because it is not the message he was bracing for.

It looks like a young Christian whose Bible class teacher said something last week that the student thought was wrong, and who has now learned, by quietly reading the text, that the teacher was right and the student was wrong. The student goes to the teacher after class, says so plainly, and thanks her for the lesson.

The student has just rejoiced with the truth at the cost of his own previous position, and the cost was nothing compared to the freedom it bought him.

It looks like a teenage girl who hears that the popular girl she has been quietly resenting has had a hard week at home, and who, instead of feeling the small satisfaction of *karma*, texts her: *thinking about you, hope your week gets easier*. The popular girl does not know what to do with the text. The teenage girl does. She has just laid down the small pleasure of resentment and picked up the larger pleasure of standing with the truth that this other girl is a daughter of the same God.

It looks like a believer who, in a Bible study, watches a brother he has often disagreed with deliver a careful, true reading of a hard passage — and who, before anyone else speaks, says aloud *that was helpful, thank you, I had been thinking about this passage wrong*. The brother across the room hears the sentence. The whole study hears the sentence. The truth has just been honored, the believer who honored it is no smaller for having done so, and the body of Christ has been built up by an act of small, hard joy.

It looks like a Christian young person who reads a news story about a public figure she dislikes being publicly humiliated, and who, instead of joining the pile-on, closes the page and prays for the man. The world's pleasure was the pile-on. Her pleasure has been replaced by another pleasure — the pleasure of grieving alongside the God who takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked.

It looks like Christ. The One who, when Mary of Bethany broke open a costly jar of perfume and poured it on His feet and Judas Iscariot publicly criticized the gift as wasteful — *why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?* — did not take pleasure in the appearance of righteousness Judas was performing, and would not let the appearance stand (John 12:1–8). He did not even pretend Judas’s question was sincere; the text tells us Judas asked it *not because he was concerned about the poor, but because he was a thief*. Christ defended Mary instead. He named her gift as beautiful. He named her preparation as for His burial. He told Judas plainly, *let her alone*. He grieved the unrighteousness — both Judas’s false righteousness and the disciples’ echoing indignation. He stood with the truth — Mary’s truthful act of love, named for what it was. He rejoiced in the woman’s gift becoming a memorial wherever the gospel would be preached.

The world’s pleasures, and ours

The world has built much of its entertainment on rejoicing in unrighteousness. The gossip column, the reality show, the comment thread, the platform where the public humiliation of strangers has been made into content — all of it runs on the small pleasure verse 6 forbids. The brother who has been caught is the day’s entertainment. The cultural figure who has fallen is the week’s headline. The classmate whose family is falling apart is the conversation at lunch. The whole machinery of public attention has been calibrated for a long time on the assumption that the

human heart will keep buying tickets to other people's downfalls. The assumption has, until now, paid off.

The Christian is called out of all of it. The believer is called to be the person in the room who is *not* clicking the article, *not* refreshing the comments, *not* listening to the gossip with the leaning interest the others are showing. He is called to grieve where the world is enjoying, and to enjoy where the world cannot even see what there is to enjoy. The truth landing in a small Bible class, in a small kitchen conversation, in a small reconciliation between two believers nobody else even noticed had been at odds — *that* is the pleasure the believer has been given to take. The world cannot see why it would be a pleasure. The believer who has tasted it does not need the world to understand. The pleasure is large enough to live on.

A note for the reader who is not yet in Christ

If you have spent your life enjoying the small pleasures the world serves up — the *schadenfreude*, the gossip, the satisfaction of seeing the people you dislike finally caught — hear one thing.

These pleasures have been costing you more than you know. They have been training your heart in a direction the heart was not made to go. The human heart was made to rejoice in the truth, and the truth includes the goodness of God toward sinners, and the goodness of God toward sinners is what your enemy needs and what your friend needs and what *you* need. Every time you have enjoyed someone else's downfall, your heart has been practicing the wrong response to the very thing God has come

into the world to defeat. The practice has been deepening the disposition. The disposition has been pulling you further from the only joy that lasts.

The good news is that the disposition can be replaced. The God who *takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked* is the God who has sent His Son into the world for the rescue of the wicked, and *you* are one of the wicked He has sent His Son to rescue. *Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures* (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). Hear it. Believe it. Repent of the long pleasure you have taken in the wrong things. Confess Him as Lord. Be baptized into His death and raised to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3–4). And as you walk in the new life, you will discover that the pleasures God grows in you are larger and steadier than the small, sour pleasures the world has been pouring into you for years. The trade is the trade of your whole life. It is the best trade you will ever make.

Where this leaves us

Verse 6 is the hinge of 1 Corinthians 13. Up to this point Paul has been writing *love does not* — does not envy, does not brag, is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly, does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness. The list of what love is *not* doing has been long, and necessarily so, because the disordered loves of the Corinthians required that long a list to be named.

Now the chapter turns. *But rejoices with the truth* is the first positive verb in the description since *love is patient* and *love is kind* at the very beginning. From here on, Paul will write only positives. *Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.* The mood lifts. The grammar lifts. The chapter has done the hard work of clearing the ground, and now it begins to plant.

That is the work this attribute is calling you into. Watch the small pleasures you take this week. Notice where you have been enjoying someone else's downfall — the public figure, the neighbor, the brother in the congregation, the family member, the person who has been a thorn for years. Catch the pleasure. Refuse it. And reach instead for the pleasure verse 6 is offering you — the pleasure of standing alongside the truth, alongside the Spirit who is the Spirit of truth, alongside the Christ who *is* the truth, and watching what God is willing to do in the lives around you when you are no longer rooting for the wrong outcome.

* * *

THINK

Bring to mind one person whose recent failure you have, secretly, enjoyed even a little. The classmate who finally got caught. The neighbor whose marriage hit the rocks. The public figure whose hypocrisy was exposed. The brother in the church whose ministry stumbled. *Now ask: what does the small pleasure I took in that moment say about where my heart has been pointed?* Sit with the question long enough to be honest about the answer. Then take the next step. *Pray for that person, by name, that God would do toward them what He is doing toward you — grow them, restore them, redirect them, save them.* The prayer is the practice of rejoicing with the truth instead of with the wrong. The first time you do it, the old habit will object. The fifth time, it will object less. By the time you have done it for a year, you will find that you have been given a different heart, and the pleasure verse 6 calls love into has become a pleasure you actually take.

Love Bears All Things

...love...bears all things...

I CORINTHIANS 13:7 (NASB)

The Greek verb Paul reaches for here is *stegei* — from *stegō*, a word built on the noun *stegē*, meaning *roof*. A *stegē* is the cover over a house that keeps the weather out. The verb *stegō* is what a roof *does*. It holds up under what falls on it. It also covers what is underneath it from the eyes of the people walking past on the road.

Both meanings are alive in the verb Paul has chosen. *Stegei* can mean *bears the weight of* or *covers, conceals*. English translators have not all gone the same direction — the NASB says *bears all things*, the older King James does the same, the NIV says *always protects*, the NLT says *never gives up*. The differences are not contradictions. They are the two halves of one verb, and Paul almost certainly meant both. Love is the roof that holds up under the weight of what comes down on it from the people it loves, and love is the roof that covers what is underneath it from the eyes of those who do not need to see.

Paul has now turned a corner in his description. The first six verses of chapter 13 have been mostly *what love does not do* — does not envy, does not brag, is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly, does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not

take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness. The negatives have done their work. Now Paul lifts the grammar and writes four positive verbs in a single rhythmic sentence: *bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things*. Four verbs. Four times the same object — *panta, all things*. The four belong together. They describe the believer's settled posture toward the brother who is testing his love.

This chapter takes up the first of the four.

What was happening in Corinth

The Corinthians were not bearers. They were exposers. They were the church that had let the laundry get aired in the pagan courts (chapter 6), that had let the worst sin in the congregation become an occasion for pride rather than mourning (chapter 5), that had let the Lord's Supper become a moment when the wealthier brothers ate their fill in front of the brothers who had nothing. The roof had come off. What should have been borne and what should have been covered was, in Corinth, being broadcast.

Paul knew that the church that had been built on this kind of exposure could not love. The brother whose failures were going to be paraded by his fellow believers was a brother no one was actually loving. The believer whose every weakness was going to become the next week's gossip was a believer no one was actually carrying. Love, Paul says, *bears*. Love takes the weight of the

brother's failure on its own roof, and the weight does not become the news of the village.

And in the spiritual-gifts setting, the same disorder was operating. The believer with the smaller gift was being exposed in front of the congregation when his contribution to worship was outshined. The newer believer whose theological understanding was still rough was being corrected publicly in ways that humiliated him. The brother whose prayer fumbled was the brother the rest of the congregation talked about in the parking lot. The roof was thin or missing entirely, and the gifts Paul had been telling them were *for the common good* (1 Corinthians 12:7) had become instruments of exposure rather than of building up. *Love bears all things* is the sentence that would have changed how the Corinthian worship service felt to the brother with the smaller gift. Whatever he gave, whatever he attempted, whatever fell short — love bore it. The roof was over him. The next time he stood to contribute, he could stand without bracing for the public review of his performance.

The God who covers

The verb *stegō* carries an echo Peter would later make explicit. Writing to scattered believers many years after Paul, he set down the doctrine that love covers:

Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.

I PETER 4:8 (NASB)

Love covers a multitude of sins. Peter was quoting Proverbs 10:12 — *love covers all transgressions* — and he was setting it down as a standing principle of the Christian life. The believer who has been loved by God in Christ has been *covered* by that love. The sins that would have exposed him to the wrath of the holy God have been hidden under the blood of Christ. The roof over the believer's head is the roof Christ went to the cross to put there. And the believer who has been covered that way cannot, for long, refuse to put a roof over his own brother.

