

Love Hates Evil and Delights in What is Good

1 Corinthians 13:6

BI: What a man rejoices in is a good test of his character. Love hates what is evil and rejoices in what God considers good.

Let there be no doubt. It's not easy to love in a manner that is consistent with God's word. None of us are by nature good at loving other people. Before we were born again it wasn't even possible because nothing inside of us was motivated to please God. But now that we have been given a new heart, a new nature, we have the capacity to love one another. And that, as we have been learning, is the secret to making an impact on the world in which we live.

What is love? "To love is to give whatever I have that you need because God wants me to." What does love look like in practical terms? Paul tells us in 1 Cor. 13:4-7. And here is what he says.

Love is patient, love is kind *and* is not jealous; love does not brag *and* is not arrogant, ⁵ does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong *suffered*, ⁶ does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; ⁷ bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Today we need to consider what it means when Paul says love "does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices in the truth" (6).

On the one hand we have *unrighteousness*. On the other hand we have *truth*. Paul wants us to know that love is something that knows when it is time to rejoice and when it is time to refrain from rejoicing. So once again, we discover that love is sometimes active and engaged, and other times it is passive and restrained. There are times when love will laugh and sing and exercise unhindered boldness in its rejoicing. And there are times when love will be quiet and still as it exercises restraint over impulses to do otherwise, even when other people are laughing and carrying on.

So how do we know when it is appropriate to rejoice and when it is appropriate to refrain from rejoicing? How do we know what love for God and others requires in any given moment. This is the question I think Paul is answering in the phrase.

I. Love Does not Rejoice in Unrighteousness:

1. It's interesting to me that Paul begins by emphasizing the kind of love that exercises restraint. As Americans, we are so chipper and ready to laugh and get loud in our happiness that it may strike us as strange that Paul would begin by emphasizing restraint. Why would he do that?

2. Well, it seems to me that the reason he first emphasizes restraint is because sinners like you and me have a propensity toward rejoicing over the wrong things.

3. The word “rejoice” means “to be joyful, glad, delighted or to find pleasure in something.” Even as believers, we are often tempted to find pleasure in the wrong things. Often we are tempted to laugh at or find pleasure in things that, frankly, God consider unrighteous. For example:

- A. When a co-worker tells an off-color joke, do we laugh?
- B. When someone exposes the faults of another for no redeeming purpose, do we listen intently, expectantly?
- C. When a scene in a movie proves to be immoral or evil, do we secretly delight in it? Are we teaching our children to delight in such things by our entertainment choices?
- D. When someone you don't like experiences a set-back or suffering, do you advertise their misfortune for your own gain?
- E. When a government official has his sin or foolishness exposed, do we rejoice?
- F. When an acquaintance intentionally makes someone else feel uncomfortable or stupid, how do we respond?

4. You see, one of the most powerful dynamics of biblical love is when we refuse to rejoice, take pleasure, or delight in things that God considers unrighteous. And by the way, people who engage in looking at pornography need to understand that when you trace the root to the bottom of that sin you find a love-less heart. In other words, you find a heart that does not love God and does not love other people (especially their spouse). What that person loves is the pleasure they extract from unrighteousness. And if you are a professing Christian, that's a scary place to be.

5. William Scroggie once said, “What a man rejoices in is a fair test of his character” (from *Leading with love* by Strauch, p. 77).

6. You see, true biblical love has a restraining quality to it. It refuses to take pleasure in things that it believes God considers unrighteous, no matter what the culture thinks. No matter what other believers may think.

I think I have told you this story before, but I remember one time in seminary when I was sitting with a few fellow students and we were laughing and carrying, and one of us, in a moment of unguarded speech, let out kind of an inappropriate joke. Most of us found it funny, but one of those brothers looked at the person who said it and asked, “What is there about me that makes you think I would find such a comment humorous?”

In that moment, the rest of us had a difficult time liking that guy. But we all walked away respecting him and wishing that our character was a Christ-like as his.

7. I suspect this kind of love for God and love for people (the kind that does not rejoice in unrighteousness) is called for most in two areas: 1) Our entertainment choices, and 2) Our conversation choices. In other words, often love requires us to make tough decisions about what we choose to watch, listen to and read on the one hand, and the kind of conversations we participate in on the other.

8. Making an impact on the world around us for the glory of God will not happen simply by passively taking in everything as it comes. We need to make choices and occasionally we need to take a stand. Sometimes we need to turn off the movie. Sometimes we need to throw the book in the trash. Sometimes we need to redirect a conversation and perhaps exhort a brother who just led it in the wrong direction. Why, because that is what love requires. Love does not rejoice in unrighteousness.

9. But there is another aspect of this kind of love.

II. Love Rejoices in the Truth.

1. We need to be careful here to not allow ourselves to think that true biblical love is dispassionate or stoic. To the contrary, love is often an extravagant thing! We are called not only to believe the truth, but to rejoice in the truth!

