

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Step Seven: To Brotherly Kindness Charity

And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. (2 Peter 1:5–9, KJV 1900)

As we've studied our way through these seven "Graces," we have paused occasionally to examine the form of the various behaviors when very sincere believers fail to build the underlying habits that support and enable the desired trait. This is particularly necessary as we examine the "Crown prince" of the seven, charity. Even a casual reading of the King James Bible's use of "Charity" makes it quite clear that the word means something far different from our contemporary use of the word. "Oh, I just love everybody" or similar emotional expressions often parade under the banner of Biblical charity, but this sentiment fails to even approximate the Biblical trait. Given our broken humanity and the equal brokenness of our culture, the dominant view of charity in our time focuses on a sentimental or emotional state of mind that blindly chooses to ignore obvious and habitual sins, to "Hate the sin and love the sinner" or some such cliché. Factually, more often than not, this emotional perspective of "Charity" takes on a distinct partiality stance. The person who tries to practice "Biblical charity" without bothering to cultivate the first six traits in Peter's inspired list will show blind tolerance for any and all sins in their friends, but they often show fierce intolerance toward people whom they don't especially like. Few behaviors could be more alien to this thing that our Bible describes as "Charity."

What is Biblical "Charity"? What does it look like? How do we know if we practice it or not? First Corinthians, thirteenth chapter, devotes more ink to this topic than any other single context in the New Testament. And it does so in the midst of a detailed discussion of spiritual gifts, chapters twelve through fourteen. If you carefully read and study this chapter, you will notice some enlightening truths. First, Paul does not use a single emotional quality to define or to describe charity, not one. Every point that he makes in defining charity he expresses as an action, a behavior. Thus, **we must conclude that Biblical charity is not at all about how we feel, but about how we act.** Consider.

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)

I will list the verbs and related words that Paul uses to define his inspired description of true charity.

1. **Suffereth long.** This trait opens the list. It confronts the "Chip on the shoulder" or the "I won't take anything off of anybody" attitude. It focuses on the benefit of others, not on fiercely protecting one's personal interests. To suffer long does not suggest those ideal, no-problem moments in life. It takes us to the front line of our battle for our faith and the frequent stumbling blocks that the "accuser of the brethren" loves to throw in our way. When such things occur, we are not enticed to become angry at Satan, but at the brother or sister in Christ who fell prey to Satan's device. Rather than follow our angry humanity, Paul reminds us that Biblical charity suffers, endures the offense from the brother or sister, and responds with "Long-suffering," not with sinful anger.
2. **Is kind.** Although kindness—in fact, all godly behaviors—begins in the mind, "kind" describes action. Whenever we have the option of being kind or not, the truly charitable believer doesn't think of a choice. This list has already made the decision for him/her. How broad is this single word. How many ways can we show kindness toward others?
3. **Envieth not.** How do we react when others around us, particularly those people whom we may feel a bit competitive toward, enjoy success? Do we celebrate their good experience, or do we resent it and think, "It just isn't fair. I deserve this benefit far more than he." I find it fascinating that Scripture reveals that the Jews who demanded that Pilate order Jesus' crucifixion are said to

have done so out of envy. (Matthew 27:18; Mark 15:10) Further, other Jews who refused to believe the gospel also fiercely worked against it out of envy. (Acts 13:45, 17:5) And in Philippians 1:15, Paul noted that some men who preach the gospel do so out of envy, not out of love for the Lord and His sheep. Do not miss Paul's point. He did not rejoice that men preached a perverted gospel that occasionally included the name of Jesus. These men were preaching the gospel, but they preached it from bad motives. Biblical charity never envies or resents the benefits that others enjoy. It rests contentedly on the Lord's rich provisions.

