

1 Corinthians Chapter 13

Spiritual gifts were present in Corinth (verses 1-7); right doctrine was ever in place (11:2); but love was absent. This led to the quarrels and exhibitions of selfishness and pride that plagued the church, notably in the area of spiritual gifts. Instead of selfishly and jealously desiring showy gifts which they don't have, believers should pursue the greatest thing of all, love for each other.

This chapter is considered by many the greatest literary passage ever penned by Paul. It is central to his earnestly dealing with spiritual gifts (chapters 12 – 14), because after discussing the endowment of gifts (in chapter 12), and before presenting the function of gifts (in chapter 14), he addresses the attitude necessary in all ministry in the church (chapter 13).

1 Corinthians 13:1 "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."

The word that was translated "charity" is agape, which means love. This use of love is not the kind of love that has conditions. It is not "I love you because", but "I love you in spite of". This type of love is the kind the Lord Jesus has for all of us. While we are yet in sin, Christ gave his life for us. This is the God kind of love. The nearest thing to that kind of love on this earth is the mother's love for her child. Even that falls very short of being the perfect love that God has for mankind.

"The tongues of men": That this gift was actual languages is established (in Acts 2:1-13), affirmed in this text by Paul's calling it "of men", clearly a reference to human language. This was the gift which the Corinthians prized so highly, abused so greatly, and counterfeited so disastrously. God gave the ability to speak in a language not known to the speaker, as a sign with limited function.

"Tongues of angels": The apostle was writing in general hypothetical terms. There is no biblical teaching of any special angelic language that people could learn to speak.

Love: Self giving love that is more concerned with giving than receiving. The word was not admired and thus seldom used in ancient Greek literature, but it is common in the New Testament.

Without love, no matter how linguistically gifted one is to speak his own language, other languages, or even (hypothetically), the speech of angels, his speech is noise only. In New Testament times, rites honoring the pagan deities Cybele, Bacchus, and Dionysius included, ecstatic noises accompanied by gongs, cymbals and trumpets. Unless the speech of the Corinthians was done in love, it was no better than the gibberish of pagan ritual.

1 Corinthians 13:2 "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 charity, I am nothing."

You may even be filled with the knowledge of God to overflowing, but without love, no one will listen. "Prophecy", in this instance, has to do with predictions. Paul speaks of this gift as the most essential one because it brings God's truth to people. Even this gift must be ministered in love.

"Understanding all mysteries" This encompasses gifts of wisdom, knowledge and discernment, which are to be exercised in love.

"All faith": This refers to the gift of faith, enduring, believing prayer; which is useless without selfless love for the church.

We must place our faith in God's ability and not in our own ability. All things we might do are no use at all, unless we are full of love for God and man.

1 Corinthians 13:3 "And though I bestow all my goods to feed [the poor], and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing."

In all the lessons, you see it is more important why you do something, than in the actual doing. The woman gave all she had, which was very little monetarily. Jesus said she had given more than those who gave great sums, because she gave all she had. The Lord does not want us to figure out some formula about giving and receiving. He wants us to give from a free heart, expecting nothing in return.

God who sees in secret will reward you openly. It is not the fact of giving all that he owns that is important. If he did not give it from a loving heart, he should have kept it. It will do him no good. We are not to give begrudgingly, or of necessity.

2 Corinthians 9:7 "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, [so let him give]; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver."

You may give your body to be burned, but that is not what God wants from you. He does not want you to die for Him; He wants you to live for Him. Everything I do with love in my heart is better than ten times that much without love.

In the previous comments of (verses 1-3), the focus is on the emptiness produced when love is absent from ministry. In the (verses from 4-7), the fullness of love is described, in each case by what love does. Love is action, not abstraction. Positively, love is patient with people and gracious to them with generosity.

Negatively, love never envies or brags, or is arrogant, since that is the opposite of selfless service to others. Never rude or overbearing, love never wants its own way, is not irritated or angered in personal offense, and finds no pleasure in someone else's sin, even the sin of an enemy.

On the positive side again, love is devoted to truth in everything. Regarding "all things" within God's righteous and gracious will, love protects, believes, hopes and endures what others reject.

1 Corinthians 13:4 "Charity suffereth long, [and] is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,

Now, we see a description of this type of love in action. How can you tell if I have this type of love? This type of love is willing to suffer for the ones he loves. This is speaking primarily of love for God, but extends to mankind as well. This type of love is a positive. This type of love overlooks shortcomings in others. It is even patient, until they can change.

This perfect love, spoken of here, never wants what someone else has, or wonders why they did not get that too. They are happy for the one who does have it. "Vaunteth", in the verse above, means boast. Someone who truly loves will not boast and brag to make someone else feel little.

This being "puffed up" is speaking of pride. We must never act proud and cause someone else pain in the doing. True love thinks of other's feelings, before they think of their own.

1 Corinthians 13:5 "Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;"

"Unseemly" means indecently, or shamefully. A person who has love in his heart would not embarrass others and God doing things that would be a shame. He would always do the decent thing. Love in the sense of "seeketh not her own" could be very well covered by the word charity. It would mean that other's needs would be more important to them, than their own needs.

This person, full of love, would not go around with a chip on his shoulder looking for someone to knock it off. He would be a peace maker. He would have the mind of Christ and would not be thinking evil thoughts. His mind, stayed on Christ, would have no room for negative thoughts.

1 Corinthians 13:6 "Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;"

The person, who has the kind of love that this is speaking of, does not find pleasure in earthly things. His pleasure is in pleasing God. The truth would be his motto. We see from the whole armor of God that all Christians must wear, what part truth has.

