

## Qualities of Love – Not Angered

*1 Corinthians*

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**Bible Text:** 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a

**Preached on:** Sunday, May 16, 2010

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If you would please join with me in turning to the book of 1 Corinthians 13. We read again beginning in verse 1. Paul writes,

1 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. 4 Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant 5 or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6 it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. 7 Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 8 Love never ends.

Let's pray.

*Lord, our hearts have already been encouraged tonight. I thank you, Lord, for the encouragement of the truth, Lord, not only in our singing but in the thoughts and the perspectives and the communication that we have heard from the school council. Lord, it just fills my heart with joy to see your people committed to your truth. Lord, I pray that tonight as we look at these verses that you would teach us, that your Holy Spirit would use the foolishness of preaching to encourage your church, to wash us clean in a sin-sick and filthy world. Lord, to prepare us for ministry, not only to one another but to go forth as missionaries and evangelists in this world that you love and that is in need of salvation. And Lord, I pray for anyone with us tonight who doesn't know you in a saving way, Lord, that in mercy and grace their heart would be opened and they would recognize their need for you, their need for Christ. We ask you for this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

We have been learning what love is and we've been learning what love isn't. He tells us that love is patient and it is kind. It is patient, that is where perhaps we have been offended, where there would be an opportunity for vengeance or for lashing out or for sometime even some type of even legitimate kind of judgment, instead of giving that, we

suffer long. That's love. Love is known not only by what it doesn't give, judgment, it's also known by what it does give, kindness. That's love. Love is not jealous. Love is not boastful. Love is not arrogant. Love is not rude. Then this morning we learned that love is not selfish. It does not insist on its own way. It is not self-seeking. We are commanded not to love ourselves, we are commanded to love God and to love others and so a God kind of love, a life that is set on a God kind of love is not self-focused, it is God-wardly focused and it is focused on the well-being of other people, specifically and primarily with spiritual interests at the forefront. We are focused on the interests of Christ. We are focused on the interests of others. We are focused on the interests that have to do with the soul. It doesn't mean that we neglect the physical realm but we understand that what is primary is the spiritual realm.

Now, tonight we come to the next quality of love that he mentions in verse 5 and he says this, "love is not irritable." Love is not irritable. The King James version has, "it is not easily provoked." The New American Standard translates it, "it is not provoked." The New International Version has, "it is not easily angered." The word itself comes from a word that means to sharpen; to make sharp; to provoke; to irritate; to promote anger; that which would provoke someone else but it's in the passive voice and so the idea is you are not provoked. You are not made angry. It's the word used in Acts 17:16 where it says this, "Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was being provoked within him as he was observing the city full of idols." When we read that verse, we are reminded that in the study of God's word, context is king because there we see in Acts 17:16 that the word can be used in a positive sense. I mean, it was right that Paul was upset. It was a righteous anger. He looked around at the city of Athens and he saw what represented blasphemy toward the true God, what represented a dishonor toward the true God and what represented a deception when it comes to lost and dying souls.

He was right to be angry and, beloved, there are some things that we ought to be provoked by. There are some things that ought to anger us, in fact, there is something spiritually wrong in us when things that ought to offend us don't offend us, when we become comfortable with that which is offensive to God, when we become comfortable and approving of that which deceives souls. There is something wrong when that is the case. There is such a thing as righteous anger. We need to be careful that we are always right in our identification of it. Sometimes we call righteous anger that which is really sinful anger but there is such a thing as being angry in the right kind of way.

But that's not the context here, is it? He's not talking about something positive here. He's talking about something that is sinful. This is you or me getting angry, being provoked in a way that is not God honoring, that is not righteous and the context for what he says to us in this kind of anger, the context for understanding this kind of anger is really what we learned this morning. This is the kind of anger that arises out of selfishness. This is me becoming irritated; this is me becoming provoked because I feel that you are in some way infringing upon me. I value me more than I value you. I love me more than I love you and you are infringing on my self-love and therefore I am irritated. If love is patient and kind, if it's not envious or boastful, if it's not arrogant or rude, if it doesn't have to have its own way, then it will not be irritable.

So tonight I want us to think about that. I want us to think about the fact that love is not angry in the kind of way that this word speaks of. Let's begin then to try to describe it. What does it mean to be irritable? What is irritability? Or what does it mean to be easily provoked? First of all, we can say this, these are some ways we can describe this lack of love: first of all, irritability means that someone is touchy. Touchy. We know what we mean by that. Do you get easily offended? Does it take just a little something to set you off? Just a little offense to your pride? Just a little something that you view as something you should not have to put up with? Do you find that you're easily put off? You're easily upset? Easily offended? That's what it means to be irritable.

Or we could describe it this way: irritability is to be offended by correction. This kind of touchiness means no one can really approach you about your sin issues. An irritable person is not an approachable person. An irritable person is not a teachable person. An irritable person is not an open person. Is that you? If there is something wrong in your life, do you want somebody to bring it to your attention? If there is something that needs to be corrected in us, do we want the Lord to change us even if it means that the knowledge of that area comes to us through another person? Are you open to that? Desiring of that? Or does the pattern of your life make clear that you don't tolerate that very well?

Now, I think we would all grant it's easier to be receptive to correction when it comes to us the right way, wouldn't you agree? Someone comes to us humbly, someone comes to us lovingly, someone comes to us, I mean, they are really on our side, that is, they really want God's best for our lives. They are only coming out of concern. I mean, that makes correction easier to receive but, folks, let me ask you tonight: do you believe that we are only to be open to correction that comes to us from friends? Does God sometimes have correction for us through enemies? I mean, is it possible that God could use less than pleasant people, less than pleasant circumstances to teach us something? To grow us? To change us? Are you someone who is approachable? Someone who can be corrected? Or are you easily angered when someone points out something about your life? Or about your family? There are some people who are very pleasant unless you want to bring up some issue that has to do with their children and then they turn into a bear. Have you ever known someone like that? You can talk about mama but do not, do not bring up mama's darling. Now we meet with a bear and if mom is upset, nobody's happy, right? But we need to be teachable. We need to be able to be corrected.

Third, irritability see is looking to be angry. That understanding of this quality feeds into what we're going to see later on as we move through the list in 1 Corinthians 13 but something is spiritually wrong in a person who is looking for evidence to justify their angry spirit and there are people like that. Always offended. They like being offended. Always looking for something to be offended about. Always upset. Never really happy. Sort of a negative slant on everything in life. Irritable.

Fourth, we could describe it this way: irritability is combative. If you're not loving, you will not absorb offense. Love is able to absorb offense. Love is able to suffer wrong.

Love means that I can pray for my enemies. Love means that I can do good to those who treat me wrongly. But if you're an angry person, if you're provoked, then you are not someone who will absorb offense, you are someone who will return offense. You want to strike back. You want to get even. Vengeance is yours, says you, when vengeance is mine, says the Lord. God calls us to entrust ourselves to him. He calls us to obey him by loving those who would mistreat us and trust him to make wrongs right and even to take that wrong and to turn it into an opportunity for salvation and redemption and for his glory. But if we're not loving, we're not willing to let the Lord work that way through that which has offended us. Where there is no love, there is no willingness to absorb offense, rather there is a combative spirit that gets angry and lashes out.

Fifth, irritability is selfish. As I said, this is connected with the quality we looked at this morning. Why do we get angry? Because we're selfish and if this is the pattern of your life, then you're the kind of person everybody has to be sensitive to you. I mean, if you're an irritable person, that means everybody has to be sensitive to you. Everyone has to walk on eggshells for your sake. Everyone has to think about what you want, what would make you happy. They want to make sure you don't lose your temper. Why? Because you're irritable. You're an angry person.

