

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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God Defines Love, "Charity"

Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. (1 Corinthians 13:4-7, KJV 1900)

It is quite apparent that the King James word "Charity" in this passage is dealing with a principle of love, not giving to poor people in need. The King James translators left occasional footnotes to help us learn more about the finer points of the words that they chose for the translation text, but they by no stretch provided us with copious details that contemporary Christian publishers would describe as a "Study Bible." Perhaps their choice of "Charity" in certain passages reminds us that they understood the word in that text to mean more than the typical English idea of "Love." If that was their intent, they were correct.

Often as I study the Bible I see that a given word in a text lies at the heart of the truth that the passage intends to communicate. I reject the idea that you must study the Greek language and word meanings to understand the English text of the Bible, and I make no apology for using and recommending the King James English translation of the Bible. It has withstood the test of time and the scrutiny of critics. I have never found a single passage where I concluded that the Greek word meaning or sentence structure of a passage corrected the English of the KJV, not one. That said, I do on occasion study Greek resources to learn some of the nuances that the translators faced in their task. This is for my learning, not in any way to correct or to improve on the King James text. A simple point for those interested in learning from the Greek text of the Bible; do not approach New Testament Greek as you approach contemporary English, by looking up the shortest available definition of a word and thinking you have the meaning. You are familiar with the grammatical rules and conventions of our English language; you are not familiar with the grammatical rules of first century Greek. In first century Greek, sentence structure, word order in a sentence, and word meaning unite to convey the intended meaning of a passage. Young's or Strong's dictionaries are liable to mislead you more than communicate the correct idea. If you think it necessary to check a Greek resource, by all means find one that is more reputable and thorough than either of these. Preferably check several resources and see how they compare. Unlike our English language, word order in New Testament Greek sentence carries

strong implications for our understanding of a passage. You might look up the meaning of a word in a good dictionary and miss the meaning of the passage because you ignored the word order in the sentence or sentences in the passage.

I have observed far too many people, preachers and otherwise, cite an abbreviated definition of a Greek word and act as if they have become instant Greek scholars. In fact, their ideas often reveal a sad ignorance of the Greek text and language, the mirror opposite of true respectable scholarship.

In the case of our study passage and this major truth regarding what I have termed the "God kind" of love, we are supremely blessed by the Lord in our English Bible. We might consult any number of highly refined and respected dictionaries to learn the meaning of "Charity" as Paul uses it in this context. No doubt many of them would give us good thoughts to consider. Example; the first dictionary I ever consulted for the meaning of this word simply defined it as "Love in a social or moral sense." Not at all a bad definition, it definitely teaches us that the word means something far different from our English idea of emotional love. You might consult the old Liddell-Scott dictionary, Louw-Nida, or one of the other more contemporary dictionaries, finding good thoughts in most of them. However, do not ignore the most obvious and by far the best dictionary of all. In Scripture itself God often defines the words that He directed the human authors to use when they wrote the text. The verses that I quote for this study in fact give us God's inspired definition of "Charity" as Paul used the word in this context. You can't get a better definition than the meaning given by the One who wrote the dictionary. ***This is part of what it means to allow Scripture to interpret Scripture.***

Let's discard all the dictionaries and learn what God says about this word in His dictionary.

1. *Charity suffereth long, and is kind.* We often hear the word "Short tempered." You want to avoid the person so described. He/She is quick to explode if you cross his/her ideas. Charity, according to Paul, is the mirror opposite. We occasionally see the word "Longsuffering" in the New Testament. Although this word may cross over in meaning with our English word

“Patience,” we also find “Patient” in the Bible. Language scholars generally agree that the King James use of these two words is with purpose. “Longsuffering” refers to how we deal with people; “Patient” describes how we should deal with circumstances. Instead of being short-tempered and temperamental, the believer whose life is daily transformed by “Suffereth long and is kind” love will be gracious and kindly even-tempered toward other believers, even when those other believers say or do insensitive things. This God kind of love doesn’t need a reason to be kind. She is inherently kind. That is her natural and consistent way of dealing with other people. She needs no excuse to be kind. She is kind whether you are kind toward her or not.

