

LOVE THAT LASTS, 1COR.13:7

40 Days of Love #6

◆ **Intro:** Euripides once said, "It's not real love unless it's eternal" Mark Twain has been quoted as saying, "You don't really understand perfect love until you've been married at least a quarter of a century." It would seem then that lasting is the real test of love. Love at first sight is not that impressive, really. Anybody can fall in love just as anybody can fall off a horse. It does however take some skill to ride a horse and even more to stay in love for a lifetime.

◆ I'm curious. How many of you have been married, or if your spouse has passed on, were married at least 25 years? Please stand! Way to go. If you've been married 40 years or longer could you stay standing a minute? Awesome. Any 50 years or longer? (if so, I would like you to come up here now and help me teach this mornings text!)

◆ Thanks. Please sit. Now of those married more than 25 years, I feel confident to say that none of you would claim it was easy. Oh it would be easy if we could get our partner to be as perfect as we think we are. But what makes lasting love difficult is that the people who try it, are all sinners. Yeah, that's pretty much it. All of us, the Bible say, have a sin problem. We are selfish by nature even with the people we say we love, and that can kill love. (We looked at that last week.)

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◆ So how do we love so that it lasts. We've been digging into Paul's letter to the Corinthian church in the first century. He reminded them, and us, that love is

◆ *"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres." 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, NIV.*

◆ Today lets ponder that last sentence. Our text says love always protects. We could put it this way...

◆ **1. For my love to last, I must chose to extend grace to another.** Other translations say here that love "bears all things", or "puts up with anything", or " is always ready to make allowances." Well, which is it? The NT term is the word στεγω. 1) It means to put a roof over, so as to keep water out. (It can be translated bear, as in putting a cover over oneself that you must hold up. So in that sense, it means to "endure". We can rule this translation out because Paul will use another word for endure 3 words later (persevere)). So Paul describes love as a shelter.

Peter says something about love in his letter that sounds similar.

◆ *"Most important of all, continue to show deep love for each other, for love covers a multitude of sins." 1 Peter 4:8, NLT.*

◆ Here Peter uses a different word that means to "cover" or "put in a cabin". Love "cabinets" sins, so to speak. It puts them away.

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What can we learn from all this covering that love does? Just this:

◆ Love makes a conscious and continuing choice to keep putting sins aside so as to shelter relationship. Love puts up with a lot. Love cuts you slack. Love lets a lot of things slide. It extends grace.

◆ Now, careful with this. It's not the sense in which we have no standard, or don't care about right and wrong.

Remember earlier Paul told us love speaks truth (v6)! But love isn't a grading inspector, you see. Love isn't darting eyes back and forth, being so strict and demanding that it must correct every flaw in those around it, or haul people before the court for each offense, or reprimand, or be wise enough to show other people each of their flaws. Do you get the picture. Love is gracious.

◆ Listen friends, people don't need harping on, nagging on, pointing at, secret conversations of concern with authorities about another person's character flaws. Most of us already know down deep that we're guilty, sinful, and messed up in lots of ways. Every one of us doubts our worth, and plays around with self-hatred. Without the Word of God to tell us how much we are still loved, and how frequently God thinks about, and longs for us we'd find it easy to just give up on goodness and love altogether. And not to mention the dark spirits that are only too pleased to whisper in our ears about our flaws. The Bible has a name for

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the Devil; it's "the accuser"! Accusing destroys. So learn the lesson: accenting someone's guilt, and attacking someone's character do NOT build relationship. They tear it down. Take Jesus' example. Just what was Jesus like that the despised sorts of his day (tax-men, mobsters, and professional prostitutes) socialized with him, the one perfect and sinless person ever to walk the earth? Something tells us he wasn't a constant barrage of correction, and judgement. [Whoa Bartholemew, what you did is inexcusable. One more of those and we'll have to replace you! You are burning bridges my friend!]

◆ I think Paul's use of "always protects" reminds us that lasting sort of love, the one where friendships go on and on, chooses not to "make a scene" even though a wrong has been done. It tempers our tendency to say too much too quickly. Love can keep it's mouth shut. It doesn't heave and sigh so everyone knows you don't like what's happening. That's just not love. That's just pride and self-ness. Love on the other hand understands how fragile people are. Scandals hurt people. Shame damages persons. Be it quiet "filling someone in" or grandiose expose' of another's faults, it isn't love's way. Jesus taught about this in Matthew chapter 18.

◆ *"If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be*

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established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector." Matthew 18:15-17, NIV.

◆ Sometimes spouses make fun of their mates quirks in public, unconsciously hoping it will leverage them into change.

Sometimes parents chew out their child right there on the ball field in the name of being a disciplinarian. Some folks are forever tattling, that is, making sure someone else knows about the flaws they have found in another. Some people bring up their hurts with everyone except the person they have issue with. Some employers demolish workers in sight of all the rest, thinking they are teaching a lesson to all. They are teaching a lesson, but is is one about their own lack of love. Some humans are forever bringing up what they do not like, but at the same time are nowhere near as verbal about what they do like. Any of this sound like you? All of these are recipes for killing love. Lasting love wants to protect, to reduce hurt and suffering. Real love hurts with the hurting, is embarrassed with the embarrassed.

