

Bethel Fellowship Church, Minneota, MN
Sunday, May 29, 2022
Sermon by Todd Mitchell

Introduction

I usually don't preach topical sermons, but this morning I am going to. Today, I will preach on the topic of patience. And here you all sit, patiently waiting for what I have to say. That's a good start!

Listening to me preach takes patience, I know! Time is valuable. I was taught in seminary that to waste five minutes of somebody's time is rude, but to waste five minutes of a hundred people's time should be a jailable offense. Time is valuable—so thank you for your patience!

Of course, we don't mind spending time doing things that satisfy our appetites. I confess that I don't have to be patient when I am eating ice cream. When I'm eating ice cream, I never think, "I sure do wish this moment were over! This is mighty hard to endure." No, it's the hard stuff that takes patience.

That's why Merriam-Webster defines "patient" as, "1: bearing pains or trials calmly or without complaint 2: manifesting forbearance under provocation or strain 3: not hasty or impetuous 4: steadfast despite opposition, difficulty, or adversity."¹ This is what patience is.

We ought to be patient for at least two reasons:

- because love is patient, and
- because God is patient with us.

Let's start with the first of those—love is patient. Please open your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 13. If you do not have a Bible with you, you are welcome to borrow one from under that little table between those two doors. We're going to be looking at more than one passage this morning.

Starting here in 1 Corinthians 13, we are going to focus on vv. 4–7, but I'll start reading from the beginning of the chapter (in the English Standard Version):

1 Corinthians 13:1–7

[1] If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. [2] And 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. [3] If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

[4] Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant [5] or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; [6] it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. [7] Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.²

1 "Patient," Merriam Webster Dictionary Online: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/patience> (May 27, 2022).

2 Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*®, copyright

We should be patient, because love is patient.

Exposition

I. Be patient because love is patient

I submit to you that patience is the root of love.

A. Patience is the root of love

Paul says a lot of things about love in these four verses. It is hard to imagine love being any one of these things without the others, but especially the very first thing Paul says love is—love is patient!

“Love is... kind,” Paul goes on. Kindness takes patience, because it takes time to be kind—time you could spend on yourself, but instead you spend it on someone else. Kindness puts the needs of other people before your own needs. I see it every time you ladies cook meals for someone in the church who needs support. But there are other kindnesses that take patience, too.

My dad was a very patient man. But Dad did discipline us. Did he discipline us because he ran out of patience? No. He did it because he was kind. We needed it, but it cost him. He spanked us not because he ran out of patience, but because he patiently endured one of the hardest things in the world—the pain of doing his duty as a parent. It is the easiest thing in the world to spoil a child, to never say “no,” to avoid conflict and tears and pain. The father who takes the easy way out, who spares the rod and spoils the child, who seems to be infinitely patient with his children’s misbehavior, is the impatient one—impatient with the demands of duty, the constraints of conscience, the obligations of obedience to God.

Think of it this way, and you will see that all disobedience is impatient. Remember, patience is enduring the hard stuff—and when we are tempted, obedience seems like hard stuff. When we don’t do what we should do, and when we do what we should not do, we are impatiently shaking off God’s will, impatiently refusing to lay up our treasures in heaven, impatiently indulging our sinful appetites right here and right now rather than put up with God’s will for one more second. But patience waits. Patience endures, and obeys.

“Love does not envy,” Paul goes on. Of course it doesn’t! Envy is wishing you had something that somebody else has but you don’t—with a bit of hatred mixed in for that other person, a bit of bitterness because somehow God has chosen not to give you whatever that other person has, whether it’s a husband, a child, a job, a car, a house, good looks, fashionable clothes, or anything else. Love doesn’t do that. Love sincerely rejoices with those who rejoice, those who have what you wish you had yourself. Love doesn’t envy, because love waits patiently on God to give you whatever he sees fit—and whenever he sees fit.

“Love does not... boast.” Patience waits for future glory. Impatience wants glory here and now. Jesus taught his disciples about this in Matthew 6. He describes people who show off how generous they are and people who show off how religious they are. Jesus said, “Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward” (Mat 6:5). All they’ll ever get out of it is the satisfaction of impressing a few gullible people. But for the one who doesn’t show off, who doesn’t boast, who keeps his accomplishments to himself, Jesus said, “your Father who sees in secret will reward you” (Mat 6:4). Love doesn’t boast, because love waits patiently on God for future glory, in his own good time.

Love “is not arrogant,” we read in 1 Corinthians 13:4. Love patiently puts others first, but the arrogant man is impatient. He would rather that others fade a little in the brilliance of his own superiority. He can’t stand being overshadowed by somebody else for a moment, much less learn from others who are wiser than he is. The loving person is different. The loving person is content to stand in the shadows and wait patiently on God to exalt him as he sees fit, and when he sees fit. This is what Paul was talking about when he wrote, in Philippians 2:3, “in humility count others more significant than yourselves.” Love is not arrogant because love patiently puts others first. “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you” we read in James 4:10. Love is not arrogant!

