

Love is Patient

- 1 Corinthians 13:4-7
- Last time we looked at the first three verses where Paul bridged the gap between his teachings on spiritual gifts in chapter 12 and chapter 14. He says, in essence, don't even try to use your spiritual gifts without love being the foundation and the motive. You will just make a mess. But by all means, if your desire is to love the body of Christ, then use your gifts and see what a blessing it will be to you and to others! Paul then goes into a teaching about love so we know he is not talking about the kind of love we might have for ice cream or for sunsets or for long walks on the beach. What does love look like when it goes to work every day? What does it look like in the home, in the church community, in the neighborhoods where we live? What should our lives look like, and what does a character look like when it is ruled by love? That's the real question. If our character is ruled by love, then the home, the church, the marketplace, and the neighborhood will benefit.
- We know that God is love. The Bible says it plainly in 1 John, but it also puts that truth on display throughout the whole story of creation, the fall, redemption, and restoration. We know that Christ is love. "Greater love has no one than this," he said, "that someone lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:13) So, if God is love and Christ is love, and we are made in his image and we are sealed with the Spirit of Christ as believers and our hearts are in his possession, then we have every reason to believe that we should also 'be' love.
- In these next few verses, Paul does four things in describing love, and it lines up with our 2 Timothy 3:16 model of examining Scripture to tell us what is true, what is not true, what we should stop doing, and what we should do. Teaching, reproof, correction, training in righteousness. In these verses, 4-7, Paul tells us, what love is, what love is not, what love does, and what love does not do. They are not given in that order, but let me show you what they are, even though we will not go in this order, nor will we finish today.
- Love is: patient and kind. Love is not: arrogant, rude, irritable, or resentful.
- Love does not: envy, boast, insist on its own way, or rejoice at wrongdoing.
- Love does: rejoices with the truth, bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Today we will look at the first of these: love is patient, and love is kind.
- **Love is patient**
- The word for patient is makrothumeo, and it means to suffer long, to be forbearing with regard to actual offenses or injuries one receives from others. The person who is patient is slow to get angry and slow in seeking revenge on the person who has hurt them. Why did Paul start with this attribute or characteristic of genuine love? Perhaps because the greatest demonstration of this attribute is what we see on the cross and the events that led up to it. Jesus was led like a lamb to the slaughter and he opened not his mouth. His love took all that the sinfulness of man could hurl at him, and because of his love he endured the cross, despising the shame.
- That was 2,000 years ago. Since that day when Jesus hung on the cross, there have been millions of people who with every breath have rejected that gift. With every ounce of their energy, they mocked the sacrifice God made to give up his only Son, and to watch him suffer and die to pay for the sins of the world. It was true of every one of us before God saved us. We were his enemies, and lived life only to please ourselves. Paul said it like this to Titus: "We ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another." (Titus 3:3) That is who we were before Christ, and that is who the rest of the world is outside of Christ's salvation. How has God responded to that? With love, that is demonstrated by patience. Peter wrote, "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance." (2 Peter 3:9)