4. **Vaunteth not itself.** To promote self seems ingrained in our broken, sinful disposition. Dominant as this behavior is, even among believers, it sometimes appears frighteningly often in preachers, of all people who should avoid it. "...we preach not ourselves..." should settle this question for every preacher. (2 Corinthians 4:5) **The Biblical behavior of charity refuses to promote self.** The moment you begin to promote yourself you have forsaken Biblical charity.
5. **Is not puffed up.** Similar to self-vaunting, being puffed up suggests an entrenched attitude that thinks no one in the world can compete with me. The puffed up mind thinks that it knows more, is wiser, and can do more of whatever is good or desirable than anyone else. Sometimes this sinful opposite-of-charity-trait invades only one individual. However, all of the opposite-to-charity traits that Paul lists function much like an infectious disease. It may begin with one individual; say a father or mother in a family. Over time, it infects the children, and then their children. Soon this puffed up, self-worshipping, self-promoting attitude infects the whole family and, sadly, becomes an identifying mark of that family. Ah, Scripture wisely warns that the sins of the fathers do pass on to the children. Sadly, we've occasionally encountered a preacher whose whole family exudes this attitude. One wonders what the preacher in the family thinks about himself.
6. **Doth not behave itself unseemly.** If we study the godly behaviors of Scripture, Peter's list, or many similar lists, we learn a consistent pattern of godly, tasteful, behavior. Our awareness of that pattern itself defines behaviors that simply are not acceptable. We view them as "Unseemly," and we wisely seek to avoid them. What is "unseemly" behavior? God does not leave us to decide the question based on our personal "Refinement." He has given us a

far more reliable record of "Seemly" and "unseemly" behavior. You can never rationalize sinful, self-serving actions by Biblical charity. Biblical charity refuses such conduct. Paul will remind a church that some sins are so "Unseemly" as not to be so much as "...named among you, as becometh saints." (Ephesians 5:3)

7. **Seeketh not her own.** Paul drives to the heart of issues. At the end of the day, when we examine what we did with our day, did we promote self, or did we invest our personal time and effort for the benefit of others? Our answer reveals whether we acted out of sinful self-interest or out of Biblical charity. Even if we rationalize that what we want is actually for the benefit of others, our overbearing attitude and words may shipwreck our actions and words at the outset. Sheep may not be the smartest of animals, but they are not blind. They have a way of sensing when someone seeks his/her personal interests and not theirs. If you do not seek your own, what do you seek by following Biblical charity?
8. **Is not easily provoked.** We all meet folks who seem to wear their feelings on their sleeves. Sneeze the wrong way and you likely will enrage them. Occasionally, you'll meet folks who actually boast about how they have refined and perfected this trait. Biblical charity acts in the mirror opposite way. Rather than looking for a reason to justify an angry reaction, it looks for reasons not to do so. When other men react to bad situations with anger, the godly believer who acts out of Biblical charity will stay his course. Paul does not say that Biblical charity is never provoked, but that it is not **easily** provoked.
9. **Thinketh no evil.** We all occasionally observe someone say or do something that we could interpret in one of two ways, an innocent or naive way, or a dark, evil way. Our sinful humanity loves to think about the evil way, and it will nudge us to impose that sinful motive onto the person's actions. Biblical charity works to avoid such evil thinking. We may rightly assess what others do against the teachings of Scripture, but we can seldom, if ever, rightly judge the motives that prompted the action. We often attribute motives to peoples' actions, but we have no way of validating those motives. Following Biblical charity, takes that onus off our backs. By the teachings of Scripture, we know whether an action is right or wrong based on Scripture, but we seldom know the reason behind someone's actions.
10. **Rejoiceth not in iniquity.** Sometime, somewhere in life, we observe people who

indulge in sinful actions. Our modern, broken culture has widely adopted the twisted notion that, as long as you can do it and get away with it, you've really done nothing wrong. It is only really wrong if you are caught. How hypocritical. Biblical charity, standing on the six bedrock moral principles that Peter has listed, groans and grieves at the presence of iniquity. Given the broad acceptance—at times promotion—of iniquity in our culture, we could easily follow the wrong path and rejoice in iniquity. How often we see movies that set us up for just such a reaction. The movie plot develops the hero's role with challenges that pull us into the plot, that cultivate our compassion for the poor, mistreated, misunderstood hero. And then the hero does something very wrong, very sinful according to Biblical moral teachings, but, oh, how we understand and even celebrate the hero's situation. Life can twist events as smoothly as any movie plot and nudge us to support the wrong behavior in our personal heroes. Biblical charity stands on consistent, moral footing, not on shifting sand emotional grounds. God's moral line is right, and it is also fixed. No politician, however popular, can alter God's moral values. No court decision can reverse God's moral code.

