

## What Love Celebrates

We need to understand that 1 Corinthians 13 love cannot take satisfaction from sin because it is a pure love - the love of Jesus is a pure love! For this reason it cannot condone or celebrate any form of wrongdoing in one's own life or in the life of others. To rejoice in wrongdoing is to justify it or celebrate it for some reason. It is to make something out to be good that is ultimately harmful to people & offensive to a holy & loving God. In Isaiah 5:20 God warns; **“Woe to those who call evil good and good evil.”** 2 Tim 3:3 tells us that one of the marks of the godlessness of the last days will be people **“not loving good”**. All we have to do is look at what sells newspapers & gets hits on social media. More often than not it is the bad news that wins... If we are to grow in loving others the way Jesus loves us then we need to have a different spirit than the spirit of the age. We also need to learn to enjoy life differently by rejoicing in different things. Understanding this will help us in learning to love the way Jesus loves.

### 1. What Love Does Not Rejoice In

The phrase we are going to focus on in this final message in the series is; **“[love] does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.”** The words wrongdoing & truth can be broad terms. Stated generally we are being told that love celebrates everything that is godly & does not celebrate anything that is ungodly. Gordon Fee comments on these words by saying: *“The person full of Christian love joins in rejoicing on the side of behaviour that reflects the gospel—for every victory gained, every forgiveness offered, every act of kindness. Such a person refuses to take delight in evil, either in its more global forms—war, the suppression of the poor—or in those close to home—the fall of a brother or sister, a child’s misdeed... It is not gladdened when someone else falls.”*

We also need to note, when the Bible talks about truth it is not only talking about what we know & believe, but also what we do & how we behave. We might assume the opposite of truth to be falsehood, but the Bible often assumes the opposite of truth to be unrighteousness (Rom 2:8; 2 Thess. 2:12), doing what is wrong. According to 1 John 1:6 Christians are called to *practice* the truth & according 3 John 3 we are called to *walk* in the truth. These are active phrases. The truth consists of everything that is right & good in the eyes of our holy & loving God. Truth is opposed to injustice, immorality & deception; any form of unrighteousness. Truth is practiced by living justly, morally & righteously. Paul writes to the Philippians; **“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.”**

As we think about the meaning of these words in 1 Cor. 13:6, we also need to ask why people might rejoice in wrongdoing. The answer is simply that wrongdoing brings them some sense of pleasure or satisfaction.

Either by personal participation in wrongdoing or by finding reason to celebrate the wrongdoing of another. The gossip enjoys spreading news about others; the liar thrives on making stuff up, the sexual sinner gets pleasure from a lustful act. In light of this we will understand that Christians are not immune to finding pleasure in wrongdoing. This is why we need to think about these words & choose to celebrate & rejoice in the right things – the things which reflect the truth!

With all that said I also believe these words are talking about something more specific. We've already touched on it with the last phrase of the quote I read from Gordon Fee – *'love is not gladdened when someone else falls'*. The precise wording of verse 6 is best translated as **"love... it does not rejoice at (epi) wrongdoing"** as the ESV puts it. If Paul was talking about a sinner's celebration of his own sin, he would simply say that love does not rejoice "in" (en) wrongdoing. By saying that love does not rejoice "at" (epi) wrongdoing, he puts the sin somewhere outside of the person who is doing the rejoicing. This means that what Paul is specifically saying is that love refuses to celebrate someone else's wrongdoing in the sense that it is not gladdened when someone else falls.

Why might a person be tempted to celebrate someone else's wrongdoing? Well sometimes people celebrate the wrongdoing of others because it gives them an excuse to commit similar sins... Sometimes people celebrate the wrongdoing of others because they find it entertaining in some way... However Paul probably had something even more specific in mind. He was writing to a local church, he was writing to a community of Christians where there was envy & disagreement, pride & division, self-seeking & resentment. So he's more likely to be talking about rejoicing in another's fall. At times we can be tempted to feel a sense of satisfaction when someone does something wrong, especially someone who irritates us or someone who we resent or are envious of... It can surface in different ways for different reasons & for this reason we need the truth of these words to bring light to the dark corners of our heart.