2. *Charity envieth not.* Envy is an evil and powerful trait. Both Matthew (27:18) and Mark (15:10) state that the Jews delivered Jesus to be crucified for envy. Jesus had something that they wanted but could not attain. If they couldn’t gain what Jesus had for themselves, they wanted to destroy Him. Typical of the Jews’ conduct toward Jesus, a person motivated by envy is bent on destruction of the person who happens to be the object of his envy. But what about Charity? Again, the mirror opposite appears. She does not envy. Charity that stands on faith in God trusts the Lord to provide what we need, so the “Charitable” believer has no desire and sees no need to resort to personal scheming to gain the upper hand or to obsess with envy over what someone else has.
3. *Charity vaunteth not itself.* We do not ordinarily use this word “Vaunt.” What does it mean? Merriam-Webster defines the word as to brag, to make a vain display of one’s own worth or attainments. We’ve met those people who very sincerely think themselves to be godly Christian people, but they have a way of talking about themselves and only themselves. Tell them the sky is falling, and they’ll find a way to turn the focus of the conversation to something about themselves. Tell them you were just diagnosed with cancer, and they’ll find a way to twist the conversation to their recent headache. Charity, the “God kind” of love that Scripture here defines, feels no need to promote herself or to brag about all of her goodness. She is busy working to serve and to help others. Her interest is their improvement and comfort, not her self-promotion.
4. *...is not puffed up.* Being “Puffed up” goes hand in hand with vaunting. Being puffed up describes the person who thinks far too highly of self and therefore too lowly of others. He may deflect his pride so as to deceive the casual observer. Rather than directly boast of self, he may simply think himself always more righteous, more right, more knowledgeable in

the Scriptures, more wise about life. Whatever the question, the puffed up believer always thinks more highly of himself and his ideas than he should. (Romans 12:3)

5. *Doth not behave itself unseemly.* What is “unseemly” behavior? The idea deals with a sense of decency. Biblical charity does not relish living on the edge of what is acceptable. You should not become a legalistic Christian. In fact, this Biblical love fiercely refuses to allow you to drift into unloving and rigid legalism. A rigid legalistic attitude might in fact be just one of several ways in which a believer could behave “Unseemly.” Love and legalism are mutually exclusive. You can’t practice both. Either pure love from and of God rules, or your multiplied rules control your life. This does not suggest that Biblical love is undisciplined. In fact, true “Charity” lives by a higher order than legalistic rules can attain. I love my wife and seek to honor her because I love her. I would not betray our vow because I love her, not simply because of a rule that tells me to keep my vows. By practicing this “Rule of love,” I show her more of my love than I could possibly show her by legalistically keeping the vow.
6. *...seeketh not her own.* Our human nature consistently looks out for our personal selfish interest above all others. “Take care of yourself, Buddy. I’m taking care of me.” This attitude is all too acceptable by sinful human measure, but the “God kind” of love refuses to practice it. How can I help you? What can I do to make your life better or easier? Let me share your burden. How often we observe a struggling or discouraged believer who refuses to acknowledge his trouble. The believer who practices this “seeketh not her own” kind of love will sense this believer’s need and desire to encourage and to help. And the believer who practices this quality of Biblical love has no need or desire to be praised in the limelight for how good or faithful he was.
7. *...is not easily provoked.* Our culture uses a cliché to describe this frame of mind, a “Chip on the shoulder.” When in the presence of such a person, we describe our efforts to survive and not set the person off as “Walking on egg shells.” The more a person manifests this attitude the more they reveal the absence of this quality of love as in any way controlling their behavior. As we practice this quality of love, we manifest a gracious stability in kind, even-tempered endurance of life’s stressful events and people
8. *...thinketh no evil.* Other points may well be included, but this point takes us to the common human attitude of imputing motives to people, especially when they act badly and we want to criticize them sharply for their conduct. “You know, he did it because...” And what follows “because” is always some very low and

unworthy motive. This attitude again reveals the absence of Biblical Charity described and defined in 1 Corinthians 13. I recall reading about a preacher who built a reputation for never criticizing people when they did something wrong. For this reason, he was often asked to preach the funeral service of people in the community, including many people who did not attend the church that he served. When the most depraved man in the region died, someone decided to test the old preacher. They raised the man's death to him, "Preacher, what did you think about this man?" The preacher thought for a moment and answered, "Well, he was a good whistler." Whether you agree with the preacher or not, he likely lived closer to this description of godly love than most folks.

