

Qualities of Love – Is Persevering

1 Corinthians

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Bible Text: 1 Corinthians 13:7

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1 Corinthians 13, and we read tonight beginning with verse 4. 1 Corinthians 13:4.

"Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

Let's pray together.

Our Father in heaven, as we have studied through these verses, Lord, You have convicted us. You've encouraged us. Lord, You have brought before our eyes the model of what we are called to walk in as followers of Your Son. And I pray, Lord, that we would not just learn information through this section, but that our lives would be transformed. That we would walk in the things that we are learning. That we would strive with all of our might to walk in love, knowing all the while, Lord, that we are in desperate need of You every moment to be able to do that. So Lord, in dependent effort I pray that we would strive to love each other and to love the world with that love that we have found in Christ. Lord, I pray that You would bless tonight's time in Your Word. Lord, I pray that You bless the preaching and the receiving of Your Word with Your power, with the teaching work of Your Spirit, and that, Lord, good and lasting things would come to us as a result of our being here this evening. We ask You this in Jesus' name, Amen.

Something I want us to bear in mind as we think about these qualities that we are learning about in verses 4 through 7 is that the Lord Jesus is the perfect expression, the perfect embodiment, of all of these qualities. In fact, it is interesting if you take the name Jesus, and you put it everywhere you see love in this section, and you think of these things in a past tense way, and you think about them in light of His ministry here on earth when He was here two thousand years ago, think about how this reads: Jesus was patient. Jesus was kind. Jesus was not envious. Jesus was not boastful. Jesus was not arrogant. Jesus was not rude. Jesus was not selfish. Jesus was not easily angered or irritable. Jesus was not unforgiving or resentful. Jesus did not rejoice in unrighteousness. Jesus rejoiced with the truth. Jesus was protective in His love. Jesus was encouraging and optimistic in His love. All of those things are perfectly true in the case of our Lord and Savior, so that

when we think about walking in love, I want us to think about it this way. When we think about walking in love, what we are thinking about really is walking after Christ. We're thinking about walking in His footsteps. We're thinking about pursuing Him. This is a life that we can only enjoy and experience as we are walking after the Lord Himself.

It's exactly what the New Testament tells us in Ephesians 5:1. Listen to what it says. "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." Be imitators of God, as His beloved children, and walk in love. What kind of love is that? As Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us. To walk in love is to be an imitator of God. To walk in love is to walk in that love that we have experienced in God's Son.

Now tonight, we come to examine this last quality that's found in verse 7, and that is the fact that love is enduring. Love endures. Love endures all things. Or we could talk tonight about it this way, the perseverance of love. And as we've done with each of these qualities, we begin tonight by asking, "What exactly does he have in mind when he talks about love enduring all things?" It's the word *hupomeno*. And the basic meaning of that word has to do with waiting, to remain, to stay in a place, to stand one's ground, to hold out, to endure, as it's translated here. Endures all things. But the idea is standing your ground, holding out against, remaining in your place. The exact same word is used in James 1:12 where it says, "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial." The word *hupomeno* there actually is *hupomeni*, which is a form of *hupomeno*. "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, for once he has been approved he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him." There's the man remaining obedient under trial, staying in the right place under trial, or, as James 1:12 puts it in the ESV, "Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life."

So this is the idea of endurance: to remain steadfast. Now, something you find about this particular word, *hupomeno*, it's often used in the New Testament in association with persecution, to remain steadfast in the face of suffering, in the face of persecution. Let me show you a few places where the word is used that way. I want you to turn to 2 Timothy 2 and what we're doing now is we're just trying to get a hold of the meaning of love endures all things. You can't practice what you don't understand. You can't walk in what you don't get a hold of so I want us to get a hold of what he's describing. 2 Timothy 2 and look at verse 8. "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the Word of God is not bound! Therefore I," here's that word, "endure everything for the sake of the elect." Love endures all things, right? Here is Paul saying, "I endure all things. I endure everything." Well, what is he enduring? He's enduring suffering. He's bound with chains. He's being treated like a criminal, but he's enduring it all for the sake of the elect of God. You see, his love for God, his love for souls, his love for God, his love on behalf of those who will be saved through the preaching of the Gospel, it is for that love's sake that he endures all these things.

