

Introduction

I'd like to begin by sharing three brief anecdotes and then asking you this question about them. What do they have in common? #1 – Several summers ago, when she had a million things to do for Bible School, my wife Jill waited at our house for a repairman, who promised he'd be no later than noon. He arrived at 2:30 instead. #2 – An out of town daughter informed her parents that she wanted to have Christmas at her house instead of theirs, breaking a 40 year family tradition. And #3 - A person from another Friends church told me that her pastor doesn't preach from the Bible. Those are the anecdotes and the question is this. What do they have in common? It's that the participants in each one – Jill, the parents, and I – had the responsibility and opportunity to love.

Turn to 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 and you'll see what I mean. This is the third sermon in a series of sermons from that chapter titled *Be a Star*.

Agape Love Is Daily

Having declared in verses 1-3 that agape love is the highest good, Paul explains in verses 4-7 how it manifests itself. It manifests itself in many ways, 15 of which he mentions. Those 15 ways teach us, by implication, two things about the nature of agape love.

The first is that it's daily. We absolutely must grasp this.

So many people think of agape love in terms of the "big deal." It is true that titanic and heroic acts of love do occasionally occur. I'm talking about dramatic ones that make people sit up and take notice: like the husband and wife who adopted 10 hard to place children or the airline passenger who risked his life to save others when it crashed.

But the agape love we see in verses 4-7 is daily. Those verses teach that its real issues are found in the nooks and crannies of our everyday lives. I refer you to the anecdotes I began with. Each one was an opportunity to love: for Jill to love the repairman, for the parents to love their daughter, and for me to love the woman and her pastor. My

point is agape love is daily. It resides in the marketplace of our lives.

The reason I tell you that is because it's helpful to know it and keep it in mind. It is for me at least. Last week, I explained that we pursue agape love by doing four things. One of those is trying the best we can to act lovingly. Well, recognizing that agape love is daily, I'm alert for opportunities to exercise it. And when they arise, I see them in just those terms, as opportunities to exercise it. That in turn usually gives me the psychic distance and intent I need to act lovingly.

Just last week, for instance, I went to the drive-thru at the bank and after five minutes or so, realized I no one was waiting on me. I immediately saw that circumstance for what it was, an opportunity to act lovingly, which assisted me in doing just that.

That then is the first thing that verses 4-7, by implication, teach us about the nature of agape love. It's daily.

Agape Love Involves the Whole Person

The second thing they teach us is that it involves the whole person.

I once heard a preacher say that love isn't feeling. It's action. He illustrated what he meant. A Christian he knew had a jealous co-worker who constantly made snide and cutting remarks to him. The Christian deeply resented him for it but treated him kindly anyway – because He wanted to please Jesus. That, the preacher said, is love.

But really, it isn't. Remember that agape love is a condition or state that the Holy Spirit supernaturally creates, sustains, and continually perfects in us. Well, like all conditions or states, it doesn't impact just one aspect of our being, but all, inner and outer. Those who have it not only act but also think, feel, and will as it directs them to.

I'd analyze it this way. We always have one of three postures whenever an opportunity to love present itself. The first is negative feeling - negative response. We have a destructive emotion and act according to it. The second posture is negative feeling - positive response. We have a destructive emotion but act contrary to it. The

Christian in the preacher's illustration had that posture. The third is positive feeling - positive response. We have a constructive emotion and act according to it. Those are the three postures and our thoughts are bound up with our feelings and responses in each one.

Let's go back to Jill's experience with the repairman. There are three possible postures. First, she feels angry and acts according to it - is rude to him. Second, she feels angry but acts contrary to it - is friendly and kind to him. And third, she feels compassion and peace and acts according to it - is friendly and kind to him..

Now, the pastor I mentioned teaches that the second posture is agape love. That's because he defines agape love in terms of behavior. But the Bible doesn't. It defines it in terms of the whole person instead. The third posture, therefore, and only the third is agape love. I'd quickly say two things in that regard lest you get discouraged and quit.

First, agape love comes surely but slowly. Remember that the Holy Spirit *continually* perfects it in us, over our lifetimes. So, when we begin to pursue it as followers of Jesus, we'll find ourselves, most of the time perhaps, in the first posture. But as we continue to pursue it, which I explained last week, and as the Holy Spirit continues to work in us, we'll find ourselves developing and growing. We'll find ourselves moving more and more into the second posture, and eventually into the third. Over the years, we'll gradually come to the point where the third posture is usual, the second occasional, and the third exceptional.

I'd say a second thing. God judges us by intent not outcome. When we die, He'll hold us accountable not for how loving we *became* but for how loving we *would have become* if we intended it. It's the pursuit of agape love, in other words, not its attainment that He judges.

Those then are the two things that verses 4-7, by implication, teach us about the nature of agape love. First, it's daily. And second, it involves the whole person.

