



Christian Maturity Series

2nd of Five Lessons

2. THE UNRELENTING LOVE OF GOD

By David Wilkerson
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I want to talk to you about the word unrelenting. It means undiminished in intensity or effort - unyielding, uncompromising, incapable of being changed or persuaded by arguments. To be unrelenting is to stick to a determined course.

What a marvelous description of the love of God. Our Lord's love is absolutely unrelenting. Nothing can hinder or diminish his loving pursuit of both sinners and saints. David, the psalmist, expressed it this way: "Thou hast beset me behind and before... Whither shall I go from thy spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there" (Psalm 139:5,7-8).

David is speaking of the great highs and lows we face in life. He's saying, "There are times when I'm so blessed, I feel lifted with joy. At other times, I feel like I'm in a living hell, condemned and unworthy. But no matter where I am, Lord - no matter how blessed I feel, or how low my condition is - you're there. I can't get away from your unrelenting love. And I can't chase it away. You never accept my arguments about how unworthy I am. Even when I'm disobedient - sinning against your truth, taking your grace for granted - you never stop loving me. Your love for me is relentless!"

At one low point, David prayed, "Lord, you seated my soul in a heavenly place. You gave me light to understand your Word. You made it a lamp to guide my feet. But I've fallen so low, I don't see how I can ever recover. I've made my bed in hell. And I deserve wrath, punishment. You're too high and holy to love me in this condition."

David had sinned grievously. This is the same man who enjoyed daily spiritual input from godly counselors. He was mentored by upright men of God. He was ministered to by the Holy Spirit. He was given revelations from God's Word. Yet, in spite of his many blessings and his devoted life, David utterly disobeyed God's law.

I'm sure you know the story of David's sin. He lusted after another man's wife and impregnated her. Then he tried to cover up his sin by getting the husband drunk, hoping the man would sleep with his pregnant wife. When that failed, David murdered the husband. He connived to send the man into a hopeless battle, knowing he would die.

Scripture says, "The thing that David had done displeased the Lord" (2 Samuel 11:27). God called David's actions "a great evil." And he sent the prophet Nathan to tell him, "Thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme" (12:14).

The Lord then disciplined David, saying he would suffer severe consequences. Nathan prophesied, "The child also that is born unto thee shall surely die" (12:14). David prayed around the clock for his baby's health. But the child died, and David grieved deeply over the terrible things he'd caused.

Yet, in spite of David's sin, God kept pursuing him in love. While the world mocked this fallen man's faith, God gave David a token of his unrelenting love. Bathsheba was now David's wife, and she gave birth to another child. David "called his name Solomon: and the Lord loved him" (12:24). Solomon's birth and life were a blessing to David, one totally undeserved. But God's love for David never abated, even in the hour of his greatest shame. He chased after David unrelentingly.

Consider also the testimony of the apostle Paul. As we read of Paul's life, we see a man bent on destroying God's church. Paul was like a madman in his hatred for Christians. He breathed out threats of slaughter against everyone who followed Jesus. He sought the high priest's authorization to hunt down believers, so he could charge into their homes and drag them off to prison.

After he was converted, Paul testified that even during those hate-filled years - while he was full of prejudice, blindly slaughtering Christ's disciples - God loved him. The apostle wrote, "God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). He said, in essence, "Even though I wasn't conscious of it, God was pursuing me. He kept coming after me in love, until that day when he literally knocked me off my high horse. That was the unrelenting love of God."

Through the years, Paul became increasingly convinced God would love him fervently to the end, through all his highs and lows. He stated, "I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (8:38-39). He was declaring, "Now that I'm God's, nothing can separate me from his love. No devil, no demon, no principality, no man, no angel - nothing can stop God from loving me."

Most believers have read this passage over and over. They're heard it preached for years. Yet I believe the majority of Christians find Paul's words impossible to believe. Whenever most of us sin and fail God, we lose all sense of the truth of his love for us. Then, when something bad happens to us, we think, "God is whipping me." We end up blaming every trouble, trial, sickness and difficulty on him.

In reality, we're saying, "God has stopped loving me, because I've failed him. I've displeased him, and he's angry at me." We suddenly stop comprehending God's unrelenting love for us. We forget that he's continually pursuing us at all times, no matter what our condition. Yet, the truth is, we can't face life and all its terrors and sorrows without holding fast to this truth. We have to be convinced of God's love for us.

I know many ministers who talk much of God's love and freely offer it to others. But when the enemy comes roaring like a flood into their own lives, they're carried away. They fall into a pit of despair, unable to trust God's Word. They can't believe God would still accept them, because they're convinced he's given up on them.

Paul addresses this crucial matter for all of us, in a single verse. He had written two letters to the Corinthians. And he chose to end his last one with this prayer: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all" (2 Corinthians 13:14).