Verse 10. "Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with Him, we will also live with Him; if we endure, we will also reign with Him; if we deny Him, He also will deny us; if we are faithless, He remains faithful—for He cannot deny Himself." What is the mark of converted people? They endure. They endure. They don't defect, which is the basic meaning there of denying Him. At times they stumble, but even in our stumbling, God continues to be faithful. He does not deny Himself. He cannot do so and so we continue with Christ. We endure but the context here has to do with suffering.

Let me show you another. Look at Hebrews 10. Hebrews 10. The perseverance of love. Hebrews 10. Look at verse 32. "But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured," there's that word, hupomeno, "you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated." You see, it's not just individual suffering coming to us directly, but it is also a willingness to suffer alongside those who are being ill-treated for the cause of Christ. "Partners with those so treated." Verse 33.

Verse 34. "For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of," what? "endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. For, 'Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.' But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls." Again it's a mark of a truly converted person. They continue. They persevere. They don't apostatize. They don't defect. They don't deny Him. They continue with Him, and they continue with Him even in the face of these kinds of struggles, this kind of hardship, this kind of suffering. In this case, verse 33 says, "publicly exposed to reproach, publicly exposed to affliction, sometimes because of a partnership with those who are treated like that, the loss of property." They are enduring all kinds of things. Why? Love for God. Love for those who love God. Love for those who need the Gospel. Love perseveres. Love endures.

Another example, look over to Hebrews 12. I want you to see that when you see this word, hupomeno or endurance, many times it is associated with persecution. Hebrews 12. Look at verse 1. "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us." Well now we've read that verse now many times, haven't we? Let us run with endurance the race. And because of the illustration, the analogy, we think of endurance simply as sort of holding out, and it's true, but notice what kind of endurance or what endurance is needed for. Look on.

Verse 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. Consider Him who endured from sinners such hostility against

Himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted." Look to Jesus as the model of love. Notice how he endured hostility from sinners, and you draw encouragement, and strength, and example from what you see in Him, and you love the same way. You endure hostility from sinners. Next verse, in fact, verse 4. "In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood." And on he goes exhorting us as sons. What does love endure? Love endures all things. That includes persecution. That includes suffering. That includes hostility from sinners. And in fact, in this context we are exhorted to continue enduring even to the point of the shedding of our blood. Enduring even to the point of martyrdom.

Look at 1 Peter 2. 1 Peter 2:18. "Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly." You see, it's not just suffering that's directly associated with sharing the Gospel. It's also suffering things that are unjust in this fallen world as you live the life of a believer. It's enduring, it's showing the love of Christ and enduring even when the kind of suffering you're experiencing is simply living an obedient life under someone who doesn't know the Lord, doesn't love the Lord, and doesn't care about you. Not only the good and gentle masters, but the unjust ones.

Verse 19. "For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps." It's like we talked about at the very beginning of the sermon tonight: who is the perfect example of all of these qualities of love? It's Jesus Himself. He is the model of endurance. It's His footsteps that we are to be walking in.

Verse 22. "He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When He was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but continued entrusting Himself to Him who judges justly."

So, look back at 1 Corinthians 13:7. "Love endures all things." Love does this. love perseveres. Love endures. Love holds its ground. It is not moved away from love for God and love for others. It's not moved away from obedience, not even by persecution, not even by suffering. It continues.

Now, I want us to think about the necessity of that kind of endurance. Why is it that love requires perseverance? Why is it that love requires perseverance? The answer of course is that love is going to be tested. If you're going to walk in the love of God, you're going to be tested. That love is going to be put to the test. And to pass the test, we're going to have to endure. How is walking in the love of Christ tested? Let me give you a few ways.

First of all, it's tested by trying circumstances. Sometimes, the tests that we face in walking in the love of Christ is that we are going to have to walk through difficult

circumstances as we love others. I thought this week about Jacob in Genesis 29 when Jacob goes to Laban, and he has the desire to marry Rachel. He loves Rachel. And Laban promises Jacob that he can have Rachel if he serves him for seven years. So Jacob works for seven years for Laban in order to get Rachel. Now Genesis 29:20 says this, "So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her." That's romantic, isn't it? "Honey, I worked seven years for you, and it was just like a few days, because I loved you so much." That would go on a card, right? I mean that's good stuff. Well, the problem was, after seven years did he get her? No. Laban deceived him, and he woke up the next morning to Leah. He didn't have Rachel. Now, you remember what happened after that? Laban said, "Well, you can have Rachel. Guess what? You've got to work seven more years." And Jacob did that. So he ends up working, laboring, fourteen years to have the one that he really loved. Now if love will endure fourteen years of labor to have its object in the realm of natural love, in the realm of romantic love, then how far is godly love willing to go in terms of difficult circumstances, trying circumstances, in order to affect its object? There are going to be times when loving someone is going to mean sharing in trying circumstances.

