

Snapshot of a Disciple

A look at love in action - 1st Corinthians 13 (verse 5b)

Hello brothers, sisters, and friends,

I'd like to pick up on the last phrase we only briefly touched on last time. But, first, we're working through 1st Corinthians 13, and I'm quoting from the NKJV (new king james version). So, if you have a Bible handy, you can use yours to keep the context or, if you need one, here's a digital one:

www.blueletterbible.org/Bible.cfm?b=1Cr&c=13&v=1&t=NKJV

Okay, so as many of you know, we are working through 1st Corinthians 13, knowing that it's not love's definition, but really agape - unconditional love in action.

So, where we left off was in verse 5, and I'd like to pick up on that phrase: "**Love [agape]... does not seek its own...**" - Curious, have you noticed that we are self-centered to the core? Jeremiah 17 reminds us of that: "**The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; who can know it?**" (Jeremiah 17:9 - and how quick we are to so easily forget it. Most people don't remember that we threw away everything good we had when we rebelled, and the longer we stayed in our rebellion, the longer it will take to unlearn the world's ways.

The world knows that they seek their own - pleasure, pride, 'fun', fame, glamour, and earthly temporal treasures, so they just try to ignore it by soothing their consciences that so long as they do something good to 'appease' whatever 'god' is out there. Then - with their checklist complete, they think that on the scale of things, that they're probably all right. What's worse is that Christians seem to buy into this thinking so easily too, not always realizing that the world is ALWAYS pushing their religion down our throats. (*yes, you read that right - I'll get back to that in just minute*). A quick and easy way to see how God sees right through this system of trying to outweigh our bad deeds with our 'good' ones is this verse: "**So Samuel said: 'Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams.'**" (1st Samuel 15:22) But, we don't have to look around much to see that many of those who say they are followers of Christ are merely doing what they can get away with, and giving God a few trinkets to 'appease' Him, forgetting that they are trying to bribe a holy God, who can see right through our games and masks. He knows every thought and motive as though we were saying it right out loud, and He will hold us accountable for them too.

Let's look at those words God spoke through Samuel a little more, though. To obey is greater, better than, far superior to doing what is right in our self-centered eyes and then doing a little 'for God' and hyping up how great what we did 'for Him' was. God's not impressed with it - whether it comes from you or me. We need to remember that.

What we need to do is like it says in 2nd Peter: **“But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.”** (2nd Peter 1:5-9) ~ Those are powerful words that need to challenge us to our core - every time we read them. And, if you didn't catch it, the concept here is continual growth - this is a continual process. Most of us don't like that - I agree. But, the problem is that we are so selfish that we really do need to keep growing or we become stale, and drift so far from God that we become hard-hearted and stiff-necked to the conviction of hearing His Word, and applying it to our hearts.

With that said, let's look back at the worldview subject again. All of us, yes - ALL of us - you, me and everyone around us - have a worldview. The world tries to make it sound like there's the Christian view and then everybody else's perspective is somehow 'neutral', but that's just not the case. You see a worldview is our understanding of a 'god' in our image, or the one True God. Either worldview then changes and adjusts how we live. It's pretty simple - the 'god' or True God we believe in will show in our actions. If we invent a 'god' in our image who is okay, with lying, stealing, coveting, and the like, then we'll live like it. But, if we truly believe God's Word, we will grow in taking Him more seriously and turning from those sins. So, that's why I said that the world is always pushing their religion and worldview down our throats, but then they flip the blame - it's called the 'blame game', where they accuse us of doing what they are doing and trying to hide. So, knowing that the world is always pushing their religion down our throats, how should we and do we respond? Simple :) ~ We don't want to be harsh in how we present God's truth or try to force them to believe God's Word, but we do need to keep taking His Word seriously and not backing down at even the slightest false accusation of the world. We need to keep growing in living His Word and sharing it with those who want to hear it. So, let's grow in this! :) ~ and if you'd like to understand more of what I'm saying on this point, ask me - I'd love to talk more about it! I believe it is a VITAL subject for today :)

One final note on the previous phrase: we have - in America, a lot of spiritual leaders who are seeking their own, and they are glad to use and abuse those around them to sort of build their 'ministry' platform. It's wrong, and it needs to be addressed to each individual doing this - in person. But, until all of those people can get confronted, you and I need to keep growing ourselves in making sure you and I only have 1 drive - to please, honor, and serve our Master and Savior, Jesus the Jewish Messiah. And, may we all keep growing in this, keeping our hearts tender to God's Word, daily.

