

LOVE

"For many, this is the most wonderful chapter in the New Testament, but as McGarvey said, "It has been admired by all ages, but, unfortunately, practiced by none!"

It is a glorious hymn in honor of Christian love, in which Paul rises on the wings of inspiration to the most sunlit heights of Christian eloquence. Like Psalms 45, it may be entitled "A Psalm of Love."

The chapter falls easily into three divisions: (1) the absolute necessity of love (I Corinthians 13:1-3), (2) the characteristics of love (1 Corinthians 13:4-7), and (3) the permanence of love (1 Corinthians 13:8-13). The last verse I Corinthians 13:13 evidently stands apart. The disorders of the Corinthian church are continually in view. Both the positive and negative attributes of love in I Corinthians 13:4-7 are clearly the opposites of conditions among the Corinthians.

Also, such words as "tongues ... prophecy ... knowledge ... faith so as to move mountains cannot be understood, except as references to the miraculous gifts at Corinth. This chapter should never be interpreted as merely an abstract teaching on love, parenthetically inserted in the middle of Paul's rebuke of the Corinthians. The situation at Corinth was still the center of Paul's attention here.

I Corinthians 13: 1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity (love), I am become [*as*] sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.)

Tongues of men and of angels ... this may be paraphrased as "all languages, human or divine." That the speech of angels should have been brought in here could have derived from Paul's own experience in which he was caught up into heaven and heard words "unspeakable, unlawful to utter" (II Corinthians 12:4). There is also an assumption here that "angels are superior in all respects to men."

But have not love ... Three Greek words for "love" are [*ER-os*] (erotic love), [*fi-LE-o*] (affection or brotherly love), and [*a-GA-pe*], which is the highest form of love, Agape the last word is used in this chapter. "The word was not a classical Greek word. No heathen writer had used it." Yet it was in the Greek language and was used in the Septuagint (LXX) Greek translation of the Old Testament from 250 BC. Thus, the Spirit chose a word for Christian love which was free of the sensual

overtones of more common Greek words. [*Agape*] is considered to be one of the grandest words in the New Testament.

Sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal ... The harsh sound of heathen worship included the clashing and banging of gongs and cymbals and the braying of brass trumpets. Such noises were characteristic "especially of the worship of Dionysus (dye-oh-NYE-sus) and Cybele (SI-bi-lee)." Paul teaches two things by this: (1) that the exhibitions of the Corinthian tongue speakers were of the same order as heathen worship and (2) that both were noisy, empty and worthless.

I 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 (love), I am nothing.

Prophecy ... knowledge ... faith so as to move mountains ... These are to be added to "tongues" mentioned in I Corinthians 13:1, all of them being miraculous gifts which had caused so much trouble at Corinth.

All faith ... Although this refers to a miraculous gift, faith is never to be viewed as appearing in various varieties, Faith is of one kind only. In all the word of God, there is no mention of several kinds, or even two kinds of faith. It is always the AMOUNT OF FAITH which is spoken of ... True to that fact, Paul is not here speaking of some special kind of faith, but of "all faith," meaning the highest AMOUNT, not some special "kind." No greater misunderstanding exists among religious people today than the notion that there is any such thing as "saving faith," understanding it as a special quality or variety of faith that inevitably obtains salvation.

Paul's words here are a sufficient disproof of the popular heresy regarding "faith alone" or "saving faith." "All faith" cannot mean anything less than faith in its highest degree (degrees of faith being often mentioned ... "little faith ... great faith ... etc."); and if certain "kinds of faith" contrary to all Scripture, should be supposed as existing, there would be no way to exclude them from Paul's sweeping words "all faith." Significantly, not even "all faith" can avail any man of salvation unless his heart is filled with love of man and of God.

Prophecy ... The miraculous gift of prophecy belonged to BA-laam, but his having love neither of God or Israel caused his ruin. Numbers 24:1ff; 31:8).

CAI-a-phas as God's high priest uttered prophecy; but his loveless heart made him an enemy of God;

John 11:49-51 And one of them, [*named*] Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, 50 Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. 51 And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation

All faith so as to remove mountains... While true enough that removing mountains was a well-known Jewish metaphor for solving difficult problems (see Matthew 17:20; Luke 17:6, it is clearly the miraculous manifestation of faith that is meant here ..."This means the highest degree of miracle-working faith."

Judas Iscariot is an example of faith to perform miracles, but with no love of Christ. Judas had faith to work miracles (Matthew 10:1); but he did not possess love, betrayed the Lord, and went to his own place.

I 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 (love), it profiteth me nothing.

Bestow all my goods ... the meaning is giving away all one's property a little bit at a time so as to reach the greatest possible number of poor people.

"... to feed the poor ..." "The Greek word here means to feed others by giving them morsels of food directly in their mouth such as a cripple or paraplegic, or to spoon feed a baby"

"... give my body to be burned ... Coining as it did before the savage persecutions in which Christians were burned for their faith, this is surprising, being perhaps prophetic.

