

# Love Is Patient!

by R. Stanley

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of patience in various aspects of life, including joy, peace, kindness, goodness, and faithfulness.*

**Scripture:** Proverbs 16:7, Isaiah 26:3, Matthew 5:9, Romans 12:12, Romans 12:18, 1 Corinthians 13:4, Galatians 5:22, Hebrews 12:2, James 1:4, 2 Peter 1:6

**Topics:** "Christian Love", "Spiritual Patience"

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## Description

R. Stanley preaches on the importance of patience as the crown of virtues and the mark of perfection, emphasizing that love is patient according to 1 Corinthians 13. He delves into the connection between patience and various aspects of love such as joy, peace, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, highlighting the need for patience to mature and blossom in these virtues. The sermon explores biblical examples like Jesus, Paul, and Joseph to illustrate how patience leads to joy, peace, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, essential for building happy homes, maintaining peace, and expressing kindness and goodness in our daily lives.

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## Transcript

The famous Love Chapter in the Bible, even 1 Corinthians 13, lists fifteen characteristics of love (vv 4-7). Most interestingly the very first manifestation is patience. "Love is patient!" I believe that the order of mention in the Scripture is also inspired by God. Shall we say that patience is the crown of virtues and the mark of perfection? (Js 1:4). Somewhere I read--

Love is...

Slow to suspect -

Quick to trust

Slow to condemn -

Quick to justify

Slow to offend -

Quick to defend

Slow to expose -

Quick to shield

Slow to reprimand -

Quick to forbear

Slow to belittle -

Quick to appreciate

Slow to demand -

Quick to give

Slow to provoke -

Quick to help

Slow to resent -

Quick to forgive

When we talk about love, the passage that comes to our mind next to 1 Corinthians 13 is Galatians 5:22,23 where apostle Paul lists out the fruit of the Spirit. It is called the eightfold manifestation of love. Patience is one of them. My recent meditation of this passage tells me that each of the seven expressions of love--Joy, Peace, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, Self-control--is linked to patience. In other words, without patience we cannot mature and blossom in any of the fruits. This article is a practical study of this connection.

## 1. Patience & Joy

We often think that the absence of trouble is what happiness in life is. It's erroneous. The Bible calls us to "rejoice in hope, being patient in trouble" (Rom 12:12). The shame and suffering Jesus experienced could not disturb His joy, because He endured them with patience and hope (Heb 12:2).

We don't find happiness by jumping out of difficult situations. The secret of happiness is to learn to accept the impossible, to do without the indispensable, and to bear the intolerable. Happiness comes when we stop wailing about the troubles we have, and offer thanks for all the troubles we don't have! "Weeping may go on all night, but joy comes with the morning" (Psa 30:5b). We miss happiness if we are not patient enough until sunrise. Life is a series of tunnels. No tunnel is without an exit. Impatience makes the time between entry and exit miserable. When Christ says, "Let's go over to the other side," we will not sink in the middle (Lk 8:22-25). It is of course natural to be terrified by the towering waves. But when we realize who is with us and what is promised, we can be patient to witness the end. We will not then lose the joy of the Lord.

Folks who are impatient with others not only kill their own joy by irritation but also that of others. We are to remember that we are made different from one another. If we possess anything extra or special over others, it is not of our own but a gift of God. Apostle Paul challenged the boastful Corinthians, "What makes you better than anyone else? What do you have that God has not given you? And if all you have is

from God, why boast as though you have accomplished something on your own?" (1 Cor 4:7). The Pharisee with the better-than-thou attitude returned from the Temple without any joy! (Lk 18:10-14).

To be able to find joy in another's joy is the secret of happiness. The first reference to sadness is made in the Bible about the fellow-prisoners of Joseph (Gen 40:6-8). Interestingly it was the Joseph known for patience who cheered them up! We are told that it takes sixtyfour facial muscles to make a frown, but only thirteen to make a smile! Why work overtime?

