



The Sermon

Daron Roberts

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

"Eight Manifestations of Love that

Remind Us of the Reason for the Season"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you so much. It's good to be here with you all. It's my little corner, partially, over there, my entourage. They're here to protect me in case Kent gets out of line. But I also have some dear friends, Matt and Renee Everett with their four kids, they're back there. Can you say, Matt and Renee? They hail from Naples, Florida, and they are spending Christmas with us this year, and they are some of our dearest, sweetest friends in the world; so make sure, if you can, meet them. Their four kids are here as well.

And then a precious young lady from our ministry right here, Jordan Bartoli and her mother are here. She came to Christ at Grace Immanuel in our college ministry from a college campus outreach two years ago; and she's like an adopted daughter to my wife and I. And her family lives in Dallas, and so she said, "I'm going to be in Dallas at Christmas," and I said, "Well, I'm preaching," so here she is. So great to have you both here. And then my brother is here and his wife Missy. So we've got a whole lot of family around here, so it's always good to come back.

And it's fun to see all these new faces. So I was just here in April and there's all these new people. This is just thrilling to see what God is doing here. And I understand there's people missing too, so this is exciting. Our ministry back home is pastored by a man named Jerry Wragg who was Dr.

MacArthur's assistant for a decade or so. And so, we love Grace Community Church and are connected out there. And that's how Kent and I met was sitting in that little coffee lounge; and he knew Jerry. And he asked Jerry to preach, and Jerry couldn't come. And when Jerry can't come and they need like the fourth string guy they bring me. So that's how I got here, to fill in.

So, so glad to be here with you. And I listened a bit to Dr. Duncan, Austin Duncan's message last week, "Joy to the World," and I thought it was a great setup for even today as we're thinking about Christmas. So if you would, you can just turn your Bibles to Matthew 1. We won't be there for a moment; we're going to be in 1 Corinthians 13. But I just want to set up some thoughts and think about Christmas a little bit.

We do have Christmas here in a couple days. How many of you are feeling a bit the tension and pressure that can come with the holiday season; and yet we also get a lot of nostalgia that comes as we think about past Christmases and past events. And yet I think we're all aware that when Christmastime comes, I think we can all relate to the fact that a mixture sometimes between business, unmet expectations, sometimes a consumer mentality of the culture – all of those start to blend together, and at times don't you think that the loving attitudes that Christ wants us to have at Christmas can sometime become a little more Grinch-like, a little more Scrooge.

In fact, one lady, she's not a believer, but she wrote a great little article called "Why do we become so cross at Christmas?" She says this: "This might be the season to be jolly, but it's equally synonymous with seething lines of people, endless social gatherings, expensive shopping trips, exhausting to-do lists, and demanding relatives." I know no one here can relate to that. "And the claustrophobia of having everyone crowded at one home together can create a pressure cooker." And then she begins to talk about statistics of women.

Now I'm sure this isn't true, ladies, but she talks about how women are twice as likely, or something like that statistically, to come very stressed at Christmas. She talks about how women all year long are kind of okay; but at Christmas, they take on the mantle of domestic goddess. She says here's what happened to her as a domestic goddess Christmas: "During one shameful Christmas shopping trip, I screamed at the department store customer service manager for not immediately being able to tell me where the frozen jigsaw puzzles were." She said, "Furthermore, I have sworn at my Christmas tree because it shed needles before I had put my decorations up."

The new parents will relate. She starts to talk about children and their gift-receiving etiquette. She says, "When our offspring, too young to understand gift-opening etiquette, don't react with the gratitude we'd like." It's easy to lose our cool. One friend of hers locked herself in her bathroom in floods of tears on Christmas morning after her three-year-old tearfully reproached her for buying the wrong Paw Patrol pajamas.

Now we laugh, but we nervously chuckle, don't we, a little bit. It makes us a little bit uneasy to see sometimes how easily we can become distracted and misplace our focus in the season of Christmas. And I think what she's really describing is two things that we all can relate to. At Christmastime, a time that's supposed to be the most loving time of year, the time that we're supposed to be most focused on the love of Christ and love for others we can actually lack love, can't we. And that stems from a misplaced focus on the reason for the season.

Bethany and I recently experienced this very same thing, I related to her. We were planning for an end of the year Christmas party for our leadership team. We have eight couples on our leadership team for our college and career ministry that oversee our ministry, and we were preparing an in the final hours, and we had our four little grommet elves, our kids, trying to help us – you know, seven, five, three, five months. So they're not exactly the most on task helpers, but they did do well.

Nevertheless, Bethany and I were starting to get a little bit raw. And you know what it gets like when the pressure's coming, the time is becoming compressed, and you realize you may not have everything done in time. Some of you husbands are looking at your wives, I see it now – easy. Just teasing. We all can relate.

So my sweet wife comes up to me and says, "Can we pray together in these final hours, because I'm just sensing my heart is getting a bit distracted on what we need to be thinking about." And I felt the same thing. And so, I was studying for this sermon this morning in preparation and thinking about what it means to love in the Christmas season and how easily love can be ruined in a season that's supposed to be all about love and Christ's love.

And so, I said something like this in my prayer. I don't know exactly what it was, but something like, "Lord, please help us be more concerned about loving you by not sinning as we prepare for the party than we are about the final outcome of our preparation. Lord, please help us be more concerned about showing the love of Christ in whom we interact with today – people at stores, to each other, to our kids – than whether our Christmas party meets our expectations."

