

“THE GREATEST OF THESE IS LOVE”

According to **2 Peter 1:5-11**, the culmination of the character traits that we are to add to our faith is love. Our love certainly should be for our spiritual family, but it must grow to include love for strangers and even our enemies (**Matthew 5:44-48**).

1 Corinthians 13 talks about the superiority of love over faith and hope (**v. 13**). The context of **1 Corinthians 13** is actually declaring the greatness of love over spiritual gifts. That is the meaning of **verses 1** and **2**. Love is also greater than the act of making a personal sacrifice for the poor or dying for the faith. Both sacrifices are in vain if done without love (**v.3**). Paul returns to his argument for the superiority of love over spiritual gifts (**v.8**).

Love is eternal in contrast with spiritual gifts which will cease. Even as Paul writes **1 Corinthians 13**, spiritual gifts are viewed as *temporary*. The three *permanent* things in the church are faith, hope, and love. Love is also greater than faith and hope (**v.13**). This is because love is eternal, and faith and hope will end when Jesus comes again. When He returns, our faith will become sight, and hope will become reality (**Hebrews 11:1; Romans 8:24**). If spiritual gifts were to last as long as faith and hope, when Jesus comes back, then **1 Cor. 13:13** would have to include the spiritual gift among the things that remain in the church.

In **1 Cor. 13:4-7**, we have a description of love. The first two words summarize love by saying what it does. The NKJV says, “*Love suffers long, and is kind.*” Rather than being adjectives, these words are verbs in the original language. First, the person who loves will endure the hurts originating from those whom he loves. And will he will endure anything from others in order to protect the ones he loves. Second, he will be kind, which in the Greek language literally means that he will make himself useful to meet the needs of those he loves. Both stances require an unselfish attitude.

To further clarify what love is, Paul through the Holy Spirit gives the Corinthians a list of things which love does *not* do. In other words, if you do any of the following things to those you love, your claim to love is an empty boast.

“**Love does not envy.**” This is referring to jealousy. Paul said in **Galatians 4:18** that it is good to be zealous for a good thing. In this context, however, envy is from a selfish motive. One of the problems was the carnality of the Corinthians regarding spiritual gifts. Several were not happy with the gifts they had and envied the ones who could speak in tongues.

“**Love does not parade itself.**” Once again, the problem in the immediate context speaks to a behavior expressing a carnal attitude toward the spiritual gift of speaking in tongues. Paul tells them to keep silent in the assembly if there is no interpreter (**1 Cor. 14:28**). They did not have a right to “show off” their gift (which others envied because of the attention they received).

Love is not puffed up. On several occasions, Paul rebuked the Corinthians for being puffed up (**1 Cor. 4:6,18; 5:2; 8:2**). It was the root of the problems reported to Paul in chapter 1 and chapter 5. It is also key to the problems of brethren not respecting the conscience of a weak brother and using their spiritual gifts in an unspiritual manner.

Love does not behave rudely. It has been said that all manners and etiquette are applications of consideration of others ahead of one’s own impulses or motives. We need to treat others the way we would want to be treated. Let us examine ourselves and make sure we think of what others feel about what we do.

Love does not seek its own. This phrase marks the center of the series of verbs of what love does not do. Love is not selfish and is not motivated by selfishness. In the example of Christ, we see that love is giving and forgiving. It is sacrificial (**Eph. 5:25**). Wherever selfishness is, all kinds of problems will be there (**James 3:16**).

Love is not provoked. The next two behaviors of love are a test of love’s control over our emotions instead anger stemming from selfish thinking. Love does not react with anger so quickly because it is irritated. This would be the opposite of longsuffering, which God has shown toward us. James said (**James 1:19**) to be slow to speak and slow to wrath.

Love thinks no evil. Not only is love not quickly angry; it does not stay angry. If one is angry for the right reason, it is not a sin. However, the danger is acting the right way while angry and not holding a grudge or keeping a record of all offenses.

Love does not rejoice in iniquity. A Christian must recognize the danger of iniquity, whether it is immorality, worldly philosophy, or false religious doctrine. True love will not cause anyone else to sin. For example, a young

man who claims to love a young lady and then tries to get her to commit fornication with him cannot truly love her.

Verse 6 begins the positive behaviors once again by stating the inverse of not rejoicing in iniquity by saying that love does rejoice in the truth. By loving the truth of God's word, we will also hate every false way opposed to it (**Psalm 119:105**).

The final four phrases, found in **verse 7**, are the highlight of love's triumph over anything and everything. These powerful traits prove that love is the greatest of all.

Love bears all things. We are willing to tolerate more from someone we love than from someone we don't care for as much.

Love believes all things. This is the trait that I used to apply to the phrase "thinks no evil." If we love someone, we will believe the best about that person. We will be slow to think negatively about them. Whenever an action or word might be possible be interpreted in a negative or positive way, love will put the best interpretation on it. Love gives the benefit of the doubt.

Love hopes all things. Love is optimistic. Even when the evidence forces a conclusion that person loved is in the wrong, there is the desire and expectation that the person will change for the better. With this positive expectation, love will do everything it can to bring about repentance and change for the better.

Love endures all things. In spite of all efforts, perhaps the person who is being loved still will not change. Love does not give up on that person. This is the strength God will provide us so that we can love our enemies and endure their mistreatment and rejection. It is the love which God had for us. It is the love in which we believe (**1 John 4:16**) and let abide in us to help others in their need (**1 John 3:17**).

Love never fails. Because it endures all things, there is no reason for love to get tired, give up and quit. God never changes, and He is love (**1 John 4:8**). Our love for Him will enable us to dwell with Him forever.

We now can see why this great love makes us like our Father in Heaven as Jesus told us to be (**Matt. 5:48**).

This is why love is the climax of the list of "graces" in **2 Peter 1:5-7**. It is also the first word to describe the fruit of the Spirit in **Galatians 5:22**. Truly, "*the greatest of these is love.*" (**1 Cor. 13:13**).