

Love can be hard sometimes

Aim: To show from the scriptures that Christian love involves more than just doing the “pleasant” things. It can also involve doing the “hard” things.

Reading: 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 “*Love suffers long...bears....endures all things.*”¹

Introduction:

For those of you who are parents, have you ever had the experience of having to discipline your child, and for the child to then say something like, “*You hurt me. You don’t love me*”?

At times, the world’s concept of love is limited in scope to scenarios where peace and harmony reign supreme, where no-one does anything to upset anybody else, and where everyone are doing good things for each other. If we lived in a perfect world, with perfect people, then I guess that this is how we could define love.

But the world is not quite like that. People aren’t perfect. And while the things mentioned above do come within the scope of love, a look at the reading from Corinthians shows us that there is more to love than just people doing good things for one another. Some aspects of love relate to areas that would not be described as giving us the “*warm and fuzzies*”. For example;

1 Cor.13:4 “*Love suffers² long....*”

The idea of having to be “long suffering” does not conjure up images of life being all rosy and comfortable. It means that you are going to have to endure something that you would rather not have to endure. And the time-frame that you have to do the enduring may be quite lengthy.

1 Cor.13:5 “*Love does not seek its own....*”

What I would like to see happen may need to be put aside in order that others can have their way³. What I want takes second place.

1 Cor.13:5 “*(Love).....is not provoked⁴....*”

People may say or do things to us that might normally provoke a “knee-jerk” reaction. Love can mean “biting our tongue”, or exercising self restraint and control.

1 Cor.13:7 “*(Love)...bears⁵ all things.....endures all things...*”

Similar to “long suffering” in verse 4. It involves being prepared to put up with things that can be very trying; to put up with frustrating things that could potentially cause us to lose patience.

In this lesson, I would like us to consider the example of Jesus in how He showed these aspects of love towards others, *i.e.* being long-suffering, not seeking His own, enduring all things and bearing all things, in the hope that we can learn from Him (**Ephesians 5:1-2; John 15:12**).

¹ All quoted Biblical references quoted in this lesson are taken from the New King James Version Bible (NKJV).

² Strong’s Concordance, Greek word 3114, “*long spirited*”, “*long suffering*”, “*patiently endure*”

³ This is based on the assumption that, whatever the event or scenario, doing it either your way or the other person’s way are both acceptable to God. We should not yield to another if it means that we sin by doing it their way – e.g. **Galatians 2:5**.

⁴ Strong’s Concordance, Greek word 3947, not “*exasperated*”, not “*easily stirred*”.

⁵ Strong’s Concordance, Greek word 4722, to “*cover with silence*”, to “*endure*”.

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LESSON

1) Jesus and the Disciples

- a) The type of people Jesus chose to be His disciples

The people that Jesus chose to be his disciples had a variety of backgrounds. A couple had previously been disciples of John the baptiser (**John 1:35-37**), and as such, no doubt were already interested in spiritual matters (**John 1:40-41**). Four of them were fishermen (**Matthew 4:18-22**). One was a tax collector (**Matthew 10:3**), and tax collectors were not known for setting high moral standards in society – consider **Matthew 9:9-12**. One was sceptical that anything good could come out of Nazareth (**John 1:46**). One was a political activist⁶ (**Luke 6:15**), while another one was a bit of a thief (**John 12:4-6**).

Some of these men, if not all, would not have been the pick of the crop as far as the religious society was concerned. In fact, it was even recognised that some of them were “*un-educated and untrained men*” (**Acts 4:13**). Like everybody else, they had their failings and shortcomings (**Romans 3:23**). And even though they spent a lot of time with Jesus, there were times when they either didn’t understand, or didn’t pick up on, what He was teaching them.

- b) The disciples were a bit slow to understand some of Jesus’ teachings

When Jesus began to teach His disciples, they didn’t understand everything that He was saying straight away. Even the parables had to be explained to them sometimes – *e.g.* the parable of the sower, **Mark 4:10-20** – see vs.13.

- have you ever been frustrated by having to explain everything you say ?

Jesus spoke of the need for humility (**Matthew 18:4**). But two of the disciples⁷ were keen to have positions of power in Jesus’ kingdom. Their mother asked Jesus if they could sit at His right and left (**Matthew 20:20-24**). But they failed to understand that true greatness is not about who is in charge, but who is the servant (**Matthew 20:25-28**).

Jesus taught them that He *must* go to Jerusalem, where He would suffer many things; that He would be killed, and rise again on the third day. [This was an essential part of God’s plan to redeem mankind - **John 1:29; Acts 4:12**] But the disciples didn’t understand, and Peter went so far as to say, “*May it never be...*” (**Matthew 16:21-23**).

- did he miss the bit about rising again on the third day ?

When Jesus spoke about spiritual food in **John 4:31-33**, His disciples thought that He was talking about physical food.