2. Now we need to understand here that “truth” is not simply a reference to doctrine. Truth in this context is the opposite of unrighteousness. So rejoicing in the truth means that we get excited about things that are righteous; things that are good; things that God gets excited about!

A. When someone repents and becomes a child of God, that should provoke all manner of rejoicing!

B. When a baby is born, it should be a big event for us!

C. When we hear that a brother or sister who had been disciplined by the church has repented, we should respond with gladness and joy, not gossip.

D. When you're playing volleyball, or ultimate Frisbee, or baseball and someone on the other team makes an amazing play, you should rejoice!

E. Sharing a meal with your family should be a time of rejoicing in God's goodness and grace. It should never be an occasion for complaining... no matter what is being served!

F. When you see a beautiful sunset, or if ever there is a day when it rains in Texas, we should rejoice!

F. We are commanded to rejoice in the Lord! So we should rejoice in everything that pleases Him.

3. How is your love this morning? Would you say more often than not that you rejoice in unrighteousness, or does unrighteousness make you cringe with a holy discomfort. Are you known as one who is pretty stoic when it comes to responding to righteous things, or do the good things God loves really light your fire?

4. Let me tell you a story.

It was unlike any day anyone in this small village in Israel had ever experienced. Everyone knew the scandalous story about the local nobleman's son who had taken his inheritance early and went out to squander it on parties and loose living. Last anyone had heard he was penniless, friendless, and living on the farm of a gentile family taking his meals with a herd of pigs. No surprise there. Everyone figured he will hit bottom sooner or later. In fact, truth be told, most of the village was *hoping* his life would end in shame. Isn't that what he deserved?

It was strange though, that the man this boy had shamed the most - his father - refused to say a negative word about his son. After having his name dragged through the mud as he did, you would think the man would at least say *something* to defend his honor, but no... Instead, the father's only concern seemed to be that one day his son would come home alive. In fact, if you looked closely, you could see him every evening before sunset standing on his roof looking intently toward the hills behind which his son has disappeared so many months ago.

Frankly, no one ever expected that the events of this day would ever occur. It was early afternoon and the mid-day break had just ended. The workmen we headed back to the fields when suddenly a cry went out. "Call the master! Call the master! Tell him to bring his rod. The prodigal son has returned!" Could it be that the master's son had come home?

We all expected the master of the house to respond with an heir of indifference. He would put on his robe, sit at his desk, and continue with his work as if nothing significant were happening. After all, this son should be considered dead to him after what he did. Eventually, when the boy arrived at the house a crowd would gather and the master would calmly approach with a noble stride, stand over the boy and pass judgment. But this isn't at all what happened.

To the contrary, when word reached the master he was still half undressed for the mid-day respite. And when he heard that his boy had come over the hill on his own two feet, he left his robe behind, girded up his loins like a school boy and took off running!

The shock of seeing the master run anywhere was enough to draw a crowd. As he came closer to his son you could hear the boy calling out something about being unworthy to be called his son, but then the boy suddenly disappeared in the overwhelming embrace of his weeping father! "You're alive! You're Alive! Praise God in heaven! My son is alive!" They embraced and wept together for the longest time, and with all the commotion of the whole village talking and yelling in confusion it was difficult to know what was being said between them?

But just then, the master stepped back and with the biggest smile I have ever seen, began to call out orders: "Bring my best robe! and a pair of shoes! Get my signet ring and put it on his hand! Strike up the band and kill the fatted calf... we're having ribs tonight! For this, my son, was dead and is alive again; he was lost, and now is found!"

What an amazing night that was! The music, the food, the laughter, the joy! Talk about rejoicing!... But not everyone was happy. Not everyone. That became abundantly apparent when the

boy's older brother came in from the fields that evening. He heard the music, smelled the food, saw the joy on people's faces. But he was not happy. In fact, when he heard what the party was all about he became angry. In fact, he was so angry he wouldn't even enter the house.

After a while, the master must have been told that his older boy was standing outside, because he left the party to go out and speak with him. "What's wrong, son?" he asked.

"What's wrong? What's wrong?" the boy replied. "Look, all these years I have served you faithfully. I never disobeyed your command, but you never gave ME so much as a young goat to celebrate with MY friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!"

To this the master said, "Son, you are always with me, and everything that is mine is yours. It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this *your brother* was dead, and is alive; he was lost and is found." (based on Luke 15:11-32).

Behold a father who understood what it means to love. He rejoiced in the truth. And behold a son who would only have rejoiced if his brother had been found dead.

Beloved, be honest with yourself. Which of these two are you most like? The father who (motivated by love) was willing to rejoice in what was good even though he had been personally harmed by his son, or the older brother who (motivated by selfish desires) would only rejoice if he got his own way.

In Romans 12:9 the apostle Paul writes, "*Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good.*"

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