

1CO 13:4-7 "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres."

People do a lot of different things in this world for a lot of different reasons. But for a Christian the reason and the motivation is as important as the actual deed, at least from God's perspective. And His perspective ought to hold a great deal of weight in our lives who have been purchased by the blood of our Lord Jesus.

And this is why Paul spends the first part of this section in 1Corinthians 13 describing the spiritual ineffectiveness of our works for God without love. Our works may appear to be accomplishing great things, but for God, who knows the heart, He's looking for more than the act itself.

And so, whether it's our use of the gift of tongues, or prophecy, or gaining all knowledge and faith, together with giving all that we have to the poor or even surrendering our bodies to the flames; if our love [agape] for God and His people is not the motivation, then all of these things essentially amount to nothing, from an eternal perspective.

The quality of each believer's work will be tested by God. And His test involves us discovering whether or not we will do those works in His love.

Of course, if our salvation was dependent upon us loving like God we'd all be in sad shape. Our salvation is dependent upon Christ's love for us who holds us and will never let us go. But, we still have the responsibility and privilege to demonstrate His love in our lives.

And so, as we said last week, Paul's intent here is not to see if we love perfectly, but do we love; do we agape? Do we seek to love like God? Do we desire to do all things in Christ's love?

And so, like that admonition to pray without ceasing, which encourages us to always be in an attitude of depending on and seeking the Lord, we need to be in an attitude of loving without ceasing, as God ceaselessly loves us.

This forces us in a sense to consider our motivation for all things we do in this life, including the use of the gifts God has given us, which are meant to be used for His glory. But as we come to our text we get a glimpse into what perfect love is. And Paul is going to give us some examples of what love is and what it isn't.

1CO 13:4 "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud."

There's a lot of stuff here and so we'll just jump right in.

"Love is patient". Patience is one of those qualities that many Christians joke about not praying for. After all, if you pray for patience, they reason, you'll need to be put into uncomfortable situations where patience will be developed.

But as believers, if we're going to love like Christ, then patience must be a fruit of the Spirit which is working itself out in our lives as we are being conformed into the image of Christ.

What's interesting about all of these descriptions of love is that none of them in the original Greek are adjectives. An adjective, of course, is simply a word used to better describe something. For example, a hot fudge sundae now becomes a "tantalizingly cool delicious" sundae.

Or a steak becomes a "sizzling juicy" steak. Adjectives bring things alive and paints pictures of whatever it is you're describing. Paul is not using adjectives. All of these words are verbs, action words.

The words describe doing, not simply explaining. And as we looked at the word love a couple of weeks ago we discovered that agape is a doing, not simply a feeling. And so, patience here in our text is a doing. It is an active participation in the love of God which shows itself in the act of patience. As one commentator put it, "it does not simply feel patient, it practices patience."

And by the way, this word patience in the Greek could literally be translated long-suffering. It's a word which is not usually identified with being patient with things and circumstances, but rather with people.

In other words, Paul isn't teaching here that when your car comes to a long red light that you should be patient for it to turn green. He wouldn't exclude that concept, but here in our text he's

speaking specifically of being patient or long-suffering with people.

And what this does is to introduce the reality that people will sometimes disappoint you, they will sin against you, they will come up short of what you expect. Paul says here that when people come up short you need to practice long-suffering. You need to love as Christ loves in those situations.

This is not to suggest that we over-look sin, or that we don't deal with it. But there are many times in life where someone else will just do or say something stupid. It's not the kind of sin which requires church discipline, it may not even necessarily require having to go to that person privately and bring it to their attention.

It may just be something in that person's life which they're trying to work through but just don't have a handle on yet. It doesn't mean we don't try and help them and encourage them with the gifts we have, but we do it in a way that understands that unless the Spirit of God touches them we'll never be able to change them ourselves.

And so patience takes that into consideration. I can't tell you how many times people have come to me over the years and have asked for counsel; be it for job changes, location changes, ministry changes, and after sitting down with them and looking at what we both see to be the best for them, they go off and do the opposite.

And sometimes you just want to shake people, but patience must be practiced, knowing that God's not finished with them or us. You still try to encourage and you still pray for them and be there for them, but in the end it's up to them as they seek the Lord.

This is what Peter addresses in his first epistle.

1PE 4:8 "Above all, love each other deeply, because love [agape] covers over a multitude of sins."

Notice that Peter identifies sin. But he says love can cover it. Not covered in the sense that we're trying to hide such sin, but we will personally cover, or to some extent let it go, so as not to bring everything people do into the light so as not to become the Holy Spirit in their lives.

