

Christian Love in Action (Part 1)

1 Cor 13:1-13 (text: v.4a)

Pre-recorded video message for Members of the
Reformed Church of Wainuiomata

For listening on the morning of 3rd May 2020 (sixth Sunday after
lockdown started)

(Sermon put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due
acknowledgement)

Reading before the service: **Ps 34:1-3**

I will extol the Lord at all times; his praise will always be on my lips. ²My soul will boast in the Lord; let the afflicted hear and rejoice. ³ Glorify the Lord with me; let us exalt his name together.

START OF SERVICE

- 1 Votum: Our help is in the Name of the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.
- 2 Greeting: Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father & from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.
- 3 **StlL 103b (= Blue Ps/H 204)** “O come, my soul, bless thou the LORD thy Maker...”
- 4 Congregational Prayer
- 5 Readings: 1 Cor 13:1-13 (text: v.4a)

And I will show you a still more excellent way.

The Way of Love

13 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³ If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

⁴ Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

⁸ Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰ but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. ¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. ¹² For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

¹³ So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

6 Sermon

Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,
We have had almost five weeks of lockdown (which was at level 4 of restricted movement).

Now we are in the first week of level 3, which still allows for us only restricted movement.

So, some of us are still working from home (and in our “bubble”).

Well, I wonder how things are going in our homes.

I’ll tell you why I say this.

You see, in the past weeks of lockdown, as I was taking my dog for his regular walks along the creeks and through our neighbourhood, I met people along my way who were mostly kind and, as far as I could see, at peace!

But here’s a sad thing, for, you see, along my way, there’s one house from which I regularly hear angry shouts – parents swearing at one another, adults swearing at the children, children yelling back. How shocking, devastating – and terribly sad! A couple of times I have even seen the police visiting that house!

My brother & sister (and dear children), sadly, in that home, love is not only rare – no, it seems it’s totally non-existing!

And, not being able to do anything tangible about those people’s situation, I have often prayed for that home!

Now, by God’s grace, I don’t expect any of the homes in our church family to be at that sad level, bereft of love! Nevertheless, I thought you & I might do well by having another good look at the words of our passage (of 1 Cor 13:4-7) in which fifteen characteristics of love are mentioned!

Now, because we will not be able to cover all fifteen in one sermon, I have entitled this sermon as *Part 1* of “Christian Love in Action.”

And here are the three points of our sermon...

- Love is Patient
- Love is Kind
- Love is Not Jealous

Love is Patient

In by far the most English versions of the Bible, our text says, “***Love is patient...***”

Now, one could argue that if love *is* patient, it does not necessarily mean that love *shows* (*acts out or lives*) patience!

But did you know that, in the original language, it does not say “Love *is* patient” – no, it says “Love *shows (acts out)* patience.” In fact, this is true for all fifteen characteristics of love mentioned in verses 4 to 7, i.e. love *acts out* patience, love *acts out* kindness, love does not *act jealously*, etc.” You see, in the Greek text, all fifteen characteristics are given not as *adjectives* but as *verbs*, i.e. as action words!

Now, having said all that, one has to admit that for love to *show (act out)* patience, it must also *be* patient!

For this reason, then, have most English Bible versions conveniently translated, “Love *is* patient, love *is* kind, and *is not jealous...*” etc.

So, *love is patient!*

What is patience?

Well, gauging by the languages in which the Bible have originally been written, patience is *length of breath*,¹ and *taking long to get hot in the face*.²

So, patience as characteristic of love is: to hold your breath/words long; yes, *to wait patiently on others and circumstances, rather than getting angry and act prematurely without due regard for the interests of others*.³ Yes, patience will endure evil, injury and provocation... and... *wait and wish for the transformation in a brother or sister rather than fly out in resentment of his/her behaviour!*⁴

Of course, some words in older English express patience in the same way – words like longsuffering, and forbearance.

Question: To *whom* will you & I show patience?

¹ μακροθυμεῖ present indicative act 3 s of μακροθυμέω **be patient**, exhibit internal and external control in difficult circumstance, long-suffering (Mt 18:26, 29; 1Co 13:4; 1Th 5:14; Heb 6:15; Jas 5:7^(2x), 8; 2Pe 3:9+); **2. delay in**, be slow in (Lk 18:7+). But the noun μακροθυμία comes from μάκρος - long – and θύμος - breath/soul/life (cf. Liddell & Scott, 1972:323, 423).