- God is love, and that looks like patience. He is patient because he does not wish any to perish and go into eternity apart from Christ. But though God’s love is infinite, his patience is not. It is perfect patience, but it will one day reach the limit God has set for it. Peter goes on, “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God...we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.” (2 Peter 3:10-13)
- They met as students at Columbia Bible College. Robertson McQuilkin remembers sitting behind her in chapel, watching Muriel Webendorfer run her “lovely, artistic fingers” through her “lovely, brown hair.” As they began spending time together, he discovered Muriel was “delightful, smart, and gifted, and just a great lover of people and more fun than you can imagine.”
- He proposed on Valentine’s Day in 1948 and they married in August the same year. For the next three decades, they raised six children and served God together at a variety of posts, including 12 years as missionaries in Japan. In 1968 they returned to the United States and Robertson became president of Columbia Bible College (now Columbia International University). Muriel taught at the college, spoke at women’s conferences, appeared on television, and was featured on a radio program that was considered for national syndication.
- The first sign that their lives were about to change appeared in 1978, during a trip to Florida to visit some friends. Muriel loved to tell stories, and punctuated them with her infectious laughter. But while they were driving, she began telling a story she had just finished a few minutes earlier. “Honey, you just told us that,” Robertson said, but she laughed and went on.
- “That’s funny,” Robertson thought. “That has never happened before.”
- As the next few years went by, Robertson watched helplessly as his fun, creative, loving partner slowly faded away. Muriel knew she was having problems, but she never understood that she had Alzheimer’s. “One thing about forgetting is that you forget that you forgot. So, she never seemed to suffer too much with it.”
- Muriel found it more and more difficult to express herself. She stopped speaking in complete sentences, relying on phrases or words. Though she continued to recognize her husband and children, she lived, in Robertson’s words, “in happy oblivion to almost everything else.”
- There was one phrase she said often, however: “I love you.” Robertson learned much about love from Muriel, and from God, during those first few years of her disease. When he was away from her, she became distressed, and would often walk the half-mile to his office several times a day to look for him. Once Robertson was helping take her shoes off and discovered her feet were bloody from walking. He was amazed by her love for him, and wondered if he loved God enough to be so driven to spend time with Him.
- By 1990, Robertson knew he needed to make a decision about his career. The school needed him 100 percent, and Muriel needed him 100 percent. In the end, Robertson says, the choice to step down from his position was easy for him to make. Perhaps the best explanation can be found in the letter he wrote to the Columbia Bible College constituency to explain his decision:
- *...recently it has become apparent that Muriel is contented most of the time she is with me and almost none of the time I am away from her. It is not just “discontent.” She is filled with fear—even terror—that she has lost me and always goes in search of me when I leave home. So it is clear to me that she needs me now, full-time...*
- *The decision was made, in a way, 42 years ago when I promised to care for Muriel “in sickness and in health...till death do us part.” So, as I told the students and faculty, as a man of my word, integrity has something to do with it. But so does fairness. She has cared for me fully and sacrificially all these years; if I cared for her for the next 40 years I would not be out of her debt.*

- *Duty, however, can be grim and stoic. But there is more: I love Muriel. She is a delight to me—her childlike dependence and confidence in me, her warm love, occasional flashes of that wit I used to relish so, her happy spirit and tough resilience in the face of her continual distressing frustration. I don't have to care for her. I get to! It is a high honor to care for so wonderful a person.*
- One special memory is of Valentine's Day in 1995. He was riding an exercise bicycle at the foot of her bed and thinking of past Valentine's days, including the one in 1948 when he asked for her hand in marriage. Muriel woke up, smiled, and suddenly spoke for the first time in months: "Love...love...love."
- Robertson rushed over to give his wife a hug. "Honey, you really do love me, don't you?" he said. In response came the words, "I'm nice"—her way of saying, "Yes."
- Those were the last words Muriel ever said aloud. Robertson continued to love his wife this way all the way till the end of her life. By the time their 50th anniversary passed in 1999, she had lost all ability to function on her own, and spent each day lying in bed. She died in 2003.
- *In a letter to friends, Robertson wrote, "For 55 years Muriel was flesh of my flesh, bone of my bone. So it's like a ripping of my flesh and deeper—my very bones," Robertson says. "But there is also profound gratitude. For ten years I've delighted in recalling happy memories. I still do. No regrets. I'm grateful."*
- Love is patient. We see that demonstrated in Robertson McQuilken's love for his wife. We also see in his story, that love is kind.
- **Love is kind**
- This is a word that means good, goodhearted, gentle. But it also means, willing to help. Think, Good Samaritan. Jesus told the story as an answer to the question, "Who is my neighbor?" The Samaritan was the least likely candidate to stop and help a fallen Jew, because Jews were despised by Samaritans, and vice versa. But the Jews who passed by glanced at their broken and bleeding fellow Jew and kept going, even though one was a priest and the other was a Levite, two 'holy' men! They didn't love their brother. Remember I said a few weeks ago, "Love is seeking the best for the other person, even if it costs you something."
- Who is our model for Love as kindness? Christ is. That's one reason I wanted Caleb to lead us in that great old hymn of faith, "Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us." The first verse says, 'Savior, like a shepherd lead us, Much we need Thy tender care; In Thy pleasant pasture feed us, For our use Thy folds prepare; Blessed Jesus, Blessed Jesus, Thou has bought us Thine we are. (repeat). Second verse, "We are Thine, do Thou befriend us, be the guardian of our way; keep thy flock from sin, defend us, Seek us when we go astray; Blessed Jesus, Blessed Jesus, hear, O hear us when we pray. (repeat) Yes, the kindness of God seeks us out. What does the shepherd do when he finds the stray lamb? He wraps it up in his arms and carries it back to the fold. When we love, we seek out the strays. When we love, we wait, like the Prodigal's father, with one eye on heaven, and one eye on the road, for the wayward son or daughter to return. So we can wrap them up with our embrace.
- Love is patient; love is kind.