

Relationships for Everyday Life: Perseverance

**Introduction**

Imagine if you will a church – a community of believers – who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ. Imagine if you will that this church – this community – is not exactly sure of what it means to be ‘church’ – to live as people whose lives are radically changing because of Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Imagine if you will – that ‘what’ this community does – is well – they take a little bit of this and a little bit of that – a little bit of what their surrounding culture does – a little bit of what the different religions around them do – a little bit of what they understand it means to be church – a little bit of what they imagine to be church – and mix it all together – and this is how they try to live together in community – as church.

Imagine – maybe – that some of the same things might be true about us today.

What can say that about the church in Corinth is they are learning what it means to be Christian community. They are learning what it means to be ‘church’. Which is true for us as well.

Paul has written them to address some of the issues that are dividing them. This morning as we come to the 13<sup>th</sup> Chapter of Paul's letter to the Church in Corinth – Paul is talking about issues that divide them in worship – the use of their various gifts in worship – the sharing without restraint or a sense of how the use of a particular gift might benefit the whole community. –

Some want to speak in the ecstatic language of tongues to be an affirmation of their piety. Others want to use their prophetic powers to demand action. Still others want to study and apply reason in well thought out arguments in order that they might convince or convict others.

So Paul writes to remind them and us – what is at the heart of the decisions they make about gifts – or worship – or how to be community together – and that is love.

## **Prayer**

## **Scripture**

We are talking about relationships – our relationship with God and our relationship with others. We are talking about how we move from the casual kind of relationships that we have so many of – relationships that skim along the surface of conversations about weather, and sports teams, and a whole plethora of insignificant things – relationships that invest in busyness of doing without real meaning.

We are talking about relationships that move from the casual to the significant – to deep places where we are invested – where we are committed – where we are changed. We are talking about a relationship with our God that moves us past a Sunday morning to a day to day ongoing relationship with our God. We are talking about relationships with others – that are honest – and real – that are safe – yet at the same time will challenge us.

Thus far we have looked at the Book of Genesis and we saw how we are created to be in relationship with our God with others. Last week we looked at the Book of Proverbs where we saw that at the foundation of significant relationships is trust – and how to move from casual to significant we will have to examine the place of trust in our relationships with others.

*(This is a side – a freebie this morning. Remember how we were talking about what proverbs were and I gave you a list of proverbs that are pretty common. Well a man gave me Sunday afternoon a couple of other proverbs.*

*The early bird gets the worm.*

*The second mouse gets the cheese.)*

This morning we are going to talk not so much about love but about ‘perseverance’ – about that stick-with-it-ness that is required in relationships that are going to move from casual to significant.

Paul tells us that perseverance is a characteristic of love. “*Love is patient.*” Paul says.

When I was growing up I had a teacher in grade school that wasn't very patient with us. "*I Suwannee you kids don't know beans when the bag is open.*" She use to say in frustration. Or "*You make me so made I could eat fried chicken.*" I am not sure why she didn't like fried chicken.

"*Love is patient.*" Paul says and then goes on to say that "*love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things, love never fails.*" Which is, I believe, what perseverance is all about.

### **God's relationship with Israel**

When I think about perseverance I think about God's relationship with Israel. The Old Testament is a primer in patience and perseverance isn't it. I mean if we were to sum it all up it would simply be the same story told over and over again and again.

God risks loving Israel in a unique and special way. Sometimes that way looks like blessing them (bringing them into a land of promise) – sometimes it looks like rescuing them (from their enemies) – sometimes it looks like giving them boundaries and rules to follow (the ten commandments for example).

Israel is grateful at first – but then they get bored – they run after different gods – gods of their own making and their own liking. They neglect the poor, abuse their power, disobey the commandments.

God acts – reminding them in subtle ways and in not so subtle ways of the responsibilities of relationship.

Over and over and over again thousands of times – this story plays itself out.

### **God's relationship with the Church**

When I think about perseverance I think about God's relationship with the church. Paul calls the church the body of Christ – and says that individually we are members of it. Therefore the church is a human institute that is to be an embodiment of the divine.

But sometimes – often times the church – is anything but an embodiment of the divine. The church misuses its power – in order to benefit politically or economically. This is true not only of the part of the church that calls itself catholic but protestant as well.

In the last week I have had conversations with two people – different people – who were so hurt by the church – by the way they were judged and treated in two very different situations – that they carried those wounds for a long, long time.

**Paul talking to the church at Corinth.**

Paul is writing to this group of believers that are working at being church – they are divided – they are wounding one another by their actions – they are boasting that they are somehow better than – this one or that one – they are misusing their God given gifts.

So Paul writes to remind them – as a community of believers – that the center of everything that they are and everything that they do is to be love. And at the center of love is this stick-to-it-ness – this patient perseverance – that bears all things, hopes all things, believes all things, endures all things.

**Examples of Perseverance**

I know this man – his wife’s health has been failing for years. She has become more and more dependent on him. She needs his help to get to the car, to get to her chair, to get into bed. She needs him to get the meals ready, to take care of the house, to do the laundry. She needs him to help her get to the bathroom and help her with her bath. He does all those things – and is glad to do them.

*“Love is patient – love bears all things.”* Paul says.

I don't know that what this man does for his wife day in and day out is as amazing, truth be told, as the fact that the two of them have been married for over 60 years. Can you image – over 60 years of hanging together in thick and thin.

I know this woman – her heart has been broken a thousand times by her son. Every time she has trusted him – in this way or that way – her trust has been broken. Over the years she has set some hard and fast boundaries on their relationship – in order to protect herself. But what is amazing to me – is while this relationship is not what she would want – she has never given up in hoping that it might be something else.

Paul says – that “*love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*”

If we are going to grow in our relationship with our God and with one another we will have to begin by finding ways to trust one another – and in trusting one another – we will be vulnerable – our trust will be betrayed – we will be disappointed – and we will be hurt. Our default position will be to go to ‘mistrust’ – but instead we are called to patient love.

Patient love – is the stick-with-it-ness – that doesn't give up – that never finds the worst – but instead looks for the best. Patient love – is perseverance that in spite of all the evidence – bears all things, hopes all things, believes all things, endures all things.

May we be this kind of community.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.