Paul's patience in his imprisonment has given us an Epistle of Joy--"Philippians." He talks about "confidence" (1:6,25), "expect-ation" (1:20), "trust" (2:19,24), "hope" (2:23), "pressing on" (3:12,14), "waiting" (3:20), "contentment" (4:11), and "fullness" (4:18). Precious patience! Next to Jesus in the New Testament no one else suffered more than Paul. Yet the rule of his life was "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing" (2 Cor 6:10). This attitude made others rich and rejoice! See how he could cheer up the sailors when their ship was running aground near the Isle of Malta (Acts 27:21-26, 33-37). Impatience of leaders discourages the followers.

Happy homes are built with blocks of patience. A husband impatient with his wife's cooking kills her enthusiasm. A wife impatient with her husband's imperfections hinders his growth and development. A parent impatient with the casualness of the children spoils their jubilation. Children impatient with the parents' strictness worries them. It takes patience to appreciate domestic bliss; volatile spirits prefer unhappiness. For every minute you are angry, you lose sixty seconds of happiness! If there's tug-of-war at home, let the rope be the love of God!

## 2. Patience & Peace

Turbulence is the inevitable lot of impatient people. Even among Christian believers very few enjoy the peace of God "like a river." The Bible promises "perfect" peace to those whose mind is "stayed" or fixed steadily on God (Isa 26:3). The Hebrew original for "perfect peace" is "Peace! Peace!" The condition to enjoy such a peace is patiently "trusting" in the Lord. "Whoever believes will not act hastily" (Isa 28:16b).

If we are not enjoying peace in our own hearts, we cannot live in real peace with others. Social conflicts are invariably the result of unresolved inner conflicts in man. Being patient with God's dealings with us is the only way to maintain peace and keep agitation away. God is not obliged to give us explanations, nor can we understand them if He gives. Whether it is prayers, puzzles, pain or problems, God's answer more often than we think is, "Wait!" The peace of God "surpasses all understanding" (Phil 4:7). Which means, we can enjoy the peace of God in spite of problems. Staying put and being patient is the secret.

Even after celebrating Christmas for generations we are yet to understand its full message. "Glory to God in the highest!" -- This is only one half of the message. The other side of the coin is, "And on earth peace, good will toward men!" (Lk 2:14). Making peace with God can be done in an instant. Enemies of God can become His children the next moment. Not so with our horizontal relationships. Building relationships with people and maintaining them means time and labour. Reconciliation with people is not a miracle like reconciliation with God. It involves self-denial and patience with others. We are admonished, "Do your part to live in peace with everyone, as much as possible" (Rom 12:18). In the pretext of this Bible verse we write off certain individuals too soon. We say they are impossible to live with. But most often the problem lies with us only. The Bible tells us, "When the ways of people please the Lord, He makes even their enemies live at peace with them" (Prov 16:7).

Peace is rare because it is difficult and the process is time-consuming. A statistics says, "Less than 8% of the time since the beginning of recorded time has the world been entirely at peace. In a total of 3530 years, only 286 have been warless. 8000 treaties have been broken in this time." However the Lord Almighty has promised, "All the nations will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks... Everyone will live quietly in their own homes in peace and prosperity" (Mic 4:3,4). The destructive weapons will be converted into constructive tools. Battlefields will become harvest fields. We as God's people are to be coworkers with God in this ministry of reconciling man with man.

Peacemaking is not to start at national and international levels. It must begin in the family, the Church and the communities. Peacebreakers outnumber peacemakers. God detests anyone "who sows discord among brothers" (Prov 6:19b). A distinguished mark of a child of God is that he would be a peacemaker (Mt 5:9). Number one reason for murders, splits and divorces is impatience. Let's make the prayer of St. Francis of Assisi (1182-1226) our daily plea before God--

Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace!

Where there's hatred ... let me sow love.

Where there's injury ... pardon.

