

Rejoicing in the Truth

1 Corinthians 13:7

[Couple Checklist promo...

Click when each item is mentioned:

- ** Chocolates..... \$30
- ** Roses \$60
- ** Weekend in Poconos \$1,000
- ** Couple Check-up! *Priceless!*

** Blank

Whenever we hear 1 Corinthians 13 read – say, at a Wedding – most of us can, if not exactly *recite* the words, we can at least *anticipate* them; they sound very familiar to us, especially those middle verses, the ones that describe ‘love’. “Love is *patient*”... “Love is (?) *kind*”. “Does not *envy*, does not *boast*, is not *proud or rude*.” Have you heard this before? I’m sure you have.

It goes on... Love is “*not easily angered*” and “*keeps no record of wrongs*” (we talked about this last week). The next line, however, is one that we tend to overlook, I think. We like to get to verse 7 – “*It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.*”

But there is a verse in between those. I don’t know that I’ve ever heard a sermon on this one, and I know I’ve never preached one before this weekend! The practical applications of not quickly getting angry over something, or forgetting the bad things, or of patience and kindness – they’re all rather *obvious*. Deep, too – but we don’t have to think too hard about them to understand them and see how they might apply to our lives and relationships. Even if we don’t *do* it very well, we at least understand these.

**Verse seven, though is a little different. Here’s what it says...

“Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.”

These two clauses are not meant to be read as two separate ideas, they are meant to go together – they form a contrast... one side of a coin and the other, so to speak. The Negative and the Positive.

Rejoicing in the Truth

On the negative side, we read that Love does *not* delight in evil. It takes no pleasure in wrongdoing. Love is never glad about injustice, and is not happy when evil (or, 'wrong') wins. Love takes no joy in hearing evil openly discussed.

One commentator put it like this: "Love is never glad to hear bad news about another person. Love never says, "Well, they finally got what they deserved." Love is never happy to hear that a brother or sister has fallen. Love does not enjoy passing bad news along to anyone.

This all, of course, goes against the grain of our modern culture. We all know that "bad news sells" and that good news goes on page 35. Why else would they put those supermarket tabloids right by the checkout counter? People want to hear the latest juicy gossip about our favorite celebrities – and mostly they want to hear about their failures. (Even if they're made up, apparently! Because, really, that stuff *can't* be true!)

This passage tell us that true love, genuine love, isn't like that. Real love turns away from gossip and rumors. And even when a rumor turns out to be true, genuine love takes no pleasure in the misfortunes of others, there's a sadness when we hear of someone's fall.

A Greek word that Paul uses here, **adikia, (lit. 'not right') in general refers to a disregard for that which is right (especially what is right in God's eyes). So, it is a disregard for God's laws and the obedience due God. It doesn't care about pleasing God. And this passage is saying to us, that's not what love is about. Love is never happy with evil, but instead, it rejoices whenever truth emerges. Or, we could say that love *rejoices* (and that's a great word too, that means ** 'celebrate') – real love *celebrates* whenever the *truth* wins.

This is an interesting contrast here, between *evil* and *truth*. What is not *true* is ... evil. Now, this requires a bit of thought... we're here in week two in this short series on communication in relationships (particularly Marriage) called "Yoked for *Life*". ('Life' referring to the 'Abundant Life' that is Jesus promises to his followers.) So, I'd like you to think a bit with me about what this verse would look like in practice, in a relationship.

Rejoicing in the Truth

Let's consider this: "What difference would it make – or could it make – if in our most significant relationships we truly find that we *celebrate* what is *true*, or *right*, or *just*?" That this is our 'joy'?

I suspect that most of us would say, "It would make no difference at all, because that, of course, is what I *always* want." But I remember reading a paraphrase of this verse once that has stayed **with me... sometimes I even read this verse like this at weddings... "Love never delights in evil, but rejoices in the truth..." "even when it is to our own disadvantage."

Is *that* what we're about? I think, if we're honest, a lot of us would have to admit that at best, we're inconsistent here... we are often happy with our opinions, our situations, our outlooks... as they are, *right or wrong*. We prefer the *status quo*. (Which is of course, Latin for "the mess we're in!") And don't confuse me with facts!