Just as Christ has covered our sin with His blood, we too can forgive and be patient with people in such a way that we don't hold it against them. We love them in such a way as to allow the Lord

to deal directly with things in their lives that only the Lord can deal with.

There will be times where we must intervene. That's why Peter doesn't say that love covers all sin, but that it covers a multitude of sin. In other words, some sin must be brought into the light, it cannot be covered in such a way where the sinner will affect the rest of the body of Christ, for example.

And so, in those instances, the love of patience or long-suffering will reach its end, and it will deal with the problem more directly. We see this all throughout the history of Israel. The Lord was long-suffering or patient with His chosen people, but there was a time when even God's patience came to an end so as to help His people back to Him.

In some cases His dealing with Israel was quite severe. He was not loving them any less, but His love took a different direction as drastic measures needed to be taken. And so, I want us to understand that as important as patience is when we're dealing with people, it is not an excuse not to get involved in the lives of other brothers or sisters when having to address certain things in their lives.

This is why it's so important to be seeking God to know the difference between patience and apathy. Patience doesn't mean we don't care. Patience cares to the point of allowing the Holy Spirit to direct both people in those situations where sin may need to be either covered or revealed.

But if anyone wants to know how patience works itself out in real life we only need to look at the word of God.

ROM 12:17-18 "Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. 18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."

The kind of attitude Paul speaks of in Romans puts godly patience into practice. A lack of patience wants to get even when people are hurtful toward you. It wants vengeance, or at least justice. But in some cases we need to just let it go for love's sake and to the glory of God.

If Paul had spent his life dwelling on how many of the Jews wanted to destroy him, it would have destroyed him and his ministry. But he was not preoccupied with their sin toward him, he

was preoccupied with the love of Christ which he wanted them to taste and see in his own life.

How else do you explain a man who is beaten, stoned, persecuted and slandered by the Jews of his day and yet can still say that he loves his fellow Jews and desires their salvation. In fact, on one occasion he even spoke of trading places with them if that were possible so that they might have eternal life.

ROM 9:1-3 "I speak the truth in Christ - I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit - 2 I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. 3 For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, 4 the people of Israel...."

His long-suffering for Israel is a long-suffering which he imitated in Christ. Remember, patience is love. That love shed abroad in our hearts includes long-suffering with people. Praise God that our Lord was long-suffering with us.

2PE 3:9 "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."

Are we patient with each other? Are we patient with the world who denies Christ? Jesus is. And that alone should motivate us to love as He does with that kind of patience which takes into consideration that the world is lost and in need of a Savior. But it should not be a patience which detaches itself from our responsibility to give them the gospel.

Remember, patience is not an adjective, it is a verb. And when practiced it always takes into account the best for others. In some cases, it is best to cover the sin with love. In other cases, it understands the motivation of the sin, and considers how best to help that person see his or her sin, but does it in a way that doesn't crush them.

Patience works in a variety of ways depending on the situation. But it works in the love of Christ, in the power of the Spirit. Being a fruit of the Spirit it is a quality which we must seek to walk in day by day.

And yes, there is no other way to measure how much patience you've got than to have it tested by God. So, may we all pray for patience as we pray for Christ's love for people, even as He has loved His people with His very life.

"Love is kind." Like patience, Paul uses a positive statement about love, whereas with the rest of his statements he uses a negative approach as he explains what love is not.

Kindness is also a fruit of the Spirit which is found in Gal.5:22. And as with patience it is not simply the state of feeling kind, but an actual working kindness which other people can taste.

Kindness is one of those characteristics which might be a little difficult to get a handle on in terms of defining because the English language treats it as an adjective rather than a verb.

In fact, the Random House College dictionary defines it this way. Of a good or benevolent nature or disposition. Sometimes we'll use the term to explain how we see someone. If they're not boisterous, if they're not pushy, if they are gentle and good natured we might call them kind.

But Paul is not simply speaking of a disposition. He's speaking of what kindness does. And what it does is to "be useful, serving and gracious. It is active goodwill. It not only feels generous, it is generous. It not only desires others' welfare, but works for it."
(John MacArthur)

We all remember the story of Ebenezer Scrooge. This guy was tight fisted when it came to money and was a tyrant when it came to people. No one liked him. And yet, in the span of one evening with those three spirits of past, present and future, he goes from a monster to one who practices kindness.

<In the morning he flags down a young boy in the snow and gives him a huge tip for buying the biggest turkey in town to be taken to Tiny Tim's home. His only motivation is seeing a need and wanting to meet it. That is kindness.

And then all of our hearts melt as we see this transformation in his life, to someone no one cared about, to one who began to care about others.

