

# Love Bears All Things

*The Characteristics of Love*

By Steve Viars

sermonaudio.com

**Bible Text:** 1 Corinthians 13:1-4

**Preached On:** Sunday, June 15, 2014

## **Faith Church**

5526 State Road 26 E

Lafayette, IN 47905

**Website:** <http://www.faithlafayette.org/church>

**Online Sermons:** <http://www.sermonaudio.com/faithlafayette>

On Father's Day we all have had different kinds of experiences with fathers, some good, some not so good, perhaps, but thank the Lord that because of his gift of Jesus Christ, it's possible for all of us to know God as our heavenly Father. John said, "As many as received him, to them gave he the power," gave he the right, Scripture says, "to become the child of God." I hope that you know him personally in that way.

When I was in the sixth grade, my family moved from Gary, Indiana out to Merrillville and if you're not familiar with the region, that is a southern suburb of Gary, we might say. Eventually, we settled into our new subdivision and I had to make a whole new set of friends and deal with everything that goes along with that kind of a transition and, honestly, it was a bit rocky for me. We lived on 79<sup>th</sup> Avenue right behind the Greek Orthodox Church if you've ever been up in that area and that was when all those businesses along Route 30, which is actually just one block over, 80<sup>th</sup> Avenue, were being built. One Sunday afternoon, some of my new friends and I decided to build a fort out in the woods between our subdivision and Route 30. There was a retention pond behind the Greek Church and some woods and then all these construction sites. So, since you need construction supplies to build a fort and since we were temporarily embarrassed for lack of funds seventh and eighth graders, we decided the best approach would be to go borrow whatever we needed from these construction sites. So we creatively entered one of the buildings that was under construction, we found a pretty good sized wooden crate that had a pallet bottom and wooden sides and it functioned for us kind of like a shopping cart. We just went around the building and picked up whatever we thought we needed for our fort. A lot of it was scraps; some of it probably wasn't scrap. It was like going to Home Depot without the inconvenience of cash registers.

We finished our shopping trip and we're dragging this fully loaded crate to the location of our proposed fort when we hear a police car siren. Apparently, some nosy neighbor saw what was unfolding and had the audacity to call the authorities which clearly makes them the villain in this story in case you're having trouble getting your bearing on what's what here. So we did what any responsible little citizens would do at that moment, yeah, we scattered to the winds. Absolutely. It was every man for himself for sure. I still have this vision of me hiding in the landscaping of one of my neighbors' houses in full daylight. It was clearly one of my finest moments for sure. Well, the police were a whole lot smarter

than us, surprise, surprise, and so they just went out and figured out who the young men were in that subdivision about that age and just started going to our houses. The next thing I know, I'm at the police station in Merrillville and I'm contemplating how many years I'm going to spend in the slammer for this infraction along with trying to figure out a creative way to blame all of this on my sister so I had a lot on my mind.

Apparently, the police reached the owner of the building who decided, praise God, to not press charges. They recovered everything and it was all returned and now it just came down to the matter of what my father was going to do to me. I don't believe I was genuinely a Christian at that time but I was attending church and my dad wasn't but he had a very solid work ethic and a very low tolerance for anybody who would ever steal anything. Now, here's what I remember about that event: yes, he spoke to me very directly on the way home; yes, he gave me consequences for what I had done; but as far as I know, he did not spread that story around to the rest of the family. In fact, I don't remember him ever bringing that event up again. He could have used it to mock my church-going. He could have exploited my failures for his personal gain. He could've torn me down to make himself look good. He could've gotten mileage out of my failures in all sorts of ways. But instead, after I admitted I was wrong and accepted my consequences, he covered it. That's the key point: he covered it and he never unearthed it again. Friends, that is a crucial component of biblical love.

With that in mind, I want to invite you to open your Bible now to 1 Corinthians 13. That's on page 137 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you if you need that this morning.

