

Love Suffers Long

By Gary Henry

“Love suffers long and is kind . . .” (1 Corinthians 13:4).

IT IS NOTHING SHORT OF AMAZING HOW HEAVY A BURDEN LOVE CAN BEAR AND HOW LONG IT CAN BEAR IT. I once knew a woman who had never had any life as an adult except the life of taking care of her mother. Her mother was a quadriplegic with no one else to care for her, so the daughter had forgone marriage and any kind of independence just to take care of her mother. When I knew this dear woman, she had been doing this for over thirty years.

LOVE DOES NOT GIVE UP ON PEOPLE. Love doesn't do difficult work for a “respectable” period of time and then give it up. It hangs in there and endures, over an indefinite period if necessary. In the real world, people and their problems can be exhausting. So we try to help them for a while, but if they don't “shape up” pretty quickly, we have a tendency to write them off as losses. But love suffers long. It knows how to keep waiting when waiting is hard.

LOVE HAS A LONG FUSE. Just as love does not “give up” easily, it does not “give in” easily to things like unkindness and ungentleness. It keeps acting kindly long after others would have started behaving unkindly. “Meekness” is sometimes defined as “strength under control,” and I think that describes the idea very well. The kind person is not weak; his strength is simply being controlled more carefully than is the unkind person's. It is true, as Eric Hoffer said, that “rudeness is the weak person's imitation of strength.”

I wish we could see the deadly seriousness of the “little” things we call irritability, grouchiness, touchiness, peevishness, and so forth. These are not little sins. If we do not repent of them and learn the laws of charity, they will carry us straight to hell.

If nothing else produces patience in our dealings with others, we at least ought to be moved by our Lord's patience with us. How long has the Lord waited and waited and waited for some of us to get rid of certain sins and weaknesses? How many times has He forgiven us of repeated offenses? ***“If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?”*** (Psalm 130:3). Why does He put up with us? It is only because He loves us. How is it then that we can claim to love others and be so short-tempered and unkind?

“Patient endurance is the perfection of charity” (Ambrose).