



LOVE

1 CORINTHIANS 13

Love suffers long, and is kind; love envies not; love vaunts not itself, is not puffed up, does not behave itself unseemly, seeks not her own, is not easily provoked, thinks no evil, rejoices not in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails ... Now abide faith, hope, and love, these three; and the greatest of these is love (1 Cor. 13:4-8,13).

Love in this passage is *agape*. What are its characteristics?

1. Love suffers long (is long suffering: patient...)

Love puts up with a lot! We understand this if we remember that God is "long-suffering" toward us. The people for whom He did so much (Israelites) constantly rebelled against him; they broke His laws; they thwarted His purposes. Despite the deliverance from Egypt and the provision for food and drink and shelter time after time, they still forsook him and worshipped idols. Yet God was patient. He would not give them up. And so He is with the church today. He has not swept the obstinate sons of man out of existence nor has he cast off His verbal followers (hypocrites). He loves them still. And that is the *AGAPE* love that we are to have for each other—we do not love because we're lovely and lovable, but because God is love and we are to be like Him!

2. Love is kind.

To be patient is to be Christ-like in forbearance; to be kind is the more active expression of Christian love. To be patient suggests self-restraint; to be kind suggests self-expression in love to our fellow men. The two are here bound in one. Love that is patient reveals itself in kindness. The miracles that Jesus did were outward expression of inward love. The truth that he preached to the multitudes was the outward expression of his inward love of truth. There is so much misery, so much heartache, so much sin, and so much sorrow. Kindness costs no money, only the effort that is required, and that discipline of spirit

which holds us close to our Lord. It is as easy to go about with a smile as it is to go about with a frown, and far more useful.

3. Love is not jealous (does not envy) or boastful.

Some members of the Corinthian church were extremely proud of their particular spiritual gift and boasted about it. More than once Paul has asked them to consider whether they had any real occasion for boasting (see 2 Cor. 11:12). It seems to have been a marked weakness of this particular church. Based on his comments against disorders in the church meeting and at the Lord's table, some were snobbish about their social status. Such people were apt to show off so that the poorer less fortunate members of the fellowship were humiliated (see 1 Cor. 3:3; 11:22; 2 Cor. 12:20) and moved to jealousy. All of this was bound to make havoc of the spirit of fellowship. What would change all that? *Agape* love!

4. Love is not arrogant or rude (does not behave itself unseemly).

There was a freedom from formal styles of worship in the early Christian churches. Such freedom has its values, but is also has its disadvantages. When the power of the Spirit of God comes flooding with Pentecostal force into the lives of such men and women as composed the community in Corinth, it is difficult for a time to confine the enhancement of mental and spiritual quality. There is a sort of overplus of spiritual power and energy that is apt to vent itself in unusual ways. Revival movements in every age afford many illustrations. So it was in Corinth. Some of the speakers thought what they had to say was more important than what another brother was saying. They would either sit impatiently until the other had finished, or make it obvious that they were not interested in what he was saying; or worse still, jump up and interrupt him with their own ideas. Feelings were bound to be hurt by such practices. Thus, Paul addresses the situation.

5. Love does not seek her own (insist on its own way)

Love lives to give and not to get. Love seeks not her own but the other man's. True love is always unselfish. Where self is at the center, that is neither the way nor the spirit of love. The greatest souls our world has ever known have been those who lived for others. Paul wanted the fellowship in the Corinthian church to be real and helpful so that it would give

them fullness of life.

6. Love is not irritable.

So now Paul turns to the effects that every display of ill-manners and arrogance might have upon those whose susceptibilities have been hurt. How difficult it is not to feel irritated in such circumstances! Some held high ideals for Christian morality and conduct of the church's worship. It irritated them to see worship brought into confusion and doubtless contempt. Paul prays for their Christian endurance that is part of the spiritual fruit of Christian love. Later he lays down certain broad rules for the conduct of public worship (*ch.14*). Here he prepares the way to make it possible for them to be open to receive the rules. Rules may not be set aside or disregarded unless they are supported by the right spirit. Love is the sovereign remedy for irritation and resentment. Irritation is apt to be the outward manifestation of pride and self-love. One is irritated if one's pride is hurt. Paul makes a plea for the "more excellent way." The petty annoyances and frustrations get us down and make us irritable. Let the love that is not centered in self, but on God, fill the hearts of all members of the community, and irritation will go into banishment with the things that give rise to it. It is the self-centered people who are apt to be supersensitive and easily annoyed. Christian love which is not self-centered, cannot be irritable.

7. Love ...is not ... resentful (rejoices not in iniquity, but in the truth)

Paul rightly associates the resentful spirit with irritability, though not all easily irritated people harbor resentment. The suggestion in the text is that those who are prone to resentment keep a careful account of the slights, fancied or real, which they have endured, and which have been so wounding to their self-esteem. They brood over that mental record until molehills assume the size of mountains. Their wrongs are stored up in the tablets of memory, and every time the record is reread the impression becomes deeper and is less easily erased. Paul pleads that love keeps no such accounts. We can select our memories. We can deliberately forget the unpleasant experiences that have befallen us. To blot out from the mind the wrongs that have been inflicted on us is a Godlike thing. This is what God does when a truly contrite sinner makes confession of his sins. His forgiveness involves

forgetfulness. In the prayer that the Lord taught to His disciples He makes the forgiveness of God concordant with man's forgiveness of his fellow men. Resentment can have no place in the heart or in the fellowship that is dominated to the full by the love of Christ.

Love's greatest qualities

1. Love bears all things.

Here Paul's thought implies that love carries the burden and even the blame for the wrong upon itself. Love carries on its own heart, the sin and the sorrow and the tragedy of all the world. We can see the shadow of the Cross in this aspect of love.

2. Love believes all things.

In its context this means that the loving spirit is always prone to believe the best about men and women. Its constant attitude is to put the highest construction upon their motives, even if at times their conduct proves difficult to understand.

3. Love hopes all things.

Jesus love gave Him insight into human nature which made Him hopeful where others saw no hope. he saw the possibilities of the fishermen of Galilee, of Mary Magdalene, of Paul himself even when Paul was a bitter enemy of the Christian church. Inspired by Jesus' love, Christians go on hoping against hope.

4. Love endures all things.

Where there is no obvious ground for faith it continues to hope; where there is no apparent ground for hope, it continues to endure. Love is like an army that is threatened with overwhelming defeat by superior numbers of the enemy but steadfastly refuses to give ground.

5. Love never ends (fails).

The Greek phrase Paul actually uses here can be translated with fair accuracy, love "never falls down on its job." Love, if it is the real thing, never lets us down. Real love is eternal, and

it is final, for it is of the very essence of God himself. No defeats or disappointments, no trials or disillusionment, no adverse circumstance whatever can get it down. The other gifts, by their very nature, are evanescent (tend to dissipate, fade away); love by its very nature is permanent.

Now we all need to take inventory of our love.

Does it line up with Paul's description in 1 Cor.13?

Probably not; but we can be submissive to the Holy Spirit and allow Him to teach us day by day!

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