

1st Corinthians Chapter 13

Chapter 13

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Verse 1

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

In the last chapter Paul showed the church that although they were many members they should work for the Lord as one body, appreciating one another, and making room for each other's gifts. In the last verse of the last chapter Paul said he would show them a more excellent way. In chapter 13 he introduces love to them. It is obvious as we read that there was very little love shown to one another, true love between the members was missing. First of all we must establish what kind of love he is talking about.

Most of the love we know and speak about today is a superficial kind of love. Love today is cheap and short lived. When I tell folk my wife and I will celebrate 60 years of marriage in 2017 their eyes glaze over, they look embarrassed and don't know what to say. Most of them think they have the record being married for 15 years! It is love that has kept us together.

There is no comparison to the love that Jesus had for you and me that took Him to the Cross and a horrible death to redeem us back to God. That was real love that He had for us that He should die in our place. Here are some attributes of love that may help us understand what love really is;

Patience – enduring love: no hurry, suffers long, believes, hopes, and endures all things (v4,7)

Kindness – love in action: it never acts rashly or insolently; puffed up or proud (v4)

Generosity – love in completion: not envious or jealous (v4)

Humility- love in hiding: no parade, no showmanship, (v4)

Courtesy- love in society: does not behave unseemly, always polite, never rude or discourteous (v5)

Unselfish- love in essence: never selfish, sour or bitter, seeks only the good of others, (v5)

Good tempered- love under control: never irritated, never resentful, (v5)

Righteousness- love in conduct: hates sin, sad at the sin of others, always slow to expose, always hopeful, always enduring, believing the best (v6-7)

Sincerity- love in profession: true love is never boastful or conceited, not hypocritical, always honest, always just, joyful and truthful.

When we look at the life of Jesus we can see all the attributes written above and as a Christian we are encouraged to love others in the same way, *not easy!* Paul calls this a more excellent way, if the church at Corinth lived a life of love one to another as he shows in these verses there would not be a son sleeping with his mother, false doctrines being preached, false idols being worshiped, all kinds of impurities and perversions and immoralities taking place, and that was in the church!

Paul also explained the many gifts given to the Christian but he also explains that they are valueless unless they are exercised with love, God's type of love, Agape Love.

The word charity

Wycliffe, translating from the Vulgate has the word charity in place of love. Coverdale, Mathews, Cranmer, and the Geneva Bible have the word 'love'. This word has been adopted by more recent translators and they contend that the word charity, which is now confined to 'alms-giving' is utterly improper and that the word 'love' alone expresses the apostle's meaning. (Adam Clark).

Some commentaries and even some Bible readers in church do not seem to know which word to use and some use both, very confusing for both reader and the church! It is accepted today that 'charity' is linked to giving of money and time for the needy and those who are not needy do not get 'charity'. However all of us need 'love' particularly the love of Jesus. The Bible says God is love and the born again Christian knows that to be true. The Bible does not say God is charity! So I hope you follow my train of thought and we can continue our chapter with the correct thinking that God is Love, true love Agape Love.

Verse 1

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels

It is widely understood that the 'tongues' Paul is using here are the many different languages that were spoken in Jerusalem at that time the time of Pentecost. Acts 2: 6, 7, 8, 9 says '*they were all amazed and marvelled*' that they heard the gospel in their own language and there were some 16 different towns and countries represented. This was a miracle of God as was what happened just prior to that when 120 followers of Jesus were in an upper room waiting on God as instructed by Him and cloven tongues like fire fell on each of them and they began to speak in a heavenly tongue as the Holy Spirit gave them the words to say. Many think these two events were the same but they are not. The first was for the followers and disciples of Jesus to equip them for what was to follow. The second was for the benefit of all the crowds that assembled so they could hear the gospel clearly and without hindrance. Wonderful planning by the Trinity don't you think?

...and have not love, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.

Whether you are preaching or giving your testimony unless the word of God is given with love it will, to the spirit of man sound like brass in the ears of the listener, and sound like noisy brass or a tinkling irritating sound. A quote from Josiah Gregory says it true, 'He who has not the love of God and man filling his heart is like an empty wagon coming violently down a hill: it makes a great noise because there is nothing in it'.

Verse 2

And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing.

The Bible says that a person can have all the gifts, even know the Bible well, have been to Bible school, have been a Christian a long time but if the love of God is not in him all his knowledge, his gifts, and his experience, is of no use to God unless the love of God is in him.

Verse 3

And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profits me nothing.

The outward acts of charity may be given with an open and lavish hand but if we give all we have including our bodies to be burned to ashes for the 'truth' (as a martyr) but withhold our hearts from God it will not profit us. Our goods and our bodies may be given but if our souls are withheld from expressing love, then all our giving is in vain. Man may fight for Christianity; man may die for Christianity, but not live in the Spirit of Christ which is Love.

