

A More Excellent Way

1 Corinthians 13

Sermon Four: A More Excellent Way Described: Part Three (v. 7)

March 7, 2021

Opening ILL: “Water, Water everywhere, nor any drop to drink.” Samuel Taylor Coleridge, The Rime of the Ancient Mariner. It seems like we are surrounded, inundated with messages of love, but where is it? It seems that our songs, our movies, our books, our sermons...everything...is about love, but where is love in our culture? Where’s the love in our world? Our twitter feeds? Our churches? **Point:** Why I deactivated Twitter (Or, at least one reason why).

I. Introduction/Review

- A. A More Excellent Way Defended.**
- B. A More Excellent Way Defined.**
- C. A More Excellent Way Described.**
 - 1. Patient
 - 2. Kind
 - 3. Does not envy/Is not jealous.
 - 4. Does not act inappropriately.
 - 5. Not selfish
 - 6. Not cranky (provoked)
 - 7. Does not keep a list
 - 8. Does not rejoice in sin/rejoices in the truth.

II. A More Excellent Way Described, Part Three (v. 7)

A. A very important and necessary clarification.

- 1. Sometimes, in the Bible, “All things” doesn’t mean “All things.”

Point: Now I know that many of you who (like me) cling to the Bible as inerrant and believe that a literal interpretation of the Bible is to be celebrated, may struggle with this statement. That’s ok. Give me a second to explain what I mean, and I am sure you will soon see why this clarification must be made!

- a. Some examples of when “All things” means all things without distinction
 - i. **Ephesians 1:11** also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,
 - ii. **Romans 8:28** And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.
 - b. Some examples of when “All things” can’t mean all things without distinction
 - i. **Philippians 4:13** I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. (Phil. 4:13 NAU)
 - ii. **Colossians 1:20** and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.
 - c. We have to be careful in how we approach things like this.
 - i. We must affirm the truthfulness and clarity of the Bible.
 - ii. We must interpret a specific passage of the Bible in light of its closest context.
 - iii. We must interpret a specific passage of the Bible in light of the general context.
2. What does “all things” mean here?
- a. It cannot mean “all things” without distinction.
 - i. To say that “all things” means everything without distinction is an interpretation that is absolutely impossible. Let me show you why:
 - a) If we take this to mean all things without distinction, we will feel obligated to bear things that we shouldn’t bear.
 - a) 1 Thessalonians 3:1, 5
 - b) If we take this to mean all things without distinction, we will believe things that we ought not believe.

a) **1 John 4:1** Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. (1 Jn. 4:1 NAU)

b) **Galatians 1:6-9**

c) If we take this to mean all things without distinction, we will endure things that we ought not endure.

3. Isn't this obvious?

a. Yes, but I have 2 purposes in focusing on this:

i. To teach you how to think through a passage and to ask the right questions.

ii. To undergird the principle of literal interpretation by dealing very carefully even with obvious exceptions.

B. Love bears all things.

1. What does this mean?

a. Dictionary.com definition: "to hold up; support: *to bear the weight of the roof*. to hold or remain firm under (a load): *The roof will not bear the strain of his weight*."

b. Greek word (*stegw*) means:

i. **1. to keep confidential, cover, pass over in silence**

a) NIV translates it "protects"

b) It is tempting to translate the Greek word here in this way, because otherwise it would seem repetitive in light of the end of the verse (endures all things).

c) However, Paul uses this same verb in 1 Corinthians 9:12 in the sense outlined below, so it seems to me that we should stick with the definition below.

ii. **2. to bear up against difficulties, bear, stand, endure**

a) **Quote:** "Love conceals what is displeasing in another and does not drag it out into the pitiless light of public scrutiny. But it is more likely that it is the latter meaning that is in mind (as in 9:12, 'put up with'). Love does not give way easily; it endures."¹

b) If this is the case, then this verse is a Chiasm, having an A-B-B-A structure.

a) The first and fourth thing listed focus on enduring through circumstances.

b) The second and third thing listed focus on thinking graciously about people.

c. For our purposes, we will approach this word as referring to people and the other as referring to circumstances, even though there is significant overlap. We will do something very similar with "believes and hopes" below.

2. What does this look like?

a. Positively

i. This seems to mean that when we love each other, we "put up" with each other.

ii. This seems to mean that when we love each other, negative circumstances don't pull us away from each other.

iii. This seems to mean that love has, by its very nature, longevity.

b. Negatively

i. This means that we don't quit on love when the going gets tough.

ii. This means that love doesn't preclude negative circumstances.

C. Love believes all things.

1. What does this mean?

a. Dictionary.com to have confidence or faith in the truth of (a positive assertion, story, etc.); give credence to.

b. Greek word (*pisteuw*) means: believe, believe in, be convinced of, give credence to

2. What does this look like?

a. Positively

¹ Leon Morris, 1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary, vol. 7, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 179.

- i. This seems to mean that we choose to give people the benefit of the doubt when the situation calls for it.
- b. Negatively
 - i. This seems to mean that we refuse to assume the worst in people.

Point: Can there be anything more relevant and necessary today? There is a whole lot of negative assumptions in this world. Do you want to stand out for Christ? Don't jump to conclusions...especially about people.

D. Love hopes all things.

1. What does this mean?
 - a. Dictionary.com: the feeling that what is wanted can be had or that events will turn out for the best:
 - b. This Greek word (elpizw) means: (1) in the sense of counting on something expect, await, hope for (LU 6.34); (2) as relying on a basis of confidence hope in, trust in,
2. What does this look like?
 - a. Positively
 - i. This means that we genuinely believe that the light at the end of the tunnel is not an oncoming train!
 - ii. This means that we sincerely believe that God has a plan in everything that happens.
 - b. Negatively
 - i. This means that we don't drop a friend or a spouse because of one flaw. Instead, we invest in them in the hope that they may/can/will change.

E. Love endures all things.

1. What does this mean?
 - a. Dictionary.com: to bear without resistance or with patience; tolerate:
 - b. This Greek word (upomenw) means "to bear up under; to endure."
2. What does this look like?
 - a. Positively
 - i. We endure when we face the trying circumstances in our lives together.
 - ii. This can apply to the church when we say, "We all want to get through this together!"

Point: Anyone out there still clinging to the belief that the Bible is not relevant?

- b. Negatively
 - i. Refusing to stop simply because the going gets tough.
 - ii. Refusing to just stick our heads in the sand and ignore the world around us.

III. A More Excellent Way Applied

A. Love will give you strength that you never thought possible.

1. Strength to bear up under unimaginable pressure.

ILL: The old story about a woman lifting a car to save her child. I don't know if that story is true, but I think we will all agree that love is a powerful motivator.

ILL: The power of love, by Huey Lewis

2. Strength to endure what you never thought you could.

B. Love may lead others to think you are naïve.

1. Sometimes, people we look at you as parents and think, "Wow! That kid has her completely under her spell."
 - a. **ILL:** Bethany and the Jedi mind trick.
2. Sometimes, people will look at you and think, "How on Earth can you believe the best about your husband/wife? What an idiot! You have your rose-colored love blinders on you!"
3. What should be our response to that?
 - a. Simple. Our response should be: "So what?"
 - b. Remember: They thought Jesus was naïve, too! (Luke 7:39)

C. Love is a more excellent way.

1. Great speaking ability cannot compete with love.
2. Great supernatural ability cannot compete with love.
3. Great sacrificial ability cannot compete with love.