One way it surfaces is in gossip. Gossiping in its very essence is rejoicing in wrongdoing, either by spreading inaccurate news about someone or even true news about someone's failure. Gossip that is true is still gossip. It can be the unfavourable way it is passed on, & sometimes it's simply the fact that it is passed on that makes it gossip. This sin is wicked because it un-lovingly, or vengefully, or even twistingly reveals the weaknesses & failures of others. The essence of gossip is spreading news about other people's shortcomings; this makes gossip a very clear form of rejoicing in wrongdoing. From my study & reflection I actually think this is primarily what Paul is talking about & he is telling us that true Christ-like love cannot ever rejoice in wrongdoing like this. Rejoicing in wrongdoing – by gossiping & slandering – reveals an unloving, vengeful & twisted heart & therefore our deep need for the Holy Spirit to pour the love of Christ into our heart. Love is never in a rush or mission to spill the beans on someone for it **"always protects."** Love never celebrates another's sin; love covers a multitude of sins. As Peter puts it in 4:8 of his first letter;

**“Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers a multitude of sins.”** May the Holy Spirit fill our hearts with this deep love even now as we reflect on this!

John MacArthur writes; *“Gossips would do little harm if they did not have so many eager listeners.”*

Choosing to listen is choosing to join in rejoicing at wrongdoing. Eph 4:29 says; **“Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear it.”** Loving the way Jesus loves means for our mouths should be channels of grace. Why does the world love gossip? 1. It sells newspapers... 2. It gets hits on social media... 3. There are people we don't particularly like... 4. There are others we think deserve what's coming to them... 5. It can make people feel better about themselves... 6. People can feel justified in being right about being suspicious of someone...

None of these things are right of course. Even if we are right about sin in someone we should not be happy about it, we should be saddened by it... When we feel happy about another's downfall it reveals more about our hearts than anything. But this is reality in this world & this is what we can be like at times if we're honest enough to admit it. We may not celebrate publically because we're 'good Christian's' & most of us restrain ourselves most of the time, or we may choose to code it in nice spiritual language, but inwardly there have been times I'm sure (for reasons mentioned above or others) that we have at very least had a little party in our hearts over the downfall of another – someone we didn't like much, someone who was critical of us, someone we envied, someone who was part of a church we didn't agree with... Love never rejoices in wrongdoing in any sense,

## **2. What Love Rejoices In**

Let's us now think about what love does rejoice in. Paul says love rejoices with the truth. Generally rejoicing with the truth means rejoicing in truth in all its forms. However from the way it's worded in Greek it seems that Paul had something more specific in mind. Paul uses the definite article here, translated **“the truth”**, indicating he has something specific in mind. When Paul does this in other places he is talking about the Gospel. So rather than celebrating the downfall of someone Christian's should be found celebrating the gospel which can lift, restore & transform that someone. We are not gossipers of bad news about others failings, we are gossipers of the good news for the redemption of others. We rejoice in the good news of Jesus & what it means for every failure in this world.

One place we see the difference between rejoicing at wrongdoing & rejoicing with the gospel is the story of Simon the Pharisee & the sinful woman that Mark spoke on a few weeks ago - **Luke 7:36-50**.

If we were hearing this story at the time it happened, something's would grab our attention straight away. The opening of this story is full of tension resulting from what didn't happen. Custom required a kiss or

greeting, usually on the face. After the guests reclined at the table, water & olive oil would be brought for the washing of hands & feet. But it's obvious from the way the story progresses that none of these things happened. Why? Probably because Simon & his friends wanted to publically dishonour Jesus. In the verses beforehand Jesus has just been pointing out the contradictions in pharisaic logic. Then all of a sudden Simon the Pharisee invites him for dinner. Simon is up to something. He is aiming to purposefully dishonour Jesus & discredit him as a prophet (see verse 39).

