

Study in 1st Corinthians 13 - Part 2

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Date: 01 January 2000

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- [0 : 00] Now, seeking the Lord's blessing, we'll turn to the first epistle of Paul to the Corinthians and chapter 13.
- 1 Corinthians chapter 13. And verse 4.
- 1 Corinthians 13 and verse 4. The first part of that verse. Charity suffereth long. Or love is long-suffering.
- Charity suffereth long. Now, we began some weeks back to look at this chapter, one of the best-known chapters, I suppose, in the Bible.
- And we saw how the Holy Spirit had given very different gifts to all the Lord's people in the congregation in Corinth, even as he gives different gifts to his own people everywhere.
- [1 : 07] And we saw the problem that arose in connection with it. That some people began to emphasize the spectacular gifts over and above the gifts that weren't so spectacular.
- For example, the spectacular gifts were the ability to speak in foreign languages, the ability to perform miracles, and to heal, and so on.
- These were special gifts which God gave the church in its period of being instituted after Christ's resurrection. And an emphasis fell on those gifts.
- And there was less emphasis on gifts such as being able to help people or to organize or to be tender or whatever and so on. The spectacular got more attention.
- And as can often happen, the people who actually possessed those spectacular gifts became, as Paul says, puffed up with them. They began to acquire some kind of sense of their own importance, and they began to consider themselves somehow indispensable.
- [2 : 16] Now, Paul is reminding the Corinthians in chapters 12 right through to 14 that God gives different gifts to different people in order that they might all help the church of Christ as a whole and contribute towards the building up of the body.
- In other words, God's gifts are to build up and to edify and not to pull down and to destroy. And in fact, he turns around to the Corinthians and says, the way that you treat one another with respect to their gifts, how you minimize some and how you exalt others, demonstrates that your love itself is declining.
- And that, to me, the apostle says, is far more important than gifts that you possess or don't possess. Because there are many gifts that we can have and still end up in our lost eternity.
- But to have, if we have true Christian love, then indeed we shall be saved. And no man is saved without it. In other words, gift isn't just, love isn't just a gift, it's a grace.
- It's an essential grace. And without it, we cannot inherit the kingdom of God. And he shows its importance as we looked at last time in verses 1 to 3 here, and I'll just read them with you.
- [3 : 41] Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels and have not charity, I am become a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. Now, I attempted to explain that last time.

I'll just say briefly this, that supposing God gave me the ability, miraculously, to speak the gospel in every single language, in heaven or on earth, if I still don't have Christian love, then I'm just making a noise.

At the end of the day, that's all it means. Verse 2, 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 and have not love, I am nothing.

Again, we're reminded by that that there were many people in the Old Testament and in the New who had the power to perform miracles, and they had a kind of belief in God that enabled them to perform miracles.

The Spirit came down upon certain people like Balaam in such a way that he prophesied, but these things didn't change the nature of those people. It didn't change their hearts. It didn't reconcile them to God.

[4 : 48] There were things that came down from above and touched them, but didn't change them. And so if we have all these powers or understandings, yet, if we don't have true Christian love, we are nothing in God's eyes.

Nothing. And finally, he says in verse 3, Though I give all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned and have not love, it profits me nothing.

In other words, I could do a thousand acts of kindness. I could even give my very life for a cause. But if all that is not motivated and animated by a true spirit of Christian love, even that itself profits me nothing.

And Paul is therefore taking their eyes off the miraculous and the things that have display and connection with them, and he's taking us right to the inward principle of holy Christian love.

If that's there, all's well, because love is the fulfillment of the law. But if it's not there, then all is lost. Now, he turns from that then to actually describe this love for us.

[5 : 59] And it's, of course, very helpful for us that he does that. He doesn't just tell us how important it is in verses 1 to 3, but he tells us what this love is actually like in verses 4 to 8.

Charity suffers long. It is kind. It does not envy. And so on. Now, he describes it really here as you see it working in a person's life.

It's not what you would call a logical definition of love that he gives, but he gives a kind of descriptive definition of it. He tells us what it is like and how it works.

And I think he does it especially in relation to the problems that were going on in Corinth. And he shows them how all these problems can be rooted down to lovelessness.

And you have a list of the problems in chapters 1 right up to 14. The whole church was full of problems. It was wracked by division, contempt for its teachers.

