

Love always

August 23, 2009 - 1 Corinthians 13:7

Sometimes people make ridiculous statements or suggestions.

One time I was trying to book a flight using airline points. I thought I had enough points to get this “free flight.” So I called the airline point’s people and entered into negotiations. In those days, for every dollar you spent through this particular card, you got one point.

At first things looked promising. We were getting close. But in the end, I was 1300 points short. She delivered the bad news. “Mr. Anderst, I’m sorry but it looks like you’re just 1300 points short of getting that free flight.” “Oh,” I said. There was silence for a moment.

Then she said, “Is there something you’d maybe like to buy for \$1300?” I was still processing the disappointment about the flight. So I didn’t know if I’d heard right. “Pardon me?”

“Is there something you could go out and purchase for \$1300 on the card so you can get the 1300 points? Then you can get your free flight!”

I was a bit too shocked to initially respond. Maybe I’d do that if I was \$25 short. But she suggests I just go to store and find a \$1300

item for fun. Yeah, I’ll just go out to Wal-mart and blow 1300 bucks on whatever so I can get my free \$500 flight!”

I don’t remember what I said. It might have been “Are you crazy,” or simply a big “No” sarcastically. I know that was probably not very loving. But I couldn’t believe it. Ridiculous, outrageous, laughable! I could not believe she said that.

People make some pretty ridiculous statements. But so does God, at first glance. Today we’re going to see a description of love that seems ridiculous.

God commands us to always love. God calls us to give love in all things. In fact, the key verse we’ll be looking at today contains the word all four times to emphasize the allness. Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. I have to admit to you, at first reading, it seems like God is making a pretty ridiculous and maybe even unrealistic statement. In my initial prep notes I wrote, “To me *this verse screams one thing at first reading. UNREALISTIC!*”

Not only that, it seems like this verse calls us to some undesirable Not only impossible; but calling us to some unattractive stances. Love always protects. Does that mean cover

things up? Love always believes. Does that mean we adopt a gullible or easy to fool stance? Love always hopes. Isn't that idealistic? Love always perseveres? In abuse? In unfaithfulness? Does this mean we're supposed to become doormats? Are we Christians supposed to be cover ups, gullible, idealistic and door mats?

Yet we know God is absolutely perfect. He would never call us to engage in something wrong. What is going on here? That's what we're going to explore today.

We have three messages left on the love chapter. We have seen Paul describe the critical importance of love for the Christian. Without love, great accomplishments and benevolent acts amount to nothing. Biblical love is patient and kind. We've seen Paul take away some of our favorite sins in love: Envy, boasting, pride, rudeness, self-seeking, easy anger and the slow burning anger of resentment. Biblical love is none of those.

Last week we discovered Biblical Love does not rejoice at wrong but with the truth.

If the Corinthians did not yet figure out that God's call to love was on a totally different level than human love, they would know for

sure by the end of the verse we're studying. They're going to see that God calls them to always love. We're going to ponder that call and what we need from God to carry it out. So first I'm going to give you one qualifier that I hope will deal with any objections that might prevent you from hearing this message today. In other words, what limitation is there on "love always." Then we'll look at the four ways God calls us to always love. Then we'll see what we need from God to even begin thinking about loving this way.

The key verse is 1 Corinthians 13:7. The NIV version says "Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres." The English Standard Version translates it literally "Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things." Before we plunge into each, we must make one qualifier.

1 Qualifier

Each description of love is bound by that which is in accordance with God's will and way. One commentator writes, "By all things Paul is speaking of all things acceptable in God's righteousness and will, of everything within the Lord's divine tolerance." In other words Biblical love does not bear, believe, hope

or endure lies, false teaching, abuse or anything else that is not of God or in accordance with His will.

We need to say this because sometimes verses like this have been used to say “love always protects so if you don’t protect my sin, you don’t love me.” Or “love always believes so if you don’t believe me you don’t love me.” Or “love always endures so even though he beats you, love always endures it.” Biblical love does not cover up sin. It does not gullibly believe a noted con man. It does enable addictive behavior by hoping that one day the addict will just wake up and change. It does not endure continual wrongdoing without speaking truth in love about the injustice. So we need to be clear that this is not some twisted love that tolerates great wrong.

But we must also guard against immediately jumping to objections to this verse. Instead of trying to find a way to not obey this, lets first find out what’s necessary to obey or live out this kind of love.

4 ways God calls us to always love

Love Always Protects The New King James and ESV version says “it bears all things.” So what is going on here? Well the word can

have two different meanings. The original word means “to keep off something which threatens, to bear up against, to hold out against, and so to endure, bear, forbear.” You can see how the English versions have struggled to make a decision here. Is Paul saying that love bears with something or someone? Or is he saying love covers over or protects.

