



LESSONS IN LIVING

Loving Through Difficult Times

“Part 4: Love is Not Jealous”

A St. Andrew's Sermon
Delivered by Dr. Jim Rigby
August 30, 2026

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (*The Inclusive Bible*)

Love is patient; love is kind. Love is not jealous, it does not put on airs, and it is not snobbish; it is never rude or self-seeking; it is not prone to anger, nor does it brood over injuries. Love doesn't rejoice in what is wrong, but rejoices in the truth. There is no limit to love's forbearance, to its trust, its hope, its power to endure.

Sermon

We're in the early parts of a sermon series looking at the love passage, essentially taking it a word at a time. The Greek is so much richer than the English that it becomes worth your time to walk through and see how each of these words can be understood more deeply. One of the most important insights Paul is trying to share is that love isn't just a feeling; it's a balance of the virtues.

In the ancient world, humanity was made up of courage, temperance, justice, and wisdom. Those four virtues appeared in slightly different lists but the idea remained the same. The feeling may be the last thing that comes along. If you're too afraid to love, beginning with that fear, embracing it and taming it may be the starting place. Wisdom may be the starting place as well, particularly in a time of propaganda and lies when you don't know whom to trust. That's what many people through history have lived through, and they kept faith not with religion, but with life.

They passed the torch through the ages. We're at that time when the institutions have crumbled. The directions that we used to say what it means to be a decent human being have caved in. It's no longer enough to be a good American. That doesn't make you a good human being.

Just as the British had to learn, every country must learn along the way that patriotism is a virtue, but it's not a virtue by itself. I think our word that we're looking at today is going to be particularly helpful for a social justice church because a lot of times, when you're a social justice

church, you start thinking you're kind of above the problems. You're looking at these poor fools who are doing all of these silly things. We can forget that we're the same species. Sometimes we just haven't experienced as much trauma or fear or frustration. All the virtues count, but by themselves, none is sufficient. Without love, all the virtues are empty.

I remember when Obama ran against Hillary Clinton. Half the social justice friends said that you were racist if you didn't vote for Obama and half said you were sexist if you didn't vote for Hillary. That seems like checkmate to me. Even if justice is your goal, that can become tunnel vision.

Confucius was right that virtues and vices are related to each other. You can't separate your strengths from your weaknesses. It's a matter of cooking them and making them palatable.

We're looking at zeal. Has anybody here ever met a zealous Christian who is loving? I mean, I may have just been unlucky. People who are really, really serious about Christianity are a lot of times less serious about love. Religion can become an end in itself. You can start with wonderful motives and still wind up with tunnel vision because, again, we're all mammals that I know of here...[laughter].

Paul is trying to help us build a world based on our loves and not our hatreds. You can see that MAGA has built a world on hate. There are candidates running, and you have no idea what their policy is going to be. You just know who they hate. We can fall into that too. Love is a balance. When we try to be urgent about it, we can lose the balance that gives it life and power.

The first word we're going to look at today is actually going to be the same word, but it's translated differently. It says, *Love does not seek its own way*.

Ou zetei ta (οὐ ζητεῖ τὰ ἑαυτῆς)
Does not seek its own way

Did anybody ever feel right about that verse in scripture that says that God is a jealous God? Seems like a character disorder [laughter]. For one thing, if you're the only God, who's there to be jealous of? The idea of a jealous God comes from the polytheistic days.

I think the idea of love being jealous...of thinking if you're not Christian, you're not really loving...doesn't hold water. I don't believe—I sounded Canadian there for a second. I don't believe... It's Lake Ontario, okay? [Laughter] God bless Canada. Don't you wish we had some brave people? [Applause] I mean, all I know is a nation of cowards, right? These small nations that stand up to this...that's what human beings do.

I am absolutely convinced that Jesus did not come to teach traditional Christianity. The Sermon on the Mount doesn't make any sense if you look at it that way. The creeds had not been written. The Bible had not been compiled. He couldn't have meant that. He came to teach radical and universal love.

You cannot follow Jesus if you're a cruel person. It's not possible to be a cruel and jealous Christian and follow Jesus. When Jesus talked about being a peacemaker, he wasn't talking about just choosing sides.

One of the easiest mistakes a social justice church can make is choosing who's right and who's wrong, then trying to make sure they are on the right side. A peacemaker establishes the principles that would be fair to everyone and then shows how that conflict is not being fair to somebody. You get to the same place, but the difference is everybody counts. You're looking for the common good. You're not saying that our side is right and the other side is wrong.

It's conceivable that Christianity can make mistakes. I know that sounds impossible, but I think when we look at the Inquisition, that had some problems to it...the Crusades, and the little slavery thing...little slips that show not only mistakes, but structural evil that found its home in traditional Christianity.

In the United States, it's a horrible mistake to think that racism showed up in the MAGA movement and that was the first anybody ever heard of it. Racism, sexism, and economic exploitation of other people came over on the Mayflower. When we blame it all on other people, we don't think to purge it from our own soul. Purging it from our soul is what's going to heal. That's what's going to heal the world. We have to protect the oppressed from the oppressor, but if we ever lose our humanity, we lose universality, and then we fall into the same storm.

I was on a radio show some years back. Radios were these things that send out signals [laughter]...never mind. I was debating a pro-life person, and about halfway through the show, I realized we were not talking to each other at all. I was talking to my people, and he was talking to his people, which is understandable, but realizing we were doing that was important.

