

“THE GREATEST OF THESE” (1)
1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Introduction:

- 1. Some chapters in the Bible stand out because of their subject matter.**
 - a. Matthew, chapters 5, 6 , and 7 are “The Sermon on the Mount.”**
 - b. Acts, chapter 2, is “the birthday of the church of Christ.”**
 - c. First Corinthians, chapter 15, is “the resurrection chapter.”**
 - d. Hebrews, chapter 11, is “the great chapter on faith.”**
 - e. First Corinthians, chapter 13, is “the great chapter on love.”**

- 2. J. W McGarvey said of 1 Cor. 13: “This chapter has been admired by all ages, but unfortunately, it has been practiced by none.”**

- 3. The church at Corinth was sadly divided.**
 - a. Factions were lined up behind favorite preachers (chh. 1-4).**
 - b. Open sin was tolerated (chapter 5).**
 - c. Members were suing one another (chapter 6).**
 - d. There was confusion about marriage (chapter 7).**
 - e. There were questions regarding eating meats offered to idols (chapters 8 &10).**
 - f. Paul’s apostleship was questioned (chapter 9).**
 - g. There was a feminist revolt in the church (chapter 11).**
 - h. The Lord’s supper revealed the divided state of the church (11).**
 - i. There was fighting over the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit (chapters 12-14).**
 - j. Some were even denying the resurrection of the body, one of the fundamentals of the Gospel (chapter 15).**

- 4. 1 Corinthians 12, 13, and 14 deal with miraculous gifts of the Spirit.**
 - a. These gifts should have been a source of unity for the church.**
 - b. Instead they had become a source of pride and contention.**
 - c. In the midst of the discussion, Paul turns aside to point out something far greater than miraculous gifts - love!**
 - d. He ends chapter 12, saying, “But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.”**

- e. The more excellent way is love!
5. Unlike English, there are several words in Koine Greek for love.
- a. Phileo is warm affection for loved ones.
 - b. Storge is family love.
 - c. Eros is sexual love (not used in the New Testament).
 - d. Agape was the highest form of love.
 - 1) It is benevolent goodwill.
 - 2) It is the love that God has for all mankind.
 - 3) Paul uses agape in 1 Corinthians 13.
6. Paul discusses the great importance of love under three headings:
- a. The demands of love (verses 1 to 3).
 - b. The description of love (verses 4 to 7).
 - c. The duration of love (verses 8 to 13).

Discussion:

I. THE DEMANDS OF LOVE (1-3).

A. The languages of men and angels are discordant without love.

- 1. “Tongues” (glossa = language) were given to the apostles by the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-8).
- 2. The apostles laid hands on others to give them this gift.
- 3. Paul had heard the language of angels (2 Cor. 12:4).
- 4. A cymbal is beautiful if used in harmony with other instruments; by itself, it grates on one’s ears.
- 5. Speaking in tongues is wonderful if it is possessed with love, but without love, it is robbed of its Heavenly beauty.

B. Miraculous gifts are worthless without love.

- 1. “Prophecy” was the miraculous ability to reveal God’s Word especially as it regards the future.
- 2. “Mysteries” is spiritual knowledge hidden until revealed.

3. **“Knowledge” is inspired information revealed by the Holy Spirit.**
 4. **“Faith” refers to a miraculous faith which given by the laying on of hands of the apostles (1 Cor. 12:9; Matt. 17:20; 21:21); it is not ordinary faith (Romans 10:17).**
- C. Giving all one has to help the poor means nothing if it is not done in love.**
1. **People give for many reasons:**
 - a. **Some want a tax write-off.**
 - b. **Some want to out-do others.**
 - c. **Some think they can bring God into their debt.**
 - d. **Many give to be seen of men (Matthew 6:2-4).**
 2. **Though we give millions of dollars to the poor, if it is not motivated by love, we can expect no reward from God.**
- D. Martyrdom is meaningless if it is not motivated by love.**
1. **Early Christians were persecuted and often forced to fight wild beasts or were burned at the stake.**
 2. **Some, such as Origen, actually sought martyrdom.**
 3. **Giving up one’s life was in vain if not motivated by love.**

II. THE DESCRIPTION OF LOVE (4-7).

A. “Love suffers long.”

1. **Love is patient with people and endures the offensive behavior of others.**
2. **Abraham Lincoln honored his rival, Edward Stanton, by giving him a Cabinet post even though Stanton detested Lincoln and had little good to say about him.**
3. **When Jesus was reviled, “He did not revile in return” (1 Peter 2:23).**

B. “Love is kind.”

1. Eldred Echols said: “Kindness is the response of a tender, concerned heart” (The Most Excellent Way, 224).
2. God is kind even to the ungrateful and wicked.

“But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return, and your reward will be great and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil” (Luke 6:35).

C. “Love does not envy.”

1. Love is not jealous of the good fortune of another.
2. Envy is a work of the flesh (Galatians 5:21).
3. Cain killed his brother because of envy (1 John 3:11,12).

D. “Love does not parade itself.”

1. Love does not boast of its accomplishments.
2. It “does not seek the highest seats in the synagogues.”

“God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (1 Peter 5:5).

E. “Love is not puffed up.”

1. One who loves is not proud, arrogant, or conceited.

“Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall” (Proverbs 16:18).

