

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.

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.

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).

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).

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).

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).

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.

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.

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.

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).

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."

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).

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).

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).

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).

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).

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).

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?