Now why did I pray that? Because my wife and I were keenly aware that the greatest threat to our Christmas party that night was not that we didn't have all the food prepared. It wasn't that all the decorations wouldn't be perfect just like we'd like. The greatest threat to our Christmas party that night is that if we prepared all of that without hearts that were worshipful focusing on Christ; or if we got the party all just like we like it, perfectly put together, but the whole time our hearts were misplacing our focus and it became about ourselves and not about Christ, that would ruin the Christmas party, not the absence of good food, or the absence of the best decorations.

You see how easily we drift from the reason for the season; and I think sometimes part of that is manger scenes, wise men, the virgin birth, all

crucial. But even as Dr. Duncan talked about last week, there's so much more to think about when we think about the Christmas season. We can't just leave it at Hallmark platitudes. We must realize that the reason for the season was Jesus was born to die.

That's what the incarnation is about. He was born to be a man, to be wrapped in human frailty and flesh, given as a gift to sinful people, so he could die a cruel, awful death, impaled on a bloody wooden cross, and then rise again, so that rebels like you and I could be sons of the Most High. That's the reason for the season. You know what the incarnation represents? It's the beginning of a long walk that Jesus took to Calvary.

Sinclair Ferguson in his new little book, I recommend it to you, it's called Love Came Down. It's devotionals for Christmas. And actually, not an original idea going to 1 Corinthians 13 today, he wrote a whole book on that. But here's what he says in his intro. He says this: "Christmas is about love, because love came down at Christmas. That's why we have Christmas in the first place."

Listen to this line: "The meaning of Christmas is found in the message of Christmas. The meaning of Christmas is found in the message of Christmas." Beloved, if we do not think about the full significance of what the incarnation means, we can miss the reason for the season. In fact, I had you start in Matthew 1:20-21. And while Mary and Joseph did not know the full significance of what it would mean for Jesus to be a deliverer, I just want you to see on the pages of Scripture, right from the get-go Joseph was told by the angel that Jesus was going to be a deliverer.

So here's what we can say. In the mind of God – because we want to have God's perspective at Christmas, right, not ours, not the culture's, not Hollywood's. We want God's perspective. Isn't that all that matters? God's perspective at Christmas was brought from the angel to Joseph, and the first message brought to them was, "Your son is going to be a deliverer. Yes, he's going to come in the second advent as sovereign King."

But Mary and Joseph will soon learn he first was going to need to be the suffering Servant. Notice Matthew 1:20-21, "But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She will bear a Son; and you shall call his name Jesus, for he," notice this. Why do you call him Jesus? Reason, "for he will save people from their sins."

The word "Jesus" there, if you know, is from the Hebrew Yeshua, which means "to deliver" or "to rescue." Beloved, right out of the gate the angel is saying, while Mary and Joseph didn't know the full significance, they would soon learn that, "Your baby boy, Mary, who was coming, and Joseph, your son, he was going to be born so that he could die."

Now if we start to back up and think of the incarnation not just as Jesus coming, but the fullness of his life and his message, we get a whole bunch more Christmas verses, don't we? For example, John 3:16, "For God so loved the world," there's love, "that he gave." Gave who? Jesus. When did he give Jesus? In the incarnation initially. Why did he give him? So that he could die.

Jesus affirms that, Mark 10:45. Listen to this. Listen to Jesus' perspective on even his incarnation and why he came: "For the Son of Man did not," listen, "come" – Come when? In his incarnation initially, at Christmas – "to be served, but to serve, and give his life as a ransom for many." Beloved, the meaning of Christmas is caught in the message of Christmas: Jesus born to die.

Now let me make a statement and then ask a question, and then we'll jump into the passage we're going to spend our time. So I just want to kind of hear my thesis up front and my argument here. If what we celebrate at Christmas is the full meaning of Christmas found in its full message – listen

– that the greatest act of love ever done was when God gave sinful man the first Christmas gift, his Son wrapped in human flesh so he could die as a substitute, if that's the meaning of Christmas, then what does it mean to be a Christian at Christmas? What does it mean to be someone who actually fully embraces the full significance of the meaning of Christmas found in the message of Christmas: Jesus born to die? What does it mean to be a Christian at Christmas?

You could even title that message today, "What does it mean to be Christian at Christmas?" And I'll answer that in one word. Here's what it means: It means that you understand love. It means to understand love. Love in what way? Love expressed to you and then love expressed to others. What do I mean? To understand Christmas fully you must understand how much you have been loved. If you are a blood-bought believer in the Lord Jesus Christ today Christmas is about you freshly meditating on the significance of why Jesus came for you in particular. So it's understanding Christmas is about me believing in faith with a fresh heart and a fresh perspective, looking at the incarnation and marveling again that this baby came to die for me. What love is this!

So it's understanding part of Christmas and love is understanding how you've been loved. If you understand that, then Jesus, say, will result in something else: you'll express love to others. If you understand how you've been loved, right, 1 John 4: "We love because" – why? – "he first loved us." So if you understand how you've been loved, the result will be you will love others. And can I just say, we could even put it this way: "To the degree you believe in faith with your heart how much you've been loved by Christ will be to the same degree you express love to others, and how little you understand or believe you've been loved is how little you will actually express love to others."