Love isn’t rude, either. That’s what we see next, at the beginning of v. 5. Love patiently endures standards of decency, patiently endures the expectations of others. The deliberately rude person doesn’t care if he offends other people, because he is impatient with people expecting him to behave himself in any way other than the way he wants to, anytime he wants, anyplace he wants. But the loving person patiently submits with good manners that show respect for the people around him.

Love “does not insist on its own way,” Paul says in v. 5, and, “it is not irritable.” When someone is rude, arrogant, boastful, or otherwise irritating, love “is not irritable.” Here is where a lot of us are caught up short. Maybe so far, so good, if I look at myself just right in the mirror, from only one side. But push just the right buttons, and we can get pretty irritated, can’t we? Or am I the only one?

I remember once, decades ago, when I complained about somebody to a man much wiser than I. (This was wrong for more than one reason! I try to avoid telling stories about myself in the pulpit, but I make exceptions when they are stories about my own mistakes.) I was irritated by all sorts of annoying things I didn’t like about a mutual friend of ours. This wise man stopped me in my tracks with his answer: “Maybe that’s all he’s capable of,” he said. That was a lesson in love, let me tell you. Love endures the irritating person and waits patiently (hopefully, prayerfully) for that person to improve—whether it’s your brother or your sister, your husband or your wife, your neighbor or your boss. Who are we to demand perfection in others when we are so imperfect ourselves?

Now, someone listening to me might say, “You just don’t understand what my life is like! And I can’t keep things bottled up inside me when somebody pushes my buttons! I let it all out whether people like it or not.” But if you are wise, you will patiently hold your tongue. “A fool gives full vent to his spirit,” we read in Proverbs 29:11, “but a wise man quietly holds it back.” Love is not irritable!

There is much more to say about these four verses, but we’re going to move on. I am convinced that love is the root of everything else Paul says about love here in 1 Corinthians 13—because the patience we need here, this patience that is the root of love, is ultimately patience with God himself!

B. Patience is ultimately patience with God

In God’s eternal decree, he has chosen to surround you with imperfect people, even malevolently evil people. You will always be up to your neck in difficult circumstances that are beyond your control. And you will suffer, of that you can be sure of. There is terrible evil in this world from Ukraine to Uvalde, TX, from the slaughter of the unborn here in the United States to the genocide of the Uyghurs in China.

Many are so impatient with God that they say, no good god would allow such evil. But who are we to question this story God has written? If there is one thing clear in the Bible, it is that God is not just the creator of all *things*. God is also the creator of a *story*, a story with good and evil, a story in which we are given free will to make choices to do good and to do evil with all of its terrible consequences—a story in which God is astonishingly patient with mankind, more patient than we can fully understand.

Listen to what C. S. Lewis said about this, in his book, *Mere Christianity*:

God created things which had free will. That means creatures which can go either wrong or right.... Of course God knew what would happen if they used their freedom the wrong way: apparently He thought it worth the risk. Perhaps we feel inclined to disagree with Him. But there is a difficulty about disagreeing with God. He is the source from which all your reasoning power comes: you could not be right and He wrong any more than a stream can rise higher than its own source. When you are arguing against Him you are arguing against the very power that makes you able to argue at all: it is like cutting off the branch you are sitting on. If God thinks this state of war in the universe a price worth paying for free will—that is, for making a live world in which creatures can do real good or harm and something of real importance can happen, instead of a toy world which only moves when He pulls the strings—then we may take it it is worth paying.³

This is God’s story we are living in. You can patiently accept this reality, or you can impatiently turn your back on God because you don’t like his creation. Either

3 C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968), 52–53.

way, you are still part of God's story—either as a child of God, or as an enemy of God.

In God's story, his timing is perfect. In Isaiah 46:9–10, he says, “remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.’”

We don't know God's timing. For over two thousand years, Christians have been waiting hopefully for Jesus to return, but Jesus still hasn't returned yet. They all died while they were still waiting patiently, just like all the Old Testament saints we read about in Hebrews 11:13. “These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.”

Even so do we wait still. We wait for Jesus to return, to gather his people, to sit on his throne and reign over his kingdom. The wait may seem long. “But do not overlook this one fact, beloved,” Peter tells us in 2 Peter 3:8–9, “that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”

How can we not be patient with this God who is so patient with us? This brings us to the last part of this sermon. Not only should we be patient because love is patient, we should be patient because God is patient with us.

