

Copyright Geist Christian Church. February 16, 2020. All Rights Reserved.

Title: Love Is Patient and Kind...or Not

Preaching: Randy Spleth, Senior Ministers

Scripture: [Ephesians 4:29-5:2](#)

Text: [1 Corinthians 13:4-7](#)

E-mail: [Randy Spleth](#)

I hope you had a wonderful Valentine's day on Friday. As I shared last Sunday, Valentine's Day has turned into a holiday of excess, a 27.4-billion-dollar extravaganza of cards, chocolates, dinners, and special gifts. I was in the drug store yesterday. Flowers, cards, and chocolates were all marked down 50%. I wondered if the half-priced love is figured into the 27.4 billion dollars. I also thought about loading up for next year, but I was worried that chocolates wouldn't taste fresh. And, I didn't think the flowers would last.

The odd thing about this is Saint Valentine wasn't into excess; he was into self-denial. He refused to bow down to false gods of Rome and Emperor Claudius II had him beheaded for it. His definition of love was based on sacrifice.

We're looking at the definition of love by looking at one of the most famous passages about love ever written. You don't have to go to church or even be a Christian to have heard of the love chapter. It's read all the time at weddings even though it has nothing to do with marriage. It's Paul's definition of love written to a church that wasn't anything but loving. Paul says that love is the most excellent way. In fact, for Paul love is everything, or it's not. He begins this famous passage with "If you speak in the tongues of mortals and angels, if you have enough knowledge and faith to move mountains, if you give everything away, but you don't have love, you have nothing." Love is everything, or it's not.

If Paul were writing to the church today, he might say something like this. If you are the smartest man in the world, like jeopardy champion Ken Jennings, or if you are the richest man in the world like Jeff Bezos, or the most powerful man in the world like Donald Trump, or the greatest athlete of the world, like LeBron James, if you don't have love, you've got nothing. Love is everything, or it's not.

The type of love Paul is referring to isn't found half-priced at Walgreens. It's a special type of love found in the New Testament. In fact, the word is rarely found outside of the New Testament. It's called agape love. This word was used by the authors of the bible to describe God's love for us, our love of God and our love for each other. What characterizes this type of love is that it's not primarily a love of emotions. That's what Valentine's Day has become. *Agape* love is a mindset, an orientation, a position, if you will, that whether I'm dealing with friend or foe, I will seek that person's highest good. This is how God loves us and how we are to love others. Or as John said, "We love because he first loved us." (1 John 4:11) That's *agape* love; it seeks the highest good of other people.

If this is confusing, and I'm sure it is because of what we've turned love into, it might help you to know that it was confusing for the Corinthians too. So, Paul shows them and us, what agape love is by showing how agape love acts. I think he does so by pointing to Jesus.

If you had one word to describe Jesus, what would it be? You might think, okay, Randy, I know a lot of words to describe Jesus. He's the Messiah, he's Lord, he's King, he's the Savior. But since this is a sermon about love then, that's what you are digging for. Jesus is love. That would be a good one but, in this case, I like Dallas Willard's word. It fits with Paul's definition. His word is "relaxed." Jesus is relaxed.¹

It's a little startling at first. It doesn't sound very religious. I'm confident that you could look through the hymnal and not find a hymn or a creed that uses the word. But if you stop for just a moment and think about it, it fits and, it will help you understand love.

Jesus' arrival on earth is a unique and divinely conceived. Early on, he astounds the scribes and priests in the Temple, saying he must be about his father's business. But he doesn't have any urgency to get on with it. He has a huge vocational weight on his shoulders; sent by God to redeem Israel and save humanity. But as far as we know, he worked as a carpenter in a little shop in Nazareth, year after year. He turns 18, 20, 25, 29, and still is just hammering nails and sawing boards. "Jesus, the clock is ticking!" "Yep! It will happen. I wouldn't worry about it."