Knowing that, we're now ready to examine the 15 ways that it manifests itself. Examining those helps us do two things that I

discussed in the previous sermons: stack ourselves up against agape love and develop a vision for it. Ask and answer two questions with each one. First, to what extent is this characteristic of me? And second, what would life be like if this were characteristic of others and me?

Love Is Patient

The first way that agape love manifests itself, according to verse 4, is that it's **patient**. The Greek word translated that is *makrothumia*. I only mention that because it's a compound word that's loaded with meaning. The word *macros* means "long" or "far" and the word *thumos* means, "hot, anger, or wrath." Putting the words together, the literal meaning is "long-anger." You all know the English term "short-tempered." That term, by way of contrast, helps us define *makrothumia*. It means "long-tempered" and every time the New Testament uses it, it means that with regard to people not circumstances. You can see then what patience is. It's being long-tempered or forbearing with people.

There's a reason we need patience with people. It's because they all have shortcomings that get in our way. By "shortcomings," I mean things like these: eats too slowly, talks too much, is always losing things, is indecisive, is overly cautious, is inattentive, thinks he's always right, is moody, and much more. By "get in our way," I mean they either hinder or delay what we want or need. The bottom line is this. Everyone that we know and meet everyday has shortcomings that can and often do make our lives more difficult or at least less good.

Several years ago, my wife and I splurged and did something for our anniversary that we rarely ever do - went to a nice restaurant for dinner. Wouldn't you know it though, the young man who waited on us was a "Waiter in Training." That's what his little tag said. He did his best of course but made several mistakes in the process that diminished the experience we had. But notice what Paul says here. Agape love is patient! It's long-tempered and forbearing. So we bore with him. We were friendly to him, encouraged him, and gave him a good tip.

Cultivate Patience

So that's the first way that agape love manifests itself. It's patient. But how do we become that? Galatians 5:22 makes clear that patience is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. He creates, sustains, and continually perfects it within us. But notice the other passage I read, 1 Thessalonians 5:12-22. In those verses, Paul closes out his letter with some general exhortations to his readers. One of those, in verse 14, is "**be patient with everyone.**" It's the same Greek word, *makrothumia*. That exhortation implies there are things we can do to cultivate patience in us and that's exactly right. There are. We can do three things

First, be realistic about people. We need to come to terms with a hard fact of life. People have and create problems. Think about the ones we deal with everyday. The truth is they're the source of our greatest joy and our greatest grief. When it comes to people, it's always a package deal. We have to take the bad with the good. Everyone we know and meet, as I've already explained, has shortcomings that can get in the way of what we want or need. Knowing that lowers our expectations. We simply anticipate that people will sometimes make our lives more difficult or less good. Anticipating that makes us less taken back when they do, which in turn makes us better able to deal with it.

We can do a second thing to cultivate patience. I read about a young woman whose car stalled at a stoplight. She tried and tried to get it started but couldn't. The light then turned green and there she sat frustrated, embarrassed, and holding up the traffic behind her. It got worse though when the driver in the car directly behind, instead of going around her, began laying on his horn. Finally, after another desperate attempt to start her car failed, she got out, walked back to that driver, who was still honking at her, and declared, "**Tell you what, you go try to start my car and I'll sit back here and honk the horn for you.**" That illustrates a second thing we can do. Put ourselves in the place of the people whose shortcomings are getting in our way. Walk a mile mentally in their moccasins. Try to picture how we'd think and feel if we

were them. That's what I did with that waiter in training. I imagined what it would be like to be him, still learning the ropes and unsure. I'd certainly want customers to be patient with me, which compelled me to be that with him. I've learned a lesson over the years. Empathy and patience are traveling companions.

There's a third thing we can do to cultivate patience. See the shortcomings in us that get in people's way. You and I need just as much patience from others as they need from us. Here's a little exercise if you're courageous enough. Ask someone who deals with you on a regular basis to do something. Compile a list of your shortcomings that make his or her life more difficult or less good. I asked my wife to do that but she didn't. I know several of my shortcomings though that'd be on her list if she did: misplaces things, too concerned about a clean kitchen, so tight he squeaks, analyzes things too much, and restless. The list, if she made it, would be a lot longer I'm sure but that's enough to make the point. You and I have plenty shortcomings of our own that get in the way of others. And we need to see those. We'll recognize just how much patience they have with us if we do, which makes us have more patience with them in return.

So there you have it, our part in the Holy Spirit making us patient: be realistic about people, put ourselves in the place of the people whose shortcomings are getting in our way, and see the shortcomings in us that get in people's way.

Conclusion

You can see from what I've said today that agape love is a daily thing that involves the whole person. And it begins with patience. I leave you in closing with an anonymous maxim in that regard: **"For the friendship of two, the patience of one is necessary."** The message is simple and clear. Impatience destroys relationships. Patience builds them. So, be patient, beginning at home!