

"Love Suffers Long"
(1 Corinthians 13:4)

Introduction: We have been looking at the supernatural love which God works in the heart of His people through the ordinary operation of the Holy Spirit. So far we have seen that love is the absolutely essential ingredient in a true saving faith and it is only in the hearts of true believers. Next, Paul compared the extraordinary work of the Spirit with His ordinary work of regeneration in the heart to show us that love is the greatest privilege which God bestows on man. Last week we saw that love must be the intention behind all that we do for God, for He stands in need of nothing, and if we do not serve Him with love in our hearts, then we in fact do nothing for Him at all. Love is greater than anything we can give or any amount of suffering that we could possibly endure.

Paul now goes on to fill out his description of the characteristics of this love he has been referring to. He tells us what it is like, and he tells us what is not like. The first characteristic of love is that it is patient. The word used in the Greek means "slow to anger," which is a translation of the Hebrew word, which is often used of God in the OT, meaning "long of nose." As anger is often seen in the nose, by its becoming red, to be long of nose meant that one's nose took a long time to get heated. A true Christ-like love, one that is wrought by the Holy Spirit in the heart of man suffers long. And what the Spirit of God is saying in this text this morning is,

Love is patient in bearing the offenses and injuries of those around us.

- I. *You Are Often the Recipient of Offenses from Your Neighbors.*
 - A. *Some People Injure Others By Being Unfair and Unjust in Their Dealings with Them.*
 - 1. *They are deceitful to them, not telling them all the truth, but concealing things and taking advantage of their ignorance.*
 - 2. *Some are unfaithful by not fulfilling their promises and obligations to them.*
 - 3. *Some are negligent in their work by only giving to their employers what the letter of their contract says and nothing more.*
 - 4. *Some ask for far too much money for the tasks that they perform.*
 - 5. *Some unjustly withhold what is due from their neighbors, neglecting to pay their debts or unnecessarily putting their neighbors to trouble and difficulty to get what is due from them.*
 - 6. *Men also do many more things like this in which they are far from doing to others what they would have them do unto themselves. Instead they provoke and irritate and injure one another.*
 - B. *Some Injure Others by Speaking Evil of Them Behind Their Backs.*

1. This is the most common form of injuring our neighbor. Others kinds of harm are frequently done, but this is the most frequent.
 2. Some concoct false reports about their neighbor and then spread them around to slander them. Or they might even spread what is true with the intent of injuring them.
 3. Others, while speaking the truth, represent it in such a way as to give an entirely different impression, presenting everything in the worst light, exaggerating their faults, and make them look as bad as possible.
 4. A great deal of damage is done among your brethren by not judging one another in the light of love, and by putting the worst possible construction on one another's words and actions.
- C. Some May Injure Others by Their Thoughts.
1. They think the worst concerning them.
 2. They constantly harbor contempt in their hearts for them.
 3. And, of course, when the mind is filled with evil thoughts, the words which are spoken concerning them express this evil.
 - a. The tongue is called a scourge in Job 5:21.
 - b. In Psalm 140:1-3, the psalmist writes, "RESCUE ME, O LORD, FROM EVIL MEN; PRESERVE ME FROM VIOLENT MEN, WHO DEVISE EVIL THINGS IN THEIR HEARTS; THEY CONTINUALLY STIR UP WARS. THEY SHARPEN THEIR TONGUES AS A SERPENT; POISON OF A VIPER IS UNDER THEIR LIPS."
 - c. The tongue here is compared with the fangs of a snake which has a deadly bite.
- D. Some Injure Others By the Way They Treat Them.
1. Some who have authority use it very harshly toward those under them by being tyrannical.
 2. Sometimes those who are under authority injure those above them by denying them the respect and honor that is due to them.
 3. Some injure others by being very selfish and self-centered, looking out only for their own well-being and not for that of their neighbors.
 4. Some are haughty and proud and think that they are better than anyone else--perhaps due to station in life, or ethnic background, or the amount of wealth they have--, and when they express this, they demean others by making them feel inferior to them.
 5. Some injure others by having a very willful spirit.
 - a. They are desperate to have everything their own way.
 - b. They will, if possible, bend everything to their own likes and dislikes.
 - c. They never want to yield to the wishes of others, nor listen to any arguments that they might offer.
 - d. And they often throw a temper tantrum if they don't get things their way.
 - e. And so they offend many.