Our church's theme this year is "Loving Our Neighbors" and I hope we're working that theme out in all sorts of practical ways as individuals and as a church but for the past several weeks now, we've been doing a word-by-word and phrase-by-phrase study of the characteristics of love in this great love chapter in the Bible, 1 Corinthians 13. If you've been with us for these studies, I hope we're getting a feel for how unique this particular passage of Scripture is in all the Bible. James Boyer in his commentary on 1 Corinthians entitled "For A World Like Ours" said this about this text: "The greatest, strongest, deepest thing Paul ever wrote. Thus, one has described the chapter before us. Many have called it Saint Paul's hymn of love or lyrical interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount or the Beatitudes set to music." Then he says, "A startling change takes place in the temper and the style of the book at this point: Paul had been plodding through the problem after problem with deep reasoning, carefully worded arguments, explanations and warnings. On each side of this chapter, the tumult of argument and remonstrance still rages but within it, in 1 Corinthians 13, all is calm. The sentences move in almost rhythmical beauty. The imagery unfolds itself in almost dramatic propriety. The language arranges itself with almost rhetorical accuracy. We could imagine how the apostle's amanuensis," that's a scribe, "must have paused to look up in his master's face at the sudden change in the style of his dictation and seen his countenance light up as it had been the face of an angel at this vision of divine perfection passed before him." That's how unique this particular set of verses is in all the word of God.

This morning, we're talking about how love bears all things. Please follow along to get some context as I read beginning in 1 Corinthians 13:1,

“1 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. 2 If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 3 And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing. 4 Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, 5 does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, 6 does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth.” and now today, “7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 8 Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part; 10 but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. 11 When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. 12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known. 13 But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.”

We're talking this morning about that phrase “love bears all things” and I'd like us to keep our outline fairly simple: we're going to talk about what does that mean. I think it might be surprising to many of us what that actually means: love bears all things. Then, we want to put some balance on this. Obviously, Paul in this section is speaking hyperbolically so we need to be sure that we're balancing this off with other places in the word of God because we really need to be sure we get this right. Lastly, the implications. So, the meaning, the balance and then the implications.

First of all, the meaning of “love bears all things.” The word “bears” in 1 Corinthians 13:7 is the Greek word “stego” and when we read it, we might be tempted to think, “Well, Paul's talking about how love puts up with things. That must be the point.” Or we bear or we tolerate the misdeeds of other people. That may be true about love, in fact, in subsequent weeks, we're actually going to look at some of the other phrases that tend to lean more to that particular meaning but I would like to suggest to you this morning that that's really not what is in focus here. We're not just talking about putting up with something; we're not talking about love tolerating. That's really not the point of this Greek word “stego” and I think maybe the best way for us to get the point would be if you hold your hand right there in 1 Corinthians 13, I promise you we're going to be back there, but I want to take you to three other places in the New Testament that use the noun form of this exact same word in a way that might be challenging but hopefully memorable to us.

Again, please hold your hand in 1 Corinthians 13 and go back to the beginning of the New Testament to the gospel of Matthew 8. That's on page 6 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you if you need that. Those particular Bibles reset numerically in the New Testament so be sure you're in the New Testament section on page 6. That will bring you to Matthew 8:8. What I want to ask you to do: please be looking for the noun form in this verse of our Greek word "stego" or "love bears all things." Are you ready? Let's see if we can find it in Matthew 8:8, "But the centurion said, 'Lord, I am not worthy for You to come under my roof, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed.'" Did you see it? "Bear"? You might say, "Are you sure? Was that the right verse?" Oh, it's the right verse, that's actually why I wanted you to see it. Now, look over at Mark 2:4. You say, "I'm not sure I saw it yet." That's okay, we've got another one. Mark 2:4. We're looking for uses, the noun form of this word "stego" which in 1 Corinthians 13:7 is translated "love bears."

Here's another use of the noun form, let's see if we can see it. This is a delightful text, you'll remember it. It's where the paralytic man's friends were trying to get this man to Jesus but there were too many people; there was no way to get their friend and his pallet through the crowds. Look for the noun form of this word "stego, love bears." Mark 2:4, "Being unable to get to Him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above Him; and when they had dug an opening, they let down the pallet on which the paralytic was lying." See it? "Bears"? You say, "No, I didn't see it."