Simon is rejoicing in wrongdoing in a number of ways in this story. He's enjoying being rude because it will potentially humiliate Jesus... As well as this he's delighted at the fact Jesus doesn't stop the sinful woman washing his feet with her tears etc because he thinks this discredits him as a true prophet. Also note how he self-righteously says Jesus should have known **"what sort of woman this is"**, as if he & her are different kinds of human beings – him righteous, her sinner. This indicates he is secretly celebrating her sinfulness because she makes him look like a spiritual winner. We need to beware of such subtle rejoicing at the wrongdoings of others in our own hearts. It is a sign we have stopped rejoicing in the gospel. In this sense rejoicing at wrongdoing is rejoicing in our own righteousness.

Very frustratingly for Simon, however, this spiritual loser invites herself into Simon's twisted game & she becomes the one who gives Jesus the honour he is due. In 1 Cor. 13:5 Paul writes love **"does not dishonour others"** (NIV). In Romans 12:9 he writes; **"Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honour."** What this woman showed was genuine love! Perhaps she caught wind of Simon's plan to dishonour Jesus in the market place & that's why she ran home & got the alabaster flask. This woman had most likely already put her faith in Jesus, since Jesus implies in verse 47 that she loved much because she had been forgiven much. She no doubt had heard hope for herself in his message of grace & responded in faith. In other words she did not do what she did to earn forgiveness, but because she'd already received forgiveness from Jesus. This was simply her offering of costly & risky love. She wept then probably not over her sin on this occasion, but over the fact her Saviour was being deliberately dishonoured. As it says in Paul's portrait, **"love always protects"** (NIV).

Simon doesn't get any of this off course because he is too busy celebrating the fact **"she is a sinner"**. He's on a different wavelength altogether. He's comparing himself with her, & he's frustrated she is interfering in his plan. He cannot see the sinfulness of his own heart. He thinks he's justified in thinking how he thinks & in doing what he's doing. So Jesus tells him a parable to highlight exactly what's going on. The parable is basically about him & the woman & Jesus himself. This becomes even clearer when Jesus applies the parable afterwards. One person in the story owes just over a month's wages, the other owes the best part of two years wages. Neither of them could pay their debts. Both of them get forgiven their debts by the moneylender.

Then Jesus asks Simon **“Now which of them will love him more?”** Simon cautiously answers **“The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt.”** Jesus tells him he’s spot on. Then he turns Simon’s reasoning around on him. Pointing out how she has honoured him where Simon dishonoured him (look at verses 44-46 again).

The contrast is clear. A good host would have kissed his guests on both cheeks & anointed their heads with oil. Simon had deliberately ignored all the duties of ordinary hospitality. By contrast, the sinful woman has done things so humble in service & extravagant in affection. Simon had assessed himself as better than this woman, but by Jesus assessment this was not the case. She may well have been a bigger sinner than Simon, but she was also a bigger lover. According to Jesus, the difference was love. More than anything love is the evidence of a forgiven heart & therefore a heart right with God. Simon didn’t think he needed forgiveness. Jesus wanted him to see he did. Jesus said; **“Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.”**

Simon’s heart was totally exposed. For all his theology & morality, he simply did not know how to love. Instead he is found rejoicing in wrongdoing... Since Simon had not experienced God’s forgiving grace in his own life, he did not know how to celebrate it in the life of another. This is because he didn’t really get who Jesus was & what he came to do. If he did he would never have dishonoured Jesus the way he did. Ironically, however, the sinful woman did get who Jesus was!

When we understand Jesus – who he is, why he lived, & died & rose again, what his mission is etc – then we’ll not be found rejoicing at wrongdoing but in the truth of the gospel. In other words we’ll not be found trying to catch people out, spreading or listening to dishonouring gossip about someone, or secretly celebrating how we’re better than others. Instead we’ll be found rejoicing with what the truth of the good news of possible forgiveness & redemption for all.