

## Love is Not Irritable

By Wendy Wood



**Love is not irritable.** Other translations say, “love is not easily provoked”. The Greek word is *paroxynō* which comes from the roots of “to” and “swift”. This is translated throughout scripture as “arousing anger” and “to exasperate”. Love is not quick to get angry or quick to show annoyance or impatience.

Jerry Bridges describes irritability this way. “While impatience is a strong sense of annoyance or exasperation, irritability, as I define it, describes the frequency of impatience, or the ease with which a person can become impatient over the slightest provocation. The person who easily and frequently becomes impatient is an irritable person. Most of us can become impatient at times, but the irritable person is impatient most of the time. The irritable person is one whom you feel you have to tiptoe or ‘walk on eggshells’ around.”<sup>16</sup> Do others, maybe especially your immediate family members, feel like they are walking on eggshells around you?

Proverbs 17:9 says, “Whoever covers an offense seeks love, but he who repeats a

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<sup>16</sup> Respectable Sins by Jerry Bridges

matter separates close friends.” Someone who is quick to anger and is impatient frequently does not cover over an offense. An irritable person points out other people’s offensive or inconvenient behavior and shows their annoyance. Genuine, godly love covers an offense by being patient and kind even when hurt by another person. A person with mature love does not need to make it known that he has been offended or inconvenienced.

This idea is repeated in 1 Peter 4:8. “Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins”. When sinned against, a loving person can go on without making a big deal of it. While it is true that love is willing to point out sin when someone is “caught” in the sin (Galatians 6:1), most of the time an irritable person responds to very small and insignificant sins. “A multitude of sins” can be covered over. These are the small ways family and friends sin against each other every single day. We are sinners. We sin. A lot! Are you typically irritated by those little sins and quick to point them out and be annoyed by them? Or do you overlook sins and graciously respond with patience and kindness?

All of these facets of love come from the heart. Out of the heart comes thoughts, words, and actions. Irritability doesn’t have to be verbal or active to be seen. Body language and facial expressions often are the first signs of being easily provoked. Some irritable people will use looks or body language as a warning that they are becoming impatient and provoked as if to warn the offender to stop before explosive anger is displayed. Because irritability is usually a quieter or smaller form of anger, it is often excused as a temperament rather than sin. But just as Jesus connected lust and adultery as the same heart issue, and anger and murder as the same heart issue, irritability and rage come from the same heart. Scriptures like 1 Corinthians 13:5 make it clear that being irritable is sin. Love does not act that way and we are commanded to love others. An irritable person says, “Don’t inconvenience me or sin against me or you will suffer consequences.”

Proverbs 12:16 says, “The vexation of a fool is known at once, but the prudent ignores an insult”. A fool makes his annoyances known immediately. An irritable person is quick to get angry and is quick to show it. This person has a “short fuse” and is easily offended. An irritable person has strong preferences for how things should be done or the way they should be treated. Any infringement on their preference is met with an impatient and rude response whether verbally or with body language. Conversely, a prudent or careful person is able to ignore an insult. A loving person allows others mistakes and sins with patience. Proverbs 19:11 puts it this way. “Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense.” It is wise to be slow to anger. There are times when it is right to be angry. But it is wise to think carefully first

and assess. It is a good thing, a glory or display of greatness, to overlook an offense.

Each of these facets of love have similarities, but also differences. An irritable person is one who demands his own way, even in small things. The irritable person is so consistently annoyed and displays their unhappiness that it forms a habitual response. The friends and family of an irritable person suffer from the frequent and quick arousal to anger.

Proverbs 29:11 says, "A fool gives full vent to his spirit [temper], but a wise man holds it back." This is the same fool as 12:16. A fool voices his displeasure at the smallest provocation. But, a wise man, or as 19:11 says, good sense, holds back his temper. An irritable person responds out of emotions. The irritable person is so focused on their own comfort and ease that any person or circumstance that causes a loss of comfort or ease is on the receiving end of harsh, hasty words.

Wayne Mack has a list of excuses that irritable people often use. As you read through this list, evaluate yourself. Are you one to excuse your lack of love?

1. They justify their irritability by blaming it on their circumstances or on other people.
2. The excuse or minimize their irritability by saying that they get over it quickly.
3. They say "I just can't help it. It's just the way I am."
4. They minimize the seriousness of their irritability by saying "What do you expect? That's the way my parents were!" In essence, the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. "It was their fault".
5. They justify their irritability by saying that other people ought to know that they don't really mean it when they react badly, that they really do respect them and love them in spite of their anger and irritability. Often I've heard, "Other people ought to remember all the good things I do and say and just ignore this aspect of my behavior. Why do they focus only on the bad stuff?"
6. They excuse it by heaping insults upon themselves. "I'm just weak! I'm no good! Others may be able to be uncontentious, gentle, considerate, meek and submissive, but I just can't be those things!"

It is true we can only love this way because of what Christ has already done for us. When we have His Spirit in us and also put effort forth, we can grow to love with patience and tolerance of others. In Philippians 2 just after we see Jesus willing becoming a servant even to the point of death, and Jesus is now ascended and seated at the right hand of God and every knee will bow to Him, we read, "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God

who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” The word “therefore” refers back to what Christ has already done. It is because of Him that we can obey. We must work out our salvation, meaning we must continue to obey God’s command to love and grow in love, as God’s grace continues to work in us through His power.

Application:

1. What stood out to you about “love is not irritable”?
2. How do you rate yourself on a scale of 1 - 10 with 10 being “very irritable”? Why?
3. How is irritability related to demanding your own way? How is it different?
4. What scripture stood out to you in this reading? How could meditating on this verse encourage you as you fight against being irritable?
5. What specific situations easily provoke you to anger?
6. Examine your list from #5. Are these preferences or sin issues?
7. If preferences, are you willing to prefer the other person over yourself and just overlook it? If it is a sin issue, is it a big enough issue in that person’s life that it needs to be addressed? If so, how will you deal with the person regarding this sin so that you honor God with your attitude, words, and actions?