

Fourthly, love **doesn't act unbecomingly** (13:5a). Paul's verb is sometimes translated *rude*, but this term – especially in its popular American usage – doesn't do justice to the sense of the Greek. The verb refers to conduct which is inappropriate or unseemly, but in a way which incurs shame. This shamefulness can be a matter of sensibility (cf. 7:36, 12:23), but it can also be inherent to the behavior or conduct itself.

It is important to recognize this distinction. A particular behavior, action or response can be inappropriate in a certain circumstance, but without being inherently wrong or shameful. So, for instance, attending a formal, black tie dinner dressed in beach attire is unseemly, but it isn't intrinsically disgraceful. Thus shamefulness can be intrinsic or implied: Something can be *regarded* as shameful based on personal, cultural or even human sensibilities (ref. again 12:23); other things are shameful *in themselves*. These observations show that Paul's term encompasses a broad range of meaning/application, but a couple of considerations are helpful in determining its meaning in this particular context:

- First and most importantly, Paul was speaking about an impropriety which is contrary to love – something that love absolutely does not do. This points toward actions or behaviors which demean, shame or harm others or which bring shame upon oneself because they transgress the law of love – love for God, other people, and even oneself (rightly understood).

And because this impropriety is a violation of love, it includes those things which are regarded as unbecoming and shameful and not merely what is inherently so. Even if a conduct isn't wrong in itself, if it stumbles or in any way harms another person (or oneself), it is contrary to love and therefore improper. Paul has already stressed this truth in the instance of Christian freedom: Eating “idol meats” isn't inherently sinful or shameful, but it *is* if it violates the obligation of love (8:1-9:27).

- Secondly, Paul provided his instruction in view of the Corinthian situation and abuses. The Corinthians were conducting themselves shamefully, not so much in terms of immoral conduct as *unloving* conduct. They were acting out of spiritual pride and so didn't have any sense of shame; if anything, they were congratulating themselves on their mature spirituality (ref. again 4:1-21, 5:1-8, 6:1-8, 7:10-24, 8:1-13). Paul's goal here, as elsewhere, was to expose and address the underlying problem, namely the Corinthians' natural-mindedness and consequent lack of love.

Thus Paul's meaning may be summarized in this way: Any action or conduct which violates love by contradicting or otherwise undermining faith, godliness, edification or unity is unseemly and shameful, even if it isn't inherently wrong. Disrupting the Church's order, harmony and peace or hurting a brother through one's mature understanding or liberty is just as unbecoming and disgraceful as engaging in immoral acts (cf. 8:1-13, 10:31-33, 11:1-14, 20-22).

Fifthly, and closely related to the previous concern, love **doesn't seek its own** (13:5b). Here as well some English renderings are less than adequate, if not even somewhat misleading. So, for instance, the English Standard Version (ESV) renders Paul's verb as love "*not insisting upon its own way.*" This rendering connotes a kind of petulance or childish selfishness which love refuses to engage in. The implication, then, is that love moves a person to yield to others in decisions and choices and not demand that everything go his own way. But Paul's meaning is much more subtle and encompassing than that.

Paul wasn't referring to a willingness to yield and let others have their way; indeed, such deference can be (and often is) an instance of the very thing Paul was denouncing as contrary to love. *He was speaking of a quality whereby a person's thinking, orientation and exertions are not preoccupied with or driven by things, matters, concerns or interests pertaining to himself.* The issue here is mindset, not actions as such: The person living a life of love is not "self-seeking" in that he regards and interacts with the things pertaining to himself (NAS, "*his own*") through love's perspective and orientation – through the mind of Christ.

This core quality of love, perhaps more than the others Paul noted, highlights the divine nature of love and the truth of the scriptural maxim that "whoever loves has been born of God" (1 John 4:7-21). For it puts its finger on the very nature of man's fallenness and the way it manifests itself in the day-to-day existence of every human being. Jesus articulated this human dynamic most succinctly (and most appropriately) in His treatment of His kingdom and its features in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:19-34, ref. esp. vv. 24-32).

- In this context Jesus emphasized the truth that men have the option of serving one of two *lords* (6:24). Not only are there only two masters, every human being serves one or the other. In other words, every person is subject to the lordship of one of these two masters; no one is free of both.
- Those lords are *God* and *mammon*. Many reduce the notion of mammon to money, but money is only one expression of mammon. *Mammon refers to anything and everything by which a person believes he will be benefitted.* Moreover, "benefit" is individually determined on the basis of personal considerations, ideals, interests and concerns. Understood in this way, it's evident that the "lord" Jesus labeled "mammon" is actually the person himself: Each person serves mammon as his master by serving his own personal benefit according to his own judgment, interests and concerns.
- Jesus makes this clear from his subsequent discussion in which He noted that all men are driven by their motivation to gratify their personal needs (6:25-31). *Importantly, Jesus didn't identify the "mammon" of money, status, power, etc., but the very necessities of life.* The proof He provided that men are enslaved to the "lord" of mammon is the fact that they are preoccupied with meeting their basic needs of nourishment and covering.

