

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 25 October 2020. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

The Heart of Charity

2 Peter 1:5-7

On 30 April 2005, a very important event happened: Katie and I were married! Now, there were several themes that were woven into our wedding. For one thing, we did an Irish theme, since we had already surrendered ourselves to God as missionary church planters in Ireland. Kelly green was our main colour; and Irish songs such as “Be Thou My Vision” were played during our wedding ceremony and reception. However, the most important theme that we wove into our wedding was the Bible’s teaching about “love” in **1 Corinthians 13**. Katie’s Dad read **1 Corinthians 13** during the ceremony; one of Katie’s pastors from her growing-up years preached on **1 Corinthians 13**; and, during our reception, we had three shamrock-shaped “satellite cakes” alongside the main cake, with the words “faith,” “hope,” and “charity” written on them. These words, of course, are taken from **1 Corinthians 13:13**: ***“And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three: but the greatest of these is charity.”***

Katie and I chose to make **1 Corinthians 13** the centrepiece our wedding because we believe that a husband and wife can have true, pure, sacrificial love in their marriage *only* when Christ is enthroned as the Ruler of their home. Charity (the kind of pure love that comes from God) is needed not only to make marriages *happy*, but to make them pleasing to God. Merely having **1 Corinthians 13** read aloud in our wedding ceremony, and having “faith, hope, and charity” cakes in our wedding reception, was not some kind of “magic” that guaranteed us a successful marriage. In order to have a marriage that pleases God, Katie and I must *practice* true, godly charity every day of our lives.

However, this is true not only in marriages, but in *every area* of Christians’ lives. Whether a believer be a man, woman, boy, or girl; young, middle-aged, or elderly; single or married; rich or poor; a student, labourer, a parent, or a retiree, God’s will is that that every believer produce unfeigned, godly love.

Now, how can we be sure that our love is what the Bible calls “charity”? How can we be sure that our love is the kind of love that comes from God, and that truly pleases God? In order for us to have true charity, there are eight spiritual qualities that they must be adding to our lives every day. If you have been paying attention to the past six messages, you know that **faith** in Christ is the foundation of all these spiritual qualities. Then, we must add to our faith virtue; and then add knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, and brotherly kindness--until finally, we add the crowning quality of **charity** (love). Charity is the sum total of all these other virtues. In order to have charity, you must have faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, and brotherly kindness.

Yet, what, exactly, *is* charity? How can you define something as fathomless as “love”? We’ve seen, from **1 Corinthians 13**, that faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, and brotherly kindness make up the substance of charity; but is there anything else that we need to know about charity? Does the Scripture give us any more descriptions of charity, which could help us to understand exactly what it is? Yes, it does. This morning we will examine the core substance of charity--the real “heart” of charity, so to speak. The title of this message is ***The Heart of Charity***.

Read 2 Peter 1:5-7.

What is at the “heart” of charity? What is godly love at its very core? Well, first of all...

I. Charity is the opposite of pride.

Please turn in your Bible to **1 Corinthians 13**; and as you’re turning there, I will remind you of what we’ve been learning. As we’ve studied **2 Peter 1**, we’ve seen that Peter’s list of eight spiritual qualities is also found in **1 Corinthians 13**. For example, in **1 Corinthians 13:7**, we saw that **faith** is part of the very substance of charity. Paul says that charity “*believeth all things.*” (In other words, implicit belief, or faith, in God’s Word is part of charity.) We also saw, in **verse 13**, that Paul binds faith into a three-fold cord, along with hope and charity. He said, “*And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three.*” We also saw that **virtue** is part of charity. In **verse 8** Paul wrote that “*Charity never faileth.*” In other words, “Charity always does what is right.” “Doing what is right” is the very definition of virtue; and Paul says that this quality is part of charity! We also saw how **patience** fits into charity, in statements such as “*Charity suffereth long,*” and “*beareth all things,*” and “*endureth all things.*”

Almost all Paul’s descriptions of charity in **1 Corinthians 13** have been studied now. However, there are still two other descriptions of charity that we haven’t looked at. In these two descriptions of charity, we shall see the very “heart” of charity—the innermost part of it—the thing that makes godly love what it is. Let’s look at the first one.

