

The Characteristics of Love

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Introduction

More has been written about love than any other human emotion, yet considerable misunderstanding surrounds the subject. In First Corinthians Chapter Thirteen, the apostle Paul sets forth the various characteristics of Christian love (1 Cor. 13:1-8). Let us consider his teaching and apply it to our lives.

1 Corinthians 13:1-8 ... 1 If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 3 And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing. 4 Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, 5 does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, 6 does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 8 Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. (NASB95)

Negative Qualities Of Love

Envieth Not

Love is not jealous (NASB); Love does not envy (NIV, NKJV); Love envies no one (NEB). Envy is a self-destructive attitude, which – in contrast with other sins – fails to provide even fleeting pleasure. Love does not allow us to become filled with jealousy and bitter resentment (Gen. 4:1-8; 1 John 3:11-12). Rather, it causes us to demonstrate a generous spirit, and rejoice at the success and good fortune that others might enjoy.

Genesis 4:1-8 ... 1 Now the man had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, “I have gotten a manchild with the help of the Lord.” 2 Again, she gave birth to his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. 3 So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the Lord of the fruit of the ground. 4 Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and for his offering; 5 but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell. 6 Then the Lord said to Cain, “Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? 7 “If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted

up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it.” 8 Cain told Abel his brother. And it came about when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him. (NASB95)

1 John 3:11-12 ... 11 For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; 12 not as Cain, who was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother’s were righteous. (NASB95)

Vaunteth Not Itself

Love does not brag (NASB); Love does not boast (NIV); Love is never boastful (NEB); Love does not parade itself (NKJV). Love does not act as a vainglorious braggart or windbag. It does not heap praise upon self, nor actively seek the applause of others (Matt. 6:1-4). It causes us to realize the importance of others, and it limits self-esteem. Love leads us to give of self rather than to assert self (Phil. 2:1-4).

Matthew 6:1-4 ... 1 “Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven. 2 “So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. 3 “But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you. (NASB95)

Philippians 2:1-4 ... 1 Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, 2 make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. 3 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; 4 do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. (NASB95)

Is Not Puffed Up

Love is not arrogant (NASB); It is not proud (NIV); Love is never conceited (NEB). Pride is a grave sin (Prov. 6:16-19). Love is not puffed up like a pair of bellows. Such an unbecoming disposition grows out of exaggerated self-conception and haughty over-estimation of one’s importance. Rather than exude an attitude that says, “I’m kind of a big deal,” love cultivates a spirit of humility (Phil. 2:5-8).

Proverbs 6:16-19 ... 16 There are six things which the Lord hates, Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: 17 Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, And hands that shed innocent blood, 18 A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that run rapidly to evil, 19 A false witness who utters lies, And one who spreads strife among brothers. (NASB95)

Philippians 2:5-8 ... 5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (NASB95)

Doth Not Behave Itself Unseemly

Love does not act unbecomingly (NASB); It is not rude (NIV); Love is never rude (NEB); Love does not behave rudely (NKJV). This term has a broad range of application. Love does not act in a disgraceful, dishonorable or indecent way (cf. 1 Cor. 7:36-38). It avoids anything that is unseemly. It behaves with courtesy, good will, and genuine respect of others (1 Pet. 3:8-12).

*1 Corinthians 7:36-38 ... 36 But if any man thinks that he is ***acting *unbecomingly** toward his virgin daughter, if she is past her youth, and if it must be so, let him do what he wishes, he does not sin; let her marry. 37 But he who stands firm in his heart, being under no constraint, but has authority over his own will, and has decided this in his own heart, to keep his own virgin daughter, he will do well. 38 So then both he who gives his own virgin daughter in marriage does well, and he who does not give her in marriage will do better. (NASB95)*

1 Peter 3:8-12 ... 8 To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; 9 not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing. 10 For, "The one who desires life, to love and see good days, Must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit. 11 "He must turn away from evil and do good; He must seek peace and pursue it. 12 "For the eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous, And His ears attend to their prayer, But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil." (NASB95)

Seeketh Not Her Own

Love does not seek its own (NASB, NKJV); It is not self-seeking (NIV); Love is never selfish (NEB). Some people are concerned only with themselves. However, love is the antithesis of selfishness. Holy Scripture teaches us to first consider the needs of others (1 Cor. 10:23-24, 32-33).

