

THE PROPERTIES OF LOVE

I Corinthians 13:6-7

True love is the very heart of the Christian life. It colors the thoughts, prompts the speech and directs the actions. In our previous studies we learned that love has certain characteristics.

- I. Love is not impatient.
"Love suffereth long, and is kind."
- II. Love is not envious.
"Love envieth not."
- III. Love is not boastful.
"Love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up."
- IV. Love is not rude.
"Love doth not behave itself unseemly."
- V. Love is not selfish.
Love "seeketh not her own."
- VI. Love is not easily provoked.
Love "is not easily provoked."
- VII. Love is not vindictive.
Love "thinketh no evil."

Now we shall note some additional characteristics of love.

- VIII. Love does not rejoice in evil.
Love "rejoiceth not in iniquity."

What a person rejoices in is an accurate revelation of his character. It is one of the queer traits of human nature that frequently a person prefers to hear of the misfortune of others rather than of their good fortune; he is much more interested in hearing a spicy story to the discredit of another than a story to his praise. It is certainly a reflection on the character and the religion of any person who takes delight in hearing of the misdeeds and failures of others.

Love is never glad when others go wrong. Love never finds any satisfaction in hearing of a person's sin. Love weeps over that. Love is opposed to and grieved by sin, but it never makes capital out of the faults of others. Christian love never gloats over the mistakes and failures of anybody. It never takes any pleasure in hearing or telling stories to the disparagement of other people. Love rejoices only over the things that are true and right. If one is glad that another person has gone wrong, he certainly does not have the spirit of Christ and is not following Him.

Recall how our Lord did in the presence of sin. One day they brought to Him a wretched woman who had forgotten all her vows, and who had sacrificed personal purity and family happiness on the altar of unholy passion. The Scribes and Pharisees who thrust the poor creature into His presence with a sort of evil and brutal delight shouted out her shame and gloated over her downfall. But Christ never took any pleasure in unrighteousness. He did not find any sort of pleasure in the fact that a human being had gone wrong. The tragedy of it all filled Him with sorrow that mounted to agony. He was ashamed for the woman and ashamed for her accusers, and to hide the blush of shame from His own cheeks He stooped and began writing in the sand. Evil moved Christ to grief and tears. "When he beheld the city he wept over it." Sin moved Him to such grief and agony that at last they broke His heart.

- IX. Love rejoices in the truth.
Love "rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth."

That is not as easy to do as it may sound. Love cannot compromise with falsehood. Love is not afraid to search for truth, and it rejoices when it finds it. Love rejoices over the things that are true and right. It seeks to advance the truth by doing what is right. Love always rejoices in the propagation, progress and triumph of the truth. It always rejoices when people accept the truth, live in conformity to it and faithfully proclaim it.

- X. Love bears all things.
Love "beareth all things." Love gets under the heavy loads and burdens of life and then carries them bravely. Love is not shaken by any sort of ingratitude or hardship. It patiently bears what it has to suffer. This does not mean that love acquiesces in all that it bears, but it bravely stands up to life and chooses to suffer rather than to rebel.

Love bearing all things is expressive of its attitude when it does not receive what it should. Love bears everything with triumphant fortitude. The word which is used here does not describe the spirit which can sit down and passively bear things, but to the spirit which in bearing them can conquer.

Love bears without resentment the injuries which are inflicted by others. Love does not break out into fierce and uncontrollable outbursts of temper under wrong, but it bears all things. A noble forbearance and self-restraint are marks of love. Love does not flame out into resentment against the injurer, nor does it seek to avenge the wrong.

In the case of wounds at the hands of foes revenge is not justifiable. Love and revenge have nothing whatever in common. They cannot occupy the same field. There can be no compromise between revenge and love. If love holds the reins of the life, revenge has to give up the struggle, acknowledge defeat and leave the scene.

Instead of being overcome, love triumphs. Love, when it has received an injury, never puts it down to the account of him who inflicts it, so as to pay it back. It harbors no resentment and bears no malice.