The picture is not a denial of sin. It is not pretending the wrong did not happen. It is not telling the brother his failure was fine, or that it does not matter, or that no one noticed. The picture is the picture of *not exposing*. The brother's failure is real. The believer has seen it. The brother does not know the believer saw it. And the believer, whose first instinct as a fallen man was to tell, has instead pulled the roof over the brother and kept walking. The failure is between the brother and God now. It is not material for any other conversation.

That covering is itself a heavy thing to do. It is hard to know about a wrong and not bring it forward. The hardness is why the same verb means *bears*. Love covers, and the covering carries weight, and love is willing to carry the weight rather than discharge the weight onto the head of the brother by exposing him. The roof both protects and presses down. The believer who has been the brother's roof for years knows what the verb means.

There is a higher example still. The same picture is drawn by Christ Himself when He says of Jerusalem, the city that was about to crucify Him:

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling.

MATTHEW 23:37 (NASB)

The hen gathering her chicks *under her wings* — that is *stegei* shown rather than spoken. The roof is the hen's body, and what is being covered is the chick's life from the predator above. Christ wanted to be that roof for Jerusalem. He was willing to take the storm on Himself so that the people underneath could be hidden. They refused. The willingness was His. The verb was His. *Love bears all things* is the verb Christ has used toward His people in every generation, and the believer who is being formed into His image is being formed into the same posture toward the brothers He has placed around him.

From the truth, the bearing

The last chapter named love's joy in standing alongside the truth. This chapter takes that joy one step further into action. The believer who is on the same side as the truth is also the believer who can bear the truth about his brother without making it public. He has seen the failure. The failure is real. The roof goes over it.

That is why *rejoices with the truth* and *bears all things* sit next to each other in Paul's verse. *Rejoicing with the truth* and *bearing all things* are not at odds. They are partners. Rejoicing with the truth means love does not pretend wrong is right. Bearing all

things means love does not parade wrong even when wrong is wrong. The believer is asked to hold both. To see clearly and to cover faithfully. To grieve the failure and to keep silent about it. To love the brother enough to want him restored and to love him too much to make his restoration a public spectacle.

That is the form of the roof. It is honest about what it is covering. And it covers anyway.

What it looks like

Bearing all things looks like a high-school girl whose best friend has told her, in confidence, about something the friend did that she is ashamed of — and who keeps the secret. Not just from the rest of the friend group. From every group. Forever. The friend does not have to worry, ten years from now, that the story will come out at a wedding rehearsal dinner. The roof was sealed when it was put up.

It looks like a high-school boy whose teammate played badly in a game everyone watched, and who, when the other guys are dissecting the teammate's mistakes in the locker room, does not contribute. He does not pile on. He may even change the subject. The roof is not in the dissection. The roof is in the silence.

It looks like a teenager whose younger brother just embarrassed himself in front of the family, and whose first move is not to mention it. He does not say *did you see what he did at dinner*. He does not bring it up later for a laugh. The brother already feels it. The bearing is not making him feel it again.

It looks like a young man in a dating relationship whose girlfriend has told him about a hard thing in her past, and who has filed the information in a place no one else will ever read it. He will not bring it up in a future fight. He will not mention it to his friends. He will not refer to it sideways years from now. The trust she gave him will be kept under the roof he agreed, by listening, to provide.

It looks like a teenage girl whose mother has lost her temper, said something she did not mean, and apologized — and who does not bring the moment up again. Not in conversation with her father. Not in conversation with her siblings. Not in conversation with her mother. The apology was real. The covering is the form love takes when the apology has been real.

It looks like a Christian who has heard, through a chain of three other believers, something embarrassing about a brother in another congregation — and who does not pass the story on. The chain ends with him. The four believers before him acted without bearing. He will not be the fifth. The information dies on his end of the line.

It looks like an older believer who, when a new convert says something theologically wrong in Bible class, does not announce the wrongness in front of the whole class. The correction can come later, in private, in a tone the new convert can receive. The roof over the new convert's head was held up by the older believer's choice not to expose the mistake to the room.

It looks like Christ. The One who, when Peter had denied Him three times in the high priest's courtyard with curses and oaths, did not expose him publicly. He let three days pass. He let

the resurrection morning come. He spoke first to the women at the tomb and instructed them, *go, tell My disciples and Peter* — naming Peter alone, knowing the disciple needed to know he was still wanted (Mark 16:7). Later, on a beach by the Sea of Galilee, after breakfast, He took Peter aside and asked him three times *do you love Me?* — one question for each denial — and three times He gave him back his commission (John 21:15–17). He did not deny what Peter had done. But He covered the failure by taking it up personally instead of publicly. He took the spectacle off Peter and put it on Himself, and Peter walked away restored. That is the roof. That is what *stegei* looks like with three nights of failure answered by three quiet questions on a beach.

The world's exposure, and ours

The world has built a vast machinery of exposure. The reality show, the comment section, the gossip column, the leaked text screenshotted to a group chat, the public account that exists for the purpose of cataloging the embarrassments of strangers — all of it runs on the assumption that human failure is content. The cultural air this generation breathes is the air of constant exposure. The young Christian who has grown up scrolling through other people's worst moments has been trained, hour by hour, in the habit Paul forbids.

The believer is called out of all of it. The cultivation of *stegei* in the believer is the deliberate refusal to participate in the exposure economy. Not the photograph reposted. Not the screenshot shared. Not the story that ends with *can you believe*.

The roof goes up over the failure, and the failure does not become content. The brother whose worst moment crossed your path is not material. He is a soul Christ died for. The roof he needed from his fellow believer was the roof of love, and you are now in a position to provide it.

The cost of the cultivation is small comments not made, small jokes not retold, small posts not posted. The reward of the cultivation is a Christian who is becoming, by that much, a place under which the people around him are safer than they have known they were. He is becoming a roof. Other believers will come to know it without being told. They will tell him things they would not tell anyone else, because they have learned what he does with what he hears. He has become a man you can trust your weakness to.

A note for the reader who is not yet in Christ

If you have spent your life in the surrounding culture of exposure, hear one thing.

You have been living in a world where the people around you would, if they could, parade your worst moments for the satisfaction of strangers. That is the world the surrounding air has trained you to expect, and to fear. The fear is one of the reasons you have built so many walls around your real self. You have learned that the people who get past the walls will sooner or later use what they find. Most of your acquaintances are people you have not let inside the walls, for very good reasons.

The gospel offers something the world has not offered you. *Love covers a multitude of sins* (1 Peter 4:8). The God of the universe knows every secret of your heart and every failure of your life. He has not exposed you. He has not paraded you. He has sent His Son into the world to die for the very sins He knows, and to offer you a covering not made of denial but made of His own blood. The roof Christ went to the cross to put over the believer is a real roof, and under that roof your worst moments are not material. They are sins paid for. They are wrongs forgiven. They are remembered no more (Hebrews 8:12).

Hear it. Believe it. *Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures* (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). Repent of the long life you have been living without Him. Confess Him as Lord. Be baptized into His death and raised to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3–4). And take your place under the roof He has been holding up for you longer than you knew.

Where this leaves us

Paul has now turned the grammar of his description fully positive. *Bears all things* is the first of four parallel verbs that will close the description of love in this verse — *bears, believes, hopes, endures*. Each will be taken up in its own chapter. Together they describe the believer's settled posture toward the brother who is testing him: love that holds the weight, gives the benefit of the doubt, refuses to despair, refuses to quit. The four belong as a unit, and each is doing distinct work.

The next attribute is the second of the four. *Love believes all things*. If bearing is the refusal to expose the brother's failures, believing is the refusal to assume the worst about the brother in the first place. Both are required. The believer who covers what has happened is also the believer who does not invent what has not happened. The next chapter takes that up.

That is the work this attribute is calling you into. The next opportunity to expose a brother is probably already on its way — the small story you could tell at the cost of someone else, the screenshot you could share, the comment you could make. Catch it. Refuse it. Pull the roof over it instead. And keep doing it, day after day, until the believers around you have learned that you are a place their failures will be safe. The Lord who put a roof over you at the cost of His own life is willing to grow the same roof through you, one cover at a time.

* * *

THINK

Bring to mind one piece of information about another person — something you know, something they would not want known, something that has been bouncing around in your head waiting for a chance to come out. Now sit with this question: *If you were the one whose failure was the secret, what would you want done with it?* You already know the answer. The Lord who covered your worst moments at the cross of His Son is asking you to be the roof for this brother's worst moment too. The next time the temptation arrives to bring the story forward, do not bring it. Cover it. And keep covering it. The roof you provide for him is the roof Christ provided for you, extended one believer further.

Love Believes All Things

...love...believes all things...

I CORINTHIANS 13:7 (NASB)

The Greek verb here is *pisteuei* — from *pisteuō*, the ordinary New Testament word for *to believe, to trust, to put faith in*. It is the same verb used hundreds of times in the New Testament for believing the gospel, believing in Christ, putting one's faith in God. Paul reaches for it now and puts it in an unexpected setting. Not believing in God. Believing the *brother*. Believing the *person*. Love, Paul says, believes.

That sentence needs careful handling before it can land properly, because read flatly it could mean love is gullible. It could mean the Christian is required to accept every claim every person makes about themselves and to ignore his discernment in favor of credulity. Paul did not mean that, and a believer who turns *love believes all things* into a doctrine of naive trust will get hurt — and will hurt the church around him — in ways the verse never intended.

