



Scriptures and Doctrine :: Love & Patience

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An Example of Loving a Very Difficult Brother

"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres." --1 Corinthians 13:4-7

WHAT LOVE LOOKS LIKE

In the 1800's, in a small town in England, in a very poor neighborhood, there lived a kind old pastor, Mr. Robert Chapman, who was well known, even outside England, for his loving and humble character. The church that he pastored for 70 years was very divisive when he moved to that town. As the years passed, he patiently loved these saints and taught them to love one another. Many years later, a short conversation was preserved which gives us a window into the soul of a man marked by unusual humility and love. Let us pay attention to his attitude that we might see higher into the heavens.

A Christian man moved to town and joined the church pastored by Chapman. Years later an enquiry was made about that man by someone from his previous church in another town. The enquirer was curious about how Chapman got along with him as the man had been very difficult to deal with. "Chapman replied that he was a valuable brother, a very valuable brother; and added: 'We did not know our need of patience till he came among us.'"

DO YOU WANT TO GROW IN LOVE?

Did you notice Chapman's attitude? He considered the very difficult brother to be God's instrument to reveal the church's need to grow in patience. Chapman clearly learned that lesson of love well, seeing the man as a "very dear brother." Do you want to learn to love? Are you willing to welcome the difficult saints in your life as God's chosen instruments to reveal your need of patience? If not, what does that reveal about your real desire to grow in love? Does this bother you? How wonderful it is that our loving Father is patient with us when we are not so with each other.

Reading about God's gracious work in and through Robert Chapman has been a great blessing to me. The first post on his blog is a recommendation of *Agape Leadership: lessons in spiritual leadership from the life of RC Chapman*. If you want to grow in love, or become more sensitive to your lack of love, this book would be a great help. Your friends would benefit from you reading it, too. The above excerpt was taken from a book recently reprinted entitled: *Robert Chapman*, by Frank Holmes

"Father in heaven, help us to see the difficult people around us as a blessing from your hand of grace to show us our need of more love. Convict us when we only tolerate them instead of loving them. Please do this soon. Thank you for loving us even when we neglect to love. Amen."

Heavenly Love is an Act of Faith

*"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."
--Hebrews 11:1*

"In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." --1 John 4:10

"But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them." --Luke 6:32

TWO KINDS OF LOVE

There are two kinds of love. Natural human love operates on an earthly level of worthiness and performance. It takes little effort to respond well to a person who respects you and gives to you. But, if that person is cool toward you, despises you, or even abuses you, then much changes, doesn't it? But God's heavenly love is not rooted in worthiness. Thus, the love He fills a man with and expects him to overflow with, has no connection to worthiness either.

WHAT GOD SEES

God declares, and thus sees, every believer as pure, perfect, holy, righteous, dearly loved, free from condemnation, welcomed without hesitation, and with all sins no longer remembered. This is what God sees all the time when He looks at every true believer. This is beautiful. So apparently when God disciplines me, he sees my sin without remembering it. The implication is that God's discipline is a restoration of, or growth in, my vision to see what He sees. God also declares, and thus sees, all those outside of Christ as condemned, under His wrath, and awaiting destruction, if they do not flee to Christ. God sees people as either 1) dead in sin or 2) alive in Christ and justified freely by His grace (Rom. 3:24). The cross of Christ is a great hope to move a man from group 1 to group 2. In God's vision, the only thing that matters for believers is, *"faith working through love . . . and . . . through love serve one another"* (Gal. 5: 6,13).

SOURCE OF HEAVENLY LOVE

True faith is a resting in the work of Christ--His death as a substitution for mine. The moment a man is recreated in Christ, he has everything he needs for life and godliness through his knowledge of Christ and has God's great and precious promises (2Peter 1:3,4). From that point on, God calls him to live by that same faith, and not by sight (2Cor. 5:7). And he can do all things through Christ, who gives him strength (Phil. 4:13).

THE CHOICE

As Christians, we get to choose 1) to walk by faith and see with God's eyes of love and grace, the world and all those around us; or 2) to walk by human sight and judge the world and all those around us (even ourselves) with eyes of performance. This latter way, the way of the flesh, bears ugly fruit: impatience, anger, envy, contentions, and much, much worse (Gal. 5:19-22). The world presses on us to walk this way. Those of the world are trapped in this "trying and striving" and want us to wallow in it with them. Because God loves His children, He disciplines us when we choose the way of performance. The Spirit is quenched, the Christian life "feels" difficult and maybe even burdensome, and relationships grow cool and distant. Onlookers are rarely discomfited by God's holiness in our lives--the cross is hidden to them.

But to walk by faith is to see with spiritual eyes what God sees. This is walking in the Spirit. The Spirit's fruit is: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22,23). Notice that this is not our effort. It is the Spirit's effort, which is limitless. Thus, walking in the Spirit is effortless, though it may be accompanied by pain or sorrow, depending on circumstances. Paul said that he was always sorrowful yet always rejoicing.

Let us be clear about this: that for believers, 1) the only thing that matters is faith working through love (Gal. 5:6), and 2) the Spirit empowers every believer to have this abundant love in every circumstance--no exceptions--if one looks with eyes of faith. The uncomfortable implication is that loving very difficult believers is super easy, even effortless. The burden is on our loving Father to keep His promises. He provides all the energy when we walk by faith.

WHY DO WE GET IMPATIENT OR WORSE?

What do you see when you notice a fellow saint sin in some way? Do you see a person who is: dearly loved by God, free from condemnation, and holy and righteous in His sight? If so, your first reaction should be one of tenderness and grace, with a desire to draw close to remind that dear saint of the cross. Irritation, impatience, envy, avoidance, bitterness, or worse, are all the overflow of noticing that dear saint with eyes of performance rather than faith. You simply forgot to consider all the promises he has in Christ. Christ is all his righteousness. Should not we also think Christ sufficient for him? **RESPONSE**

"The only thing that matters is faith working through love." When a brother sins we should restore him to faith--a vision of the cross. The brother has not lost his faith, he simply has forgotten to use his faith. The world tempts us to restore him to a proper human performance or worthiness standard. The standard chosen does not matter.

Which vision will you choose: "Faith working through love" or human performance?

Your life will bear the fruit of your choice: Gal. 5:22,23 or Gal 5:19-21

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