

Paul's next pair of qualities of love consists of a negative and a positive one: Love **does not rejoice in unrighteousness**, but **rejoices in the truth** (13:6). Here, too, a couple of considerations are important to discerning Paul's meaning. First of all, this statement must be interpreted in its context. No one would disagree with this, but if the context is itself misperceived or mistreated, then this interpretive principle won't be of any help; in fact it could lead the interpreter in the wrong direction. Second, these two qualities must be seen as mutually interpreting; that is, each one explains the meaning of the other.

The first thing, then, to address is Paul's terminology: *Specifically, what did he mean by "righteousness" and "truth" and how do those concepts speak to the nature and operation of love?* Starting from the above considerations, it is evident first of all that these two terms must be interpreted in the light of Paul's surrounding discussion of love's attributes, orientation and activity. The contextual framework, however, extends beyond Paul's immediate list of love's qualities to the contribution of chapter thirteen to the larger context addressing the matter of spiritual gifts. Even more broadly, Paul's language in this verse must be considered in terms of the issues and concerns he was addressing in this epistle.

At bottom, the letter must be treated as an organic whole, not only because it came from one mind and with a unified purpose, but because Paul wrote it to a particular community with particular problems and needs. Thus, fragmenting the letter and isolating a given passage or topic insures that it will be mistreated and likely even misinterpreted (as is the case with all of Scripture). With this in mind, the following things can be said about Paul's terminology:

The term, *unrighteousness*, is readily subject to misinterpretation, not only because of certain presuppositions regarding the concept of righteousness, but also because this Greek word group has a broad semantic range.

- Because it often has legal or judicial overtones in scriptural usage, many tend to define unrighteousness in terms of deviation from a moral or ethical standard – a standard often prescribed and mandated by law. From this vantage point, it's easy to conclude that Paul's point was that love sets itself against all deviation from lawful behavior.
- Others see in this term a more generic connotation of wrongfulness. Thus D. A. Carson's rendering: *Love does not delight in evil*. There are at least two notable concerns with this sort of rendering: First, Paul's term (*adikia*) carries an implicit judicial connotation which is not inherent in the notion of evil (at least in contemporary American vernacular). In terms of contemporary English usage, "evil" is too generic to hone in on Paul's meaning. As well, in the preceding verse Paul used the Greek term which commonly denotes general wrongfulness or evil (cf. Romans 2:9, 7:19-21, 12:17-21, 13:4, 10, 14:20, 16:19; 2 Corinthians 13:7; 1 Thessalonians 5:15), which suggests that he meant something else (or more) here.

In its most basic sense, unrighteousness refers to deviation from the “right.” And because, from the Scripture’s viewpoint, “rightness” is objective and fixed rather than arbitrary and subjective, righteousness and justice are relative synonyms, with the former tending to connote right *thinking* and the latter right *practice*.

- Righteousness is “rightness”; it is conformity to what is right, with rightness being determined objectively by God – not so much as supreme Legislator but as *Creator*. That is, rightness is determined by the nature of things as they really are – as God created and ordered them as a reflection and expression of His own person and nature and toward the realization of His purposes in them and for them (Romans 1:18-20; Ephesians 1:9-10).
- *Thus a thing’s righteousness is its conformity to the truth:* the truth of itself as well as its relation to God and all other things (which “things” include all other creatures as well as the principles and existential dynamics which comprise and characterize the created order).

And so, while unrighteousness certainly includes the violation of explicit moral or ethical standards, it is much more. It speaks to *all* failure – through ignorance, folly, error or willful violation – to conform to the truth of how things really are, whether in one’s perceptions, attitudes, or actions. The importance of this wider perspective is illustrated by the frequent attempt by commentators to attach Paul’s statement to particular matters of unrighteousness he addressed in his epistle. So some say that Paul was referring to the Corinthian practice of judging one another in order to exalt themselves; others point to their toleration of immorality or their abuse of their liberty. In all these respects (and many others) they were guilty of “rejoicing in unrighteousness.” But while such practices were clearly instances of unrighteousness which love rejects, to confine Paul’s meaning to them is to miss the larger issue he was speaking to.