We've all heard the expression, "The truth hurts". Even when the truth hurts, the hurt is not due to the truth, but the truth hurts because of the broken nature of human beings. I believe that truth always brings us closer to God, and the truth shines the Light of God's power into every dark corner. That's why the opposite of 'truth' here in this passage is 'evil'. In truth and in love, there is always joy because the truth always leads us to God. Even when it is initially painful, ultimately, the truth brings joy... and (as per the title of this series, "*Life*")

Truth be told however, often we'd rather live with something less than *truth* than make the effort (which could be uncomfortable or painful) to align ourselves with God's way of seeing things. Sometimes God wants to change our reality, our perspective, but we're not exactly... interested.

I know there were some people last week who had a hard time accepting the statistic that I shared from George Barna, (Barna Research) stating that conservative Christians have a higher rate of divorce than the rest of the groups they polled, including Atheists and Agnostics. Well, I think that *should* make us uncomfortable, but, again, sometimes the truth hurts. Realizing that this is the situation should lead churches in two directions:

Rejoicing in the Truth

1. Provide help and support for those going through the pain of divorce, and making sure that we are not stigmatizing or labeling anyone... and 2. Doing more to help strengthen marriages. We're trying to do both, here.

Now, I'm not trying to induce guilt – I don't work like that – but another illustration of this verse that kept coming to me this week is that I know, that there's a bit of reluctance (and there's been a *lot* of discussion) among some couples in our congregation about whether or not to take the Marriage Check-up that we're offering. And it seems that the reluctance is due to fear over what 'might be stirred up'.

Which is curious, as the point of this exercise is to *build*, and *affirm*, not destroy or tear down; and since the results of the 'check-up' are totally based on our own input, it is *truth* for us... but if we don't want to *see the truth*... if we run from it... then, according to Paul in today's verse... that's not *real* love. (Is there anything wrong with my logic?)

** The English author P. D. James once wrote "Perfect love may cast out fear, but fear is remarkably potent in casting out love!"¹ We talked last week about 'Fighting Fair' – I'd say that many marital 'fights' result not from a quest for 'truth' but more often a quest to 'be right'. If we all were looking simply for 'truth' many discussions would be quite different – both in their methodology and their results. (And believe me, we're all in this boat! I'm not pointing fingers at anyone!)

So, again I ask... What difference would it make – or *could* it make – if in our most significant relationships we are truly seeking our joy in what is *true*, or *right*, or *just*? Wouldn't it mean that we would want to know what our significant 'other' is thinking about things... would it mean that we would *want* them to grow and develop, that we would *celebrate their* doing, and being *everything* that God intended for them to be – not just for us, but for *themselves*? What would this have to say to us (or lead *us* to say) when we realize that we've been wrong about something... or, shortsighted, or selfish?

¹ P. D. James, *Time to Be in Earnest* (Ballantine Books, 2001), p. 45

Rejoicing in the Truth

And how about the way we speak to one another? If the words we say are not pure or unadorned, then it's not the truth. It's easy to start to rationalize small "white lies" because we're telling them for "good" reasons, or to twist the truth to further our cause, to exaggerate the truth to make us look better. To withhold information – to tell only "part of the story" - which can serve to paint a completely different picture. We've all done it..., isn't all of this the opposite of 'rejoicing in the truth'?

**In writing to a fellow named Gaius, his brother in the faith, the Apostle John wrote,

*"For I was very glad when brethren came and testified to your truth, that is, how you are walking in truth. I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth."
(3 John 3-4)*

No greater joy than this... knowing that we are walking in the truth. That this is what our lives are about. Paul wrote that "love rejoices in the truth." There is nothing more important, or more foundational, than that we build our lives on a lifestyle of living in the truth. We can have all the self-esteem we want, have great paying jobs, be the best at anything and everything we try, but if we lack truth in our lives, we really haven't accomplished anything from God's perspective.

Love rejoices and congratulates others when it sees them walking in the truth. We all know how easy it is to become critical of others when they fall short of *our* goals for their lives! (This is especially true in family relationships.) Our children are not as smart as we had hoped or our wife isn't as concerned about neatness as we think she should be, or the husband fails to do something deemed "husbandly". We can easily get our standards from unhealthy places – i.e., we see the pretty and perfect people on TV or we have an ideal of how 'everybody else' lives, and then wonder why our lives aren't measuring up.