God has called us Christians to be salt and light, but we have lost our saltiness and brightness. Churches and Christian organisations have become the breeding ponds of hatred, rivalry and disunity. There's no scarcity for leadership training and management seminars. But "wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find confusion and every kind of evil" (Js 3:16). Peace will be absent if there is no "willingness to yield" (v 17). Christian committee meetings are no better than pandemoniac Assembly and Parliament sessions. The only difference is that we begin with prayer and end with benediction! Patient listening is the secret of peace in planning meetings. After all, we know what we want to say; on the other hand, we don't know what the other person is going to say! Apostle James in his practical wisdom wrote, "My dear brothers and sisters, be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. Your anger can never make things right in God's sight" (Js 1:19,20). James must have learnt it from King Solomon who penned centuries ago from his administrative experience, "Avoiding a fight is a mark of honour!" (Prov 20:3).

There are of course born-fighters. They do not know the "way of peace" (Rom 3:17). They can't sleep unless they provoke someone. To be victorious in such trying situations is to follow the Jesus' method of staying silent without speaking a word (Mt 27:12-14).

### 3. Patience & Kindness

The very next thing Paul says after "Love is Patient" is "Love is Kind!" (1 Cor 13:4a). Also in the list of the marks of God's servants, he mentions "kindness" immediately after "patience" (2 Cor 6:6). So also in the list of the fruits of the Spirit, "kindness" follows "patience" (Gal 5:22). Kindness is a language that the dumb can speak and the deaf can hear and understand. Some folks are supernaturally endowed, like Mother Teresa (1910-1997), with the gift of "showing mercy with cheerfulness" (Rom 12:8d). For most of us, kindness is a virtue that has to be cultivated. H.W. Longfellow (1807-1882), an American poet, put it this way--

Kind hearts are the gardens,

Kind thoughts are the roots,

Kind words are the flowers,

Kind deeds are the fruits.

That's why we read that Jesus "grew" in favour with men (Lk 2:52).

Kindness is such an important virtue that John the Baptist equated the "fruits of repentance" to acts of kindness. He told the people, "Be kind to the have-nots!" To the tax-collectors he said, "Don't overload the tax-payers!" He admonished the soldiers, "Don't chargesheet anyone falsely!" (Lk 3:8-14). The greatest thing a man can do for his Heavenly Father is to be kind to His children! Jesus has taught us, "You must be compassionate, just as your Father is compassionate" (Lk 6:36). The problem with us is that we tend to be kind only to those who are kind to us. But as for God, He is "kind to the unthankful and to those who are wicked" (v 35b). We must be kind to the unkind people; they need it the most! This is where patience is challenged.

There can be hundred-and-one reasons why we need not shower kindness on certain individuals. But Joseph of the Old Testament and Joseph of the New Testament stand before us to shout into our ears that it is never right to be unkind to anyone. What was the need for Joseph to be so kind to his brothers for all that they had done to him? (Gen 50:21). Why did the next Joseph hesitate to publicly disgrace his pregnant fiancée? (Mt 1:19). The law was after all on his side (Dt 24:1). These were men who had experienced God's kindness in their own lives. That was the more-than-enough reason for them to be kind to the undeserving. The story of the unkind debtor Jesus narrated shames us and warns us sternly. When the debtor pleaded with the King, "Be patient with me," his debt of millions of dollars was instantly forgiven out of kindness. But he grabbed the throat of his fellow-servant who had owed him just a few thousand dollars, even though he also pleaded, "Be patient with me!" The story ends with the moral, "Should we not be merciful to others as God is to us?" (Mt 18:21-35). Apostle James put it bluntly: "There will be no mercy for you if you have not been merciful to others. But if you have been merciful, then God's mercy toward you will win out over His judgment against you" (Js 2:13).

Being too busy to be kind is both unhealthy and unchristian. We speak so much about the Good Samaritan but walk with the shoes of the Priest and the Levite! (Lk 10:30-35). I guess the Priest was hurrying to the Temple to offer sacrifices, and the Levite was following him to count the offerings! We are too busy if we are too busy to be kind! It is terrifying to realize that our acts of kindness will decide our eternal destiny (Mt 25:34-46). I read on a bumper sticker, "Beware the barrenness of busyness!" We are not to deny kindness even to strangers (Lev 19:33,34). Hospitality is included here (Heb 13:2). Abraham never realized he was entertaining angels when he was showing kindness to three strangers (Gen 18:1-8). Satan does not appear in black or angels in white, to our naked eyes!

