“Love is patient” …This is the first of fifteen descriptions of love in First Corinthians 13:4-8. It’s the one I want to focus on today. “Love is patient.” What the apostle is saying here in this well-known chapter often called a “Hymn of Love” is that our love for one another should be like God’s love for us. It is a different kind of love. God’s agape love is not just a “feeling”, but actions.

Although “patient” here is translated as an adjective in English, it is actually a verb in its original form. It really could be translated more accurately as “love does patience.” The Greeks thought of patience as “having a long spirit.” To us, that is a curious phrase. But I will show you how it is also a helpful, phrase. Some people, we say, have a rather “short fuse.” Their impatience flares up in anger whenever their own plans or ideas are delayed or frustrated. The “instant world” in which we live breeds its own forms of impatience. We want what we want when we want it, and we want it now. We hate waiting. It is when we focus life on ourselves, on achieving our own goals and ambitions, that we are short on the fuse and impatient. But when we have the love that really cares for others, we will seek to understand their needs and be patient.

The Greek word for “patient” here is makrothumia, which is comprised of two shorter words: macros, which means “long”; and thumia, which means “passion” or “wrath.” A very literal translation of the word might be something like: “long wrath.” What the Bible tells us here is that love is the opposite of having a short fuse. Love has a “macros thumia”; it has a “long fuse.” Not a bad translation for “love is patient.” In other words, love is not easily angered or upset. The King James’ version reads “Love suffers long” and is actually one of the better translations of this verse. Love “suffers long” or is “long-fused.”

I was struck by how similar this word “patience” is in meaning to “perseverance.” They have some similar qualities. But “patient”, makrothumia, is almost always used regarding people, not just circumstances. You can persevere through circumstances, but you are patient with people – because you love them. Love is patient.
We believe that this kind of love comes from God. God is the source of love. John writes that “God is love” while the apostle Paul says that “the fruit of the Holy Spirit is love.” Since God is love, God is also patient towards us. God is the great example of the patience of love. In fact, the Bible is full of examples of God’s patience: it is the story of the whole Old Testament, how God was patient with the children of Israel, even though they continually disobeyed the Lord. In Psalm 103 we read: “The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in lovingkindness … the Lord has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.”

God has been patient with us – and this is even truer of us who have been saved by faith in Christ than it was of the people of Israel in the Old Testament. God has mercifully shown us God’s love and patience and saved us through Christ – so it is incumbent upon us to demonstrate that same patient love to others. God had such great mercy, and love for us, and showed us patience, in saving us through Jesus. If we really understand how patient God has been with us, then we will have no qualms about showing that same patient love towards others.

“Love is patient”! It is a vital quality; it the first quality of love. How do we apply that to those whom God has commanded us to love? Some applications for you to think about and then I will close.

1. Love is patient in *listening*. It involves truly patiently hearing what others have to say, and thoughtfully considering what they are talking about. There are some people in some of OUR personal relationships today, who, if they could, would say: “I beg you to listen to me patiently!” If we love them, we will. Love patiently listens!

2. Love is patient with *the flaws and annoyances of others*. We need to be careful that we do not “run out of patience” with others – and end up saying something that hurts them. God’s spirit produces the fruit of love in us that will make us patient and tolerant of the flaws and annoyances we get from each other.

3. Love is patient when we have been *wronged by others*. Peter asked Jesus: “How many times shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him; up to 7 times?” But Jesus responded with His famous answer: “Up to 70 times 7”! In other words, we are
to be extraordinarily patient with others’ sins and failures. Someone has said: “Patience is love on the anvil, bearing blow after blow of suffering.” Let us be patient with others’ sins – just like God is patient with ours! Someone has said: “Patience is love on the anvil, bearing blow after blow of suffering.”

I could go on and on with applications, but the bottom line is, we should show the patience that comes from love in every area of our lives. I Thess. 5:14 says: “Be patient with everyone”—the Greek word pantas literally means, “all.” There is no relationship in your life and mine, in which we are not to show agape love. And because love is first of all, patient, it means that there is no one in your life and in my life to whom we are not to demonstrate the patience that comes from love.

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