In fact, Jesus said that, didn't he? Luke 7:47, the sinful woman, remember? She's forgiven. The Sanhedrin is sitting there wondering what's going on. "Jesus, why are you doing this?" And Jesus says this: "For this reason I say to you, her sins," this sinful, immoral woman, "which are many, have

been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who has been forgiven loves little." That is to say, to the degree you understand how much you've been loved will be to the degree you express love to others this Christmas.

So here's what I want to do in our time. I want to go over to 1 Corinthians 13. Please turn there with me. And I know this isn't your classic Christmas passage, but I want to take a little bit different look at it. The passage was originally written to Corinth who is struggling to love one another, and its first context is body life in the church.

But let me ask you something: "How does Corinth come to understand what love means?" Answer: "They understand how Christ loved them." So I want to look at each clause from 1 Corinthians 13 with this mindset: How did Christ show that love to us; and then how that should result in us loving other people the same way. And I warn you, this is going to both be massively encouraging and desperately convicting, because this passage goes right into the very fabric of our interpersonal relationship right down to how you speak to one another and every encounter that you have on every single day at every moment. And it's agape love, which is a love of the will, it's a love of volition, because 1 Corinthians 13 is mostly found in the context when you're being mistreated and sinned against, when you don't feel like loving and you still move towards people and love them. Christians of all people should understand what it means to be loved when you were unlovely, right?

So here's what we're going to look at in 1 Corinthians 13: Eight manifestations of love that remind us of the reason for the season; or, eight manifestations of love that remind us how to be Christian at Christmas. Rather than reading the entirety, I'm going to work it through it clause for clause as we work down through it.

Eight manifestations of love that remind us how to be Christian at Christmas or remind us for the reason for the season. Let's get a running start on verses 4 to 7 with verses 1 to 3 so we can get the context. And



here's what I'm going to do when I read 1 to 3. I'm going to take our Christmas theme and I'm going to apply in verses 1 to 3, okay? So the context is to Corinth, but I'm going to add our Christmas theme.

So notice 1 Corinthians 13:1. Watch this: "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal." Translation: "If I go around humming heavenly carols, but I do not have Christlike love, I'm useless and an annoying drum or cymbal."

Verse 2: "If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and knowledge; and I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but I do not have love," remember our theme this morning is love, "I am nothing." We can say this: "If I read the Christmas story to my kids, and I have the nativity scene all around my house, and people come to me and I can show them the prophecies from the Old Testament to the New, and I can wax eloquent on what was fulfilled in the first and second coming and the first advent and the second, but my heart does not have love, Paul says I'm a hypocrite."

Verse 3: "If I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and I surrender my body to be burned, but I do not have love, it profits me nothing." You can say this: "If I do Christmas food drives and I give to Toys for Tots, and I sacrifice my time and even my life, and my attitude is all about myself, it's worthless." However, by contrast, let's look at these eight manifestations of what love looks like when we were loved, and how we express that love.

Now, look at verse 4. Let us start looking through this outline: "Eight manifestations of biblical love." Here's your first one, and I'll give these to you all the way through: Love serves despite merit. Love serves despite merit.

Notice verse 4 there of chapter 13. I'm going to take these words together: "Love is patient, and love is kind." What does that word for "patience"

there? It's actually a compound word. Maybe you've studied this before. On the frontend of the Greek word, it means "a long period of time." On the backend of the Greek word, it means "anger." So the word literally comes to mean "enduring the anger of another for a long period of time." So to be patient means to endure and take and absorb the anger of another person for a long period of time: patience. That's what the word came to become.

But it gets comboed here, we can say, with the word "kind." We don't just endure and tolerate and grit our teeth with a white-knuckled grip and say, "Fine, I'm just going to absorb your wrath, but I'm going to be angry and bitter, and I'm going to distance myself from you, and I'm going to be difficult, and I'm going to give you a cold shoulder, so I'm going to passive-aggressively let you know that you're mistreating me."

That's not love. Love is kind. It's a word – listen – for moving towards people in compassion, generosity, mercy, tenderness, and service. Do you know what you could combine these words to mean? Biblical love moves towards people and serves them with tenderness, with compassion, with mercy, with kindness, despite their merit, despite if they've earned it, and even when they're being hostile to you. That is love in those first two words. It's an agape love. And, beloved, if you say, "I don't even know how I'd even understand that," well if you are a Christian, it ought to be one of the premier ways you understand love, because those two words are actually spoken of – patience and kindness – on how Christ loved you in the gospel.

Turn over to Romans 2 real quickly, Romans chapter 2. This is how Christ loved us. This is absolutely amazing. Just studying this for me personally this holiday season has just made me realize afresh that you cannot plumb deeply enough in the depth of the gospel. We will spend eternity discovering all its profoundness. But think about this; if we're saying love someone despite their merit, if you're a Christian you have been loved despite your merit.

Notice chapter 2, verse 4 of Romans. Here's Paul giving a bit of a rebuke: "Or do you think lightly of the riches of," notice there's our word, "kindness and tolerance and," here's our second word, "patience," and then it shows up again, "not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?" Stop there.