² Also cf. the Hebrew expression “His nose got hot” אַגְרָה אֲגִיר־אַנְפָס & “length of nose” מִזְמָרָה i.e. “slow to anger.” See the next footnote for examples.

³ Johnson, A. F. (2004). [1 Corinthians](#) (Vol. 7, pp. 239–258). Westmont, IL: IVP Academic.

⁴ My adaptation of the words of Henry, M. (1994. [Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume](#) (pp. 2267–2269). Peabody: Hendrickson) “...that shall rather wait and wish for the reformation of a brother than fly out in resentment of his conduct.”

Answer: To the same people to whom we show love!

And who are they?

Well, they are (as God's Word says) your & my neighbour!

And who is my neighbour?

Well, gauging by our Lord's parable of the Good Samaritan, your/my neighbour is everyone who crosses our path: e.g. the elderly person who is a bit slow in front of us at the checkout in Countdown or Pak 'n Save; the customs official who screens & checks your luggage at the airport; the colleague who is new to the job and whose performance slows you down; your team mate who is still learning how to play the game on the sport field. But here are the immediate ones with whom you & I shall be slow to anger: all those in your lockdown "bubble" with whom we're sharing the same bathroom, kitchen and lounge!

And look, because love is patient, does it not follow that patience is part of the double-love commandment? Yes, if I say I love God Triune for all He has done for me, then, moved/driven by that love, should I not love – and be patient with – my neighbour!?

Love is patient!

Question: Why does our text list "patience" as the first characteristic of love?

Well, is that not because God, out of love for His own, is (as the Bible says) ***compassionate and gracious, patient*** (literally: **slow to anger**) ***and (yes) abounding in love!***?⁵

Indeed, as someone has said so well, *Patience is the red carpet upon which God's gracious love approaches us.*⁶

⁵ cf. Ex 34: 6 (and many other similar passages) ***The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.*** Also cf. Num. 14:18; 2 Chr. 30:9; Neh. 9:17; Ps. 86:15; 103:8; 111:4; 112:4; 116:5; 145:8; Joel 2:13.

Also cf. God's love for His elect described in 2 Pt 3:9 says, ***He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.***

⁶ My slight amendment to the words of LUCADO, M. 2002. A love worth giving: living in the overflow of God's love. Nashville, TE : W Publishing Group. p.15.

My brother & sister, if this is so (and it is), does it then not follow that every human being who loves God through Jesus Christ *will* also have/show patience?

After all, look, is patience not listed as a fruit of the Spirit (in Gal 5:22),
“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness and self-control...”⁷

I pray that that's you & me through a heartfelt surrender to our Lord Jesus Christ!

Well that was the first characteristic of love – love is patient. Here's the next...

Love is Kind

Again, our text literally says, *love acts kindly*.⁸ And, as said before: Love *acts* kindly, because love *is* kind!

Well, is it a wonder that love expresses itself in kindness!?

You see, kindness too is a fruit of the Holy Spirit listed in Gal 5:22,
“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness,⁹ goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness and self-control.”¹⁰

Why is kindness a fruit of the Spirit?

Because, just like patience, *kindness* too is an *attribute of God* mentioned many times in the OT, e.g. Ps 118:1ff, “***Give thanks to the LORD for He is good, His lovingkindness¹¹ endures forever!***”

⁷ ***But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.***

⁸ χρηστεύεται present deponent indicative 3rd person singular of **χρηστεύομαι**: to provide something beneficial for someone as an act of kindness—‘to act kindly, to be kind’ (Louw & Nida).

The verb appears only here in the entire NT. But the noun χρηστότης appears in a few other verses of the NT. According to Bauer (1979:886) it means among other: goodness, uprightness; kindness, generosity (of men & of God). In Hebrew it is תֹּוֹתַּה.

⁹ χρηστότης

¹⁰ ***But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness and self-control.***

¹¹ The Hebrew word is תֹּוֹתַּה n.m. goodness, kindness... of God: *kindness, lovingkindness* in condescending to the needs of his creatures (Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A. (1977). *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (p. 339). Oxford: Clarendon Press).

Where do we see God's greatest act of kindness?