◆ *"We should please others. If we do what helps them, we will build them up in the Lord. For even Christ didn't please himself. ...So accept each other just as Christ has accepted you; then God will be glorified." Romans 15:2-7, NLT.*

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◆ Love always protects. Who is the Holy Spirit bringing into your mind right now, that God wants you to extend grace to? Next Paul says that love always trusts. We could put it like this:

◆ **2. For love to last, I must choose to express confidence in another.**

◆ **A.** Our text says, love always trusts. Again translations vary: some say “love never stops believing.” or “love believes all things”, or “love never loses faith.”

◆ 1) On one end of the spectrum, Paul certainly isn't talking about being gullible. Gullible people believe everything they hear. They buy the Sham-wow, and the 3 extra sets for a mere addition of \$19.99, and the Mop-wow, and the Dust-wow, and the Vac-wow attachments... because they trust people. Paul is certainly not telling us to believe everything just because it's printed in the newspaper, or on the internet. So what does it mean that Love always trusts? Love does not subscribe to nonsense, but it does go beyond common sense.

◆ 2) On the other end of personality spectrums is the cynic who believes nothing, and trusts nobody. He assumes people are as bad as they can be. He looks at the world with a cold distrust. He is suspicious, and always on edge. Perhaps because he sees the worst sort of things in himself, he thinks the worst of everyone else as well.

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◆ Which side should the wise person lean toward? Being cynical/overly careful, or being gullible/over-trusting? If you were thinking cynical you're wrong. *Psychology Today* magazine reported in an article "Trust and its Consequences" that Dr. Julian Rotter of the University of Connecticut spent years studying the consequences of trust in human behavior, personality development and relationships. He developed a scale to determine the level of trust in a person's life. Then he compared how trusting a person was with ten different common behaviors for healthy living. Let me give you a little True or False trust test.

- ◆ Trusting people tend to be more gullible.
- ◆ Trusting people tend to have a lower IQ.
- ◆ Trusting people live more disappointed lives.
- ◆ "Gullible" is not in the dictionary.

◆ All false. Study after study has shown that trusting people are consistently less gullible. They have a higher IQ. And they live much happier lives than cynical, questioning, suspicious people. Love always trusts.

◆ B. Listen, "always trusting" doesn't mean you have to believe everyone you meet is as pure as the driven snow. Still the person of lasting love doesn't assume all people are liars either, but he knows well what might cause someone to lie. So while love doesn't throw all doubts all away, it is willing to give someone the benefit of the doubt. Love is always leaning toward trust. That

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is, the kind of love that lasts, relaxes it's guard, as Lewis Smedes puts it. There is a sort of careless streak in love. It can be careless with it's goods. Like Mary dumping expensive perfume on Jesus' feet. It can be careless with it's self. Not so concerned that we might not get reciprocal attention. Or that someone we help will be able to help us. Or that we might be misinterpreted in our attempts at kindness and end up looking like a fool. Love can live with looking like a fool if a little love might come to life. When lasting love comes alive, maybe you will be less practical and a little more sure of another person's worth, a little less demanding that all scales be balanced.

◆**C.** Who in your world are you trying to balance scales with? Who are you sure really needs to learn a lesson? What might it look like if you exercised "always trusting" love? Maybe we'd be less nervous when calculating our share of a group dinner bill. Maybe we'd be open to "getting taken" on the possibility that the person we help really needs it. Maybe we'd send our teen off without repeating all our instructions a 5th time, and if they fail, we don't resolve that we should have said it one more time, or that it's the end of the world to fail. Love gives people second and third chances. (After that it's over. Three strikes you're out, right?

After that put `em in their place. Let `em have it, I say! -No?)

◆*"Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me?"*

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Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times." Matthew 18:21, 22, NIV.

◆ Have you ever said any of these?

◆ "I'm never going back to that church as long as I live."

◆ "That's the last time you'll ever touch me."

◆ "See if I ever volunteer there again!"

◆ "That's it, they're off the list."

◆ **Conclusion:** An old couple was celebrating 50 years. Their Golden Anniversary. They were asked for some sagely advice, or at least how they managed together for so long. The aged wife replied, "Well, when we got married, I made a list of 10 things my husband could do that I would forgive him for. A guest asked the woman what some of the faults she had chosen to overlook were. The grandmother replied, "To tell you the truth, my dear, I never did get around to listing them. But whenever my husband did something that made me hopping mad, I would say to myself, *Lucky for him that's one of the ten!*"

◆ To be trusted is a gift that love gives. And we're out of time. There are two more keys in verse 7 that we'll look at next week when we celebrate the wrap up of our 40 Days of Love with dinner, and testimonies! Maybe you remember that I said early on, and along the way that there isn't a person in this room who can do this. As wonderful as it sounds, as much as we'd like to live these things, the turning point for you will not come until you admit that you cannot be savior of your own heart. The

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necessary step is to open your heart and cry out to Jesus for love, for forgiveness of sin, for power to love others like he loves you.