

Beginning in chapter twelve, Paul exhorted the church in Corinth to consider all the gifts of the Spirit to be equally appreciated as they all work together to build up the body of Christ, which is the church in the world today. We need the supernatural gifts, but we equally need Spirit empowered gifts of service and generosity. We saw how the word *charisma* translated as gifts was also used of salvation. I would also add that it was used regarding marriage and abstinence (1 Corinthians 7:7ⁱ). This means it has a much wider use than is commonly thought of today when we talk about gifts of the Spirit.

After stressing that all the parts of the body are needed to make the body whole, and that every part needs every other part, Paul concluded his list of gifts and their functions by saying that there is a more excellent way (1 Corinthians 12:31ⁱⁱ). Two weeks ago we read the first three verses of this chapter which tell us any gift, whether tongues, prophecy, knowledge, generosity, or even martyrdom, without love means we are nothing.

Today we turn to the definition of love given to us as descriptions of how love behaves. This passage is often used in wedding vows, and appropriately so, for marriage is the supreme test of *agape* love (Ephesians 5:25ⁱⁱⁱ). However, Paul is describing more than a marriage relationship. He is telling us that this should be the definition of Christian behavior. As the first fruit of the Holy Spirit in our lives (Galatians 5:22^{iv}), *agape* demonstrates to the world that our union with Christ is authentic. ³⁵ *By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*” John 13:35 So let us now carefully examine what the apostle tells us regarding how this love is to be manifest in our daily lives. It is really a measure of how faithfully we are walking in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16^v).

⁴ *Love is patient and kind;* 1 Corinthians 13:4a God is love (1 John 4:8^{vi}). That means He is patient and kind, and because we are in Christ, we should reflect that to the world. Let that declaration shine a light into your heart and mind. Love is patient and kind! And I am often impatient and unkind in my thoughts and sometimes in my speech as well. What am I to do? There is a wonderful verse I hope you all have memorized. ⁹ *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* 1 John 1:9 Please keep this verse in mind as we go through these verses, because they should convict us all of how far we have to go to truly be the ambassadors of Christ that He is calling us to be in this world (2 Corinthians 5:20^{vii}), and the man or woman we should be in our marriages.

I confess the day before I began working on this that I was impatient and had unkind thoughts. Thanks be to God that I did not express them to the degree that I was thinking. Thinking that way is sinful enough. The Spirit convicts me. And so, I confess that my thought life is often impatient and unkind and I repent, which means I want with all my heart by the grace of God to go the opposite way, the way of kindness and patience. I think of how patient and kind God has been to me and am amazed that I can then turn around and be so impatient with others. It reminds me of the parable of Jesus in Matthew 18. A man was forgiven an insurmountable debt and yet he went out and had a man imprisoned for not paying the small amount he was owed (Matthew 18:32,33^{viii}). That ungrateful man is you and me when we refuse to be gracious to others considering how gracious God has been to us!

Are we patient with those who won't take our advice, with the idiosyncrasies of others that get on our nerves, with those who don't yet know Christ, with those who don't listen to the other side of an argument? Are we kind to them even though they get on our nerves? And how about those who keep stumbling into sin, especially if it is a sin against us? We don't have to enable them, but we do need to be patient and kind. Why? It is not because they deserve it. It is because that is how God has been to us when we did not deserve it. It is because that is the prompting of the Holy Spirit who lives in us. He will guide us if we would willingly yield to His leading.

I was going to preach to the end of the chapter, but when I read verses 4 to 7, even though I memorized this chapter and review it every week, WHAM! these verses hit me with the full force of the conviction of the Holy Spirit. If I know these things, why don't I do them (John 13:17^{ix})? It is usually because I have justified my behavior, when there is really no justification. **Jesus commands us to love one another as He has loved us** (John 15:12^x). That means being patient and kind. We must come to the place of being intolerant of our old nature when it stamps its little spoiled feet and demands to have its way. We must exercise that fruit of the Spirit that is self-control and say, "Not today old, spoiled, selfish nature! I am a new creation in Christ, and I choose love!" And then we shoot off a prayer asking for forgiveness and strength to follow through in His power.