Well, at Golgotha where He gave His Son over to pain & God-forsakenness for the salvation of His people – for you & me!

Look, is that not what Paul says (in Tit 3:4-5), “... *when the kindness¹² and love¹³ of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.*”¹⁴

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No doubt, God is kind!

But what about our Lord Jesus? Is He kind?

Well, think with me: Is it possible that the Son of God could voluntarily and in love give His life on a painful cross to save God's loved-ones – without Him being kind?

Impossible!

Christ's love blossomed in kind deeds right through His whole life on earth! After all, is it not so that every miracle which authenticated His preaching also came from a heart filled with empathy and kindness towards the blind, the hungry, the lame, the sick, and those who were grieving?

Surely, the Son, like His Father, is *abundant in lovingkindness!*¹⁵

David says about God, “Your lovingkindness is better than life.”¹⁶

¹² χρηστότης noun feminine singular, nominative related to the verb **χρηστεύομαι** (to act kindly) in our text (1 Cor 13:4)

¹³ **φιλανθρωπία:** affection for people in general—love of mankind, affection for people' (Louw & Nida, ibid)

¹⁴ Tit 3:4-5a ὅτε δὲ ἡ χρηστότης καὶ ἡ φιλανθρωπία ἐπεφάνη τοῦ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν Θεοῦ, ⁵ οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων τῶν ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ ἀ ἐποιήσαμεν ἡμεῖς ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὸ αὐτοῦ ἔλεος ...

Paul says much the same about God's kindness in Eph 2:4-7 Eph 2:4-7 **But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— ⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.**

¹⁵ רַב־מְדֹון (acc. to the text critic footnotes)

¹⁶ cf. Ps 63:3 מִמְּדֹון רַב־כָּלֵב

My brother & sister (and dear children), how are you/I doing with kindness – kindness to people on our path; kindness born out of (and driven by) a deep love for our Lord?

You know, the person who has been moved by God's love shown to us in Christ – that person has kindness on his lips; his heart is large, and his hands are open!¹⁷

How does this apply to you & me? Well, does it not mean that every time your lips say an encouraging word to someone; and every time your hands make a meal for someone too frail (or too busy) to do it himself; every time your heart and hands give an encouraging card to someone or give a donation where it's so badly needed – well, that's the time when your God-founded love blossoms into kindness!

See how kindness is the tangible expression of love? And isn't it so that kindness is best when it is driven by my love for God who poured out His love so kindly and generously to me?

My brother & sister, I pray that your & my religion will never be a merely outward façade – yes, I pray that you & I will never be heartless cold obliging churchgoers, for if that be the case, do you know what our Lord will then say to us? Well, the same words with which He once reprimanded some cold, heartless and self-righteous Pharisees when He said to them: ***Go and learn what this means: 'I desire lovingkindness,¹⁸ and not sacrifice.'*** (In other words: "I desire love in action – not empty religion"). ***For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.***¹⁹

Well, so far re Point 2: "Kindness."

Here is the last point....

¹⁷ My adaptation of some of the words of M Henry (*ibid*), ". *It is kind—chrēsteuetai*. It is benign, bountiful; it is courteous and obliging. *The law of kindness is in her lips*; her heart is large, and her hand open. She is ready to show favours and to do good. She seeks to be useful; and not only seizes on opportunities of doing good, but searches for them. This is her general character. She is patient under injuries, and apt and inclined to do all the good offices in her power. And under these two generals all the particulars of the character may be reduced."

¹⁸ ἔλεος, οὐς *n*: kindness or concern for someone in serious need—'mercy.' And in the OT, **תּוֹךְ** 1. **loyal love**, unfailing kindness, devotion, i.e., a love or affection that is steadfast based on a prior relationship (Ex 34:6, 7); 2. **glory**, i.e., lovely appearance (Isa 40:6); 3. **favor**, i.e., the giving benefits (Est 2:9), note: for another interp in Ps 52:3[EB 1],

¹⁹ Mt 9:13, quoting Hosea 6:6 כִּי תָּסַד חֶפְצָתִי וְלֹא־זָבֵחַ

Love is Not Jealous

Verse 4 also says, “***Love is not jealous.***” Some versions have it as “***Love does not envy!***²⁰

What does that mean?

