

Christ-Centered Love

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. Or as the bulletin cover paraphrases/summarizes: It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres, and it never fails. ***Talk about a perfect text for a perfect day!***

But...we're not here to celebrate one day, as beautiful and "perfect" as it may be. We're here to celebrate a marriage; ***a new beginning***. A wedding is but a ceremony on a single day; a few hours in one single day. Marriage, however, is for life—***real life***. Besides that, here's the reality: I don't know a single married couple who can boast of these realities. I know that sounds rather ***negative***, especially on a day like today, **but it's true**. And the longer you've been married, the more you know how true this is. "*Love is patient and kind...always? Love isn't rude...ever? Love never insists on its own way? Love isn't irritable or resentful? Ever?!"*

No couple—no one single person—can ***honestly*** say that about themselves. Why? Because we're all children of Adam. We're all sinful by nature. And that's an important point to stress here. I don't say these things as an indictment against the other person; e.g., "*they're not patient or kind; they're rude; they insist on their own way; they're irritable. They're the problem!*" I've been married too long to know how dangerous that kind of talk is. ***Besides that...look in the mirror***. I look in the mirror of God's Word, and the reflection I see isn't very pretty. I am not always patient or kind. I can be rude and insist on my own way. I can certainly be irritable (and irritating) at times. I'm sure my wife is nodding in full agreement right now.

So...what do we do with these verses then? I guess we could call them ***prescriptions***; you know...here's the kind of love you should strive for in marriage. But, as I said, we all fail at this...***miserably***. We can try all we want, but we're always going to come up woefully short when we measure our efforts against God's perfect and righteous demands of the Law. We could put the blinders on and take the Lifetime Channel approach (which happens at weddings all the time), and look to these two standing front and center and let out a ***big mushy sigh*** and tell ourselves that these words are a ***perfect description*** of these two standing front and center. But I know Matt and MeKale, and they would be the ***first ones*** to confess their own sinful shortcomings in regards to the perfect love being spoken of in these words.

So...what do we do? Answer: We look to Christ. That sounds so simple, doesn't it? **It is that simple**. In fact, it's all so simple that it's staring us in the

face. You see, the original Greek (which this text was written in) uses the word “agape” when speaking of this perfect love. This is important! This isn’t “love” the way the world [*mis*]understands it. Agape love is unconditional, merciful, and gracious. Agape is a John 3:16 word. “*God so agape’d the world that He sent His only-begotten Son....*” Agape is the very word used to describe God Himself. “*God is agape. God is love.*”

Dearly beloved: The unconditional, merciful, gracious, steadfast, unfailing, perfect love of God *is Christ Jesus: God’s love in the flesh.* In this way, these verses are **perfect descriptions**, not of us, but of our heavenly Bridegroom. Any time you see the word “love,” substitute the word “Jesus.” It’s that simple. This is what Paul is getting at in this text. If you have everything that the world calls “great,” but you don’t have Christ...**you’ve got nothing.** Jesus is patient. Jesus is kind. Jesus always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. The love and mercy of Jesus never fails. This Christ-centered reality changes the way you understand all this, doesn’t it? **It should!**

This is especially true when we consider these words *within the context of marriage.* We look to these words and we begin to see things differently. We see things through the lens of Christ. Matt and MeKale: Your Lord has brought you together to spend the rest of your lives together, and I’m going to let you in on a secret: There are going to be days when one or the both of you is irritable and selfish. There are going to be times when one of you demands your own way. There are going to be times when trust won’t exactly be running at 100%. There are going to be those times when harsh words are spoken and feelings are hurt and the words of forgiveness need to be spoken, heard, and meant. ***It doesn’t mean that your marriage has failed.*** It just means that you’re both human; you’re both children of Adam; you’re both in need of a Savior and His unconditional love and forgiveness.

For better or worse, in sickness and in health, richer or poorer, in good times and in not so good times, see things—***see each other***—through the lens of Christ and His love. See each other as Christ sees you. Love one another as you have been loved...by Him. Forgive one another just as you’ve been forgiven by Him. Dare to be different. ***Keep Christ at the center of your marriage.*** Pray together. Worship together. Be together where your heavenly Bridegroom is; right where He calls you to be; where He forgives you and nourishes you with His Word and Sacraments, ***for it is His unconditional and unfailing love and grace and mercy*** that will truly bless and keep this marriage, now and to that day when He Himself parts you in death. Between now and then, may your love for one another ***flow forth from and flow back to*** the love that God has for you in Christ and because of Christ.

To Him alone be all glory, praise, and honor. AMEN