You may recognize this verse. It's often used in church services as a benediction. It's usually said rote by the pastor, and few hearers grasp its enormous significance. Yet this verse isn't just a benediction. It is Paul's summary of everything he's been teaching the Corinthians about God's love.

This verse deals with three divine issues: the grace of Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost. Paul was praying that the Corinthians would lay hold of these truths. I believe if we also can comprehend these three issues, we'll never again doubt God's unrelenting love for us:

1. First, Paul considers the grace of Jesus Christ.

Just what is grace? We know this about it: whatever grace is, Paul says it will "(teach) us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world" (Titus 2:12).

How do we reach such a place, where we can be taught by grace? And what is the teaching that grace offers? According to Paul, grace teaches us to deny ungodliness and lusts, and to live holy and pure lives. If that's so, then we need the Holy Spirit to shine on our souls the foundation truth of this doctrine.

We find the secret to Paul's statement about grace in 2 Corinthians 8:9. He states, "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich." Paul isn't talking about material riches here, but about spiritual riches. (Numerous passages prove this. Throughout his letters, Paul speaks of the riches of Christ's glory, riches of wisdom, riches of grace, of being rich in mercy, faith and good works. Likewise, the New Testament refers to spiritual riches as opposed to the deceitfulness of worldly wealth.)

Paul is telling us, "Here is everything you need to know about the meaning of grace. It comes to us through the Lord's example. Simply put, Jesus came to bless, edify and build up others at his own expense. That is the grace of Christ. Though he was rich, for our sakes he became poor, that through his poverty we might be rich."

Jesus didn't come to magnify himself or bring himself glory. He gave up every right to capital "I," meaning all emphasis on "I, me, mine." Christ passed up every opportunity to be the greatest among his fellow men. Think about it: he never prayed down blessings on himself so he could be known or accepted by others. He didn't push his divine weight around to gain power or recognition. He didn't exalt himself at the expense of poor, less able men. And he didn't glory in his own power, ability or achievements. No, Jesus came to build up the body. And he proved it by glorying in God's blessings upon others.

When Christ walked on earth, he wasn't in competition with anybody. Surely he heard his disciples glorifying his mighty deeds. Yet in all humility, Jesus answered, "You're going to outdo me. I tell you, you'll perform greater works than all of mine." Later, when reports came back to him that his disciples were performing those very works, casting out demons and healing people, he danced with joy.

How many of us can claim this same kind of grace? In my view, it's sorely lacking in much of the church. Few Christians truly rejoice when they see their brothers or sisters being blessed by God. This is especially true of many pastors. When they see another minister reaping God's blessings, they think only of their own condition. They say, "I've been struggling in prayer for years. But now this young preacher comes to town, and God starts pouring out blessings on him. What about me?"

Here is the unrelenting love of God: to rejoice in seeing others blessed above ourselves. Paul writes, “Let love be without dissimulation [hypocrisy]...Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another” (Romans 12:9-10). Here is a grace that’s willing to remain humble, even as it rejoices in others’ blessings.

In Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, he describes seeing very little of this kind of grace.

Paul found the Corinthian Christians in competition with each other. The church was full of self-exaltation, self-promotion, self-seeking. Men and women gloried in their spiritual gifts, jostling for status and position. They even competed at the communion table. Affluent believers paraded their exotic foods, while the poor had nothing to bring. Others were so proud, they thought nothing of suing each other to settle their disputes.

This was all contrary to the grace Paul preached. These Corinthians were stamped with an immense capital “I.” They were all about taking and not giving. Even today the word “Corinthian” connotes their carnality and worldliness.

Paul told these believers, “I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ... Are ye not carnal, and walk as men?” (1 Corinthians 3:1, 3). Think of what Paul was saying. Babies seek only to have their own needs met. They cry out for pampering. And the Corinthians were childish in just that way. These people were soft on sin, some indulging in fornication and even incest.

When we think of such believers, the word “saintly” doesn’t come to mind. Yet, in spite of all their carnality, God directed Paul to write to these people as “the church of God...them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints...Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ” (1:2-3).

Was this a mistake? Was God winking at the church’s compromise? No, never. God knew all about the Corinthians’ condition. And he never overlooked their sins. No, Paul’s grace-filled address to these people is a picture of God’s unrelenting love. Try to imagine the Corinthians’ amazement as they heard Paul’s letter read in church. Here were self-contented believers looking out for number one. Yet Paul, writing under divine inspiration, addressed them as “saints” and “sanctified in Christ.” Why? God was securing his people. Let me explain.

If God judged us according to our condition, we would be saved one minute and condemned the next. We would be converted ten times a day, and we would backslide ten times daily. Every honest Christian has to admit that his own condition, even at best, is one of struggle. We’re all still fighting, still having to rely on faith in God’s promises of mercy. That’s because we still have weaknesses and frailties in our flesh.

