

Love...

Written by Frank Garner

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No doubt you have seen the charming little cartoon with the above title. On occasion the little single block work is profound. The more one considers the piece, the more meaning it provides. The letter to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians, Chapter 13) provides what appears to be a poem about love (charity) that could be entitled "Love is..." To do due justice to the apostle's work, we need to consider his words very carefully. Of the three great virtues, faith, hope, and charity (love), the apostle proclaims love as the greatest.

As husbands and wives, parents, grandparents, friends, brothers and sisters in Christ, we all proclaim our love for one another. How do we measure up in these relationships? With the break-down of families, marriages, friendships, and congregations, it is clear that love may be a missing ingredient.

Love is not something that mysteriously descends on us. Love develops and grows. Love is practiced. Love is something we do, not something that happens to us. Let's look at Paul's descriptions carefully.

Love Is Patient and Kind

The KJV states that "Charity suffereth long." Many modern versions say "Love is patient." Are we patient in our relationships? Husbands, are we patient with our wives? They are very busy and have stresses in their lives. We are not the only persons placing demands on them. They can become tired. They can be worried. Wives, what of those unfathomable creatures, husbands? We husbands take a lot of patience especially when we think we are being most reasonable!

We have children and grandchildren. Those children are bundles of queries, actions, explorations, emotions, observations, desires, and needs. God instructs us to bring them up "in the nurture" of the Lord. That takes patience. Most of us have been guilty of saying or thinking, "My patience is running thin!" or "I've been patient long

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enough!" Not really. Not if we love the person like we say we do. Remember, "Charity suffereth long."

Next, we see that "Love is kind." We know what acts of kindness are. There are thousands of them, little acts that mean so much. Please notice there is no time frame or count on kindness. If we love someone, we cannot place a quota on our acts of kindness to them. We can not say, "The time for kindness is finished for today." We cannot say, "I have been kind to you so now it's your turn to be kind to me."

All people respond to kindness. Children are especially needful. If we want to rear kind children, we must model kindness to them. They learn it from those closest to them. Kindness is not synonymous with license. We are to "admonish" our children. I suggest we can admonish with a degree of kindness. The contrast to kindness is cruelty. Cruel words and cruel deeds are not Christian virtues. They are not acceptable options with the ones we love.

The apostle tells us that "Charity envieth not." Envy and jealousy are not good virtues. They cause us to be resentful and bitter to other people whom we perceive to be favored over us. Envy will cause us to withhold kindnesses from them. That is not a characteristic of love for our neighbor, spouse, child, brother or sister. As one version states, "Love knows neither envy nor jealousy."

Love Is Not Puffed Up

The next characteristic of love states, "Charity vaunteth not itself." "Vaunt" is an old word. It means to be vainglorious, or a braggart. This is a spouse, parent, friend, brother or sister that must always be preeminent. Their ideas are better; their knowledge is greater; their needs (desires) are first; their possessions are finer. In a family situation, all others must abandon themselves to the fulfillment of this person. A person who acts this way loves himself/herself, not the other relations. They are selfish and domineering. Children, families, congregations suffer because of vainglorious people.

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Notice these alternative translations. "Love has no high opinion of itself (BBE). "Love does not parade itself (NKJV). "Love is not vain" (MKJV). "Love doesn't brag" (WEB). "Love is not forward or self assertive" (WNT). "Love is never boastful" (NEB). We get the idea easily enough.

Along the same line, we are told "Charity is not puffed up." I get a mental picture of the bantam rooster all puffed up to impress and bluff. Various versions say, "Love is not boastful" (RSV). "Love is never conceited" (TCNT). "Love is not arrogant" (NAS). "Love is not puffed with pride" (Williams). We are to be humble, selfless people. One source of our strength is the love we have for others.

Our general behavior addresses our love for other people. This includes direct action we take toward other people and the impact our behavior has on them. The apostle's statement is "Charity does not behave itself unseemly." If we love people, we are not rude or arrogant to them. We display good manners in our personal relationships. This direct contact with our children, spouses, brothers and sisters corresponds with this trait. We do not allow our children to be rude. We point out that the behavior is inappropriate. It is hypocritical to proclaim our love for someone then treat them rudely.

The other meaning of this characteristic of love is that love does not behave indecently, inappropriately, or unbecomingly. If we love the people of our family and our circle of friends, including the congregation, we will be concerned about the impact our lives have on them. To behave indecently, inappropriately, or unbecomingly has a negative impact on them. It grieves them. It causes them sorrow. It brings undeserved shame on them. Therefore, how we behave our-selves has a direct bearing on how we love our spouses, children, parents, brothers, and sisters.

Love Does Not Insist On Its Own Way

The next description of love is especially telling. "Charity seeketh not her own." We observe more anger, hostility, bitterness, loud voices and arguments because of this issue than any other. Simply stated, one translation says, "Love is not selfish." When we bunker into the "my way or no way" mind set, love of self becomes the overriding factor. The desires of the husband or wife, the children or parents, the brothers or sisters are not important.