Does anybody remember when Hillary ran against Obama? You had friends who said, *You're racist if you don't vote for Obama*, and *You're sexist if you don't vote for Hillary*. They're different sets of people, but I didn't like those choices. That's the tunnel vision. Every virtue has a vice connected to it. Confucius said it's a bundle, and we have to realize what our own Achilles heel is.

I'm so proud that this is a social justice church. At the same time, I think Paul is saying that once we become jealous for that position, once we start seeing ourselves as the inside club versus the outside club, we cannot heal the world because we don't have the universal vision that would have made that possible.

Love is not zealous
(ζῆλος or zelos)

That's the first translation of this word *zelos*, and we can move to the second one, which is *zealous*, which, I think, is more of what Paul has in mind...the kind of zealot Christian who speaks of the love of God, but it sure feels like hatred. It sure feels like judgment.

Love is a balance of the virtues. You can't do it with zeal alone. It takes a maturity that sometimes we're not that interested in.

In ancient Greece, they had a god called *zelos*, and that is related to this concept. In Europe, the polytheistic gods became the saints. The gods kind of got promoted or demoted, and that way they could have both. You could have a religion that called itself monotheistic, and yet, if you believe in Satan, you're not a monotheist. You believe in at least two gods. If you believe in the trinity, that's four.

The symbols of *zelos* were a lantern and a whip. That's kind of an accurate representation of some forms of Christianity. *Jesus loves you very much, but if you say no to me, you're going to be tortured for all eternity. In love. It will be in love...*[laughter].

This is insanity. Yet if you call it theology, then okay, well, I guess, I guess, you know, somebody's got to know this stuff. That's not what Jesus taught. Look at the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus did not come to teach Christianity. He came to teach radical universal love.

Sometimes we have to slow down to do that. Sometimes it's not the teachable moment. I ran across a couple of quotes I liked this week.

Joseph Addison said,

I would have every zealous person examine their heart thoroughly, and I believe they would often find that what they call zeal for their religion is either pride, self-interest, or ill repute.

Charles Colson said,

Moral crusaders with zeal but no ethical understanding are likely to give us solutions that are worse than the problems.

I think this summarizes the MAGA movement. You cannot hate your enemies and follow Jesus Christ. The MAGA movement is not only unchristian, it's heresy. When you teach hate instead of love, when you teach judgment instead of grace, when you worship the Bible but you don't obey it, when you put Ten Commandments on the schools but you'll only vote for people that violate the Ten Commandments, when you call the people who are the descendants of the original inhabitants of this hemisphere *illegals* and then you only vote for felons, that's insanity. Only religion can get away with calling it anything else.

Paul, for all of his flaws, realized that love isn't simply a feeling. It's a life. It's a practice. It entails all of us, and none of us can do it perfectly. All of us come into it and fall out of it, but zeal, even for good causes, even for the virtues themselves, betrays us if we don't love.

Love is not impatient **(ζῆλος or zelos)**

The last slide, I was not really happy with this, but I couldn't think of a better way of saying it. This word also refers to boiling water, and I was trying to get that idea of the urgency of when we're zealous for something. How when we have a good cause, we don't want to learn anything that muddies the water. When we have a good creep to play the villain in our life, we don't want to learn about the tragedies that made that sound like it makes sense.

One of Aesop's fables was about a very thirsty pigeon. It sees a picture of water on a wall mural, and it's so urgent, it falls into the wall, breaks its wing, and gets captured, which is a sad story. The moral of the story is that you should never let your zeal outgrow your discernment. Yes, justice is very important, but it's not always the time to work.

A lot of you cook. If it doesn't fit in the microwave, I can't cook, but I understand the concept, and that is, if it's too early for a sauce, you move it to the back burner.

The love that Paul is talking about sometimes moves the virtuous goal to the back burner until somebody's ready to hear that. When somebody's defensive or wounded, that may not be the time to teach. We always have to protect people from persecution, but if we can realize that sometimes good causes are not yet ready and that sometimes our tunnel vision is counterproductive in terms of the love that this world needs to heal...

One of the first lessons I learned as a minister is that you cannot change people if you do not love them. You may not be able to change or teach them anyway, but that's surely true when you really don't like somebody. So if we see love as not something that we do, but something that we are, it's a recognition of the humanity of every person. That doesn't mean you like the person. It doesn't mean you want to be with the person, but you don't wish harm on another person. That little step changes the world.

Sometimes the church can be like scarecrows that are so busy chasing away the crows that we never have time to plant any corn. We spend so much time refuting religions we consider to be false that we never build a temple to love, the one temple we're called to build. So when you look around you and you see the madness that has seized this nation, realize that loving is a gift, and even if it doesn't change the whole world, it changes the chemistry of the world to the extent that it's within your power.

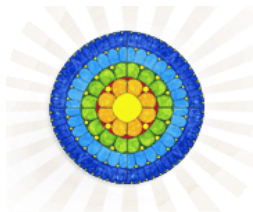
Even if there's nothing you can do, love is something you can be. A single virtue does not give you the whole balance. If a virtue isn't loving, it's not the right time for it yet. You are human too. You're a mammal. You're a primate. We're not hovering above the human condition, but we can be good examples. To do that, we have to make love the measure and realize that if we do the loving thing at the loving time in the loving way, then we've done our duty.

Benediction

Rev. Carol Johnson

Thank you. As we leave from here, if you don't remember anything, remember that you are loved. And it is because of that love that you feel that may we find ways to express the love that Jesus taught us. taught us. And in that expression, may we remember everyone's humanity even as we uphold everyone's rights. Amen.

Transcribed and edited by a member of the St. Andrew's Sermon Transcription Project.



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