II. Be patient because God is patient with us

God is patient, so patient! Turn with me now to John 3. You may know John 3:16, one of the most famous verses in the Bible: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” But take a close look at the very next verse, John 3:17. It ought to be just as famous, because it shows how patient God is.

A. God patiently sent his Son as a Savior

“God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him” (Jhn 3:17). God is so patient! Jesus could have come not as a savior, but as a judge.

He didn't have to. He could have come to judge the world. And one day, he will. He has said that he will do so. At any moment, God may come and judge the world. He has done it before in the great flood that wiped almost every living things from the face of the earth like wiping out a dish, as the Hebrew puts it.

But God is patient! Instead of pouring out his justice on the world, he poured out his own Son's blood on the cross so that all who believe in him might be saved

from the wrath to come. We cannot understand God's patience unless we understand this.

Stick with me! I beg a little more patience from you this morning. Let me explain why Jesus was sacrificed on the cross, and I will show you what all this has to do with our study of patience this morning.

Here is why we desperately needed the sacrifice of Jesus. We have all sinned, and all of us must face God. Now, God is a perfectly righteous judge. Unlike human judges, God can never be corrupted. As we see time and again in the Bible, God hates injustice, and he promises perfect justice in the end. Every crime against God receives a perfect punishment in God's court.

But what kind of punishment must we pay for our crimes against God? Our sin against this infinitely holy God requires an infinite punishment. If you and I must pay the penalty for our sin, we could never finish paying for it! Did not Jesus teach that hell is eternal? When he returns to judge the world, he taught, he will say to the condemned, "'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'... these will go away into eternal punishment'" (Mat 25:41–46).

But there is a way of escape. God allowed somebody else to take our punishment for us. His name is Jesus. Only Jesus could pay the penalty for our sin. You could not pay for my sins any more than I could pay for yours. If you asked me whether or not I had paid for your sin after a million years in hell, I could only answer, "I have not even begun to pay for my own!"

Jesus is different. He was born a man, but he is more than a man. He is also God himself, the one and only Son of God (Jhn 1:1; Php 2:6–11). This is a fundamental of the Christian faith. And as a perfect God-man, Jesus atoned for our sin once and for all. "For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified." All the bloody sacrifices of the Old Testament pointed to this one, perfect sacrifice of Jesus (Heb 10:1–14).

Thank God that he is not impatient like we so often are. Thank God that his timing is not our timing. Thank God that instead of sending Jesus as a judge two thousand years ago, he sent him as a savior. We still live in the era of John 3:17. God is so patient that to this day, he still gives each one of us another chance to turn away from the world, the flesh, and the devil, another day to love God and serve him. Because there will come a day when you and I will stand before God to answer for our lives.

B. God patiently invites us, still, to love & obey

At the judgment, the biggest question will not be whether or not you sinned so badly that you deserve the wrath of God. There's no doubt about that—we all have. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23).

No, the biggest question will be whether or not you turned to Jesus in obedience. Look at John 3:18. “Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.”

Most do not believe. Yet God is patient, so patient that all around the world and right here, right now, the gospel of Jesus Christ is being preached. He is so patient that despite all you and I have done in rebellion against him, he has brought us to his Word one more time this morning. He still patiently calls us one more time to submit to his will, to obey his Son, our Master Jesus Christ, to patiently wait on God’s will, patiently enduring every temptation to do all the evils that love is not.

Will you patiently submit to this God who is so patient with you? None of us know what tomorrow will bring. For all you know, today could be your last day. But as long as you are still breathing, God is patiently inviting you to love him and obey him. “The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love” (Psa 103:8).

Have you turned to Jesus? Does it show? Do you patiently wait on this patient God who loves you so much that he has brought you once again to this gospel today? Do you patiently submit to his will, or do you impatiently rebel against him?

Conclusion

Brothers and Sisters, let us be patient. Be patient with one another. Be patient in the car on the way home today, and be patient as you head into another week. When loving others costs you, be patient. When everything seems to go wrong, be patient. When you cannot understand the hidden purposes of God in the evil things that happen to you and around you, be patient.

Patiently say, with the Psalmist, “For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is from him” (Psa 62:5).

And again, in Psa 37:7–9:

Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices!

Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil. For the evildoers shall be cut off, but those who wait for the LORD shall inherit the land.

Be patient, because love is patient. Be patient, because God is patient with you.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, forgive us for our impatience with the people in our lives—and especially for our impatience with you. Thank you for your amazing patience with us. Thank you for giving us one more day to get it right, to submit to your will as loving, patient children. Please help us to be patient, to trust in your will, and to be content with your perfect timing. May our patience reflect your own perfect patience, Father, that your glory may be magnified over all the earth. In Jesus name, Amen.