Okay, you've got one more shot because that is the right verse. Look at Luke 7, go one more book over: Matthew, Mark, Luke. This is on page 50 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you if you need it. This is Luke's rendition of that first passage we looked at in Matthew but he uses "stego" too, at least, in the way we have it recorded here. I'm in Luke 7:6. Do you remember what we're doing? We're looking for the noun form of the word "love bears" all things. Luke 7:6, "Now Jesus started on His way with them; and when He was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to Him, 'Lord, do not trouble Yourself further, for I am not worthy for You to come under my roof.'" You say, "Wait a minute, I see a similarity in those three verses but I don't see the connection between that and 'love bears' all things." What is the word you saw in all three verses? The word "roof." That is the Greek word "stego." Love bears all things. It's the word "roof" and that's the word picture that Paul is painting here. Friends, biblical love is like a roof.

How so? What does a roof do? Well, love covers. One standard lexicon defines this word like this: "love bears" means "to cover" or "to pass over in silence" or, here it is, "to keep confidential." Love bears all things: it keeps things confidential. Think about the corollary, Proverbs 10:12, "Hatred stirs up strife." Have you got it? "Hatred stirs up strife, But love bears all things, love covers all transgressions." How is that? Well, what does hatred do? Hatred blows the roof off. Hatred tells a story far and wide. Hatred cannot and will not shut up, especially if in the telling of the story, there is some perceived advantage for self. See, think about how my dad handled that situation with me having problems with the police. Nobody else in my extended family needed to know about my thieving ways and it did not need to be broadcast to his associates at work. It

didn't need to worm its way into the next ten year's worth of dinner conversation. He didn't need to tweet it; he didn't need to post it on Facebook; he didn't need to rub my nose in it every chance he got. Love is like a what? It's like a roof. I admitted it, I accepted my consequences, I asked forgiveness and now he was an incredibly loving father by covering it, by choosing to keep it forever confidential.

John MacArthur said this in his commentary on 1 Corinthians, he said, “Stego, to bear' basically means 'to cover' or 'to support' and therefore 'to protect.’” Please get all of that. “Love bears all things by protecting others from exposure and ridicule and harm. Genuine love does not gossip or listen to gossip.” Did we all get that? “Genuine love does not gossip or listen to gossip even, like my thieving ways, even when a sin is certain. Love tries to correct it with the least possible hurt and harm to the guilty person. Love never protects sin,” that's why it needs to be addressed, we're not talking about that and I'll balance this in a minute but, “love never protects sin but it is an anxious to protect the sinner.”

Are you feeling convicted yet about this gossip thing? Maybe we ought to just bring the gospel immediately into this because we all struggle here, right? Anybody here want to stand up and say, “I never struggle with gossip ever. I never say it and I never listen to it”? I've never seen anybody struck in the church house on a Sunday morning. We all struggle here so we'd better just bring the blood of Christ into this right away. Friends, when we talk about love covering, love being like a roof, that's got the blood of Christ written all over it which means when we gossip to people who are not part of the problem and not part of the solution regardless of the lame excuse we might erect in our heads for doing so, we have to recognize how unlike our God we are choosing to be.

That was pictured at the Passover. This concept had been driven into the very DNA of God's people through events like the tenth plague during the wilderness wanderings where the children of Israel were told to take an unblemished lamb and then take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the house in which you eat it and then God explained, “The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live and when I see the blood, I will,” what? I will love you. Love bears all things. Love is like a roof. “When I see the blood, I will pass over you and no plague will befall you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.” That's what love does, it bears all things. It's like a roof: it covers, it passes over in silence.