As noted repeatedly throughout this study, Paul recognized that the Corinthians’ unrighteous attitudes and actions were *symptomatic* rather than problematic; the essence of their unrighteousness was their failure to employ the mind of Christ. That is, their fundamental violation of what is right was their deviation from the “rightness” of their true identity in Christ. Thus Paul’s corrective – whatever the particular issue – consisted in a call to repentance: “*Do you not know...?*” (cf. 1:10-31, 2:12-16, 3:16-23, 5:1-7, 6:1-20, 9:19-27, 11:1-3, 17-28, 12:27-30). The Corinthians didn’t need to change their behavior as such, but to step back and rethink who they were in Christ and how their life and identity in Him needed to define and determine their relation to one another and the issues they faced.

The conception of righteousness as conformity to the truth is confirmed by the parallel Paul drew between it and the notion of *truth*: *Love shows its rejection of unrighteousness precisely by embracing and exulting in the truth*. These two qualities of love are thus mutually implying and mutually interpreting (cf. Romans 2:1-8). But what, exactly, is the “truth” love embraces and celebrates?

The first thing to note is that Paul employed the definite article with the noun “truth.” He didn’t say that love rejoices with truth, but with *the* truth. This indicates that he was specifying the notion of truth and not speaking in generalities. In other words, he had a specific truth in mind or was speaking of truth in a specific arena or sense. Scholars recognize this and so provide various answers to the question of what particular truth (or arena of truth) Paul was indicating. Some say he was referring to the gospel; others argue that he was speaking of truth as it is *in itself*: truth as objective, disinterested and dispassionate; truth as uncolored and uncorrupted by human perspectives and agendas. Understood a certain way, both views are arguably correct.

Paul’s overall approach to the concept of truth supports the conclusion that he wasn’t referring to factual correctness as such, but to truth as speaking to the way things really are – truth as the actual reality of Creator and creation, *most specifically in terms of the relational dynamics between God and His creation as revealed in the salvation history and realized in Jesus Christ*. This is the truth proclaimed in the gospel – the truth as it is incarnate and glorified in Jesus (cf. Romans 1:16-20, 3:1-7, 15:8-9; 1 Corinthians 5:7-8; 2 Corinthians 4:1-6, 6:1-11, 13:1-8; Galatians 2:1-14, 5:1-7; Ephesians 1:3-14, 4:20-24, 6:13-15; Colossians 1:1-5; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-14; 1 Timothy 2:1-4, 4:1-3; 2 Timothy 3:1-8; etc.).

This notion of truth coincided with Jesus’ own conception, for He openly insisted that *He* is the truth – not merely that He is truthful or conforms His practice to what is true, but that He is the sum and substance of truth as the incarnate and glorified Logos (cf. John 1:14-17, 14:6; cf. also 7:18, 17:17-19). *Jesus is the truth of God and the truth of His creation (as True Man), as well as the truth of God’s purpose for His creation in relation to itself and in relation to Him*.

Having examined Paul’s terminology, it’s now possible to consider how the ideas of unrighteousness and truth correspond to love’s nature and the way it expresses itself. Stated as a question, *exactly how does love renounce unrighteousness so as to rejoice with the truth – both as a matter of intrinsic conviction and practical orientation and operation?* Again, if righteousness is “rightness,” then love rejects that which contradicts the “right.” Love also discerns the true and greatest good of its object, which implies that it discerns the truth of the object itself. And discerning the *truth of its object* and thereby the *true good of its object*, love applies itself to that good *in truth* – that is, in sound judgment, sincerity and integrity. Love is bound over to the truth of the *right* and *good* and so tolerates no deviation from it; *love is the way the mind of Christ perceives, judges and acts*.

All of this discussion helps to explain Paul’s compound verb in the second clause: “Love *rejoices together with* the truth.” It’s not merely that love embraces and celebrates the truth; it joins together, as it were, *with* the truth in its *own* celebration of itself. Love stands alongside the truth in the sense of upholding truth’s perspective and passion. Love is of God, and so is devoted to the truth as it is in Jesus, even as *that* truth informs and inflames love’s orientation and zeal.