I think of the difficult places that missionaries go out of love for souls. You leave family. You leave your homeland. Missionaries don't make a lot of money. You go out and you live on a small stipend to be able to minister the Gospel. Foreign land, difficult circumstances, sometimes not good medicine, sometimes food you're not used to, all sorts of things in order to share the Gospel. What would motivate someone to do that? The love of God. A love for God. A love for souls. As Paul put it, "Willing to endure all things for the sake of the elect that they too may obtain what we have in Christ."

I think about what it means for us to bear one another's burdens. The Bible teaches that we are to bear one another's burdens. That is going to involve, at times, unpleasant circumstances. I'm willing to be put into a difficult situation, let's say, to be able to help you carry your burden, to be able to help you through your situation. The love of God will motivate us to do that. Let me ask you, when is the last time that you undertook a task that was difficult for you, trying for you, unpleasant for you, but you did it to demonstrate the love of Christ? When is the last time that it cost you in a personal way to demonstrate the love of Jesus to someone else? Love is willing to do that. Love endures all things, and that means, at least in part, trying and difficult circumstances. I think preeminently of Christ stepping out of heaven, laying aside the visible display of His glory, taking to Himself the form of a bondservant, coming into this sin sick world, living in the midst of us, taking to Himself a sinless human nature, all for the sake of redeeming us from our sins. His willingness to step out of the glory of heaven to come to what He made and to walk through all the difficulties that we walk through in the human realm, and He did it, not because He had need of us, but just because He loved us, because He was willing to save us. Love endures all things. That includes trying circumstances.

This also, as we've just seen in all of the verses that we looked at, love is going to require perseverance because of persecution, because of hateful opponents. I want you to look again at the book of Hebrews. Look at Hebrews 11 and you see an example of this. Hebrews 11. If you're going to love Jesus, you're going to be numbered with Jesus, you're

going to be identified with Jesus. That means that you're going to suffer with Jesus. If they called the Master of the house Beelzebub, what are they going to call His servants? If they hated Him, the perfect Son of God, are they not going to hate us? And folks, I'll tell you, this is a real test, I think, of the sound doctrine of the church. This is a real test of whether we're living out genuine Christianity or not. There's something wrong when the world can hate Jesus but find nothing wrong with us. When the world can despise Jesus but have no problem with us. And you know this, right now we are living in a time when the church is trying to remove its reproach by distancing itself from the message of the cross. The world wants to present a Jesus who is hated if He's presented in truthful terms but present Him in a way that removes the stigma of the cross. And the reason why the church wants to do that is not out of love for Jesus but out of love for self, an unwillingness to be identified with Him in such clear terms that we would share in His reproach. If you're going to follow Christ, you're going to suffer persecution and indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus, what does the Bible say? Shall be, will be, what? Persecuted. Will be persecuted. But love for Him is willing to endure. In fact, we count it a joy, a high honor, a privilege to suffer on behalf of His name.

Hebrews 11. Look at verse 24. You see an example of this. "By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter." He could have. He could have had all the privilege and all of the ease of a member of Pharaoh's household. But that's not what he chose. Verse 25. "Choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin." He saw that kind of acceptance for what it was. It's the fleeting pleasures of sin. And he chose instead, not only to be identified with Christ, but to be identified with Christ's people. We saw that in the verses we read earlier on a couple of occasions, that this love is willing to be numbered with those who are ill-treated on behalf of the truth.

Next verse. Verse 26. "He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward." Moses loved God, loved God's people, and was willing to share in the reproach of Christ, and willing to be mistreated with the people of God, because he did not love the fleeting pleasures of sin. Rather he loved God and loved God's people. That's the love of God. A willingness to endure all things that includes not only trying circumstances but persecution.

