

1 Corinthians 13

charity: Christian love: a. God's love to man; b. Man's love of God and his neighbour, commanded as the fulfilling of the Law, Matt. xxii. 37, 39; c. *esp.* The Christian love of our fellow-man; Christian benignity of disposition expressing itself in Christ-like conduct; one of the 'three Christian graces' fully described by St. Paul, 1 Cor. xiii. (Oxford English Dictionary)

- I. This chapter is renowned as the “love chapter” of Scripture.
 - A. It was not that Paul just thought it would be nice to include some inspirational words about love and so stuck this chapter in his epistle to Corinth.
 - B. This chapter is in the midst of Paul's detailed instructions about the use of spiritual gifts in the church. **1CO 12-14.**
 - C. Compared to the other gifts, charity is “...a more excellent way” (**1CO 12:31**).

- II. The church at Corinth is a witness that a church may be full of disorder, yet still God's church.
 - A. This fact does not excuse churches from orderly operation, or the corrective measures of the epistle would be nonsensical.
 - B. Corinth had disruptive problems with:
 1. division. **1CO 1:10; 11:18; 12:25.**
 2. strife. **1CO 1:11; 3:3.**
 3. glorying in inclusiveness. **1CO 5:2, 6.**
 4. glorying in spiritual gifts. **1CO 14:12, 26.**
 5. heresies. **1CO 11:19; 15:12, 29.**
 6. confusion. **1CO 14:26-33.**
 - C. Paul is not only giving a solid doctrinal and practical guide for the use of spiritual gifts, but also here shows a superior way of service to Christ and one another.
 1. Near the conclusion of **1CO 12**, Paul points out the order and value of the gifts.
 2. They run from the most important gift (apostle) to the least important (tongues). **1CO 12:28.**
 3. Paul here exhorts the saints to *earnestly covet the best gifts* he had just enumerated.
 4. However, for those discouraged by his low estimate of their gift, frustrated without a gift in the list, or simply desiring to serve the Lord more perfectly, he offers a superior alternative: *the service of love*. It is more excellent than being an apostle or any spiritual gift.
 5. The power of love amongst brethren is not a *particular* (affecting a part, not the whole) gift as were others; it is available for all to exercise. **1TH 4:9.**

- III. Spiritual gifts without love are worthless. **vs. 1-3.**
 - A. Speaking in tongues without love is nothing but irritating noise. **v. 1.**
 1. The *tongues of men* are the various languages of mankind. **ACT 2:8.**
 2. The *tongues of angels* is *hyperbole*, emphasizing the greatness of this presumed gift of tongues to make a greater appeal for love.
 - a. There is no Bible basis for a specific language of angels.
 - b. Compare this text's construction with **ECC 6:6; AMO 9:2.**
 3. Paul begins with tongues, since it is apparent here is where the Corinthians had their greatest problems.
 4. Tongues are obviously not a proof of true Biblical love.
 5. Tongues exercised in any way outside his definition of love are mere clanging

noise.

- B. Prophecy, wisdom, knowledge and faith without love are vain. **v. 2.**
 - 1. Prophecy, wisdom and knowledge were special abilities to know and reveal God's will by inspiration prior to the completion of the New Testament Scriptures.
 - 2. Faith was that confidence and trust in God that could seek and expect great things from God. **ACT 6:5, 8.**
 - 3. These gifts are exaggerated beyond their reality to make a greater appeal for the importance of love.
 - a. The gift of prophecy didn't know all mysteries. **1CO 14:29-32.**
 - b. Whether or not Paul had faith that could remove mountains was not the issue. It was that if he did have such exaggerated faith but had not love, he was nothing.
- C. Charitable giving and martyrdom without love are not profitable. **v. 3.**
 - 1. Again, an extreme description is made here of giving and suffering to make the greater appeal for love.
 - 2. Even those outward actions of charity or love do not prove the existence of the inward truth and reality of love. Men can have false motives for their outward actions. **PRO 26:24-26; JOH 12:4-6.**

IV. Love is the greatest measure of human relations. **vs. 4-7.**

- A. By fifteen concise and eloquent statements, Paul clearly defines the nature of true love by the highest standard ever given.
- B. If Corinth would learn such love, their division and strife would shortly end, and they would be using their spiritual gifts in a profitable way. c/w **COL 3:14; 2:2.**