[6 : 58] There was immorality in the church. There was misunderstanding of a lot of teachings. People putting themselves first, misuse of the Lord's Supper, all these things.

But the apostle says a lot of it is rooted in this, just a lack of love in the heart of the Lord's people. Now, I don't think I can overemphasize the importance of the whole thrust of what the apostle is saying here.

Not just at a theoretical level, but a practical level for our own Christian walk and discipleship today. That we really look at what this love is requiring of you and me.

How it demands that we live and show forth the love and the character of God to the world that is around us. Now, let's begin with this one.

I'm not going to give a sermon, as it were, absolutely to each one. But on some of them I will. And we'll look at the first one. Charity suffereth long. Or love is long-suffering.

- [7 : 59] Long-suffering. Now, that's something that's quite often commanded in the word of God. Something that's commanded as being a part of a holy character.
- Part of a holy walk. Part of a holy life. For example, in Colossians chapter 3, verses 12 and 13. The apostle Paul tells us to put on long-suffering as a garment of clothing.
- To put it on and to make sure that we wear it as one of the garments that belong to a holy life. Long-suffering. Now, maybe to take that figure of clothing and maybe to change it a little bit.
- I think you could describe love in many ways as a kind of garment. And when you stand at a distance from it, I suppose it looks like one color.
- But when you get up to it closely, you can see that there are many different strands of different colors that make up the one overall impression from a distance.
- [9 : 07] Now, you all know what I mean. I'm sure you've all got clothing like that. That from a distance is just one color. Close up, it is a finely interwoven fabric of many different threads and many different colors.
- Now, love is just like that. Love is just like that. And to put on love or to work at love or to develop Christian love means that you give attention to many different threads and fabrics.
- The person, in other words, who's weaving that cloth, he has to deal with the different colors and the fabrics. He's got to put them in the right place. Even if the one overall impression is one of love, but he still, in making the garment, he has to be careful how he makes it.
- And so must you. There are many individual threads and garments that go into, individual threads that go into making the garment of love. And long-suffering is one of them.
- Long-suffering is one of them. And I suppose another word sometimes people use for long-suffering is patience. But it's actually more definite than patience.
- [10 : 13] What long-suffering is, is this. It's patience in connection with suffering wrong at the hands of other people.
- Not patience in connection with your providence or with ill health or anything like that. But long-suffering is patience in connection with suffering wrong at the hands of other people.
- Now, you know the kind of thing I mean. For example, you can be ridiculed. You can be insulted. You can be misrepresented.
- Your faults can be exaggerated. People can backbite or speak evil about you. And so on. The list is endless. And it can happen in your home. It can happen at the hands of your brothers or sisters.
- It can happen at your workplace with office struggles and with power struggles. It can happen in your school. Some people have often said that they never suffered as much at the hands of people as they suffered during their school days.
- [11 : 19] And that can well be true. Some children, as we know, can be very cruel and heartless in the way that they deal with others. But long-suffering has to do with how we bear all that.
- It has to do with how we respond to it and how we bear it. And it's part of true Christian love without which we are nothing. Part of Christian love without which we are nothing.
- Now, to long-suffer that means, as the word itself tells us, that we're able to suffer it or to endure it. And we're able to go on suffering it and enduring it.
- Now, I think, again, this needs constant emphasis that how we respond to things like that is a very visible thing in your life and mine.

In fact, it is really the visible garment of our Christianity. We lay the spiritual foundation very often in private. The very spiritual heart and core of our Christian life, well, most of that is laid in private.

[12 : 24] It is in the secret place. It is between ourselves and God. It comes from fellowship and communion with our God and Father in heaven and with the Lord Jesus Christ.

It comes from reading the word and coming to the throne of grace. That's where the spiritual foundation is laid. But that's in private. But the life that we live in the presence of men, that's the light that we are to allow to shine in the presence of men.

You remember how Christ said, Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and that they may glorify your Father which is in heaven.

And in the very same sermon, Christ reminds the people that their personal devotion before God and their personal prayers must be private and must not be public.

Now, we're liable to turn all that around as though our holiness was a private thing. But that's not so.

[13 : 54] Coming into the presence of God will be seen openly. But the coming into the presence of God must be done secretly. Now, there's an important difference. I wouldn't want to confuse anybody.