2. The chief of police wanted to impress others with his athletic ability, but fell flat on his back in wet grass.

Conclusion:

1. Eldred Echols wrote: “Love is the heartbeat of the universe. It binds us to God’s eternal purpose for our existence, and is the sure foundation of our eternal future. It is the most powerful force in time or eternity, and the most enduring” (The Most Excellent Way, 229).
2. We will continue our study of love in 1 Cor. 13 in a lesson to follow.

“THE GREATEST OF THESE” (2)
1 Corinthians 13:1-3

Introduction:

1. Eldred Echols, longtime missionary in Africa, told the story of a 12 year old boy named Andondile.
 - a. Andondile appeared at his door one day to ask for a job.
 - b. He was small, skinny, barefoot and ragged.
 - c. Bro. Echols felt sorry for him and hired him.
 - d. He proved to be a very good and dependable worker.
 - e. Andondile asked if he could accompany the missionaries when they went to town to buy supplies.
 - f. He came back with a large bundle which he opened to show two cheap blankets he had bought for his younger siblings.
 - g. The next time he bought a blanket for his mother, a widow with four children to raise.
 - h. As the oldest child, Andondile had assumed the role of provider for his family.
 - i. He was very happy the day he was able to buy some calico cloth for his mother so she could make a dress for herself.
 - j. He refused charity of any kind, but finally agreed for bro. Echols to buy a blanket for him if he deducted its cost from his wages.
 - k. This little African boy was barely educated, unrefined, and superstitious, but he understood love and love’s demands!

2. in the previous lesson, we learned the following regarding love.
 - a. First Corinthians 13 is preeminently the great chapter on love.
 - b. There are four words for love in Greek, but agape is the word used in 1 Corinthians 13.
 - c. Agape is the benevolent good will that God has for all mankind.
 - d. Unless motivated by love, miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit, acts of charity, and even dying for the Cause of Christ, are meaningless.
 - e. We then considered the description of love in I Corinthians 13:
 - 1) Love is longsuffering.
 - 2) Love is kind.

- 3) Love is not envious.
- 4) Love is not boastful.
- 5) Love is not proud.

3. We will continue the study of love's description in 1 Corinthians 13.

Discussion:

I. THE DESCRIPTION OF LOVE CONTINUED (5-7).

A. "Love does not behave rudely."

1. Love is courteous and tactful, not wishing to offend others unnecessarily.
2. Society considers rudeness unacceptable.
3. Good manners, politeness and courtesy show a kind concern for others.

"In honor giving preference to one another" (Rom. 12:10).

"Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous" (1 Peter 3:8).

B. "Love does not seek its own."

1. It is not selfish.
2. Love does not demand its rights while ignoring the rights of others.

"Let each of you look out, not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others" (Philippians 2:4).

C. "Love is not provoked."

1. Love is not easily angered.
2. Righteous indignation is good (Matthew 21:21,13; Mark 3:1-6).
3. Unchecked anger leads to other sins (Matthew 5:21,22).

“Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the Devil” (Eph. 4:26,27).

D. “Love thinks no evil.”

- 1. Love does not keep a record of wrongs.**
- 2. An article in The Reader’s Digest was entitled “Are You a Grievance Collector?”**

“...bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another, even as Christ forgave you, so you must also do” (Colossians 3:13).

E. “Love does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth.”

- 1. Love does not take pleasure in hearing bad things.**
- 2. Love delights in hearing good about others (2 John 4).**

F. “Love bears all things.”

- 1. Love is willing to suffer hurt, insult, and mistreatment for the sake of the one loved.**
- 2. Love perseveres in its relationship with the one loved.**

G. Love believes all things.”

- 1. It puts the best construction on the conduct of the one loved; it will not accept charges against him until proved.**
- 2. “My friends won’t believe it; those who do are not my friends.”**

H. “Love hopes all things.”

- 1. Because he was a slow learner, Adam Clarke’s teacher told a visitor, “He’s the stupidest boy in the school.”**
- 2. The visitor told Clarke: “Don’t be discouraged. You may be a great scholar someday.”**
- 3. Clarke studied 40 languages and wrote a commentary on**

the entire Bible that is still used 200 years later.

I. "Love endures all things."

1. It handles ill treatment without hatred or retaliation.
2. The cruel treatment and rejection of men did not deter our Lord from dying for our sins.

J. "Love never fails."

1. When the earth passes away and time is no more, God's love for His people will remain.

II. THE DURATION OF LOVE (8-13).

A. Miraculous gifts would end, but love continues forever.

1. Prophecies will fail in that they will no longer be given.
2. The Spirit given ability to speak in other languages will stop for its purpose will be fulfilled.
3. The miraculous gift of knowledge will cease when the word is fully given and the New Testament is complete.

B. Miraculous gifts were only partial and given by the laying on of the apostles' hand (Acts 8:14-21; 19:6; 2 Tim. 1:6).

1. When the complete New Testament was revealed, these gifts were no longer needed.
2. When the last person died upon whom an apostle had hands, miracles inevitably ceased.
3. Miraculous gifts belonged to the infancy of the church;
4. When the Word was revealed and confirmed the church reached its maturity.

Conclusion:

1. Faith, hope and love continue but miraculous gifts have ceased.
2. Love will outlast even faith and hope for they will find fulfillment at the coming of our Lord.