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4.

There are many things that make up charity. Faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, and brotherly kindness are all part of charity. However, at the very heart of charity is *the denial of self*. This is why Paul says that “*Charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up.*” The very “heart” of charity is to put God first, others second, and self last. *This* is what makes godly love what it is. We’ve seen this again and again as we’ve studied these spiritual qualities. Remember what Jesus said when He was asked what the greatest commandment is? He said, “*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*” (Matthew 22:37-39). In true love, self is always last. John the Baptist put it this way: “*He (Christ) must increase; but I must decrease*” (John 3:30).

Love is the opposite of pride; and pride is the opposite of love. True love, Paul says, does not “*vaunt*” itself, and is not “*puffed up.*” That word “*vaunt*” means “to boast”; and “*puffed up*” means “inflated.” Just as yeast rises in a pan of bread, and makes the loaf appear to be much bigger than it really is, so pride inflates one’s self-image, and makes self appear to be bigger and more important than it really is. Oftentimes pride is disguised so well, that it actually *looks like* humility to the unsuspecting. However, it is pride, nonetheless; and it cannot be mixed with love. Let’s look at another place where this term “*puffed up*” is used.

Read 1 Corinthians 8:1.

Look at the contrast, here. Knowledge (whether it be worldly knowledge, or biblical knowledge that is misused in order to glorify self) makes a person **“puffed up”** in his own mind. In stark contrast, charity **“edifies,”** or **“builds up”** others. Pride gives the appearance of “bigness”; but it is not built upon a solid foundation. It will eventually collapse. That’s why the Bible says that **“Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall” (Proverbs 16:18)**. Charity, on the other hand, builds others upon a solid foundation, because it endeavours to establish others’ lives upon Christ and His Word.

From the moment when the first sin was committed, pride has *always* been the opposite of love. When Lucifer’s heart was lifted up in pride—at that moment when he first desired to sit upon the throne of the Most High God—it was at that moment when love for God *died* in him. And when Lucifer’s love for *God* died, his love for everyone else died, too.

Read Isaiah 14:12-14.

Five times, Lucifer declared “I will”! Now, I ask you: Did you hear any love in Lucifer’s ‘I will’ speech? No, you didn’t, because there was none. When pride entered Lucifer’s heart, love died; and he has been an indescribably wicked, selfish, malignant being ever since then. So it was when mankind sinned. When Adam and Eve bought into Satan’s lie that they could be “like gods,” and chose to disobey God, and declared that they were now the rulers of their own lives, love suddenly died. When pride entered their hearts, love for God, and for each other, vanished (or, at best, was twisted and perverted). Even when they realised their colossal failure, they did not run to God to ask for forgiveness and restoration; instead, they recoiled from Him. God, in His love, had to *seek after them*, and find them. Even when He had found them, they still showed no sign of love for God, or for each other. Adam (being the gallant, brave husband that he was) blamed his wife, *and God*, for his failure; and Eve blamed the devil. Ever hear that saying, “The devil made me do it”? That’s exactly what Eve said!

Now, thank God, Adam and Eve did find forgiveness and salvation when they placed their faith in God’s promise that a Saviour would one day come to take away their sin. Nevertheless, the sin nature, which they had now acquired, remained with them; and it has been passed down to every one of us. **Romans 5:12** says, **“Wherefore as by one may sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.”** **Psalm 58:3** says that we **“wicked”** from our mother’s wombs—that we are already **“estranged”** from God at birth, and that we come forth from our mother’s womb **“speaking lies.”** Which of us did *not* begin to say “me,” “my,” and “No!” as soon as we were able to speak? Which of us did *not* begin to say, “That’s mine!” or “I want!” from the time that we were able to form our first sentences?