That doesn't mean that we shouldn't come to church and things of that kind. Of course, it doesn't mean that. There is a very public coming together to pray. But your private devotion must be your business and yours alone.

Remember how the Pharisees twisted all this around. They didn't care whether they long suffered or short suffered anybody. But they were very careful to do their private prayers standing on the street corner.

So that they would be seen of men. And the Lord says, they have their reward. The kind of reward that they expect. Well, they have their own reward. But you, he says, do it in secret.

And your reward shall be openly. Now, let's always remember that the spiritual foundation is laid between ourselves and God. But it must be developed outwardly.

[14 : 52] I'll say a little bit more about developing it later. So then, here you are. You're insulted. You're spoken against. You're ridiculed. Your faults are taken up and exaggerated.

And people are speaking evil about you. And that is a very practical day-to-day thing that meets you in your Christian life. And how you deal with it is part of the visible garment that men see. Now, the first thing that we have to do is this.

To deal with the people who are doing that. Deal with them gently. And it's interesting in the Bible that gentleness and long-suffering always go together.

And we're even told to rebuke with gentleness. Now, sometimes, as we know in life, you have to be, in a way, pretty kind of severe. Sometimes, when things get out of hand.

But there's still a certain mild kind of severity. And even when things go very far, you must still be gentle in your dealings with the people. Always showing that you have a care for their good, a concern for their well-being, and a desire to redeem them to a better course of life.

[16 : 00] So we must deal gently with these people. And that reminds us of the importance of keeping ourselves in a proper spirit all the time.

It takes two to quarrel. And if one person's not interested in a fight, a fight won't begin. It always takes two to quarrel. You keep your own spirit quiet and keep it gentle.

And remember what Proverbs tells us. Now, let me say just now that as we go through 1 Corinthians 13, I'm going to be referring very, very frequently to the book of Proverbs.

And I would like nothing better than for everyone here, myself included, to make a habit of reading the book of Proverbs, especially from chapter 10 through to the end of that book.

Even as they used to teach it, along with the Psalms in schools, there's a good reason for that. The book of Proverbs is just a handbook for daily living and for encountering different situations daily.

[17 : 00] Look what Proverbs chapter 15, 1 says. A soft answer turns away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger.

Now, there's a very straightforward proverb, and how often we know it, that if you give a soft answer to a provocation, it can turn away someone's anger.

But if you respond to grievous words with grievous words, it stirs up anger. And the thing acquires suddenly a life of its own, and it goes out of all proportion.

Many such quarrels you can stop by just responding in a soft way to it. The same chapter and verse 18 tells us this, Proverbs 15, 18. A wrathful man stirs up strife, but he that is slow to anger appeases strife.

Now, anger is just a very and an awkward situation. Hence the importance of keeping our own spirit right, even if someone else's spirit has gone wrong.

[18 : 08] You maintain gentleness, and you belong suffering, and it will very often turn away wrath. And then again, there's this. Not only should we be gentle in our dealings with those who oppose us, but we should reprove them, and reprove them very carefully.

Leviticus chapter 19 tells us this, and it's a very interesting commandment. Leviticus 19 and verse 16.

Now, there's a connection here between rebuking someone and being a tale-bearer. Now, you know what a tale-bearer is? It's someone who hears a story about someone else and goes and carries it to another person.

Usually with a measure of delight in it. He can hardly refrain himself from spreading it. Now, Leviticus 19, 16 says this, Thou shalt not go up and down as a tale-bearer among thy people.

Neither shalt thou stand against the blood of thy neighbour. Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart, but thou shalt rebuke thy neighbour and not suffer sin upon him.

[19 : 23] You shalt not avenge nor bear a grudge against the children of your people, but you shalt love your neighbour as yourself. Now, you have an enormous wealth of practical Christian teaching in that.

An enormous wealth. If we would just meditate on that. You shalt not avenge yourself nor bear a grudge. You shalt not hate your brother in your heart, but you will rebuke him and not allow sin upon him.

And you must not go down as a tale-bearer among your people. Now, all these things are related. And they're related like this. If you're going to properly rebuke someone, what you do is, let's say someone has insulted you or spoken evil of you behind your back.

