

1 Corinthians 13:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,

Analysis

Charity suffereth long (ἡ ἀγάπη μακροθυμεῖ, hē agapē makrothymeī)—Paul begins defining love's positive qualities. Makrothymeō means "long-tempered" (literally "long passion"), the opposite of quick-tempered. It's patience under provocation, enduring difficult people without retaliation. God's own makrothymia delays judgment to allow repentance (Romans 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9).

And is kind (χρηστεύεται, chrēsteuetai)—Chrēsteuomai appears only here in the NT, meaning actively benevolent, showing practical goodness. Love doesn't merely refrain from harm (patience) but actively does good (kindness). These two qualities form love's foundational posture: enduring and generous.

Charity envieth not (οὐ ζηλοῖ, ou zēloi)—Zēloō can mean healthy zeal or sinful jealousy; context determines meaning. Here, negative: love doesn't envy others' gifts, possessions, or status. This directly confronts Corinthian jealousy over spiritual gifts (3:3; 12:31).

Charity vaunteth not itself (οὐ περπερεύεται, ou perpereuetai)—This rare verb (appears only here in biblical Greek) means boastful self-display or bragging. Love doesn't parade achievements or seek recognition.

Is not puffed up (οὐ φυσιοῦται, ou physioutai)—Physioō is Paul's favorite term for arrogance in 1 Corinthians (4:6, 18, 19; 5:2; 8:1). Literally "inflated," it describes pride that puffs up with self-importance. Love deflates ego.

Historical Context

The Corinthian church was rife with competition: factions boasting of teachers (1:12; 3:21; 4:6), arrogance over knowledge (8:1), divisions at the Lord's Supper (11:17-22), and jealousy over gifts (12:14-26). Greco-Roman society rewarded self-promotion and honor-seeking. Against this, Paul presents love as patient, kind, humble, and non-competitive—radically countercultural in ancient Corinth and modern Western culture.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. Which of these five qualities—patience, kindness, contentment, humility, or selflessness—most challenges you in your closest relationships?
2. How does social media culture encourage the very self-promotion ('vaunting') and envy that Paul says love rejects?
3. In what specific ways might you be 'puffed up' with spiritual pride over knowledge, gifts, or theological correctness?

Interlinear Text

Ἡ	ἀγάπη	μακροθυμεῖ	χρηστεύεται	ἡ	ἀγάπη	οὐ	ζηλοῖ
G3588	Charity	suffereth long	and is kind	G3588	Charity	not	envieth
	G26	G3114	G5541		G26	G3756	G2206
ἡ	ἀγάπη	οὐ	περπερεύεται	οὐ	φυσιοῦται		
G3588	Charity	not	not itself	not	is		
	G26	G3756	G4068	G3756	G5448		

Additional Cross-References

1 Peter 4:8 (Love): And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.

Ephesians 4:32 (Parallel theme): And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

Colossians 3:12 (Love): Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering;

Proverbs 10:12 (Love): Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins.

1 John 4:11 (Love): Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

Proverbs 17:9 (Love): He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends.

1 Peter 3:8 (Love): Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous:

1 Thessalonians 5:14 (Parallel theme): Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men.

2 Peter 1:7 (Love): And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.

Ephesians 4:2 (Love): With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;