I said to you earlier, "Our love is going to be put to the test." It's amazing how many people who say they love God and say they love God's people begin to step away. Remember what this word means, hupomeno? To remain in place, right? To stand your ground. It's amazing how many people begin to move away from the Gospel, begin to move away from Christ, listen, begin to move away from godly people when persecution starts. Willing to be the friend of godly people when everybody loves them, but let them begin to be hated, and despised, mistreated, ill spoken of because of the truth, and all of a sudden people begin to back away, because they're not loving God, and they're not loving God's people at that point. They're loving themselves, or they're loving the world.

Look at 2 Timothy, and you see an example of that. 2 Timothy 1. Look at what we read in verse 15. I tell you folks, I read 2 Timothy, and I'm amazed every time I read it. I think

about Paul, and I know the only way that this man was not crushed was the sustaining grace of God, because here is a man who literally poured out his life on the altar of missionary service, who has seen countless people come to Christ under his ministry. He has seen numbers of churches planted as a result of his ministry and he gets to the end of his ministry and the end of his life, and you ask, "Who stands with Paul?"

Look at what he writes. 2 Timothy 1:15. "You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes. May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains, but when he arrived in Rome he searched for me earnestly and found me— may the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that Day!—and you well know all the service he rendered at Ephesus."

Look over to chapter 4. Look at verse 9. "Do your best to come to me soon. For Demas," and if you read some of the other New Testament letters that Paul wrote, you'll see Demas mentioned at the end of a couple of others where he is just treated like a faithful servant in terms of how Paul describes him or mentions him. Now you come to verse 9. "Do your best to come to me soon. For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica." He didn't stay in his place, did he? He didn't endure, did he? He didn't stand his ground. No, Paul begins to suffer. Paul is in prison in Rome. Paul is experiencing difficulties, and what happens to Demas? He departs. How does Paul explain it? Not love for God, not love for God's people, but love for the world.

"Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry. Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments." His personal copies, probably, of the Scriptures. Verse 14. "Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message." And then he says this, "At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me." You know these qualities that we've been learning about love. Notice his next statement. "May it not be charged against them." That's the love God, isn't it? How is someone sustained in this kind of love? Next statement, "But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it." Paul's focus is God-ward and Gospel-ward. It is God-ward and he is still focused on the salvation of people, sending these people that could be with him out for service, even after he's been deserted by most. It's amazing.

End of verse 17. "So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen." Why does love have to stay in its place? Why does love have to remain faithful to God under trial? Why does love need perseverance? Because to love God and to love others will take you through trying circumstances, and to love God and love others will mean you will have to bear up under persecution. Suffering specifically associated with your identification with Jesus. Suffering specifically associated with your identification with godly people.

There's a third reason why love needs perseverance. Trying circumstances. Persecution. A third reason is because we are called to love difficult people themselves. Sometimes the difficulty, the reason why we need to stay at it, stay in our place, is because the person that we are striving to love is themselves a difficult person. We are called to love people who are unlovely. We are called to love people who would push us away. Love endures with difficult people, because it believes all things, and it hopes all things. Ultimately, we persevere, we stubbornly love people, because we believe in God's ability to change lives. Gordon Fee said this, he says, "Love has a tenacity in the present buoyed by its absolute confidence in the future." Did you get that? It's tenacious in the present, because it has absolute confidence about the future "that enables it," he says, "to live in every kind of circumstance and continually to pour itself out in behalf of others. Paul's own ministry was a perfect example of such love."

How was Paul able to love the unlovely? And you think about examples of this, reasons why love has to be persevering, and again I come back to Paul's relationship to the churches. I think about God's love for Israel. What it is to love people who don't get it, to love people who are difficult to love. We don't have to think very far to think of an example for that, do we? Because all we have to reflect on is God's love for us. Every salvation testimony is a testimony of conquering love. Every salvation testimony is a testimony of God loving a sinner into His family. There were in our sinful ignorance. There we were in our sinful rebellion. There we were unlovely. Nothing about us that would commend us to God, and even while we were sinners, Romans 5:8, God demonstrated His own love toward us in that while we were sinners Christ died for us. The just for the unjust. The sinless one for sinners. He didn't look upon us and see lovely people with great potential, that there was such value in them it motivated Him to set His love on us. Rather He saw humanity ruined by sin, God haters by nature, filthy, clothed in the filthy, putrid, unacceptable rags of what our sin is with nothing to commend us to Him, and He loved us anyways. And He loved us in this way, that He gave His only begotten Son, who died on a cross to pay for all the sins of all those who are brought to God, all those who trust in Jesus Christ as the Lord who saves.