You see both our words there. You've got "kindness" there and we have "patience" there. And he's saying here that that kindness and patience leads a person to repentance. If repentance is being talked about, that means sin is being talked about. So we could even say, "What type of kindness and patience was shown to us, and what was our condition? What was our sin that we needed to repent of?" Turn over to Romans 5.

What was our sin we needed to repent of? What was our condition? What should we celebrate at Christmas? What should we marvel about in God incarnate? Look at verse 8 of chapter 5: "But God demonstrated his love toward us." When did he show us patience and kindness and tolerance and compassion? In, "while we were yet sinners." Define him.

Notice verse 8: "Christ died for us." And then look at verse 10: "For while we were his enemies we were reconciled through the death of his Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved," notice, "by his life." That's his incarnation, his righteous life.

Beloved, do you know what you ought to think about and believe freshly this Christmas? When you look at that baby in a manger and you think about Christ coming, being born to die, you realize that that baby represents the fullness of time when God sent his Son to be a substitutionary sacrifice for me. In love he sent him while I was defying him, a rebel against him, hating him, pushing him away; as his enemy, he sent his Son into human history to die for me. That's what the baby represents.

Do you know what God thinks when people look at Christmas and turn it into some sentimental deal with just some kind of surface approach to it, and they kind of skip through the surface, fill in some family stuff, add a little Jesus, read their manger scene, and live for themselves, and they don't think seriously about the loving mercy of God to send his Son to die? Do you know that God doesn't take that lightly? He doesn't take that as a small thing for someone to think little of Christmas. Allow me to show you how significantly God thinks about that.

Notice back in Romans 2 again. To think little about the full Christmas message and not to realize the patience and mercy of God shown you, here's what God says to you. If you're here today and God brought you here to this wonderful little church and you don't know Christ, let me give you a loving warning from Romans 2 on what God thinks if you think lightly of Jesus. Notice Romans 2:4, "Or do you think lightly of his riches and kindness and patience and tolerance?" The answer is, "Yes, some do."

Notice verse 5, "So because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath at the revelation of the righteous judgment of God." Translation: "You either bow to baby Jesus born to die as Lord now or you'll be forced to bow on the last day when you face him as Judge." But we as believers, by contrast to that, should be blown away at the kindness shown to us.

Now if you understand that love and you're in family dynamics and you're at the holiday season and you're with that difficult person even in a line at the store, or that person that cuts in front of you in traffic, heaven forbid, is it really right then to lash out, "How dare they! How wrong are they! How much mistreatment! What an injustice!" Really? The injustice is that we were saved. It only became a just sacrifice because Jesus was that substitute.

True love, if we understand how we've been love, we will love other people despite their merit even when they don't deserve it. That's patience and kindness. That's just our first words.

Second: Manifestation of love at Christmas. Love not only serves despite merit, but love is not proud. Notice the next three words in 1 Corinthians 13; turn back over there, if you would, from Romans, 1 Corinthians 13 back

Love, notice again: "Love is not jealous; love does not brag, and love is not arrogant." Jealousy could even be a word for "coveting." Christmas seems to be the season of coveting, doesn't it? "I want what other people have."

We're shepherding our kids all the time on that tendency in their heart. And yet that word for "jealousy" we all know it far too well; I wish we weren't so acquainted with it. It's the idea of that inner seething that you feel when others have what you want, when you desire something or you crave something they have. That may even be an affirmation you want them to give you, or it may be some thing that they have. Either way, it's that tendency in our heart to want what others have.

Here's what jealousy says. Jealousy says, "I want what you have, and I don't want you to have it. And if I can't get it, I'll make you pay for having it." That's jealousy.

He goes on. Love never does that. Love is never that way, because love also doesn't brag. Notice in the text, "It does not brag." Brag is to heap praise on one's self. It could be translated "clamoring for attention." It's basically self-branding. Love does not put their brand out so that people notice them to worship them.

And then notice, "Love is not arrogant." Literally, "to blow yourself up" or "be inflated," "to have an exaggerated self-conception." Here's what it is,

here's this word; this is a painful one for arrogant. It's the idea of walking into a room and comparing yourself to other people and finding ways you can elevate yourself over them to feed your personal significance. That's that word.

Beloved, do you know what Jesus did at Christmas? He didn't put himself high. He didn't puff himself up. He didn't make himself arrogant. He didn't sit there and covet for another's glory. He made himself low for us. In fact, just turn to Philippians 2 really quickly; just going to breeze through a profound passage we could preach a whole sermon on.

Philippians 2:5-8. If you want, just turn over there. Notice what Jesus did in the opposite of that. Love never does that, because here's what love did. Philippians 2:5-8, "Have this attitude in yourselves, which was in Christ Jesus." So the previous attitude of considering others more important than yourself.

Verse 6, "who, although he existed in the form of God," that means he was fully God, God wrapped in human flesh, "he did not regard equality a thing to be grasped." We should gasp at that statement. Literally, you understand what he's saying is Jesus was fully God and had full rights to grasp and hold on to all of his deity and express all of his deity at every moment that he wanted to. But instead of clutching for that, he gave up his independent right to clutch for his deity. He didn't give up his deity; but he clothed himself in humanity so that he could serve you and I.

We go around and we're not a deity, and we clutch for our own rights all the time. We're demanding certain treatment everywhere we go. We're demanding people care for us. We're demanding people love us a certain way. Jesus had all the rights to demand it and gave that up to serve. That's unbelievable.