Every one of us is naturally inclined to exalt and promote self. Pride has thoroughly corrupted our hearts. In fact, not only does pride corrupt us; it deceives us. As we get older, our pride becomes more and more sophisticated and deceitful. We learn to disguise our pride, and to make it look virtuous, until we convince even *ourselves* that our pride is good. In fact, we can convince ourselves that our pride is actually *love!*

I remember hearing a sermon several years ago, in which the pastor asked the provoking question, “Why do we tell our spouses, children, or loved ones, ‘I’m so *proud* of you’?” Saying ‘I’m proud of you’ is just another way of saying ‘I love you,’ right? Well, the simple answer to that question is: No. Saying “I’m proud of you” is *not* just another way of saying “I love you”! God *never* has anything good to say about pride. There is no such thing as “good pride,” because pride is ultimately self-glorifying—even if it be directed to self *through* someone else (such as a loved one). Perhaps you’re thinking, “Pastor, isn’t this just a case of semantics? Isn’t this just a matter of words and expressions?” No, it isn’t! At what point does pride—which, we know, originated with Lucifer—suddenly become “good pride” instead of “evil pride”? If there were a kind of pride that is “good,” would not that “pride” have originated with God? Is not God the Source of all goodness and righteousness? Of course He is! Who, then, would dare say that God desires to place “good pride” in our hearts? There is no such thing as good or godly pride! Pride is ungodly; and it is the opposite of love.

Brethren, there is something we need to understand about charity. True love is *not a feeling*, as the world tells us. True love is a *choice*. It is a choice to love God, regardless of the circumstances in our lives. True love is the choice to love God, regardless of whether things are going the way *we* think they should go, or not. It is also a choice to love others, regardless of what circumstances may arise, and regardless of how that person *treats you* in return!

Now, warm, pleasing feelings *do* often arise when you are practicing charity; but because of your sin nature, your feelings can be easily warped and corrupted by *pride*. That’s why feelings must not be trusted or followed. Love is not something that you “fall” into. If it were, it would be something you could “fall” out of just as easily as you “fell” into it! The kind of love you can “fall out of” is not true love; it is the false “love” of the world! It is not the love that comes from God. Here is what God’s love looks like.

Read Romans 5:6-8.

We live in a world where people lightly abandon those whom they should love the most, and give this justification: “Well, we just fell out of love.” Many people say, “I just can’t love my friend, or parent, or brother, or sister, or spouse, anymore. Things have changed. We both have changed.” Christian, aren’t you glad that *God* hasn’t “fallen out of love” with you, even though *you* change and waver—even though *you* often harden your heart against Him? If He had fallen out of love with you, you’d be in serious trouble. You have rebelled against Him and offended Him not only since the day you were born, but even since the day you were saved! Yet, God has chosen to love you, in spite of the countless wrongs you have done Him!

Well, guess what? If you have placed your faith in Jesus Christ, not only *can* you have the kind of unfailing love that God has, but you are *commanded* to have that same kind of love! **First John 4:10-11** says, “*Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and send his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.*” God can give you the power to love not only people who love you, but even people who have wronged you—whether they be enemies, or loved ones who have let you down.

Wouldn't you like to have love and forgiveness in your heart, instead of bitterness and anger, which slowly corrodes, poisons, and destroys every relationship in your life? God can take married couples whom the world would call "mismatched," and teach them to love each other passionately. Not one marriage that makes Christ the true Ruler of the home, and the true Centre of the relationship, *ever* fails. Not one friendship in which Christ is the Ruler ever fails. The Lord can teach saved husbands and wives, or brothers and sisters in Christ, to love each other with godly love, even if there be sinful "junk" in their past that has crippled their ability to love. God can do this because He *is* love! When the "love of God is shed abroad in your heart," He is able to do things in your life that the world would call impossible.

Read Romans 5:1-5.

