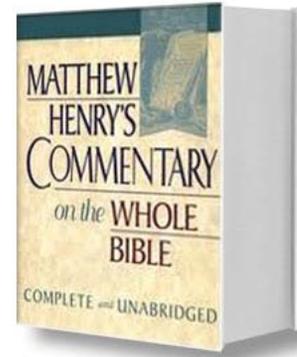


Love in First Corinthians Thirteen

By Matthew Henry

Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 1 Corinthians 13:4-7



The apostle gives us in these verses some of the properties and effects of charity, both to describe and commend it, that we may know whether we have this grace and that if we have not we may fall in love with what is so exceedingly amiable, and not rest till we have obtained it. It is an excellent grace, and has a world of good properties belonging to it. As,

I. *It is long suffering — makrothymei.* It can endure evil, injury, and provocation, without being filled with resentment, indignation, or revenge. It makes the mind firm, gives it power over the angry passions, and furnishes it with a persevering patience, that shall rather wait and wish for the reformation of a brother than fly out in resentment of his conduct. It will put up with many slights and neglects from the person it loves, and wait long to see the kindly effects of such patience on him.

II. *It is kind — chresteuetai.* It is benign, bountiful; it is courteous and obliging. *The law of kindness is in her lips;* her heart is large, and her hand open. She is ready to show favours and to do good. She seeks to be useful; and not only seizes on opportunities of doing good, but searches for them. This is her general character. She is patient under injuries, and apt and inclined to do all the good offices in her power. And under these two generals all the particulars of the character may be reduced.

III. Charity suppresses envy: *It envieth not;* it is not grieved at the good of others; neither at their gifts nor at their good qualities, their honours nor their estates. If we love our neighbour we shall be so far from envying his welfare, or being displeased with it, that we shall share in it and rejoice at it. His bliss and sanctification will be an addition to ours, instead of impairing or lessening it. This is the proper effect of kindness and benevolence: envy is the effect of ill-will. The prosperity of those to whom we wish well can never grieve us; and the mind which is bent on doing good to all can never wish ill to any.

IV. Charity subdues pride and vain-glory; *It vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,* is not bloated with self-conceit, does not swell upon its acquisitions, nor arrogate to itself that honour, or power, or respect, which does not belong to it. It is not insolent, apt to despise others, or trample on them, or treat them with contempt and scorn. Those who are animated with a principle of true brotherly love will in honour prefer one another, **Rom. 12:10.** They will *do nothing out of a spirit of contention or vain-glory, but in lowliness of mind will esteem others better than themselves, Phil. 2:3. True love will give us an esteem of our brethren, and raise our value for them; and this will limit our esteem of ourselves, and prevent the tumours of self-conceit and arrogance. These*

ill qualities can never grow out of tender affection for the brethren, nor a diffusive benevolence. The word rendered in our translation *vaunteth itself* bears other significations; nor is the proper meaning, as I can find, settled; but in every sense and meaning true charity stands in opposition to it. The Syriac renders it, *non tumultuatur—does not raise tumults* and disturbances. Charity calms the angry passions, instead of raising them. Others render it, *Non perperà et perversè agit—It does not act insidiously with any*, seek to ensnare them, nor tease them with needless importunities and addresses. It is not froward, nor stubborn and untractable, nor apt to be cross and contradictory. Some understand it of dissembling and flattery, when a fair face is put on, and fine words are said, without any regard to truth, or intention of good. Charity abhors such falsehood and flattery. Nothing is commonly more pernicious, nor more apt to cross the purposes of true love and good will.

V. Charity is careful not to pass the bounds of decency; *ouk aschemonei — it behaveth not unseemly*; it does nothing indecorous, nothing that in the common account of men is base or vile. It does nothing out of place or time; but behaves towards all men as becomes their rank and ours, with reverence and respect to superiors, with kindness and condescension to inferiors, with courtesy and good-will towards all men. It is not for breaking order, confounding ranks bringing all men on a level; but for keeping up the distinction God has made between men, and acting decently in its own station, and minding its own business, without taking upon it to mend, or censure, or despise, the conduct of others. Charity will do nothing that misbecomes it.

VI. Charity is an utter enemy to selfishness: *Seeketh not its own*, does not inordinately desire nor seek its own praise, or honour, or profit, or pleasure. Indeed self-love, in some degree, is natural to all men, enters into their very constitution. And a reasonable love of self is by our Saviour made the measure of our love to others, that charity which is here described, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*. The apostle does not mean that charity destroys all regard to self; he does not mean that the charitable man should never challenge what is his own, but utterly neglect himself and all his interests. Charity must then root up that principle which is wrought into our nature. But charity never seeks its own to the hurt of others, or with the neglect of others. It often neglects its own for the sake of others; prefers their welfare, and satisfaction, and advantage, to its own; and it ever prefers the weal of the public, of the community, whether civil or ecclesiastical, to its private advantage. It would not advance, nor aggrandize, nor enrich, nor gratify itself, at the cost and damage of the public.

