

1. Love Does Not Pursue Self-Flourishing

- a. This phrase has been translated numerous different ways
 - i. Examples
 1. “does not insist on his own way” (ESV, RSV, NRSV)
 2. “is not self-seeking” (NIV)
 3. “is not self-serving” (NET)
 4. “does not seek its own interest” (NAB)
 5. “does not seek its own” (NASB)
 - ii. Literally, “does not seek its own [things]”
 1. The object is not stated, it is left in ellipsis
 2. The context comes from 10:23-24
 - a. “all things are lawful, but not all things are profitable”
 - b. “do not seek your own [x], but the [x] of the other” (v24)
 - i. Thus, the [x] is “profit” or “advantage”
 - c. Paul refers to his own *modus operandi* as “I do not seek my own *profit*, but that profit of the many...” (v33)
 - iii. Thus, the operational norm of Love is that which seeks to cause the other person(s) to flourish, to be built up, to gain
- b. Seek – “to strive after”
 - i. The idea is concerning intensity or priority of pursuit
 1. “strive for” is a good contextual translation
 - ii. It is a common axiom of the Flesh, the natural human heart’s condition, to love itself, to honor itself, to strive after its own glory, comfort, sustenance, and power
 1. “although we knew God, we did not honor Him, nor give thanks, but we became futile in our thinking and our foolish hearts were darkened. We became fools, while deeming ourselves wise, having exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling moral man and other created things...” (cf. Rom 1:18-32)
 2. We make ourselves the center of the world, and all of our strivings are centered on obtaining or defending such glory, which leads to the warfare of self-righteous pride and self-righteous despair with God, with each other, and within our own souls (Galatians 5)
 - iii. It is not that we seek to demean ourselves, but Love does not even consider itself in the equation, at least not *foremost*
 1. So, it is not self-hatred, but such a certain expectation of God’s good provision, believing His Word, that our strivings are not to obtain anything but what He has commanded and promised
 2. In this, our efforts and striving are for the sake of others, without the *need* to obtain anything for ourselves but to honor the Lord from who we have received all good things
 - a. PROMISE: Ephesians 1:3-14
 - b. PROMISE: Romans 8:28-32
 - c. PROMISE: 1 Cor 3:21-23
 - d. PROMISE: 2 Thess 2:16-17
- c. the things which bring itself flourishing
 - i. “The opposite of love is not hatred; it is in indifference.” (Keller)
 1. In this way, our ignorance of others, our lack of concern, our indifference, is self-centeredness.
 2. We often can excuse our lack of love because it does not feel like animosity (“I don’t hate him, I just don’t want to ever see him again”)
 - ii. Self-centeredness is not merely immoral, it is completely unlike God
 1. It places myself at the functional center of the Universe, expecting to be served and receive power, prestige, reputation, comfort, glory
 2. We, as His image-bearers, with His Spirit, are to reflect Him by *seeking to cause the other to flourish* (Father-Son-Spirit)

3. God gives, to the righteous and the unrighteous; He labors for the well-being of mutinous creatures; He loves the world
 - a. And HE IS the functional center of the Universe!
- iii. One of the greatest fronts in the Spirit's battle against the Flesh is our need to redefine love into consistency with God's *other-flourishing* love
 1. It is warfare because our human hearts are self-serving, and even our love is often tainted with self-serving motives
 - a. So when God tells us to "consider others as surpassing us in honor" (Phil 2:3), we cringe to apply it to "that" person
 2. We naturally believe that haters need to be punished
 - a. We do this actively: wrath, vengeance, violence, fits of rage, gossip, shaming, public exposure, etc.
 - b. We do this passively through avoidance, dismissal, indifference, de-friending, etc.
 3. Whether active vengeance or passive indifference, both work against the righteousness of God, the way things are supposed to be among us, and destroy those for whom Christ died.
 - a. "the wrath of man does not accomplish the righteousness of God" (James 1:19)
 - b. "[Love] does not believe that 'finding oneself' is the highest good; it is not enamored with self-gain, self-justification, self-worth. To the contrary, it seeks the good one's neighbor – or enemy (cf. Phil 2:4)." – Gordon Fee

