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Do I Best Understand Love as an Emotion or a Decision?



IT IS A GOOD PRACTICE TO STUDY THE biblical ingredients of love on a regular basis. Love is often misunderstood in our culture as an emotion versus an action. Understood as a volitional decision, a decision by me to be loving in any given situation is the knot that firmly ties relationships—and possible additional long-term relationships—together. But notice the mountaineering knot I chose in the picture: What is peculiar about it?

First Corinthians 13 is often referred to as the love chapter. People quip that love is indefinable, but the apostle Paul lists fifteen specific—definitive components—of love. To the degree you are obedient to these aspects of love is the measurable degree to which you are a loving individual. In listing both positive and negative indicators of love’s existence, Paul determines its presence or lack thereof.

Continued next page

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The views expressed in each Bible study are those of the author, and do not necessarily reflect the position of any individual Bible Study Sponsor.



★ PUBLIC SERVANT ENDORSEMENT

Vicki Strong

Vermont State Representative
Orleans-Caledonia District 1



Rep. Vicki Strong, Orleans-Caledonia District 1 who sponsors the Capitol Ministries® Bible in the Vermont State House in Montpelier, has seen a need for a legislative Bible study since she was first elected to office in 2011.

“We have long needed a place to sit quietly and respectfully focus on spiritual truths and pray together. This provides us sanity, refreshment, hope, strength, and comfort amid all the issues we get pounded with in this environment.

“My goal is to help legislators hear what it means to know the Lord and have Him be in their lives, help them understand a Christian world view and to be strong to stand for that in our morally declining culture.

“We’ve named our study, ‘Soup for the Soul,’ hoping that fellow legislators will learn that the Bible is the foundation for our life.”

The Bible study is led by Ministry Leader Pastor Rosaire Bisson who also serves as assistant pastor for Christ Community Alliance Church in Barre, Vermont.

Notice that the word for “love” (agape) could be exchanged for “Jesus,” as He perfectly embodied via His sinless life, all of the characteristics of the study that will follow. May you and I be more like Jesus.

Read on, my friend!

Ralph Drollinger

I. INTRODUCTION

Contextually, chapter 13 is sandwiched between two chapters of instruction by Paul to the church at Corinth whose members, in their carnality, emphasized the practice of certain spiritual gifts above the practice of Christian love. Paul instructs them that love is preeminent. Again, it’s what ties people together.

Of special note are the love-defining verbs that follow under the second outline point: “The Elements of Love.” All fifteen are in the present continuous tense “denoting actions and attitudes which have become habitual, ingrained gradually by constant repetition.”¹ These defining characteristics of love are worthy of constant review and practice, especially with our spouses, family members, office staff, and professional colleagues. Again, and again, as my choice of graphics on the first page suggests, love is what ties us together and sustains our relationships.

Given that repetition is the key to ingraining, I like to revise and teach this study often. Akin to driving a car, these specific, measurable aspects of love should become habitual responses in our lives—even though they are more difficult and take much longer to cultivate than are the skills involved in driving a car.

Before examining the fundamental aspects germane to objective love, Paul first emphasizes—and appropriately so—the superiority of love. So, let’s look at that first.

II. THE ESSENTIALITY OF LOVE 13:1–3

“If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.”

In these three opening verses, Paul makes three stark comparisons in order to underscore the incomparability of *love*. These introductory remarks exclaim the dominance of *love* as a virtue over all other character traits. It is important, motivational, and insightful to note that the three comparisons *are related to qualities necessary* from a human perspective for one to succeed in the capital community! One must possess speaking skills, leadership, and self-sacrifice. As critical as those are, *love*—from a godliness perspective—is of greater importance! The first compar-



ison in verse one is to a person's oratory abilities.

A. LOVE OVER ORATION 13:1

"If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal."

