

THE SPECTRUM OF LOVE (Part 1)

Please take your Bibles and turn to what is often referred to as the “love chapter” of the Bible—I Corinthians 13. Two weeks ago, we looked at the superiority of love. Paul pointed out to the Corinthians—and us—that love is superior to at least 4 things. It is superior to great speaking (v 1), vast knowledge (v 2), mighty faith (v 2), and sacrificial giving (v 3).

Love is supreme; verse 13 reminds us that in regards to faith, hope, and love, the greatest of these is love. In chapter 14, verse 1, we are exhorted to follow after—pursue—love. But what is love? I love God; I love my wife; I love my children; I love my grandchildren. I love fishing and football and food; I love hiking and traveling—but I also love sitting at home and reading. Does love mean the exact same thing in all the ways I just used them? Obviously not, but what does it mean? Is it something you *feel*—or something you **do**?

Henry Drummond points out that love is like light in that it is composed of multiple parts. Just as a beam of light can pass through a prism and reveal the colors of a rainbow, God takes “love” and passes it through the prism of divine inspiration. What comes out the other side is love broken down into its component parts. Drummond writes: “And in these few words we have what one might call the spectrum of love, the analysis of love.”

I Corinthians 13:4-7, God uses 15 phrases in His description of love. Some of them appear in our English Bibles as adjectives, but in the Greek they are all verbs—action words. Why is that important? Because it demonstrates that God defines love as *doing*—and not primarily a *feeling*. So how do we look at the 15 different components of love in a way that will help us remember them? First off, we are not going to attempt to look at all 15 today. We are going to look at the first 9, though, and as I looked at them more carefully, I believe you they can be lumped together in three groups of three: patience, humility, and sacrifice.

1. Love is patient

We have here in verses 4 and 5 three different descriptions of patience.

A. Suffers long—v 4 “charity suffereth long”

MacArthur points out that this long-suffering—this extreme patience—is in regards to *people*. It is **not** about being patient in the midst of extreme circumstances like loss of home or possession; nor is it suffering long in spite of a lot of personal physical pain. It is bearing long with the imperfections, faults, and differences of others. It is giving people time to grow and change and make mistakes and not “writing them off,” so to speak

Here’s an interesting question: Was Paul ever convicted about his own sin when God used him to write Scripture? I believe he was—and this would have been one of those times. Paul wasn’t always long-suffering; Paul didn’t always give people time to grow and change, did he? In Acts 13:13 a young man by the name of John—whose surname was Mark—left the missionary team while on their first journey and returned to Jerusalem. In Acts 15:37-40 we see the team was making arrangements to go on their second journey:

Acts 15:37-40 “And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. ³⁸ But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. ³⁹ And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; ⁴⁰ And Paul chose Silas...”

Paul was not long-suffering in this instance; he did not give John Mark time to grow and change and “gave up on him.” Barnabas didn’t give up on him, though—he took Mark and went to Cyprus. God didn’t give up on him either because He used this same man to write the book of Mark! And approximately 17 years later Paul

wrote in his second letter to Timothy: “Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry” (II Tim 4:11).

Are you long-suffering with the people in your life—your spouse, your children, your co-workers, your neighbors, your brothers and sisters in Christ? How thankful we should be that God is long-suffering to us! **Psalm 103:13-14** “Like as a father pitieth His children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him. ¹⁴ For He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust.”

The patience of love is seen in suffering long; it is also seen in that it...

B. Stirs slow—v 5b “...is not easily provoked...”

What does it mean to be not easily provoked? It means to not be easily angered; it means to not be characterized by a “sudden outburst” of anger. We know people like that, don’t we? They are like a ticking time-bomb that you **know** is going to go off—you just don’t know why or when. We all have “buttons” that can be pushed, but some have more than others. Ray Fowler wrote:

“But some people are covered with buttons. They seem to take special pride in polishing and grooming their buttons, and then they wear them all over the front of their life where people can’t help but bump into them. They even set their buttons on a hair trigger so that the slightest touch will provoke a reaction!”

God warns us against being quick-tempered, about having a “hasty” spirit.

Proverbs 14:29 “He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding: but he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly.”

Proverbs 16:32 “He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.”

Love is patient; it is slow to anger. Don’t blame your temper on your heritage or your upbringing—and don’t pride yourself in the fact that although you blow up fast, you get over it fast. Love is not easily provoked.

The patience of love is seen in that it suffers long and stirs slowly. It is also seen in that it...

C. Stores nothing—v 5c “thinketh no evil”

Some of you might be thinking, ‘Pastor, how do you get “stores nothing” from “thinketh no evil”?’ I’m glad you asked! “Thinketh no evil” comes from the Greek word “*log-id-zo-mai*” and is an accounting term. It means to “reckon, count, compute, calculate.” It does not refer to you or I not having evil thoughts; it means that we don’t count—we don’t keep track of—*the faults of others*. In some translations it is rendered “it keeps no record of wrongs.” In other words, it forgives and forgets past offenses instead of keeping track of them.

Do you keep track of how people have hurt you or wronged you? If your goal is to be a **bitter** person, here’s the best way to do it. Be on the look-out for all the ways people hurt you and write it down. If someone raises their voice at you, write it down. If they say something mean to you, write it down. If they look at you wrong, write it down. If they don’t say anything to you—but you think they should—write it down. If you hear from someone else that someone said something bad about you, write it down. Keep a detailed list—and look at it often. What a horrible way to live—and what a miserable life that will produce!

Steve Cole writes: One married man said to his friend, “You know, every time my wife and I get into a conflict, she gets **historical**.” His friend said, “Historical? Don’t you mean **hysterical**?” “No, I mean historical. She rehearses everything I’ve ever done wrong in the whole history of our marriage.”