It was also illustrated by the mercy seat. You may recall after the Passover, after the miraculous parting of the Red Sea, that God gave very specific – it's incredible how detailed this instruction is in the Bible about the furniture in the tabernacle and in the Holy of Holies on top of the ark of the covenant was the? It was the covering called the? Mercy seat. Think about this: God said, “Then Aaron shall offer the bull of the sin offering which is for himself and make atonement for himself and for his household, and he shall slaughter the bull of the sin offering which is for himself. He shall take a firepan full of coals of fire from upon the altar before the LORD and two handfuls of finely ground sweet incense, and bring it inside the veil. He shall put the incense on the fire,” can you smell it? “He shall put the incense on the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of

incense may cover the mercy seat,” can you feel it? “That is on the ark of the testimony, otherwise he will die. Moreover, he shall take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle it with his finger on the mercy seat on the east side; also in front of the mercy seat he shall sprinkle some of the blood with his finger seven times.” All of that was designed by God to appeal to all of our sense, all of them. As we think about how delightful and delicious it is that God loves us like that, making it possible for our sin to be covered. Covered because of his mercy.

Ultimately, this is accomplished through the shed blood of Christ. We know the beginning of this text, I assume, because many of us have memorized it but how does it go on to discuss, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” We know that, huh? “Being justified is a gift by his grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus whom God displayed publicly as the propitiation in his blood through faith. This was to demonstrate his righteousness because in the,” what does love do? Love bears all things. Love is like a roof. “Because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.” That's why in the next chapter, Paul quotes David and says, “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven and whose sins have been,” anybody want to guess the Greek word there? Stego. “Blessed are those whose sins have been covered.”

We could also say this: that love protects. When we're having bad weather outside, the message is “take cover.” Get under a roof. My dad was protecting me by not gossiping about what I had done. No one else was part of that problem, inquiring minds didn't need to know. No one else was part of the solution so he kept that juicy morsel under roof even though you'd better believe, my actions had disappointed him. You'd better believe, my actions had angered him. You'd better believe, my actions had shamed him and hurt him and shamed our family and everything he stood for. Thank God for a father who loved me. Love bears all things. Love protects. And it wasn't just a matter of saying he loved me and then not doing it. I'll tell you right now: I'd rather have a daddy who said it less and did it more any day of the week if my only alternative is the opposite.

MacArthur said this, it is so true: “There is perverse pleasure in exposing someone's faults and failures.” True that, huh? As already mentioned, he said that's what makes gossip appealing. The Corinthians cared little for the feelings or welfare of fellow believers; it was every person for himself. Like the Pharisees, they paid little attention to others except when those others were failing or sinning. Man's depravity causes him to rejoice in the depravity of others. It's that depraved pleasure that sells magazines and newspapers that cater to exposes and true confessions and the like. Listen, I will be talking to some people today and they fill their brains with that all through the week. That's what they watch on television. It's just a bunch of gossip. That's what they have on their dumb-phones and their ipads and all of their devices; they are filling their brains with gossip and they are surrounding their hearts with gossipers. Do you understand that if you hang around a crock long enough, you're going to start smelling like a pickle and you can say you're loving all day long but if your life is filled with gossip because you've surrounded yourself with gossipers, you need some pastor to love you enough to tell you

to repent and today would be a really good day for that because, friends, love bears all things. It's the same sort of pleasure that makes children tattle on brothers and sisters, whether to feel self-righteous by exposing another's sin or to enjoy that sin vicariously, we're all tempted to take a certain kind of pleasure in the sins of others. Love has no part in that. Amen. Amen. And Amen. Love has no part in that. It does not expose; it does not exploit; it does not gloat; it does not condemn. It bears, B-E-A-R-S, it does not bare, B-A-R-E.