If he means bears with, it probably points bearing with the irritations and struggles we have with others. It is possible that Paul is emphasizing that in light of the situation. The Corinthians were especially irritated with each other. They refused to bear with some of each other’s shortcomings. So Paul could again be emphasizing this.

The problem with that interpretation is Paul has already said this maybe twice in the previous verses. Remember verse 4 - Love is patient. That requires bearing with the things that bug us about other people. Then we saw a couple of weeks ago in verse 5, “Love is not easily angered or irritable.”

So there’s perhaps a stronger case for “love always protects” or covers with a cloak of love. We’ve already mentioned that does not mean “cover up” like conceal a sin or protect someone from facing up

to what they've done wrong. But it could mean to protect others from unnecessary exposure, ridicule or harm. Or it could mean to protect another's reputation in a conversation. It could mean to refuse to hear gossip.

It protects another from too much exposure; too many questions; too much information they don't need to hear; from bad mouthing of their name; to talking badly about them; it stands up in a conversation and says no to character slamming.

I remember one time when my wife was really sick in one of her pregnancies. I shared how sick she was and our fears that this would go on the entire 9 months. Well almost everyone felt compelled to share their pregnancy sickness horror stories. Some were so sick that they hardly ate for months. Some were sick right through delivery. One person said, "Well at least with this sickness, you know there's an end date for it." We were in month three trying to make it day by day. That meant there could be six more months of illness before there was any relief.

Finally, there was one dear lady who came to me and said "I am so sorry for what you endured during that sharing time. You didn't

need to hear all that stuff. You needed encouragement. I felt like a protective roof was coming over me. Here was someone I could talk to. She not only talked the talk, she walked the walk. She took our oldest on days we couldn't find a sitter. The day Caleb was being born, she took Courtney the whole day. Here was someone who offered me a protecting love I will never forget.

We can offer a similar love to others when we protect them in some way from too much of whatever.

Always Trusts

The second description of love found in verse 7 comes out this way: "Love always trusts" or "Love believes all things." The word means "to believe or be persuaded of, to place confidence in, to trust." This kind of love believes the best about someone else. It is not a gullible love. It doesn't say to the robber you discover in the den, "Oh, you're taking my wallet out of my desk, emptying it of my money and placing the money in your pocket. But I believe you when you say you're not stealing from me. I believe that you will repay." Trusting love does not prohibit discernment or a wise assessment of

things. But it does limit a tendency to justify moving from discernment to constant suspicion.

Have you ever been around someone who is always suspicious of everything? They doubt everyone's motives. They dismiss apparent sincerity. They immediately believe the worst about someone but seldom believe the best.

In the sports world recently there have been several incidents involving athletes in trouble. Football player Michael Vick has gotten out of prison after serving 18 months in jail for hosting dog fighting at his home. He has apologized, served his time and now speaks for the SPCA; the Society for the Protection from Cruelty to Animals. But the discussion centers mostly around his sincerity. I listened to a couple of sports reporters talking about this. They prided themselves on being "suspicious people." Someone is suspicious if they are "doubtful, mistrustful, disbelieving or guarded."

I recognize some of you have been deeply hurt in life by someone who took advantage of your trust. But I appeal to you to not let that experience color your view of everyone else in the world. Love is not suspicious about everything that comes out of everybody's

mouth. Biblical love involves actually trusting others to tell truth or to try something different or do it their way.

When we don't offer loving trust to others, they sense it. Then we force them into difficult decisions that will kill any growth or deepening of our friendship. Usually people respond in one of two ways to suspicious people. They try to do everything the suspicious person wants so they can maintain the relationship. But inside they're dying. "I'm doing this stuff but I don't know if this will even be enough for them to trust me." Or they just give up on the relationship. They walk away. They shut down. They don't dare introduce a new idea or thought because they know it'll be shot down or have to pass 38 hurdles before it's accepted.

But love always trusts. Love believes all things. Love does not solely look backwards at what happened before. It looks forward to what might be. It believes in the future potential of a person. It trust what God might do in this person, believing that He who began a good work in them will carry it on until the day of Christ Jesus.

The next description of love relates to love always trusts.

Love Always Hopes

This too is a forward looking love. But it comes after a dismal failure. It is not an unreasoning optimism that fails to take into account reality. This love refuses to take failure as final. It oozes confidence that looks to ultimate triumph by the grace of God.

I hope you have been on the receiving end of this kind of love in your life. I hope you can look back to a time when you failed; when you disappointed someone; when you shattered someone's belief in your sincerity. Yet though hurt, they still loved and hoped in what God could do in you.

I have seen this hoping love flow from many of you in this body. I see you parents with children who are not walking with the Lord. I hear your sorrow and your hope in the Lord. I've heard you say "he or she is in God's hands. All I can do is pray." You have discovered the truth of that moment of dedication when you entrusted your child to the hands of God because you knew you could not always be there. Yet He could.