When a village in Samaria refused to extend hospitality towards Jesus because He was on His way to Jerusalem, the disciples James and John were ready to call fire from heaven to destroy them (**Luke 9:51-54**). They

⁶ Simon the zealot. Strong’s Concordance, Greek word 2208, “*partisan for Jewish political independence*”. Also Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible, Vol. 5, Q-Z, “Zealot”, page 1036

⁷ The latter part of **Matthew 20:22** and verse **24** would suggest that the two sons were “in on it” with their mother.

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obviously missed the bit about Jesus coming to save man, not to condemn man (**John 3:17; Luke 9:56**).

But not only did they mis-understand Jesus at times, they also abandoned Him in His hour of need.

c) The disciples abandoned Him in His hour of need

When Jesus went out to the Mount of Olives with His disciples after having the Passover meal, He was about to face the biggest test of His earthly life (**Philippians 2:8; Hebrews 5:8**). He told His disciples that they would all stumble that night, *i.e.* that they would all be scattered from Him, and that Peter would deny Him (**Matthew 26:31, 34**). Peter and the other disciples⁸ said, “*No way. We’ll stick by you. We won’t deny you*” (**Matthew 26:33, 35** paraphrased - SK).

Now we may think that, because Jesus was (and is) God, and that because He knew that they would all abandon Him, that He didn’t need their company – that He could handle all this on His own. But Jesus was also human, and in this great time of need, He wanted their company. Have a look at **Matthew 26:37-38**;

“And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. Then He said to them, “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with me.””

Does that sound like a man who wanted to be alone? No, it doesn’t. This was the biggest trial of His life on earth, and Jesus wanted the emotional support and companionship of His friends.

But what did they do ? They fell asleep while He prayed – not once, but twice (**Matthew 26:40, 43**). And when the mob came with their clubs and swords (**Matthew 26:47**), the disciples didn’t hang around for long – they “*...all..forsook Him and fled*” - **Matthew 26:56b**.

Later on that night, Peter, the one who so strongly stated that he wouldn’t stumble, that he wouldn’t deny Jesus (**Matthew 26:35**), did just that (**Matthew 26:69-74**).

d) Jesus still loved His disciples

But in spite of these failings, Jesus didn’t abandon His disciples, He still loved them, and He loved them to the end. (**John 13:1, 34**).

In **John 13:5-12**, as Jesus is assembled with the disciples for the Passover meal, He humbled Himself and washed their feet. He did this before He said that one would betray Him (**John 13:21**), so it is safe to assume that He washed even the feet of Judas, knowing full well what Judas was about to do (**John 13:26-30**). He washed the feet of Peter, knowing that Peter would deny Him (**John 13:38**). And He washed the feet of the others, knowing that they too would soon abandon Him (**John 16:32**).

⁸ We sometimes think that, because of **Matthew 26:33**, it was only Peter who said these things. But a look at the latter part of verse **35** shows that all the disciples said similar things.

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2) Jesus and the nation

Not only did Jesus show these qualities of love to His disciples, He also showed them towards those of His own country

a) His countrymen didn't believe Him

We read in **John 1:11** that, "*He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him*". The nation of Israel was the nation that God chose to be His own people (**Deuteronomy 7:6**). This was the nation through whom the Messiah was to come (**Matthew 1:22-23; 2:5-6; John 1:41**).

While there were people who believed and followed Him (**John 10:42**), it seems that from **John 1**, in general terms, the bulk of the people didn't.

- In **John 6:60-66** we can see that many who initially followed Him decided to leave Him when they couldn't understand some of His teachings.
- In **Luke 10:13-14**, we see that He had done mighty works in the Galilean cities of Chorazin and Bethsaida, but they refused to repent (**Matthew 11:20**).
 - it was at Bethsaida that Jesus had fed the 5000 (**Luke 9:10-17**)
 - at various times, people said to Jesus, "*Show us a sign....and we will believe*" (**John 6:30; Luke 11:16; Mark 8:11**). but it seems that even when people did see the signs, they still didn't believe and repent.
- Even some of His own family, His brothers, didn't believe in Him at the time (**John 7:5**⁹).

b) He faced hostile opposition from religious leaders

One would normally expect that the people who would be the most pleased to see the Messiah would be the religious leaders in Israel. However, such was not the case for most of them. Throughout His ministry, in spite of all the miracles that He had done, they questioned His credentials and authority (**Mark 2:5-7; Matthew 21:23**).

- When He explained to them how He was the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies, they were filled with wrath (**Luke 4:16-28**).
- They accused Him of getting His power from Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons – **Matthew 12:24**.
- In **Luke 19:47**, we read how the Chief Priest and the scribes sought to destroy Him.
 - They sent spies to try and catch Him out on His words – **Luke 20:20, 26**.
- His life was in danger more than once;
 - In **Luke 4:29**, He was thrust out of the city of Nazareth (His "home" town) and taken to the top of a cliff so that He could be thrown off.
 - In **Matthew 26:3-4** we see that they tried trickery to kill Him.
 - In **John 10:31**, the people tried to stone Him.