Whatever may have prompted Paul's words here, the lesson is clear, that neither liberal giver nor fanatical laborer "mother Teresa" may be assured of eternal life without the all-important, indispensable virtue of love.

In the days of the persecutions, some were tempted to seek martyrdom as a sure means of attaining eternal life; but a proper regard for what Paul said here would have discouraged such a thing.

Paul in these first three verses did not mention all of the miraculous gifts taught about in the 12th Chapter, but only the most respected; and thus what is said here are examples which were chosen and can be applied with equal force to all the other supernatural gifts.

I Corinthians 13: 4 Charity (love) suffereth long, [*and*] is kind; charity (love) envieth not; charity (love) vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,

Paul enumerated fifteen qualities of love in verses 4-7; but this is not a dissertation on love. subject. The qualities cited here contrast with the extraordinary gifts so coveted at Corinth; and they are presented here as exactly opposed to the characteristic of the puffed-up Corinthians.

Those traits of love are therefore presented which stood opposed to the temper which they exhibited in the use of their gifts. They were impatient, discontented, envious, inflated, selfish, rude, heedless of the feelings or interests of others, suspicious, resentful and critical.

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

Seeketh not its own ... "Love does not insist upon its rights." He also stated that "It would be the key to almost all the problems which surround us today, if men would think less of their rights and more of their duties." The essential selfishness in all human nature has been exploited politically in this generation, and the ultimate fruits of unbridled selfishness are yet to be reaped.

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

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

Believeth all things ... As Johnson said, "This does not include gullibility, but means rather that the believer should not be suspicious." We should think the best of our brethren until they show themselves as false.

I Corinthians 13: 8 Charity (love) 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.

Love never faileth ... notice prophecies, shall fail and be done away; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall be done away.

I Corinthians 13:9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.

I Corinthians 13:10 But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

“...when that which is perfect is come ... perfect Greek Tel’-os a neuter noun it cannot mean Jesus, it must be an inanimate object that is perfect ... the Bible ... the Holy Scriptures>

II Peter 1:3 According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that [pertain] unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue:

Beginning here, and to the end of the chapter, it is the permanence of love, as contrasted with the supernatural gifts which were so highly treasured by the Corinthians, which is stressed. Now he declares that all of these spiritual gifts which had so dazzled and inflated the Corinthians were soon to end,

Paul had just outlined the glory and desirability of Christian love, the same being the "most excellent way" that he mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:31b. But here he made the unqualified declaration of the end of supernatural gifts in the church.

Love never faileth ... As in the RSV, "Love never ends."

Prophecies ... shall be done away ... This cannot mean that prophecies shall be contradicted by events, but "The supernatural gift of prophecy shall cease to be necessary, and therefore shall not be continued."

Tongues ... shall cease ... This means that the TRUE gifts of tongues or languages would cease. Any authentic speaking in tongues is here restricted by the apostle Paul to the age of miracles; and when that ceased, the tongues ceased.

The very fact of Paul's showing "the more excellent way" declared that the supernatural gifts would soon pass away. Those gifts at Corinth had a purpose. In that day in Corinth, no man had a copy of the New Testament; therefore it was necessary that supernaturally endowed men should teach and lead them.

During the childhood age of the church, miracles validated the message of the inspired preachers

Mark 16:20 And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with [them], and confirming the word with signs following.

Miracles were to confirm the word of God. "No miracle today could confirm the word of God; it is already confirmed. Men need simply to believe and obey it."

No true Christian can deny that God is still working in the world, and especially in His Church or kingdom.

What about the answer to prayer? Yes indeed God answers prayer, and sometimes in the most astonishing ways; but such a thing bears no likeness to the supernatural and visible wonders of the apostolic age ... in other words: I believe in miracles not miracle workers or spellbinders.

The character of people pretending to perform miracles in this generation disproves their claims. They get rich doing it; but the apostles never took money for healing anyone.

The miraculous endowments designated SPIRITUAL gifts have FAILED, have CEASED, have VANISHED AWAY and are therefore no longer in force. All such powers were temporary and provisional and cannot now be exercised.

There is a meaning in such words as "cease ... fail ... vanish away," not merely of continuing no longer, but of being superseded by something else.

"Tongues prophecies, and ... knowledge shall be superseded." which is correct. And what was to replace the tongues, and other supernatural gifts? It was the inspired writing of the New Testament. Thus, the fact of the appearance of that which was to do the replacing ... this and other Epistles replaced the tongues of Corinth.

The great problem before Paul was the instruction and guidance of the church in Corinth; and the most acceptable view of what might be called "perfect" in the completed canon on the New Testament.

Brother McGarvey understood it as "the recorded word." Others: "The body of truth fully revealed." Some identified it as "The New Testament."

The comparison which Paul at once made contrasted the childhood age of the church with the early church's maturity, and with the ultimate condition of the saints in heaven.

Regarding calling the Bible "perfect," it should be noted that even of the Old Testament it was said, "The law of the Lord is perfect converting the soul"

Psalms 19:7 The law of the LORD [is] perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD [is] sure, making wise the simple.