Notice verse 7: "He emptied himself." Literally, the idea is "poured himself out." In what way he poured himself. Gave out his independent right to fully express his deity by adding humanity.

Notice. How do we know that? The rest of the text, "taking on the form of a bond-servant, being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

Beloved, do you realize that Jesus had to become a man so that we could have a perfect, sinless substitute before God? When we celebrate the baby in the manger, realizing we're celebrating God becoming man, so that you and I could have a sacrifice that was sufficient to God. Realize that we could never stand before God on our own. None of you and I could come and say, "Hey, we're perfect."

So Jesus had to become a man, be tempted in every way, live without sin, and die a sinless death as a substitute, so that we could have an offering to God and we could say, "You should never accept me, God, because of me. But I point to him; he's perfect, he was enough. He lived the life I couldn't live, he's my substitute."

What we celebrate at Christmas is God becoming man. And when he could have made himself high in what we might call in this passage arrogance, he never would do that. He made himself low. So, beloved, if we really believe that, then what ought our interactions to look like with one another? Should we be standing over people, desiring and making them treat us a certain way, while condescending and deferring and serving and preferring in love, just like Christ did for us? That's love, and that's our second. That's our second manifestation of love.

Now our third. Not only is love served despite merit, not only is love not arrogant, but notice this: "Love is others-centered." Notice verse 5: "Love

does not act unbecoming; it does not seek its own." Man, these words are very fascinating. I don't know if you've studied this "unbecoming" word before, but it's very interesting. Find its roots in the Old Testament and it has the idea to be shamed or to be shameful. You can find it in passages like Leviticus 16 where it's even talking about a public indecency.

Here's the idea of the word of unbecoming: it's the idea to describe someone who doesn't care about how their sin affects other people; so they live and make their own choices and do whatever they want despite who their sin affects. Example would be, say, adultery. That not only is an offense to God, but it hurts the other spouse; and if there's kids, it hurts kids in the process, right? Sin affects everyone. The sins splash.

The word "unbecoming" says love never lives in such a way that they think about their choices in a vacuum. They don't say, "Well, I'm the only one that I want to live for, and so I'm going to make my choices; I don't care who it affects." Rather, love says, "Every choice I make I'm considering God and all the people my choices will affect."

Not only is love never unbecoming, but notice, "it does not seek its own." The idea is, "Make its point, make self a reference point." Even the word "seek" there is "to plot" or "to strategize." Love never sits around and thinks about how self can be served. You take those two concepts together, beloved, you have this idea: love lives in a way in its public and private life to avoid sinful actions and sinful choices that could hurt the name of Christ and splash on other people in your family, and it doesn't because it has others' interests at their heart, and they are slow, and plot to consider how they can strategize to serve others. Now stop there.

How did Jesus do that for you and I? Think about it. How did Jesus do that for us? Well, from the foundation of the world, Ephesians 2 says, before time, he was planning and strategizing and plotting as the premeditated of God with your name. If you're a Christian here, think about this; just stop and think about this. If you are a Christian, your name was in the mind of



God before the foundation of the world, and he was plotting and strategizing and planning how in the incarnation he would come to live a perfect life for you and die a death for you. He did all that because of love for you.

From the foundation of the world, if you are a Christian, that ought to blow your mind. Your actual name was in the mind and heart of Jesus even when he was on the tree dying for you; you were there even if you weren't born yet. How can we sit around and be selfish when we think about the plotting and planning of God to serve us? It's just so convicting.

Love is never arrogant. Love loves others despite their merit. Love is others-centered. Next one, next manifestation. These are getting painful, and these next few are tough as well. But think about the way Christ loved us. Do you see already that to the degree you plumb the depths of the gospel and believe it in your own heart and in your own life, and you meditate on these truths is to the degree you will be able to know how to love others. And a small gospel means a lack of love, and a big gospel means a real bunch of loving people.

I've been thinking about this church and this community in Dallas. I think about Dr. MacArthur will say, "Hard truth makes soft people." Right? Well, big God theology and big understanding of how much you were loved as a rebel that hated him, big God theology: "I'm depraved, and he chose me and saved me. I was a rebel at the core, and he mercifully rescued me." To whatever degree I'm humbled profoundly by that, that will splash all over my relationships. So humbling to think about the incarnation this way.

And that leads to our next one, this one's tough: "Love is not personally offended." Ah, man, this is hard in our culture. You guys heard of microaggressions? They're everywhere. I read something recently that someone's allowed to be offended and lash out at you if you show an act of chivalry. In fact, for a guy to open a door for a lady is a sign that he's

thinking he's better than her and they're not equals in society; so she's allowed to lash out. It's called a microaggression now.

Everything can offend in this culture, right? You can get offended at everything. And actually, it's a virtue, it's your passport to be offended. In fact, the longer your list of offenses, the bigger you're a card-carrying member of the "I've been offended" club. Everywhere you go our culture says it's right to be offendable. We have rights. We're American, right?

And Christians in other times, even in the book of Corinthians, they would laugh at the way we talk about we get offended. They didn't get to go to Nero and go, "Hey, you treat us a certain way; and we're going to go march out on the street if you don't treat us a certain way." Nero and Claudius and all them say, "Go ahead and go march; my soldiers will be out there, and you'll all die." We are just an offendable bunch of people.