XI. Love believes.
Love "believeth all things."

This does not mean that love believes everything it is told, for love is not a negation of common sense. It means that love is not suspicious, but those who are mastered by love are devoid of suspicion. That love believes all things does not mean that it accepts as true all that is stated. Love is never taken in thus. It is, however, ready to impute the best motives even to one whose act is unkind or injurious. In bearing with evil conduct love seeks to avoid undue suspicion.

Love takes the best and kindest view of all men, in all circumstances, as long as it is possible to do so. It is always ready to believe the best about a person until it is bound to accept a contrary verdict. Love is ever disposed to believe the best of others. There are some people who always put the worst possible construction upon the actions of their fellows. They view every action of others, regardless of how good it may be, with suspicion. They think that behind every generous deed there is some selfish motive. If a man does some big thing for his community they always want to know what he is going to get out of it. There are plenty of evil-minded people who refuse to believe in the honor of any man or the purity of any woman. They belittle others. The reason for such an attitude is that they judge every one else by their own mean and selfish minds. Our judgments are projections and reflections of ourselves. Love believes the best about people. Love believes in men to the uttermost. Its faith in humanity survives repeated shocks. It is far better to run the risk of being disappointed than to have a proud and cold heart that does not trust anybody and does not give anybody credit for virtue. However, it is of no use to expect a person without love to appreciate others.

Love trusts implicitly and completely. In relation to God, it means that love takes God at His Word, that it believes absolutely in His promises, and that it can take every promise which begins with the word "whosoever" and say, "That means me." In relation to our fellows, it means the love which always believes the best about other people. It is always true that we make people what we believe them to be. Our Lord Jesus Christ believed the best of people. He even believed the best of people whom everybody else regarded as hopelessly degraded and vile. Instead of suspecting or surmising, love believes the best rather than the worst about others.

XII. Love is hopeful.
Love "hopeth all things."

Here is an example of real optimism. Love hopes for the best in the face of every adversity. Love faces the wrongs and miseries and injuries of life, as well as the tangled problems of this baffling world, with a high courage and an indomitable hopefulness. Love hopes even when it cannot find ground for faith. Love holds its ground in the day of defeat. At midnight it keeps its face to the dawn. When others faint and give way, love holds on in hope. Love never ceases to hope. It was the belief of Christ that nobody was hopeless. All of us should be optimists of this sort. Never lose hope of a man, regardless of how disappointing he may be. When it is disappointed in the one in whom it believes, love yet hopes for better things of him in the future, even when others have ceased to do so. Love hopes even when it cannot find any firm ground for faith. Love never despairs of anybody. Love expects much of every one. When this faith is betrayed love still hopes.

Faith leads to hope, and the faith we have in our fellowmen fills us with hope for them. Faith perceives this, hope expects it. Faith realizes that it is possible for a terrible sinner to become a true saint, and hope expects that he will. Love goes on working for men in the hope that they may be reclaimed. It finds its perfect expression in the parent who keeps on praying for his or her wayward child, and will not give up hope. Love sees the bow across the storm cloud and looks for the better time to come. "Hopeth all things" is the optimism of love in spite of all appearances. Let us keep on hoping for the best. Even when the hope meets with repeated disappointment, love waits on expectantly and perseveringly. This is part of love's response. Love looks at things in the best light instead of the worst. It is optimistic in the face of all unfavorable appearances and adverse circumstances.

XIII. Love endures.
Love "endureth all things."

Love bearing all things refers to its attitude when it does not receive what is due to it, but love enduring all things refers to its attitude when it receives what is not due to it, that is, ill-treatment.

What good is patience, kindness, generosity, humility, courtesy, unselfishness, charitableness, sincerity, graciousness, confidence and assurance unless they continue? Most people can be kind for a day, but love is kindness that endures.

"Endureth all things" means that the spirit is not crushed under the weight of heaviest affliction and disappointment. Love never breaks nor fails. Love holds on when others faint and give way. Love continues bearing, believing and hoping to the end. Love will not retreat. No obstacles are great enough to stop the work of love, and no burdens are heavy enough to make her fall into despair. Here is love's final

test. It keeps on staying under. If it gets from under, it was not love in the beginning. "Endureth all things" means to remain strong through all processes. This sort of love for others was exemplified by the poor old mother who was seen waiting in the entrance of the penitentiary to take home with her her sin-hardened son who was soon to be released.