Now, can I ask you, are you allowing the word of God to do its work? Are you? We can say we're loving all day long but not if we are guilty of the sin of gossip. Please listen to these words from the book of Proverbs, "A gossip betrays a confidence but a trustworthy man keeps a secret." Or Proverbs 18:8, "The words of a gossip are like choice morsels." You see, it's not just a matter of saying it, it's a matter of listening to it. I had occasion to ask somebody recently, "You know, it's obvious now that the jig is up, that you have been listening to gossip. Why was it so delicious for you to listen to such things?" "The words of a gossip are like choice morsels, they go down to a man's inmost parts." Or Proverbs 20:19, "A gossip betrays a confidence so avoid a man who talks too much." Wow. Proverbs 26:20, "Without wood a fire goes out; without gossip a quarrel dies down." It's illogical and unbiblical to say on the one hand that you love someone but then choose to blow the roof off their perceived failures by telling people who are not part of the problem or not part of the solution. And lest some of us are starting to build all of our reasons why it's okay in that particular situation to gossip about that person because we're pretty good at justifying ourselves, aren't we? And I'm smiling right now, I love you, are you feeling it? Are you feeling it over at Faith West? I'm loving you. But listen, can we forget this, "Well, I'm just stating facts." If you're stating facts to the wrong people, it's still gossip. Or, "I'm just trying to get counsel to know how to respond." Really? "I just want them to pray for us." Oh please. Let's call it what God calls it: it's choosing to be unlike our covering God. It's choosing to be terribly and wickedly unloving and some, and perhaps many, of God's people simply need to repent of it.

Just like with all of these characteristics that we've been studying, we have to put some balance on this and I hope as you're trying to think, "What about this? What about this? What about this?" That's fine because as I said in the beginning, Paul is speaking hyperbolically here by his use of the word "all" and we've been trying to balance these ideas all through these messages in this series. Paul is speaking hyperbolically, in other words, he's exaggerating for purposes of effect, that's what that word means. But bears all things does not and cannot mean just look the other way when men and women around us are displeasing God. You say, "How do we know that it can't mean that?" Because that would contradict so much of what has already been articulated in this book. The problem of division in the church discussed in chapter 1, that isn't something that is just to be borne, that's not to be covered, that had to be addressed and confronted in chapter 1. Or the problem of the incestuous man in chapter 5 and, even worse, the church's pride in allowing the incestuous man to continue to be part of that congregation without that sin being addressed. Those problems could not just be covered; those problems had to be confronted and they were, clearly, in this book preceding 1 Corinthians 13. The problem of them taking one another to court, it had to be exposed, it had to be dealt with. Their

abuses at the Lord's Table; their selfish expression of the showy gifts. The tenure and nature of this entire book means that we can't take the position that covering things means failing to handle sin with the right people in the room.

You say, "Well, how do we balance this?" Let's look at this from several different perspectives and hopefully end up in a balanced position on "love bears all things." How do we do that? By avoiding four wrong extremes. Love covers, love bears all things, how do you avoid this? Here's one: harping on inconsequential issues, especially because of your own perfectionism or bitterness. Here's the thing, friends: not everything rises to the issue of something that requires confrontation. You've got to just bear that. You don't even have to talk about it. It's not a habit, it's not harmful, it's not a spiritual issue per se, and yet some people spend so much time harping on things that are absolutely inconsequential so if your husband generally picks up his socks but one day in a rush forgets, that's not the time to whip out your dumb-phones, snap a picture of his errant socks on the floor, send it out to your entire distribution list on Facebook with a message that asks them to pray for you because your husband is such a slob. I mean, some people are like angels: they're always up in the air harping about something. It's the best I've got. Listen, love ought to cover a lot of that silly stuff. Here's what Peter said, "Love covers a multitude of sins." Maybe these aren't even sins and yet we ought to be better at covering inconsequential things.

Here's the other side: it's failing to confront the person about sin if it is harmful, if it is habitual. Now, if we're talking about something that that person continually does, it could potentially harm them spiritually or someone else, yes, you do have to address it with them. With them. You go to that person and you go to that person alone, "Brethren, if anyone is caught in any trespass you who are spiritual, restore that one." So you go and you talk to them. Or Luke 17:3, "Be on your guard, if your brother sins, rebuke him and if he repents, forgive him." So the loving cover comes if it's either not consequential, it's not habitual or harmful or if you went to the person and the person repented and it's been handled. You say, "Why doesn't that happen?" One of two things happens: either just covering things if they're not a big deal or if they are an issue, actually going face-to-face and talking to that person. Here's the answer: because people are too busy gossiping to everybody else. That's one way to define gossip: talking to people who are not part of the problem and not part of the solution. That's what Solomon meant in Proverbs 20:19, "A gossip betrays a confidence so avoid a man who talks too much."