Speaking kindly is an art to be learnt. Everyone in this world is hurting. Kind words are like medicine. If someone were to pay you Rs. 10/- for every kind word you ever spoke and collect Rs. 5/- for every unkind word, would you be rich or poor? Speak kind words and you will hear kind echoes! The person who sows seeds of kindness enjoys a perpetual harvest. There's a Malayan Proverb: "One can pay back the loan of gold, but one dies forever in debt to those who are kind!" Acts of kindness are not to be broadcasted (Mt 6:1-4). He who has conferred kindness should be silent; he who has received one should speak of it.

Kindness begets kindness, but be patient if your kindness is not positively reciprocated. Pray for a short memory as to all unkindness. Someone said, "Two things stand like stone: Kindness in another's troubles; Courage in one's own!" Our disappointments are due to over-expectations. Blessed is he who expects nothing; for he shall not be disappointed! Gilbert Chesterton encourages kind folks saying, "The man who expects nothing sees redder roses than common men can see, and greener grass, and a more startling sun!" Kindness is like snow; it makes everything it covers beautiful.

#### 4. Patience & Goodness

I consider Genesis 6:5 the saddest statement in the entire Scripture: "The Lord observed the extent of the people's wickedness, and He saw that all their thoughts were consistently and totally evil." David lamented centuries later : "All have turned away from God; all have become corrupt. No one does good, not even one!" (Psa 14:3). His son Solomon echoed, "There is not a single person in all the earth who is always good and never sins" (Eccl 7:20). Apostle Paul summarised these Old Testament statements in his Epistle to the Roman Christians, "No one is good-- not even one... For all have sinned!" (Rom 3:10,23).

This is the picture of the unregenerate man. At spiritual rebirth, God puts His Spirit into us to indwell. The residential ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of every child of God is to transform him and make him like the very Son of God. This of course does not happen overnight. That's why the godly virtues produced in our new life are called the "fruit" of the Spirit. Who has heard of instant fruitbearing? Stripping us off our badness layer by layer and enabling us to express the goodness of God is the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit from day one of our conversion to Christ. This does not happen apart from our cooperation. That's why we are called "to put off the old man ... and put on the new man" (Eph 4:22-24). Because this is a long-drawn process, many have stopped in the middle due to impatience.

When we talk about the virtue of goodness, there are two aspects--being good, and doing good. The first one leads to the other. Good people will do good, although all those who do good may not be good people. This was the logic of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount: "A good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree produces bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot produce good fruit" (Mt 7:17,18). Goodness is a fruit of walking with God. God's goodness is the root of all goodness. Psalmist David confessed to God, "You are my Master! My goodness is nothing apart from You" (Psa 16:2). I believe this is the main reason why God testified of David that he was a man after His own heart (Acts 13:22b). Oftentimes David exclaimed, "O Lord, how great is Your goodness!" (Psa 31:19a).

God's goodness is associated with His patience. When He passed in front of Moses He proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord God, ... longsuffering and abounding in goodness" (Ex 34:6). This proclamation was made when God instructed Moses to prepare two stone tablets like the first ones (v 1). It is the patience of God that manifests His goodness to us so He may give us a second chance! Referring to this nature of God, Paul rebuked the hardhearted, "Do you despise the riches of God's goodness, tolerance and patience, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?" (Rom 2:4).

It was patience that enabled Jesus to do good to people all through His life. He was patient with folks in their slowness to understand. That was why He could continue to teach them (Lk 24:25-27). He was patient with the unbelief of people. That was why He could continue to heal them (Mt 17:17,18). He was patient with the thanklessness of the beneficiaries. That was why He could continue to bless the needy (Lk 17:17-19). He was patient with the forgetfulness of His disciples. That was why He continued to perform miracles for them (Mt 16:9,10). He was patient with the fearfulness of His associates. That was why He

continued to encourage them (Mt 14:24-32). He was patient with the unsteadiness of His disciples. That was why He could continue to support them (Lk 22:31-34). Even today He is patient with our weaknesses. That is why He continues to plead for us in Heaven before the Father (Heb 4:15,16).