Well, that means only one thing: if love does not envy, then love and envy don’t go together!

Why can’t love & envy go together?

Because envy goes against love’s very grain!

And the envy/jealousy by which the members of the Corinthian church tried to outsmart one another²¹ was exactly the “barometer” by which the Apostle Paul knew (that) they were lacking in God-founded love!

Pure, unselfish love is God-founded, but envy leads to pain and disaster!

You see, Prov 14:30 says, “...***envy rots the bones***” (NIV).²²

And Prov 6:34 says, “***For jealousy makes a man furious, and he will not spare when he takes revenge***” (ESV).²³

James removes all doubt about the lengths that envy can go (Js 4:2), “***You desire and do not have, so you murder.***²⁴

Look, is that not what Cain did when he envied his brother Abel’s successful offering? Yes, his jealousy/envy led him to murder!²⁵

The same is true for Joseph’s brothers!

You see, Gn 37:11 tells us straight-out that Joseph’s brothers ***were jealous of him!***²⁶

And whereto did their jealousy lead them? To murderous thoughts and near-murderous actions!

²⁰ Present active indicative 3rd person singular of ζηλώω: to experience strong envy and resentment against someone—‘to be jealous, to be envious’ (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 759). New York: United Bible Societies).

²¹ cf. 1 Cor 12 and 14

²² The ESV is more literal, “***A tranquil heart gives life to the flesh, but envy makes the bones rot.***”

תְּנִי בָשָׂרִים לְבַ מְרֻפָא וַיַּקְבֵ עֲצָמוֹת קְנָהָה:

²³ This is said about a man whose jealousy has been aroused by an adulterer (cf. Prov 6:32-34), ***But a man who commits adultery lacks judgment;***

whoever does so destroys himself. ³³***Blows and disgrace are his lot, and his shame will never be wiped away;***

³⁴***for jealousy arouses a husband’s fury, and he will show no mercy when he takes revenge.***

²⁴ Js 4:2 ἐπιθυμεῖτε καὶ οὐκ ἔχετε, φονεύετε

²⁵ cf. Gn 4:2ff.

²⁶ נִקְנָאָוְבָן אֲחֵי

Well, does it now come as a surprise that Matthew tells us that it was exactly *envy* which caused the Jews to hand over our Lord to be killed (Mt 27:18).²⁷

Envy/jealousy kills...!

No wonder Prov 27:4 says: ***Anger is cruel and fury overwhelming, but who can stand before jealousy?*** (NIV).²⁸

Dear children, do you struggle with envy/jealousy?

You know, once after dinner, a mother said to her 13-year old son, “Johnny, thank you so much for washing the dishes tonight!” “What a good job you’ve done!” Then, what was Johnny’s brothers’ & sisters’ reaction? Well, their reaction was pretty much the same as that of the sour-faced older brother of the Prodigal Son. Here’s how they reacted to mum’s praises of Johnny: “Ah, Mum!” “We washed the dishes three times last week, and you didn’t give us even one word of thanks!” “That stinks!”

So, what should Johnny’s siblings rather have said?

Well, if they’re in awe of what God, through Jesus Christ, has done for them, here is what Johnny’s siblings could say: “Johnny, we rejoice with you in this compliment!” “Yes, Johnny, we grant you Mum’s words of praise!”

Children, is that how you will react next time when someone else gets praised?

What about you, young parents? You see, I often see how young parents’ faces drop when they hear how another couple gets praised for their little child’s progress: “Hi Tom & Mary, how have you achieved such progress in your 2-year old Johnny’s vocabulary?” “Man, your son is only two, and just listen how he talks!”

Then, if the other couple, green of jealousy, will not audibly respond, they might at least think by themselves, “Ah, what do you know!?” “Our little Mary was a much greater talker, and that even at 18 months!”