You must not go and take that tale to another. What you must do is, come aside to your brother and just tell him. Just tell him what you have done and that you have heard about the thing and that you're sorry about the thing and that you wish he had not said it and you would be appreciative if he would not do it again.

And it would be good in some way to remind him that ultimately an offence against anyone is an offence against God. And to make clear to that brother that you're not going to fall out with him, you're not going to keep it up, you're not going to make a record of it, as far as you're concerned, you're going to put it behind you and that that is the end of the matter.

[20 : 49] You're going to rebuke in that spirit and in that way. Now, sometimes I suppose you ask, well, should I always rebuke? Well, I think you have to stop and think.

For example, if it's a one-off thing that the person himself knows, it's probably better just buried and forgotten about. If it's something that the person isn't aware of as being particularly wrong or if it's habitual, he's doing it again and showing every sign of doing it again, well, yes, you certainly should.

Because as Leviticus tells us, you mustn't allow his sin to rest on him. You mustn't allow him to go on ignorant of the thing in that kind of way. So you need to think. And then again, there's this, if it festers in you or if it's going to trouble you, then certainly yes.

Because notice that connection between avenging yourself, being a tailbearer and rebuking your brother. See, sometimes you can say to yourself, well, I'm just going to leave it be.

But really you're not leaving it be. And what it's doing is it's festering down here and it's coming back at you. Maybe day after day it's coming back. And that festering sore can quickly grow.

[22 : 04] And it can become tailbearing. It can become vengeance. Returning evil for evil. Doing to him as he did to you.

Beginning to think about him as he thought about you. And so on. So the way to avoid tailbearing and to avoid vengeance is very often just dealing personally and quietly with your brother about the thing that has gone wrong.

But I'll say this. That if you're going to do it in a bad spirit, it is better not to do it at all. And just to leave it be and let it wash over you.

Because there's nothing worse than coming up to a person and seething with anger and giving a rebuke that's just coming out of nothing but raw fleshly anger.

And as you well know very often it just comes back on yourself. And it shines through. If we rebuke in the wrong spirit, then it shines through.

[23 : 01] So we should gently deal with him and gently rebuke. And then again we should do this. We should commit ourselves to the justice of God.

There's a thousand things in this life that we can't really deal with. Many, many things to do with ourselves and to do with our sufferings that we can't deal with.

And sometimes we just have to recognize that God is God. And that he sits on the throne of the universe. And that he is ruling and ruling well, ruling justly.

And in this we follow the example of Christ. Now these again are very important words. In 1 Peter chapter 2 and verse 23. We're told this.

And servants are here told to be ready to suffer many injustices at the hands of their masters. Because, he says, you were called to this. Because Christ also suffered.

[24 : 01] Leaving us an example that you should follow in his steps. He did no sin. Neither was guile found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he didn't revile again.

When he suffered, he didn't threaten the person. But he committed himself to him that judgeth righteously. Now there's a beautiful thing in that. This is faith. What faith does is it goes to God with the thing.

Committing yourself to the righteous judge. Him that judgeth righteously. Now that's a test of your faith and mine. And it's as simple as that. It's a test of our faith.

You know, God is invisible at the end of the day. And sometimes when a wrong is done to you, you want visible things to come into place. And you want to work with visible things.

And you want it in your own hands. But what faith says is this. Is that I believe in a providence that is ruling this world. And I believe that sometimes, even if it takes years, God has his way of righting wrongs.

[25 : 04] Putting injustices right. And as it were, putting the whole balance sheet the way it ought to be. I believe that. Because God rules. And he rules righteously.

In other words, it's a test of your faith. Whether you take vengeance into your hands. Or whether you leave a matter with God. It's simply a test of faith. Some people act in this world. I suppose we all do sometimes.

As though God didn't exist. As though there was no overall providence. As though there was no overall judge. In other words, if I don't vindicate myself. If I don't get back at this person. If I don't declare to the world the truth of the whole situation.

In all its gory details. Then what are people going to think of me? Well, the question, the answer to that is. Is what people think of you the most important thing in the world? Is that the most important thing, what people think of you?

Is it what they think of me? Did Christ spend hours vindicating himself on the cross? Did he spend hours lecturing Pontius Pilate as to what his lifestyle was actually like?

[26 : 06] They called him a glutton. They called him a drunkard. They called him a madman. They called him possessed with a devil. They called him Beelzebub. They said he was a friend of sinners. Did he go along giving huge orations about what he was actually like?