⁹ See **Matthew 13:55** for the names of His brothers.

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If we think that these things did not affect Jesus, have a read of **Luke 13:34**. Later on, in **Luke 19:41-44**, Jesus weeps over the city – not for Himself, but for the people. Jesus had a love and compassion for them (**Matthew 9:36**) - these were lost souls, and He cared about them.

In spite of how He was treated, Jesus still loved them enough to die for them (and us) on the cross. **Romans 5:7-8** says;

“For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love towards us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Jesus was long-suffering with these people. Jesus did not seek His own, was not provoked. He bore all things, He endured all things.

3) Application

As we grow in Christian love, it would be expected that we would be growing in kindness, compassion, gentleness, and doing good things for each other (**Galatians 5:22-23; 6:10**). But we should also expect to be growing in things like, long-suffering, not being easily provoked, bearing and enduring the shortcomings of other people. **Romans 15:1** says;

“We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves.”

This does not mean that we turn a blind eye to sin and error.

- Jesus told the woman caught in adultery not to sin any more (**John 8:11**)
- Jesus rebuked and corrected the Sadducees for their mistaken belief about the resurrection (**Mark 12:18-27**).

If we see people in sin, our love for them should motivate us to help them out of it (**Galatians 6:1**).

- When Paul rebuked the Corinthians for not dealing with the situation where a man was with his father’s wife (**1 Corinthians 5:1-7**), he said that his rebuke was motivated by his love for them (**2 Corinthians 2:4**)¹⁰. He was concerned about their spiritual welfare, and therefore wanted them to repent of their sin of omission (**2 Corinthians 7:9-10**).

So then, our “*bearing with the scruples of the weak*” doesn’t mean that we condone or participate in their sins (**1 Thessalonians 5:22**). Rather, it means that we patiently accept the fact that the weak may need some time to grow and mature – some old habits may be hard to shake off. It

Agape love is about doing what is best for the other person; not what is necessarily best for ourselves.

¹⁰ Sometimes, people will point out the faults of others mostly with the aim of “showing them up”, rather than coming from the motivation of love in trying to help the person out of their sin (**Galatians 6:1**). However, if people say things from wrong motives, then they will have to answer to God for it (**1 Timothy 5:24; Hebrews 4:12**). But whatever a person’s motivation for saying what they say, if what they say is true, then we need to accept the truth of it.

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There will be times when this type of love requires us to do things that we would rather not do. When Paul wrote to the Galatians to correct some of their religious errors, he had a concern that they might consider him as their enemy for telling them the truth (**Galatians 4:16**).

- have you ever felt like that ? Have you ever felt that someone might not like you anymore if you tell them what they need to hear ?
- Love rejoices in the truth (**1 Corinthians 13:6**), it doesn't let error prevail.

There may be times when love requires us to make personal sacrifices for the benefit of peace and harmony¹¹. We are told in **Romans 12:18** that; "*If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.*" But sometimes disputes can arise that are not resolved to our satisfaction. We may feel that we haven't received justice regarding what someone may have done to us. But Paul says in the context of **1 Corinthians 6:1-7** that if need be, "*.....accept (being) wronged. Why not rather let yourself be cheated?*" (vs.7b). Sometimes there are things that we just have to leave in God's hands (**Romans 12:19**).

- Love does not seek its own (**1 Corinthians 13:5**).

The ultimate example of love is Jesus on the cross. No "*warm and fuzzy feelings*" here. No "*feel-good*" emotionalism. This was hard. This was suffering. This was the hard aspects of love in action. What Jesus did at Calvary embodies everything that is said in **1 Corinthians 13:4-7**. This act of love involved enduring the shame (**Hebrews 12:2**), the mockery (**Mark 15:20**), the ridicule (**Matthew 27:42-44**), the injustice (**Mark 15:14-15**) and the pain – both physical and mental (**Matthew 27:26; .Mark 15:34**) – all for the benefit of others.

While enduring these things, Jesus was not provoked. "*...when He was reviled, he did not revile in return, when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously*" – **1 Peter 2:23**.

There are aspects of love that are easy. There are aspects of love that can be very enjoyable. The world may like to focus just on these things as being the attributes of love. But there are also aspects of love that are hard;

- things that require us to be patient and long-suffering;
- things that require us to bite our tongue at times,
- and things that require us to put aside our own needs and desires for the benefit of others.

As we grow and mature in love, we need to grow in these areas as well. And as we do, we may then come to understand and appreciate more the love that God has shown towards us (**Ephesians 3:14-19**).

¹¹ We should never compromise truth in order to have peace and harmony – **Galatians 2:14; Acts 4:19; 1 Thessalonians 2:4**.