We also cannot be good to people unless we are tolerant and patient. John Wesley (1703-1791) gives this excellent piece of advice--

Do all the good you can,

By all the means you can,

In all the ways you can,

In all the places you can,

At all the times you can,

To all the people you can,

As long as you can!

Goodness should not stay as an abstract virtue, but be expressed practically. Look at these examples of doing good to people: Helping an aged person; Destroying a letter written in anger; Offering the apology that saves a friendship; Stopping a scandal that's wrecking a reputation; Guiding a teenager to find himself; Taking time to show your mother consideration; Accepting the judgment of God on any question; Etc. There's no limit to the amount of good a man can do if he doesn't care who gets the credit. We need "good" men like Barnabas who can be patient with unsteady candidates like John Mark (Acts 11:24; 15:37,38). Otherwise the Church would not get strong men like Paul (Acts 11:25,26). Let Diotrefeses be converted into Demetriuses! (3 Jn 9-12). A little girl prayed, "Dear God, make all bad people good, and all good people nice!" Shall we all say, "Amen!"

## 5. Patience & Faithfulness

The KJV translation of the word "faith" in Galatians 5:22 is not correct. It is actually "faithfulness." The modern versions render this word correctly.

Nothing in life can take the place of faithfulness and dependability. Brilliance, genius and competence are all subservient to the quality of faithfulness. Take for example, marriage. Faithfulness plus dutifulness is the ideal. But faithfulness minus dutifulness is better than dutifulness minus faithfulness (Mal 2:13-16). God's basic desire is that we stay faithful wherever He has called us to whatever responsibility. Moses was faithful to God "as a servant;" Jesus was faithful to Him "as a Son" (Heb 3:5,6). Whatever task God assigns to us is not because He has "found" us faithful but He has "counted" us faithful (1 Tim 1:12). We are to live up to it. The five-talented servant earned another five. The two-talented servant earned another two. Both of them were called "faithful" and rewarded equally, because each of them was 100% faithful with what they were entrusted with (Mt 25:19-23). It is said that the master of these servants returned to settle accounts with them "after a long time" (v19). The patient and consistent labour of the servants is obvious.

Faithfulness at the beginning of a work or a course is not difficult. When the initial excitement wanes and the early enthusiasm waxes, it is not easy to maintain faithfulness unless we are patient and committed to

consistency. God complained to Ephraim, "Your faithfulness is like a morning cloud, and like the early dew it goes away" (Hos 6:4). The servant who lost his patience because of the delay in the return of his master began to mistreat his fellow servants and became unfaithful in his responsibilities. He had his end in the lake of fire (Mt 24:48-51). Only if we are "faithful until death," we will receive the crown of life (Rev 2:10c).

From the very beginning of our Christian walk and work, we must learn to keep our eyes on the final day of rewards and not keep looking for immediate blessings and benefits. This is how we can be patient amidst all odds and stay faithful till the end. A lone missionary was preaching in the cold wilds of Alaska. An explorer asked him why he was wasting his life in a dreary place like that? The missionary replied, "Results are not my business. I leave the results with God. I must be faithful and do my best for God. Someday results will come!"

The Book of Proverbs has a lot to tell us about faithfulness. Faithfulness among friends and colleagues is to conceal unpleasant matters. Impatience drives us to reveal secrets (Prov 11:13). Faithfulness in communication brings health to the persons involved (13:17). The test of faithfulness is whether by what we speak we refresh people "as snow in the heat of summer" (25:13). "A faithful witness does not lie" (14:5). We don't cook up stories or exaggerate matters. The "yes" of a faithful man means "yes," and his "no" is "no!" He assumes responsibility not only for what information he passes on, but also for what impression he leaves, and with what intention. What he speaks is not only true but also the truth. Lasting friendship is the result of unwavering faithfulness. Here's a challenging question: "Many will say they are loyal friends, but who can find one who is really faithful?" (20:6). Faithful friends don't flatter each other (27:5,6). Those who are faithful in business will labour patiently and tirelessly. They will not look for shortcuts for getting rich quick (28:20).