When you reflect on your own testimony, when you think about who you were outside of Christ, and now you are really a child of God, is that not the story of God loving you when you were unlovely? And that is how we are to love. Love people, not because of who they are, but love people because of who God is. And love people because this is the love that He has shown to us, and He has commanded us to show that very same kind of love to others. In the family of God, certainly, I mean listen, we should be able to love brethren, shouldn't we? If we're called to love our enemies, commanded to love them, if we're called to love the lost, so much so that, as Paul said, we're willing to be spent up, spent out, on behalf of lost souls. We're willing to endure all things for the sake of the elect. If we're called to love lost people, aren't we called to love each other, even when it is difficult, even when you are being difficult, even when I'm being difficult, even when we're not acting in a lovely fashion?

Love perseveres. Love stays in its place. Love endures all things. This is why, quick side note, but I think it is applicable here, this is why divorce is such a hateful thing in the church. God hates divorce period, but for divorces to take place in the midst of people who claim to know Jesus as Lord and Savior is something that is absolutely inexcusable. We ought to know what it is to love each other in an enduring way, to persevere in love.

Now, how do we express this practically? Well, first of all, in prayer. We've mentioned it this morning. Have you lost hope? Have you stopped praying for someone? Well, we persevere in prayer on behalf of those we are loving. So we practice this through prayer. But also what you do is you gather up all of these qualities that we've been learning about, and then you practice them in an enduring way. That is, you continue to be patient. You continue to be kind. You continue not to envy, not to boast, not to be arrogant, not to be rude. You continue to be unselfish. You say, "I've been unselfish a long time. When do I get to be selfish?" Answer. "Never. You continue to be unselfish." "You know I haven't been irritable in a while. Is it alright to be irritable? I'm tired." No. No, love is not irritable, not today, not tomorrow, not next week. You continue to walk in that quality. You continue not to hold unforgiveness. You continue not to rejoice in wrong doing but rejoice with the truth. You continue to protect. You continue to believe. You continue to hope. In all these things you persevere. Take all these qualities and practice them in a way that doesn't end and now you've captured this last quality. Love perseveres. Love endures all things.

And we do this, finally, I would say, in a sacrificial way. Look at this last verse, and we're done. 2 Corinthians 12, and listen to the heart of the apostle who is probably the greatest human example outside of Christ that we'll ever see of this kind of love. 2 Corinthians 12, and look at verse 14. "Here for the third time I am ready to come to you. And I will not be a burden, for I seek not what is yours but you. For children are not obligated to save up for their parents, but parents for their children." Can I just stop there and ask you, "Do you focus on what is owed to you, or what you have a responsibility to give to others?" When you talk with people who are not walking in love, and they are struggling to walk in love, almost always they are focused on what they are owed. "Well, here's what my husband or my wife owes me." Well, Paul isn't focused on what the Corinthians owe him. He puts himself in the role of the parent. He puts them in the role of children. And he says, "It's not your responsibility to take care of me. It's my responsibility to take care of you."

Verse 15. Therefore he says this, "I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls." I will be emptied on an altar of service on behalf of your souls. You say, "Well, that's because they really loved him. I mean, they must have really endeared themselves to Paul, right?" We know better than that. Look at the next statement.

He says, "If I love you more, am I to be loved less?" And you go on, and you read the verses that follow, and you see that they are full of suspicion toward him, full of doubt toward him, full of criticism toward him, and yet he says, "I am willing to be poured out for you." That's what it means to endure all things because you love. Because you love God, and, as a result of loving Him, you love others.

Folks, are we loving like that? Are we walking in these qualities that we've been studying in 1 Corinthians 13? Are we striving to? I think the best we can say about this list, the very best we could say, is we're growing in them, right? No one can say, "I've arrived at this." But by the grace of God do you desire to walk in these things, and are you striving to?

And let us remember tonight as we finish, as we finish this section, the goal of this section is not to be put on a magnet on a refrigerator, or on a calendar, or on a valentine's card. The goal of this section is to realize this is the love of God in action. This is not just to be memorized, talked about, preached about. This is to be lived. So may God by His grace, by His Spirit, enable us. We have the capacity in Christ. May He enable us, and may we yield to Him in such a way that we actually are walking in these things that we've been learning about in an enduring, persevering fashion. And all God's people would say, Amen.