He finally starts his ministry with John baptizing him. He gets this big heavenly affirmation, a marketer's dream: big crowds, a dove lighting on him. The opportunity for a huge launch. What does he do? He goes off the grid for 40 days just to be alone with God in unhurried prayer.

He returns and finds himself at a wedding. The wine runs out. His mother seeks him out and says, "Jesus, they have no wine." He says, "What concern is that to you and me? My hour has not yet come." Jesus is too relaxed to do anything about it. His mother has to encourage him to get his ministry started, right then and there.

He finally preaches his first sermon in Nazareth. It is so radically inclusive of outsiders that they want to throw him off a cliff. Luke deliberately says, "Jesus passed through the midst of the crowd." He just saunters down the street like a guy without a care in the world. Who does that?

One day, Jesus and his disciples are walking through Samaria. He tells them, "You go on ahead and look for food. I'm just going to hang out at the well. I'm a little tired. I just want to relax. They do and when they get back, he's relaxing with Samaritan woman married five times and shackled up with some guy. No rabbi would go anywhere near this woman. He's just relaxing with her, talking to her like she is the most important person in the world.

They were in a boat one time. The storms were so bad the disciples were freaking out. They are fishermen and they're afraid they are going to die. They're used to boats. They're used to storms. Jesus is taking a nap! Whoever heard of a napping Messiah? Jesus is relaxed.

I think we see this most in Jesus's relationship with his disciples. They were a very slow group. They were slow to understand what he taught, slow to trust and slow to serve. They misunderstood him, doubted him, denied him, and abandoned him. Jesus diagnoses their condition at the very end of the gospel of Luke. "How foolish you are and how slow to believe." (Luke 24:25)

If you are the leader of an urgent movement to save the world, the very last quality you want in your team is slowness. Yet, Jesus picked these guys. He was very demanding of them but never demeaning. He never said, "I'm going to swap, find some followers who get it." Why? Because he was teaching us about love, and the very first characteristic of love Paul describes is, "Love is patient..." This is how love acts.

Patience is the ability to dwell gladly in the present moment when we would prefer not to. It embraces both the urgency of life and mission and the reality of our condition and the people around us. It is often translated long-suffering because it means love can suffer difficulty for a long time and not stop loving.

Why is this the focus of Jesus? Because Jesus came to show us God and if there is anything, God is patient with us. Think about confessing your sins to God, something that should be apart of your everyday prayer life. God listens and then, interrupts, saying "Wait, wait" Which sins do you have in mind?" When you begin to spell them out, God says, "Wait. You were here three days ago confessing the very same thing. You were here three times last week. Look, you know the expression from the law. Three strikes and you're out!" But God doesn't do that. God does not deal with us according to our sins or reward us according to our iniquities. God's patient with us. God works with us. Because that's the nature of the God who gives us *agape* love. God does for us what we must do for others. Patience is the way love acts.

Truth be told, we are all sinners. We all mess up. When we think we've got sin licked, it comes back again. We struggle with it, and other people struggle with it. So, we need to be patient with folks. We are patient with others because the work God does in them doesn't happen overnight. We know this because the work that God is doing in us, isn't happening overnight. ²

There is a wonderful prayer by a priest named Teilhard de Chardin there is a very important line in it. It's too long to read completely but here are a few lines.

"Above all, trust in the slow work of God. We are quite naturally impatient in everything to reach the end without delay. Give our Lord the benefit of believing

that his hand is leading you and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself in suspense and incomplete. Above all, trust in the slow work of God, our loving vine-dresser.³

“Trust in the slow work of God.” Have patience to have patience because love is patient. That's the passive side of love. It waits. “Love is patient, love is kind.” Kindness is the action side of love and when paired together, Paul says they are the definition of love. All people need kindness. All of us are on an uphill climb, carrying heavy burdens. All of us need kindness.