Faithfulness in money matters is incalculably important in the sight of God. Because the love of money is the root of all evil, God considers our faithfulness in financial dealings as the basic qualification to assume any spiritual responsibility. Jesus asks, "If you are unfaithful in worldly wealth, who will trust you with the true riches of Heaven?" (Lk 16:11). He concludes, "Unless you are faithful in small matters, you won't be faithful in large ones" (v 10). Faithfulness in small things is the big thing! Faithfulness in money matters means several things: Not delaying the repayment of loan; Prompt payment of taxes; Cheerful giving to God; Liberality in charity; Not accepting or giving bribe; and so on. Those in Christian ministry must be able to testify like Prophet Samuel (1 Sam 12:3-5) and Apostle Paul (Acts 20:33-35). Matters of dishonesty must be restituted as Zacchaeus volunteered (Lk 19:8).

If at any point of time, due to whatever reason, we stumble in faithfulness, we should not give up but resist the temptation to quit. The encouraging truth is that even if we become unfaithful, God remains faithful, because He cannot deny Himself (2 Tim 2:13). The very Name of our Elder Brother is "Faithful!" (Rev 19:11).

## 6. Patience & Gentleness

As I am writing this article on the 13th September 2003, I see one of my forty pigeons sitting on the window sill of the room upstairs. It's white. How gentle and peaceful are its looks! I pray, "O Dovelike Spirit, take away my rudeness and roughness, and make me gentle like You and the lamblike Son of God!"

Gentleness or meekness and patience have often made a couplet in the Scriptures (Col 3:12; 1 Tim 6:11). Among the word pictures for "gentleness" in the Bible, two are prominent: One is that of a shepherd

"gently leading the mother sheep with their young" (Isa 40:11c); the other is that of a mother "gently feeding and caring for her own children" (1 Thess 2:7b). When we decide to follow Jesus, He enrolls us in the School of Gentleness. He does not teach us from textbooks. As a role model He stands before us beckoning us, "Learn from Me, because I am humble and gentle" (Mt 11:29). When we take our eyes off Him, pride, arrogance, stubbornness, rudeness and the like take possession of us. We lose peace, patience and poise.

Isaac exemplified in gentleness in his patience with those who quarrelled with him over the wells (Gen 26:15-22). Gentleness yields. Later Jesus taught, "If anyone takes away your shirt, give him your coat, too!" (Mt 5:40). We wonder how this would be possible. Will not people take advantage of us? May be, but that's how we can find "rest for our souls" (Mt 11:29). Did not David concerning Jesus sing prophetically, "I am a worm and not a man?" (Psa 26:6a).

Without a spirit of gentleness we cannot be patient with the faults of others. Apostle Paul admonished the Galatian Christians, "Dear brothers and sisters, if another Christian is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path" (Gal 6:1). One main reason why we must be patient with the faults of others is that they may have to be patient with ours! This is illustrated in the example of high priests. Hebrews 5:2, "Because he is human, he is able to deal gently with the people, though they are ignorant and wayward. For he is subject to the same weaknesses they have." King David's failures were unimaginable. God didn't condone his sins but dealt with him redemptively. At the end of his life, he sang to God, "Your gentleness has made me great!" (2 Sam 22:36b). David had to pay heavily for his sin (Prov 6:29), but God's generosity to him is seen in the choice of Bathsheba, among the wives of David, to be Solomon's mother (2 Sam 12:24), even though centuries later Matthew wanted to still call her as Uriah's wife (Mt 1:6). Solomon gratefully remembered his mother often in his Book of Proverbs (Prov 4:3; 1:8). Jesus does not break a bruised reed or quench a smoking flax (Mt 12:20).