Thank the Lord, he doesn’t judge us according to our condition. Instead, he judges us by our position. You see, even though we’re weak and sinful, we’ve given our hearts to Jesus, and by faith the Father has seated us with Christ in the heavenlies. That is our position. Therefore, when God looks at us, he sees us not according to our sinful condition, but according to our heavenly position in Christ.

Please don't misunderstand. When I say God secures his people in grace, I'm not talking about a doctrine that allows believers to continue in promiscuous sin. The Bible makes clear it's possible for any believer to turn away from God and reject his love. Such a person can harden his heart so repeatedly and so rigidly, God's love will no longer penetrate the walls he has erected.

Right now, you may be in a Corinthian condition. But God sees your position as being solely in Christ. That's how he dealt with the Corinthians. When God looked on them, he knew they had no resources to change. They didn't have any power in themselves to suddenly become godly. That's why he inspired Paul to address them as sanctified saints. The Lord wanted them to know the security of their position in Christ.

Do you struggle with a weakness? If so, know that God will never be hindered in his love for you. Hear him calling out to you as a "saint," "sanctified," "accepted." And lay hold of the truth that Paul describes: "Of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" (1 Corinthians 1:30).

2. Paul next addresses the love of God

In Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians, he addresses their need for God's grace. That's because of their failures. But in his second letter, Paul focuses on God's love. He knew that the Lord's unrelenting love was the only power able to change anyone's heart. And Paul's second letter proves that God chooses to use love as his way of showing his power.

First Corinthians 13:4-8 gives us a powerful truth about God's unrelenting love. No doubt, you've heard this passage many times, from church pulpits and at weddings: "Charity [love] suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth."

Most of us think, "This is the kind of love God expects of us." That's true, in a sense. But the fact is, no one can live up to this definition of love. No, this passage is all about God's love. Verse 8 proves this: "Charity [love] never faileth." Human love fails. But here is a love that's unconditional, never giving up. It withstands every failure, every disappointment. It doesn't gloat over the sins of God's children; on the contrary, it grieves over them. And it resists every argument that we're too sinful and unworthy to be loved. In short, this kind of love is unrelenting, never stopping in its pursuit of the beloved. That can only describe the love of almighty God.

Consider how this powerful love affected Paul. In his first letter to the Corinthians, the apostle had every reason to give up on the church. He had many causes to be angry with them. And he could have easily written them off, despairing over their childishness and sinfulness. He might have begun his letter this way: "I wash my hands of you. You are a totally incorrigible people. All this time I've poured out my very life for you. Yet the more I love you, the less you love me. That's it - I'm leaving you to your own devices. Go ahead and fight among yourselves. My work with you is over."

Paul never could have written this. Why? He'd been apprehended by the love of God. In First Corinthians, we read of him turning over a man to Satan, for the destruction of the man's flesh. This sounds so harsh. But what was Paul's purpose? It was that the man's soul might be saved (see 1 Corinthians 5:5). We also see Paul sharply reproofing, correcting and admonishing. But he did it all in tears, with the gentleness of a nurse.

How did the carnal Corinthians react to Paul's message of God's triumphant love? They melted at his words. Paul later said to them, "Ye sorrowed after a godly sort... Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation" (2 Corinthians 7:11, 9-10). Paul was telling them, "You cleaned yourselves up, you were indignant over your sins, and now you're filled with zeal and godly fear. You've proved yourselves clear and clean."

I tell you, those Corinthians were changed by the power of God's unrelenting love. As we read Paul's second letter to them, we find the big "I" in this church has disappeared. Sin's power was broken, and self was swallowed up by godly sorrow. These people were no longer wrapped up in gifts, signs and wonders. Their emphasis now was on giving rather than getting. They collected offerings to send to believers who'd been hit with a great famine. And the change came by the preaching of God's love.

I am personally convicted by this truth. In my younger years, I preached messages on the evil conditions in the church. I despaired over the deplorable state of so many of God's people. And I set out to correct these things with a sword and a sledgehammer. I struck at compromise and smashed everything in sight. And in the process, I brought people under condemnation that never should have been.

If Paul had preached that way in Corinth, he certainly would have smashed all carnality, brought down fornicators, and stopped all the lawsuits. But that church would have dissolved. There would have been no congregation left for Paul to reprove. Such "in your face" preaching is misguided by human zeal. It's usually the result of a preacher not having his own personal revelation of God's love for him.

3. Finally, Paul focuses on the communion of the Holy Ghost.

The Greek phrase Paul uses translates as "the fellowship of the Holy Ghost." At first, the Corinthians knew nothing of such fellowship. The church body was rampant with individualism. Paul said of them, "Every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ" (1 Corinthians 1:12).