What Paul means is something more careful and more demanding. *Pisteuei panta* — *believes all things* — describes the disposition of love toward the brother before evidence requires otherwise. Love does not begin by suspecting. Love does not assume the worst. Love does not interpret the ambiguous

comment as the cutting one. Love, presented with a story that could be read several ways, reaches for the most charitable reading first, not the most cynical one. Love believes the brother is telling the truth until it has actual reason to believe he is not. Love gives the benefit of the doubt and gives it generously, because love has been given the benefit of the doubt by the One whose discernment is perfect and whose grace toward His people is the deepest grace any of us has ever received.

What was happening in Corinth

The Corinthians were not believers in this sense. They were suspects.

The factions of chapters 1 through 4 ran on suspicion of the teachers the other factions followed. The lawsuits of chapter 6 ran on suspicion of the brother across the courtroom — on the assumption that he was, in fact, the cheater, the liar, the wrongdoer, the one whose word could not be trusted in a private conversation between believers. The conflicts over food sacrificed to idols in chapters 8 through 10 ran on suspicion in both directions — the strong suspected the weak of legalism, the weak suspected the strong of compromise, and neither side gave the other the charitable reading the situation could have borne.

Paul's correction in chapter 6 had named the principle clearly:

...why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded? On the contrary, you yourselves wrong and defraud. You do this even to your brethren.

The Corinthians were so quick to assume they had been wronged that they were the ones doing the wronging. Their suspicion of one another had made them, in fact, untrustworthy themselves. The opposite of *believing all things* was not careful discernment. It was a daily, low-grade refusal to give the brother the credit a brother is owed, and the refusal had been corroding the whole congregation.

In the spiritual-gifts setting, the same disposition was at work. The believer whose prophecy was given was suspected of having invented it. The brother whose tongue was interpreted was suspected of having coordinated the interpretation. The teacher whose hard word landed uncomfortably was suspected of having a private grudge. Whatever was given in the worship service was being filtered through the suspicion of whoever received it, and the gifts that were supposed to build up the body were instead being parsed for hidden motives. Paul's chapter on love is, among other things, a long correction of this whole posture. *Love believes*. You who have been suspecting each other since the day this church started have not yet been loving each other.

The God who is faithful, and the love that trusts

The verb Paul uses here is a vertical verb before it is ever a horizontal one. *Pisteuō* is what the believer does toward God. The man who has put his faith in Christ has *believed* the witness God has given about His Son (1 John 5:9-10). That kind of belief is not credulous. It is grounded. It is grounded in the

trustworthiness of the One who has spoken. The believer trusts God because God is *pistos* — faithful, trustworthy, the One whose word does not fail.

God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

I CORINTHIANS 1:9 (NASB)

That sentence sits at the very beginning of the same letter. Paul opens his correction of the Corinthians by reminding them that the God who has called them is faithful — *pistos*. He is the kind of God you can put your trust in. And the believers He has called are being asked, by extension, to be a people who can also be trusted, and who can also trust.

The two halves of Christian community require both. The believer is asked to be the kind of person whose word holds, whose promises stand, whose conduct does not undermine the trust the brother is being asked to extend toward him. And the believer is asked, in turn, to extend that same trust toward the brother who is doing the same work in the opposite direction. *Pisteuei panta* describes the second half. The first half is the believer's own faithfulness. The second half is the believer's willingness to assume the brother is doing the same work, and to credit him for it until the evidence requires otherwise.

Christ Himself, who knew exactly what was in every man (John 2:24–25), still entrusted His ministry to twelve men whose failures He foresaw. He knew Peter would deny Him. He chose Peter anyway. He knew Judas would betray Him. He invited Judas anyway. He knew the eleven would scatter the night of His arrest.

He spent three years pouring His life into them anyway. He was not naive. He was not surprised by the failures when they came. But He believed in His men with a kind of believing that the men themselves had not yet earned. The believing was the love. The believing was what made the eventual restoration of Peter, and the eventual reception of the Holy Spirit by the eleven, and the building of the church on their preaching, possible.

The believer is not Christ. The believer does not know what is in every man. But the believer has been given a Lord who modeled, in His own choosing of men, what loving belief looks like. The brother is to be believed until proven otherwise. The benefit of the doubt is to be extended generously. The first reading of the situation is to be the charitable one. The suspicious reading is to be resisted, even if it turns out, sometimes, to have been the right one. The cost of believing wrongly is real. The cost of suspecting wrongly is worse, because the suspicion is itself a wrong done to the brother, and is a wrong done thousands of times to brothers who never gave any actual cause for it.

From the bearing, the believing

The last chapter named love's roof — its refusal to expose the brother's failures, its willingness to bear the weight of what it knows. This chapter takes up what love does *before* it has anything to bear. Bearing covers what has happened. Believing refuses to invent what has not. The two work as a pair. The brother under the roof is not just being covered for his real failures. He is being given, by the love over him, the benefit of the doubt for the

failures he was suspected of and never committed. Many a Christian has spent years being suspected of things he never did by a brother whose love had not yet learned to believe. The wounds of that suspicion are deep. The verse Paul writes here is the cure.

The two together — *bears all things, believes all things* — give the brother a place to live. Under the roof he is not being exposed for what he has done; under the believing he is not being framed for what he has not done. The Christian community in which both attributes are alive is a community in which a believer can finally come up for air, because he is no longer bracing for either the exposure or the invented charge. That is the church Paul is trying to build at Corinth. That is the church love is trying to build everywhere it goes.

What it looks like

Believing all things looks like a high-school girl whose friend has not texted her back in two days, and who, instead of jumping to *she must be mad at me, she must be talking about me, she must be done with the friendship*, reaches for the simpler reading first — *she has had a hard week, her phone has been off, she will text when she texts*. The first reading is usually the right one. The cynical reading is rarely needed.

It looks like a high-school boy whose girlfriend mentioned, in passing, that she had lunch with a male friend from her childhood, and who does not assume the worst. The childhood

friend is the childhood friend. The lunch was lunch. He trusts her, because she has given him no actual reason not to.

It looks like a teenager whose parent has just been late picking him up from practice, and whose first thought is not *they don't care about me, they forgot, they always do this*. His first thought is *something must have come up*. He waits without spiraling. The parent arrives. The parent had a real reason. The teenager has not spent the waiting time building a case against people who love him.

It looks like a student whose teacher has just given him a lower grade than he expected, and whose first move is not to assume the teacher has it in for him. The first move is to read the assignment again, look at the teacher's comments, and consider that the grade might be the honest one. If, after careful looking, he still thinks there is an error, he goes to the teacher with a question, not an accusation.

It looks like a Christian in the congregation whose brother said something across the room last Sunday that could have been a slight and could have been an innocent comment, and who chooses the innocent reading. He does not work the comment over for days. He does not bring it up at the dinner table. He does not slowly construct, in his head, the case against the brother. He gives the brother the credit of being a brother. Most of the time the credit is deserved. When it is not deserved, the credit was still right to extend, because extending it cost the believer nothing and protected the body from another small wound.

It looks like a young person who has heard, secondhand, something unflattering about another believer — and who refuses

to accept the unflattering report as the truth until he has heard it from a more reliable source than the chain that brought it to him. *Believing all things* requires a *not* — not believing every rumor, not extending credibility to gossip, not letting suspicion become certainty on the basis of nothing but a story from someone who heard it from someone. The believer who refuses to repeat the rumor and who refuses to file it as truth is doing the discerning work that love requires.

It looks like Christ. The One who, knowing Peter would deny Him within hours, looked at Peter and said, *I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers* (Luke 22:32, NASB). Christ believed Peter would turn again. Christ believed Peter would strengthen his brothers. Christ was not naive about the failure that was about to happen, and He was not paralyzed by it either. The believing went past the failure to the restoration on the other side. The believer who has been loved that way knows the verb.

The world's suspicion, and ours

The world has been training the human heart in suspicion for a long time. The advertising assumes every salesman is lying. The news assumes every public figure is hiding something. The friend-group dynamic in many a school assumes every other friend is secretly competing. The comment threads assume every poster is acting in bad faith. The whole air of public discourse in this generation has been calibrated for suspicion — *what is the*

angle, what is being hidden, what is the real motive. The young Christian who has been catechized into that air will read the brother across the room through the same lens, and the lens will distort every charitable reading the situation would otherwise have allowed.

The believer is called out of all of it. The cultivation of *pisteuei panta* in the believer is the deliberate refusal to lead with suspicion. The first reading of the friend's silence is generous. The first reading of the parent's lateness is generous. The first reading of the brother's comment is generous. The cynical reading is held back. It may turn out, sometimes, to have been the right one. The believer can deal with that when it comes. He will not preemptively deal with it by assuming it.

The cost of the cultivation is small wounds the believer absorbs by being charitable when he could have been guarded. The reward is a Christian who is becoming, by that much, a believer the people around him can finally relax in front of. He is not running their motives through a suspicion filter. He is taking them at their word. They have come to expect this from him. They tell him things they would not tell anyone else, because they have learned that he will not turn the telling into a case against them.

A note for the reader who is not yet in Christ

If you have been raised in the world's suspicion and have started to suspect that the suspicion is making you smaller, hear one thing.

