

The Definition of Love

"Charity 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."

I Corinthians 13:4-7

Introduction:

1. The first part of the fruit of the Spirit is love, which is the bond of perfectness (Galatians 5:22-23; Col 3:14).
2. The first and second commandments are for us to love God and neighbor, and our text is here is for neighbors.
3. Apostles were first in the church of Christ, but loving one another is a "more excellent way" (I Cor 12:28-31).
4. All the works one could do to serve Christ and others are utter vanity without Christian love (I Cor 13:1-3).
5. The temporary gifts of the immature church passed away, but Christian love will never fail (I Cor 13:8-12).
6. Faith and hope are great graces as well as charity, but the greatest of all three is clearly charity (I Cor 13:13).
7. The royal law is love your neighbor, which is the preeminent mark of Christ's disciples (Jas 2:8; John 13:35).

Love Suffers Long

Loving sinners requires suffering, since sinners are imperfect. Longsuffering by definition requires suffering. If there is no pain, there is no love. Love without suffering is impossible. No person can or will always meet your expectations. Suffering long is tolerating injury, sacrificing desires, and seeing little success. Paul emphasizes this point by repeating it as not being easily provoked, bearing all things, believing all things, hoping all things, and enduring all things. Love gives and sacrifices for its object. This is extremely important. Love does not say, "I'm not going to put up with that," "she doesn't have the right to do that," and "I can't let her get away with that."

It takes two to fight; love covers sins and ends fights while hatred stirs up strife (Pro 10:12; I Pet 4:8). While obviously some offences must be judged, most personal offences can be suffered and covered. Love ends strife as quickly as possible (Pro 17:14). It shows its glory by passing over transgressions and deferring anger (Prov 19:11). Love means covering an offence completely and never repeating it (Prov 17:9). React slowly toward those you love (Pro 14:29; 15:18): take a long time to get angry and add to strife. Be slow to speak and diffuse the anger of those you love (James 1:19). Speak gently and turn their anger away (Pro 15:1; I Pet 3:8-9). We put up with the faults and offences of others by a meek and lowly attitude of longsuffering (Eph 4:2; Col 3:12-14). Love that suffers long works - you will win your object (Pro 25:15; Eccl 10:4).

Every person has his own desires, and these warring desires cause fighting among those who are supposed to love each other (James 4:1). But love prefers the desires of others and ends fighting (Rom 12:10; Phil 2:1-4). Contention in a relationship is simply a result of pride (Pro 13:10). However, frequent or constant giving up of desires is definitely suffering (Luke 6:32-35; II Cor 12:15). Love will do it for a long time.

Love Is Kind

Kindness is affectionate, benevolent, gentle, and sympathetic treatment of others. It is what we all desire from others (Prov 19:22). Consider also that love does not behave itself unseemly, seeks not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, and believeth all things.

A loving woman will do her husband good and not evil all her life (Prov 31:12), initiate acts of charity toward others (Prov 31:20), and have a law of kindness in her mouth (Prov 31:26). Love uses the lips graciously, and such love can win kings (Prov 16:13; 22:11; Eccl 10:12). Love will communicate itself to others (John 15:15).

Love includes bowels of compassion (Col 3:12-14). Such tender feelings are important (Gen 43:30; I Kings 3:26; S.S. 5:4; I John 3:17). Love shows kind affection (Rom 12:10). Kind affection will seize opportunities for doing good (Luke 11:11-13) and create opportunities (Matt 6:8,32). Love would never cause trouble to any, and would quickly seek reconciliation if it did (Matt 5:23-24). It always treats its objects politely and courteously. Sometimes it must show merciful tenderness rather than reproof (I Cor 4:21). Love will want to show charity and hospitality (Luke 10:30-37; Rom 12:13; I Pet 4:8-9). It knows the golden rule.

Love Does Not Envy

Envy is the hostile feeling of resentment for the superior advantages of another (Gen 37:4). It often includes emulation (Rom 11:14; Gal 5:20), or the ambition to equal or exceed another in any thing. It is a terrible and oppressive evil (Job 5:2; Prov 14:30; 27:4; James 3:14-16). Do not be deceived thinking that you are free from this great evil (James 4:5). Consider that love does not seek her own.

Love, by esteeming others better than one's self (Phil 2:1-4), does not envy the advantages of another. It rather rejoices at another's advantage and blessing (I Cor 12:26). Since God makes us to differ (I Cor 4:7), envy is actually fretting against the Lord.

Love Vaunteth Not Itself

Vaunting one's self is to boast, brag, or commend one's self by speech or bearing. It is the arrogant assertion of one's own presumed abilities or superiority (Judges 7:2; I Kings 20:11). Such an attitude and conduct will result in shame (Prov 11:2; 25:27) and contention (Prov 13:10). Since God makes us to differ (I Cor 4:7), we should not be puffed up. Consider that love does not seek her own.

Love avoids vaunting itself by promoting others (Phil 2:3). Seek a lower position than expected, and let others raise you up (Prov 25:6-7; Luke 14:7-11). Resist mentioning your own accomplishments, and let others praise you (Prov 27:2; 25:27). An easy way is to direct conversation away from one's self and toward others (Phil 2:4). Love asks of others rather than testifying of self. Love seeks serving rather than service (Luke 22:24-27). Consider the love of Abigail (I Sam 25:41).

Love Is Not Puffed Up

Love does not have a spirit or attitude of pride. Vaunting one's self is the arrogant assertion of superiority, while being puffed up is the attitude and spirit of the same thing.

