

I Cor. 13:1-7; James 5:7-11; Love is Patient I. What Patience Does II. What Patience is Not III. Perfect Patience Revealed

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, Jesus said in Mt. 5 that our righteousness must exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees. Our righteousness is one that comes by faith- but it is also a doing good from a heart of love. Unlike the Pharisees- our hearts have been changed so that we eagerly desire and pursue the most excellent way- the way of love. As we saw last week, love is needed in the church. The early church was filled with division and even anger- while the purpose of these spiritual gifts- these talents from the Spirit- is for the benefit of the body. Without love, we have and are nothing! Therefore we must- as 14:1 says- pursue love- run after it and seek it with all your heart. Now that we know the need for this love- how it is vital for the church and our spiritual life- we now begin by looking at the parts of love. In other words- what does love look like- what does it do? We consider this theme: Jesus Christ's patient love moves us to patiently love the church. Our focus is on v. 4-5.

I. What Patience Does

Love is patient! We start by defining this patient love- and by seeing what patience does. Basically, love restrains me from a fleshly response. There is no room for knee jerk reactions when it comes to service within the church, rather we are to be patient. This word is a compound word literally meaning- to be long suffering. Love refuses to lose heart, patiently and bravely enduring difficult people and even offense. The focus of this word is on our response to people- not necessarily situations. To be lovingly patient with fellow man. To be slow to anger, not easily stirred to wrath. To be kept from resentment, to overlook wrongs and refuse to allow bitterness to remain within your heart. As v. 4 continues- patient love replaces anger with kindness. Patience is needed in this world- because our world is filled with both sin and sinners. In our relationships with others- patience refuses to get wound up or hot-headed. True, Agape love suffers long and has great endurance without retaliation. Just think of a few situations- when you are cut off in line- or in traffic. When someone annoys you at work or at school

with their lack of social graces. Others who keep getting the same question wrong- doing something to annoy you again and again. Even simple differences can be annoying- a different way of talking or eating- can all be opportunities to lose our cool. In the home- with our spouse and children- love does not fly off the handle but goes the extra mile. Patient with the failures of others- showing grace to those around us. Love is the chief fruit of the Spirit- and is a sign of Christ's work within you. But remember, the context here is specifically the church. Patient love suffers long in the context of serving with fellow sinners. When church leaders minister to a stubborn sheep- or when the congregation sees the weakness and failure of her leaders- love suffers long! Love patiently endures! You are called to serve sinners- and sinners are called to serve and support you. The reason that this attribute is needed is because our world is messed up- and we are messed up! Joining the church does not take away all our sinful traits. Nor does it make us less inclined to be annoyed! As we will see in our next point, love is the opposite of quick anger. In the context of service where we walking with fellow pilgrims- who are themselves sinners- that is where patient love is seen! If we all were perfect and had all the answers- we would not need patience. To prove this point, I Thes. 5:14 says- be patient towards all men. And our earlier reading from James 5 said- be patient, and again we read- you also- be patient. Like the farmer who plants the seed and waits for the sun and rain- patience is needed because God is sanctifying us and others over time. He is still at work in you- and in the other members of this church. Growth takes time- and patient love acknowledges this truth! James also says- be patient like Job and the prophets. They experienced such hardship- even their friends and families turned against them- but they patiently endured because God is faithful. That is how we God's providence applies to us- patient when things or people are against us! So you must be patient in your love.

II. What Patience is Not

So love is patient- but the opposite of patient love is revealed in v. 5- love is not easily angered. Love is not irritable- or quick tempered. Most of us at the end of a long, hard day are like dry kindling. Just

waiting for a spark to ignite us! We are easily exasperated- irritated by the smallest thing- or provoked by the least slight. One little thing sets us off- I have been there! You think everyone is against you- that nothing can go right! We should rather seek to be like wet sea weed- almost impossible to light! These times of being easily angered usually come when we are tired or hungry- or when our computer keeps freezing up and losing our work. Lots of things can irritate us- cell phones, mindless work or cold weather. But remember this text is speaking about loving service within the church. Not only can things irritate us- we can become irritated with people! How they do what they do! Even when they sin against us- we get sharp and lose our cool. We speak our mind and by our actions or by our words, we break people down. This is really a failure to love rightly! The real problem is not the person that annoys us- not the situation- but us! Our love is not as mature as we think it is! So when people spill milk on us- by their lack of social graces; or when they don't do things the way we think they need to be done- even when they step on our toes by sinning against us- love is patient- it is not irritable but longsuffering! Lack of patience produces grumbling- and quick anger. Remember, you might be the pebble in someone else's shoe! Sometimes God sends difficult people into our lives to teach us how to truly love! It is easy to love those who are like us- but to be patient with those who are different and needy- that is true love! So be patient in your loving service.

III. Perfect Patience Revealed

Because the truth of the matter is- people can be irritating sometimes! We all have our quirks and habits that can be offensive. How can the church be a place of patient love- like we are called to be? Patience in words and works? As we found out last week- we will only be loving as the love of God flows through us. Those who know God's patience- will show patience towards others. Do you know how patient God is with you- when you keep messing up? Keep falling into sin, keep doing the same things that God has said- don't do! Why hasn't God just given up on you and me? Why not throw in the towel and let us have what we deserve? Because the good news of the gospel is this- God's love is patient!

God's patience is clearly seen in our world. As II Peter 3:9, the Lord is patient with you- patient towards you- that all should reach repentance. God's patience means that He exercises self restraint in the midst of hostility- even showing goodness and kindness to a world that is rebellious! His patience means that we have time to repent and be saved! Praise God for this loving patience! It was the patience of God- His longsuffering- that moved Him in love to proclaim grace to those who have fallen! In many ways, we can link salvation as a whole- the postponement of the judgment of the world after the fall- we can credit this to God's patient love! As Rom. 2:4 echoes, do not presume on the riches of His kindness and patience. Do you now know that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance! But this patient love is also meant to give us time to produce fruit! Consider how patient Jesus was and is! During His earthly ministry, the crowds pressed upon Him and His enemies hounded Him. His own disciples were quick to speak and slow to understand. As He taught and answered questions- as He healed and ministered to His people- how patiently He loved! He did not fly off the handle at every offense- whenever His disciples stumbled or fell asleep. And the only anger He had was righteous indignation against rebellious leaders. Even now- how patient He is with His church- that is what makes Him our compassionate and merciful High Priest! He knows our weakness for He shares our flesh! He, like a farmer, is waiting for our fruit of righteousness to grow and develop. His work within us by the Spirit is bringing about a change within us- we are being made holy in this life. The fruit of patience is being made evident within us- within our church- because Christ is causing it to grow! Jesus' patient love fills our hearts. We who know this kind of love- will eagerly desire to show it to others!

As Eph. 4 says- walk in a manner worthy of your calling. With all gentleness and patience- bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Jesus Christ's patient love moves us to patiently love His church! Lord, give us the grace to respond patiently to life's annoyances- knowing that patience produces peace and harmony! May our church be a place where we serve each other patiently- as we love in word and work!