Well, Christians are not supposed to be personally offendable. Notice, "Love is not provoked." It's literally the word, and its basic definition, "to be stirred up in your inner life over something." And the word came to describe an inner anger and response when you perceive you've been mistreated. Oh, man. If you're married, you know this one well. "I perceive I've been mistreated, and now I feel justified to make you pay because you've mistreated me." Hmm.

Love doesn't do that. You know why? Because love doesn't take into account a wrong suffered. Notice, a wrong suffered is a word for people's sin against you. It's a mathematical term, counting and computing. It's the idea of in the relational dimension it came to be storing up the ways people have personally offended you, and then keeping a mental record in debits and not forgiving them for how they've wronged you.

Love never does that. You know why? Because loves pardons people, love forgives people. Why? Because we've been forgiven. I mean, who are we

on a human to human level to hold an offense against other people when Holy God has offended sinful man? One writer said, "True love does not forgive and forget, but rather remembers and still forgives."

You say, "Well, aren't I supposed to be offended and provoked sometimes, Pastor, about wrongs and mistreatments?" Of course. Actually, this word "provoked" is used in the positive.

Acts 17, Paul's looking up on the Areopagus and he's offended that they're worshipping other gods instead of the living God. But the word's also used to be personally offended. So you say, "Well, how do I evaluate if I'm nurturing a wrong and I've been personally offended, or this is about God's glory and his offense?" Simple; just ask yourself, "Why am I offended?" Ask yourself. There's only two answers: "I'm either offended because God's glory is being brought down and his holiness is being diminished, and I'm offended because God's offended." Well, I should go to that person and say, "I think you're dishonoring the Lord."

But I think that category is far less part of the time than this bigger category of when we ask ourselves, "Why am I bothered that person said that or did that, or treated me that way?" If it's not because you think they offended God and it's about you, you're not loving in that moment. Love is not provoked. Love does not nurture hurts. Love does not keep a record of wrongs. Rather, love forgives.

Jonathan Edwards had a daughter that really struggled with this. In fact, Jonathan Edwards of his ten daughter had one daughter that had such a struggle with this, of keeping a record of wrongs and being unforgiving, Jonathan Edwards one time told a young man not to marry his daughter because she had this issue.

In fact, here's how the story goes. The late Puritan in America says this, Edwards' story goes like this. When a young man fell in love with his

daughter, asked Jonathan Edwards for her hand in marriage. Dr. Edwards replied, "You can't have her." "But I love her and she loves me," the man protested. Jonathan Edwards says, "It doesn't matter."

Edwards insisted, and the man said, "Why?" and Edwards said, "Because she's not worthy of you." You think about a dad saying that about his daughter. Wow, this is quite the moment.

And the man responds to Jonathan Edwards and says, "But she's a Christian, isn't she?" Jonathan Edwards says, "Yes, she's a Christian." The man's exasperated now and goes, "Okay, what is the deal?" and Edwards says this, "The grace of God can live with some people with whom no one else could ever live." Wow, quite the moment.

Now we laugh at that; but it does bring into account this whole idea of being provoked and taking into account a wrong suffered. It makes it difficult for people to be around you, because that sin just continues to splash on people. And the root of the word even means "to become bitter or sour or unforgiving." The most miserable people I've met in my life are the people that hold a record of wrongs and have a debt in their mind and make people pay that have offended.

Beloved, do you know what Jesus did? You think about 1 Peter 2 for a moment. Don't have to turn there, just think about it. It's the passage that talks about Jesus suffering and dying; and when he was reviled he did not revile in return. And when they hurled threats at him, he did not hurl threats back. And when they're coming against him to crucify him and hating him, he just kept entrusting himself to the Lord. He kept no record of ultimate wrongs in heart, no personal offense.

Do you realize that the beating hearts – think about that – the pounding heart of anger and adrenaline that was in the men that were trying to crucify and were going to kill Jesus, Jesus was the one sustaining their

heartbeat at the moment that they were reviling him. The air in their lungs that was pounding out of their chest, he was letting their lungs breathe. You think about that love; and the incarnation represents him coming to do that.

When reviled, he was not provokable. He did not take into account a wrong suffered. In fact, he did the opposite, right? He not only didn't take into account a wrong suffered personally, but he took on sin and then gave us righteousness. We sit around holding this list of wrongs and grudges. Jesus says, "I clear the debt of people and fill up their account with righteousness, and I give myself as the substitute." He just realized unforgiving people, you have to wonder if they understand the gospel.

Let me just make one more point about this. And this is for me too, this is for all of us. So I'm calling Daron out here as well. It is hypocrisy – just listen – it is hypocrisy on our part to punish other people when they offend us, to hold grudges and keep records of wrongs, to nurture hurts in our hearts and not forgive, to retaliate when offended, to be bitter towards others when we think we're mistreated, while at the same time enjoying the benefits of the perfect sin substitute baby Jesus, wrapped in a manger, born to die, who cleared your account and holds no wrongs against you. It's hypocrisy in us to boast in the gospel while holding all these offenses. Love doesn't do that because love understands, "The biggest offense in the world is what I did to Christ; and he forgave me."

