

The More Excellent Way – Part 1  
1 Corinthians 13:1-4a  
May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2021

1. The absolute \_\_\_\_\_ of love (13:1-3)

2. The active \_\_\_\_\_ of love (13:4-7)

a. Love is \_\_\_\_\_. (v. 4a)

b. Love is \_\_\_\_\_. (v. 4b)

3. Applying the Word

a. Soak up God's patient and kind love for  
\_\_\_\_\_.

Love is what it \_\_\_\_\_.

Questions for Discussion/Reflection on 1 Corinthians 13:1-4a

1. In what way is "the Bible a book of love," as Alexander Strauch says? How do the grand themes of creation, fall, and redemption fit within the theme of love?
2. How does the use of hyperbole in vv. 1-3 help us to understand what Paul means by speaking with the "tongues of men and of angels?"
3. Is the warning about loveless ministry in vv. 1-3 referring to ministry without *loving motives* or ministry not accompanied by *loving actions*? Both? What difference does it make in how we interpret and apply the passage?
4. Why is it sometimes easier to focus on tasks and self-sacrifice than active love for people?
5. Consider the following questions by Melissa Kruger as you evaluate your own patience: (v. 4)
  - a. In what area of your life are you struggling to demonstrate patience? Is there a particular person with whom you find it difficult to be patient?
  - b. How does your impatience manifest itself: Anger? Annoyance? Sarcasm? Judgment? Discontentment?
  - c. What's the underlying reason for your impatience: Pride? Control? Comfort? Fear? Selfishness? Distrust?
6. Who do you know that excels at kindness? How do they demonstrate kindness in practical ways?
7. What similar themes about active love do you see 1 John 3:14-24?

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Big idea: Gifted ministry without loving behavior is worthless.

### Intro

Strauch – It is no exaggeration to say that the Bible is a book of love. The story of the gospel, “God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son” (John 3:16), is the greatest love story ever told. Because of God’s great love for us, we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love our neighbor as ourself (Mark 12:30-31).

Leaders are to be examples of love:

**1 Timothy 4:12** Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but *rather* in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe.

The goal of our instruction should be love:

**1 Timothy 1:5** But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

The gifts in the body are to help the body build itself up in love

**Ephesians 4:16** from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

The first fruit of the Spirit listed is love (Gal. 5:22)

**Galatians 5:22** But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

It can be so easy for us to substitute other things as our end goal – knowledge, power, entertainment, comfort, a defensive posture against the culture.

In the middle of discussing spiritual gifts, 1 Corinthians pauses to give a beautiful, poetic, urgent plea for love.

He calls this “the more excellent way”

**1 Cor. 12:31b** And I show you a still more excellent way.

The more excellent way for what? The more excellent way to have an impact. They thought it was their knowledge, wisdom, speaking abilities, or showy gifts that would make them significant. No, it is love that

Few passages are as beloved or as helpful because of the tangible, understandable description of real love.

1. The absolute **necessity** of love (13:1-3)
  - a. Five gifts described with hyperbole that cannot be usefully exercised without love
    - i. Notice its in the first person, applying it to himself first, not just to them
  - b. Gifted speech (v. 1)
    - i. Eloquent, powerful speech or the gift of tongues with the ability to speak a foreign language.
    - ii. Throughout there is hyperbole – even if in prophecy he had all knowledge, even if his faith could literally move mountains, even if he gave away all his possessions including his own life – so he isn’t here claiming that he could speak in an angelic language or that there even is such a thing.
    - iii. The most gifted speech apart from love is meaningless, noisy, and annoying.

