

Snapshots of a Disciple
A look at love in action - 1st Corinthians 13:4

Hello brothers, sisters, and friends :)

Welcome back to my little study through 1st Corinthians 13! Glad you could join me. This chapter so much describes and so much doesn't describe me - in the details. I'm growing in it, but wow! This stuff is deep. I hope it's also a blessing to you. As I study this, I see that I'm a frail human who too often does what comes natural to me (rebellion, revenge, etc), and yet I don't want to stay there. I want to keep growing to be conformed to the image of Christ to walk in His footsteps, to be like Him. If you're reading this, I'm sure you feel the same. Let us remember not to give up - for God did not give us His Word to condemn us, but to teach us how to grow, closer to Him and more like Him. ~ :)

Okay, so, we've already seen a bit of depth to introduce what love looks like in the first three verses of 1st Corinthians 13. So, before we start, let's review what we've seen so far, before we pick up in verse 4.

“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.” (1st Corinthian 13:1) ~~ This chapter is about not love's definition, but it's a picture of love in action. It starts with the purest form of love - God's love - *agape*. And, this word is the Greek word - '*agape*' meaning absolutely unconditional love. That is the only kind of love that those of this world don't understand and cannot give, until they repent from their rebellion, surrender their lives to Jesus and become new creations in Christ - starting a journey of growing in being a follower of Christ. This kind of love can only come from God - not us. So we have to be in close communion and harmony with Christ to even have this love. And for us to get this kind of love, we must always keep in our minds the awesome - yes, **awesome** display of love that Jesus showed. His example and manifestation of love is so magnificent. So much so, that words fail to describe it. That is the example we must study diligently so that we might walk in His footsteps and love others like He loves us. :)

“And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.” (1st Corinthians 13:2) ~~ It doesn't matter if we can preach well, serve well, teach well, and do ministry in general well - if we do not love the family that God has given us and the people we are talking with, it's all for nothing - empty noise - clanging cymbals, and we are nothing - of not much use (at that time). It does not matter if we can speak eloquently to large audiences or have the brilliant presence of mind to be able to answer every question posed to us - if we do not care about the people we are talking with, the people we work with, and our family - it's empty noise - it's hollow. We must love the people we preach to! That takes intentional growth in patience and self-control on our part and it's worth it! We

must care about the souls of the people we talk with. We must love those around us - it's not an accident, it takes persistence and faithfulness in the details.

“And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.” (1st Corinthians 13:3) -- It does not matter if we had all of the billions of the world at our disposal, we can still waste it all (in light of eternity). And, we can fail in 2 ways:

1> if we give to others yet do not genuinely care about those whom we are trying to help, our help is meaningless. And,
2> if we work hard to meet the physical needs of those around us, yet do not take care of their soul, by telling them of repentance and Jesus, and/or helping them to grow closer to Him - we've done nothing in light of eternity. Yes, that's right - nothing. I'm sure that's a painful thought for you and it is to me too. But we do need to recognize it and change accordingly. Everywhere Jesus went, He met physical and spiritual needs - He never just the met physical needs, because this body is going to die. And those of us who are adopted sons and daughters of the King of Kings are to be constantly and consistently growing as peacemakers - peacemakers, that is, who help people make peace with God. That is, we need to continue to grow in helping people see how they're offending a holy God and how to change more of their lifestyle to please Him!

Okay, with that brief review, let's dig into verse 4.

“Love suffers long and is kind...” (1st Corinthians 13:4) ~ Let's look at that a little deeper, word by word. **“Love”**, as we've talked about before is **'agape'** - unconditional, unchanging love. That's something that describes God, but doesn't describe us very well! God loves truth and people unconditionally. And that means that He hates rebellion against Him and what is right - because our rebellion destroys us and His holy presence cannot tolerate sin. I should say - sin is consumed in His presence. And yet, even though He hates sin and how we mistreat Him, He continues to extend His love to all - some accept, some reject. Please note, I'm not talking about salvation here - just the quality of love that is described in this passage. :)

Okay next phrase - **“suffers long”**. Now, when I've read this, I've caught the patience side of this and that's been helpful. But, I didn't catch what that there's two concepts in this word - it's pretty cool! :) ~ Here's what it says: **'1) to be of a long spirit, not to lose heart; a) to persevere patiently and bravely in enduring misfortunes and troubles; b) to be patient in bearing the offenses and injuries of others; 1) to be mild and slow in avenging; 2) to be longsuffering, slow to anger, slow to punish'** ~

[**my notes:** that's Strong's Concordance notes - a handy little feature in the **'Interlinear Scripture Analyzer'** which you can download for free at: www.scripture4all.org ~ I think you'll enjoy it as much as I do! It's small, fairly easy

to use and (I think) very helpful. If you need help setting it up to work efficiently and you think I can help, just ask! :) ~]

Okay, so 2 things we can notice from that:

- 1> genuine love [God's love] is not quick to respond/attack, and
- 2> genuine love [God's love] also doesn't give up on people (unlike us who do).

Both of those are wrapped up in the phrase: "**suffers long**". I think it easily links to the phrase in verse 5 - "**is not easily provoked**" (1st Corinthians 13:5).