The suspicion you have been carrying has had a cost you may not have seen. It has cost you trust. It has cost you closeness. It has cost you the ability to receive the love that has, in some cases, been right in front of you, because suspicion will not let love land. The cynic does not just refuse to give the benefit of the doubt to others. He refuses to receive the benefit of the doubt for himself. He has trained himself to assume that the love being offered him is not real, and the training has cost him every relationship that the love could have grown into.

The gospel offers something the suspicion of the world cannot offer. *God is faithful* (1 Corinthians 1:9). The Lord who has spoken about Himself in the Word does not lie. The promises He has made to those who come to His Son are promises He keeps. The believer who has come to Christ has been given a Lord he can trust without keeping his guard up — because there is nothing in this Lord to be guarded against. The One who knows your worst and has not used it against you, who has covered it at the cost of His own Son, is not the kind of God you need to suspect. He is the kind of God you can come to.

Hear it. *Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures* (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). Believe it. Repent of the long suspicion that has kept you out of reach of the love being offered. Confess Him as Lord. Be baptized into His death and raised to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3–4). And learn, slowly, the new posture of a believer who has been given a Lord he can trust and a family he can extend that trust toward.

Where this leaves us

Two of the four positive verbs in Paul's sentence have now been laid down. *Bears all things*. *Believes all things*. The brother under that kind of love is being covered for his real failures and credited for the failures he never committed. Half of what a Christian community needs to be a place where people can actually live is being described here.

The next attribute is the third of the four, and it turns from the brother to the situation. *Love hopes all things*. When the believing has been tested — when the brother *has* failed in a way the believing cannot deny — what does love do then? Does it give up on the brother? Does it conclude that the situation is hopeless? Paul has an answer, and it is not what the world would expect.

That is the work this attribute is calling you into. Watch your readings of the people around you this week. Notice where you have been leading with suspicion. Notice the cynical interpretation you have been reaching for first. Refuse it. Reach instead for the generous one. The first time you do it, your trained reflex will object. The fifth time, it will object less. By the time you have done it for a year, the brothers around you will have noticed, and the body of Christ will be the place it was always meant to be — a place a person can stand without bracing.

* * *

THINK

Bring to mind one person whose recent action you have been quietly suspecting — a friend whose silence you have been reading as anger, a parent whose distractedness you have been reading as indifference, a brother in the church whose comment you have been turning over in your mind looking for the slight. Now sit with this question: *what is the most charitable reading of what happened?* Hold the charitable reading in your mind. Decide to extend it. And the next time the temptation arrives to revise the reading back into the cynical one, refuse the revision. The believing you are practicing is the believing Christ extended toward Peter on the night Peter would fail Him. It is the believing the Lord has extended toward you. It is the love verse 7 is calling you into.

Love Hopes All Things

...love...hopes all things...

I CORINTHIANS 13:7 (NASB)

The Greek verb here is *elpizei* — from *elpizō*, the New Testament word for *to hope, to expect with confidence, to wait for what God has promised*. The verb has nothing to do with the wishful version of hope the surrounding culture has reduced the word to. When the world says *I hope* it usually means *I would like, though I do not expect*. When Scripture says *elpizō* it means something nearer to *I am expecting, with confidence, what God has said is coming*. Christian hope is not a feeling. It is a settled posture toward a future the believer has been promised.

In verse 7, Paul puts the verb in an unexpected setting. He does not say love hopes for its own salvation, though that is also true. He says love *hopes all things* — *panta elpizei*. Love is hopeful toward the people it loves. Love is hopeful toward the situations it walks into. Love does not give up. When the brother has, in fact, failed in a way the believing of the last chapter cannot deny — when the situation has, in fact, gone wrong in a way that looks final — love still hopes. Love refuses to write the brother off. Love refuses to call the situation hopeless. Love continues, against contrary evidence, to expect what God has been able to do in worse cases than this one.

That is the verb. It is closer to bedrock than to feeling.

What was happening in Corinth

The Corinthians had been writing each other off. The factions of the first chapters were exercises in writing off — *I am of Paul* was, among other things, the public announcement that *I am no longer expecting anything from the followers of Apollos*. The man in chapter 5 — sleeping with his father's wife — was a man the Corinthian church had given up on in the wrong direction; they were not hoping he would be restored, they were enjoying that he was there. The believers being dragged into pagan courts in chapter 6 were brothers each side had stopped expecting anything from. The whole letter is full of writing-off — short patience, quick dismissal, the assumption that whatever was broken in the Corinthian fellowship was going to stay broken.

Paul did not give up on them. The whole letter is the long, patient, careful work of a man who still expected God to do, in the Corinthian church, what He had been doing in believers since the beginning. Paul's expectation was not naive. He saw the failures with full clarity — chapter after chapter of correction documents how clearly he saw them. But the seeing did not produce despair. The seeing produced a letter. The letter assumed the Corinthians would, eventually, become what they were supposed to be. *I have confidence in you in the Lord*, he could write later (Galatians 5:10, the language is from a different letter but the disposition runs through all of Paul's correspondence). *Being confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in*

you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus, he wrote to the Philippians (Philippians 1:6, NASB). The hope was not for the people. The hope was in the God who was at work in the people. That was a hope worth holding.

In the spiritual-gifts setting, the writing-off was constant. The brother whose interpretation fell flat was being written off as not really gifted. The brother whose prophecy was unclear was being written off as a fraud. The newer believer whose contribution to worship was clumsy was being written off as not yet ready, with the implication that he might never be. *Love hopes all things* would have turned every one of those judgments around. The brother whose interpretation fell flat was still a brother God could use. The brother whose prophecy was unclear was still on a road of growth that had a future. The newer believer was a newer believer, and newer believers grow, and the right posture was to expect the growth and to give him room to do it.

The God of hope

Hope in Scripture is grounded in the character of the God who has made the promises:

Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

ROMANS 15:13 (NASB)

The God of hope. That is a title. The God we serve is not just a God who allows hope to exist; He is the God in whom hope itself

originates. He is, by His very being, the kind of God toward whom expectation makes sense. He keeps His promises. He finishes what He starts. He has been, in every generation, the God who took broken situations and made them new, broken people and remade them, broken nations and gathered out of them a remnant. The believer who has been brought to that God has been brought to the only Source of hope that does not eventually run out.

That is why Christian hope is not the world's wishful thinking. Wishful thinking is the small ungrounded wanting of a person who has no reason to expect what he is wanting. Christian hope is the settled expectation of a person who has been given reasons — the cross, the resurrection, the indwelling Spirit, the Word in his hands, the body of believers around him, the long history of God's faithfulness to His people from Abraham forward. The believer hopes because the God he hopes in has earned the hope, again and again, across every generation, and is at work right now in every situation the believer can see and many he cannot.

That kind of God produces a kind of hoping that the surrounding world does not understand. Paul wrote it most plainly to the Romans:

...and we exult in hope of the glory of God. And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out

within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

ROMANS 5:2-5 (NASB)

Hope does not disappoint. That sentence carries the weight of the verse Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 13:7. The believer is being asked to hope toward the brother, toward the situation, toward the prodigal, toward the wandering son, toward the marriage that looks broken, toward the brother in the church who has fallen and not yet been restored — and the hoping is not going to disappoint, because the God in whom the hoping is grounded is the kind of God who finishes what He starts. The believer who has been writing off the brother has been forgetting which God is at work in him.

Christ Himself modeled this kind of hoping in the most expensive way the universe has ever seen. He hoped for the restoration of Peter, who would deny Him in a few hours, and *prayed for* him that his faith would not fail (Luke 22:32). He hoped for the gathering of the church through the eleven men whose understanding was, at the end of His earthly ministry, still seriously incomplete. He hoped for the salvation of Saul of Tarsus, the man hunting His people from house to house, and met him on the Damascus road. The Lord whose hope toward sinners was the engine of His every move on this earth is the Lord who has put the same kind of hoping into the believer through the Spirit who has been given to him.

From the believing, the hoping

The last chapter named love's belief — its refusal to assume the worst about the brother before evidence requires otherwise. This chapter takes up what love does when the evidence *does* require otherwise. The brother *has* failed. The believing has been tested past where it can go. What now? Does love conclude that the brother is finished? Does love conclude that the situation is hopeless? Does love walk away from the marriage, the friendship, the brother in the congregation, the prodigal child, because the latest evidence has been bad?

No. *Love hopes all things.* The verb takes over where the verb of the last chapter has reached its limit. Believing had been the disposition before the failure. Hoping is the disposition after it. The believer who has been forced to admit that the failure happened is still not free to write the brother off. The same God who has been at work in believers from the beginning is at work in this brother right now, and the work is not finished, and the believer's hope is properly placed in the God who is doing it. The hoping is for the brother's restoration. The hoping is for the marriage to be redeemed. The hoping is for the prodigal to come home. The hoping is for the believer himself, on the days when he is the one who has failed and hopes someone, somewhere, is still hoping for *him*.

Believing and hoping sit next to each other in Paul's sentence for a reason. Believing covers the disposition before there is a failure to deal with. Hoping covers the disposition after. Together they spell *love does not give up*. Whether the evidence is currently

favorable or currently dark, the believer's posture toward the brother is the same. Not naive. Not denying. Hoping. Expecting, on grounds that have nothing to do with the brother's track record, that God is still at work in him.

What it looks like

Hoping all things looks like a teenager who has been praying for the salvation of a parent or a sibling for as long as she can remember, and who, this morning, prays for them again. The God of hope has not yet shown her what He is going to do. She keeps praying, because the hoping is not built on the family member and it is not built on her circumstances; it is built on the God who has restored prodigals across every generation and is at work, right now, in the person she has not yet seen restored.

