

# The LOVE Test

## “Are You Patient & Kind?”

Part 2

### Scripture Reading

*“And I will show you a still more excellent way.” (1 Corinthians 12:31)*

*“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong and a clanging cymbal. If I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.”*

*“Love is patient and kind...”*

### Prayer of Blessing

### Introduction

According to Jesus Christ, our two greatest purposes in life are to *“love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all of your soul and with all of our mind. This is the great and first commandment. And the second is like it: love your neighbor as yourself.”* (Matt. 22:37-39)

In these words of Christ our Savior, we are reminded that our redemption was secured through faith in order that we might become comprehensive lovers of God. A heavenward love with God as the object is our supreme goal. Every other goal, every other task, and every other calling – no matter how esteemed, honorable, or admired by mere mortals - is secondary to our supreme call of God-love. Above and beyond everything else, we were created and redeemed to love God with our actions, desires, and thoughts.

In the very same breath, Jesus exhorts us not only to a comprehensive love of God; He also exhorts us to love our neighbors. To be sure, neighborly love is not confined to those who dwell on either side of us. Nor is it confined simply to those who reside in our neighborhood. Neighborly love is not reserved for the boundaries of streets and neighborhoods. Neighborly love is an all-inclusive love. The neighborly love Christ speaks of extends beyond geographic, racial, socioeconomic, political, nationality, and religious boundaries.

- It is a love that includes Caucasians *and* African Americans, rich *and* poor, Democrats *and* Republicans, Hindus, Buddhists, *and* Muslims.
- It is a love that includes vision impaired Little League umpires, insecure parents who live vicariously through their kids, and tired Wal-Mart clerks who, in your estimation, need a lesson or two in customer service.
- It is a love that includes the combative atheist, the doubting skeptic, and the backsliding Christian.

- It is a love that includes the incompetent coworker, the unethical and self-promoting boss, as well as the abusive and obnoxious customer.
- It is a love that includes the rebellious and defiant teenager, the spiteful and resentful ex-husband or ex-wife, the addicted spouse, and the estranged sibling or parent.

Neighborly love is an all-inclusive love. It is a love that is void of prejudices, preferences, and prerequisites.

In these two verses, Jesus summarizes the Gospel with one simple yet extraordinary command -- LOVE! This isn't any kind of love. This is *agape* love. This is supernatural God-love. It is a love that sees people the way Jesus sees them. It is a love empowered by the Holy Spirit. It is a spiritual love that empowers us to place the well-being and interest of others ahead of our own. It is a display of love that is utterly impossible without Jesus Christ living in us and through us.

Thus, as we learned last week, without agape love, our spiritual gifts become noisy gongs and clanging cymbals. Without agape love, our service, our words, and our giving gain us nothing of eternal value. Without agape love fueling our lives, we become "nothing."

## **Video** "What Is Love?"

Therefore, it is of paramount importance that we ask the question – **"What is love?"**

### ***[Show Video]***

As we've just seen, we live in a day and time where people advocate and implement a broad definition and understanding of love.

- For one person, love is "the essence of all things" – whatever means.
- For another person, love is unattainable and fleeting – it's ethereal.
- For another person, love is simply being you and allowing others the freedom to be themselves without judgment or expectations.
- For another person, love is giving and sincerity of heart.

For the vast majority of people we work with and go to school with, love is a subjective and relative idea and feeling.

Yet, Christians are not "most people." We are God's adopted children, redeemed by the blood of Christ, justified by faith alone, and set apart for God-glorifying works. We are a royal priesthood of believers who have been called to adopt and commanded to display a form of love that is both mysterious and absurd to the world we live in. This love we are called to display, however foreign it may be to the world, must be the passion of our soul and the fuel that empowers us to run the Christian race with endurance.

It is this mysterious, absurd, counter cultural, foreign love that we must inquire of God to explain. As God, through His Spirit reveals and explains, we must pray that our minds will be illuminated, our souls gripped, and our hearts pierced by this amazing God-love which

has been lavishly applied to our lives. We must also pray that the Spirit of Christ would empower us with the supernatural ability and desire to lavishly extend this God-love to each other and every person God divinely guides into our lives.

## **“Love is Patient...”**

In 1 Corinthians 13:4, God, through the Apostle Paul, begins to paint His magnificent portrait of what agape love looks and how it acts towards others. The first two strokes of God’s agape masterpiece include “patience and kindness.”