Jesus' language highlights the truth that people have, as their first and overriding concern, the gratification of their own personal interests. Again, it's crucial to note that He didn't mention secondary, discretionary or perceived ("felt") needs, but those which are undeniable and critical – those needs which are fundamental to human existence.

- By treating these fundamental and essential needs as mammon, Jesus was indicating that serving those needs is itself a form of idolatry which sets aside the other master who is God Himself. This is a radical notion that is lost on many. Everyone recognizes that people have as their primary concern meeting their basic life needs; indeed such preoccupation is not only understandable, it appears necessary and right, for the person who doesn't satisfy these needs *dies* (note Maslow's "hierarchy of needs"). And yet Jesus treated this pursuit as serving the "lord" of mammon.

At face value Jesus' position is outrageous; if seeking to meet one's basic need for food and clothing amounts to serving the false god of mammon, then all human beings are idolaters – *including Christians*. Yet Jesus was saying something else.

- He wasn't condemning people's efforts to provide for the necessities of life, but their anxious preoccupation with meeting those needs.
- More specifically, Jesus was indicting the *unbelief* attached to people's approach to satisfying their needs. In their natural condition, human beings are devoted to their own interests; their thoughts and days are preoccupied with securing their personal well-being (in any number of arenas). In Jesus' words, they are "anxious for their lives": *What will I eat?; what will I drink?; with what will I clothe myself?* (6:25, 31-32).

This preoccupation of heart, mind and life reflects man's intrinsic obsession with the things pertaining to himself, but it more importantly gives expression to his fundamental unbelief. People's anxious preoccupation betrays their lack of faith: They don't trust that the God who created them knows their vital needs and will meet them. In Jesus' judgment, unbelief is the most basic form of human insanity: It is absurd to think that the Creator-Father doesn't discern the needs of His creatures – especially His children; it's even more absurd to think that, knowing their needs, He'll not provide for them. God provides for even the least significant of His creatures; how will He fail to provide for His image-sons (6:26-30)?

Jesus drew upon the issue of essential human needs rather than "felt needs" in order to make and reinforce His point about unbelief. Everyone in His audience would have agreed with Him that preoccupation with selfish, self-indulgent concerns amounts to serving the false god of mammon; none, however, would have felt that way about a person seeking to provide for life's necessities. Approaching His topic in this way enabled Jesus to make the critical point that unbelief and idolatry are not what people naturally assume they are.

By constructing his argument as He did, Jesus highlighted the real issue with people's natural orientation and pursuit (their "seeking their own"): It's not that they expend the necessary effort to satisfy their legitimate needs; that's incumbent upon everyone, and the person who refuses to make that effort incurs guilt with God as a sluggard who puts Him to the test (cf. Psalm 37:25, 127:2 and Matthew 6:32-33 with Proverbs 6:6-11, 20:4). The issue is that men provide for their needs in *unbelief*. And their unbelief isn't necessarily in what they do or how they do it, but in their mindset and orientation. In their natural state, people are *anxiously preoccupied* with their needs, betraying the fact that they don't trust God to meet them. Self-assured or not, they nonetheless look to their own resourcefulness.

And so, while Paul was obviously speaking to the Corinthian tendency to promote their own rights, freedoms and interests above others (7:1-16, 8:1-9:27, 11:17-34), he was getting at something more fundamental: the principle of natural human self-preoccupation which lies behind all selfish attitudes and acts. People are intrinsically engrossed with matters pertaining to themselves; they naturally and spontaneously "seek their own" (12:5). And whether they pursue the satisfaction of legitimate needs or the gratification of "felt needs," they do so faithlessly – out of alienated minds which view all things through the lens of the autonomous self.

And as this natural human condition highlights man's fundamental unbelief, so it also demonstrates his lovelessness. Faith and love always exist together, for the one who knows and trusts God loves Him and the one who loves Him knows Him in truth and so trusts Him (cf. John 8:12-43, 14:1-24, 16:12-28 with Galatians 5:6; Ephesians 3:13-19, 6:23; 1 Timothy 1:12-14; Titus 3:15; Philemon 5; etc.).

Man in his natural state is defined by his preoccupation with things pertaining to himself. His days are consumed with providing for his basic life needs, and beyond those concerns his thoughts and energies turn inexorably to his "felt needs" and how best to satisfy them. The calamity of Eden left Adam's race in a state of self-isolation and anxious self-preoccupation; people live their lives isolated within their own minds, so that all interest in and involvement with matters external to them is framed by and processed through their sense of themselves. People might give of themselves to other individuals or causes not directly related to them, but those "selfless" urgings and undertakings are nonetheless the exertions of a self-referential being; *religion is the great proof that men can never escape from the intrinsic principle of "seeking their own."*

Love, however, doesn't seek its own because it operates according to a reality larger than and beyond the individual (the one who is loved as well as the one loving). The person who loves hasn't escaped from himself – *he* is the one loving, but his love is the love of His Father. And that is true in two senses: The Christian's love is of the *same sort* as His Father's in that it derives from Him, but it is also an *extension* of his love for his Father. The Christian's love isn't bound up in himself, but in the triune God; his love is inseparable from his faith. Love doesn't seek *its own* in that its self-giving is *unto God*; it is an exercise of faith.