

Introduction

There's an old axiom that says, "**The devil's in the details.**" So is the understanding. It's in the details of things that we understand them. Those things include love. Love has its details and 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 identifies 15 of those.

What we learn from them, generally, is this. Love isn't a vague and abstract thing. It's quite discernible instead. It manifests itself inside us, in the attitudes and inclinations that characterize our psychological lives. It also manifests itself outside us, in the words and deeds that characterize our behavioral lives. To this point, I've preached about 12 of the 15 ways that love manifests itself. I'm going to preach about the last three today, in verse 7.

Believes All Things

The 13th way that love manifests itself is that it "**believes all things.**" The Moffatt translation captures its real meaning. Love "**is always eager to believe the best.**"

This aspect of love operates in two contexts. One is that someone tells us something bad about a person. A woman, for instance, told me this about her pastor. He said there wasn't any money in their church's love fund to help with a financial need she had. But she found out shortly thereafter that there was. The other context is that we ourselves witness a person say or do something that seems bad. So, we see our neighbor walk back from his "by the road" mailbox carrying a *Playboy Magazine* in his hand. You can see that both contexts have this in common. We think that a person has said or done something bad but don't know for sure. We aren't certain.

So, what do we do when that's the case? Paul tells us here. We eagerly believe the best. This aspect of love is about interpreting things.

Let's go back to the two anecdotes I shared and analyze them. Let's determine what the logical possibilities are in both. There are three

possibilities in the first. #1 - the woman lied. Her pastor didn't tell her there wasn't money in the love fund. #2 - she told the truth and her pastor lied to her. Or #3 - she told the truth and her pastor was mistaken. There are two possibilities in the second. #1 - our neighbor is in to pornography and subscribes to *Playboy*. And #2 - he was discarding a magazine that someone threw on the road by his mailbox.

Suppose that I hate the pastor. How will I interpret things? I'll be drawn to the second possibility that he lied to her. Suppose that we hate our neighbor. How will we interpret things? We'll be drawn to the first possibility that our neighbor is in to pornography.

That's illustrates, by way of contrast, the intuitive response of love. It eagerly believes the best. So, if I love the woman and the pastor, I'm drawn to the third possibility. She told the truth and he was mistaken. And if we love our neighbor, we're drawn to the second. He's discarding a magazine someone threw on the road.

Love is intentional though as well as intuitive. We must intend to believe all things. In his commentary on this verse, Adam Clark explains how we intend to do that: **"Love is ever ready to believe the best of every person, and will credit no evil of any kind but on the most positive evidence; gladly receives whatever may tend to the advantage of any person whose character may have suffered from obloquy (censure) and detraction."** Notice that love credits evil to people only when the evidence is "the most positive." Otherwise, it credits good. I've developed my own rule and it's this. Give people the benefit of the doubt until you know otherwise. Doing that isn't naïve. It's loving. So absent exceptional circumstances, believe all things. Eagerly believe the best about people, not the worst.

Hopes All Things

Agape love manifests itself in a 14th way. It **"hopes all things."**

"All things" refers to the potentialities of each person we know and meet, the great things that he or she is capable of becoming and doing.

We do need to be realistic about that, what people are capable and incapable of. Walt Disney once said, **“You can achieve all your dreams if you have the courage to pursue them.”** He was well intentioned but wrong. Some dreams are beyond people no matter how much courage they have or how much effort they put into pursuing them. Some things are impossible for them to become and do. We must not hope those things because doing so harms them. It places unrealistic expectations on them that will eventually discourage or even break their spirits.

But having said that, I’d also say this. Everyone we know and meet, according to Psalm 139:13-16, has potentialities for greatness. And those potentialities are the “all things” that love hopes.

To hope all things means to do two things.

First, we believe in people’s potentialities for greatness. In his book *Winning with People*, John Maxwell explains what he calls “The Number 10 Principle.” He believes that everyone he meets is a ‘10,’ that is, “has great potential.” He’s right and that’s what this aspect of love is about. We believe that people are 10’s. We believe that they have potentialities for greatness – that they can become outstanding persons who live outstanding lives.

Howard Hendricks, one of America’s finest professors and speakers, was, by his own admission, a hellion as a boy. He was badly behaved and disruptive of everyone around him. In his book *Say It with Love*, he tells about the only public school teachers he remembers. One was his fifth grade teacher, Miss Simon. He remembers Miss Simon for this. She actually tied him up with rope to his seat and taped his mouth shut so that she could teach her class. The other was his sixth grade teacher, Miss Noe. He remembers Miss Noe for this, **“That year I found the first teacher who ever convinced me she believed in me.”**

That’s the first thing that this aspect of love does. It believes that people have potentialities for greatness, that they’re capable of becoming and doing great things.

