

Love Rejoices

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Introduction

Our text comes from 1 Corinthians 13:6, "Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth." Have you ever known anyone who delighted in doing evil? My first thought has to do with someone I know that delights in doing **mischief**, as the Calvin and Hobbes cartoons show that I have handed out. In the upper panel, we see the pure joy in Calvin's heart as he performs his evil deed, and he cannot hide it even when he tries to say that he is sorry. In the lower panel, Calvin considers the worth of heaven if he can't do his mischief. In other cartoons, Calvin undergoes very intensive battles around Christmastime because he simply cannot be good when he sees opportunities for evil, even though he knows that Santa is watching.

Now the acquaintance that I referred to earlier reminds me very much of Calvin. He loves practical jokes, especially when he can get someone else to do the dirty work. I did catch him in the act one time, however, when he was personally trying to get me. Believe me, there's nothing like getting to your office early in the morning and having David Elrod crawl out from under your desk and try to act as if what he was doing down there was perfectly natural. After a few seconds of that, though, he gave up and reached down to pull the water bottle out that would have been used to douse me.

General Principles

What Paul is talking about goes much deeper than merely acts of mischief. We can think of his words in a general sense, dealing with good and evil, and we can also consider the very personal application of it in our every day relationships.

I am really very interested in this particular part of Paul's description of love. I guess it is because it seems to be the whole foundation of love. We must love good and hate evil. We must rejoice when goodness happens no matter where or when. I mean that our emotions must get involved and grab hold of us whenever we see a reflection of God's unfailing Good.

Now it should be an obvious choice. Let me illustrate this by showing you these two little cubes. One of these is an ordinary sugar cube, but the other, though it looks just like it, is made up of tiny glass shards glued together. Which one do you think I should eat? One tastes really good, but the other will shred my body apart from the inside. Pardon me for a moment while I make my choice. I sure hope I marked these right. (Act confused about which one is which.) I would offer it to Dave but I don't think that he would trust me (read verse 7). He does need a lot of sweetening, though. Of course, what I mean by that is that he uses six sugars in his tea.

Those two cubes looked almost identical. Is there usually this ambiguousness between good and evil? We may struggle sometimes trying to find the right thing to do, but there is a huge gulf between Good and Evil. But apparently some people see them as an equal choice. The thing is, though, that evil shreds up your insides, too. Personally, I really love Goodness. I just don't understand why people love evil.

God tells us what he wants from us very simply in Amos 5:15, "Hate evil, love good." We should all seek the ultimate Goodness which is characterized by God. We should hate evil, as well, knowing the pain and suffering that it has caused and continues to cause to all mankind. If we do not love the Good here on earth, what will we do when that is all that there is?

This is a look at the general aspect of this idea. But the context of 1 Corinthians 13:6 really points to love between individuals; it seems to be specific as to our relationship to people. Amos 5:15 is very powerful, but we need to focus in on individual relationships as well. Let us see what preceded this statement about good and evil.

Individual Application

Amos begins his message by denouncing several of the surrounding nations. Take a moment and imagine the feeling of the Israelites as one by one Amos destroys their neighbors, whom they hate. I hear them 'Amen-ing' and saying 'Right on!' to each one of these prophecies. Suddenly, Amos changes gears and attacks their arch-rival Judah. Judah has rejected the law of God, going astray from the path of righteousness. The crowd is really pumped now! You can just feel the joy in their hearts as they imagine the downfall of their enemies!

This shows on a personal relationship basis the bad part of our text verse. They are all delighting in the evil that will befall their neighbors. But wait just a minute! Amos did not know when to quit. His next message, and his longest one, was directed straight at Israel itself! Suddenly the crowd became dumbfounded and silent! Surely Amos cannot be talking about them! Indeed he is, however, and he has reserved most of his punch for this message. We see here the folly of delighting in evil, for we are all sinners and have fallen short of the glory of God.

In thinking of individual relationships, we need to look at our verse in two sort of connected ways. The first has to do with whether we hope that someone suffers physical setbacks or that they have success. The other relates to our speech; whether we use slander or the truth .

Fall of Enemies

Amos was a great example of hoping that your enemies fall. We can also think of Daniel's enemies as they gleefully watch him being thrown into the lion's den. Then there was Jonah who set up for himself a little booth in the hope that God would change his mind and destroy the Ninevites. But for the all time greatest along this line, we turn to the story of Haman and Mordecai.

Mordecai was a Jew in captivity in the land of Babylon who took care of an orphaned cousin named Esther. She was a very lovely girl who through God's providence became queen of Babylon, though she had kept secret her family background. It happened one day that Mordecai learned of an assassination conspiracy against the King. Mordecai reported it, the conspirators were punished, and this was recorded in the chronicles of the king.

Now Haman was a Babylonian who King Xerxes honored higher than of all other men. All the royal officials at the king's gate knelt down and paid honor to Haman, but Mordecai would do this. When Haman saw this, he was enraged. Yet having learned who Mordecai's people were, he scorned the idea of killing only Mordecai and looked for a way to destroy all of the Jews in the kingdom. This was truly an evil thing. Haman told the King, "There is a certain people scattered among the provinces of your kingdom whose customs are different, who do not obey the king's laws; it is not in the king's best interest to tolerate them. If it pleases the king, let a decree be issued to destroy them, and I will put ten thousand talents of silver into the royal treasury for the men who carry out this business." So the king agreed, not knowing the nationality of his queen.