The RSV gives us the best translation of this statement. "Love does not insist on its own way." It is difficult to improve the clarity of this statement. Each of us can make application to our own lives. When we see conflict in personal relationships, the majority of the time we are witnessing a struggle of two self wills. Certainly, two people will have differing views, ideas, desires, and wishes at the same time. "Charity" or "Love" soothes the conflict. A husband and wife, parent and child, brother or sister will be tolerant of the other if they love them. If we love one another, we will "suffer" an inconvenience, an activity, a chore, even though we don't particularly like it or want to do it.

When the differences of two individuals come head to head, love must be present. Paul says, "Charity is not easily provoked." If we love one another, we will not wear "our feelings on our sleeves." We will not be touchy. We will not be constantly irritable. Sure, someone is going to say or do something that hurts our feelings. That is a fact of life. How we respond is a measure of our love for them. One version states, "Love is not quickly made angry." It is not a loving environment that has people "protecting their turf at every turn. This is particularly important for husbands and wives and parents and children. Ephesians 4:31 tells us, "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

Love Doesn't Keep Score

Sometimes, we are personally injured, hurt by something a loved one says or does. How do we respond? Paul addresses that when he says, "Charity thinketh no evil." The original language suggests this "evil" is a harboring of resentment for a wrong suffered. Notice how these versions render the idea. "Love taketh no account of evil" (ASV). "Love bears no malice" (MNT). "Love is not resentful" (RSV). "Love does not keep account of evil" (Phillips) "Love keeps no score of wrongs" (NEB).

I really like that one. We cannot keep score. Life with the ones we love is not a contest. We are not competing with them. We are trying to help one another through "this crooked and perverse" world. We cannot do that if we are keeping account and trying to even the score. If we brood over wrongs and slights, we make ourselves miserable as well as those around us.

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The next two points are plainly related. "Charity rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth." First, love will not lie. Love will be honest and truthful. Second, love will take no pleasure in wrong doing. Love will take pleasure in doing what is right. Third, love will not be happy with evil. Love will side with the truth.

These observations cover many aspects of our relationships with our loved ones. We will not lie to them (or anyone). We "spea k the truth in love." If we truly love them, we will not take pleasure in being bitter, hostile, vengeful, or hurtful to them. To the contrary, we will take pleasure in doing the right things for them regardless of perceived wrongs.

As stated before, love is not a license. Love is not happy with evil; never happy when wrong is done. This applies to us but also to our loved ones. We can not rejoice at the wrongs that our loved ones commit. We can not wink at indiscretions or childhood pranks. To take pleasure in their wrongs is to condone them. Motivated by love, we must point out the wrong and show them the right way.

We must exhibit joy in what is true and right. If a child or adult loved one suffers for doing right, we should be the first to support, praise, and express our love for them. We must set the truth and righteousness before them in a loving fashion. We must encourage them to follow that path by our example, support, and love.

Love Never Gives Up

In the booklet "Making Plans for Marriage" by brother Raymond Stiner, he uses a version of these verses that says "Love never gives up." The KJV states, "Charity beareth all things." We will undergo any amount of adversity for those we love. Why? It's because we love them. When we see a person bail out on a marriage, or a troubled child, or a troubled brother or sister, it may be that we are seeing a lack of love for the people involved. Paul tells us that love will "bear up" under these things. We may not approve of their deeds. We may not be able to tolerate the problem. We may not be able to fix the problem. In extreme circumstances, we may not be able to continue to abide with the problem. However, we can still love them.

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Charity "believeth all things." Love is trustful. It is full of trust. That does make us vulnerable to abuse. We are not naive. But, how is a child to grow and learn without admonishing, correcting, and then trusting parents? They must learn to try again. And, we must trust them to try again. This also applies to adult situations. A trusting environment (again not a naive environment) is a loving environment. Trusting has a lot to do with forgiveness.

Love is "full of hope." It "hopeth all things." We look for the best from the people we love. We expect the best in our relationships with them. We hope for the good things to happen. We are positive and supportive. We are not purveyors of doom and gloom. We are not "negative Ninnies." If I am always skeptical and negative with my grandchildren, what am I doing for them and to them? What am I doing to support them, encourage them, and build them up? If we are not hopeful with our marriages and spouses, how long can they continue to grow and enrich? If we are not hopeful for those outside of Christ, where is the influence and encouragement necessary to bring them in? Love is full of hope.

Paul tells us "Charity endureth all things." This seems to be a recurring theme through the poem. Charity suffereth long." "Charity beareth all things." "Charity endureth all things." One version states, "Love is full of patient endurance" (WNT). The Amplified says, "Love endures.. .without weakening." Love is not something that we turn on and off according to our need. It is not something we dispense according to our liking.

Finally, "Charity never faileth" (vanish away). "Love is eternal." -PO Box 841, Princeton, TX