It looks like a high-school girl whose best friend has, this year, made a string of choices the friend used to know were wrong — and who has not written the friend off. She is still texting. She is still showing up. She is still praying. The friend has not come back yet. The hoping is not contingent on the friend coming back; the hoping is contingent on the God who has brought friends back across every generation of the church.

It looks like a teenage boy whose father has been absent or hard for years, and who refuses to give up the hope that the father can yet be brought to Christ. The father has given him no recent reason to expect it. The hoping is not built on the father's signals. The hoping is built on the God who saved Saul of Tarsus on a road the apostle Paul was traveling for the worst possible reasons.

That God can save this father too, and the son who hopes for him is not crazy. He is on solid ground.

It looks like a young person in a dating relationship that has hit a hard place, and who, instead of jumping to the conclusion that the relationship is finished, prays for the other person, prays for himself, prays for the wisdom to see what God is doing, and waits to see whether the season is one God is using to deepen the relationship rather than to end it. Sometimes the right answer will be that the relationship should end. Sometimes the right answer will be that the season is a refining. The believer is not given the answer in advance. He is given the disposition — hope — and the disposition keeps him from quitting before God has had time to show His hand.

It looks like a Christian whose brother in the congregation has fallen into a public sin and is now in church discipline. The believer is not writing the brother off. The believer is praying for the brother's restoration, every day, in the way the brother in the congregation prayed for him on the day he was the one who had fallen. The body of Christ has historically been a place where fallen brothers can be restored, because the believers around them did not give up. That body is the body verse 7 is calling every believer to be a part of.

It looks like a Bible class teacher who has watched young believers come and go over many seasons, some of them falling away, some of them growing — and who, for the young person currently struggling, still hopes. The hope is not naive. The teacher has watched the same struggle in other young people who did not, in fact, come through. But she hopes for this one, because

hoping for them is what love does, and the teacher has learned, by long walking with the Lord, that the hoping has been worth doing every time.

It looks like Christ. The One who, hanging on a cross between two criminals, did not write off either of them. He spoke with the one who turned to Him, and promised him paradise. The other did not turn. Christ was not surprised by either response. He had been hoping for both. He was hoping for both. The hoping was the love. The salvation of the one who turned was the hoping arriving at its object. The refusal of the other was the hoping not being received. The hoping was right to extend in both directions.

The world's despair, and ours

The world has been losing its hope for a long time, and losing it faster in this generation than in any previous one. The young people growing up now have been told, in a thousand ways, that the future is bleak — that the climate is failing, that the economy is rigged, that the institutions are corrupt, that meaningful work is rare, that lasting marriages are unusual, that the friends they have will probably drift, that their own minds are anxious and depressed and likely to stay that way, that the country is breaking, that the world is ending. Some of this is overstated. Some of it has real ground to stand on. All of it has had a cumulative effect on the young heart, which has been told, in effect, *do not hope. Hope will only set you up to be disappointed.*

The Christian is called out of all of it. The believer is called into a hoping that does not depend on the news, on the economy, on the polling, on the trend lines, on the personal circumstances of the believer in this current month. The hoping is built on a God who has been steady across every collapse the human race has experienced for six thousand years, and who is bringing His purposes to their appointed end no matter what is happening on the surface. The young Christian who has been catechized by the surrounding despair has been catechized into a faith his Bible does not teach. The Bible teaches hope. *We exult in hope of the glory of God.* The believer is being invited into that exulting, and the surrounding voices that have been telling him hope is foolish are voices he can stop listening to.

The cultivation of hope is not, in the believer, a denial of reality. The believer sees the situation as clearly as anyone. The cultivation is in *where the believer puts the situation* once he has seen it. He puts it in the hands of the God who has been writing redemption stories since the beginning. He waits, with the kind of waiting that is not anxious because the waiting is on a God who can be trusted. He keeps doing what he has been called to do — pray, love, serve, witness — and he leaves the timing and the outcome to the Lord who has not failed yet and will not fail now.

A note for the reader who is not yet in Christ

If you have been carrying the surrounding despair and have started to notice that the despair is making your life smaller, hear one thing.

The hope you have been told to live without is a hope that does, in fact, exist. It is not the wishful thinking the world has reduced the word to. It is the hope that comes from being brought into a relationship with the living God who has been faithful to His people across every generation. The God who raised Christ from the dead is still raising things. The story is not over. Your story is not over. The hope you have been told to abandon is the very hope God has been holding out to you the whole time, waiting for you to receive it.

Hear it. *Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures* (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). Believe it. Repent of the long despair that has shrunk your expectations. Confess Him as Lord. Be baptized into His death and raised to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3–4). And then live as a man or woman who has been given the only hope worth giving — the hope that is grounded in a God who keeps His promises, and who is bringing every one of His purposes to their right end.

Where this leaves us

Three of the four positive verbs are now down. *Bears all things. Believes all things. Hopes all things.* The brother under that kind of love is being covered for his real failures, credited where the failures were never committed, and hoped for where the failures have been undeniable. Almost the whole picture of what a Christian community ought to feel like has now been described.

The last of the four turns to the believer himself, in the long view. *Love endures all things*. When the bearing has stretched into years, the believing has been worn down, and the hoping has gone on so long it has begun to feel like wishful thinking — what does love do then? Paul has an answer, and the answer is not what an exhausted believer would expect. It is one verb, and it is the strongest of the four. *Hypomenei*. Stays under the load. The next chapter takes that up, and then we close.

That is the work this attribute is calling you into. Think of one brother, one situation, one prodigal, one friend, one marriage you have been quietly writing off. Catch the writing-off. Refuse it. Reach instead for the verb the Spirit has put in you — hope. Pray for that brother, that situation, that prodigal, that friend. And keep praying, and keep hoping, and keep showing up, because the God who has been writing restoration stories across every generation is at work in this one too, and your hoping for it is the love verse 7 is calling you into.

* * *

THINK

Bring to mind one person or one situation you have given up on. You did not announce the giving-up — you may not have admitted it even to yourself. But somewhere, quietly, you stopped praying for them. You stopped expecting anything. You decided the situation was finished. *Now sit with this question: what would it cost you to begin hoping again?* The cost is real. The hoping will require you to be disappointed sometimes. It will require you to keep showing up when nothing is changing. But the alternative is the despair you have already been living with, and the despair has been costing you more than the hope ever would. Begin again. Pray once tonight for the person or the situation you had given up on. And again tomorrow. The God of hope is willing to grow the hope in you, one prayer at a time.

Love Endures All Things

...love...endures all things...

I CORINTHIANS 13:7 (NASB)

The Greek verb here is *hypomenēi* — from *hypomenō*, literally *to remain under*. The prefix *hypo-* means *under*. The verb *menō* means *to remain, to stay*. Put them together and Paul's word is, in flat English, *stays under*. The picture is mechanical. A weight has been placed on a man, and the man stays under it. He does not move out from under it. He does not collapse. He does not run. He bears the weight for as long as the weight is there.

This is the last of Paul's four positive verbs in verse 7. *Bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things*. And it is, by design, the strongest of the four. When the bearing has stretched into years, when the believing has been worn down by repeated failure, when the hoping has gone on so long it has started to feel like wishful thinking — what does love do then? It stays under. It does not move. It is still there in the morning. It will still be there next year. The verb is the verb of a man who has decided that the weight he is under is the weight he was given to carry, and that the carrying is the love itself.

The other three verbs of verse 7 describe what love does in the various seasons of relationship — covering, trusting, hoping. This last verb describes what love does *when the seasons have all*

passed and the weight is still there. It is the verb of long marriages. It is the verb of long parenting. It is the verb of long ministry in one congregation. It is the verb of long friendship through hard years. The Christian who has been loving for a long time recognizes the verb when he sees it, because it is the verb his life has been spelling out, one ordinary day at a time, for as long as he has been walking with the Lord.

What was happening in Corinth

The Corinthians were not endurers. They were quitters.

The factions of chapters 1 through 4 were exercises in quitting on each other — the believer who attached to Apollos had quit on the believer who attached to Paul, and vice versa. The lawsuits of chapter 6 were quitting on the slow work of private reconciliation in favor of the fast satisfaction of public verdict. The food disputes of chapters 8 through 10 were quitting on patience with brothers whose consciences had not yet caught up. The Lord's Supper in chapter 11 had been turned into a quick gathering for the wealthy rather than the long waiting for the whole congregation to arrive. The worship in chapter 14 had been disordered into a competition that the more impressive gifts won quickly rather than into the slow, patient, orderly building up of the body that takes time. The Corinthians did not stay under things. They moved out from under, found a quicker resolution, took the satisfaction available now rather than waiting for the work to be done properly.

Paul names the verb in 13:7 because the church that learns this verb will look completely different from the church that does not. A church of quitters is the church Paul has been describing for twelve chapters. A church of endurers is the church Paul has been writing the letter to produce.

In the spiritual-gifts setting, the quitting was constant. The brother whose growth in his gift was slow was being abandoned by the believers who had expected faster progress. The newer convert whose theological understanding was rough was being given up on by the older believers who had expected him to learn faster. The congregation that had hoped, in the early years, to be a model of unity had given up on that hope and settled into the comfort of its divisions. *Love endures all things* is the verb that turns all of this around. The slow growth is endured. The rough understanding is endured. The hope of unity is endured for, year after year, until the body actually becomes what the body was meant to be.