V. Love is the enduring grace and gift for Christians to seek. **vs. 8-13.**

- A. "Charity never faileth" describes the enduring character of love: it will always be the basis for conduct pleasing to God and man.
- B. Prophecies, tongues and knowledge shall come to an end. **v. 8.**
 - 1. Prophecies would not fail in the sense of God not keeping or performing His word, but rather the *temporary gift* of prophecy would end. **1CO 12:10; 13:2.**
 - 2. Speaking in tongues for a sign would likewise end.
 - 3. Knowledge would not vanish away in the sense of all men becoming senile or ignorant; but rather the *temporary gift* of divine knowledge would come to an end likewise.
 - 4. Paul continues to reason with the Corinthians not to put so much stock in their temporary spiritual gifts. These were not the enduring aspects of Jesus Christ's religion.
- C. The gifts of knowledge and prophecy were only *imperfect* gifts. **v. 9.**
 - 1. Those having the gift of knowledge did not know everything but rather only a part of the knowledge God had for the church.
 - 2. Those having the gift of prophecy did not all have the same specifics of revelation given them, but only a portion.
 - 3. Such gifts of the Spirit were *limited* to any individual, so order and cooperation had to occur for learning. **1CO 14:29-32.**
 - 4. Paul implies that even he had *imperfect* knowledge by his appeal to *perfect* knowledge and prophecy. **vs. 2, 12.**
- D. *Perfect* knowledge and prophecy would then end *partial* gifts. **v. 10.**

1. The perfect thing coming is set in careful contrast to those things that were in part: knowledge and prophecy. **vs. 9-10.**
 2. The complete and inspired Scriptures with the New Testament are "...that which is perfect..."
 - a. David called the O.T. law of God *perfect*. **PSA 19:7.**
 - b. Paul said Scripture could *perfect* Timothy. **2TI 3:16-17.**
 - c. James called Scripture the "...perfect law of liberty..." (**JAM 1:25**).
 - d. The completion of the Scriptures meant the end of the apostles and the signs and wonders accompanying them to *confirm the word*.
MAR 16:20; HEB 2:4.
 - e. Paul is dealing particularly with *revelatory* gifts (knowledge and prophecy), but he includes tongues due to their great abuse at Corinth.
- E. Maturity should cause a change in our conduct. **v. 11.**
1. Paul simply draws an illustration of maturity.
 2. If the Corinthians would mature in their understanding of spiritual gifts, they would recognize the superiority of *enduring love* to the *temporary gifts* they had.
 3. Paul had already referred to their immaturity. **1CO 3:1.**
 4. He would shortly encourage them to *not be children in understanding*. **1CO 14:20.**
- F. Their grasp of God and truth was inferior to what it would be. **v. 12.**
1. The focus shifts here from the perfection (completion) of the Scripture to the perfection of the individual.
 2. The theme of the chapter remains unchanged: the superiority of things *perfect and permanent* (which accord with maturity) to things *partial and temporary* (which accord with immaturity).
 - a. The body of knowledge which is the complete revelation (the Bible) superates and displaces the temporary gifts of knowledge and prophecy.
 - (1) Immature saints dwell on temporary expedients like gifts.
 - (2) Mature saints thrive on Scripture.
 - b. The knowledge and understanding of Christ which is peculiar to the heavenly state superates and displaces the temporary current state of what we can know now through grace and Scripture.
 - (1) The Apostle Paul knew much about Christ but looked forward to an even fuller knowledge.
 - (2) Our understanding is currently clouded by our infirmity, but that shall someday be changed.
 - (3) We now see Christ through the eyes of *faith* and *hope*.
1PE 1:8; ROM 15:13.
 - (4) At the coming of Christ we will see and know Him perfectly.
PHIL 3:21 c/w 1JO 3:2.
- G. Love is greater than faith or hope. **v. 13.**
1. Faith and hope, like charity, are not *particular* gifts but *universal* to all believers. All three of these gifts "abide," i.e., last longer than the temporary expedients.
 2. Neither faith nor hope will be needed or helpful in heaven. **HEB 11:1; ROM 8:24.**
 3. Faith and hope are helpful for that which is *not seen*. Love is helpful for that which *is seen* (**1JO 4:20; COL 3:14**) and therefore suited to both the present circumstance and when all the elect family see each other in heaven forever.
 4. Though faith and hope abide much longer than other spiritual gifts, yet even they are exceeded by love. *Charity never faileth*.