God says, *“Love is patient and kind...”*

One might wonder, ***“God, did you have to start with patience? Could you not have started with ‘love is not rude’ or ‘love does not envy or keep score’? Anything but patience.”***

Patience! Herein lies proof that the love God is calling us to display is truly mysterious and counter cultural. Rare is the person who possesses patience – especially the degree of patience God is describing here.

Typically, for most people, patience is relegated to being inconvenienced and having to wait. In the same vain, the target of our patience, or lack thereof, is usually a circumstance or an event. Yet, when God says, *“love is patient...”*, the definition and target are all together different.

The Greek word for patience used here to describe agape love is more accurately defined “long-tempered” and “longsuffering.” It is the opposite of “short-tempered.” We’ve all met people; in fact, we might be one of those people, who are known to have a “short” fuse. Agape love has a long fuse – a very long fuse.

The New King James Version (NKJV) recognizes this meaning and offers a more accurate translation - ***“Love suffers long and is kind...”***

Not only is the definition of patience all together different; so is the target or object of patience. Typically, we view patience through the lens of circumstances or events. Patience, or lack thereof, is usually associated with long check out lines at Wal-Mart, bumper-to-bumper traffic at Clemson and South Carolina football games, inconvenient commercials during the NASCAR race, or being put on hold for twenty minutes while you wait for the next available Time Warner, American Express, or Delta Sky Miles representative. Yet, the Greek word used here to describe patience has people almost exclusively as its target.

Thus, when we apply to agape love this new definition and new target of patience, a more accurate translation would read – ***“Love is longsuffering toward people.”***

Honestly? Virtually all of us are notoriously impatient people – especially when it comes to people. We want what we want, how we want it, when we want it. We want immediate gratification, immediate pleasure, immediate justice, immediate downloads, immediate

access to our favorite websites, and immediate results. We expect people to behave according to our standards, our values, our preferences, our timetables, and our wants. When these people fail us (i.e. coworkers, friends, confidants, family, and spouses), we become judgmental, offended, defensive, and oftentimes caught in the trap of revenge and retribution. Whether we'll admit it or not, falling into this trap renders us "emotional vigilantes" who use caustic words and vindictive actions as our weapon of choice.

When was the last time you were injured by another person's words or actions? Maybe it was a caustic comment. Maybe it was a slanderous lie that questioned your character or integrity. Maybe it was an injustice at work. What was your response? Was your fuse short or long? Were you short-tempered or long-tempered?

Thomas a Kempis, the well-known Catholic monk who wrote the *Imitation of Christ*, once said of Christian patience:

*"He is not truly patient who will suffer only as much as he pleases or from whom he pleases. A truly patient man gives no heed from whom he suffers, whether from his superior or from his equal or from someone below him."*

Impatience toward people and the revenge and vindication that so often accompany it reveals one of the most sobering and embarrassing flaws we all wrestle with – pride and self-centeredness. Where patience is lacking, self-centeredness has taken up residence on the throne of our lives.

In his classical work *Charity And Its Fruits*, Jonathan Edwards, who is to this day considered America's most important philosopher and Christian theologian, wrote:

*"Humility is always found connected with longsuffering. A humble spirit disinclines us to indulge resentment of injuries; for he that is little and unworthy in his own eyes, will not think so much of an injury offered to him as he that has high thoughts of himself...It is pride or self-conceit that is very much the foundation of a high and bitter resentment, and of an unforgiving and revengeful spirit." (p.79)*

Edwards' point is simple and convicting. The root cause of our impatience, which is a heart that rejects longsuffering toward people, refuses to forgive, and quickly seeks revenge and vindication, is a high and lofty perception of who we are. It is pride. It is self-centeredness. It is conceit. It is a blindness and forgetfulness to who we are apart from the longsuffering of God.

John Chrysostom, the great Church Father and teacher, once wrote,

*"Patience is a word which is used by the man who is wronged and who has it easily in his power to avenge himself but will never do it."*

When it comes to agape love, patience is slow in avenging – no matter how grievous the offense may be. Patience is our intentional choice to take a great deal of punishment from evil people or circumstances without losing our temper, without becoming irritated and angry, or without taking vengeance. Patience is the capacity to be wronged and not retaliate. Patience is the state of spiritual and emotional peace when faced with provocation and injustice.