D. A. Carson was interviewing Carl Henry. He was a famous man. If you know Carl Henry, he was a famous evangelical preacher known far and wide. D. A. Carson said, "You're known far and wide for your incredible influence. But Dr. Henry, you're most known for your humility." D. A. Carson said, "How have you remained so humble when you've had so much influence?" Carl Henry said, "How can a man be arrogant when he stands beside the cross?" That's love.

Love serves despite merit. Love is not proud, it's others-centered. It's not personally offended. These next few we'll just unfold very quickly. Love lives by conviction.

Notice verse 6: "Love does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth." Look at that little word "rejoice" there. Just look close at it in your Bibles. There's rejoice, and then rejoice. You have rejoice doing something in the negative, not rejoicing in unrighteousness; and you have rejoice doing something in the positive, love rejoicing in truth. What's the word "rejoice" then? It means "to agree with," "to be glad in," "to trust in," "to partake with approval," "to welcome into your life," and "to promote something." So that means love does two things.

The word for "unrighteousness" is the word for "righteousness" with a prefix that says something negative. So, the word "unrighteousness" is anything that God says is not godly or holy or aligned with his word, that's unrighteous. Wonder what's in the unrighteous category? Anything that does not perfectly align with this.

What does love do? Love never affirms anything that goes against the Word of God. Think about that: nothing unrighteous, nothing sinful. Do you want to know something then? People could be out there burning it up in the streets, doing all types of social gospel ministry and tearing it up around town. But if they insulate people in their sin and don't do the other side of this – rejoice in truth and preach the gospel to them – they're not loving. In fact, just look at verse 3 and take it with this passage: "And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and I surrender my body to be burned, but I do not have love, it profits me nothing."

Beloved, homeless shelters and mercy ministries that muzzle the clarity of the truth and insulate people in their sin are not the most loving people on the streets. Faithful Christians that preach the truth and don't allow people to be insulated in their sin, and pulpits that faithfully preach the gospel,

those are the most loving places at Christmas. Why? Because love loves people's soul more than they love their comfort.

You know that every person in this room's going to spend eternity somewhere? All of us – my kids, everyone here – we're all spending eternity somewhere, and we'll stand before God alone. And what love says is, "I love your soul more than I love my comfort or your comfort. So I'm going to tell you the truth. I'm not going to warm you up with a cheese sandwich and a roof over your head so that you're more comfortable before you go to hell. I want you to know Jesus Christ was born to die. Son came to die, God's Son."

That's what Christmas ought to be about. Christmas holidays ought to be about rejoicing in truth, talking about truth, never insulating sin, never glossing it over, calling out what is sin, and you say, "Well, should I go to my family and say, 'Everybody, okay, time for my love message. Everyone sit down, all the unbelievers in my family; time for me to love you.'" No, I'm not saying do that, not saying be insensitive. I'm saying when God gives opportunities, we ought to speak and never muzzle the clarity of Scripture for our own comfort, because love would never do that. Self-love does that; biblical love wouldn't.

Next, "Love lives with patience." Love is patient with other people's weaknesses. So we've seen love serves despite merit, it's not proud, it's others-centered, it's not personally offended, love's led by conviction. And by the way, on our last point, did Jesus ever muzzle the clarity of the gospel? Did Jesus ever insulate anyone in their sin? Never. He always was perfectly loving. Sure, we could go out and do those mercy ministries; but it ought to be full of gospel truth for people's souls.

So next word – sorry, I went back sermon: "Love is patient with weaknesses." I'll tell you what; this right here, verse 7, toughest area for Daron Roberts to live. That's me. You know why? Because this word right here is very similar to the word "patience."

Remember the word "patience" was "absorbing the wrath of another for a long period of time." The word, if you look down just two words from now, we're going to see there that love endures all things. See that in verse 7, "Love endures all things." That's a word for suffering because of the gospel. So patience is suffering because of wrath in general. Endures, at the end there, is suffering because of the gospel.

So what's the word "bears"? It's a totally different word. Here's what it means. It means to be, we could say, bear with others in the sense that you are bearing with them in weaknesses and immaturities that may or not be inherently sinful, and then not complaining or retaliating when you perceive something they've done that you don't like.

Let me say that again. It means you're not petty. You absorb and you're patient with weaknesses, quirks, immaturities, and the way people are different than you. Oh, man, when I do premarital counsel I know this is coming for married couples. They'll get happily married, and they're so happy; and then all of a sudden someone doesn't close cupboards.

My wife is a professional cupboard closer. It's actually one of her spiritual gifts, because she married me. I actually knocked the door off our motorhome the other day on the way here because the door may not have been closed. She had to bear with that.

The word "bearing up" here is the idea that when you see immaturities and weaknesses – and you parents know this with your kids – that may or may not be inherently sinful, you just live above them and absorb them, and serve those people without complaining about their weaknesses. Ah, man. We're so prone to nurture little things and assume the worst of motives and assign wrong thinking when it may just be a way someone's different than us. And in the church, you watch how much that pettiness gets into church



life, right, in 1 Corinthians 13. All the little ways there was these pockets arising in Corinth because there was pettiness.

You know what my pastor Jerry tells me? Told me years ago – and my wife and I rehearse it to each other all the time. He says, "Daron, if you want to be faithful in ministry you have to learn to live above pettiness. You just live above it, you absorb. You absorb weaknesses in people, because you know what; how many weaknesses does Jesus absorb of you a day? How about this last hour?"