Kindness works itself out in the lives of others. But kindness is motivated by mercy and grace. Kindness is often given to people who don't deserve it. In fact, the true measure of kindness is seen in those very situations.

How else can you explain Jesus' words to His disciples to love your enemies?

To love your friends can be tough enough at times, but to love your enemies involves a variety of the fruit of the Spirit including kindness. But I'll tell you something, when you demonstrate kindness to people who are your enemies, it turns out to be one of the best ways to make them your friend.

It may not happen overnight, it may never happen, but it can never be said by your enemies or anyone that you didn't extend love to them that it didn't make some sort of impact on them.

The impact, whether they acknowledge it or not, is that they saw Jesus in your life. And again, that's what our objective is. To have Christ's love shed abroad in our lives is meant to be seen in practical ways which the world would never be involved in.

I dare say that most of us, when we were unbelievers, never entertained the idea of loving our enemies. If someone crossed me I immediately went into the "get even" mode. I began to scheme on how I could do to them what they did to me. It's not natural to love your enemies.

And unfortunately, many believers will take that attitude of an eye-for-an-eye among themselves, instead of showing kindness. This is exactly what was happening in Corinth.

PRO 11:17 "A kind man benefits himself, but a cruel man brings trouble on himself."

But where do we actually see kindness working itself out in real life in the Scriptures? Well, the greatest model for kindness is found in God Himself.

In the context of judging other people with our own standard of judging Paul brings out an interesting take on who deserves to be judged and yet are not.

ROM 2:4 "Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?"

It is God's kindness which looks beyond our guilt and sin and instead offers salvation. And in a similar way God has called us out to reflect His kindness. It's easy to be kind to someone we like, but to be kind to those we might deem less desirable is the true test of kindness.

And that type of kindness will go the extra mile for people so that they might taste and see that the Lord is good. Kindness can be

tasted. Kindness, like the rest of the fruit of the Spirit, is meant to be tasted, which means it is meant to be practiced among people who don't deserve it and might not even appreciate it.

I mean, how many of us deserve the kindness of God; a kindness which gently approaches us and encourages us to seek Him as we take His gift of life in Christ by faith?

Peter talks of this kindness in relationship to our salvation and how we should respond to it.

1Pet. 2:2-3 "like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord."

And if you have received His salvation, you have tasted the kindness of the Lord. This type of kindness produces life, not death. It produces hope and takes away wrath.

TIT 3:3-7 "At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. 4 But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, 5 he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life."

In our kindness toward one another and people in the world, we see their need and gently go to them when they deserve something less than love and kindness, and we allow them to get a taste of God's kindness and they are given a glimpse into the heart of Jesus.

That's what God did for us and that's what we need to be practicing as well, with the understanding that our Lord is still lavishing kindness on us today. It's not as though our Lord extended kindness and then somehow cut us off. His kindness to us today is translated into His personal involvement in our lives as He strengthens us and builds us up to be His servants.

MAT 11:29-30 "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

The word for easy [my yoke is easy] in Mat.11:30 is essentially the same word we have in our text in 1Corinthians. Jesus is saying my yoke is kind. In other words, as we take His yoke upon us, which is to submit to Him, to follow Him, to humble ourselves before Him, we actually experience His kindness in such a way that He is gentle with us as He promotes our growth in Him.

The world looks at a yoke and sees it as bondage, as something to be dreaded and avoided. It sees no gentleness or kindness in such a thing. That's why God's ways are not our ways. His ways are beyond understanding, but not beyond truth and reality.

Christ's kindness is actually appropriated in a unique way in the lives of His people as we humble ourselves under His yoke and trust that He is loving us and doing all things for our best.

But He wants us to take that kindness and patience and extend it to others. This was Paul's message to the Corinthians who were practicing anything but patience and kindness even among themselves.

And this is why this whole issue of defining love has come up. They were playing church. They were selfishly seeking their own good instead of seeking the good of others. And so, to seek the good of others we need an attitude of kindness and patience even as God has demonstrated patience and kindness to us.

One of the best places to practice such fruit is with those we're closest to, and that's usually our spouse and children. But extending it to our family in Christ is also a great place to share such fruit. And of course, we don't want to forget those people in the world who don't know Christ. If anyone needs patience and kindness it is those who don't expect it.

May we pleasantly surprise all men with such love. Paul puts these two characteristics of patience and kindness into perspective as he wrote to the Romans.

ROM 12:12-17 "Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.< 13 Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. 14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. 16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. 17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody."

May God be glorified as people see Jesus' patience and kindness in our lives. And may we rely on God's strength and grace to accomplish such fruit as His Spirit enables us.