

Rejoice with the Truth

Zach Wallace | 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 | November 15, 2020

Last week Chad took us through the first three verses of this chapter and showed us how important love is. Even our best efforts, skills, and gifts will be unhelpful, ineffective, even destructive if we don't have love. V2 if I don't have love, I'm *nothing*. This week the passage tells us *what love is*. We'll look at the definition of love, action of love, the origin of love.

So first off, what is love?

In these verses Paul is describing love, but he could just as easily be describing Jesus. We could replace the word love with the name of Jesus and have no problem reading it. Jesus is patient and kind... God perfectly demonstrates his love in Christ. God's love for us *patiently* endures the sins of his people, and *kindly* extends mercy. Christ's *patient* suffering and *kind* service. Patient endurance and good kindness. This is a description of our God and our King. But how good a description is it of us? Let's jump in and look at these first two things that Paul tells us love is.

What love is: Love is patient. Love is kind.

Love is patient. How are we doing on that? I've been patiently waiting at home for the authorities to say it's safe to go out and get back to normal life. I've been patiently waiting for this election to get over with. I'm waiting for a vaccine. I'm waiting for everyone to be able to gather together in the ballet and worship with the whole church. We're waiting for a lot. Maybe you think you've been doing pretty well at being patient lately. But actually Paul's not talking about being patient or perseverant in our circumstances, as important as that is. This kind of patience or endurance is in response to people, not situations. It's patient love, the way God loves us. The descriptions we see of God in the old testament as being *slow to anger*. It's not short-tempered, but long-tempered. I think of the Cobra Kai dojo from Karate Kid. Their motto is strike first, strike hard, no mercy. This is precisely the opposite of patient love. Love doesn't strike first. Early in my marriage there were times that I could tell my wife was upset with me for something, but I wouldn't really know what it was. My strategy would be to pick a fight about something that I knew I could win and hopefully avoid an issue on which I was probably in the wrong. I fought for myself, not for my wife and my marriage. That's not love. Love is meek. When you are offended or hurt, love doesn't lash out to injure others to protect the self, it absorbs the barbs and pursues the person. And the opportunity to express patient love happens when we live close enough to one another to endure hurts over time. Real love, patient love endures over time. As the King James Version translates it, "charity suffereth long." We're going to be in each others' lives enough to suffer one another and we're going to stay there. Now it can be tempting to withdraw from people, City Group, church when we're hurt. But unlike many people we have a reason to stay. Christ loved us when we hurt him. Christ is patient with us when we don't deserve it. You see, in Christ we're called to love one another whether they

deserve it or not. In Christ, they DO DESERVE it. Patient love supersedes the emotions, pain, and conflict and endures all things. My wife, Grace, continues to endure me and my sin as I hurt her, but she keeps loving me, because Christ loves her. Love is patient.

Next Paul says love is kind. This is another one that can't exist in a vacuum. We can't be kind all by ourselves. Kindness is constructive. It's active. It adds to that which it touches. Kindness is't just sitting idly by and being nice and not causing conflict. While the patience of love reflects Christ's suffering and death on our behalf, the kindness of love mirrors the perfect goodness of his life. Have you ever thought of someone, man, they're just too kind? Kindness adds to others' lives and builds them up. We're talking about more than a random act of kindness. This kind love finds its happiness in the happiness of others. So it works to care for them. When Daniel Ting texts me to check in during COVID and new parenthood to see how we're doing. When Eric Magnuson asks how my support raising is going and offers me support and encouragement. When William Hsu remembers something I said in fight club a few weeks ago and asks me how it's going. Kind love looks outside of itself for a need and does something about it. Kind love is active. So let's look at the action of love.

Action

The Corinthian church has been off the rails. So Paul's been admonishing them for the ways they've failed to demonstrate the love of God and reflect the fact that they are his people. And now he's going to go in on 8 things that love is not. 8 things that are characteristic of the way the Corinthians have been treating each other. As we look at them, let's try to pause and consider: Where have I gone against love? How can I deepen in patient love? In my marriage, in my City Group, in my Fight Club, in our church. We don't have time to go into each one super in-depth, so we're going to combine a few and focus on those that are especially applicable to us right here and right now.