As we consider this challenging definition of “patience,” an obvious question arises to the surface – **“How do we love with this kind of patience?”** How do we suffer long the injustices, offenses, and wrongs done to us, as well as those we love? How do we become “long-tempered,” “long-fused” people? When tempted to defend and avenge our cause, our words, and our name, how do we love with agape patience?

The answer is simple. We must meditate on the longsuffering love of God, which has been lavishly debited to our own account through saving faith in Jesus Christ. Put simply, **we must glory in the character of our Heavenly Father.**

When leading God’s cranky and ungrateful people, Moses meditated on the longsuffering love of God.

*“The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, and forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin...” (Exodus 34:6-7)*

When contemplating the greatness of God, King David meditated on the longsuffering love of God.

*“The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. (Psalm 145:8)*

When calling Israel to national repentance, the prophet Joel meditated on the longsuffering love of God.

*“Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.” (Joel 2:13)*

When God asked Jonah why he was “exceedingly displeased and angry” over Nineveh’s repentance, Jonah replied...

*“That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love...” (Jonah 4:2)*

When we feel the urge to retaliate and avenge, we can rest assured that we our Enemy has captured us with one of his greatest traps – forgetfulness. A forgetfulness that has quickly and conveniently forgotten the injustices and grievances our own sinfulness has brought upon God. A forgetfulness that defiantly turns a blind eye to the longsuffering love God has extended to us innumerable times. Put simply, one who is quick to defend and vindicate, while being slow to forgive and be merciful, is one who has forgotten his own desperate and daily need for such love.

Again, Jonathan Edwards speaks poignantly to this point:

*Love...works by gratitude. They that love God will be thankful to him for the abundant long-suffering that he had exercised toward them in particular. They that love God as they ought, will have such a sense of his wonderful long-suffering toward them under many injuries they have offered him, that it will seem to them but a small thing to bear with the injuries that have been offered to them by their fellow-men.” (p.78)*

If we have any hope of loving people with agape love, we must meditate daily on the longsuffering, long-tempered, merciful, and forgiving love of God toward us. We must, as daily recipients of God's grace and mercy, glory in the character of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.

Have you forgotten the lavish display of God's longsuffering love toward you? Have you forgotten that God is slow to anger and abounds in steadfast love toward to you? Have you forgotten that God's fuse is long toward your sin and unrighteousness? Have you forgotten that out of God's longsuffering love for you, He relented from giving you what you deserved – wrath and eternal condemnation?

Extending agape love is only possible to the degree in which we meditate on God's longsuffering love for us.

### **“Love Is Kind...”**

God's second stroke of agape love is “kindness.” Kindness is the result of longsuffering. Instead of seeking justice and revenge, agape love chooses to “show kindness” to those who have offended us, wounded us, slandered us, and angered us.

This word kindness means to be “useful, serving, and gracious.” Instead of retaliation and revenge, we are to make ourselves useful in a manner that is gracious and serving to the offending person.

Is this not what Christ did for us?

In Titus 3:4-5, the Apostle Paul writes...

*“But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy...”*

In Romans 2:4, the Apostle Paul writes...

*“Do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?”*

Instead of exercising His righteous wrath and judgment toward us, God extended kindness to us – kindness that lead to repentance and salvation.

Is it possible that our choice to extend kindness – to graciously serve the offending person – could lead the person to repentance and even salvation? I think so!

Agape love graciously serves and blesses people whose injustices wound us, anger us, and offend us. The greatest expression of this kindness was the Cross of Christ. On the cross, Jesus graciously offered his life for people whose sin would daily wound and offend the holy God.

## **The LOVE Test – Part 2**

There you have it, that's the second section of The LOVE Test. Here are two specific questions Jesus wants you to answer this week:

1. Is your love longsuffering and long-tempered toward those who hurt you, offend you, and anger you?
2. Do you seek to graciously serve people with the kindness Jesus exhibited on the Cross of Calvary?

If your answer happens to be no, then the solution is simple – begin reflecting on the longsuffering love of God which has been lavishly credited to your life through Christ Jesus. Meditate on the character of God – His steadfast, abounding, faithful love and mercy that is slow to anger and quick to forgive.

Remember who you were and who you are today as a result of agape love. Without God's agape love, we all would be hopeless children of wrath destined for eternal condemnation.

Be an agape lover this week! Bask in the longsuffering love God relentlessly applies to you. Enjoy His patience and kindness, for when you do, you will extend it to others.

This is the most excellent way!