^{4b} *love does not envy or boast*; 1 Corinthians 13:4b Paul now turns to defining love by what it does not do. If we are letting the love of Christ have His way in us, if our minds are renewed by the Word and we are walking in love, we will not envy what others have, whether it is a physical thing or a spiritual gift. Rather, we will be thankful that God has blessed our brother or sister with it and encourage them regarding it. Envy is a sneaky way for the flesh to assert its selfishness. We think something along the lines of, "That person doesn't deserve that. I would do a much better job of stewardship if I had it." But that is really ingratitude toward God and a lack of love toward our brother or sister. We elevate ourselves instead of elevating them. We are second guessing God who gave them what they have.

Boasting is akin to envy, in that it declares, "I deserve this and don't I do a fine job with it!" We should have the exact opposite attitude. "Why is God so gracious to give me this thing or ability? May He help me use it for His glory and acknowledge it is from His generosity and grace to an undeserving soul."

^{4c} *it is not arrogant* ^{5a} *or rude*. 1 Corinthians 13:4c,5a Arrogance and rudeness go together. To be arrogant often results in being rude. Arrogance is the prideful opinion that we are better than someone else. It tempts us all at one time or another. We look at someone and see their faults and think that we could never fall to such a pathetic condition. I like the adage, "Except for the grace of God there go I!" That is what we should say. Instead, we are often like the Pharisee praying in the temple. ¹¹ *The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.'* Luke 18:11,12 Even as we read these verses that reveal the qualities of love, our pride can leave us just like that Pharisee - rejecting conviction.

If we will let the Holy Spirit examine our hearts, we will be more like the one whose prayer was heard and went home justified before God. ¹³ *But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!'* Luke 18:13 Pride is the life blood of the old nature. It

demonstrates its ugliness in rude expressions that put others down, as if somehow, they are less important or valuable. Every person was made in the image of God. Every person has intrinsic worth that Christ died to redeem. Humility is the work of the Holy Spirit revealing God to us (Isaiah 6:5^{xi}). The clearer we see the holiness of God, the humbler we will be as we realize how short we fall of His glory (Romans 3:23^{xii}), and yet how gracious He has been to sinners like us.

Pride sometimes comes from comparing ourselves with others. We think we behave better than they do. We think we are more generous. The verse that should level us all is in Luke's Gospel. ¹⁰ *So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.'* Luke 17:10 Who has ever done all that God commanded us to do? Even if we could, we would still have to say that we only did what was our duty. Why is that? It is because everything that we have, our life, our talents, our ability, our wealth, our health, it all came from God. Everything! So what do we owe Him? Everything! After all, what He asks of us is for our good. That mindset will help us avoid an arrogant and rude attitude. When we meet others less fortunate in any way, it should cause us to thank God for His mercy on us and consider how we might help them.

^{5b} *It does not insist on its own way;* 1 Corinthians 13:5b Who among us has never insisted on having their way? Marriage is a testing ground for this one. Most of our struggles are over who will be most insistent to have their own way. But it raises its ugly head in churches, regarding everything from paint color to communion juice. Lord, please help us to prefer others above ourselves. I thank God I learned a long time ago to choose my battles wisely, and make sure it is a hill worth dying on. Everything else is waste of time. You can have your way. But still, I find my old nature being impatient with others who insist on their way after a reasoned argument. Ha! The old nature tries to weasel its way in, and if it can't find one way, it will try to find another.

I would encourage you that if you are struggling with this one with a housemate or fellow employee, or even your spouse to think how important the issue really is? Chances are you will come to the conclusion that it isn't worth a fight. Yield to the Holy Spirit and you will find sometimes the other person's way was just as good or even better, and you will have enjoyed missing the battle of the wills. There comes a time when we must stand our ground on moral issues, but we can do so with love and understanding of the other person's perspective. We can try to find a compromise acceptable to both parties, but that is not always possible. We can agree to disagree. Just don't make trivial matters the issue.