1. Strauch's example of beating on a metal pot with a hammer while teaching on this subject – at first it is amusing then it gets annoying. "At this point I remind them that this is what they are like to others and to God when they use their gifts apart from love. They are nothing more than "a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal."
- iv. Love will be described in a few verses, but it's enough now to note that it isn't merely saying "I love you" at the end of your words that make them loving. It isn't the tone itself that makes the speech something other than a noisy gong or clanging cymbal.
  1. It's a life that is patient, kind, concerned for others rather than self.
- v. Examples –
  1. On the more extreme side, I recently read a horrific account of someone that was abused by a man that I considered my favorite professor and the most gifted preacher I've heard. Two years ago he was fired from his church and seminary position after an affair came to light with a female student but more info was just released and I was so grieved to hear about the way he manipulated and twisted scripture in the relationship with her.
    - a. His words were powerful, compelling, eloquent – but among the many ways you could describe his conduct is that it was unloving.
- c. Knowledge without love
  - i. We've already seen this earlier in 1 Corinthians
    1. **1 Corinthians 8:1-3** Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies. <sup>2</sup> If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know; <sup>3</sup> but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him.
    2. In fact, these examples of gifts without love seem tailored to the priorities of the Corinthians.
      - a. They prized clever speech and human wisdom (1:17; 2:1)
      - b. We'll see in ch 14 that they were elevating the gift of languages above prophecy that could be understood by the hearer.
    3. We're a church that values sound doctrine. It's a part of our DNA and it should be. We offer Sunday school classes for adults that dig into theology and scripture in detail. We include instruction in our youth and college ministries. We highlight good books in our resource center.
      - a. But there is a warning for us in this verse.
    4. We take seriously the first half of 2 Timothy 1:13, but we cannot ignore the second half.
      - a. **2 Timothy 1:13** Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.
    5. George Sweeting, former president of Moody Bible Institute, "Too often Christians are concerned about hidden truth, but indifferent about loving difficult people."
- d. Gift of faith without love
  - i. Paul is putting his finger on the key things we value – of course we value a robust, confident faith in God.
    1. We are justified by faith (Rom. 5:1)

2. We are saved by faith (Eph. 2:8)
  3. We stand by faith (1 Cor. 16:13)
  4. We live by faith (Gal. 2:20)
- ii. He even uses Jesus' description of faith:
    1. **Matthew 17:20** if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you.
  - iii. Faith and faithfulness separated from love is empty.
- e. Sacrificial giving without love
- i. Even self-sacrifice can be done apart from love.
  - ii. "Surrendering my body" is either a reference to willing martyrdom or selling oneself into slavery in order to give the money to help others.
    1. Either way it was a great act of personal sacrifice.
- f. Divine mathematics
- i. Carson: five minus one equals zero
  - ii. Jerry Bridges – write down, either in your imagination or on a sheet of paper, a row of zeros. Keep adding zeros until you have filled a whole line on a page. What do they add up to? Exactly nothing! Even if you were to write a thousand of them, they would still be nothing. But put a positive number in front of them and immediately they have value. This is the way it is with our gifts and faith and zeal. They are the zeros on the page. Without love, they count for nothing. But put love in front of them and they immediately have value.
- g. True love has an impact for Christ
- i. Greg Livingstone, the general director of Frontiers International that works to plant churches in predominantly Muslim countries said they have seen an explosion of church in places like Algeria where more than 50,000 people came to Christ from a muslim background over a 15 year period. They were clearly sharing the gospel but he said what paved the way for impacting people was a mercy ministry through which they fed and ministered to 14,000 mothers and babies. (referenced in Wayne Mack's *Maximum Impact*, pg 19)
- h. Jesus excelled in each of these – speech, knowledge, faith, self-sacrifice – all motivated by and expressed in deep love for us.
- i. **Ephesians 5:1-2** Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; <sup>2</sup> and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.
  - ii. Before you feel the convicting weight that says, "I need to be more like this," remember that Jesus is perfectly *like this* toward you.
  - iii. Each of these active characteristics of love are perfectly, completely true of Jesus *toward you*.
- i. Honest self-assessment of love
- i. You want to teach – but do you want to love people?
  - ii. You care about doctrine – but do you love people?
  - iii. You want to serve – but do you want to love people?
  - iv. You want to lead worship – but do you want to love people?

- v. You have faith – but do you love people?
- vi. You're at church every Sunday – but do you love people?
- vii. You're generous with your giving – but do you love people?
- j. The natural question to ask is, "what is love? What is loving?"
  - i. Is it just saying "I love you" to people? Being a hugger? Smiling? It may include those things.
  - ii. 1 Corinthians defines and describes love in beautiful, poetic, active terms.
    - 1. Notice that love is not described as a motivation here but is given concrete action. It is behavior. To love is to act. (adapted from Fee)
- 2. The active **characteristics** of love (13:4-7)
  - a. Love is **patient**. (v. 4a)
    - i. *Macrothumea* – to be patient, long-suffering, lit. long/delayed wrath
    - ii. God is supremely patient with us.
      - 1. God is slow to anger
        - a. **Numbers 14:18** 'The LORD is slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression;
      - 2. God's patient kindness is meant to lead to repentance
        - a. **Romans 2:4** Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?
        - b. **2 Peter 3:9** The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.
      - 3. Even those who will receive eternal punishment are the recipients of much patience
        - a. **Romans 9:22** What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?
        - b. Kittel - It has the end in view. ... Rom. 9:22 – delay is not so much to allow time for repentance. The delay is simply to bring out more clearly what God already wills and knows, but what He allows to come to plain fulfillment in man.
      - 4. Paul was saved in order to demonstrate Jesus' patience
        - a. **1 Timothy 1:15-16** It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. <sup>16</sup> Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.
          - i. Remarkable statement – Paul says God saved him so that Jesus' great patience could be put on display
          - ii. Kids – imagine if your parents said, "God gave me this child so I could show how patient I really am." Would that be a compliment?
    - iii. Insight into the character of God and man gives patience
      - 1. <sup>CSB17</sup> **Proverbs 19:11** A person's insight gives him patience, and his virtue is to overlook an offense.