1 Corinthians 10:23-24 ... 23 All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify. 24 Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor. (NASB95)

1 Corinthians 10:32-33 ... 32 Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God; 33 just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but the profit of the many, so that they may be saved. (NASB95)

Is Not Easily Provoked

Love is not provoked (NASB, NKJV); It is not easily angered (NIV); Love is not quick to take the offence (NEB); It is not touchy (Philip's Translation). Some are quick-tempered, becoming irritable over many things and little things. However, where there is love, there is self-control (Eph. 4:26-27; James 1:19-20). The flames of wrath are not easily kindled, nor do they keep burning long in a heart filled with love.

Ephesians 4:26-27 ... 26 Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and do not give the devil an opportunity. (NASB95)

James 1:19-20 ... 19 This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. (NASB95)

Thinketh No Evil

Love does not take into account a wrong suffered (NASB); It keeps no record of wrongs (NIV); Love keeps no score of wrongs (NEB). Paul uses a technical term in this passage. This Greek word was used in commercial dealings to describe entering debits/credits into a ledger. We must not keep a running account of offenses that we have suffered. Dwelling on real or perceived wrongs leads to bitterness and resentment. Love does not harbor a sense of injury (Prov. 17:9; 1 Pet. 4:8). When God forgives, He forgets: "Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." We should have the same attitude.

Proverbs 17:9 ... 9 He who conceals a transgression seeks love, But he who repeats a matter separates intimate friends. (NASB95)

1 Peter 4:8 ... 8 Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. (NASB95)

Rejoiceth Not In Iniquity

Love does not rejoice in unrighteousness (NASB); Love does not delight in evil (NIV); Love does not gloat over other men's sins (NEB). It is all too characteristic of human nature to take pleasure in the downfall of others. Love finds no pleasure in sin (Prov. 2:10-14; Rom. 2:6-11). Love is not indifferent to moral considerations. Christians should be grieved whenever sin is committed. We recognize that God's will has been violated, and also understand that someone has been hurt. Sin harms the transgressor and also those with whom he or she is associated.

Proverbs 2:10-14 ... 10 For wisdom will enter your heart And knowledge will be pleasant to your soul; 11 Discretion will guard you, Understanding will watch over you, 12 To deliver you from the way of evil, From the man who speaks perverse things; 13 From those who leave the paths of uprightness To walk in the ways of darkness; 14 Who delight in doing evil And rejoice in the perversity of evil; (NASB95)

Romans 2:6-11 ... 6 who will render to each person according to his deeds: 7 to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; 8 but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. 9 There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, 10 but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 11 For there is no partiality with God. (NASB95)

Positive Qualities Of Love

Suffereth Long

Love suffers long (NKJV); Love is patient (NASB, NIV). Love does not quickly become angry at the shortcomings and mistakes of others. In contrast with those who exhibit an explosive temper, love operates with a long fuse, manifesting considerable capacity of forbearance (1 Thess. 5:14; 2 Tim. 2:24-25).

1 Thessalonians 5:14 ... 14 We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone. (NASB95)

2 Timothy 2:24-25 ... 24 The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, 25 with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, (NASB95)

Kind

Love is kind (NKJV, NASB & NIV). Love demonstrates a good natured and considerate spirit. It is expressed through active good-will. Love seeks out opportunities to help others (Matt. 25:34-40; Eph. 4:31-32). As the poet once said, "I shall pass through this world but once. Any good thing, therefore, that I can do, or any kindness that I can show to any human being, let me do it now. Let me not defer it, or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again."

Matthew 25:34-40 ... 34 "Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 35 'For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; 36 naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.' 37 "Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? 38 'And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? 39 'When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' 40 "The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.' (NASB95)

Ephesians 4:31-32 ... 31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. (NASB95)

Rejoiceth In The Truth

Love rejoices with the truth (NASB, NIV); Love delights in the truth (NEB). Love and truth go hand in hand; the one cannot exist without the other. A love for truth is at the very heart of Christianity (John 8:31-32). When truth is victorious, love shares the gladness of its victory (3 John 3-4).

John 8:31-32 ... 31 So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." (NASB95)

3 John 3-4 ... 3 For I was very glad when brethren came and testified to your truth, that is, how you are walking in truth. 4 I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth. (NASB95)

Bearth All Things

Love bears all things (NKJV & NASB); It always protects (NIV); There is nothing love cannot face (NEB). Life can be challenging, but those who live by the principle of love will not yield to complaining, grumbling or bitterness. They will bravely withstand the trials of life. Love enables us to endure all manner of adversity (2 Cor. 11:23-29; James 1:2-4, 12).