2. Love Seeks the Flourishing of Active Enemies

- a. "not irritable" or "not provoked" = *moved to wrath by another's actions against oneself*
 - i. The OT usage connects this "provoked" aspect to "despise" or "scorn"
 1. Thus, it is to be provoked to anger by being disrespected, scorned, or treated as contemptuous
 - ii. Almost always used of God being provoked by His people's disrespect, scorn, or contempt by idolatry (Numbers 14:11; Deut 1:31-34; 9:7-8; Ezra 9:14; Ps 10:3-4; Pr 14:31; Zech 10:3 [kindled]; Isa 5:24-25)
 1. Why is it that God is provoked in such a way, but we are not to be? How can God be loving and be provoked if love is not provoked?
 - a. May it be that God is worthy of worship and we are not? May it be that love, for us, is not to defend our righteousness, but God's?
 - b. Just as God does for His own glory, so we are to for His glory, and not our own?
- b. When we are provoked to wrath, *we are acting as if we are God!*
 - i. And, in a real sense, even our irritability, our short-temperedness, our little grunts of frustration or loud exhales that the person in front of us in the movie theater are meant to hear, are really small claims to the throne of God, tiny war cries of mutiny
 - ii. Why do we get irritated? Is it not that we believe that we deserve more respect than we think we are receiving, not merely respect, but *submission to our desires and plans*?
 1. I get irritated with a slow driver because they should know my schedule. My tardiness is not my fault that I left late, it's their fault for driving slow. So, I get irritated. They are not bowing to my will.
 2. I get frustrated with my dogs for playing next to me because my desire and will is to watch a fictional story on a piece of lighted glass. They are not bowing to my will, which I have deemed to be all-important in that moment, and my wrath bursts through to consume them.
 3. Do you see, that irritability, the little burr under the saddles of our hearts, is rooted in wanting to be God, to be treated as gods?
 - iii. Thus, irritability is not a small things, a little peccadillo, it is a sign of a much bigger problem: arrogant sedition against God.
- c. There is a proper wrath in love, but it is other-protective

- i. Righteous anger does not come from self-love, but from other-love, the desire to build up others and to honor the Lord.
- ii. The premier example is Jesus, who endured scorn, spite, contempt, and withheld His righteous wrath because, in the words of Peter, "When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, *but continued entrusting Himself to the one who judges justly.*" (1 Pet 2:23)
 - 1. Jesus endured contempt because He trusted the Father. [POEM]
- d. Love is not controlled by another's behavior or words
 - i. Often, our wrath, anger, depression, guilt, etc. responds to another person's words or actions
 - ii. But faith in the gospel, the good news of the Almighty uncreated God's great grace towards us in the gift of His Son and Spirit, gives us reason to:
 - 1. Recognize that what angers me may be unjustified (I am a sinner with a god-complex, in need of grace)
 - 2. Recognize that what angers us may be justified (They are sinners with a god-complex, in need of grace)
 - 3. Love them sacrificially because my hope is not whatever they have stolen from me, but in God's great and precious promises
- e. Love works for its enemy's flourishing, just like God.
 - i. Matt 5:43-45 – be sons of your Father, who blesses the just and unjust
 - ii. Jesus, the one who only suffered for righteousness, reveals the love of God to us and how to love others well, striving for their flourishing, *especially when those others revile and demean you*
 - 1. He did not seek his own advantage in our salvation, but His Father's and ours!
 - 2. Phil 2:6 – "did not consider equality with God something to be clung to, but He emptied Himself *taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of Man...*"
 - a. Jesus' act of emptying Himself was taking the form of servanthood, expressed by His incarnation, to the point of death
 - b. This was an active pursuit of His, a zealous decision to love His Father and to love us, disregarding His own comfort, power, authority/rights, even though He had them in His hand and within His grasp
 - 3. Romans 15:1-7
 - a. "Even Christ did not strive to please Himself, but as it is written, "The revilings of those who reviled You, fell on me.""
 - b. Thus, Christ Jesus bore up the disgraces, the hatreds, the shaming, the reproaches against Him *with a desire to please His Father and to benefit the very ones who hated Him!*
 - 4. Matt 20:28 – "The Son of Man did come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for the many"
 - 5. 2 Cor 8:9 – "Though he was rich, for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich..."