The God who stays under

The verb *hypomenō* is a verb Scripture uses about the believer's response to trial — and the trials are real and the staying-under is hard. But the deeper truth is that the God we serve is Himself a God who has stayed under His commitments to His people across every generation. He did not give up on Israel through forty years of wilderness rebellion. He did not give up on the kingdom of David through generations of bad kings. He did not give up on Israel when she was carried into exile. He did not

give up on the world when it was so dark He had to send His only Son into it. He did not give up on the eleven disciples who scattered the night of the cross. He did not give up on Peter who denied Him three times. He did not give up on Paul who was breathing threats and murder against the church. The God we serve is the God who *stays under*.

Christ on the cross is the deepest demonstration of *hypomenō* the universe has ever seen. He stayed under. He could have come down. He had every angel of heaven at His call (Matthew 26:53). He stayed under. He stayed under the betrayal of Judas, the denial of Peter, the scattering of the eleven, the false accusations of the Sanhedrin, the cowardice of Pilate, the cruelty of the soldiers, the mockery of the crowd, the weight of every sin every elect sinner had ever committed and was ever going to commit, and the silence of His Father on Friday afternoon. He stayed under. The salvation of the world was purchased by His *hypomenō*, and Hebrews names the verb directly:

...fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

HEBREWS 12:2 (NASB)

Endured the cross. The verb is the same family. He stayed under the cross because there was a joy on the other side of it and a Father who would raise Him out from under. The believer is being asked to learn the same posture toward the load his life has placed on him. The marriage that is hard. The child whose growth

has been slow. The brother who has wounded him for years. The congregation whose faithfulness is small. The ministry that has not yet borne the fruit he had hoped for. The personal weakness that has not yet been overcome. Stay under. There is a joy set before you. There is a Father who will raise you out from under in His time. The carrying is not forever. The carrying is for now. The endurance is what love does in the meantime.

From the hoping, the staying

The last chapter named love's hope — its refusal to write off the brother or the situation when the evidence has gone dark. This chapter takes up what love does *when the hope itself has been wearing thin*. The believer who has been hoping for the prodigal for fifteen years is the believer most tempted to give the hoping up. The mother who has been praying for the wayward son for sixteen, twenty, thirty years is the mother whose endurance Paul is writing about. The hoping has been hard. The hoping has been long. The hoping has not yet been visibly answered. And still — *love endures*. The mother prays in the morning of the thirty-first year as she prayed in the morning of the first. The weight has not been moved out from under. The mother has not been moved out from under. The endurance is the love still being practiced.

That is why this verb is the right last verb. The chapter on love does not end with the believer's victory; it ends with the believer's steadiness. *Hypomenei panta* — *endures all things* — is the verb of a love that has nowhere to be in a hurry, because the

love itself is the destination and the staying-under is what love looks like over time.

What it looks like

Enduring all things looks like a teenager whose parents have been walking through a hard season for as long as he can remember, and who has not lost his footing in his own walk with the Lord, and who is still showing up for family dinner on a Tuesday night, still being part of the household, still loving the people God placed in his home. The household has endured. He has stayed under. The endurance is the love he has been quietly practicing for years.

It looks like a teenager whose sibling has a serious physical or developmental difficulty, who has spent years of his own childhood watching his parents bear it and helping where he can, and who has not turned bitter about the attention the sibling needs, the freedoms he has missed, or the cost the family has carried. He has stayed under. The verb is the love he has been practicing since he was a small child.

It looks like a teenager who has grown up in the same congregation his whole life, through preachers he liked and preachers he found harder to listen to, through seasons when the youth group felt alive and seasons when it felt small, through brothers who have wounded him and brothers he has helped — and who is still there on the first day of the week, still wanting to be there. He has endured. The congregation has endured. The endurance is the body of Christ being a body of Christ.

It looks like a high-school student who has been waiting on the Lord for something he has prayed about for years — a friend he hopes will come to Christ, a parent he hopes will return to the Lord, a healing for someone he loves, a clear sense of direction for his own life — and who has not turned bitter and has not stopped serving the Lord while he waits. The waiting is the form. The serving is the form. The not-bitterness is the form. The verb the young person has been practicing in his prayer life is the verb *verse 7* is calling him into, and the season of waiting is not wasted — the season is where the endurance is being grown.

It looks like a teenager whose home life is harder than his friends know, and who is choosing, day after day, not to give up on his parents, not to give up on his siblings, not to give up on the slow work of being faithful in a difficult house. The teenager does not know what he is doing. He is *hypomenō*-ing without the Greek word for it. The Lord who sees him is teaching him the verb that will shape his marriage one day, and his parenting one day, and his service in the body for the rest of his life.

It looks like a student who has been praying for the same classmate to come to Christ for years and has not yet seen the answer, and who keeps praying, keeps showing up for him as a friend, keeps living the gospel in front of him without ever giving up that this is the year, or the next year, or some year God has not yet shown. The harvest the student is praying for is not in his hands. The praying is, and he keeps doing it.

It looks like a teenager who has been praying for a relative he barely knows to come to faith, for as many years as he has been able to pray, and who is still praying. He may not see the answer

for decades. He may not see it in this life. He prays anyway. He stays under.

It looks like Christ. The One who, on the night before His crucifixion, asked the Father three times if the cup could be removed (Matthew 26:39–44), and stayed under it anyway. The One who, on the cross, when the offer of relief in the form of His own miraculous descent was hovering in front of Him for hours, did not take it. The One who endured the cross, despising the shame, for the joy set before Him. The believer's endurance is the long shadow of His.

The world's quitting, and ours

The world has been training the human heart to quit for a long time, and faster in this generation than ever. The advertising assumes the consumer will be ready for the next product within months. The job market assumes the worker will move on every few years. The dating culture has been built around the assumption that any difficulty is sufficient cause for the relationship to end. The marriage rates have been falling and the divorce rates rising, in part because the surrounding air no longer expects anyone to stay under anything for long. The young Christian growing up in this air has been told, in a hundred small ways, that the right response to hardship is exit.

The believer is called out of all of it. The cultivation of *hypomenei panta* in the believer is the deliberate refusal to exit when exit is the surrounding cultural default. The believer stays in the marriage. The believer stays in the congregation. The believer

stays at his post. The believer stays under the family difficulty. The believer stays under the brother who has not yet been restored. The staying is the love. The staying is what the surrounding world will not understand and will eventually, in the believers who actually do it, recognize as something it has been missing.

The cost of the staying is real. The years are real. The unrelieved difficulty is real. The temptation to leave is real and recurring. The believer who stays anyway is doing what Christ did on the cross at scale, in his small life, and the Lord who sees him is the Lord who is teaching him the same verb that bought the world's salvation. The staying is not wasted. The staying is what the eternity to come will reveal had been the very engine of every faithful Christian life.

A note for the reader who is not yet in Christ

If you have been quitting things for a long time, and have started to suspect that the quitting has been costing you the very kind of life you have been hoping for, hear one thing.

The endurance you have not been able to find in yourself is endurance the Lord is offering to grow in you. He has done it in every generation of believers since the church began. The Christian who has been faithful for fifty years did not start as a champion of endurance. He started as a person like you — someone whose natural tendency was to give up when things got hard. The endurance was put in him by the Spirit who was given to him when he came to Christ, and the endurance has been grown, year after year, by the same Spirit doing the same work.

The gospel is the door. *Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures* (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). The man or woman who hears that, believes it, repents of the long pattern of quitting, confesses Him as Lord, is baptized into His death and raised to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3–4), and remains faithful to Him, has been given the Spirit who endures (Romans 8:11) and is being made into a person who endures. The change does not happen overnight. The endurance is grown one weight, one season, one year at a time. But the One who is growing it is the One who has been doing this work since the beginning, and what He has done in others He is willing to do in you.

Hear it. Believe it. Repent. Confess. Be baptized. And begin the new life of a believer whose Lord stayed under the cross until the work was done, and whose Spirit is now teaching the same staying in you.

Where this leaves us

The four positive verbs of verse 7 are now down. *Bears all things. Believes all things. Hopes all things. Endures all things.* Together they describe the believer's settled, long-term posture toward the brother and toward the situation. Love covers what has happened. Love refuses to invent what has not. Love continues to expect what God can do. Love stays under the load until God's work is finished.

That is the description of love Paul has been writing for the Corinthians and for every church since. The description has now

been completed. What remains in chapter 13 is the section on what love does *forever* — the closing section in which Paul lifts his eyes from the practice of love in this life and sees what love does when this life is over. The next chapter takes that up, and the book closes with it. The believer who has walked through the attributes of love is being asked, in the closing chapter, to lift his eyes and see what the love he has been practicing will become when the temporary things have passed and only the eternal things remain.

That is the work this attribute is calling you into. Whatever weight has been on you — the long friendship, the long family difficulty, the long prayer for a parent or a sibling, the long waiting on a hope God has not yet answered — stay under it. Pray for the strength to stay under it. Ask the Lord who endured the cross for you to give you, day by day, the endurance that does not depend on the weight being lifted. The weight may not be lifted in this life. The endurance is being formed in you regardless, and the endurance is the love. The next morning will come. Be there for it.

* * *

THINK

Bring to mind one weight you have been under for years — the relationship that has been hard, the prayer that has not been answered, the ministry that has not yet borne fruit, the personal weakness that has not yet been overcome. *Now sit with this question: what has the long staying-under been doing in you, even though it has not yet done what you wanted it to do?* The answer is that the staying has been forming you into the image of the One who stayed under the cross. The forming is the gift. The lifting of the weight, when it comes, will be additional. The staying itself is the love verse 7 is calling you into, and the staying tomorrow morning is the next move in that love. Be there for it.

Love Never Fails

Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known. But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.