2 Corinthians 11:23-29 ... 23 Are they servants of Christ?—I speak as if insane—I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. 24 Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. 26 I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; 27 I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. 28 Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches. 29 Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern? (NASB95)

James 1:2-4 ... 2 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. 4 And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (NASB95)

James 1:12 ... 12 Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. (NASB95)

Believeth All Things

Love believes all things (NKJV & NASB); It always trusts (NIV); There is no limit to its faith (NEB). It is easy to think the worst, but love maintains faith in others. Love looks for the good rather than the evil, focusing on the bright spots, not the dark shadows. Love is ever ready to make excuses for others, throwing a mantle of kindness over the faults and shortcomings of others. Love refuses to yield to unfounded suspicion. It causes us to give others the benefit of the doubt. Unless you are presented with conclusive evidence to the contrary, believe the best about fellow Christians, family members, and friends (2 Cor. 7:16; 2 Thess. 3:4; Phile. 1:21).

2 Corinthians 7:16 ... 16 I rejoice that in everything I have confidence in you. (NASB95)

2 Thessalonians 3:4 ... 4 We have confidence in the Lord concerning you, that you are doing and will continue to do what we command. (NASB95)

Philemon 21 ... 21 Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, since I know that you will do even more than what I say. (NASB95)

Hopeth All Things

Love hopes all things (NKJV & NASB); It always hopes (NIV); There is no limit to its hope (NEB). We ought not be pessimistic in our view of others. Rather, hope for the best. Love never loses faith God, and strives to maintain faith in others. Hope looks forward. Love refuses to accept momentary failure as final (Luke 13:6-9). In a crisis, it does not despair; rather, it anticipates the ultimate triumph of God's grace (2 Cor. 1:8-11).

Luke 13:6-9 ... 6 And He began telling this parable: "A man had a fig tree which had been planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and did not find any. 7 "And he said to the vineyard-keeper, 'Behold, for three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree without finding any. Cut it down! Why does it even use up the ground?' 8 "And he answered and said to him, 'Let it alone, sir, for this year too, until I dig around it and put in fertilizer; 9 and if it bears fruit next year, fine; but if not, cut it down.' " (NASB95)

2 Corinthians 1:8-11 ... 8 For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life; 9 indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead; 10 who delivered us from so great a peril of death, and will deliver us, He on whom we have set our hope. And He will yet deliver us, 11 you also joining in helping us through your prayers, so that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the favor bestowed on us through the prayers of many. (NASB95)

Endureth All Things

Love endures all things (NKJV & NASB); It always perseveres (NIV); There is no limit to its endurance (NEB). In the Greek, this was a military term that referred to the ability of an army to sustain an assault. It described steadfast endurance in the face of difficulties. Love causes us to bravely persevere. Love is patient in tribulation, enabling us to triumph over difficulties, persecutions, and temptations. Christianity provides us with the fortitude to overcome the adversities of life (Matt. 10:21-22; Heb. 12:1-4).

Matthew 10:21-22 ... 21 "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. 22 "You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved. (NASB95)

Hebrews 12:1-4 ... 1 Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. 4 You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; (NASB95)

Never Faileth

Love never fails (NKJV, NASB & NIV); Love will never come to an end (NEB). Few things in life endure, but love is permanent. This beautiful chapter closes with the statement: "And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity" (1 Cor. 13:13). One day faith will become sight, and hope will be realized, but love will endure for eternity (1 Cor. 2:9; 1 John 3:1-2).

1 Corinthians 13:13 ... 13 But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love. (NASB95)

1 Corinthians 2:9 ... 9 but just as it is written, "Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, And which have not entered the heart of man, All that God has prepared for those who love Him." (NASB95)

1 John 3:1-2 ... 1 See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. 2 Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. (NASB95)

Conclusion

Christian love is a multi-faceted jewel. It causes us to be patient with others, and not quickly retaliate against their shortcomings. Love results in active kindness. It causes us to shun evil attitudes such as resentment and envy. Love doesn't allow us to become puffed up with pride; nor does it act in a boastful, rude, or unbecoming way. Instead, we treat others in a courteous and respectful manner. Love is not self-seeking. Selfishness must be laid aside, and replaced with genuine consideration for the needs of others. Love does not allow us to become easily angered. If we truly love others, we will not keep a running ledger of their mistakes. Love produces a genuine morality. Whereas the world takes pleasure in sin, he who practices Biblical love delights in the truth. Love is steadfast: bearing, believing, hoping and enduring all things. Christian love is the summation of what godly character is all about. Without it we will not see God. How well do we manifest this quality in our lives?