True charity is the opposite of self-exultation. True love pours contempt upon pride, and follows the example of the Saviour, who is "***meek and lowly in heart***" (Matthew 11:29). As Christians follow Christ's example, they find "***rest***" unto their souls. Do you have "rest" in your soul, Christian? God's people may go through severe struggles in their lives, yet still have "rest" and peace deep inside, because they are abiding in Christ, and His love is spread abroad in their hearts. Are you practicing charity as you should? Or is there pride in your heart that is hindering you from practicing godly love?

II. **Charity is the opposite of selfishness.**

Please turn, once again, to **1 Corinthians 13**; and we will look at one last description of charity.

Read 1 Corinthians 13:5.

In **verse 4**, we saw that charity is the opposite of pride. Now, in **verse 5**, Paul uses the sharp surgical knife of God's Word to uncover yet another truth about charity. Not only is charity the opposite of *pride*; it is also the opposite of *selfishness*. Paul says that charity "***seeketh not her own.***" "Seeking your own" is the perfect definition of "selfishness."

Now, what is the difference between pride and selfishness? They are so similar, that they are somewhat hard to distinguish. Yet, there *is* a slight difference. Pride is the *attitude* of exalting self; but selfishness is the *action* of pursuing self. Selfishness seeks after its own interests, because it operates upon the principle of pride (the belief that "*I*" am most important). Selfishness is the *immediate result* of pride. If you have pride in your heart, then you will also have selfishness. They are inseparable.

Now, before we go any further, let's look at a passage that describes the attitude and actions of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Read Philippians 2:1-4.

Humility, lowliness of mind, and esteeming others instead of self--*this* is love! This attitude is diametrically the opposite of the values of our sin-ridden world. Folks, we live in a mad, mixed-up world! We live in a world where pride and selfishness are destroying the fabric of

families and whole civilisations. We live in a world in which people burn, loot, and murder-- and then have the audacity to *blame* their victims for the crimes that they have committed against them! People today are increasingly self-absorbed, calloused to the needs of others around them, and downright cruel and malicious. Yet, the people who are regarded as the behavioural experts inform us that our problem is that we don't "love ourselves" enough! Brethren, nothing could be further from the truth! Self-love is causing untold misery in people's lives. You show me a person who doesn't love God, and who is wrapped up in self-needs and self-wants, and I'll show you someone who is absolutely miserable. The *Bible* says, "***In lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.***" The *Bible* says, "***Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.***" Charity is concerned about the needs of others—not only physically and materially, but spiritually. This love for others is founded upon love for *God*; and it manifests itself in *obedience* to God. Let's read on in our **Philippians** passage.

Read Philippians 2:5-8.

Folks, love really is this simple! Trust in God, humble yourself before Him, and allow *Him* to fill your heart with His kind of love. Place the things of God, and the things of others, above your own desires. By the way, "Look not upon your own things" does *not* mean, "Don't take care of your physical needs," or "Don't work for a living." Paul is not saying, "Let yourself go, live like a hermit, and go around with a death wish on yourself." It is right and natural to take care of our "own flesh." **Ephesians 5:29** says that "***no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it.***" We do need to wash ourselves, groom ourselves, clothe ourselves, feed ourselves, and work to earn money so that we can do these things; and we certainly have no right to end our own lives, or to *desire* to end our lives. If you truly love God, then you will desire to take care of the "temple" of your body, because it is God's property. Taking care of God's property so that you can be fit to serve God is not "self-love"; it is stewardship. However, to *love yourself* is "selfishness"; and selfishness and charity cannot co-exist. Self is *never* the object of godly love.

Consider Jesus' life. He is our ultimate example of charity. When you look at Jesus' life, do you see Him loving Himself? No, you don't. Of course, you do see Him meeting bodily needs. You do see Him eating, drinking, sleeping, and working (both as a carpenter, and during His ministry). You see Him receiving food and lodging in people's homes, and graciously accepting their hospitality when it was offered to Him; but you do not see Him loving Himself. What you *do* see is Christ constantly expressing His love for His Father, and pouring Himself into others. You see Him showing His love even toward those who hated Him.