9. *Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth.* When people allow envy, jealousy, or any form of selfish and sinful motive to control them, they relish bad things happening to their adversaries. "Serves him right, he deserved it." One has to wonder, "And what do **you** really deserve?" In fact, the two-pronged point reveals that the believer who lives by godly 1 Corinthians 13 "Charity" rejoices when good things happen, even to his worst enemies. You trust God to judge kindly and righteously. You feel no compelling need to supplement or to replace Him in judgment.
10. *Beareth all things.* The word "Beareth" and its modern word form "Bears" suggests carrying a weight or burden. We see another form of the word in Scripture, "Forebear." When it might be easier on our carnality and its sinful appetites to explode and rip into people, this quality picks up the weight of the occasion and carries it with quiet grace. In most cases, the source of the weight is something that another person, likely another believer, says or does that "Rubs you the wrong way." Will you explode and give that person a piece of your mind? Or will you quietly bear the weight of the thoughtless imposition? How much of this love is at the helm of your life's ship?
11. *...believeth all things.* The point here is not that the loving believer is mindlessly gullible. Rather the "Charitable" believer has faith in his brothers and sisters. Instead of constantly thinking the lowest things about them and their actions, the loving believer holds his brothers and sisters high in grace and loving respect. Instead of viewing his brother or sister with "The Bible teaches total depravity, and, brother, you are a good example of it," the loving believer thinks highly toward his brothers and sisters. Would you like a focused explanation of this behavior? Read Philippians 2:1-4. Instead of walking over your brothers and sisters, 1 Corinthians 13 "Charity" guides you to hold them in higher esteem than you hold yourself.

12. *...hopeth all things.* The loving believer is not a gloomy pessimist who constantly thinks the sky is falling, the church is dying, and life is awful. So what if things are not ideal at the moment. God is in His heaven, and God is faithful to His promises. I put my hope in Him, not in the lesser-of-two-evils political party, or the better of two bad candidates for high office. I know that my deliverance rests in the Lord and I look forward with joyful anticipation to His return and glorious victory.

13. *...endureth all things.* Life under the sun where we live it each day will not dish up the ideal. Every dark cloud will not bring fresh, reviving spring showers. Some clouds will bring a devastating tornado with lightning and thunder, hailstones and ruin. But, even in the darkest storm, the Lord reminds us that the Second Coming is a reality that we can believe in and look forward to. Between now and then, you may face troubles and disappointments. What does Scripture teach us to do in the meantime? Remain steadfast. Endure affliction as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:58; 2 Timothy 2:3). Forget the popular idea that you can treat your Christian faith as an entertaining hobby. Scripture never describes the walk of faith as a hobby. Paul often described it as a warfare, but never as a hobby. Prepare yourself. Endure the hardships of your faith, for you shall encounter them if you take your faith seriously, Biblically.

You'd seldom find a dictionary of New Testament words that gives you thirteen ideas or definitions for a word. You certainly wouldn't find a dictionary that would shed such practical light on what this trait looks and acts like. Friends, we have the glorious blessing of the Lord giving us an inspired definition, explanation, and detailed instructions regarding this thing called love.

Think about how you have regarded Biblical love in the past. Today. Most of us ignore Scripture and hold to the superficial emotional idea of love as a tender feeling toward someone. Few things could be imagined that are more opposite the Biblical concept of love. If you analyze this inspired list that defines and describes Biblical love, every descriptive term is a verb, not an adjective. It describes action, not feeling or emotion. Yes, emotions are involved in almost everything we do, but this lesson corrects and teaches us. If we practice Biblical charity, **our emotions will follow our actions, not dictate them.**

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor