

### Love is Patient (1 Corinthians 13:4)

"If I had the gift of being able to speak in other languages without learning them and could speak in every language there is in all of heaven and earth, but didn't love others, I would only be making noise. If I had the gift of prophecy and knew all about what is going to happen in the future, knew everything about everything, but didn't love others, what good would it do? Even if I had the gift of faith so that I could speak to a mountain and make it move, I would still be worth nothing at all without love. If I gave everything I have to poor people, and if I were burned alive for preaching the Gospel but didn't love others, it would be of no value whatever. Love is *very* patient and kind, *never* jealous or envious, never boastful or proud, never haughty or selfish or rude. Love does not demand its own way. It is not irritable or touchy. It does not hold grudges and will hardly even notice when others do it wrong." That's a paraphrase of 1 Cor 13:1-5, not a word-for-word translation, but an explanation that for me helps me think about those overly familiar words a little different way. It also reminds me that I haven't arrived in the love it describes. I love you and my family, but am I...

- 'very patient'*? Not always with my kids or waiting when in a hurry
- 'never jealous or envious'*? Not true of me. Put your name in the text
- can they say of your name 'never boastful or proud, never haughty'?
- does your name fit the sentence 'doesn't want his or her own way'?
- what about 'is not irritable'? Some here may be irritated right now!
- some may be more 'touchy' than others or 'hold grudges' more and longer, but do any of us 'hardly even notice when others wrong us?'

We need to remember Paul wrote this to bring conviction and correction to Christians. If you weren't with us this morning you'll want to listen to that message for more of the context and background in v. 1-3, tonight let's look at the first part of v. 4 '*love is patient.*' But we can't take these verses out of their context and just put them on needlepoint - it's ok if your house has this on needlepoint - but we need to see what Paul was pointing out in context, the church's need to be pointed to a higher love, a more excellent way, that's the point: our need for God's love in us, to us, and through us. Paul wasn't writing this like a chart on the wall or as check-boxes to check and move on from, he's writing this as a challenge to Christians who must never move on from these things. It's not bad to crochet these words or frame them in your home, but by His love let's cultivate these words so they will frame our lives

[our outline: the definition, the divine source, the daily practice]

If you have your Bible open to 1 Cor 13 look at 14:1 '*Pursue love...*' This is where it's going, we're to pursue this love and we start in 13:4 with *patience*

One way we could translate the first part of v. 4 is '*true love waits patiently.*' The first word in v. 4 is *love - agape* - and we need to define this love first. The best definition of love isn't in a textbook, it's right here in this chapter. This chapter is called the 'love chapter,' but I'm calling it 'the love of Christ chapter' because it isn't just about the meaning of love. And it isn't about man's love or even marital love primarily, although it can apply to every relationship. This is a Christ-centered chapter about the love of Christ and from Christ, love through Christ and to Christ's people, for Christ's glory. I'm to love outside the church, too, but this context (ch 12-14) is the church. Jesus: *love one another as I've loved you...they'll know your Christians by...*

This is not the Greek word for romantic intimate love in marriage or in sex (*eros* that we get erotic from but it's never used in the NT for love). It's also not the Greek word for family love of affection or brotherly love, the filial love of the Greek word *philia* behind *Philadelphia* - 'city of brotherly love.' This word *agape* has application to marriages and families and brothers and sisters in Christ, and sometimes it overlaps with *filial* love, but it's not erotic or emotional feelings based on attraction between a man and a woman. That in biblical language could fall under lust or desire. The young person who is emotionally involved in a romantic relationship with sensual kissing or with sexual activity before marriage may say 'I love him or her so much I can't wait.' The Bible says that's not love. In 1 Cor 13:4 '*true love waits patiently*'

It's not that *agape* is without affections or feelings, it's just not driven by or determined by them ebbing, flowing, coming, going (but nor is it unfeeling cold duty either). *Agape* love isn't that concept of something you fall in and out of involuntarily, this love in this context is a choice you commit to for the good of the one loved and doing all for the glory of God, 10:31 says. In the context of 13:5 this love does not seek its own, love is not self-seeking. It's the self-sacrificing love of Eph 5: '*Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.*'<sup>2</sup> *And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a...sacrifice to God ...*<sup>25</sup> *Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,*<sup>26</sup> *that he might sanctify her ...*<sup>28</sup> *In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies* [Paul explains that love] *nourishes and cherishes...just as Christ does the church'*

The word *agape* was used by early Christians for Christian love and even what we just experienced. Fellowship meals were called *agape* in Jude 12. It's translated there 'love feasts' but literally it's just the word *agape*, but for the early church it became a noun to describe their life and meals together.

*NET Bible Notes:* 'the love feasts of the early church involved the Lord's Supper, worship, and instruction.' We'll do the Lord's Supper next week and some families stay after that to eat together at the picnic tables, but this was the word *agape* in 1 Cor 13 that marked the early Christians in fellowship.

A book on customs in Bible times says 'upon certain days appointed, they made a common table; and when their service was ended and they had all communicated in the holy mysteries, they all met at a common feast: the rich bringing provisions, and the poor and those who had nothing being invited, they all feasted in common together.'<sup>1</sup> You can see this in chap. 11.

Paul writes before 1 Cor 13 about their lack of love in their love feasts in **11:21**: *'For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk.'*<sup>22</sup> *What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.'* Apparently the poor were being humiliated and felt despised by the rich who showed off an abundance at meals to those with nothing. Paul warns in 1 Cor 13 you can have it all but if you lack love, you actually are nothing. It's one thing not to have much of anything materially or physically at church, but those lacking love to them are actually nothing spiritually! In 10:31 it says food or drink is all to be to God's glory, but they glorified self. In 11:21 some drank too much to intoxication. That's not the right kind of spirit Christians are to have, spirits that make you drunk at the church feast!

It seems in v. 21 some weren't waiting or saving food for the rest, as some would go hungry from their love meals, it says. Look at v. 33: *'So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another...'* That takes us in context to 13:4 which again, we can translate *'true love patiently waits'*

The advantage of something like 'patiently waits' is these are active verbs in v. 4-7 and are in the present or continuous tense in the original language. In the ISV: *'Love is always patient, Love is always kind, Love is never envious Or vaunted up with pride. Nor is she conceited and never is she rude, Never does she think of self Or ever get annoyed. She never is resentful, Is never glad with sin, But always glad to side with truth, Whenever the truth should win. She bears up under everything, Believes the best in all, There is no limit to her hope, And never will she fall.'* That translation brings out these are continuous tense, these are the characteristic patterns, which also shows me I fall short of this love. Not only is this in present tense, it's active verbs.

That version uses a pronoun (she) to personify love as something outside us. *Agape* is a feminine noun but not in abstract, it's followed by actions, verbs. In v. 4-8 there's 15 verbs Paul gives for what love is and what it isn't. Or to be more precise, there's 15 things love does or doesn't do. In your English Bible the 15 words sound like adjectives ('patient and kind,' etc.) but in the Greek language Paul wrote, they're all verbs, actions not merely adjectives. This isn't just what love *is*, it's what love *does* and what love *does not do*. Young's Literal translation says things like '*the love doth not envy, the love doth not vaunt itself...<sup>5</sup> doth not act unseemly, doth not seek its own things*'

'Doth' isn't a word we use today unless your church doth use the KJV, but I like the way that old literal translation reminds us this chapter is about what love *does* and *does not do*. In the NKJV it has '*love suffers long*' and that's a good sense of what it does. v. 4-7 isn't nouns, adjectives, attributes of love, it's actual expressions in real life. This is love in action, it's not in word only

This word patience especially has to do with people it's hard to be patient with. It can apply to circumstances but in this context it's people I patiently show love to when it's hard to. In old English it suffers long and can a long time without reacting in anger. The idea is having a long fuse, it takes a lot before you go off. Some people have a short fuse and explode easily like a grenade with the pin pulled (some even less seconds than a grenade). Some people are like explosive nitro, you shake them and they blow up big time!

Charles Hodge says this verb in v. 4 means 'patiently bears with provocation and is not quick to assert its rights or resent an injury'.<sup>2</sup> James 1 says we're to be '*slow to speak and slow to anger.*' It's related to forbearance for people who can seem unbearably bothersome. Jerry Bridges defines its opposite of *impatience* 'as a strong sense of annoyance at the...faults and failures of others [that he says are usually unintentional, it's] often expressed verbally'<sup>3</sup>

That's part of the definition (point #1), #2 the divine source of patient love

I can't say it better than the Scripture reading earlier said it from 1 John 4:

<sup>7</sup> *Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.* <sup>8</sup> *Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.* <sup>9</sup> *In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him...* <sup>19</sup> *We love because he first loved us* [i.e., love's divine source]

So this love that patiently waits isn't something we just muster up within us.

God is love and love is from God in the gospel who sent His Son to love us and live for us that we might love and live through Him. Once we know that love in salvation we can love and will love, but it's because He first loved us

Moses wasn't one by nature patiently slow to anger, he once killed in a rage. How did he lovingly lead stiff-necked knuckle-headed Israel? He saw God's glory and it reflected on his face. God declares his name in Ex 34:6 Yahweh '*God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.*' Later in Numbers 14 as Israel grumbled wanting to go back to Egypt, God's wrath was poised to strike them down but Moses interceded with this truth: '*The LORD is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love...Please pardon the iniquity of this people, according to the greatness of your steadfast love*'

Patience is closely associated with forgiveness there and Mt 18, Eph 4, etc. God's steadfast love is patient, slow to anger, longsuffering, and that's what Nehemiah pointed to as to why Israel was never wiped out for her sin (Neh 9:17). It's what David pointed to as his hope when wicked people came up against him and did wrong to him (Ps 86:15). It's what Joel appealed to in urging Israel to repent (Joel 2:13), and it's what his less than patient fellow prophet Jonah knew (Jonah 4:2). It was Jeremiah's prayer when insulted and threatened: '*Do not, in view of Your patience, take me away...*' (Jer. 15:5).

In 2 Pet 3 God's patience to us is for our repentance and salvation (v. 9, 15). In Rom 2:4 God's loving patience is part of what's to lead us to repentance. Even those who don't repent, the vessels of wrath he shows 'much patience' to (9:22) as God is 'the God of patience' (15:5 NKJV). The Paul who wrote 1 Cor 13 wrote in 1 Timothy 1:16: '*I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life...*'

Alexander Strauch says 'God himself is the supreme example of [patience]. When we are tempted to be impatient with others, we should stop and think about the gracious longsuffering of God with us and our many wrongs against him. In light of his patience toward us, who are we to think that we cannot patiently bear with the weakness and failures of others -- or the wrongs they may have done to us?'<sup>4</sup> To put it in the flesh, think about Jesus.

In 1 Cor 13:4-7 my name doesn't fit, but His does: *Jesus is patient and kind* [think of His gentleness with frustrating followers]; *Jesus does not envy or boast; Jesus is not arrogant or rude. Jesus does not insist on His own way*

[think of Jesus praying to His Father, 'not my will but yours be done']; *Jesus is not irritable or resentful*; [PTL] *Jesus does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Jesus bears all things [the cross, insults], believes all things, hopes all things, Jesus endures all things [I fail but Jesus never fails]*

We've seen patient love's definition and its divine source which all leads to:

### **3rdly and finally: The Daily Practice of Patient Love**

After '*love waits patiently*' in 13:4, 14:1 commands '*Pursue love.*' How do I pursue (present tense, active, daily) this patient waiting love? Turn to Ps 37. Jerry Bridges gives daily examples where we can be tempted to impatience:

Parents can become impatient over the slow response to the training of children and teenagers. "How many times have I told you...?" Christians [can be] impatient drivers. We can become impatient at the slowness of the service in a store, at the bank, or in a restaurant... [but he says whatever our temptations to impatience we can't blame it on the external situation or on others, Bridges says] The actual cause of our impatience lies within our own hearts, in our own attitude of insisting that others around us conform to our expectations... we need to acknowledge and repent of our impatience as sin<sup>5</sup>

Next time tempted, what should I think? **#1. Remember God is in control**  
Ps 37:7 *Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself ... Your translation may say 'Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for him...'*  
Instead of resting in God, impatience is fretting in things outside our control and forgetting God who's still in control, so we can be still and rest in God.

Phil Ryken explains: 'Children get impatient with their parents... Parents get impatient with their children... At school we get impatient with the time it takes to learn everything... On the job we get impatient with coworkers who make it harder for us to do our work. In the marketplace we get impatient with people who are lazy or incompetent. On the weekend we get impatient with our friends when their interests do not align with our plans. It happens any time that other people fail to honor our agenda or meet our demands for efficiency: rather than waiting for God to work, we try to "play God" ...

This is one of the main things to remember whenever we start to get impatient: God is still in control. True love has the patience to see this ... as James Boice said [whatever our circumstance that makes it hard to wait] we can know that it flows from Christ's love and is controlled by it [sovereign love!]. Once we know this, and learn to live by it, we are ready to love people with the patience that comes from trusting that God is in control.'<sup>6</sup>

Jacob encountered God's sovereign life-controlling promises in Gen 28 then his love patiently waited despite bad dad in 29:20: *Jacob served 7 years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had...*

**1<sup>st</sup> application: Remember He's in control, #2 Remember He's at work**

Turn to Galatians 5 but we could also see this in Rom 8:28: *God is working together for good all things ...* Question: does 'all things' include what we get impatient with? Yes! If you look up *all things* in Greek means *all things* and Rom 8:29 reminds us the good in context is making us more like Christ. We're not patient like Christ was and is, so God brings into our lives things that test our patience He works together in for good, to make us like Christ.

Gal 5:22 *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness ...* Just like 1 Cor 13:4; *love...patient and kind*, here the Spirit works this in us. It's God-produced love that leads to patience worked in us by a patient God. Ryken again explains this concept of fruit God produces as He works in us:

'It is not simply that God is in control but also that he is doing something good in the lives of his people... This is something to remember when we get impatient. Even if we do not understand what God is doing, we can believe that he is still at work. Trusting in the sovereign goodness of God will help us turn our attention to others in love rather than focusing on our own frustrations... So often we are in a hurry for God to do his work in someone else, when in fact he is busy wanting to do something in us.'<sup>7</sup>

Now turn to Eph 4. Remember He's in Control, Remember He's at Work...

**3<sup>rd</sup> and final application: Remember He's Patient to us in the Gospel**

An old song says: Have patience, have patience, Don't be in such a hurry

When you get impatient, you only start to worry

Remember, remember that God is patient, too

And think of all the times when others have to wait for you

Who's that song is from? It's from Herbert the Snail of the Music Machine. He was right: we need to remember, remember God is patient too, with you. Eph 4:1 *I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,<sup>2</sup> with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love [all go together].* It starts with humility which starts with the gospel of Eph 1-3, I was dead in my sin stinking, but God rich in mercy in patient forbearance forgave me in my stench, so v. 32 calls me to do that to others as God in Christ did for me. Then Eph 5:1-2 calls me to imitate His loving and giving Himself up for me

Col 3 is where I'll end just a few pages forward, help for our daily practice:  
3:12 *Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and **patience*** [and what does that look like? v. 13 gives the application] <sup>13</sup> ***bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.*** <sup>14</sup> *And above all these put on love*  
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<sup>1</sup> James M. Freeman and Harold J. Chadwick, *Manners & Customs of the Bible*, p. 549.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of First Corinthians* (Banner of Truth, 1958), p. 269.

<sup>3</sup> Jerry Bridges, *Respectable Sins*, p. 116.

<sup>4</sup> Alexander Strauch, *Leading with Love*, p. 41.

<sup>5</sup> Bridges, p. 117.

<sup>6</sup> Phil Ryken, *Loving the Way Jesus Loved*, p. 81-83.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83-85.