6. Some injure others by delighting in opposing them.
 - a. They are not acting for the good of anyone.
 - b. Rather, they are acting from a spirit of opposition to a party or a person.
 - c. And they only do so that they might injure them or frustrate them.
7. Some injure others by having a spiteful spirit against them, with or without a cause, even hating their neighbor so that they rejoice only when they are in trouble or cast down, thinking that they will be more exalted by their demise.
8. Others injure some by a spirit of envy towards them thinking ill of them only because of what they might have to enjoy.
9. And there are many who injure others from a spirit of revenge, returning evil for evil, or evil for imagined assaults.
 - a. Some hold on and nurse grudges as long as they live.
 - b. They will at every opportunity use it to try and injure that other person.
 - c. These are only a few of the ways in which men can and do injure one another.

II. When You Are Confronted with Offenses and Injuries, You Must Patiently Bear Them.

A. How Are We to Do This?

1. You must bear with the injuries you receive from others by not seeking revenge.
 - a. Revenge may be taken in several ways besides inflicting immediate pain on someone.
 - b. We can take revenge in our conduct and speech by showing a bitter spirit.
 - c. We may speak ill of them to our neighbors to gratify our need for revenge.
 - d. Therefore, if you are to exercise Christian patience toward others, you must bear with their injuries without retaliating in your words or deeds.
 - e. You must bear it without anything in your actions which would reveal a bitter spirit.
 - f. You must receive it with a calm disposition, and a soul filled with meekness and quietness and goodness, not only in the presence of the one who injured you, but also behind his back.
 - g. This is why this virtue is always connected with gentleness in the Scriptures, "BUT THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS LOVE, JOY, PEACE, PATIENCE, KINDNESS, GOODNESS, FAITHFULNESS, GENTLENESS, SELF-CONTROL; AGAINST SUCH THINGS THERE IS NO LAW" (Gal. 5:22-23).
 - h. The one who manifests this spirit will not be rash, passionate, bitter, lashing out with the tongue, but will have peace, calmness and gentleness.
 - i. He may reprove his neighbor, this is oftentimes his duty, but it will be done intelligently and calmly, and not rashly.
 - j. The reproof will be for their sin against God, not

- for his offense against you.
- k. It is to lament his sin against God, rather than his injuring you.
2. You must bear these injuries with a constant love in your heart, without those emotions within that destroy it.
 - a. You should not only not lash out with your tongue or actions, you should also have the same state of heart.
 - b. If it is within your heart, you have already sinned.
 - c. But you should not cease to love your neighbor because he has injured you, but rather pity him.
 3. You must bear their injuries without losing the quietness and peace within your heart and mind.
 - a. When we let them disturb our peace, then we allow them to create anger in our hearts, and we cease to bear with them with Christian patience.
 - b. It distracts us from our proper duty as Christians, especially our religious duty of prayer and meditation.
 - c. You need to maintain the serenity of your souls like the glassy surface of the water when it is undisturbed.
 4. You must be willing to suffer much for the sake of peace, rather than to do what you have opportunity and the right to do in defending yourself.
 - a. If you exercise the fruit of Christian patience, then you don't take advantage of the opportunities to vindicate yourself.
 - b. You might by exercising your rights, bring great trouble upon the one who injured you, while by not exercising them, you bring great suffering upon yourself in forbearing it.
 - c. But this is what love demands.
 - d. Taking revenge may lead to an established war, while forbearing may bring a hope of regaining your neighbor and making him a friend rather than an enemy.
 - e. This is why Paul says to the Corinthians, "ACTUALLY, THEN, IT IS ALREADY A DEFEAT FOR YOU, THAT YOU HAVE LAWSUITS WITH ONE ANOTHER. WHY NOT RATHER BE WRONGED? WHY NOT RATHER BE DEFRAUDED? ON THE CONTRARY, YOU YOURSELVES WRONG AND DEFRAUD, AND THAT YOUR BRETHREN" (1 Cor. 6:7-8).
 - f. This does not mean that all injuries ought to be born in this way by us so that we never defend ourselves or take opportunity to vindicate ourselves.
 - g. But in many, if not most cases, it would be better to suffer long first, according to the spirit of this text.
 - h. And it may be that you will have to suffer much for the sake of peace from sincere Christian love toward those who injure you, rather than justifying yourself when you have opportunity.