3. How Do We Do This? Love is Controlled by Gospel Hope.

- a. 1 Peter 3:8-9
 - i. Peter is connecting the promise of future blessing (inherit) with the power of present mercy
 - ii. Here is a powerful truth: We love our enemies well *when we see, savor, and seize the future promises of God's blessing.*
 - 1. Jesus "entrusted Himself to the One who judges rightly": we tend to be vengeful when we doubt that God will do well
 - iii. What we *hope* in dictates our present behavior.
 - 1. Thus, the command to not return insult for insult, hatred for hatred, demeaning for demeaning, is rooted in God's promise of blessing
 - 2. When I believe God's promise, that He has prepared for me all that my heart longs for, and that I must wait for Him, then I don't *need to obtain the shadows of these things now.*

- a. I don't have to have the comfort of my television show.
 - b. I don't have to protect the façade of my reputation of punctuality, but can repent of my tardiness as my fault and not the other drivers, making changes to leave earlier as my own issue, not theirs
 - c. When my heart is trusting in the Lord's promises, then I love others well, but if my joy is set on these present comforts, then when they are threatened, I defend them like a Mama Bear.
 - iv. Jesus "endured the cross, despising its shame, *for the joy set before Him*"
 - 1. When you are mistreated and you feel animosity and bitterness growing within your heart, you must stop and ask, "In what am I placing my hope for life?"
- b. 1 Peter 3:18
 - i. Christ died, "the righteous for the unrighteous, *that he might bring us to God...*"
 - 1. We see that love gives up its own present comforts, pleasures, and ease in order to bring others to know God rightly and to be reconciled to Him
 - 2. If irritability is rooted in wanting to be God, or acting like Him in sovereignty, then love is rooted in wanting others to see God and acting like Him in self-sacrifice and mercy
 - 3. "that he might bring us *to God.*"
 - ii. Do you see that functional enemy as having an eternal destiny, either with God in transformed beauty for the glory of God, or as a hater of God in unleashed horror and terrible hellish judgment?
 - 1. Every person who provokes you, is somebody made in God's image on one of two sides in the cosmic war of thrones.
 - 2. There are no neutral players and there is no "little" game. Every person, in the light of this, ought to be treated with the proper circumspect and awe correlative to this reality.
 - 3. Nobody is an obstacle to your joy, only distrusting God is. Love trusts God and seeks to cause others to flourish in a reconciled relationship to Him, with hope securely anchored in the only capable anchor point: the Word and promises of God.
- c. How do we love our enemies like this?
 - i. Remember the depth of our need for God's mercy (repentance) "I am the foremost of sinners" (1 Tim 1:15)
 - ii. Remember God's provision of His Son for our flourishing *as complete and utter grace* (faith) "Christ came into the world to save sinners...I received mercy" (1 Tim 1:15-16)
 - iii. God's love for us in the gospel of the crucified King is the "King Blossom" around which our love for others flourishes.
 - 1. The "king-blossom" is the central bloom in the cluster of apple blossoms [pic]
 - a. It is the first to bloom, the first to pollinate, the lead of the other fruits.
 - 2. This means that when we are regenerated by God and answer the gospel calling, we are centrally becoming less self-centered and more other-centered (this is hopeful, for it is God's work in us!)
 - iv. Titus 3:1-7