

"The Greatest of These..."

1 Corinthians 13

It's Valentine's Day—A day that has been set aside to celebrate LOVE. But, to celebrate love we must know what love is. Most secular definitions of love fall short of the essence of love.

- "A deep devotion or affection" (*Funk & Wagnalls Standard Desk Dictionary*).
 - "An affection of the mind excited by beauty and worth of any kind, or by the qualities of an object which communicate pleasure" (*Webster*).
 - These definitions indicate love is an emotion, but love is more than a "sentimental feeling."
- ➔ The Bible says, "*God is love*" (1 John 4:8, 16). God doesn't merely love — He is the very expression of love.
- ➔ Love is more easily described than defined. You will not find a better description of "love" than 1 Corinthians 13—commonly called the "Love Chapter." It's description of love describes God. You could interchange the word "*charity*" to "God" or Jesus without doing any injustice to the text. It would tell you what God is like.

However, the word "love" is not found in 1 Corinthians 13 in a King James Bible. Instead, we read "*charity*," which is a better word than love. You may experience love without charity, but you will never experience charity without love.

"*Charity*" is associated with conduct, not emotions. Notice "*charity*" is always active (vs. 4-8). Biblical love is not something that you *profess*—It is something you *practice*. It is not something that is merely *said*—It is something that is *shown*. 1 John 3:18—"*Let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in DEED and in truth.*"

"*Charity*" is **love in action** / giving, especially as it related to those in the body of Christ.

In the 29 times the word "*charity*" occurs in the KJB, each time it is in the context of fellow believers. It is never used in the context of the

unsaved (cf. 1 Cor. 8:1; 14:1; 16:14; Col. 3:14; 2 Thess. 1:3; 1 Tim. 2:15; 2 Tim. 3:10; 1 Pet. 4:8; 5:14; 2 Pet. 1:7, etc.)

It appears that "*charity*" is a word God reserves for Christians, whereas "love" may be used towards the lost or believers.

➡ Let's look at what God says about "true love."

I. See it's **EXCELLENCE** (vs. 1-3).

- A. How we SPEAK (v. 1). Eloquence in speaking is just noise without charity. Adolph Hitler was a tremendous orator, but he had no love. TRUTH MUST BE SPOKEN IN LOVE (Eph. 4:15).
- B. How we SERVE (v. 2)—Gifts of prophecy and knowledge without charity often leads to pride (cf. 8:1).
- C. How we SACRIFICE (v. 3). It is possible to give without loving. If our giving is not motivated by charity, it profits us nothing.
 - 1. Giving out of duty; giving of necessity; legalistic giving.
 - 2. Giving to be seen of men (Matt. 6:1-2).
 - 3. Giving with the personal agenda or motive of selfish gain.

II. See it's **EXPRESSIONS** (vs. 4-6).

- A. POSITIVE expressions.
 - 1. Charity is **PATIENT** (v. 4), even when you feel like complaining (cf. Gal. 5:22). Charity is willing to suffer pain and trials a long time without resentment.
 - Difference between true love and infatuation—PATIENCE.
 - 2. Charity is **KIND** (v. 4), even when you feel like retaliating or speaking badly about another. "Kind" means to show yourself helpful and act benevolently.
 - 3. Charity is **TRUTHFUL** and honest (v. 6). Charity rejoices in the promotion and proclamation of truth. Does not LIE.
- B. NEGATIVE expressions.

1. Charity does **not envy** (v. 4) when other people get more attention than you. Charity shows no resentment towards another's successes or achievements.
2. Charity does **not brag** or show off (v. 4).

E. Charity **SUCCEEDS** (v. 8), even when you feel overwhelmed and doomed to fail.

SUMMATION (v. 13): Biblical love is constant—It will never lose its force. As Solomon wrote, *“Love is strong as death... many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it”* (Song of Solomon 8:6-7).

What would this world be like if everyone practiced charity? There would be no wars, crime, abuse, injustice, immorality, divorce.

Charity is the greatest. HOW IS CHARITY GREATEST?

- Faith and Hope are human qualities—Charity is a Godlike quality.
- Faith and Hope are temporal—Charity is eternal.
- Faith without charity is dull. Hope without charity is cold. Charity brings life to faith and turns hope into reality.

More people have been won to Christ by genuine love and charity than all the apologetic arguments in the world. And more people have been driven from Christ by the hypocrisy and arrogance of many so-called Christians than all the doubts in the world.

As I've often quoted Dr. Ruckman, “All church problems are basically love problems.”

How well do these characteristics of charity apply to you? Are you really a loving person? Towards your spouse... children... the unsaved?