What is love not:

Love does not envy. First up, Paul is addressing the spirit of division and competition among the Corinthians. Strife and rivalry have the church jockeying for position. It's all about comparison. We can probably skip this one, as it's not really a problem for us right. What's wrong with seeing something good that someone else has and thinking it would be nice to have it for yourself? But let's ask some tough questions. How do you feel about others' success? Are you able to be happy for them when they get good things? Does it make you feel better when someone else loses? Remember the story from 1 Kings when one woman's son dies and she steals another woman's baby? The two women come before king Solomon and argue over whose baby it is and Solomon says to cut the baby in two and give each woman half. What does the thief say? Go for it. Neither of us get him. It wasn't about being a mom. She just couldn't stand to see the other woman with what she didn't have. Do you ever feel kinda mad when your friend gets a raise, or a new car, or a new house. It was hard for Grace and I to celebrate the

pregnancies of our friends and family as we tried to two years to have a child of our own. A loving community celebrates well together. Kind love finds its happiness in the happiness of others, but envy begrudges the person for what they have.

Love doesn't boast and it's not arrogant. The Corinthians were all about their spiritual gifts, especially those that would make them look good. They wanted the showy gifts that would give them a platform and earn themselves followers and praise. Are you humble? Are you teachable? Paul's saying love doesn't seek to be lauded; it seeks the good of the community.

In the age of the Big Me, it's really hard not to join in the race for praise. Earning respect, station, and power are idealized in our society. It reminds of a story about William Cary the missionary to India, many consider him to be a hero of the faith. By the power of the Spirit, he did amazing things preaching the gospel and translating the bible into several languages. And before that he was a cobbler. And he wasn't particularly respected, because he didn't come from the "right stock." And one evening he was back in England at a party and one of the guys there was trying to make fun of him in front of everyone and said "Hey Mr. Carey, I hear you make shoes." and William Carey responded, "Oh no, I just mend them." this guy tried to put him down and William Carey went lower. He wasn't boastful or arrogant. He said no I never made shoes, I just fixed them. Are you anxious to be heard; to make things about you in conversation? Do you interrupt other people, or look for opportunities to share what you know or think about a topic. Or do you go lower? Are you in the race for praise or to love? Later in chapter 8:1 Paul says: "we know that ["all of us possess knowledge."](#) This "knowledge" puffs up, but love builds up." don't be puffed up or look for community to make you feel better about yourself. Be the kind of person that goes lower and lifts others higher.

[V5 \[Love isn't\] rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful.](#) Love isn't selfish. The Corinthians have been rude, disgraceful, shameful. Misconduct in intimacy, appropriate dress, humiliating the poor during the Lord's supper. Their behavior is contrary to courteous, kind, decent love. They've been insistent on their own way, seeking their own good and not the good of their neighbors (10:24). Love gives of itself; it doesn't insert itself. And they've been irritable, short-tempered. They're not patient or forbearing. They're letting others get on the nerves. That's what people do. They're irritating when what matters most is you, your comfort, your perspective people bug you. In a world that tells you to make your own space and have it your way when you want it, it's hard to think about the sacrifices of time, and energy, and preference that we have to make for community. William shared last month at story Sunday about considering switching City Groups and I bet that's something we can all relate to. He wanted to insist on his own way, and was irritable with people who were not like him. Sometimes there are people and situations that just get to us, or we think it would be easier if we were over there with people we have more in common with. We don't get to pick who's in God's family and when people live as family there are real highs and lows. It gets messy sometimes and it gets beautiful. William's story shows the good that patient love produces. By sticking it out

and sacrificing some of his preferences he found a community that cares for him. They make space for him to be and feel heard. They ask about and pray for his marriage and his parents. They're not perfect, but they're committed to one another and they practice patient and kind love for each other.

Love isn't resentful.