Sixth, we could describe it this way: irritability only gives what is destructive. Where there is love, there is an investment. Where there is love, there is a willingness to invest and give and build godliness into another person's life but in irritability, there is nothing loving in it. At the moment we're angry, we don't care about the person we are angry with. At the moment we're angry, there is no investment in the person we are upset with. When we're irritable, we're willing to hurt, willing to wound, willing to disappoint, willing to act in a way that will not be redeemable, doesn't demonstrate Christ. We are destructive when we're angry. John MacArthur put it so well in his commentary on 1 Corinthians 13 when he wrote this, "Telling our wives or husbands that we love them is not convincing if we continually get upset and angry at what they say and do. Telling our children that we love them is not convincing if we often yell at them for doing things that irritate us and interfere with our own plans. It does no good to protest, 'I lose my temper a lot but it's all over in a few minutes,' so is a nuclear bomb. A great deal of damage can be done in a very short time. Temper is always destructive and even small temper bombs can leave much hurt and damage, especially when they explode on a regular basis. Lovelessness is the cause of temper and love is the only cure."

Love is not irritable. It's not touchy. It's not offended by correction. It's not just looking to be angry. That's not love, love is not combative. It's not selfish. Love isn't wanting to give what is destructive but irritability is. So how do we overcome this anger problem? Is there someone here tonight that you know you have an anger problem? If there is someone here tonight that you feel all your family members turning to look at you because you're an irritable person, how do we deal with this? Well, the short answer is we love. We've got to walk in the love of God. But let me give you some specific and practical things you might want to think about.

First of all, if you want to overcome this, you have to recognize your irritability as sin. We do it in so many areas of our life, don't we? We relabel sin. We explain it away in some fashion and usually the way we explain it away is in some way congratulatory to us. "Well, in my family, we just learn to tell it like it is," code for, "We just go ahead and hurt each other." But it sounds so much better to describe it as just transparency. When you are an angry person, when you are an irritable person, when you are a touchy person, when no one can bring correction to you, when everyone walks around on eggshells around you, what is that? That is sin. You are not loving. Will you recognize it as sin?

Second, if I want to overcome this, not only must I recognize it as sin, I've got to care that it is sin. It's possible to recognize something as sin in your life but not really care and as I said this morning, what will make someone care about this is salvation. Someone who is habitually angry and is not troubled by it is someone who may not be a believer at all. Folks, do you understand the difference between external motivation and internal motivation? The difference between expressing some concern about what the word of God says because you know through instruction that you should be concerned and there are people around you who hold you accountable to be concerned, you know, external pressure to care about these things versus something that arises from within you because you're a redeemed person with a new nature? The Holy Spirit dwells in you and when you live in sin, you're convicted. It troubles you when there is something in your life that isn't Christ-like. Do you know the kind of pressure that would be in your life to live a loving example if no one around you ever said a word to you about it? Do you desire to live out 1 Corinthians 13 because it is in your heart to live out what God commands, what God delights in, what glorifies God and what will be a witness to the living God through your life? Do you want to love for that reason?

So if I'm struggling with anger, first I've got to recognize it's a sin issue; second, I've got to care and I've got to want in my heart to live out what is the love of God. Third, if I want to overcome this issue, I've got to see that at the root of it is selfishness. "Why am I an angry person? Why am I irritable when I am irritable?" Do you ever stop and realize, "Do you know what? I'm just being selfish. I mean, I'm just being a selfish person"? So that fourth, what I've got to do is I've got to look away from myself. You'll never overcome anger until you move your focus in response to the word of God away from you at the center of your universe to God and others coming before you. "I must love God more than me. I must love others more than me. I've got to repent of the pride that believes that everything exists to please me." "How do these children interrupt my schedule? How dare they get in the way? I mean, after all, when we decided to have children, we never knew there would be any kind of responsibility associated with it, right?" Do you know what? We're living right now in a culture where people want to have children for self-gratification but when it comes to the sacrifice and the investment and the work that this is really what it means to be a parent, we've got a selfish generation of people turning their back on their families because they don't know what it is to love. What is sad is some of those people profess to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Mothers who don't want to be mothers. Fathers who don't want to be fathers. Why? Because it's too much of an infringement on what I want out of life. It's just selfishness so I've got to turn from the pride that believes that everything exists to please

me and I must then intentionally aim to invest in others for the glory of God. Instead of feeling that someone is intruding upon my time, I must intentionally seek to give them my time.