No person ever lived who was kinder than Jesus, and he wants us to do acts of kindness in his name. That could easily be another word you could use to describe Jesus. Jesus is kind. Go back and look at the stories when he was so clearly relaxed, patient. At first, it might seem as Jesus is being passive. But in each case, Jesus acts in kindness. He responds to his mother's request and turns water into wine. He is kind enough to simply walk away from his hometown synagogue, not judging but distancing himself so that they might not further sin. He is kind and affirming of the Samaritan woman who has known nothing but sin in her life. He responds to the panic of the disciples by stilling storm.

Kindness is the first business of Jesus as Savior and it is to be ours as well. There are to be no limits placed upon our kindness. We are to pour out acts of love and generosity even toward persons that we may deem undeserving. For Christians, this is particularly significant because we believe that God poured out his love on us when we were undeserving. God was kind to us. Or as Paul says to the church in Ephesus, “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.” (Ephesians 4:31) When we do, we imitate Jesus.

Kindness is among the most basic requirements for the believer because it is the way love acts. Sometimes our acts of kindness meet with only cold ingratitude from the recipients of those acts. That's all right. That's on them. We obey Jesus. Kindness is the first business of a follower of Jesus.

One of my colleagues has changed the opening of this chapter to drive home the act of kindness. He wrote it this way:

“I may have a brilliant mind, a wonderful personality, and a healthy body; but if I am not kind to those around me, it does me no good.”

“I may have a good income, a beautiful home, and an expensive car, but if I am not kind and generous in sharing them, I don't make a difference in the world.”

“I may have great success in my business or profession; I may have power and influence over many people; but if I don't treat people with kindness, I am a failure.”

“Kindness is love in action. Kindness is the pebble in the pond, whose ripples can change the world. 'Having the faith to move mountains is great; having hope in

bleak circumstances is wonderful, but deeds of loving-kindness transform lives and last forever

'I may have many wonderful qualities in my life, but without kindness, they are not enough.'⁴

I like that because love is patient...that's the attitude. Love is kind...that is the action. Love is patient; love is kind, or it's not. Having set up patience and kindness as a great example of how love acts, Paul then offers a checklist of things which love is not. Love does not envy. Love does not boast. Love isn't arrogant or rude. Love doesn't insist on its own way. It's not irritable. It's not resentful. It doesn't rejoice in wrongdoing.

If you think this list is hard to hear, there is a reason. Paul's choice of words here was quite deliberate, a provocative slap in the face to the church in Corinth. This is the way they were acting, the way they were treating people. He's pointing fingers. He's saying, "Love is not like you, not like you, not you, not you, not you." Paul is saying this with love. He is saying this with love, not in spite of but because he loves the people of Corinth, loves them too much to continue in their unloving life. Paul is not being subtle here.⁵

And we should be either. Having spent the majority of the sermon on what love is, at the very least we must address that we too have a problem. There is something on this list for everyone present, a box that can be checked. If we are honest, there is something here for all of us, something that gets in the way of being patient and kind.

I suppose I could do what Paul has done, point fingers and say, love is not like you, or like you or not you or not you. But to do so would not be the way God treats us, the way Jesus showed us, or for that matter, the way I am to love. It wouldn't be patient or kind.

Let me leave it with you this way. Love is patient; love is kind or it's not. There is an all-encompassing list of when it's not. I encourage you to look at the list, to think about when you are not patient and kind or when you don't act lovingly. Why? Because love is not primarily about making people feel good, the love of Valentines' Day. It is about imitating God and as beloved children, living in love as Christ loves us. It's not cheap. You can't find it half-priced. It is a fragrant, sacrificial offering to God, one which I pray you'll make.

¹ Ortberg, J. Love is Patient, Kind. May 12, 2019. Menlochurch.com. The relaxed section in the sermon is found in this message.

² Robinson, Haddon. What Is This Thing Called Love? By subscription at preachingtoday.com.

³ <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/prayer-of-theilhard-de-chardin/>

⁴ Millard, Kent. *Dynamic Preaching*, Vol. XXXIV, No. 2, pg85.

⁵ Robinson, Haddon. Love Does Not Boast. By subscription at preachingtoday.com.