Not even the sin. I mean, the sin he has to deal with, wow, that's a lot. But just the ways that we don't – we're weird. We're quirky. There's things we do that if we're more careful with them, they may reflect the gospel in a better way, and they may not be inherently sinful; but we've just got ways we're wired that aren't as helpful, and they rub off on other people.

Love says, "I'll bear that. I'll wear that. You know how much Jesus has to deal with me? Of course, I can do that. Come on, I'll absorb that." Rather, what we do is we actually take it as a personal offense, which is unloving.

And that goes with the next idea: Love is optimistic. Love is optimistic. Notice two more "believes all things" ideas. "Love believes all things, and hopes all things." Similar concept. And you may go, "What are all things here?" You can't believe everything, right? We don't believe false gospels. We don't hope in people that they will live happily ever after if they don't know Christ.

So it's not believing and hoping in everything. It's believing and hoping here in the context of body life. So for you here in the church or with people you're around in a relationship; when you don't know their motives, when you don't ultimately know what's going on in their heart, and they're telling you what they're doing and you don't know any different, you assume the best, you believe the best about them.

We are a pessimistic culture. Why? Because, frankly, if we're hurt about something it's just easy to assign wrong motives to something. Love says, "You know what; I'll believe the best and I'll hope the best." And you say, "Well, Jesus knew the motives. How did he do that?"

It's true, he knew the motives. But if you watch him with his disciples, wasn't he encouraging to them? Even in their weaknesses, they slept in Year One and they slept in Year Three, and he still encouraged them. He's praying and they're sleeping twice. And he launches them in the book of Acts and says, "Go take on the world for the gospel, guys. You go take the charge, I trust in you." Talk about hopeful optimism for the gospel.

One of my pastors at our church, when we're counseling people and ministering to them and I'm not always sure how they're doing, he always reminds me, "Daron, when you're ministering and you hear what people are saying and they haven't given you reason to suspect that their motives are inherently wrong, today we rejoice."

Love is optimistic. Love rejoices. Love finds ways to be encouraged about what's going on in other people's lives, and hopes in the best for the future, because love's always looking for greater fruit.

Lastly, not only does love suffer with joy, but love endures all things. This is the word for "enduring because of the gospel." Is everybody in our family and everybody around us – if I had a show of hands, all of us have unbelievers in our family. Or maybe you're here today and you're visiting as an unbeliever. We're thrilled you're here and you're hearing about this. But this word is specifically for believers. This word is when you are acting righteously and other people get angry about it and they start mistreating you for the sake of the gospel, love says, "I'll absorb that, because it allows me to be like Jesus."

And you think about it; some of the greatest ways you're going to be able to show the love of Christ to people in this holiday season is when they're mistreating you for Christ's sake. That may be the best thing about it. Your unsaved family members, the best picture of the gospel they may see this Christmas is when they mistreat you and sin against you because of Christ, and you still love them. That's what endurance does. I love that word. You joyfully endure even when being mistreated. That's what love does. And, of course, Christ did that for us.

So, our time's gone, so now I'm going to sum up everything I've said. Ready for it? One paragraph. This is my definition of agape love, my working definition. Ready?

Here is what it means to be loving at Christmas and understand how you've been loved and express that to others: agape love, a love that can only be found in Christ, that need no reciprocation when you're serving another, that serves enemies and ministers to antagonists. It overlooks wrongs, can be patient with weaknesses, absorbs others' anger, assumes the best of motives, can serve without praise, can meet a need with no agenda, can be rejected and take no personal offense, serves people despite their merit, lavishly forgives no matter the offense, rejoices in truth and rejects falsehood, never affirms evil, hopes for the best, views people as eternal souls to serve rather than temporal resources to consume.

Beloved, don't you see how easy it is to miss the reason for the season, to not focus enough on how we've been loved by Christ and how much he's cared for us, that other people don't get the benefit of that same love? You say, "I want to be more loving this Christmas I want to focus more on that." Well then swim deep in the glories of Calvary. Believe afresh the significance of Jesus born to die. Study the narrative of Jesus in Luke 2 and Matthew 1. But think about the fullness of his life. And then even Austin's message last week: think about he's coming back as sovereign King; and you're even preparing for that now in how you worship him.

Beloved, I wanted to give us this charge, and mostly for my own heart in many ways, to make sure that we put love right back in the center of Christmas, and we worship afresh this season on how Christ has loved us, and we love other people with Christlike love that Christ wants us to reflect. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Lord Jesus, we are desperately convicted on ways we don't love and overwhelmed at the way you've loved us. Lord, when we think about this love, it is absolutely clear that if we do not know you and we have not had your Spirit indwell our heart that's given us power, we could never live this way.

Lord, I know I'm a guest here today. Father, you know my heart, and you know that I love to see people saved. If there's those here today, Lord, that hear the definition of love, and they hear how you sent your Son to love sinful people, and they look at their life and they don't see that they ever express love like that, that they don't love that way, that their life is all full of self-love, Lord, I pray you'd save them this Christmas, and they would marvel at Jesus being born to die.

Thank you for this church and this ministry. And this church already reflects so much of what 1 Corinthians 13 says in love. And may this not just be a Christmas message, but help launch them into next year, Lord. Thank you for this time, in your name we pray. Amen.