I CORINTHIANS 13:8-13 (NASB)

We have spent fifteen chapters walking through what love does and what love does not do. Now Paul turns. He has finished describing love. The closing six verses of the chapter are not another attribute. They are an answer to a question every honest reader has been quietly asking: *Why? Why is this love the one Paul says is the most excellent way? Why does this love deserve the weight he has just placed on it?* And Paul answers in one short sentence at the head of the section, before he has explained anything: *Love never fails.* Whatever else has been said, whatever else can be said, the love I have just described is the one thing that will not pass

away. It outlasts the gifts. It outlasts the partial. It outlasts the very age the gifts were given for. *Love never fails* is the closing argument of the whole chapter.

This last chapter of the book takes up that closing argument carefully, because it requires the reader to think about three things at once: what the gifts were, what the perfect is, and why love is greater than either faith or hope at the end.

Love never fails

The Greek verb is *piptei*, a common word meaning *falls* — falls down, fails, collapses, drops away. Paul says of love that it does not. Whatever else falls — kingdoms fall, men fall, gifts fall — love does not. It stands. It continues. It is not the kind of thing that ends.

This sentence is also a verdict on everything Paul has been writing for fifteen chapters. The Corinthian church had been chasing the gifts. They had been ranking themselves by the gifts. They had been turning their worship services into competitions over the gifts. And Paul has told them, in three verses at the head of chapter 13, that the most impressive gift exercised without love is nothing. Now he tells them why. The gifts are temporary. Love is not. The believer who has been chasing the temporary, at the cost of the permanent, has been chasing the wrong thing — and *love never fails* is the sentence that settles it.

The gifts will be done away

Paul names three of the gifts the Corinthians had prized most:

...if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away.

I CORINTHIANS 13:8 (NASB)

Three gifts. Three verbs of removal. *Prophecy* — the speaking-forth of God's word — will be *done away*. *Tongues* — the speaking in languages the speaker had not learned — will *cease*. *Knowledge* — supernaturally given understanding of God's mysteries — will be *done away*. These were the headline gifts of the apostolic age. The Corinthians had been wearing them as badges. Paul tells them that the badges have an expiration date. Whatever spiritual stature the Corinthian gift-holders had been claiming on the basis of their gifts was a stature with a built-in end. The gifts were temporary. The love is not.

Why were the gifts temporary? Paul says it plainly in the next two verses:

For we know in part and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.

I CORINTHIANS 13:9–10 (NASB)

The reason the gifts were temporary is that the gifts were *partial*. They gave the church *some* of the knowledge of God, *some* of the word of God, *some* of the understanding of God's mysteries —

but not all of it. They were the means by which the Spirit gave the early church what it needed to live by, before the *complete* thing was finished. The gifts were the scaffolding around the building. Once the building was finished, the scaffolding came down.

What is the *complete* thing? The Greek word is *teleios* — *complete, mature, finished, brought to its full end*. And the question of what Paul means by *the perfect* is one every careful reader of this passage has rightly asked, because the answer matters.

The Christian reader has often defaulted to assuming Paul meant *the return of Christ* — the eschaton, the day we will see Christ face to face. There is a real sense in which the eschaton *is* in view here, because Paul will move shortly to language of *seeing face to face* and *knowing fully*, and that language reaches its highest fulfillment at Christ's return. But the *partial* gifts that the *perfect* replaces in 13:9–10 are partial *means of revelation* — prophecy, tongues, knowledge. They were the gifts by which God was making His mind known to the early church before His mind had been made fully known in the completed Word. The *perfect* that replaces these partial means is naturally read as *the completed revelation of God in the New Testament Scriptures*. When the canon was complete, the partial means by which the Spirit had been revealing God's mind to the early church were no longer needed. The church had the whole Word in its hands. The scaffolding came down.

That reading is supported by the language of the next verse:

When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things.

I CORINTHIANS 13:11 (NASB)

Paul's comparison is not between this life and the next life. His comparison is between the church's *infancy* and the church's *maturity*. The infant church spoke and thought and reasoned with the partial gifts because the infant church did not yet have the full Word. The mature church speaks and thinks and reasons by the Word that has now been completely given. The infant church needed prophecy because the prophetic word was still being added to the canon. The mature church does not need prophecy because the prophetic word is now finished and sealed in the pages of the New Testament. The infant church needed tongues because the gospel had to be confirmed by signs as it spread into new languages. The mature church does not need tongues because the gospel, in those languages, has long since been preached and confirmed and written down. The infant church needed supernatural knowledge because not all the mysteries of God had yet been disclosed. The mature church does not need that knowledge because the mysteries have now been disclosed in the completed apostolic teaching.

The childish things were not foolish things. They were not bad things. They were the things the church needed at the age the church was. And when the church grew up — when the *teleios* came in the form of the completed Word of God — the childish things were *done away*. The same Spirit who had been giving

them removed them, because the work they had been doing was finished.

This reading takes Paul's own metaphor seriously. The child who has become a man does not still speak in his childhood babble. He has the full vocabulary of the mature man. The church that has been given the full vocabulary of the New Testament does not still need the partial speech-forms of the apostolic age. *When the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.* The perfect came. The partial was done away. That is the apostolic verdict on the question.

Mirror dimly, face to face

Paul then turns to a second image:

For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:12 (NASB)

This sentence is reaching further than the verse before it. The mirror image is not about the New Testament canon; it is about the difference between *knowing God in this life* and *knowing God in the next*. In Paul's day a mirror was a polished piece of metal — its reflection was real but it was dim, imperfect, partial. The believer in this life sees God through such a mirror. Through the Word. Through creation. Through the Spirit's work in his heart. Through the body of believers around him. The seeing is real but it is partial. He does not yet see God *face to face*.

When the believer dies — and at the resurrection still more — the mirror is set aside. The believer sees the Lord directly. He knows the Lord directly. The partial knowing of this life — even the knowing made possible by the completed Word — gives way to a fuller knowing that the completed Word itself promised. *Now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.* The “then” of that sentence is the believer’s “then” in glory. The full knowing has been promised. The believer is walking toward it.

So the chapter is doing two things at once. *When the perfect comes* is about the completion of God’s revelation, which happened with the closing of the apostolic canon. *Face to face* and *I will know fully* are about the believer’s eternal seeing of the Lord, which is still ahead. Both are true. The first explains why the partial gifts were temporary. The second explains why even the completed Word, as glorious as it is, is itself a kind of partial knowing compared with what is coming. The believer is meant to hold both. The gifts that confirmed the message in the apostolic age were temporary, and they have ceased. The believer’s knowing in this life is also temporary, in a different sense, because the believer’s knowing in the next life will be a vastly fuller knowing than anything the believer can achieve now, even with the whole Bible open in his lap.

When will miraculous gifts be done away?

The question has now been answered. The miraculous gifts of prophecy, tongues, and supernatural knowledge were done

away when the *perfect* came — when the revelation of God in the New Testament Scriptures was complete. The last of the apostles wrote his last book under the inspiration of the Spirit, the canon was closed, and the partial means of revelation were no longer needed. The scaffolding came down.

This answer matters because you are going to run into people — on social media, at conferences, in books, in conversations with friends — who claim to have new messages from God, direct words from the Spirit, or miraculous signs confirming a teaching not found in the Bible. Paul's answer in 1 Corinthians 13:10 gives you a steady place to stand. You do not need to chase signs when you already have the complete story. The Bible open in your lap is everything the Spirit needs to make you mature (2 Timothy 3:16–17; Ephesians 4:11–16). What was given for the church's infancy was taken away when the church grew up. The right place for your energy is not the chasing of gifts that ceased. The right place is the love that *never fails*.

Why love is the greatest of the three

Paul closes the chapter with the sentence the whole book has been building toward:

But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.

I CORINTHIANS 13:13 (NASB)

Faith, hope, love. These three. The trio that Paul names elsewhere as the three abiding virtues of the Christian life (1 Thessalonians

1:3; Colossians 1:4–5). All three remain when the gifts have passed. All three are the substance of the mature Christian’s daily walk with the Lord — believing what He has said, hoping for what He has promised, loving the One who has loved him and the brothers He has placed around him.

But the greatest of these is love. Why? Paul does not stop to explain. He does not need to. The whole chapter has been the explanation. But the believer who has walked through the book can see the reasons stacked in the closing sentence even without Paul stopping to name them.

Faith is great. Faith is the means by which the believer was saved — *for by grace you have been saved through faith* (Ephesians 2:8, NASB). Faith is the means by which the believer walks with the Lord through this life — *we walk by faith, not by sight* (2 Corinthians 5:7, NASB). Faith is essential. Faith is unmissable. But faith has a horizon. *Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen* (Hebrews 11:1, NASB). When the things are seen — when the believer stands before the Lord he has believed in — faith will have become sight. The work of faith will have been completed. The believer in eternity will not be exercising faith in the same way he is now, because what he has been believing he will now see.

Hope is great. Hope is the settled expectation of what God has promised — the resurrection, the new heavens and new earth, the gathering of God’s people, the wiping away of every tear (Revelation 21:4). The believer is sustained in this life by the hope of what is coming. But hope, like faith, has a horizon. *Hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees?* (Romans

8:24, NASB). When the believer is standing in the new heavens and new earth, the hoping will be done. The promises will have been kept. The hope will have arrived. Hope, like faith, was given to carry the believer across a particular kind of distance, and the distance will eventually have been crossed.