Anybody here ever feel like you're at the end of your tether rope when it comes to time? You feel like you don't have one more ounce to give? Have you ever noticed how the Lord tests that? I mean, when you feel like you don't have one more ounce to give, that's when all these things arise that require more of you. It tends to make you irritable, doesn't it? "I just don't need this right now." Well, listen, what should I do if I begin to feel irritated because there are these things arising that I didn't plan on, I feel like I can't take anymore already, how do I respond to that? Listen, respond to it this way: God is sovereign. He never allows us to be tested beyond that which he is willing and able to give us the ability to obey him so, "Lord, obviously this has come into my life by your design. Now Lord, let me submit myself to you this moment and instead of being irritated because my time is being infringed upon, let me right now intentionally give my time away for your glory and for the good of this person. Instead of focusing on what someone said or did that bothered me, let me focus on what I can say or do to bless them and to leave a witness for Jesus."

Someone says something that hurts you, offends you, mistreats you, how do you respond to that if you're loving them? The Bible tells us we are to bless those who curse us. We are to do good to those who oppose us. Be a blessing. You'll be sons of your Father who is in heaven who causes the sun to shine and the rain to fall on those who are enemies of his, those who are hostile in mind toward him, the just and the unjust. That's the standard. Instead of resenting when someone presents me with an area of my life that is in need of change, let me thank God for them. Let me love them for it. Do you love your teachers? Do you love those who correct you? Do you love them for it? Do you know what, beloved? We need to remember something: "deceitful are the kisses of an enemy, faithful are the wounds," what? "Of a friend." A friend will wound you when an enemy would kiss you, flatter you, because an enemy is only interested in self-gain. They will manipulate you to advance themselves but a friend will say the things you need to hear even when you may not want to hear it. Do we love them for it? Are we open to it? Are we receptive?

So if we begin to feel irritated when someone is telling me something I don't want to hear, let me in that moment say, "Lord, thank you that you love me enough that right now you have sent a messenger." Now, that doesn't mean that everything someone wants to say to me is accurate. We have to take it all before the Lord and we have to let him sift it out and what is true and right, we need to hold onto, and what is just hurtful and wrong, we need to let it go. But we are not to be too fast to just let it go. We need to go before the Lord and examine the things that are being said. Instead of always wanting my way, I need to look for ways to show the people in my life how valuable they are to me. Which do you enjoy more? Here is a test of whether we're walking in the love of Christ, whether we're walking in the steps of Christ, remember this, he came not to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many. That's love. Do you enjoy being served or do you find great joy in serving? Do you take the time to let the people know around you in your

life how thankful to God you are for them. Instead of wanting to get your way, are you looking for ways to let those people in your life know they are valuable to you? Instead of looking for things to be angry about, looking to justify my anger. If I want to overcome this area in my life, I've got to strive to see the things I can rejoice in and look for the opportunities to express that joy. Are you doing that? Are you taking note of the blessings of God? Are you looking for that which you can rejoice in? Are you taking the opportunities God gives you to express the joy of the Holy Spirit recognizing how blessed you are?

Folks, we use the language but I don't think we get the lesson sometimes because the truth is, the truth is if we had gotten what we deserved, where would we be right now? Hell. God has forgiven us, delivered us, caused us in his Son to stand before him accepted and along with those blessings which are unable to be estimated in terms of their value, in terms of those spiritual realities, in addition to those spiritual realities, God has given us temporal blessings like someone we are married to if we're married and children if we have children and brothers and sisters in the Lord around us. I mean, do we take the time to take note of how God has been gracious and merciful and good to us and are we a joyful person as a result? Love takes note of the goodness of God but anger and irritability does not.