A little boy cleaned up his fish tank and let four goldfish in. All of them died one after the other. He was wondering why. An expert discovered the problem. The boy had washed the tank with soap! Sometimes in our zeal to clean up the lives of others, we unfortunately use "killer soaps"--condemnation, criticism, nagging, and fits of temper. We think we are doing right, but our harsh treatment is more than they can bear!

Gentleness is indispensable to those in leadership responsibilities. The temptation to crush the opposers with authority and power will always be there. Moses was a great leader. Matthew Henry (1662-1714) comments, "When God's honour was affected, as in the case of the golden calf, Moses acted as a lion. When his own honour was touched, as in the matter of Aaron and Miriam backbiting him, he was mild as a lamb (Num 12:3)." He did not react but left the matter to God-- "God heard it!" (v 12c). Being their apostle, Paul had every right to authoritatively address the Corinthian Christians when they were opposing him. But he wrote, "I, Paul, plead with you with the gentleness and meekness that Christ Himself would use" (2 Cor 10:1a).

Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892) has made this observation: "John Knox (Scottish Reformer, 1514-1572) did much, but he might perhaps have done more if he had a little love. Martin Luther (1483-1546) was a conqueror, but if he had sometimes mixed a little mildness with it... he might have done more good than he did." The motto of Christlike leadership is: "Behold, your King ... lowly!" (Mt 21:5). This call was given at His first advent. The same call comes to us on the eve of His second coming: "Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand" (Phil 4:5).

## 7. Patience & Self-control

We are exhorted to "add patience to self-control" (2 Pet 1:6). A 16th Century Bishop used to say, "Self-control is nine-tenths of Christianity!" Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865) commented, "Intemperance is one of the greatest--if not the greatest-- of all evils known to mankind." Solomon warned, "A person without self-control is as defenseless as a city with broken-down walls" (Prov 25:28). Uncontrolled temper is an ugly fruit of sin. It's a wolf too ferocious for the flesh to tame. Our only hope is to let Christ transform our temper. Temperance is self-restraint in feelings, words and actions.

One of the paradoxical commandments in the New Testament is, "Be angry, and do not sin!" (Eph 4:26). I understand the meaning of this passage better from a modern paraphrase of the New Testament: "If you are angry, be sure that it is not out of wounded pride or bad temper. Never go to bed angry--don't give the devil that sort of foothold." Wisdom says, "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who conquers a city" (Prov 16:32). As a general rule, the angriest person in a controversy is the one who is wrong!

Tongue-control is supreme when we talk about self-control. "We all make many mistakes, but those who control their tongues can also control themselves in every other way" (Js 3:2). Solomon challenged, "Do you see a man hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him" (Prov 29:20). Someone prescribed, "When angry, count ten before speaking. When very angry, count one hundred and then don't speak!" No matter whether you are on the road or in an argument, when you begin to see red, STOP!

Faultfinding and slander are the worst plagues the Church of Jesus Christ is suffering with. We don't realize--

There's so much good in the worst of us,

And so much bad in the best of us,

That it ill becomes any of us

To find fault with the rest of us!

How we react to slander and abuse measures how Christian we are! Attacks and counterattacks are unproductive. David said, "I am deaf to all their threats. I am silent before them as one who cannot speak. I choose to hear nothing, and I make no reply ... I prayed, O Lord my God, Don't let my enemies rejoice at my downfall" (Psa 38: 13-16). When Shimei cursed David, one of David's men wanted to cut off Shimei's head. But David restrained him with the words, "If the Lord has told him to curse me, who am I to stop him?" (2 Sam 16:5-10).

As we get closer and closer to the end of the age, there will be more and more "slandering without self-control" (2 Tim 3:3b). Let's resist our impatient and impulsive desire to root out all evil instantly. We are not capable of doing a perfect job. We may mistake wheat for weeds! Wait for the Day! (Mt 13:24-30; 1 Cor 4:5).

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