I have seen this hoping love in spouses who have an unbelieving marriage partner. There are times when that hope dwindles. Our job as a church family is to come around you during

those times to restore your hope in what God can do in your partner's life.

When we were on vacation, we had the privilege of visiting our former church. One great joy was seeing a man in church who we'd pray would one day be there. His wife came to Christ fairly early in our ministry. She became super involved. Yet her heart was broken by her husband's non-interest in spiritual things. He began to hang around for special events. He played on our softball team. He came when his wife got baptized. People prayed and hoped in what God could do. By the time we left, he still did not attend church, but he did say to me, "Tom, I really appreciated the times I heard you speak." We often joked around. So I didn't know if he was serious. But then he made sure that he emphasized, "I'm serious."

And now he comes to church with her every week. I'm not 100% sure if he has received Christ. But if not, he's close. He's in his sixties. People prayed for years. God is working in our friend's heart. So if you are in a dark time right now where you don't know about your kids, or spouse, or that friend who seems to have walked away

from Christ, ask the Lord to fill you with that love that hopes in what He can do.

The last one is **Love Always Perseveres**. This one is difficult to translate. It literally means “to remain under.” It describes one who stays behind while others go away; to stay when others flee. It is the endurance of a soldier who in the thick of battle continues to fight while others flee. So the translation “perseveres” is a good one.

Have you ever thought about that word per-severe. One definition of severe is “difficult to endure, perform or fulfill,” like I faced a severe test. The prefix per can mean “thoroughly; utterly.” So per-severe means “to thoroughly and utterly endure difficulty.” This is the kind of love necessary when even hope is disappointed for a season. *When hope is disappointed; when people disappoint; when life disappoints – it does not fold the tent and quit – it determines to stay; remain.*

This Love stays. It does not tolerate sin. It does not say “it’s okay to beat me. It’s okay to take advantage of me. “That’s contrary to God’s will. But it stays when it’s hard to stay. It says “I am willing to identify with you,” even though others say they are leaving. I am

willing to stay with you even though I’m disappointed. I am willing to stay with this church body with its strengths and weaknesses; with its strong points and weak points. I am willing to keep loving my kids even when they’re difficult. By God’s grace and strength, I am going to stay because He stayed with me and put up with me. s.

Talk about four difficult ways of loving! Then Paul has to make it worse by adding on the word “all.”

Why the “all” or “always?”

This love is challenging enough without the all. If Paul just wrote love protects, trusts, hopes and endures we might say, “That’s super hard.” This passage already has enough shock value. But now he finishes it off with the crazy addition of the word “all.” So I think he’s really hammering home that this kind of love from God is fundamentally different from anything human. He’s talking about a love way beyond what they’re used to. He’s reminding that they are in a church with brothers and sisters in Christ. They are called to treat each other with a love that is fundamentally different than what they were used to. They cannot function as a body with a worldly love. They must enter into a love that lasts forever because we Christians

will be in a forever relationship with each other. God calls His people to offer a love that is profoundly different than anything they have ever seen before.

But how? To always love, always ask God for His love.

God and Christ offer exactly this kind of love to us: Christ offered us a protecting love when He died on the cross to protect us from God's wrath which we deserved. Christ believes in what God will do in us. Christ's love looks forward in hope to what we will become. Christ's love endures to the end so we can endure. Receive this Love from God for the first time; anew and afresh today.

Some of us need to Bask in the total assurance that you are reconciled to God and accepted by Him. You can't love this way because you think God doesn't love you this way. You are somehow enslaved to the notion that only after you offer love and goodness to others, God will forgive you. But God's forgiveness does not depend on you. It depends on what happened on the cross.

God first cleanses his people from guilt and reconciles them to himself. Then he equips them for holy loving. Pastor Walter Marshall wrote in 1692 - Forgiveness is the horse that pulls the cart of good

works. Don't put the cart before the horse! Let God convince you again of His forgiveness of you.

Finally ask God to pour His love through you into other's lives. God's love showers down constantly on this world and its people. He's like a watering can with multiple holes that pours out several streams of water to quench the thirst of many. God's showers of love fall on all of us. But He calls you to be that specific concentrated love in others lives. You're like watering can with a narrow spout. When you receive and are filled up with God's love, He then takes you to pour His love specifically on the people around you. He uses us to give a concentrated dose of His love for others.

We are going to need this kind of love in reaching out to our community; to stop on the Jericho beside a wounded traveler. Wounded and hurt people sometimes hurt others. But we also need to pour it into our families and church family. Love always protects, trusts, hopes and perseveres. It's a ridiculous love. But when we're full of that love from God, we can then pour it out on others.