One's *love* for others is more important than their speaking abilities. The metaphorical meaning of "*becoming a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal*" relates to empty philosophizing. Someone who knows and exclaims all the right answers but has no *love* is akin to the church of Ephesus as described in Revelation 2:1–7. That church had all the right doctrine but had lost their *love* for God. Proverbs 3:3 summarizes the necessary virtues a legislator needs possess: both a herald of truth and be a man or woman of *love*. "*Do not let kindness and truth leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart.*" Solomon's use of the words "*neck*" and "*heart*" bespeak of both *love* (kindness) and *truth* as being a part of one's outward and inward adornment. The meaning of the Hebrew word for "*heart*" (*leb*) includes intellect, emotion, and will. The mature believer possesses *love* and *truth* simultaneously in full measure. The loving legislator, because his priorities are straight, is neither inwardly nor outwardly *a noisy gong or clanging cymbal*—even when he or she heralds the truth on the floor, such speech should be couched in words of *love*.

B. LOVE OVER LEADING 13:2

"If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing."

It is not a stretch to interpret the second verse of chapter 13 to be a statement of

the primacy of *love* over leadership. A legislator who knows the Word of God and who is acutely *knowledgeable* of all the policy issues and possesses *faith*—visionary leadership for his or her personal and party's future—who possesses not a genuine, heart-felt *love* for people, Scripture states emphatically, amounts to *nothing*. The phrase "*so as to remove mountains*" is Pauline hyperbole² (also seen in verse 7) intended to emphasize the conveyable meaning "to make what seems impossible possible."³ You may be a great leader, or an up-and-coming great leader in American government—one who may be able to achieve what others deem impossible, a man or woman of great *faith*—but never forget that it is more important to *love* people, especially those who have nothing to do with helping you to accomplish your leadership objectives. Don't kid yourself into thinking that people don't pick up on self-centeredness.

C. LOVE OVER SELF-SACRIFICE 13:3

And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.

For sure, one who gives sacrificially of time, talent and treasure is to be exalted above the lazy and uncommitted who do not. But in comparison to *love*, sacrificial qualities are of lesser significance. In fact, a life of personal sacrifice for one's cause will *profit nothing* when all is said and done in eternity. One who lacks *love* is woefully deficient.

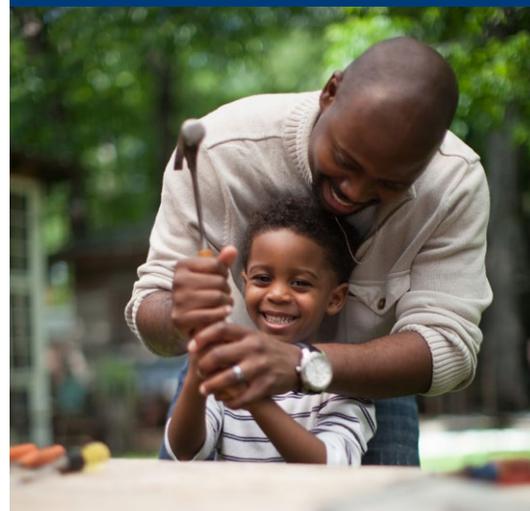
"Love is the indispensable addition which alone gives worth to all other Christian gifts."⁴

Lord, help us to get this—to work on being more loving! Life in the capital, in the

♥ VERSE OF THE WEEK

1 Corinthians 13:3

"And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing."



"Love is the indispensable addition which alone gives worth to all other Christian gifts."





John Randolph of Roanoke



community, or in the home without *love* is *nothing* (*oudeis*) meaning “nothing at all.” How are you doing as a preeminent-ly loving person—a lover of people and especially your mate, if you are married? What follows the essentiality of *love* in the inspired mind of the apostle Paul are the biblically objective indications of *love*; they should help to answer the question “am I a loving person?” more realistically, versus analyzing subjective feelings that may or may not accurately reflect one’s real *love* quotient.

III. THE ELEMENTS OF LOVE

A. FROM 1 CORINTHIANS

13:4–7

“Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

After first stating for openers what *love* is: *love is patient and kind*, Paul describes the characteristic elements of *love’s* non-existence; the following seven descriptors on this inspired-by-God passage list what *love* is not. Sometimes the best way to describe what something is, is to state what it’s not.