So let me finish tonight in the way of application with some tough questions and I invite you to examine yourself as I have examined myself. First of all, would the people who know you best say that you are patient or irritable? Now, we're talking about a pattern. I'm sure there is someone here who has never been irritable. Would you please stand? No one is going to stand up. Rightly so because we've all been irritable but I'm talking about a pattern. Would the people who know you best say that you are patient or irritable? Second, would the people who know you best say that you become angry easily? Third, would the people who know you best say that you have explosions of anger? Fourth, would the people who know you best say that you are easy to be around, easy to approach, even about your failures? Fifth, would the people who know you best say that they experience the love of Jesus Christ from your life, that when they're around you they see Jesus?

"Richard, what should I do with a sermon like this?" You know, I have 2 motivations in my heart for you as I preach this: 1. I pray for you that if you have an anger issue, if you are an irritable person and you are a believer, I pray that God would produce in your heart a real sorrow over your sin and you would stop relabeling it and stop excusing it and justifying it and you would look into the mirror, a pure clean mirror of God's word and call what is wrong in your life exactly what it is and with a broken heart turn from it and ask the Lord to so change you that those even who are closest to you would be able to testify, "I now see the Lord Jesus in this person in a new way. In a way I have never seen before. They once were irritable, they once were angry, but now I see God's love working in them."

The second motivation I have is this: that if you are angry in a continual way, if this is the pattern of your life and you examine your spiritual condition and you have to admit there

is clear evidence because this isn't an every once in a while thing for you and this isn't a here lately thing for you, this has been the pattern of your life, that maybe there is someone here that would recognize your need is for salvation because if you will be honest and I think here's a clear way to distinguish the 2, the motivation to be loving is not coming from your heart. It may be coming from pure instruction. You have been informed that you ought to be this way. It may be coming from people around you who tell you you ought to be this way but it really doesn't ever convict you, concern you, bother you that you're such an angry person and there is no inward motivation to deal with your sin. There is no inward desire to be like your Savior.

So for anyone struggling with this and at some time or another we're all struggling with it, what will we do with it? Let's not continue in sin that grace might abound. Let's recognize that the Lord has saved us and set us free so that we can walk in the love of Jesus Christ. As we said this morning, we've got to focus not on the fruit but at the root problem and that is we must be filled with the Spirit, submitted to the Lordship of Christ, saturated with the word of God moment by moment, day by day, and then God's love will shine in and through our lives. Love is not angry.

Let's pray.

*Father in heaven, we thank you for this time we are having in 1 Corinthians 13 to examine ourselves in light of what you command, what you have created in the new nature, what we have the capacity for in your Son. And Lord, I pray that wherever we your people are failing the test that, Lord, we would recognize it as sin against you and a poor testimony of who we really are in Christ and that, Lord, we would turn from our sin not only through confessing our sin to you but also making things right with those whom we have hurt and that, Lord, we would determine even in this hour that we desire with all of our hearts to walk in the love of your Son in the way that it is described for us in these verses. I pray, Lord, that we would learn as a church that it does no good to acknowledge our sins in this room and walk out of this place and do nothing about it but that, Lord, what we need to do is not only acknowledge this right now before you but turn this area of our life over to you. Lord, we know it won't be automatic, we know that sanctification is a process and we know, Lord, that it will take ongoing repentance and ongoing confession and ongoing focus on your Son and on your word but, Lord, may you create just an insatiable desire in us to walk in your love even as we see it in this chapter. Again Lord, I pray for anyone who doesn't have the love of God in them because they don't have your Son, reveal that to them, Lord, and save them. We ask you this tonight in Jesus' name. Amen.*