No. He let it be. He let it be. Knowing that his life would speak for itself. And that one day his righteousness, as Psalm 37 says, would be clearly shown as in the light of the noon day.

Psalm 37 says this. Set thy trust upon the Lord and be thou doing good. Now that's your part. Don't worry about consequences.

Set your trust upon the Lord and be doing good. And God will bring it to pass. Like unto the light he shall thy righteousness display.

And he thy judgment shall bring forth like noontide of the day. Rest in the Lord. Patiently wait for him. And don't fret for the one who gets success in sin prospering in his way.

[27 : 12] Commit yourself to the righteous justice and providence of God. Now sometimes, I don't want to be simplistic in all this. I know that sometimes that there are grave things that can arise that have consequences beyond yourself or beyond your own reputation and so on.

But rather than go into the intricacies of that right now, what I wish to emphasize is this. That the whole thrust of the script here from beginning to end says this.

That it's better to suffer much yourself for the sake of peace rather than to use your rights in self-defense or self-justification or whatever.

The reason is obvious. The more we act that way in terms of justifying self and so on, the more we deepen hostilities and it often does more harm than good.

Whereas a soft answer turns away wrath. Leave these things alone. You know, insults and provocations, things of that are like mud. You're better just to let them dry and then you can shake them off.

[28 : 19] When you deal with them when they're wet, it's very difficult. Just leave them to dry and very often you'll find that you can just shake them off. Don't deal with anything in wrath.

You know, if you love a person, you'll put up with a lot. You can see that with your own children. You love your children. You bear with a lot in your children. But sometimes, you know, when you don't have love to a person, you don't find it so easy to bear.

But if you make an effort to love a person, you'll put up with a lot. But listen again to the book of Proverbs. I just want to quote a few verses to you from the book about how we should be ready to put up with people's faults and failings.

And provocations is stronger than faults and failings. For example, Proverbs 19 and verse 11 says this. The discretion or the wisdom of a man defers his anger.

In other words, he makes a conscious point to put off anger. It is his glory to pass over a transgression. Now listen to that. Listen to that. Proverbs 20 verse 3.

[29 : 42] We're told this. It is an honor for a man to cease from strife. But a fool will be meddling. In other words, it's the fool who always goes around meddling in strife and controversy that belongs to other people.

But it is an honor for a man to stop striving. Not a shame. You know, there are some people who think their own whole reputation goes down the tube if they cease to strife. Cease to strife and it is an honor.

It is a fool who meddles. How often, friends, have all of us been caught dabbling in things that just don't belong to us? And we make all kinds of reasons for saying that they belong to us when they don't belong to us.

Ask some very old, mature Christians and they will tell you just that. To recognize when a business is yours and when a business is not yours. It can make all the difference in the world.

Proverbs 10 and verse 12 again says this. Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all sins.

[30 : 51] Now hear that again. Hatred stirs up strife. And how well we know that. If you hear something about someone you don't like, it's quite easy to put your tuppenceworth in there, isn't it?

It's quite easy to go and spread the tail and mix it along because you don't have much time for the person anyway. But if you love the person, you will cover the sin.

Now, I suppose that word has to be understood. That doesn't mean that you lie about it or cover up about it. That's not what it means. But it means that with your own forgiveness, you will blot it.

You will look away from it. That's what God does when he covers our sins. He puts the forgiveness of Christ, he puts the blood of Christ upon it and looks away from it. We look away from it. Many things done to us, we must look away from it.

Because love covereth all things. Now, you say, well, this is a very hard standard to maintain. Well, I think there are some things to help us.

[31 : 49] And I'd like to give four brief ones. First of all, when things like this come your way, I think one of the most important things to remember is this, that God appoints your insults and your provocations.

He allows them in your life and in your portion. In other words, these insults are rooted in a strange way in the mercy and in the love of God.

The malice of men is permitted in the mercy of the Master. The malice of men is permitted by the mercy of the Master.

In other words, hard as it is for you to understand of me, God says that's what you need right now in your life. That's what you need.

If it wasn't, I wouldn't give it to you. He doesn't willingly afflict the children of men, but you need it right now in your life. And you can cry out to God and say, I don't need this in my life.