Do you hold grudges? Love does not—and neither should we.

First, love is patient. Second,

2. Love is humble

Just as there was three aspects of patience, we see here three different components of humility. There is some overlap here, but there are also some distinctions.

A. Wants not—v 4 “charity envieth not”

The word envy here means to “be jealous; to strive.” In other words, it is a strong desire to have what others have. We can envy a lot of things that belong to others. The tenth commandment found in Exodus 20:17 reminds us that we are not to covet our neighbor’s house—or his wife—or his possessions.

--During the fall of Jericho, Achan “saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them;”

--David saw Uriah’s wife Bathsheba, wanted her, wrongfully took her, then arranged for her husband to be put to death so he could “rightfully” have her.

Envy is not just about wanting **things** though, is it? Sometimes it is about wanting another person’s position or praise. Saul, although king, burned with envy against David. Why? Because after victorious battles the women would sing “Saul has slain his thousands—but David his tens of thousands.”

Love is humble; it is content with what it has and does not desire what others have. It can handle others being blessed and having things that they themselves do not have.

We also see the humility of love in that it...

B. Vaunts not—v 4 “charity vaunteth not itself”

“Vaunteth” comes from the Greek word “*per-per-yoo-om-ahee*” and is used only once in the Bible—right here. It means to “boast one’s self;” in other words, to be a bragger. Whereas envy wants what others have, the braggart wants you to know what he has that you don’t!

Some people are very outspoken regarding their greatness. The boxer Muhammad Ali immediately comes to mind. He unashamedly proclaimed, “I am the greatest!” Most braggers we know are much more subtle, however. My guess is that most of us have been in a conversation with another person who—no matter what the topic—have done bigger, or better, or more than everyone else in the group.

--If the most fish you caught in one day was 50, they got 60.

--If the fastest that you’ve ever driven a car was 100 mph, they went 120.

--If the best paying job you ever had was \$30/hr; theirs was \$40.

I think you get the point. Love is not like that. Notice I Corinthians 4:7 “For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?” Love does not brag because it recognizes that whatever it has is from God.

C. Inflates not—v 4 “is not puffed up”

“Puffed up” comes from a word that means to “inflate, blow up, to puff up, be proud.” So what’s the difference between bragging and inflating yourself, being puffed up? I think the distinction is this:

Bragging is in relation to **others**; being puffed up is in relation to **ourselves**.

We don’t have to be an overt bragger to be proud, do we? In fact, I daresay Christians are quite good at keeping their pride hidden! They don’t outwardly *say* anything, but inwardly they have the attitude that they are better—and can do better. It is thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought to think—the thing Paul warned us against in Romans 12:3.

Think about how pride is the opposite of love and “kills” love. Can we love someone when we want what they want...or want them to know how great we are...or secretly look down on them because we think we are better than them? Love is about others, isn’t it? But pride is about us!

Love is patient, love is humble, and thirdly...

3. *Love is sacrificial*

A. Sacrifice of kindness—v 4 “Charity suffereth long, and is kind...”

Does it cost anything to be kind? Often times not in *money*, but it certainly does in time. It doesn't cost money to call someone or text them to see how they are doing, but it does take time. It doesn't cost money to walk across the yard and help a neighbor, but it does take some awareness and thoughtfulness. Although cards cost *some* money, they aren't very expensive and often times can “make someone's day.”

We live in a fallen world with fallen people who are often unkind to one another. How different we can be by just being kind. In Acts 10:38 we read of Jesus that He “went about doing good.” Think of all the kindness that Jesus showed while here on earth. He obviously did things that we cannot do like make the lame to walk and the blind to see and bring people back to life. But He also comforted those who were afraid or were hurting; He was not too busy to hold children; and He forgave those who failed Him.

Not only is there the sacrifice of kindness, there is also...

B. Sacrifice of courtesy—v 5 “Doth not behave itself unseemingly”

The idea here is that love does not act disgracefully or dishonorably; it is not ill-mannered or rude. We work hard at teaching our children not to be rude, don't we? We want them to say “please” and “thank you” and “excuse me.” It is a good thing to teach by example that you should open a door for someone at a store and let them go in ahead of you—unless it's Black Friday and you are getting in line for that big screen TV 😊!

It is more than just good manners, however. It is a respect for others whereby we don't do things to **purposely offend** them. It is a concern and compliance for what others consider decent. We watch how we talk and how we dress and how we behave so as not to make others feel uncomfortable. How different from what goes on in our society today!

We see the sacrificial nature of love first in kindness, then in being courteous, and lastly...

C. Sacrifice of unselfishness—v 5b “...seeketh not her own...”

Not going out on a limb to say that it takes sacrifice to be unselfish. We sacrifice our own comfort to care for the needs of others.

Philippians 2:3-4 “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. ⁴ Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.” Verse 4 means we are not to look out for merely our own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

Love is unselfish; it sacrificially meets the needs of others regardless of who is more “deserving.” It is not a debate about who had the hardest day so the “winner” gets to sit on the couch while the “loser” has to cook dinner. Love does not dwell on what it should **get**; love is focused on the needs of others and what it can give to meet those needs.

Are you thankful that Jesus didn't insist on His rights? Aren't you glad He was unselfish—that He left the comfort of Heaven and His position in Heaven and His praise in Heaven to come to earth and die for us? **Mark 10:45** reminds us “For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

What is love? Love is patient...and humble...and unselfish—everything that Jesus was and is.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS:

1. Are you patient with the faults and frailties of others—or do you keep a list of ways that people have hurt you?
2. Are you humble—are you content with what you have—or do you want what others have and brag about what you have and secretly look down on others because they are not quite like you?
3. Are you selfish—or unselfish? Are you too selfish to be kind and courteous and look out for the needs of others?