

Dealing with Difficult People (1 Cor 13:4-7)

Prepared and preached by Pastor Steve Rhodes for and at Bethel Friends Church in Poland, OH on Sunday, October 23, 2022

Humor can light up a room. We can break tension with humor. I have seen it happen. I have served on many church committees and boards as well as boards for community organizations. I have experienced meetings in which one person can bring the tension up and make it very difficult. I have experienced other times in which one person makes the meeting enjoyable. Humor helps. We can break tension with humor. I have experienced times when one person doesn't take themselves too seriously, has a smile, is lighthearted and the whole meeting goes smoothly. Other times, one person is overly critical, defensive, will not tolerate the opinion of others, controlling, and difficult to be around. In those cases it is difficult to serve with them.

We are in a sermon series on dealing with life's difficulties. How do we deal with difficult people.

My theme today is that we respond to difficult people in love.

We will look at 1 Cor 13:4-7. Let's read that passage.

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.

I. I have 12 applications. I will read them and then re-read them while talking about the passage with respect to each application.

1. When dealing with difficult people we must be patient (verse 4).
2. When dealing with difficult people we must be kind (verse 4). This means that we always extend grace, love, and support. We must be Jesus to them.
3. When dealing with difficult people we must not envy or boast (verse 4). We must be humble.
4. When dealing with difficult people we must not be arrogant (verse 4). Again, we must be humble. Maybe we are the difficult person.

5. When dealing with difficult people, we must NOT be rude (verse 5). No, we must go back to the previous verse and be kind and patient.
6. When dealing with difficult people we must not insist on our own way (verse 5). Is it possible that they are difficult people because we are insisting on our own way? No, we must live out Philippians 2:3-4 and consider others more important than ourselves.
7. When dealing with difficult people we must not be irritable, or resentful (verse 5). That could make it all the worse, couldn't it? Again, being loving means that we are not resentful. We are not irritable. If we are irritable, we are likely difficult.
8. When dealing with difficult people we must not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoice with the truth (verse 6). This means we want good things. We do not want them to fail. We do not want them to be more difficult. No, we want the best.
9. When dealing with difficult people we must bear all things (verse 7). This means that love covers sins and protects believers from further harm.
10. When dealing with difficult people we must believe all things (verse 7). This means that we give them the benefit of the doubt. Let's believe the best. We are not automatically suspicious.
11. When dealing with difficult people we must hope in all things (verse 7). Do we hope the best for them?
12. When dealing with difficult people we must endure all things (verse 7). We must do whatever we can to preserve the relationship and for sure to preserve the faith.

- II. Let's talk about each of those. They come right out of the passage:
- a. First let's put this in context.
 - b. In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul introduces spiritual gifts. We have the purpose of spiritual gifts.
 - c. In 1 Corinthians 13 we have the motivation of spiritual gifts, which is love.
 - d. In 1 Corinthians 14 we have the use of spiritual gifts.
 - e. This passage is written to a divided church. We see in 1 Corinthians 11 that they were getting drunk at communion. See 1 Corinthians 11:20-21.

- f. In 1 Corinthians 1:10 we see Paul write about their divisions. They were divided over dietary laws. They were divided over authority. They were divided over which apostle to follow. They were not living in communion. They were even divided over spiritual gifts!
- g. Then, right in the middle of Paul’s writings on spiritual gifts we have this love section.
- h. I believe these are great instructions on how to deal with difficult people.
- i. The first 3 verses of 1 Corinthians 13 introduce the subject of love. He is saying that love is most important. When he mentions the tongues of angels some think he is writing about an angelic language, others think he is just using hyperbole. It is as if he is saying, “Even if I can speak with angels without love it is unintelligible.”
- j. Then, we get to 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. Let’s read those verses again: *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.*
- k. Now, let’s go back to the applications:
 - 1. When dealing with difficult people we must be patient (verse 4). Love is patient.
 - a. Give grace. Try to see it from their perspective. Try to remember that sometimes you may be difficult. Sometimes remember that personalities just clash. It happens. However, love is patient.
 - b. These are all verbs in the Greek. This means they are action words.
 - c. One church father, John Chryostam, shared: *“long tempered” is used of one who is wronged and has the power to avenge themselves, but won’t.*¹
 - 2. When dealing with difficult people we must be kind (verse 4).
 - a. This means that we always extend grace, love, and support. We must be Jesus to them.
 - b. Love is friendly and helpful.
 - c. Again, remember, we need others to be kind to us, right? We must be kind.

¹ Swindoll; Insight for Loving; 03.01.2022

- d. Chuck Swindoll shared: the word for “kind” is used for aged wine that has mellowed. When Jesus said my yoke is “easy.” Easy is the same root word as kind.²
3. When dealing with difficult people we must not envy or boast (verse 4).
 - a. We must be humble.
 - b. Envy will say “jealous” in some translations.
 - c. Again, Swindoll shares: “is not jealous” has the idea of holding people loosely without suspicion.³
 - d. How much of a difference would that make? Why do we get suspicious of others?
 - e. Love does not brag; this means it does not call attention to itself.
4. When dealing with difficult people we must not be arrogant (verse 4).
 - a. Again, we must be humble.
 - b. Maybe we are the difficult person.
5. When dealing with difficult people, we must NOT be rude (verse 5).
 - a. No, we must go back to the previous verse and be kind and patient.
 - b. Think of how many Christians can “cuss” without using “cuss words.”
 - c. We can be rude, right?
 - d. This means we do not interrupt.
 - e. This means we are not unreasonably suspicious of others, see above.
 - f. Let’s aim that we are NOT the difficult person.
6. When dealing with difficult people we must not insist on our own way (verse 5).
 - a. Is it possible that they are difficult people because we are insisting on our own way?
 - b. No, we must live out Philippians 2:3-4 and consider others more important than ourselves.
7. When dealing with difficult people we must not be irritable, or resentful (verse 5).