To see both perspectives of this verse, let's look at a couple of more verses on each :)
"**A fool's wrath is known at once, but a prudent man covers shame.**" (Proverbs 12:16)

"**A quick-tempered man acts foolishly, and a man of wicked intentions is hated.**" (Proverbs 14:17)

"**He who is slow to wrath has great understanding, but he who is impulsive exalts folly.**" (Proverbs 14:29)

"**A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.**" (Proverbs 15:1)

"**So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath' for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.**" (James 1:19-20)

Okay, so that's a few verses about what we do when we are quick to get angry, short-tempered, and quickly impatient. And it also starts to give us an idea of what we should grow in - understanding what patience is and growing in it. ~

Now, let's contrast our natural tendency to respond wrongly, by looking briefly at what Jesus did when He was in situations like we are - so that we might walk in His steps ~ :)

"**He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth.**" (Isaiah 53:7) ~ That is the Master of the Universe displaying true love in harsh affliction. Remember, He tells us to bless and not curse those who hurt us (Matthew 5:44, Luke 6:28, Romans 12:14)... very hard to do in our strength, but we must keep growing - yes? :)

Again - Christ's example for us to grow in following:

"**For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: 'Who [Jesus] committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth'; Who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness--by whose stripes you were healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.**" (1st Peter 2:21-25)

And a similar passage with a different angle that also enhances the our understanding of how Jesus maintained His obedience and agape love.

“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and [that] every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:5-11)

Jesus deserved nothing that He went through - absolutely none of it. Talk about ‘grace under fire’! Jesus did it. And He calls us to grow in that too. How did He do it? Humility. Jesus kept a humble perspective of Himself - a far cry different from what we too often do and what the world does all the time - boasting ourselves as though we’re something great... But, what does the Scripture say? **“For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.”** (Romans 12:3)

Now, if you [like me] are feeling just a little inadequate right now, then good :). You say good? Haha! Yes. :) Why? Because, when we think much of ourselves and that we’re doing well, we’re not doing as well as we thought we are. But, when we constantly keep a remembrance of our rebellion, and the things we want to grow to leave behind - remembering that we aren’t something special, but wanting to be faithful to our Master and Savior Jesus, the Messiah - then and only then are we walking in true humility. So, if we’ve been humbled by these passages and look down in shame, then our hearts truly are contrite - and that humility is pleasing to God. :) However, we must not stay there - we must continue to hold onto that attitude of humility, yet not moving to the position of condemning ourselves and giving up. No, we must - when confronted with our sins, come to God and repent, ask Him to forgive us and teach us not to live like that anymore, and then grow in living differently - even working on thinking differently. Growing more in not thinking like the world does, but growing in thinking more like Christ does - in essence, growing in thinking Biblically. ~ And, that is an uphill path - one of blessing through trials and hardship, with the opportunity of future wonderful rewards :)

And one more verse before we transition to part 2 of that definition:

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1st John 1:9) ~ This is by far one of the most valuable verses to me! Please notice, in case you didn’t catch it this time in reading it - that when we confess and forsake the sins we do see that we are doing (not wanting to do them anymore), then God not only forgives us of those, but also of the sins that we are doing that we didn’t even know about yet. That’s complete restoration, and the opportunity - not for a second chance to prove ourselves, but another opportunity to

take the next step and continue growing and in fellowship with God, our Creator!
Now, that's special!

So, on the subject of not losing heart and giving up ~ let's look at a couple of passages on that subject - since that is included in the definition of 'suffering long' ~ so that we might gain encouragement for the Scriptures, strengthening ourselves in His Word!
Ready? Okay, :)

“Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart...” (Luke 18:1) ~ The Greek word for not losing heart is not the same word as in 1st Corinthians 13:4, but similar, and obviously the same encouragement is implied.

“Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.” (2nd Corinthians 4:16)

A passage that ends with a life-verse for me: **“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.”** (Galatians 6:7-9)

“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin. And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: ‘My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.’ If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?...” (Hebrews 12:1-7) ~ None of us like chastening, but let us also take this passage to heart, so that we do not get weary and give up. And let us remember 3 things from this passage:

1> many have faithfully gone before us, leaving us an example in Scriptures for us to learn from,

2> those of us who are followers of Christ, we have many fellow brothers and sisters all around us - we're not alone and that's good news :), and

3> If we get in trouble when we do what we know is wrong, that shows that God loves us - embrace it! God doesn't discipline Satan's children as Hebrews 12 goes on to explain. And, based on the measure we prove faithful here on Earth, will affect our level of rewards and leadership in the eternal Kingdom of Jesus, forever and ever. Then we will find the full definition of His rest! Till then, I say, based on Scriptures, let's keep growing!

So, this concludes today's study into 1st Corinthians - specifically looking at verse 4 today. I hope and pray it's been a blessing to you, as it's been to me. It comes at a much needed time! :)

Till next time, this is your growing brother/friend, a learner at the feet of Jesus. Let's continue to lift His wonderful and matchless Name high! ~ SH :)