

## I Corinthians 13 by David E. Moss

Love. It is the most electric concept known to man. It is the stuff by which every human relationship survives -- or dissolves for lack of it. It is a many splendored thing. It is what the world needs, because without it, the human soul is utterly destitute.

But what is it?

Poets have written about it; philosophers have mused about it; and musicians have crooned about it through every generation of mankind. Yet love seems to remain so enigmatic.

The reason is simple. Man tends to seek a human definition to everything he experiences, but love defies a definition derived from a human context. Love is of God, because God is love (I John 4:7,8). If something is so intricately a part of the heart of God, any understanding of it must come directly from Him.

This makes His definition of love in I Corinthians 13 so significant. It is clear that God considers love to be the primary ingredient of the spiritual nature of His children. In fact, love is to our spiritual life what breathing is to our physical life.

### I. THE CONCEPT OF LOVE

#### 1. Agape (Agape)

There are several Greek words in the New Testament that are translated as "love." Agape is the one God chose to describe what flows from His heart. In secular usage, agape was an obscure word prior to its appearance in Scripture. The New Testament teaching concerning intimacy with God through the Gospel of Christ (symbolized by the renting of the Temple veil) deserved the coining of a new definition for a rare uncommon word. Agape's importance was immortalized being used 116 times in the New Testament.

#### 2. Charity

Fully twenty five percent of the time agape is translated "Charity" in the King James Version. The reason was to highlight and underscore the real concept of the word. With our modern technology, we can print the words of a text in several ways to bring special attention to it. We can underline words, type **bold face letters**, **enlarge the letters**, or use a different type of letter *such as italics*. In 1611, such devices were tedious and cumbersome. A much more convenient and colorful way to bring emphasis to a word was to use a synonym with a different flare. Whenever you read the word "Charity" in Scripture, it is unnecessary to reduce it to the more simplistic form "love." In each instance, see the word as highlighted in some decorative fashion, emphasizing the real meaning of love.

According to I Corinthians 13, Charity is supreme above all other spiritual talents granted to man. It excels speaking with the tongues of men and of angels. It is to be much preferred over the gift of prophecy and the ability to understand all mysteries and knowledge. It is even superior to the faith which has the capacity to remove mountains. And, it is of far greater value than any personal sacrifice a person might make such as distributing all his worldly goods to the poor or being martyred for his faith.

Charity is a multifaceted spiritual talent. Being transferred directly from God's heart to

ours, it enables a human being to remain unconditionally faithful to a relationship. The emotional dimension of love is merely a symptom of its presence in our lives, and not a part of the real substance of *Charity*. God lists sixteen elements of this talent that define it as a functional spiritual gift with many applications.

## **II. THE ELEMENTS OF LOVE**

### **1. Charity suffereth long.**

*Charity* has a fuse so long that no matter how difficult things become it never reaches the point of explosion. Love is so firmly committed to its object that it never reaches the point of saying, "*I can't take it any longer*" or "*I don't need this*" or "*I have to have a life of my own.*" Love is so firmly set that it cannot be persuaded to change its mind.

### **2. Charity is kind.**

*Charity* always uses gentle mannerisms, being concerned about how its actions will affect others. Character is a marvelous thing, but was meant to be distributed, not hoarded. Love cannot be harbored in a heart, but must be shared. When it is shared, it always acts in such a way which makes others comfortable and refreshed.

### **3. Charity envieth not.**

*Charity* never allows passions to generate negative energy, and never expresses resentment toward others. To wear envy in your heart is the same as wearing a sticker on your forehead that says "*I am spiritually immature.*" Envy creates an atmosphere of contention by hating others for having something it does not have. It seeks to destroy those who have prospered above it. *Charity* wants only to encourage and it delights in the prosperity of others.

### **4. Charity vaunteth not itself.**

*Charity* never over values self, makes a vain display of its own worth, or exaggerates its own accomplishments. Human nature considers importance in the eyes of others to be of great value. Unfortunately, human nature is willing to do anything in order to achieve this. You really are not acting in love if you claim undeserved credit in an attempt to gain more respect, or if you make exaggerated promises which you cannot keep in an attempt to make others feel good. *Charity* is content to be just what it is and nothing more.

### **5. Charity is not puffed up.**

*Charity* never pretends to be something it is not. There is no value in claiming victory when there is none, sounding tough when you are not, saying something is good when it is bad, or believing things that are not true. *Charity* is always honest and totally devoid of lying, prideful attitudes.

### **6. Charity doth not behave itself unseemly.**

*Charity* never does anything to cause others to blush. Excessiveness in any form is incompatible with the concept of love, whether it is the way a person dresses, or the way he behaves, or the way he talks. *Charity* will always demonstrate respect for the ones it loves and never cause them any embarrassment.