A puffed up attitude keeps many from accommodating others, honouring others, admitting faults, seeking forgiveness, and promising better conduct (Rom 14:15; I Cor 5:2; 8:1). Love finds it easy to apologize, ask forgiveness, and change conduct. Love guards against thinking too highly of ourselves (Rom 12:3; I Cor 8:2; Gal 6:3; I Tim 6:17-18). A meek and quiet spirit is an attitude of great price (I Pet 3:3-4). Love will get down to others (Rom 12:16). Love controls its thoughts (Phil 2:3).

Love Does Not Behave Itself Unseemly

Unseemly behavior is conduct not appropriate, fitting, suitable, or proper for the occasion. Love always seeks to behave properly in every situation. It remembers all of God's distinctions among the ranks of men. Love behaves graciously. A lovely person is someone who always behaves properly - a gracious person. A gracious person retains honour (Prov 11:16), while a little folly leaves a stinking mess (Eccl 10:1). Speech is important (Prov 15:23; 22:11; 25:11). Be careful about needing to "speak your mind."

Love seeks to avoid offending others (I Cor 10:32-33). That person with an independent spirit that disdains social decorum and acceptable conduct does not know love. Love will even practice wise discretion with its objects of affection (Prov 25:17). Consider carefully saying, "to each his own," "different strokes for different folks," and "this is a free country."

Love Does Not Seek Her Own

Love is unselfish. Love gives to and for others (John 15:13). Love pursues others and their pleasure before self. Love is seeking to please others for their benefit (Rom 15:2; I Cor 10:24). It is a sincere consideration of others (Rom 12:10; Phil 2:4). Love will compromise personal preference to agree with its object (Amos 3:3).

Love is willing to be spent for another (II Cor 12:15). Love is doing to others what you would have them do to you (Matt 7:12; Luke 6:31). Love seeks to improve its object by investing in it (Rom 15:2; Eph 5:28-29). Love does not say, "I have my rights too," and "What do I get out of the relationship?"

Love Is Not Easily Provoked

Love will tolerate much before it reacts; remember, it suffers long. Love is not easily annoyed, angered, or made resentful (Prov 19:11; James 1:19). Quick anger is the mark of a fool (Prov 14:17), and fools do not love properly. Fools are opinionated, uncompromising, always right, revengers of evil, and teachers of lessons. Love has a better response to provocation than anger (Pr 25:21-22; Rom 12:20-21).

Love Does Not Think Evil

Love always puts the best possible construction on the words and actions of its object. It will deny and defend against evil thoughts or charges as long as possible. "Innocent until proven guilty" applies better to this principle than it does America's legal system. It will believe all things and then hope all things.

It will not entertain evil surmisings, or suspicions, about another (I Tim 6:4). Those that make a man an offender for a word know nothing of love (Isaiah 29:20-21). Love will drive away backbiting tongues (Prov 25:23). Digging up evil (Prov 16:27) or repeating evil (Prov 17:9) are not part of love. Jealousy will not be a major factor where love reigns. Love trusts.

Love Does Not Rejoice In Iniquity

Love is grieved when it sees others sin (Psalm 119:136; II Sam 4:9-12). It takes no pleasure in the fall of another. It rather rebukes in order to protect from further sins (Lev 19:17). Love does not hold back needed reproof of its object (Psalm 141:5; Prov 3:12; 13:24; 27:5-6; Rev 3:19). And such affection will win its object (Prov 9:8; 28:23). Love that does rejoice in iniquity is actually hatred (II Sam 13:1-20). Whores do not know about true love regardless of their words (Prov 7:18).

Love Rejoices In the Truth

Love is pure and rejoices in purity (James 3:17; II Pet 1:22). It takes great delight to see its object in the truth (III John 3-4). A pure heart will win its object (Prov 22:11).

Love may be measured by the keeping of God's commandments toward others (I John 5:2-3; II John 6). Love of God and love of neighbor summarize the entire law (Matt 22:37-40; Rom 13:8-10). Love should abound in knowledge and judgment and be able to approve excellent things (Phil 1:9-10).

Love Bears All Things

Love will put up with much grief and many burdens. It will not tire or give up easily. It will not reject some offences or sacrifices just because they are difficult. It is willing to assist at all times of trouble (Prov 17:17).

Fulfilling the law of Jesus Christ to love one another requires bearing others' burdens (Gal 6:1-2; Rom 15:1-2). Are you able to weep with those suffering (Rom 12:15; I Cor 12:26). Burdens slow us down, make us tired, and give us pain; but don't fret - you are loving.

Love Believes All Things

Love trusts the words and actions of its object as far as possible. It will put a positive construction on even doubtful conduct. Where faith and trust are lacking, fear is controlling; but love casts out fear by trusting its object as far as possible (I John 4:18).

Paul believed as much as he could positively about the Corinthians (I Cor 11:18). While the simple believe every word without proof or prudence (Prov 14:15), love requires such evidence before it will assume evil. Love does not imply foolish naiveté (Phil 1:9-10). Job purposed to believe God even in death (Job 13:15).

Love Hopes All Things

When love is struggling to believe the words and actions of its object, it relies on hope to consider its object in the best possible light. Even when it is hard to believe good regarding some person or event, love yet hopes that all is well. Hope operates even when there is nothing to be seen to encourage believing (Rom 8:24).

Love Endures All Things

When love is struggling to bear the griefs and burdens of its object, it perseveres in the work without fainting. Love never gives up. Jacob's love for Rachel is an example of such endurance (Gen 29:15-30).

"For better or for worse" are often trite words of ceremonial ritual, but they well describe this aspect of love. Solomon described it more eloquently as the unquenchable nature of love (S.S. 8:7). Love does not justify "I cannot put up with this any longer."