Verse 4

Love suffers long and is kind; love envies not; Love vaunts not itself, is not puffed up.

True love will endure evil and provocation without being filled with resentment or revenge. Most of the love of the world wants revenge if wronged, and in that it holds within the heart all the things that remove us from the Love of Christ. True love will suffer many slights from the person it loves and wait to see the fruit of such patience.

it is kind. It is tender and compassionate, obliging to others, it is mild and gentle, it creates trouble for no one. It not only seizes opportunities of doing good but searches for them.

it envies not. Those that have this pure love rejoice in the progress and blessings bestowed upon others. It is not grieved at the good will others enjoy but is happy for them.

It vaunteth not itself. True love will not put itself forward, does not desire to be noticed or applauded. It is not puffed up meaning it is not inflated with a sense of its own importance.

Every man whose heart is full of the love of God is full of humility because he knows his heart is cleansed from sin and so there must be an outward expression of love to others.

Verse 5/6/7

Does not behave itself unseemly.

Love never acts out of place but behaves with decorum and good manners: it is never rude. A man may have a natural bluntness and strait talking disposition but if he professes a love for Christ and therefore a love for his fellow man he must strive to control all that may harm or offend another. Love is never satisfied unless salvation comes to all.

Verse 8

Love never fails, but whether there be prophecies they shall fail, whether there be tongues they shall cease; whether there be knowledge it shall vanish away.

Love never fails; The Corinthian Church prided themselves in the use of the gifts but they had no love for one another. Hence the letters sent to Paul, the visits to Paul by those with sad tales to tell of and the misbehaviour in the Church in general.

Prophecies, tongues, knowledge shall all be done away with when the Lord returns. There will be only one language in heaven. All the things we highly prize, the things we go to university and get diplomas for, the things we pass exams for all of them will be of no use in heaven. These and even the heavenly gifts are only given to the present imperfect church until He comes. Only love will remain throughout eternity that is how important it is for us to know the love of Christ.

Love never fails. Love is a permanent and perpetual grace lasting for eternity. Love towards God and our fellow man can never be dispensed with. It is essential to our social and Christian life and our preparation for eternal glory will be a waste of time if our hearts and souls are not deeply imbued with the Love of God.

The Bible says that prophecies, tongues, knowledge and indeed all that we in the church hold dear will vanish away. The Greek translation is 'shall be done away with' which implies that a higher hand will take away, discard, banish, these supernatural gifts of the Spirit which are no longer required to be superseded by love. It is love that shall enter heaven where these spiritual gifts will have no place.

Verse 11

When I was a child I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man I put away childish things.

Paul, still speaking to the Corinthian Church, tries to explain that the leaders and the members are acting in an immature way; still behaving as children. Paul, in our modern language is encouraging them to grow up in the things of God. They had the elementary lessons which replaced the false teaching in the early chapters, now he is stretching their minds to think beyond the 'infant' stage and to think as a grown spiritual man. He exhorts them to put away the things that have hindered them and to press toward the mark of the high calling. He says we know only in part, in other words there is so much more that God wants to reveal to those He can trust. To become trustworthy we must hold fast to the faith so that we can learn how to exercise and express the agape love of God in any situation we encounter good or bad.

Verse 12

For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as I am known.

When the sun shines brightly we put on a pair of sun glasses to dim the light. This reduces the clarity and sharpness of everything we see and when we take them off everything becomes clear again. Paul says that we only know in part the majesty and glory of God and the wonders of heaven. All the study of God, and His majesty, all the study of what heaven is like will not give us the complete understanding of the subject. But Paul encourages us by saying *but then face to face*, wow! What a difference we will see the heavenlies more clearly, we will have the understanding of God and, if we remember the things of earth, we will know its fullness and enjoy the rewards that await us.

Verse 13

And now abides faith, hope, and love but the greatest of these is love.

Having given the church an insight into things eternal Paul now comes back to earth and says *and now* in this present life abides faith. Faith, by which we apprehend spiritual blessings and walk with Christ. Hope, by which we view and expect our eternal inheritance and causes us to walk circumspectly so as not to lose that inheritance. Love, by which we show the virtues of the Christian experience to others.

Without faith it is impossible to please God and also without faith we cannot partake of the grace of our Lord Jesus. Without hope we could not endure the tribulations of this world. But Paul says, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, love is the greatest of them all. Paul tells us when we see God face to face we stand before the greatest, the highest, and the epitome of Love because He gave us only Son Jesus to die in our place, it is then Love will be perfected.

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Be blessed

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