After briefly examining and defining all of these virtues in 1 Corinthians 13, we will review Colossians 3:12–14 for additional insights relative to the emotional aspects of *love* in order to round out the study. (Because *love* is emotive as well—but let’s be careful not to get the cart before the horse). Keep in mind that emotions, both good and bad, always stem from one’s thinking, either proper or improper thinking respectively. Given our cultural

misunderstanding of *love*, I think it is essential for both you and I to approach and teach on *love* in this order: 1 Corinthians 13 before Colossians 3.

1. Love is patient (*makrothumeo*)

Literally, this means “suffers long.” This first characteristic is the ability to be taken advantage of by a person many times and not be upset. The root word means “to persevere.” James uses this same Greek word in describing the attitudinal response of the prophets of old whose words went unheeded by their peers (cf. James 5:8ff.). Program your mind with Philippians 1:6.

“For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.”

The truth of this passage will help you sober to the fact that God is not through sanctifying the other person—and I am not perfect either! So be *patient*, not condemning and judgmental! Remember too, that since Christ forgave your sins—past, present, and future, that you must find room in your heart to forgive others who have wronged you. To be longsuffering, *patient* with another’s shortcomings is to be categorically *loving*!

2. Love is kind (*chresteuomai*)

The counterpart to *patience*, is *kindness*. The Greek word means “to show one’s self mild.” This characteristic is a willingness to give to another, including one’s enemies, and to be gentle and slow in responding. The Greek root means “one desires and works for another’s welfare.” It is the idea of good will, generous responses, and actions in contradistinction to holding onto past bad memories and being bothered by another in the future (aka “he or she gets on my nerves”).

“I am at last reconciled to my God and have assurance of His pardon through faith in Christ, against which the very gates of hell cannot prevail. Fear hath been driven out by perfect love.”

— John Randolph of Roanoke, congressman under Presidents John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, James Monroe, John Quincy Adams, Andrew Jackson; U.S. senator; diplomat.

Hugh A. Garland, *The Life of John Randolph of Roanoke* (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1853), Vol. II, p. 99, to Francis Scott Key on September 7, 1818.



3. Love is not jealous (*zeloo*)

Literally the root means “earnestly desire.” Contextually, *jealousy* is similar to covetousness as it is used here, carrying the idea of envy. It is a desire to have what another possesses as well as fearing someone will steal what you possess. To the contrary, Scripture commands us to want what another possesses, but rather to “*rejoice with those who rejoice*” (Romans 12:15). Choose to be glad for those who have—be they more talented, successful, popular, or beautiful—versus envious. Are you the biggest cheerleader of your colleagues?

4. Love does not brag (*perpereuomai*)

Literally, “to talk conceitedly.” The mature-in-Christ have forgotten about self-importance. Center on others, not self. Proverbs 27:2 states:

Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips.

Further, be characterized by asking others sincere questions (cultivate personal curiosity) and talking little about self. Don’t be quick to add your personal stories to every conversation; in the crowds in which you circulate, everyone already gets the point. It is better to spend your time asking questions of others. *Love does not brag.*

Think when approaching conversation, “What can I learn from this person? Versus “What can I tell this person about me?”

5. Love is not arrogant (*phusioo*)

Literally, “to puff or blow up.” William Carey who translated the Bible into 34 languages was once put down in a banquet. An arrogant man said to him, “Mr. Carey, I understand that you were once a shoemaker.” Carey replied, “I was not a

shoemaker, only a shoe repairman!” Strive to be big-hearted, not bigheaded. Make it a habit to play down self in the presence of others. Proverbs 16:18 states:

“Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling.”

Reciprocally, keep in mind James 4:6...

“GOD...GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.”

6. Love does not act unbecomingly (*aschemoneo*)

This is the characteristic of someone who cares so little for others around them that they act without proper decorum for the occasion. It is to act rudely or impolitely, maybe even crudely. Work always on sensitivity for others. Always display respect for another regardless of their position or ability to assist in your objectives.