One of the really tough things for me as I was preparing and writing this, was thinking of all of these things that love isn't and rather than evaluating how I have failed in all of these ways, I thought of all of the ways that I have been wronged within community over the years. How I've seen arrogance and boasting and obstinance. And it was honestly really frustrating thinking about the times I've fought and sacrificed for unity and love and been met with the opposite. And then I got to love isn't resentful and it punched me in the gut. Maybe as I've been talking you've been thinking about the sins of people in your community and replaying the tape on all the unloving behavior you've had to put up with. And then here we are. Love isn't resentful. It keeps no record of wrongs. This is a whole new step up from just not being irritable. This is patience and forbearance through what is done against us or what we think should have been done for us. Peter says it another way in [1 Peter 4:8 Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins](#). Love covering sins isn't just sweeping bad things under the rug and ignoring them, it's bearing the weight of them and forgetting them as if they'd never happened. We don't make others account for their sins against us. I was really surprised at how easy it was to think back on all of the different communities I've been a part of and think of the ways that people had wronged me in all of the ways Paul describes here. I've been seriously resentful. I started tripping on the mountain of all that stuff I had tried to hide under my rug instead of forgiving with patient love. As I processed that with the Lord I was so struck by his patient love for me. God doesn't hold my wrongs toward him against me. In Christ, my slate's been wiped clean and my debt is paid and I can offer that kind of grace and mercy to others. Who are you holding a grudge against that you need to let go?

[Love does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth](#). As humans, we're enthralled by calamity. There's a reason when we call something a trainwreck the implication is that we can't look away. Reality TV tells us that our worst behavior is worth putting on display. The Corinthians kept taking each other to court over little stuff. They found pleasure in dragging people through the mud publicly for their failures and wrong doings. Are you excited when you see someone you don't like fail or lose? A really pernicious way that this rears its head today is in gossip. We want the sordid details. We take vicarious delight in sharing and hearing negative news about others. Hey, at least it's not us, we'll say. We feel better about ourselves. We gloat in perverse satisfaction. We'll even disguise it as a prayer request, asking for prayer for the dirt we have on others. I remember talking with a friend a few months ago and us agreeing that within our friendship we had a problem with gossip. It didn't usually seem that malicious, but we quite often found ourselves talking about other people. We confessed to one another and agreed that

we needed to change it. Then I said, “OK, but before the moratorium starts, did you hear that...” I stopped short and laughed and he quickly admitted that even immediately after our conversation and commitment to repentance, as I joked, he had gotten excited at the opportunity to hear something juicy. But it's no laughing matter. Gossip tears a community apart. It's speaking about others in a way God would never speak of them. Love in community doesn't do this. [Love rejoices with the truth](#). Love doesn't covet bad news about other people; it finds its joy in truth. What truth? The truth of the gospel. The truth that Jesus in perfect humility, came to earth and lived in perfect kindness, and suffered in perfect endurance, and saved us from sin, death, and evil, so that we can be called children of God. And as his children we are a family, the community of the church. So with every act of kindness, every extension of forgiveness, blessings poured out on our enemies, every soul saved, and proclamation of truth, We rejoice! Love stands on the side of the gospel and seeks mercy and justice for all.

The origin our love.

So then what is the origin of love?

In Christ and by the power and ministry of the Holy Spirit, everyday we have and grow in love. A love that Jesus demonstrated perfectly for us and toward us.

Because of Christ's finished work of love for us we can have a love that [v7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things](#). Love that acts on behalf of and for the sake of others. Love that is tenacious. Love that is confident. Our love is hopeful because of the object of our hope. We don't believe that others will get it right next time, so we can forbear this once, we believe in a future hope and greater source of mercy for that person. When someone says something in City Group that sounds a little off, do you jump on it or tune them out, or do you assume the best of them and maybe ask them to clarify? When you're listening to a sermon are you critically evaluating for perfect theology, or trusting the Spirit to speak truth? Do we think of people as hopeless? Is there anyone you think is beyond help? Love knows no limit to its endurance, no end to its trust, no fading of its hope.

Paul has given us a framework for what love looks like as sinners collide. We need patience and kindness as we live in the community of imperfect people that God has called us into. And we can look to Christ and his patient love for us as the example and the source of our love for one another. This love is God's character displayed in his people. Oh that we would be a people of whom it could be said: City Life is patient. City Life is kind...does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Where are you lacking love? Let's read the passage again, this time inserting your name for love. Maybe even read it out loud with me. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you where you are most lacking in love; to make one or two of the words or phrases here stand out as an area where you need to grow and let's walk in repentance together, with patience, kindness, and love.