11. **Rejoiceth in the truth.** Biblical charity doesn't live in the clouds of fantasy. She lives in the real world, and she always cheers for truth, never for iniquity. The Pilates of our time may confront that One and only One who personifies truth (John 14:6), but they react as did Pilate, "What is truth?" (John 18:38) As Pilate immediately walked away from Jesus, not pausing for His answer to the question, so do those in our day who refuse the path of Biblical charity.
12. **Beareth all things.** One of the best modern examples of this quality appears in the quip, "He ain't heavy. He's my brother." Biblical charity doesn't complain and refuse to step out of self to the aid of others. She rejoices at the opportunity.
13. **Believeth all things.** No, this trait does not depict a gullible, naïve soul who "...will believe anything." It rather describes a conscientious person who stands on faith, godly, Biblical faith, not on personal whims and emotions. I recently had a discussion with a relative on the question of capital punishment. My objective was to nudge her to shift her thinking away from her personal emotions as the basis for what she believed to Scripture. As I engaged her in dialogue, the thought occurred to me. In all such sensitive and important issues,

God has given us in Scripture a reliable record that enables us to move away from deciding the question based only on our personal emotions. Scripture declares what God has already declared as right. We need only to believe "...all things..." that we read in Scripture to transform our lives from hopelessly complicated to simple and straightforward.

14. **Hopeth all things.** Think of Abraham who lived childless with a promise of a miracle son for thirty long years. At that, the thirty years of waiting started when he was seventy years old! At times, Abraham faltered, but every failure took him to painful trouble. When he lived in hope of God's faithful fulfillment of His promise, he found blessings. "And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness." (Genesis 15:6) This passage in no way describes Abraham's moment of ultimate salvation. It describes a moment when faith claimed the day in the life of a man of God. For ten to fifteen years (Based on the testimony of Hebrews 11:8), Abraham had been walking by faith. At times, he doubted, as you and I doubt on occasion. But his noble example always relates to those occasions when we see Abraham leaning on his hope in the faithful promise of his God. (Romans 4:18)
15. **Endureth all things.** The finale of Biblical charity caps the list and makes it complete. When faced with two choices, endure and exemplify the longsuffering, patient grace of our Lord Jesus, or strike back, Biblical charity endures. "I don't get mad; I get even" often appears, not only in the words of the cliché, but in the actions of people who do not at all understand the moral demands of Biblical charity. How often the gracious, truly charitable believer must endure grief that tests his/her limits, but godly charity, empowered by God's grace, is stronger than the urge not to endure. Occasionally you will hear or read of quite sincere preachers or Bible teachers who confuse the active, God glorifying qualities of Biblical charity with a person's new birth status. Not understanding this point from Scripture, these misguided souls will teach that you either must do these things to gain the new birth, or that, if you ever fall short of doing them, you aren't actually born again in the first place. Paul will have nothing of this "Back door salvation by works" idea. For a born-again person, these behaviors are not automatic or divinely predetermined. They are the result of conscious, willful obedience to the Lord's teachings in Scripture. Clearly by the quality of a moral commandment, some

born-again people will practice these traits to one degree or another, and some may not practice them to any observable degree at all. In no point of this lesson did Paul imply that these behaviors either cause or are automatic behaviors of the new birth. He introduces the whole list in the context of our profitable use of spiritual gifts in serving God by serving His people.

Think. Fifteen verbs, fifteen words that specifically describe precise actions, all build together to form our understanding of this thing called charity. Did you find a single emotional point in the list? Not a one. Every verb defines specific action. Biblical charity, then, is not about how we feel, but about how we act.

Unquestionably, in Peter's list, Biblical charity as an all-encompassing behavior, not an emotion, rightly stands in the last position. Not because it is least important—quite the opposite. It holds this position because we must develop all of the qualities—habitual behaviors—in Peter's list before we can even start on true charity, conduct that fills out the list and makes our life fruitful to our God. In Peter's list, charity or no charity, as we may perceive it, does not reveal if we are or are not born again. It reveals our fruit-bearing status. We are growing mature in our faith and bearing precious fruit that glorifies our God, or we are taking up space in the Lord's field without bearing fruit to Him. How is it with you?

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Worship service each Sunday 10:30 A. M.
Joseph R. Holder Pastor