VII. It tempers and restrains the passions. *Ou paroxynetai — is not exasperated*. It corrects a sharpness of temper, sweetens and softens the mind, so that it does not suddenly conceive, nor long continue, a vehement passion. Where the fire of love is kept in, the flames of wrath will not easily kindle, nor long keep burning. Charity will never be angry without a cause, and will endeavour to confine the passions within proper limits, that they may not exceed the measure that is just, either in degree or duration. Anger cannot rest in the bosom where love reigns. It is hard to be angry with those we love, but very easy to drop our resentments and be reconciled.

VIII. Charity *thinks no evil*. It cherishes no malice, nor gives way to revenge: so some understand it. It is not soon, nor long, angry; it is never mischievous, nor inclined to revenge; it does not suspect evil of others, *ou logizetai to kakon — it does not reason out evil*, charge guilt upon them by inference and *innuendo*, when nothing of this sort appears open. True love is not

apt to be jealous and suspicious; it will hide faults that appear, and draw a veil over them, instead of hunting and raking out those that lie covered and concealed: it will never indulge suspicion without proofs, but will rather incline to darken and disbelieve evidence against the person it affects. It will hardly give into an ill opinion of another, and it will do it with regret and reluctance when the evidence cannot be resisted; hence it will never be forward to suspect ill, and reason itself into a bad opinion upon mere appearances, nor give way to suspicion without any. It will not make the worst construction of things, but put the best face that it can on circumstances that have no good appearance.

IX. The matter of its joy and pleasure is here suggested:

1. Negatively: *It rejoiceth not in iniquity*. It takes no pleasure in doing injury or hurt to any. It thinks not evil of any, without very clear proof. It wishes ill to none, much less will it hurt or wrong any, and least of all make this matter of its delight, rejoice in doing harm and mischief. Nor will it rejoice at the faults and failings of others, and triumph over them, either out of pride or ill-will, because it will set off its own excellences or gratify its spite. The sins of others are rather the grief of a charitable spirit than its sport or delight; they will touch it to the quick, and stir all its compassion, but give it no entertainment. It is the very height of malice to take pleasure in the misery of a fellow-creature. And is not falling into sin the greatest calamity that can befall one? How inconsistent is it with Christian charity, to rejoice at such fall!

2. Affirmatively: *It rejoiceth in the truth*, is glad of the success of the gospel, commonly called *the truth*, by way of emphasis, in the New Testament; and rejoices to see men moulded into an evangelical temper by it, and made good. It takes no pleasure in their sins, but is highly delighted to see them do well, to approve themselves men of probity and integrity. It gives it much satisfaction to see truth and justice prevail among men, innocence cleared, and mutual faith and trust established, and to see piety and true religion flourish.

X. *It beareth all things, it endureth all things, panta stegei, panta hypomenei*. Some read the first, *covers all things*. So the original also signifies. *Charity will cover a multitude of sins*, 1 Pt. 4:8. It will draw a veil over them, as far as it can consistently with duty. It is not for blazing nor publishing the faults of a brother, till duty manifestly demands it. Necessity only can extort this from the charitable mind. Though such a man be free to tell his brother his faults in private, he is very unwilling to expose him by making them public. Thus we do by our own faults, and thus charity would teach us to do by the faults of others; not publish them to their shame and reproach, but cover them from public notice as long as we can, and be faithful to God and to others. Or, *it beareth all things*, —will pass by and put up with injuries, without indulging anger or cherishing revenge, will be patient upon provocation, and long patient, *panta hypomenei* — holds firm, though it be much shocked, and borne hard upon; sustains all manner of injury and ill usage, and bears up under it, such as curses, contumacies, slanders, prison, exile, bonds, torments, and death itself, for the sake of the injurious, and of others; and perseveres in this firmness. Note, What a fortitude and firmness fervent love will give the mind! What cannot a

lover endure for the beloved and for his sake! How many slights and injuries will he put up with! How many hazards will he run and how many difficulties encounter!

XI. Charity believes and hopes well of others: *Believeth all things; hopeth all things*. Indeed charity does by no means destroy prudence, and, out of mere simplicity and silliness, believe every word, *Prov. 14:15*. Wisdom may dwell with love, and charity be cautious. But it is apt to believe well of all, to entertain a good opinion of them when there is no appearance to the contrary; nay, to believe well when there may be some dark appearances, if the evidence of ill be not clear. All charity is full of candour, apt to make the best of every thing, and put on it the best face and appearance? it will judge well, and believe well, as far as it can with any reason, and will rather stretch its faith beyond appearances for the support of a kind opinion; but it will go into a bad one with the upmost reluctance, and fence against it as much as it fairly and honestly can. And when, in spite of inclination, it cannot believe well of others, it will yet hope well, and continue to hope as long as there is any ground for it. It will not presently conclude a case desperate, but wishes the amendment of the worst of men, and is very apt to hope for what it wishes. How well-natured and amiable a thing is Christian charity? How lovely a mind is that which is tinctured throughout with such benevolence, and has it diffused over its whole frame! Happy the man who has this heavenly fire glowing in his heart, flowing out of his mouth, and diffusing its warmth over all with whom he has to do! How lovely a thing would Christianity appear to the world, if those who profess it were more actuated and animated by this divine principle, and paid a due regard to a command on which its blessed author laid a chief stress! *A new commandment give I to you, that you love one another, as I have loved you, that you also love one another, Jn. 13:34. By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, v. 35*. Blessed Jesus! how few of thy professed disciples are to be distinguished and marked out by this characteristic!

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