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

- a. That could make it all the worse, couldn't it?
 - b. Again, being loving means that we are not resentful. We are not irritable. If we are irritable, we are likely difficult.
 - c. I read the following in a devotion from John MacArthur:
 - d. *The great eighteenth-century preacher and theologian Jonathan Edwards had a daughter with an uncontrollable temper. When a young man asked Dr. Edwards for his daughter's hand in marriage, he said no. The young man was crushed. "But I love her and she loves me," he pleaded. "That makes no difference," Edwards replied, "she isn't worthy of you." "But she is a Christian, isn't she," the young man argued. "Yes," said Edwards, "but the grace of God can live with some people with whom no one else could ever live."*
 - e. *That may seem harsh, but Jonathan Edwards knew what his would-be son-in-law hadn't yet learned: the presence of selfish anger indicates the absence of genuine love. "Love," said Paul, "is not provoked." It isn't given to sudden outbursts of emotion or action. It doesn't respond in anger to offenses committed against it.*
8. When dealing with difficult people we must not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoice with the truth (verse 6).
- a. This means we want good things. We do not want them to fail. We do not want them to be more difficult. No, we want the best.
 - b. One source shares: *That love "keeps no record of wrongs" is literally "it does not reckon, calculate the bad/evil."*³³⁸ *While the phrase could mean, "Does not contemplate evil," the meaning in context more likely has to do with holding wrongs against someone else.*³³⁹ *Barrett suggests the meaning, "Does not put*

³³⁸ Gk. οὐ λογίζεται τὸ κακόν. BDAG, "Love keeps no score of wrongs."

³³⁹ Ciampa and Rosner, *First Corinthians*, 647. Also Fee (*First Corinthians*, 639), who notes Zech 8:17 and the similar language used there, suggesting a meaning like "love does not devise evil against someone else." Fee thinks, however, that Paul's use in 1 Cor 13:5 more likely refers to

down evil to one's account."³⁴⁰ Collins renders as "does not calculate evil" and comments, "Following on the mention of being carried away in anger it may be a subtle reminder that vengeance belongs only to the Lord alone (cf. Rom 2:19 with its citation of Deut 32:35; 1 Thess 4:6 with its allusion to Ps 94:1)."³⁴¹

- c. This may mean that we are not thin skinned.
 - d. We do not hold a grudge.
9. When dealing with difficult people we must bear all things (verse 7).
- a. This means that love covers sins and protects believers from further harm.
 - b. We protect. We want the best.
10. When dealing with difficult people we must believe all things (verse 7).
- a. This means that we give them the benefit of the doubt. Let's believe the best.
 - b. We are not automatically suspicious.
11. When dealing with difficult people we must hope in all things (verse 7).
- a. Do we hope the best for them?
 - b. MacArthur shares: *Hope is illustrated in the true story of a dog who was abandoned at the airport of a large city. He stayed there for over five years, waiting for his master to return. People at the airport fed and cared for him, but he refused to leave the spot where he last saw his master. If a dog's love for his master can produce that kind of hope, how much more should your love for God produce abiding hope?*
12. When dealing with difficult people we must endure all things (verse 7).

that done to one by another person. Paul's claims that love "keeps no record of wrongs" reflects the Jesus tradition at this point, "Father, forgive them" (Luke 23:34). The next quality of love, "does not rejoice in unrighteousness," would be redundant if 13:5 means "does not contemplate/think upon evil."

³⁴⁰ Barrett, *First Corinthians*, 305.

³⁴¹ Collins, *First Corinthians*, 481.

⁴ Mark Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen, vol. 28, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 312.

- a. We must do whatever we can to preserve the relationship and for sure to preserve the faith.
- b. Love endures.

So, I think those are good instructions for dealing with difficult people.

C.S. Lewis writes:

To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket - safe, dark, motionless, airless – it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. The alternative to tragedy, or at least to the risk of tragedy, is damnation. The only place outside Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love is Hell.

I believe that the most lawless and inordinate loves are less contrary to God's will than a self-invited and self-protective lovelessness. It is like hiding the talent in a napkin and for much the same reason 'I knew thee that thou wert a hard man.' Christ did not teach and suffer that we might become, even in the natural loves, more careful of our own happiness. If a man is not uncalculating towards the earthly beloveds whom he has seen, he is none the more likely to be so towards God whom he has not. We shall draw nearer to God, not by trying to avoid the sufferings inherent in all loves, but by accepting them and offering them to Him; throwing away all defensive armour. If our hearts need to be broken, and if He chooses this as the way in which they should break, so be it.⁵

Prayer

⁵ Lewis, C.S. *The Four Loves*. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1960), 169-170