When Mordecai learned of this, he sent a message to Esther, and told her that she should not think that because she was queen that she alone of all the Jews would escape. This was for this reason that she had become queen at this time. So Esther invited the king and Haman to a banquet. She did not reveal her purpose that day, but Haman left there happy and in high spirits because he was singled out for this honor. But when he saw Mordecai ignoring him he was filled with rage. Haman often boasted about his vast wealth, his many sons, and all the ways the king had honored him. But the existence of Mordecai ruined everything for him. His wife and all his friends advised him to have a huge gallows built so that he could have Mordecai hanged on it before a similar banquet with the king and queen the next day. This suggestion delighted Haman, and he had the gallows built.

That night the king could not sleep; so he ordered the record of his reign to be brought in and read to him. It was found where Mordecai had saved the king's life. So when Haman entered the presence of the king to ask for the authority to hang Mordecai, the king asked him how to honor a man that the king was pleased with. Naturally, Haman thought it was for himself, and was devastated when it turned out to be for Mordecai. Instead of getting honor from Mordecai, or even getting to hang him, Haman has to run before him now proclaiming what a great man Mordecai was. You can imagine how this infuriated him. In this state of confusion and discouragement, the message came to come to the second banquet Esther had prepared.

This time during the banquet Queen Esther stated her request that her people be saved. Imagine the horror in Haman's mind as he realizes that he has tried to condemn the queen to death. When the king asked who could have done this vile thing, the answer of course is Haman. Then Haman was terrified before the king and queen. The king was then told of Haman's plan to kill Mordecai, and in a rage he ordered that Haman be hanged on the gallows that he had built. And a way was found to let the Jews protect themselves against Haman's plan.

Haman was a man filled with love only for himself. This made him conceive of great evil through which he could accomplish his goals. He had no love of the truth at all.

On the other hand, we remember that David, in spite of all of his troubles with king Saul, had no joy in hearing of the downfall of the Lord's anointed. Jesus longed for the salvation of all men, and in Matthew 23:37 he says, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing." God does not want us to burn; he has no joy in our punishment. In 1 Tim 2:3, we read, "This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth." And We find in Romans 5:6-10:

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

We may feel that we have the right to envision with joy an enemy burning in the fires of hell for the wrong they have done us. But this is not an expression of love for our fellow man at all. God has made it very clear that we are to love our enemies. This means that we should not hope that God "gets" them, and they will burn in hell. We need to see if we have been able to achieve this in our own lives. We must hope that they turn to God and are saved. This is crucial to if we are truly to "delight not in evil, but rejoice in the truth."

Slander

In Psalms 52:3,4 we read, "You love evil rather than good, falsehood rather than speaking the truth. You love every harmful word, O you deceitful tongue!" In our hope that someone will fall we sometimes use help make it happen by slandering the name and reputation of others. Notice the joy in Proverbs 18:8, "The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to a man's inmost parts." And we all know how people delight in this. Slander can be achieved by outright lies or by twisting the truth to make something look bad.

One of the definitions of the word Satan is "the accuser". We remember him standing as an accuser of Job, saying that he would fold under the right kind of pressure. We read in Zechariah 3:1, "Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him." We know that Satan is continually accusing each and every one of us to try to steal us from God.

But Christ stands as our defense. In speaking of Christ we read in Hebrews 7:25, "Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to **intercede** for them." Christ will not listen to bad things about us, and counters the accusations of Satan. In Philippians 2:3 we see that Christ thought the best of us, for in humility he considered us better than himself. He accounted us as righteous in spite of our sin, and he rejoices in the spark of Good in us. This spark was enough to cause him to die for us.

We must likewise look for the good in people. In Titus 1:15, we read, "To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure." Then in Philippians 4:8: "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things." Remember the story in John 4:4 about the Samaritan woman at the well? Jesus saw the best in her even though we would have judged her as unworthy.

Conclusion

The bottom line is that love means we don't want anyone to hurt, not even our enemies. Jesus said in Luke 6:27-28; "But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you." We should never want to return hurt for hurt, even though this is hard for us sometimes. Love should always be touched by the pain of others.

In Luke 11:51 we find Christ giving tribute to Zechariah as sort of the final prophet martyr in the history of Israel. But if you read the story of Zechariah you find that he had a different attitude from Christ about those who did him in. In 2 Chronicles 24:22 we see that his dying words were, "May the LORD see this and call you to account." Christ, of course, forgave those who had killed

him. This is the example that we must try to follow. Christ is the Truth, the way and the life; and we should rejoice in him always.

Wanting evil for others will chew us up inside, just like if I had eaten the cube of class shards. Perhaps I did eat that cube, and now I am being sliced from the inside like a ham! I'll let you know. Christ has shown us a way to escape that consuming bitterness, if we will just love the truth, love the Good, like He does. The choice is clear to me. As I have said before: Happiness is the best revenge, anyway.