Ephesians 6:14 "Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness;"

You see you are not only to speak truth, but to have it tightly bound around you. The true Christian with this godlike love does not love to make a lie, but gets real joy from telling the truth.

1 Corinthians 13:7 "Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things."

Paul thought it all joy to suffer for Christ. This verse above, is speaking of being willing to bear whatever persecution comes our way, in the name of the Lord. This "believeth all things", has to do with faith in God.

Abraham believed, and it was counted unto him as righteousness. This means continues to believe, even in the face of problems. Christians have hope of the resurrection.

Matthew 10:22 "And ye shall be hated of all [men] for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved."

We see from this Scripture that there is something to endure. It also tells us how long it will be required of us to endure.

1 Corinthians 13:8-10 "Charity never faileth: but whether [there be] prophecies, they shall fail; whether [there be] tongues, they shall cease; whether [there be] knowledge, it shall vanish away." "For we know in part, and we prophesy in part." "But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away."

These verses refer to love's lastingness or permanence as a divine quality. Love outlasts all failures. Paul strengthens his point on the permanence of love by comparing it to the spiritual gifts which the Corinthians so highly prized: prophecy, knowledge, and languages, all of which will have an end. There may be a distinction made on how prophecy and knowledge come to an end, and how the gift of languages does. This is indicated by the Greek verb form used. In the case of prophecy and knowledge, they are both said to "be abolished" (in both cases the verb indicates that something will put an end to those two functions).

(Verses 9-10), indicate that what will abolish knowledge and prophecy is; "that which is perfect." When that occurs, those gifts will be rendered inoperative. The "perfect", is not the completion of Scripture, since there is still the operation of those two gifts and will be in the future kingdom. The Scriptures do not allow us to see "face to face" or have perfect knowledge as God does (in verse 12).

"The perfect" is not the rapture of the church or the second coming of Christ, since the kingdom to follow these events will have an abundance of preachers and teachers. The perfect must be the eternal state, when we in glory see God face to face and have full knowledge in the eternal new heavens and new earth. Just as a child grows to full understanding, believers will come to perfect knowledge and no such gifts will be necessary.

On the other hand, Paul uses a different word for the end of the gift of languages, thus indicating it will "cease" by itself, as it did at the end of the apostolic age. It will not end by the coming of the "perfect," for it will already have ceased. The uniqueness of the gift of languages and its interpretations was, as all sign gifts, to authenticate the message and messengers of the gospel before the New Testament was completed.

"Tongues" were also not a sign to believers, but unbelievers, especially those unbelieving Jews. Tongues also cease because there was no need to verify the true messages from God once the Scripture was given. It became the standard by which all are to be deemed true. "Tongues", was a means of edification in a way far inferior to preaching and teaching.

In fact (chapter 14), was designed to show the Corinthians, so preoccupied with tongues, that it was an inferior means of communication, an inferior means of praise, and an inferior means of evangelism. Prophecy was and is, far superior. That tongues have ceased should be clear from their absence from any other books in the New Testament except Acts. Tongues ceased to be an issue of record or practice in the early church, as the Scripture was being written. That tongues have ceased should be clear also from its absence through church history since the first century, appearing only sporadically and then only in questionable groups.

1 Corinthians 13:11 "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."

This is just saying that we cannot always stay a baby in Christ. Sometime down the road, we need to start being an adult in the Lord. Milk is for babies. Get where you can chew the Word and get stronger nourishment. We need to grow in the Lord to the extent that we can stop being fed, and begin to feed others. It is alright to be a child, when you are first saved. There is a time however, to put all that behind and take on the responsibilities of adulthood.

1 Corinthians 13:12 "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 also I am known."

We will not fully understand about the Lord until we meet Him face to face. We see Him now in types and shadows in the things we read of Him. There will come a time when the dark glass is removed and we will see Him face to face. Jesus tore the curtain away in the Holy of Holies. We can now enter in.

1 John 3:2 "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."

1 Corinthians 13:13 "And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these [is] charity."

Faith, hope, and love are all very much of Christianity. They do not change. You might even say; they are conditions of Christianity. "Abideth" means continues to abide. You see, these never change as they are absolutes. If we had to give up all but one, we would have to hang on to love.

John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

To sum up this lesson, we would have to say that Paul is teaching them the proper functions of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, in the confines of their traditions. There is a song written from (1 Corinthians 13), called "Charity".

1 Corinthians 13 Questions

1. The word that was translated "charity" in verse one, is what?
2. What does agape mean?
3. While we were yet in _____, Christ gave His life for us.
4. What is the gift of prophecy?
5. What is it speaking of about "understanding all mysteries"?
6. What is the faith speaking of in verse 2?
7. What could possibly be wrong with bestowing all my goods to feed the poor?
8. What is wrong with giving your body to be burned?
9. What kind of a giver does God love?
10. What is this type of love, or charity, like?
11. This type of love is speaking primarily of the love for God, but includes what else?
12. What does vaunteth in verse four mean?
13. What are they puffed up with?
14. What does "unseemly" in verse five mean?
15. Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the _____.
16. Where does the Christian's pleasure come from?
17. Paul thought it all joy to _____ for Christ.
18. How long must the Christians endure?
19. When I became a man, I put away _____ things.
20. We now see through a _____.
21. Now abideth _____, _____, and _____.
22. The greatest of these is _____.
23. How could we sum up this lesson?