Thus "perfect" most assuredly is applied to the revealed word of God; and such being true of the Old Testament makes it even more applicable to the New Testament.

That which is in part shall be done away ...

These gifts were to continue in the church to guide and instruct it until the completed will of God was made known. They were to serve a temporary purpose; then when their office was fulfilled, they were to pass away and give place to the revealed will of God.

I 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

Can this be anything but a declaration that the Corinthians should stop being children and grow up? In case any of them might have missed the point, he added a bit later, "Brethren, be not children in mind" (1 Corinthians 14:20). Furthermore, that admonition was given in the same breath with Paul's statement that five understandable words were worth more than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue or language!

I 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.

In this there surely must be a glimpse of eternal things; and it evidently occurred to Paul in connection with what he had just said of the childhood age of the church giving way to maturity.

We may refer the words about seeing through a mirror darkly, and knowing "in part" to the present dispensation of God's grace, and the words about being "face

to face" (presumably with the Lord) and knowing "fully" may be understood as descriptive of conditions in eternity.

That there is, in fact, just such an emphasis in this I Corinthians 13:12, is proved by Paul's prompt return to the "now" in the final verse immediately after this.

In a mirror darkly ... Ancient mirrors were of polished brass, easily tarnished, and any image was only dimly seen. Paul himself referred even to the Christ as "the image of God" II Corinthians 4:4; Colossians 1:15

Nothing is dim about Christ as God's image except the tarnished mirrors by which mortal men behold it.

Then face to face ... In the resurrection, we shall behold the face of the Beloved.

I 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.

Now I know in part ... Note the temporal "now I"; and note also that Paul was not referring to the Corinthians who knew far less than he did and Paul said this of himself ... the greatest Biblical scholar of all time.

What a shocking rebuke of intellectual arrogance for Modern Professor Smart with their TWIDDLE DD's

The greatest mind of the apostolic age, other than that of Christ Himself, here stressed the partial and incomplete nature of that whole body of revelation which Paul, more than any other, delivered to mankind.

I Corinthians 13:13 And now abideth faith, hope, charity (love), these three; but the greatest of these [*is*] charity (love).

But now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

But now ... This means "in this present age ... the stress in this verse regards "the supremacy of love,"

"Now" in this verse meant that Paul had returned to the present situation after the departure from the subject to speak of eternal things in I Corinthians 13:12, which should be treated, actually, as a parenthesis.

The clause "now abideth" implies that these graces faith, hope and love are not always to abide; at least the graces of faith and hope shall not abide; for seeing that faith is:

Hebrews 11: 1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen

Faith is the persuasion of things hoped for and hope that is seen is not hope

Romans 8:24 For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?

When we are in heaven, where all the objects of our faith and hope are put in our possession, there can be no place for faith and hope.

The "now" of this verse shows both faith and hope deal with uncertainties, and there shall be no uncertainties in the eternal world.

Abideth ... here has the force of saying that the miraculous spiritual gifts shall not abide;. It is in this dispensation that faith, hope and love abide; but what is especially stressed, "Love is the greatest" of the trio.

And the greatest of these is love ... It is an unqualified disaster for advocates of the "faith only" theory that love should here be ranked ahead of faith;

Throughout the chapter, it has been made clear that love as a virtue of men, not as an attribute of God, is meant. It is true, of course, that the love in Christian hearts has been shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Spirit; but by the virtue of that very fact it becomes a Christian virtue.

WHY LOVE IS THE GREATEST THING

Love is the fulfillment of the law, which was never true of faith

Romans 13:10 Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love [*is*] the fulfilling of the law.

Love outranks faith in the power to motivate people.

Love includes obedience which is not true of faith or hope.

John 14:15 If ye love me, keep my commandments.

Love is the heart of the Great Commandment to love God and one's neighbor

Mark 12:28-31 28 And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all? 29 And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments [*is*], Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: 30 And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this [*is*] the first commandment. 31 And the second [*is*] like, [*namely*] this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.

Love shall abide eternally, whereas both faith and hope shall not, except in some exceptional sense.

Love, if lacking in the heart, would be a sufficient deficiency to prevent one's salvation, even if he possessed "all faith"

I 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.

Love works the greatest miracle of transformation in human hearts, distinguishing it from faith, which exists in some pretty cold fish!

This chapter may be viewed as one of the most important in Scripture, not merely for the truly marvelous things said of love, but also for the firm word therein regarding the end of the miraculous age.

Concerning the subject of love, there is none other which so fascinates and inspires the hearts of people; for this gift ranks first among the fruits of the Holy Spirit

Galatians 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, 23 Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

There is even a sense in which it is a continuing "miracle" throughout the church age, not any less than the "confirming miracles" of the apostolic period, merely different. It is the signature of God Himself in the hearts of all the redeemed.

LOVE IS GOD'S SIGNATURE Love is God's imprint upon the human heart, A glorious installation, His image to impart. It is the precious bridal song, the hymn Of Jesus' Bride, the ransomed throng who have believed in Him.

Sources: KJV, theWord.com, Burton Coffman, B.W. Johnson & Adam Clarkes commentaries.