Now, perhaps you are thinking, "Well, yes, it's true that Jesus was selfless; but Jesus is God! He's perfect, and I'm not; so how can I, as a sinful human being, be held to His standard?" The answer to this question is this: "As far as your salvation is concerned, you *can't* live up to His standard." None of us can be saved by living up to Christ's standard of selflessness, because His standard is perfection. That is why Christ paid the price for our sins, in our place. You can't earn your salvation: you need simply to receive it by faith. Salvation is a free gift. We are saved by God's grace alone, through faith in Christ alone. However, after you are saved, God *does* expect you to *strive* to be like His Son, because you love Him. As long as

you are submitted to Him, you have all the divine power to imitate Christ's character. The whole reason Christ saved you was that He might break the power of sin in your life, and give you the power to do truly good works. **Ephesians 2:10** says, *“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”*

In this lifetime, you will not attain to utter perfection. Not until the resurrection day, when Christ will give us new, sinless bodies, will you be completely conformed to the image of God's Son. However, while you are in this mortal body, God wants you, through the power of His Holy Spirit, to *strive* to live a holy life, after the pattern of His Son, so that your life may be pleasing and profitable to God.

Jesus Christ is the true God; but He is also true Man. He is the “second Adam.” *“The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening (or, “life-giving”) spirit.”* Christ lived the perfectly righteous life that Adam *should* have lived; and by His quickening power, He enables those who trust in Him to be like Him. He is our example of holiness, and of true, pure, godly *love!*

Read 1 Peter 1:18-22.

Conclusion: As we close this series of messages on spiritual fruitfulness, I would ask you, Christian: “Is there pride in your life?” Is God really sitting on the throne of your life, where He belongs? Or is there a measure of self-exultation there? If so, that pride needs to be gotten rid of, because where there is pride, there cannot be love. Is there selfishness in your life? Or do you love God with pure love? Do you love others with the kind of pure love that God has? Or do you love others mostly because you want to receive favours in return? Jesus said, *“For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? For sinners also love them that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? For sinners also love those that love them.”*

If you will allow God to place His supernatural love in your heart, it will make all the difference in your life. It will make all the difference in your relationships. It will enable you to forgive people against whom you have held a grudge for years. It will make all the difference in your marriage *if* you determine to love your spouse with true, godly charity--regardless of what he or she does or says to you in return. In your witness to the lost, it will make all the difference when you practice godly charity. God's love will motivate you to knock on doors when you don't feel like it; to distribute tracts; or to share the Gospel with a lost friend or co-worker, even when it seems that he or she is not listening. **Most importantly, true charity will make all the difference in your relationship with the Lord.** His love will motivate you to pray and read your Bible, even when you are tired or overwhelmed with cares. Why? Because you know that you are talking with the God who loves you, and whom you love. Godly charity will motivate you to run from temptation—whether it be lustful thoughts, alcohol, drugs, ungodly television shows, lying, gossip, backbiting, hatred, anger, or simple unbelief. Because you love God, and you do not wish to displease Him (and, because you are resting in His sanctifying power), you will strive to live above the world and sin. God will make you fruitful in your knowledge of Him.

Now, perhaps you are not truly saved. Perhaps you have a certain level of human love; but somehow, you know that you do not have the kind of charity that the Bible speaks of. If so, I am here to tell you that you *cannot* practice true, godly love until you place your faith in Jesus Christ. You can't give

something that you don't have. Time and time again, I have heard Christians testify that they did not know what real love was until they repented of their sin and believed on the Lord Jesus Christ. This is very true! Christ is the Author of true, godly love; and you cannot have this love until you enter into a personal relationship with Him. Won't you admit your need of Jesus, repent of your sin, and place your complete faith in the One who loved you, and died for you? If you will do so, He will shed His love abroad in your heart.