^{5c} *it is not irritable or resentful;* 1 Corinthians 13:5c If we don't get our way, are we irritated by it to the point of losing our peace? Are we resentful toward the person? That is another way the flesh tries to gain a foothold (Ephesians 4:27^{xiii}). The Spirit will have us forgive and go forward (Ephesians 4:32^{xiv}). Sometimes we need to avoid people who consistently abuse our generosity or kindness to keep from enabling them. But we should be sure we don't avoid them because we have become impatient or resentful. The way to know the difference is to ask yourself if the way forward is out of love for them.

I have a hard time with this one. I sometimes want to avoid someone for my sake not theirs. I do not want to give my time to what seems to be a waste of time. But that is impatience and often resentful. It isn't acting in love. And when I realize that, I can change my attitude, humble myself, and share in love and hope that God will work through me for their good.

How do we experience more of God's love for others? I think we need to ask God for His heart for them. Think about their eternal state. Hear what they are going through. Ask God for genuine concern for them. Pray for them. Most of us are so wrapped up in our own concerns, we neglect to consider the concerns and pain in others. We think we have enough to deal with. But that's because we aren't trusting the Lord as we should for our health, finances, and relational struggles. If we really cast our burdens on the Lord (1 Peter 5:7^{xv}), then we can begin to love others enough to care about what they are going through.

⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. 1 Corinthians 13:6 Love never accepts wrongdoing, even if one might benefit from it. Love rejoices in truth prevailing. It was wrong for the wealthy Corinthian believers to leave the poor believers the communion scraps. It was unloving. It is wrong to elevate one's self in the church above others because of our gift. The truth is each one is needed and valuable. While some gifts may be more helpful in building up the body, all are gifted from God and necessary for the health of the whole church. That is the truth.

Paul addresses stealing in his letter to the Ephesians. Apparently, some thought to meet their own needs it was okay to steal from the wealthy (Ephesians 4:28^{xvi}). We cannot justify wrongdoing. We must cling to the truth, which is God's Word (John 17:17^{xvii}). There we find what is righteous and what is evil.

⁷ Love bears all things, 1 Corinthians 13:7a Paul returns to what love does. Love bears up under whatever circumstance it faces. *Bears* in Greek is a military term for enduring an assault. It is willing to endure because the love of God is patient and kind. It bears with that person who annoys you, who insists on their way, who put you down, or ignores you. It bears with the failings of the weak instead of pleasing ourselves (Romans 15:1^{xviii}). It bears with the person who thinks they have a gift they don't really have, with the tenant that is late paying their rent, or the landlord who is picky and on your case all the time, or with a homeowners association that demands you do this or that.

We can see an overlap of these defining qualities of love. To bear all things is to be patient with others, not to insist on our own way, not to be rude, resentful, or irritable. That is love. And you know what? It will reduce your blood pressure and put a smile on your face. We need a heavenly perspective to do that (Colossians 3:1,2^{xix}). We must realize that love is more important than these little annoyances that so often pull us out of the Spirit and into the flesh.

Love *^{7b} believes all things,* 1 Corinthians 13:7b That does not mean that we believe everything we hear, but rather that we believe the Word of God in every matter. We believe that sowing to the Spirit reaps life and peace (Galatians 6:8^{xx}). We believe that living a life of service can be joyful and rewarding and that selfishness only makes us lonely and miserable. We believe to gain our life we must lay it down in service to the One who laid down His life for us (Matthew 16:25^{xxi}). We believe Jesus is coming again and that He will reward everyone for what they have done (Matthew 16:27^{xxii}). We believe He has redeemed our souls and made us righteous before God (2 Corinthians 5:21^{xxiii}). It is love for God and His word that causes us to believe all these things. We love Him because He first loved us (1 John 4:19^{xxiv}). We believe all these things because the grace of God opened our eyes to the truth of His Word and the love that He has for us. When we believe all these things, our lives are transformed into lives of love, the love of God.

^{7c} *hopes all things*, 1 Corinthians 13:7c Love hopes all things declared to us in the Word, all the promises of God. It is that hope that helps us bear all things. It bolsters our patience and strengthens our belief. ⁵ *and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.* Romans 5:5 My greatest hope is to see Jesus face to face. I am assured of that hope because of what He has done for us. And when that takes place, we will be like Him for we will see Him as He is (1 John 3:2^{xxv}). Christians have the greatest hope, and it is hope based on actual events of history and the declaration of the One who cannot lie (Titus 1:2^{xxvi}). It is based on the unchanging Word of God. That is why it is a sure hope. And if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it with patience (Romans 8:24,25^{xxvii}). Love is patient, like a bride waiting for her wedding, anticipating but waiting!