The second thing it does is treat them accordingly. When we love

people, we don't just believe they're 10's. We show it. We show it by the things we say and do. We talk and act as if they have potentialities for greatness. We tell them what they can become and do and assist them in becoming and doing that as much as we can.

That's what Miss Noe did with Howard Hendricks. When school began, the very first thing she said to him was: **"Oh, you're Howard Hendricks. I've heard a lot about you."** She then jarred him by adding, **"But I don't believe a word of it."** Those words set the tone for the entire year as she coaxed, encouraged, and assisted him in becoming the very best student he could be.

That then is what love does. It hopes all things. It believes in people's potentialities for greatness and treats them accordingly.

That's a loving thing because of what it usually achieves. Poet and philosopher Johanne Wolfgang von Goethe tells us what that is: **"Treat a man as he appears to be and you make him worse. But treat a man as if he already were what he potentially could be, and you make him what he should be."** That's an exaggeration but it does correctly communicate the power of hoping all things. It dramatically impacts the way people think and feel. It brings out the best in them and their efforts and usually transforms their persons and lives.

It did that to Howard Hendricks. Miss Noe's influence was on him was life defining. He writes: **"That year I found the first teacher who ever believed in me. And you know, I never let that woman down. I would knock myself out for her. I'd work and do all kinds of extra projects. My most vivid memories of that class are of occasionally looking over at the door with the little windowpane in it and seeing Miss Simon, my fifth-grade teacher, peeking in to see this thing which was come to pass. Here I was, sitting, clothed, and in my right mind – and working."**

You can see what hoping all things achieves. It enlivens and motivates people. That makes it one of the most loving things we can do.

Endures All Things

We come now to the 15th and final way, in these verses at least, that love manifests itself. It **“endures all things.”**

“All things” refers to the negative attitudes and behaviors of others. It’s the things that people say and do that make our lives either less good or even bad. A checkout clerk told me not long ago that customers are always chewing her out that there aren’t enough lines open, which she has no control over. That’s the kind of attitude and behavior that the words “all things” encompass.

One of my favorite cartoons growing up was *Popeye*. Remember what Popeye always said, **“That’s all I can stands, cuz I can’t stands n’more!”** I loved that because that’s when the real action began. That’s when he ate the spinach, attacked Bluto, and beat him up.

How many times have you and I thought and felt that same way? Someone has said and done so many negative things or the negative thing he said or did is so big that we’ve had it with him. That’s all we can stands and we can’t stands no more. He’s gotten “under our skin” in other words and that’s when the action begins. We attack - say or do negative things to him. Or we withdraw - distance ourselves from him.

But that isn’t what love does. On the contrary, it “endures” all things. It endures the bad attitudes and behaviors of others.

The Greek word translated “endures” is a strong word. It’s a military term the context of which is a soldier positioned in the middle of a violent situation. He doesn’t cower in the face of what’s raging around him but stands steadfast and strong instead, doing what he has to.

That’s exactly what we do when we love people. William Barclay’s translation of the verse really does express what Paul intends to say, **“Love bears everything with triumphant fortitude.”** People don’t get “under our skin” when we love them. We don’t get “fed up” and attack or withdraw. In the face of the most negative things they say or do, we stay spiritually, mentally, emotionally, and physically strong. We continue to relate and help – if we can.

I say "if we can" for a reason. Sometimes a hard-hearted person makes life so unbearable, for others or us, that we can no longer relate and help. We have to withdraw, not throw away, but withdraw. We aren't doing that though because we're "fed up" or have "had it" with the person. We're doing it in love, to achieve kingdom goodness for others or us.

Years ago, I knew two Christians and a horribly caustic co-worker of theirs who was always criticizing some one or some thing. The first Christian finally got "fed up" and withdrew. He wouldn't interact with her at all. He wouldn't even acknowledge her presence unless he had to for a work related reason. But the second Christian "endured all things." He continued to relate to and even help her. He also "hoped all things," that she'd see Jesus in him and one day change, become the person God made her to be.

Conclusion

Finally, at last! We've finished verses 4-7 and the 15 ways that agape love manifests itself. Love has its details and we now know them. That in turn enables us to do a vital thing – determine how loving we are or are not. What we do is this. We prayerfully and carefully stack ourselves up against the attitudes, inclinations, and behaviors that are inherent in verses 4-7. Where we do measure up, we thank God and stay the course. Where we don't measure up, we practice what I've preached in this series, asking the Holy Spirit to help us as we do.

Please understand something. I'm not asking you to do something that I myself am not. I'm doing it and here's why. This is my singular motivation in fact. It's because **"Jesus is not impressed by our success in anything other than love."** That's what Shawn Bolz says and he's right. Jesus is not impressed by our success in anything other than love. So let's make and carry out the decision to love – just as Paul explains it here, in verses 4-7.