B. *This Is Why this Virtue Is Called "Long-Suffering."*

1. *First because we are called not only to bear a small injury but a great deal of injury.*
 - a. *We are to maintain a peaceful heart and countenance and love our neighbor, not only when he injures us a little, but also when he injures us a lot.*
 - b. *And not only a few injuries, but many, even though he may injure us for a long time.*
 - c. *Long-suffering does not mean that we bear these injuries meekly for a season and then stop doing so.*
 - d. *But that we should bear them in meekness for as long as they continue, even to the end.*

2. *Secondly, because in some cases, we must suffer a great while before we take any opportunity of vindicating ourselves.*
 - a. *We may be driven at last to defend ourselves, but we may not do it out of a spirit of revenge.*
 - b. *We may not seek to injure the one who has injured us.*
 - c. *We may need to in a spirit of self-defense defend ourselves, but even this may be given up in many cases in the interests of peace.*
 - d. *But it must also be in a spirit of Christian love, lest we should cause injury to the one who injured us.*

III. *But This May Only Be Done If You Have Christian Love in Your Hearts.*

- A. *When There Is a Love to God and the Lord Jesus Christ in Your Hearts, It Will Incline You Towards Long-suffering.*
 1. *First because it inclines us to imitate Him.*
 - a. *Long-suffering is an attribute of God, "THEN THE LORD PASSED BY IN FRONT OF HIM AND PROCLAIMED, 'THE LORD, THE LORD GOD, COMPASSIONATE AND GRACIOUS, SLOW TO ANGER, AND ABOUNDING IN LOVINGKINDNESS AND TRUTH; WHO KEEPS LOVINGKINDNESS FOR THOUSANDS, WHO FORGIVES INIQUITY, TRANSGRESSION AND SIN; YET HE WILL BY NO MEANS LEAVE THE GUILTY UNPUNISHED, VISITING THE INIQUITY OF FATHERS ON THE CHILDREN AND ON THE GRANDCHILDREN TO THE THIRD AND FOURTH GENERATIONS" (Ex. 34:6-7).*
 - b. *And in Romans 2:4, Paul says, "OR DO YOU THINK LIGHTLY OF THE RICHES OF HIS KINDNESS AND FORBEARANCE AND PATIENCE, NOT KNOWING THAT THE KINDNESS OF GOD LEADS YOU TO REPENTANCE?"*
 - c. *God is far more aware of the wickedness in the world than we and yet He forbears the world to exist every day.*
 - d. *And not only is He aware of every infraction of His holy law which men defiantly break every day, but even in light of it, He continues to pour out of His benevolence upon them, causing His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and the rain to fall on both.*
 - e. *Not to mention the fact that He daily offers the*

riches of His spiritual blessings in Christ to those who daily refuse them.

- f. Think about how long God patiently endured your blasphemies against His name before you came to repentance toward your sins and faith in Christ.
 - g. Since God Himself is longsuffering, if you love Him, will you not imitate Him in this?
2. Secondly, love to God will incline you to express your gratitude to Him for His longsuffering toward you.
 - a. You who love God are aware of how much He endured with you, it should incline you to bear with the lesser offenses of your neighbors.
 - b. God has forgiven you ten thousand talents of debt, will you not forgive your neighbor their 100 denarii?
 - c. If you do not, it may demonstrate that God has not been merciful to you, you are a stranger to His grace and outside of Christ.
 - d. Our gratitude toward God will incline us to obedience towards Him where He commands us to be patient when wronged.
 3. Thirdly, a true love to God will incline us to be humble before Him.
 - a. Love in our hearts to God tends to exalt Him in our own eyes and to lower our estimation of ourselves.
 - b. If you truly love God, you will see that He is infinitely holy and pure, while you are defiled and sinful.
 - c. And when you are humbled in your own sight and confess that you are not deserving of good but only evil, then you will not resent it so much when you endure ill treatment at the hands of your neighbors.
 4. Fourthly, love to God will help you to accept what comes into your life as coming from the hand of God.
 - a. God's hand is in everything that comes into your life.
 - b. His is the One who governs the world by His providence.
 - c. When injury comes to you from your neighbor, you must realize that it has come as a part of God's plan, according to His love and wisdom.
 - d. When David was leaving Jerusalem on account of his son Absalom, Shimei came out to curse him. But David did not take revenge nor would he allow any of his men to, for he said, "Let him alone and let him curse, for the Lord has told him" (2 Sam. 16:11).
 5. And lastly, love to God gives us the ability to bear the injuries of others, because it places us above the injuries of men.
 - a. First because you who are the Lord's are hid in Christ, out of the reach of danger, and the Lord has promised that all things will work together for good for you.
 - b. Secondly, because the more your happiness is in God, the

less your happiness will be in the things of the world.