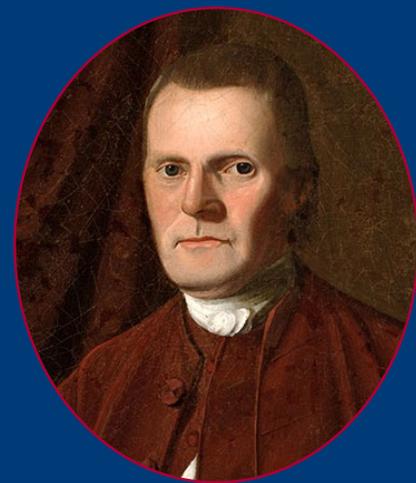
7. Love does not seek its own (*zeteo beoutou*)

Jesus “*did not come to be served, but to serve*” (Matthew 20:28). Be occupied with others’ needs, not yours. Philippians 2:3 states:

“Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves.”

Herein is boilerplate Christianity! Are your mate’s objectives more important to you than your own? What will you do by way of time, talent, and treasure for your mate that will spell out to him or her in no unmistakable actions that you cherish him or her above yourself? One of the measurable aspects of *love* is not seeking your self-interests all the time. Coach Wooden used to stress the habit of doing a kind deed for someone on a daily basis who in no way could repay you. That is an excel-

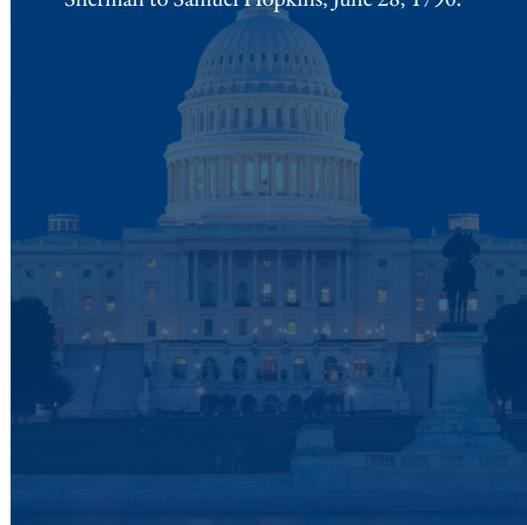
Roger Sherman



“[I]t is the duty of all to acknowledge that the Divine Law which requires us to love God with all our heart and our neighbor as ourselves, on pain of eternal damnation, is Holy, just, and good.... The revealed law of God is the rule of our duty.”

— Roger Sherman, signer of the Declaration of Independence; signer of the Constitution; “Master Builder of the Constitution”; judge; framer of the Bill of Rights; U.S. senator.

Correspondence Between Roger Sherman and Samuel Hopkins (Worcester, MA: Charles Hamilton, 1889), p. 10, from Roger Sherman to Samuel Hopkins, June 28, 1790.





Oliver Wolcott



“May the Divine Redeemer conduct us to that seat of bliss which He himself has prepared for His friends; at the approach of which every sorrow shall vanish from the human heart and endless scenes of glory open upon the enraptured eye. There our love to God and each other will grow stronger, and our pleasures never be dampened by the fear of future separation.”

— Oliver Wolcott, signer of the Declaration of Independence; military general; governor of Connecticut.

Letters of Delegates to Congress: January 1, 1776-May 15, 1776, Paul H. Smith, editor (Washington DC: Library of Congress, 1978), Vol. 3, pp. 502-503, Oliver Wolcott to Laura Wolcott on April 10, 1776.

lent habit because it keeps reminding us of this truth: *Love does not seek its own*.