Friends, it is amazing how deeply ingrained this particular habit can be in the hearts and lives of people who might be doing a lot of things well. I believe that. I had a counselee from another state, her husband had left her for no biblical grounds at all, mistreated her terribly and so she was coming to our counseling center to try to get some help for that. Because she was coming, she wanted to have somebody drive with her so she would bring different women from the church, a different one generally each week, but someone just to drive over with and then that women would stay out in the waiting room while I would bring the counselee back and me and the trainees would work with that person about what she was struggling with. So, each week it was a different woman, a different woman, a different woman and this counselee did very well. She was at a good church;



she did real well handling that particular episode of suffering in her life. In fact, we had decided this particular week I was talking about was going to be her last week. We knew that in advance and so I went out to the waiting room and she had a new woman with her that Monday and they were just in an animated conversation, they were really going at it, so much so that I actually had to kind of interrupt their conversation to announce my presence in the waiting room. It was almost like they really didn't want to stop talking to each other in order for her to talk to me and so, being the insightful counselor that I am, I just said, "Hey, you know, this is your last Monday and it's obvious that you guys have got something going here, do you want to just come back, both of you this time, and maybe we can talk about whatever is going on?" They said, "Oh, that would be great." They walked back to the office and they're still having a very animated conversation with me even as they're walking back down the hall, with each other, not with me at all, with each other, walking down the hallway. They sit down in the office so it's me, the two trainees and they're sitting there in the two chairs and they're just talking to one another. I mean, they are wound up about something for sure. Finally, I had to kind of interject and I'm looking at my watch and I kind of have to interject myself and I said, "Is there some way I could help you here?" And they started spinning this yarn. It was unbelievable how wound up they were about a young couple in their church that was about to get married and they had no business getting married whatsoever and they started going down through all these reasons. They were biblical reasons in many cases why this young couple should not be getting married: they were not communicating well; their relationship was on-again, off-again; they were in trouble financially. Bam, bam, bam, bam and they're telling me how everybody in the church is really wound up about how this young couple should not be getting married. Finally, my counselee who knew me well, she could see the look on my face and she could see that I wasn't just tracking, "No! That's terrible!" like that, so finally my counselee just stopped and said, "What?" And I said, "Well, you say this young couple should not be getting married, right?" "Yeah." "You say that you've got biblical reasons why this young couple should not be getting married?" "Yeah." "You say that everybody in the church is really wound up about this young couple getting married, right?" "Yeah." Then I said, "Well, who has gone and talked to the young couple?" Both of their heads just immediately went down and after what seemed like a pretty good period of time, my counselee, mine, she raised her head and she said, "You're right. The pastor should have gone." The pastor should have gone. There was no thought in their mind that instead of gossiping throughout the entire church house, that somebody actually ought to love the couple enough to go and talk to them.

It's amazing how much energy gets wasted on gossip instead of love bearing all things. Or this perspective: remaining bitter and unforgiving after genuine repentance has occurred. That's another way that love does not bear all things, it's because people even after the person repented will not forgive them. "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you along with all malice, be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other just as God in Christ hath forgiven you." This standard lexicon I've been quoting from said this about "stego": it throws a cloak of silence over what is displeasing in the other person. Have you got a cloak of silence? Do you even own a cloak of silence? Do you have access to a cloak of silence? If it's not a big deal, shut up about it. I don't know how else to say it. Just be quiet and if it is a deal,

stop gossiping to people who are not part of the problem and not part of the solution. Go talk to the person face-to-face and after they repent and ask forgiveness, don't bring it up ever again. "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you along with all malice, be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other just as God in Christ also has forgiven you."