This individualism carried over to the people's spiritual gifts. Apparently, the Corinthians were coming to church only to edify themselves. One came with the gift of tongues, another with a prophecy, another with a word of wisdom - yet they were using their gifts to serve themselves. Everyone wanted to leave saying, "I gave a prophecy today," or, "I spoke mightily in the Spirit." And it was causing utter disorder. Paul made an explicit call for order, instructing them, "Learn to hold your peace. Let someone else speak. Seek to edify the body, and not just yourself."

The deepest work of the Holy Spirit deals with more than spiritual gifts. Signs, wonders and miracles are all needed, and they have their place. But the most precious work of God's Spirit is to unify the body of Christ. He seeks to establish fellowship among God's people, by his unifying power. Yet, too often today, when we speak of the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, we still tend to think individually. We think in terms of "me and the Holy Spirit," saying, "The Spirit and I enjoy intimacy in Christ."

Paul ties fellowship and unity to the two issues we've already talked about: the grace of Christ and the love of God. He says, in essence, "To truly understand these two issues, they have to bring you together. That's how you can measure Christ's grace and God's love in your life. It's determined by your willingness to be in full unity and oneness with the whole body of Christ."

What does it mean to have unity and oneness? It means removing all jealousy and competition, and no longer comparing yourself to another. Instead, everyone rejoices when a brother or sister is blessed. And all are eager to give rather than take. Only this kind of fellowship truly reveals Christ's grace and God's love.

This message boils down to one issue: Am I Willing to be changed?

The question is, "Do I really want to allow the Holy Spirit to show me where I need changing?" You see, there's a purpose behind God's unrelenting love. It is this: There is power in God's love to solve all your problems by changing you.

If you tell me you're a good person - kind, charitable, forgiving, washed clean in Christ's blood - I answer, God's love provides for more than forgiveness. You can be forgiven and a good person, but still be governed and enslaved by your sin nature. We're all born with Adam's nature, the tendency to sin. In fact, it's that nature in us that gets easily provoked, jealous, lustful, angry, unforgiving. This same nature is the one in us that loves money, sows seeds of destruction, and can't rejoice when others are blessed.

If you've been fighting against your sin nature, you're waging a losing battle. That nature can't be changed. It will always be flesh and always resist the Holy Spirit. Our fleshly nature is beyond redemption, and therefore it must be crucified. This means admitting, "I can never please God on my own. I know my flesh can never help me."

We have to be given a new nature, and that nature is the very nature of Christ. This isn't a redoing of our old nature, or a makeover of our flesh. The old has to pass away. What I'm talking about is the birth of a totally new nature. And the New Covenant has made provision for this: "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4).

God's love says to us, "I want to assure your position in Christ. You have to give up trying to change your flesh's nature, and let me give you my Son's nature. There is but one condition for this to take place: simply believe. This change in nature comes by faith alone. You must believe I will be God to you."

Beloved, any believer can become as much like Jesus as he or she desires. If you can just say, “I believe God truly loves me,” you’re confessing that he has offered you power to be changed.

Scripture says we all have been given a measure of faith. Therefore, we all have the capacity to believe the Lord for this infusion of his nature.

Make this your prayer today: “Holy Spirit, I know I don’t have much of the grace Paul is talking about. Show me where I need to change. I believe my Father loves me unrelentingly. And that love has made provision for me to take on his nature. I know I’ve been given the power to be changed by you. Give me your nature, Jesus.”

(Please continue to next page for workbook questions)

THE UNRELENTING LOVE OF GOD
Follow-up Questions

1. Write out a key verse of this study.

2. According to this sermon, what was David the Psalmist facing, as interpreted from Ps. 139:5, 7-8? What was David's conclusion about God?

3. What did God call David's action in sinning against another man's wife?

4. How was David disciplined?

5. God gave David a token of His unrelenting love. What was it?

6. What did Paul say about God's unrelenting love?

7. I Corinthians 13:14 deals with what three issues?

8. What does grace teach us, according to Apostle Paul?

9. [Complete]: The unrelenting _____ is to
_____ in seeing _____ blessed

_____.

10. If God judged us according to our condition (at any given time) what would happen?

11. God judges us by our _____
12. How can we misuse or misunderstand the grace of God?
- _____
- _____
- _____
13. How did the carnal Christians in Corinth react to Paul's message of God's triumphant love?
- _____
- _____
- _____
14. What happened to the Corinthian Christians when they were changed by God's power?
- _____
- _____
- _____
15. What is the deepest work of the Holy Spirit? (Check the right answer below)
- _____ Being used in spiritual gifts.
- _____ Being unified in the Body of Christ.
16. How should we measure God's grace and God's love in our lives?
- _____
- _____
- _____
17. What does it mean to have unity and oneness?
- _____
- _____
- _____

18. Because our fleshly nature is beyond redemption, what must we do with it?

19. Any believer can become as much like Jesus as he or she desires. How?