Love does not have that horizon. Love does not end. Love does not arrive at anything that completes it, because love itself is what eternity is *for*. God has been love from before the foundation of the world. God will be love into the everlasting future. The believer who has been learning love in this life has been learning what he will be doing forever. The love between the Father and the Son and the Spirit, the love that overflowed into the creation, the love that sent the Son to a cross, the love that has been at work in the believer through the Spirit who has been given to him — that love is the very nature of God Himself, and the very nature of God Himself does not pass away. *God is love* (1 John 4:8). What the believer has been practicing all the way through this book has been the very thing that will be the substance of his eternity.

That is why love is the greatest of the three. Faith will become sight. Hope will be fulfilled. Love will continue, because love is what God is, and what God is does not end.

What this means for the believer

The believer who has walked through this book has now been given two things at once. He has been given a description of the love God calls him into — fifteen attributes, walked through

one at a time, with the Greek words named where they helped and the Corinthian failures named where they sharpened. And he has been given, in this closing chapter, the reason the whole walk has been worth taking. The love he has been learning is the love that lasts. Everything else in his Christian life — the gifts he has exercised, the knowledge he has accumulated, the ministries he has been part of — will, in one way or another, pass into the perfect, into the resurrection, into the eternity where the partial becomes the full and the dim becomes the face-to-face. Love alone keeps going. Love alone is the through-line of his eternity.

That is why Paul placed this chapter where he placed it. The Corinthians thought the gifts were the main thing. Paul corrected them. The main thing was the love by which the gifts were either built up into something useful or rendered into noise. The Corinthians thought the standing of a believer was measured by which teacher he followed. Paul corrected them. The standing of a believer is measured by the love he is being formed into. The Corinthians thought the impressive Christian was the one with the showy ministry. Paul corrected them. The impressive Christian is the one whose patience absorbs and whose kindness gives. He refuses to envy what God has given his brother. He keeps quiet about what God has given him, refuses to inflate the man underneath his mouth, and lives by the form that fits a saint. His life is no longer organized around himself. He has stopped flaring at every provocation, closed the ledger he used to keep on his brother, and traded the small pleasure of a brother's downfall for the larger pleasure of standing with the truth. He bears the brother's failures under his roof, believes the best until the

evidence requires otherwise, hopes when the hoping has been hard, and stays under the weight when the weight has not been lifted. *That* believer is the believer the rest of eternity will recognize. The Lord Himself will recognize him, because the love this believer has been practicing is the love this believer's Lord has been demonstrating from the day the world began.

The believer who has not yet obeyed the gospel

If you have read this book and have not yet obeyed the gospel, the closing chapter is doing one more thing on its way to your ear. It is reminding you that the time you have to make the decision is not unlimited.

The gifts had a time. The age of the apostles had a time. The earthly ministry of Christ had a time. The patience of God has a time. Every season has been ordained by God to do what He intended it to do, and every season comes to its end when God has decided the end has come. The season you are in right now — the season in which you can still hear the gospel, can still come to Christ, can still be brought into the family of God by obedience to the Good News — is a season too. It is not infinite. The Lord whose patience has been making room for you is *not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance* (2 Peter 3:9, NASB). The patience is real. The patience is also bounded. The end of the patience is the end of the opportunity, and the end of the opportunity is the beginning of the verdict.

The gospel is good news exactly because the verdict has not yet come and the way to escape it has been laid before you. *Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures* (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). Hear it. Believe it. Repent of the life you have been living without Him. Confess Him as Lord. Be baptized into His death and raised to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3–4). Remain faithful to Him until death (Revelation 2:10). The Lord whose love never fails has been holding out that love to you for every year of your life so far, and the holding out is still going on right now. The right response is not to wait. The right response is to obey. Appendix A walks the pattern of the gospel response in one place; if you have any uncertainty about what obeying the gospel means, the appendix gathers the New Testament’s own pattern carefully.

A closing word

The book is finished. You have walked through fifteen attributes of love and the closing chapter on what the love means in the long view. Whatever else this book has done in you, our hope is that it has set the love of God before you as something larger than you knew, more demanding than you wanted, and more glorious than the world has ever managed to describe.

Take the book and close it. Set it on a shelf. Then take what the book has been pointing at — the Word of God — and open *that*. The Word is where the love of God lives. The book is a small reading of one chapter of that Word, by one believer, for the use of the next generation of believers coming up. The Word is the

Lord's own description of His own love. Read it. Sit with it. Argue with it where you need to. Bring it back to itself.

And then, one day at a time, live what it describes. Be patient with the brother. Be kind to the family member who has worn you down. Refuse to envy the friend whose life is going better than yours. Refuse to brag about what God has given you. Refuse to inflate the man underneath your mouth. Refuse the unbecoming conduct. Stop organizing your life around yourself. Stop flaring at the small wrongs. Close the ledger you have been keeping on your brother. Refuse the pleasure of his downfall. Stand with the truth. Cover the failures you know about. Believe the best until evidence requires otherwise. Hope when hoping is hard. Stay under the weight when the weight has not been lifted.

This is the love the Lord calls us to. It is the love He has poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Romans 5:5). It is the love we have been invited to learn to walk in for as long as we are on this earth, and to continue walking in for the eternity to come.

It is the love that never fails.

Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.

EPHESIANS 3:20-21 (NASB)

* * *

THINK

You have come to the end of this book. The last reflection prompt is the simplest one in the book and the longest in its work. *In one sentence, what one move of love is the Lord calling you to make this week, in light of everything you have read?* Write the sentence down. Do not edit it. Do not make it bigger than it is. Then go and make the move. The book will have done what books can do. The walking-out is now yours. The Lord whose love never fails will be with you, on the day you make the move, and on the day after, and on every day for as long as you are practicing the love this book has been describing. Begin.

What It Means to Obey the Gospel

This book uses the phrase *obey the gospel* — Scripture’s own language — when describing how a sinner responds to the good news of Jesus Christ (2 Thessalonians 1:8; 1 Peter 4:17; Romans 10:16; Romans 6:17). For the reader who has never encountered the phrase, or who has heard it but never seen its content laid out in one place, this appendix gathers the pattern Scripture itself sets down.

What the gospel is

The word *gospel* means *good news*. The apostle Paul gives the content of that news plainly:

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.

I CORINTHIANS 15:3–4 (NASB)

That is the gospel. Christ died for our sins. He was buried. He was raised. Three historical facts that together constitute the news God has sent into the world for the salvation of sinners.

What it means to obey it

The gospel is news, but it is news with a response built into it. Scripture speaks of those who *obey* the gospel and those who do not:

...dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. — 2 Thessalonians 1:8 (NASB)

For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? — 1 Peter 4:17 (NASB)

To obey the gospel is to respond the way God has appointed in His Word. It is not bare mental agreement. It is not merely feeling moved. It is doing what the Lord and His apostles instructed when men asked them, *what shall we do?* (Acts 2:37). What follows is the pattern Scripture itself lays out — what one must hear, believe, do, and continue to do.

1. Hear the gospel

Faith does not begin inside us. It begins outside us, in the message about Christ:

So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

ROMANS 10:17 (NASB)

Before anyone can believe, repent, confess, or be baptized, he must hear the gospel. The Word of God is the door through which everything else enters.

2. Believe

Belief is more than acknowledging that Jesus existed. It is taking Him at His word as the Son of God — who came in the flesh, died for our sins, was buried, and was raised:

Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins. — John 8:24 (NASB)

And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. — Hebrews 11:6 (NASB)

Belief is the receiving of the message as true and binding.

3. Repent

Repentance is a change of mind that produces a change of life. It is turning from sin toward God:

I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. — Luke 13:3 (NASB)

Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all

people everywhere should repent. — Acts 17:30
(NASB)

Repentance is not perfection achieved. It is the decisive turning of the heart and will away from sin and toward Christ.

4. Confess Christ

The believer is called to confess Christ openly:

...that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. — Romans 10:9–10 (NASB)

Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. — Matthew 10:32 (NASB)

The one who has come to believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, declares it openly. The mouth confesses what the heart has come to know.

5. Be baptized

In the New Testament, baptism is the appointed point at which the believer is united with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection — the same death, burial, and resurrection that is the very content of the gospel (1 Corinthians 15:3–4):

Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” — Acts 2:38 (NASB)

Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name. — Acts 22:16 (NASB)

Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. — Romans 6:3–4 (NASB)

This is the step most contested in modern teaching. For the reader who wants to see the full New Testament case worked out — every conversion account in the book of Acts, what the Lord and His apostles taught, and a careful examination of the common objections raised from tradition — see the companion volume *Why Do You Delay? Baptism, Salvation, and What the Bible Actually Says*, available at noblemind.study. That work walks through the texts in depth so they need not be repeated here.

6. Remain faithful

Obeying the gospel is not finished at the moment of baptism. The new life entered there is to be lived out to the end:

...Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. — Revelation 2:10 (NASB)

For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end. — Hebrews 3:14 (NASB)

The Christian life is not a single moment. It is a walk. The same Lord who calls a sinner to begin in obedience calls him to continue in obedience for the rest of his days.

A closing word

If you have not done these things, the love of God described in this book is held out to you in Jesus Christ. The same Lord who lays down for the believer the standard of love in 1 Corinthians 13 has also laid down the way that standing becomes possible — through obeying the gospel of His Son. The door is open. The blood that closes the ledger has already been shed. There is no reason to wait.

Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.

ACTS 22:16 (NASB)

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2 JOHN 4

Chapter 11

3 John

3 JOHN 4

Chapter 11

Revelation

REVELATION 2:10

Chapter 16, Appendix A

REVELATION 21:4

Chapter 16