Okay, well, I thought that would add some color or personal application of that passage to your and my life, and to fill in a little better what I should have covered more of last time.

Okay, so picking up on the next phrase: **“is not provoked”**. That’s pretty clear. Another verse, that we looked at last time briefly also says this in short-form in a different way: **“So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.”** (James 1:19-20)

By way of review, we saw last time how pride and outburst of anger go hand-in-hand. Same here, when we seek our own, that leads us and sort of causes us to be provoked to be rude to those who get in our way of seeking what we want. If/when we can see that, it can grow to become a mental, spiritual red-flag to help us see when our heart has gotten off-track.

I know this is a subject that we all need to keep growing in, so I won’t dwell on it long. I’ll just post 2 more verses for each of us to meditate on and pray over.

“So rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents [turns back] from doing harm [in response to repentance].” (Joel 2:13)

“Be angry, and do not sin’: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil.” (Ephesians 4:26,27) ~ Of course, the way to conquer our prideful anger is intentional growth in self-control, patience and perseverance - and learning how to bless (not curse) and how to rejoice when we’re wrong for Christ’s sake. All of those things take intentional quality time and effort - just like growing a flower or vegetable garden :) ~ so, knowing that we’ll like the outcome - let’s keep growing :) ~ **“Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”** (Hebrews 12:11)

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Okay, so now, moving on to the next phrase: **“thinks no evil”**. Now, if when you read that, you didn’t say - ‘wow!’, you might check your pulse. Why? Because, we live in a society that almost seems to expand on the depth of rebellion - by the day. Remember Proverbs talks about this: **“Fools mock at sin, but among the upright there is favor.”** (Proverbs 14:9)

I think we, who name the Name of Christ, too easily forget that in Christ, we are to depart from evil, not laugh at or entertain ourselves with it. If it really wasn’t that wrong, then why would God hate it and tell us to?

Some gentle reminders for us all to continue to grow in:

“These six things the LORD hates, yes, seven are an abomination to Him: a proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil, a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren.” (Proverbs 6:16-19)

“And to man He said, 'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding.’” (Job 28:28)

In Ecclesiastes, God says it this way: **“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man's all.” (Ecclesiastes 12:13)**

We need to remind ourselves that there are some things God hates - witchcraft, immorality (of all types), and idolatry - included. And there are some things God tells us to abhor. When He says He hates murder, should we entertain ourselves with something that glorifies murder to get what we want? Not according to God. And, when He says He hates lying, should we then go entertain ourselves with something that trivializes lying? No. When He says not to covet, should we then fill our minds with the constant push of Madison Avenue (advertising) - stuff that we won't need and can't take with us to Heaven, but will become traps and unnecessary burdens for us here? No. And when He says to flee immorality, are we really 'released' and 'allowed' to be immoral, show off our bodies to others with less and less clothing (something outside of alone with husband and wife), and to pretend that lust/pornography are 'normal' and to think that we're okay because we're *'just having fun'*? Not according to God's Word.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, we need to be consistent. That doesn't happen in a day or even a year - I know that. But we need to make it our aim. We need to truly believe God's Word and take it seriously, not trivially when it's convenient for us and what we want to do. If God says it's wrong, it's not legalism - He is correct in whatever He says is wrong. As I've said to some on the streets, God isn't a little holy - He's completely holy. So, if we're going to follow Him, we need to continue to grow to be more like Him. Or, if we choose not to grow, we need to at least be honest and recognize that the more we ignore His Word, the more we become just like the world and will suffer many of their same consequences. God warns us that He will not be mocked - we will reap what we sow, but He always allows u-turns (as long as we're breathing). :)

One concluding verse to ponder: **“I will set nothing wicked before my eyes; I hate the work of those who fall away; it shall not cling to me.” (Psalm 101:3)** - I strongly believe that we, who claim to follow Christ, need to take David's heart-commitment here and make it *our* heart commitment. Probably we all need to make these next verses life-verses :) -

“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20)

“Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 6:11)

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1st John 1:9)

So, with this said, thanks for joining me! I hope you'll join me next time, as we move to verse 6 in our study through 1st Corinthians 13 - agape - unconditional love in action.

For now, this is your friend, growing bro, a servant/life-slave of Jesus, signing off ~
adios for now, SH