But if we could look deeper we might see substance of greater value, something of lasting value, a life and a heart that has been made pure by the power of God. Again, what would happen in our relationships if we tried to learn to look deeper into each other's lives? What if we tried to learn to look with the eyes of love? Rejoicing in *truth* – even when it is not to our 'advantage'? Even when it hurts?

Rejoicing in the Truth

Singer Johnny Cash's wife, June Carter Cash, died in 2003. As a follower of Jesus, she displayed many Christ-like qualities in her life. In particular, she never quit loving her husband and never quit challenging him, despite his failings. You could say that, above all else she wanted ... the truth.

In his 1998 autobiography, Johnny Cash describes how his wife stuck with him through his years of amphetamine abuse:

“June said she knew me—knew the kernel of me, deep inside, beneath the drugs and deceit and despair and anger and selfishness, and knew my loneliness... She said she could help me... If she found my pills, she flushed them down the toilet. *And find them she did; she searched for them, relentlessly.*²

There's an example of the truth hurting... but leading to a greater joy.

Love rejoices whenever the truth wins out... even when it is to our own disadvantage.

Here's another different kind of example of someone rejoicing in the truth (i.e., doing the right thing, even when it 'cost them' something... at least at first.) Two missed free throws, ordinarily the cause of a coach's headache, became the symbol of sportsmanship in a Milwaukee boys' basketball game in 2009.

Milwaukee Madison senior Johntell Franklin, lost his mother, Carlitha, to cancer on Saturday, Feb. 7, decided he wanted to play in that night's game against DeKalb (Ill.) High School after previously indicating he would sit out.

He arrived at the gym in the second quarter, but Franklin's name was not in the scorebook because his coach, Aaron Womack Jr., didn't expect him to be there. Rules dictated Womack would have to be assessed a technical, but he decided he would put Franklin in the game anyway. DeKalb coach Dave Rohlman and his players knew about the situation, and told the referees they did not want the call made. The referees had no choice. But Coach Rohlman did.

² Johnny Cash, *Cash: The Autobiography* (Harper, 1998)

Rejoicing in the Truth

"I gathered my kids and said, 'Who wants to take these free throws?'" Rohlman said, recounting the game to the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. "Darius McNeal put up his hand. I said, 'You realize you're going to miss, right?' He nodded his head."

McNeal, a senior point guard, went to the line. The Milwaukee Madison players stayed by their bench, waiting for the free throws. Instead of seeing the ball go through the net, they saw the ball on the court, rolling over the end line.

"I turned around and saw the ref pick up the ball and hand it back to the player," Womack said ... "And then [McNeal] did the same thing again."

Said Rohlman: "Darius set up for a regular free throw, but he only shot it two or three feet in front of him. It bounced once or twice and just rolled past the basket."

"I did it for the guy who lost his mom," McNeal told the newspaper. "It was the right thing to do." Womack, overwhelmed by DeKalb's gesture, wrote a letter to the DeKalb Daily Chronicle, which had first reported the story.

"As a principal, school, school district staff, and community you should all feel immense pride for the remarkable job that the coaching staff is doing in not only coaching these young men, but teaching them how to be leaders," Womack wrote.

DeKalb had traveled more than two hours for the game, and waited another two as Womack rushed from the hospital, where he had been with Franklin, to the school to gather his team.

"We were sympathetic to the circumstances and the events," Rohlman said in the Journal Sentinel. "We even told Coach Womack that it'd be OK to call off the game, but he said we had driven 2½ hours to get here and the kids wanted to play. So we said, 'Spend some time with your team and come out when you're ready.'"

The two schools had met twice previously, and this one ended with a Madison victory, but as in the other games, they also shared a pizza dinner, "four kids to a pizza, two Madison kids and two DeKalb kids," Womack told the Journal Sentinel.

"That letter became a big deal in DeKalb," Rohlman said in the paper. "We got lots of positive calls and e-mails because of it. Even though we lost the game, it was a true life lesson, and it's not one our kids are going to forget anytime soon."³

Interesting choice of words: "it was a *true* life lesson"

**Love does not delight in evil... but rejoices whenever the truth wins out...

Even when it hurts. At first.

³ http://espn.go.com/high-school/boys-basketball/story/_/id/3914375/team-gesture-supports-grieving-opponent/