- (i) Men can only touch the things which you possess in this world.
- (ii) But if your sole desire and love is in God, then men can do what they want to your earthly possessions, but they will not seem that important.
- (iii) When Ziba deceived David into thinking that Mephibosheth delighted in his downfall, David gave to Ziba all of his belongings. But when David returned from exile and found Mephibosheth among those who welcomed him, he divided them in half. Upon which, Mephibosheth answered, "LET HIM EVEN TAKE IT ALL, SINCE MY LORD THE KING HAS COME SAFELY TO HIS OWN HOUSE" ((2 Sam. 19:30).
- (iv) And so, if you love God, nothing else will be of much importance.

B. In the Same Way, Love to Our Neighbors Will Incline Us to Patient Forbearance.

- 1. Love will bear with a multitude of faults and offenses. "HATRED STIRS US STRIFE, BUT LOVE COVERS ALL TRANSGRESSIONS" (Prov. 10:12).
- 2. We will always put up with more with those that we truly love than with those that we don't.
- 3. A parent will put up with many things in his own child that he would find repugnant in someone else's child.
- 4. If we love our neighbors, then we will not be inclined to hatred and revenge, but we will bear with them in their offenses.

IV. Uses.

A. Do you bear meekly with the offenses you receive from others?

- 1. From what has been said it becomes you to suppress all wrath, revenge and bitterness of spirit toward those who have offended you or will offend you in the future.
- 2. Whether they have slandered you or scourged you with their tongues, or injured you with their hands.
- 3. Paul says in Romans 12:17, "NEVER PAY BACK EVIL FOR EVIL TO ANYONE."
- 4. Consider what Christ endured at the hands of sinners.
 - a. Though He was the Lord of glory, He humbled Himself and became a reproach among men.
 - b. He was charged with gluttony and being a drunkard, of being a friend of tax-gatherers and sinners, a deceiver, a madman, possessed with a devil, a Samaritan, a blasphemer, and a worker of miracles by the power of the devil. The Jews were even willing to cast any out of the their synagogues who would confess Him to be the Christ. And they tried to murder Him.
 - c. Yet Christ bore these injuries from the Jews without one word of reproach and without resentment.
 - d. And when He was betrayed by a friend and led to the cross, as a sheep He did not open His mouth to defend Himself, but on the cross He cried out, "Father,

forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

- e. If Christ endured these things, how much more should you?
- B. *If You Are Not Able to Bear With the Injuries of Others, You are Not Going to Be Able to Live in this World.*
1. You live in a fallen world, where the love of God is absent in most and is only very imperfectly present in some.
 2. The general principles by which the world operates are those which will tend to bring injury to you.
 3. Jesus said, "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; therefore be shrewd as serpents, and innocent as doves" (Matt. 10:16).
 4. If you do not have this patience and meekness, you will certainly be miserable all of your lives.
- C. *But if You Live in this Way, You will Be Above Being Injured.*
1. If you do not become provoked by the injuries of others, then their provocations will only fall to the ground and you will be uninjured.
 2. But you will fall under the power of the one trying to harm you only to the degree that you let your minds be disturbed and provoked.
- D. *If You Display a True Christian Spirit of Long-suffering, It Will Demonstrate Real Maturity in Your Life.*
1. The Proverbs say, "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city" (16:32).
 2. If you can remain calm when others injure you, and pity and forgive them from your heart, this manifests true godlike character.
 3. "Patience of spirit is better than haughtiness of spirit. Do not be eager in your heart to be angry, for anger resides in the bosom of fools" (Ecc. 7:8-9).
- E. *It Is That Kind of a Spirit which Was Manifested in the Saints.*
1. David very patiently endured mistreatment at the hand of Saul.
 2. When Stephen was stoned by a mob of Jews, he knelt down and cried out to the Lord not to lay this sin to their account (Acts 7:59, 60).
 3. Paul also suffered much at the hands of the Jews and yet still was willing to become accursed on their behalf if they might be saved.
- F. *If You Endure Such Treatment at the Hands of Men Patiently, You Will Be Rewarded in the Same Way by God.*
1. Jesus said, "For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you" (Matt. 7:2).
 2. And again, "For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father

will not forgive your transgressions" (6:14-15).

3. If you claim to have been forgiven of your many offenses against God, but refuse to forgive those same offenses by others, you are far from the grace of God.
4. But if you forgive others their offenses against you and bear patiently with them, then you demonstrate that you have received God's grace, and God has and will continue to patiently pardon your sins.
5. People of God, it is only through the grace of Christ that you may exercise this Christian virtue. Call upon Christ for the strength, trust in Him alone to do it, and He will give you the ability to suffer long for His glory. Let us pray!