2. The more we understand God's patience to us and the more we understand the nature of people as frail, broken, image bearers, even rebels against God that He shows great patience to, we can show patience.
  - a. The child you are feeling impatient with, what was their day like at school?
  - b. The rude cashier at the gas station, what recent medical diagnosis are they processing?

iv. Melissa Kruger had 3 helpful questions on patience for self-assessment:

1. In what area of your life are you struggling to demonstrate patience? Is there a particular person with whom you find it difficult to be patient?
2. How does your impatience manifest itself: Anger? Annoyance? Sarcasm? Judgment? Discontentment?
3. What's the underlying reason for your impatience: Pride? Control? Comfort? Fear? Selfishness? Distrust?

b. Love is **kind**.

i. Patience and kindness go together as two sides of the same coin.

1. **Romans 2:4** Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?
2. Long-suffering is the passive quality, kindness is the active quality.
3. Just like with patience, God is our model of kindness. He is perfect kindness.

ii. One Greek dictionary defines this word as "to function in a helpful manner."

1. Strauch - Kindness is a readiness to do good, to help, to relieve burdens, to be useful, to serve, to be tender, and to be sympathetic to others. It has been said, "kindness is love in work clothes."
2. Gentle words are kind words, but it's more than words that are in mind. It's thoughtfulness, helpfulness, sympathy, asking questions, interest in others.

iii. Leaders are to be kind

1. **2 Timothy 2:24** The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged,

iv. The exemplary woman in Proverbs 31 is kind as well as wise

1. **Proverbs 31:26** She opens her mouth in wisdom, And the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.

### 3. Applying the Word

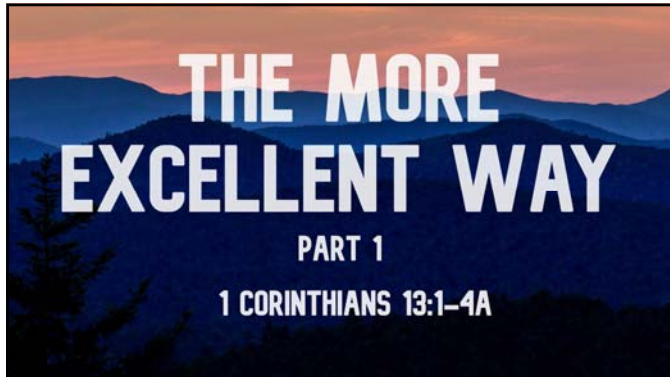
a. Soak up God's patient and kind love for **you**.

- i. Matt Smethurst - If you have a high and soaring view of God's sovereignty, but you don't have a high view of his kindness, you have a low view of God.
- ii. **1 John 3:1a** See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and *such* we are.
- iii. **1 John 4:19** We love, because He first loved us.

b. Love is what it **does**.

- i. These are all verbal descriptions of what love does.

- ii. **1 John 3:18** Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.
- iii. Someone who says they love you but they don't display these characteristics is not really loving you.
  - 1. Can you insert someone you are dating into these verses? "Johnny is patient. Johnny is kind. Johnny is not jealous."
- iv. Just like everything else, our love falls short.
  - 1. Philippians 1:9 includes the prayer that our love would abound more and more – which means its something we can grow in. It's not "all or nothing" but can be developed.
  - 2. But Jesus' love is perfect.



1

**1 Timothy 4:12** Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but *rather* in speech, conduct, **love**, faith *and* purity, show yourself an example of those who believe.

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**1 Timothy 1:5** But the goal of our instruction is **love** from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

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