Love ^{7d} *endures all things*. 1 Corinthians 13:7d While we are waiting for that glorious day when He calls us home, love enables us to endure all things. I am reminded of soldiers who were engaged before they went off to war. They endured the hardship of battle, sleeping in the rain, marching for long hours, and occasionally they would pull out a picture of their bride to be. They endured everything because they had a destination and an expected end. They could see past it all because they knew their day was coming if they just endured for the sake of love. And sometimes life in this fallen world seems like a battle zone. It seems like we would be hard pressed to endure another day. Paul mentions that he experienced that in his second letter to the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 1:6). But that is when we pull out our picture painted for us in the words of Scripture. We read of the Wedding Feast of the Lamb (Revelation 19:7^{xxviii}). We read of the heavenly city and the new heaven and the new earth (Revelation 21:1,2^{xxix}). We read of a God who loves us and gave Himself for us, and we endure. ² *looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.* Hebrews 12:2

This is love, the first fruit of the Spirit: patient, kind, without envy or boasting, not arrogant or rude, not insisting on our own way, not irritable or resentful, not rejoicing in wrong but rejoicing in truth, bearing all things, believing all things, hoping all things and enduring all things? By the grace of God may we allow the Spirit to express this fruit of *agape* love in all its fullness in our lives, as we wholeheartedly cooperate with the only true God whose eternal nature is *agape*.

Questions:

- 1 How do you see yourself in relationship to the first declaration?
- 2 Why should we be patient and kind to all?
- 3 Why is envy unloving?
- 4 Why doesn't love boast?
- 5 What helps to humble us?
- 6 Why do we insist on our own way?
- 7 What should we do instead?
- 8 How do we experience more of God's love for others?
- 9 Review the four actions of love in verse 7?
- 10 How can we endure all things?

ⁱ **1 Corinthians 7:7 (ESV)**

⁷ I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another.

ⁱⁱ **1 Corinthians 12:31 (ESV)**

³¹ But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

ⁱⁱⁱ **Ephesians 5:25 (ESV)**

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,

^{iv} **Galatians 5:22 (ESV)**

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

^v **Galatians 5:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

^{vi} **1 John 4:8 (ESV)**

⁸ Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

^{vii} **2 Corinthians 5:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

^{viii} **Matthew 18:32-33 (ESV)**

³² Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me.

³³ And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?'

^{ix} **John 13:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

^x **John 15:12 (ESV)**

¹² "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

^{xi} **Isaiah 6:5 (ESV)**

⁵ And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"

^{xii} **Romans 3:23 (ESV)**

²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

^{xiii} **Ephesians 4:27 (NIV)**

²⁷ and do not give the devil a foothold.

^{xiv} **Ephesians 4:32 (ESV)**

³² Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

^{xv} **1 Peter 5:7 (ESV)**

⁷ casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

^{xvi} **Ephesians 4:27 (NIV)**

²⁷ and do not give the devil a foothold.

^{xvii} **John 17:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.

^{xviii} **Romans 15:1 (ESV)**

¹ We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves.

^{xix} **Colossians 3:1-2 (ESV)**

¹ If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

² Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

^{xx} **Galatians 6:8 (ESV)**

⁸ For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

^{xxi} **Matthew 16:25 (ESV)**

²⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

^{xxii} **Matthew 16:27 (NIV)**

²⁷ For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.

^{xxiii} **2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)**

²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

^{xxiv} **1 John 4:19 (KJV)**

¹⁹ We love him, because he first loved us.

^{xxv} **1 John 3:2 (ESV)**

² Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

^{xxvi} **Titus 1:2 (ESV)**

² in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began

^{xxvii} **Romans 8:24-25 (ESV)**

²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees?

²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

^{xxviii} **Revelation 19:7 (ESV)**

⁷ Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready;

^{xxix} **Revelation 21:1-2 (ESV)**

¹ Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.

² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.