### **7. Charity seeketh not her own.**

*Charity* never desires what benefits itself without considering how this will affect others. If any one item in this list epitomizes the essence of love, it is this one. This strikes at the very heart of the divine law of love. Self seekers indulge in liberties at the expense of others. *Charity* is gratified by the advancement of others. It always seeks the welfare of others rather than of itself.

### **8. Charity is not easily provoked.**

Charity is not easily ignited to anger, and never starts emotional fires by its contentiousness. When a person is provoked, he has been pushed beyond his level of tolerance. Real love has such a high tolerance quotient, that it is like a candle that simply will not be lit. Charity renders conflict irrelevant because it refuses to participate.

9. Charity thinketh no evil.

Charity does not keep a record of offenses, debts, faults, errors or mistakes. It never reminds persons about all the wrong things they have done. This is because Charity knows how to forgive. Forgiveness is a promise never to bring up the matter again. Charity keeps this promise unflinchingly.

10. Charity rejoiceth not in iniquity.

Charity takes no pleasure in morally corrupt ethics, and does not enjoy reports of wrong doing. Rejoicing in iniquity includes, (1) expecting to be rewarded for doing something wrong; (2) taking advantage of those who fail; (3) delighting in conspiracy; (4) taking pleasure in those that do things worthy of punishment; and (5) giving God credit for assisting in evil plans. Charity has impeccable ethics and separates itself from the willfulness of the depraved human heart. It takes pleasure in the forgiveness of God that delivers it from iniquity.

11. Charity rejoiceth in the truth.

Charity elevates truth to the highest priority, and takes pleasure in things that are not afraid to be examined in the light. There are many negative things in life that are factual. But truth implies good quality that is unashamed when exposed to public scrutiny. Bad news may be factually accurate and thus generically true, but because it is not edifying, it cannot be considered truth. Truth welcomes scrutiny and loves to be examined. This is why Charity likes truth so much.

12. Charity beareth all things.

Charity knows when to stop before its behavior becomes excessive. Love does not complain or make demands. Bearing all things is the quality of meekness, by which love keeps human impulsiveness in check. The notion that we should always speak our mind is not accurate. There is a time to speak and a time to keep silence. Charity knows when to put a lid on it.

13. Charity believeth all things.

Charity knows the value of being able to believe in a person and practices trust. This is not gullibility. Charity does not let itself be easily deceived nor does it blindly believe what it knows to be untrue. But love does avoid skepticism, reluctance, and conditional belief. To say that Charity believes all things addresses the element of trust that makes a relationship unbreakable. It is the opposite of fear. It is the door of possibility. It is an imperishable commitment.

14. Charity hopeth all things.

Charity refuses to let experience discourage its hope for tomorrow. It is eternally optimistic. Pessimism is like thirst. Thirst exists because of the lack of water. Pessimism exists because of the lack of hope. Charity knows the source of living water that will never run dry. It never gives up on the possibility that problems will be solved, wounds will be healed, and good feelings will ultimately prevail.

15. Charity endureth all things.

Charity never lets irresponsible behavior influence its attitude toward the guilty person. Enduring all things is the supreme sacrifice that love makes in order to benefit the lives of others, even if they are your enemies. This is exactly the kind of love God directed toward us even while we were yet sinners. This expresses the unconditional nature of love that keeps two people bonded together for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in

health.

16. Charity never faileth.

Charity never comes to an end. It does not know how to say, "I don't love you anymore."

**Conclusion**

A Summary of I Corinthians 13

As great as these things are:

- speaking languages few or no one can,
- understanding and being privy to new revelation,
- having a dynamic faith few ever experience,
- giving all you own to meet the needs of others,
- martyrdom

none of them have any real value unless the motivation for them is love. The very thing I may hope to accomplish without love is the very thing that is rendered meaningless without love.

**Faith** is the thing that connects us to the heart of God. Without faith it is impossible to please Him. **Hope** is the eye of faith, sustaining it through all that is unseen and uncertain, making it possible for us to believe that God is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.

But **love** is the very heart of God. It is not a feeling, though exhilarating and refreshing feelings result from it. **It is the talent to be selfless and to be sacrificially concerned with the welfare of others.** It was the agape love of God that made it possible for His Son to selflessly make Himself of no reputation, to take upon Himself the form of a servant, and as a man, to humble Himself, being obedient unto death, not for any benefit to himself, but solely for the benefit of the lost souls of the human race.

The next time you say to any one, "I love you," realize what you are telling them. By those three little words you are making a commitment. You are saying,

"I promise always to

*maintain my composure,  
make you as comfortable as possible,  
delight in all your prosperity,  
be content with who I am,  
be honest about everything,  
never cause you embarrassment,  
seek your welfare above my own,  
refuse to participate in conflict,  
throw away the record of your mistakes,  
maintain the highest level of ethics,  
welcome examination,  
know when to stop,  
build trust in our relationship,  
be optimistic,  
endure everything that threatens our relationship,  
and,  
I will never stop doing all of these things."*

This is love.