8. Love is not provoked (*paroxuno*)

Literally “to irritate, arouse to anger.” *Love* guards against being upset, irritated or angered. Remember, *love is kind*. A person who is intent on having their own way is easily *provoked* when he or she is denied what they want.⁵

9. Love does not take into account a wrong suffered (*logizomai*)

The Greek has the idea of not “ledgering” *wrongs* someone has done and keeping a log. Chrysostom remarked that a *wrong* done against *love* is like a spark that falls into the sea and is extinguished forever. The famous saying, “Don’t get mad, get even” illustrates the opposite idea being conveyed here. If you are a Christian, your response must be to forgive and forget. When it comes to wrongs done against you, do not engender a memory akin to an elephant. Praise God He takes not into consideration our past sin! Clasp onto the virtue of Christ’s forgiveness enables one to forsake the bondage of bitterness. Don’t keep a log—it is not *loving*.

10. Love does not rejoice in unrighteousness (*adikia*)

Isaiah warns, “*Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil*” (5:20). It is not *loving* to sacrifice *truth*. One should not applaud the presence of sin in another. For sure, the biblical concept of *love* is not emotional sentimentality devoid of *truth*.

11. Love rejoices with the truth (*aletheia*)

Love cares that what another believes is *truthful*. It is not *loving* to allow another to be hurt by lies, since what one believes (and then acts upon) is determinative to

personal, familial, and national destinies. It follows that *love* does not *rejoice* with erroneous thinking.⁶

The following remaining four elements of *love* are stated in a literary device known as hyperbole, exaggeration in order to make a strong point. (See endnote No. 2). The repetition of *all things* therefore relates to *all things* within the confines of God’s righteousness, will, and tolerance.

12. Love bears all things (*stego*)

Literally “to cover.” “*Love covers a multitude of sins*” (1 Peter 4:8; cf. Proverbs 10:12). You can measure your *love* for another by how quickly you are willing and apt to forgive and forget, to move on after another faults you. God’s nature, and hopefully, the believer’s actions must emulate God’s revealed character in Psalm 103:12:

“*As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.*”

It follows that in order for us to be as loving as Jesus expects us to be that we be forgiving and forgetful.

13. Love believes all things (*pisteuo*)

Love trusts, it is confident; it isn’t suspicious or cynical. *Love* trusts even after experiencing past hurts after trusting and being wronged. It is better to trust and be hurt again than to end up living life alone and bitter. Keep taking risks in your relationships!

14. Love hopes all things (*elpizo*)

Literally, “to anticipate with pleasure.” Jesus did not take Peter’s failure as final. The believer continues to hope that sinners will someday turn from their sin and that believers will someday mature in



Christlikeness, for to lose hope is equivalent to losing *love*. Again, and similar to the virtue of *patience*, “*For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus*” stated Paul in Philippians 1:6. Remember, “as long as God’s grace is operative, human failure is never final.” People do learn from their mistakes; *hope* for the best in a person relative to his or her future. To carry in you such an optimistic attitude toward others is to be *loving*!

15. Love endures all things (*hupomeno*)

This Greek word was used of an army that held its position no matter what the cost. *Love* holds fast to the one it *loves*. It will stand against all opposition. *Love* remains loyal even when the object of *love* is less than perfect.

These fifteen virtues may seem somewhat mechanical. They will however produce the emotions of *love* that are critically important to every human being and necessary to tying us together for the long run!

Keep in mind, theologically speaking, all of these attributes of *love* already and completely exist in the life of the child of God per Colossians 2:10. The believer is made positionally perfect before God at the point of salvation. How obedient one is to his new God-given, loving positional perfection in everyday practice is a matter of obedience. All that to say this: no believer can reason, “I am just not a very loving person.” All believers are perfect in their *love*: How obedient are you to your new nature in Christ?

IV. THE EXUBERANCE OF LOVE

Colossians 3:12–14 speaks to the passions

of *love*:

“So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.”

In light of all the perfect and sacrificial *love* Jesus Christ has displayed to and for the world (John 3:16) God expects nothing less in response from His followers. *Heart of compassion* (*splagchnon oiktirmos*) speaks of the seat of emotions. These elements of God’s exuberant, supernatural *love* are poured out via the indwelling Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. Again, and importantly, all of the elements of *love* presently exist in the believer’s heart (cf. Ephesians 1:3; Colossians 2:10; 2 Peter 1:3–4). It isn’t a matter of gaining them; it is a matter of taking ownership and using them!