My brother & sister, I have seen how, when such compliments were given on social media (like Facebook or Messenger or WhatsApp) – I

²⁷ cf. Mt 27:17-18 *So when they had gathered, Pilate said to them, “Whom do you want me to release for you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?”* ¹⁸ *For he knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered him up* (συνηγμένων οὖν αὐτῶν εἶπεν αὐτοῖς ὁ Πιλάτος· τίνα θέλετε ἀπολύσω ὑμῖν, [ἱησοῦν τὸν] Βαραββᾶν ἢ Ἰησοῦν τὸν λεγόμενον χριστόν; **18** ἦδει γὰρ ὅτι διὰ φθόνου παρέδωκαν αὐτόν). For φθόνον cf. Louw & Nida, “φθόνος, οὐ m: a state of ill will toward someone because of some real or presumed advantage experienced by such a person—‘envy, jealousy.’ τινὲς μὲν καὶ διὰ φθόνου καὶ ἔριν ... τὸν Χριστὸν κηρύσσουσιν ‘some people ... preach Christ ... because of envy and rivalry’ Php 1:15. Expressions for ‘envy’ or ‘jealousy’ are often idiomatic, for example, ‘the heart burns’ or ‘the stomach is hot.’”

²⁸ אַכְזָרִיָּה חֲמָה וְשַׂטְּף אָף וּמִי יַעֲמֶד לְפָנָי קְנָאָה:

have seen how the jealous couple then suddenly “unfriended” the praised couple.

Obviously, there was no Christlike love!

Well, sadly, jealousy also flourishes in what was supposed to be the most beautiful relationship – i.e. that of husband and wife. Wow, how often have we not seen that when a wife gets praised in public, her husband, green with jealousy, reacts with sarcastic comments. Sadly, the same also happens when *he* gets praised – then she would mutter words like, “Oh I wish they knew how useless he is at home!”

Jealousy! Envy! How evil! It only reflects a zeal for one’s self-advancement! It’s a resentment toward others for what they are or have! Yes, envy always involves the comparative “-er,” or the adverb “more” as in *better, brighter, prettier, richer, stronger, wiser; or more* skilled, *more* competent, *more* disciplined, *more* mature – even *more* spiritual!!²⁹ Children, if you really love your brother or sister with real Christ-like love; husbands if you really love your wives as Christ loves the church; wives if your love for your husband is driven by your love for the Lord, then what should be your/my reaction when they get praised or are doing well?

Well, to share in the other person’s praise/joy! Rejoice in the things he/she rejoices! Let the other person’s bliss and sanctification be an addition to ours, instead of impairing or lessening it!³⁰

Well, we have had a closer look at three of the fifteen characteristics of love given in verses 4-7.

So, allow me to ask: In response to our Lord’s great love for us, how are you and I doing?

Here is a small (yet significant) test!

You see, it has often been said (that) if you want to test yourself & see how you are doing as far as love is concerned, then replace the word *love* in 1 Cor 13:4-7 with your name. Are you ready for it?

Well, let’s say your name is Mary. Then, how about reflecting well & deeply when you hear...

²⁹ My adaptation of the well-said words of Johnson (*ibid*).

³⁰ My adaptation of the words of Henry (*ibid*).

“Mary is patient, Mary is kind. Mary does not envy, she does not boast, she is not proud.⁵ Mary is not rude, she is not self-seeking, she is not easily angered, she keeps no record of wrongs.⁶ Mary does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.⁷ Mary always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres”?

Well, how did that go?

Do you think anyone of us can really put his/her name in there?

Well, for the sake of our Lord, that's the ideal toward which we should be striving!

My brother & sister, whose name can we put in place of the word “love” in verses 4-7?

Well, I know of only one name: Jesus!

Jesus is patient, Jesus is kind. Jesus does not envy, He does not boast, He is not proud.⁵ Jesus is not rude, He is not self-seeking, He is not easily angered, He keeps no record of wrongs.⁶ Jesus does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.⁷ Jesus always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Jesus is the only One whose Name can rightly replace the word “love” in every instance of our passage!

Yes, Jesus portrayed (and is) perfect love!

He is the expression of God’s love!

May God grant you & me to, with a heart surrendered to God, smother our selfishness by radiating the love of Christ who did not look in envy at equality with God – yes, who **did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant** (Phil 2:6-7, ESV).³¹

AMEN (2660 words excluding footnotes)

³¹ Also remember how He, when tempted, showed that His love for us was greater than bread for a famished man; yes, greater than all the riches of the world (Mt 4).

8. SttL 503 (not in Blue Ps/H) “A new commandment I give unto you...”

9. Benediction (Num 6:24-26)

*The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious
to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you
peace.*

AMEN