You might say, "Why did you word that previous point with the word 'zealously'?" Because we have to work at this, friends. In the power of the blood of Christ, we have to work at this which is why Peter said in the words just preceding the verse I quoted a couple of moments ago, "the end of all things is near." Do you believe that? And I'm not trying to make some sort of prediction but I'm going to tell you right now, if you look at what's going on around our world and you're a futurist in any way, shape or form, you ought to have one eye on the sky. "The end of all things is near therefore be of sound judgment, be of sober spirit for the purpose of prayer. Above all, keep fervent." That's what we're talking about, "keep fervent in your love for one another because love covers a multitude of sins." Who said that? Loose-lipped Peter, for crying out loud. You might even say big-mouthed Peter said that. "Be of sound judgment, have a sober spirit, keep fervent, work at loving one another because love is like a roof, it covers a multitude of sins." Here's a question to think about: fervency, if we could channel all the fervency devoted to gossip on the part of the average Christian or the average church and transfer all that energy into fervently loving one another, how much further along would the average Christian and the average church be?

What are the implications of all of this? I've mentioned it several times already: this requires the power of the gospel, does it not? I hope you're saying, "I've got to run to the cross. I need Jesus desperately in order to do this." Two of the verses to the hymn that we sang last week – I mention, it's been a long time since I've thought about this hymn,

"Rock of Ages, cleft for me,  
Let me hide myself in thee.  
Let the water and the blood,  
From Thy wounded side which flowed,  
Be of sin the double cure,  
Save from wrath and make me pure.

"Nothing in my hand I bring,  
Simply to the cross I cling.  
Naked come to Thee for dress,  
Helpless, look to thee for grace,  
Foul, I to the fountain fly,  
Wash me, Savior, or I die."

Friend, if you've never trusted Christ as Savior and Lord, we would encourage you to do that today even in a message on gossip, that's what God could use to draw you to the end of yourself. I would encourage all of us to ask, "Now, how do you respond to the perceived sin and weaknesses of others, especially those who are closest to you in your

life?” Do you gossip about them or do you love them? Here's one sad biblical example that fits especially with Father's Day: it's the way that one of David's sons chose to gossip about him. Do you remember this? It's 2 Samuel 15, “Now it came about after this that Absalom provided for himself a chariot and horses and fifty men as runners before him. Absalom used to rise early and stand beside the way to the gate; and when any man had a suit to come to the king,” his father, David, “for judgment, Absalom would call to him and say, 'From what city are you?' And he would say, 'Your servant is from one of the tribes of Israel.' Then Absalom would say to him, 'See, your claims are good and right, but no man listens to you on the part of the king.’” He's dissing his own dad. “Moreover, Absalom would say, 'Oh that one would appoint me judge in the land, then every man who has any suit or cause could come to me and I would give him justice.' And when a man came near to prostrate himself before him, he would put out his hand and take hold of him and kiss him.” How loving Absalom is. “In this manner Absalom dealt with all Israel who came to the king for judgment; so Absalom stole away the hearts of the men of Israel.” I'm saying to you: Absalom gossiped about his own father. And mark it down, generally speaking, when gossip is present, rebellion is not far behind.

If you want to grow in biblical love, friends, you have to learn how to control your tongue. Time doesn't allow us to do this idea justice but the book of James has a marvelous chapter about the power of the tongue. It says things like “see how great a force to set aflame by such a small fire; the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body and sets on fire the course of our life and is set on fire by hell.” That's what gossip will do to a family. That's what gossip will do to an organization. That's what gossip will do to a business. That's what gossip will do to a church. That entire chapter is filled with powerful statements like that but have you ever noticed how the book of James ends? With our word, cover, “My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.”

Friends, if there is somebody in your life who is failing, don't gossip about it. Talk with them face-to-face directly if you need to and then after they repent, build a roof. Build a roof.

Let's stand together for prayer, shall we?

*Father in heaven, thank you for this opportunity to think about this particular characteristic of love and, Lord, I pray that we would respond to what we have heard in a way that would help us grow in this important characteristic. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*