[32 : 53] But God says by giving it to you, yes, you do need it in your life. And here it is. We often think of our lives in the Christian life as a chastisement or a discipline.

It's a whole life of discipline. And we need rough edges taken off. And there may be a reason for what you've got, for your insult and provocation. You needn't think of yourself as absolutely undeserving of it all.

In fact, there might be something very glaring that has caused it. Maybe you've been responsible for putting that in someone else before. You can often forget that, you see, when a trouble comes. You might forget the fact that you are responsible for putting insults and provocations on someone else.

God appoints it for you. And so you've got to look by faith behind the malice of the person who's doing it onto the goodness of God who's allowing it.

And I think one of the best illustrations in the Bible of that is simply David when Shimei was throwing stones at him. Now, that was a hard portion for David.

[33 : 55] And what Shimei was saying was this. He says, you're a man of blood anyway. And you took the throne from that man Saul. And of course, he was of Saul's family. You took the kingdom of it, of him.

And you did it by deceit. And you did it by crookedness. And your own rebellion in your own family at the hand of Absalom is nothing but your own retribution upon your own head for it.

And he picked up the stones and threw them at David. He wouldn't have done that before. And one of David's captains came to him and said, why should a dead dog like this curse you?

Let me take off his head. And David said, you sons of Zeruah, what have I got in common with you? Very often he said to them that they were too bloody for him, as it were.

Their attitude didn't seem to be right at all. He said, God has said to this man, curse David. God said it to him. And why should I? He says, not let it be.

[34 : 52] God allowed it to be. God let him give vent to this at this time. And that's my portion. And I'm going to take it as my portion. I'm not going to take vengeance for what this man says about myself.

I'll leave it. I'll leave it be. Shammai was to suffer for it, of course, later in his life. But David, at this point, just let it be. And very often we just have to do that, recognizing that God's in it.

David said God's in it. And of course, you know, you can't get over this, that there was part, partly truth in what Shammai said. It wasn't part truth because it was only part truth because David hadn't taken the kingdom from Saul illegitimately.

But you'll remember that David had made a great transgression with Bathsheba and her husband. And it was because of that that Absalom rebelled in David's own household.

The sword was not going to depart from his house because of that sin. And David had the meekness to acknowledge, yes, I must go through many things in this life, some of which I have brought upon myself.

[35 : 58] And I will leave it be. Who am I to take off this man's head for insulting me when God is appointed? Look at what God's appointed. And sometimes ask yourself, what's God saying to me through this?

Is there something in my life I need to put right? Have I been careless in my dealings with others? And so on. Ask yourself the questions instead of being ready to retaliate. And then again, there's this.

God's dealings with us are full of long-suffering. In fact, when God showed Moses his glory in Exodus 34, that was one of the things that belonged to his name, that he was long-suffering.

Long-suffering. And he's long-suffering to the world. How many blasphemies arise this Sunday all over the world in the ears of God? How many people will take Christ's name in vain in the town of Stornoway itself on this, the Lord's day?

How often is God provoked? How often is God insulted? And yet we're told that God sends his reign and he sends his son upon the just and upon the unjust.

[37 : 04] He gives them food. He gives them clothing. He gives them shelter. And he bears with them. And not only that, but his own people too. You're a Christian in here today. How often do you provoke God?

In your thoughts you provoke him. In your words you provoke him. And yet he long-suffers you. Doesn't he? He long-suffers you. Should you not long-suffer someone else.

That goes back to our second reading. It's a very vivid parable. Here's a king. And this man owes him so many talents. Just take it that it's millions of pounds because that's what it comes to.

The whole sum comes to millions of pounds. And the king demands those millions of pounds from the man there and then. And the man says, have patience with me. And he forgave the man.

He forgave the man the debt. And then the man goes straight out of the king's presence. And he meets someone who owes him what comes to a few pounds in our currency. And he says, give me those few pounds.

[38 : 05] And the man says, have patience with me and I'll pay it. And he had no patience with him. And he got arranged for him to be thrown into prison. And of course when the king heard about it, he called him back and said, what do you mean?

And he says, I freely forgave you millions of pounds debt. And for the sake of a few pounds, you go and put your own fellow servant in prison. When he's only the same as you.