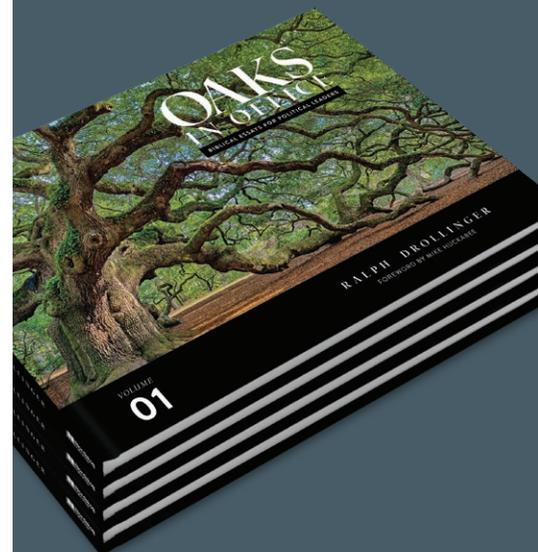
The *essential*, *elemental*, and *exuberant* aspects of *love*, as listed in Corinthians and Colossians, are all characteristic ingredients of the truly redeemed, and they should naturally flow forth in and from the life of every Spirit-filled follower of Christ!

V. THE ETERNITY OF LOVE 13:8

Now let us return to the closing passages on *love* as found in 1 Corinthians 13.

1. LOVE NEVER FAILS

Love is permanent. It is an attribute of God, which means it never withers or decays. The believer should view this as a communicable attribute from God. *Love* is to be present and active in the life of ev-



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ery believer. Likened to Jesus, we need possess eternal, unfailing, ever-present *love*! Never failing *love*! Agape *love* is part of the believer's very nature! May these virtues be increasingly unfolding in your life! May you conscientiously and regularly cultivate the habitual traits of Christ's unending *love* in your personhood!

The 1 Corinthian 13 passages go on to contrast the importance of *love* with the spiritual gifts in the body of Christ (which is another study with a great deal of complexity).

May God help you to put on the very nature every believer already possesses: the *essential, elemental, exuberant, and eternal* aspects of *love*. Amen! **cm**

- 1 David Prior *The Message of 1 Corinthians* (Nottingham, England: Inter Varsity Press, 1985) p. 229-30.
- 2 In the literary genre of Scripture, as in the best of writing today, various figurative devices are inculcated to communicate both effectively and artfully. These devices would include (among many) the use of simile, allegory, ellipsis, metaphor, paradox, irony, euphemisms, etc. The figurative device used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:2 and 7 is "hyperbole." The people of the Middle East in ancient time used intensified exaggerated expressions to convey a thought with more force. An additional example would be what the apostle John states in his gospel about the life of Christ, "**I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written**" (21:25). (cf. E.W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* [London: Messrs, Eyre, and Spottis-woods, 1889], pp. 171ff.) Such insights defy a wooden literalistic approach (of which Evangelicals are often falsely accused) to biblical interpretation/hermeneutics.
- 3 H.L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, 1922-1928. As quoted in Barrett, C.K. *The First Epistle To The Corinthians*, *Blacks New Testament Commentary Series* (London: Hendrickson Publishers, 1968) p. 301.
- 4 Ibid, p. 303. This quote in its tightest context relates to the point of chapter 13 in comparison to chapters 12 and 14. The application of the quote is nonetheless an appropriate capstone as used in the placement of these notes.
- 5 The exception to being not provocative is if another is maligning or contradicting God's Word. Being provoked over such is akin to righteous indignation.
- 6 Herein biblical Christianity conflicts with Postmodernism in that the Christian faith is based upon perspicuous moral absolutes as explicated in and through propositional truth, i.e., infallible and inerrant biblical revelation.

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Yamoussoukro, Cote d'Ivoire
Yaoundé, Cameroon