And I am the king. And so that person was then taken. And he was delivered to the tormentors. And Christ says these solemn words. That so God shall do to us if we don't forgive from our heart our brothers their trespasses.

How dare you, when God every day forgives your sins, refuse to bear with the sins of your brother? How dare we not cover the many wrongs that are done to us when God covers yours every day?

That's the point. That is the point. And it's very strong. And it's very powerful. And I think a point in the parable that emphasizes it is that the man came straight out from the presence of his king to refuse his own fellow servant.

[39 : 16] Do you notice it? It's as though being in God's very presence seemed to have little effect. I wonder if it's true that sometimes you can rise up from a reading of the Bible and go straight into dealing with someone in a way that you shouldn't at all.

God long suffers. And you should long suffer because God long suffers you. And then again, I suppose, just connected to that, I mentioned already the way Christ long suffered.

How many things he was called, but he just committed himself to God. You know, it wasn't easy for the Son of God to be considered by almost everybody in the earth as a drunkard and as a glutton and so on.

A blasphemer and a deceiver. But he just committed himself to God. The last thing I want to say is this. That this love, if you can develop it, and I'll say a little about that before I close.

This love becomes an immunity when you acquire it. Because it puts you out of the reach of your enemies. I remember reading once about communists who were torturing a Christian believer in Russia.

- [40 : 29] And every time they were torturing him, all he would do was pray for them. And that eventually broke their resolve. Because when a person is really wanting to get you, the last thing that he wants to see is the fact that it doesn't really put you up or down.
- He wants to see you riled by a thing. But when he sees you're not riled by it, it has a strange way of breaking their resolve. And Proverbs 16, I think, has something in connection with that.
- Proverbs 16, 32. He that is slow to anger is better than a mighty man. And he that rules his spirit is better than he that takes a city.
- He that rules his spirit is better than he that takes a city. Now what that says is that, of course, a person who takes a city has power. But if you learn to rule your own spirit, that is real self-control and power.
- It is real freedom. It is real discipline. See, when you reach that place where it doesn't matter to you what people say about you, you're just committed to God, you have peace and you have freedom.
- [41 : 40] As long as you bristle with irritation at what people do to you, you've got no freedom. You're anxiously trying to vindicate yourself here. You're anxiously trying to get your reputation across there.
- You're putting out a lot of sweat trying to get a good picture of yourself across. Leave it. Forget your reputation. Concentrate on your character. Concentrate on your character. And leave your reputation with God.
- Once you learn this kind of long-suffering, you've conquered a city. The city of your own heart. You've learned self-control, spiritual discipline.
- And you leave matters with the Lord. Well, how do you acquire it? Very, very briefly. And lastly, this by prayer and by practice.
- I want to close by reminding us that this long-suffering is a fruit of the Spirit. Look at it there in Galatians 5. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace.
- [42 : 38] Long-suffering. God alone can give it to you. And that's where we go back to the secret place. That's where true spirituality is built.
- That's where it is made. That's where it is fashioned. One to one with God. In the means of grace. Pray for long-suffering. And practice your long-suffering.
- Practice love. Love. Some people balk at that expression that we can't practice love. Of course you can't practice at love. You can work at your love. Even as you work at your faith.
- Even as you work at your hope. You can work at your love. If you just think of love as a feeling, well, you've got no control. Or little control. But if you think of love as a set of principles and practices that you're to work out in your life, and they're hard.
- Don't think of love as an easy option. I said that before. It's not contrasted to holiness. It is holiness. It is holiness. It is a work and a labor.
- [43 : 40] If you can prayerfully and practically labor at this love, oh, friend, you'll conquer a city. And it'll be a garment. Let your light so shine before men that they may see you good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven.
- Make sure the thread of long-suffering is there. Let us pray. Lord, our God, teach us to bear many injuries and to bear them in a right way.
- And even if we have sometimes to deal with a matter in a formal way, may we do so reluctantly. And may we do so in a spirit of love, care, and kindness.
- Always seeking the edification of the church of Christ and the purification of the person that we are dealing with and seeking to guard our own souls.

Oh, Lord, this is a gift from thyself. And it is not a garment that nature can weave or produce. And help is therefore to be much in the secret place that we might grow to be like Christ himself.

[44 : 47] For he is the true long-suffering man. We ask thee the forgiveness of our sins. For Christ's sake. Amen.