

High Peaks Bible Fellowship

Love as a Way of Life 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Introduction

- Paul had already mentioned the superiority of love: "Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies" (1 Cor 8:1). Limiting our freedom in Christ for the sake of others has always been the most loving thing to do. Now the apostle Paul will elaborate on this concept by proving that the greatest spiritual gifts are worthless unless they are used with Christian love.
- In this passage, the word love is a translation of the Greek term *agape*, which is used nine times in this chapter. The noun *agape* and the verb *agapao* are used to describe the kind of love expressed by God the Father toward His Son (John 17:26), as well as the love of God toward sinful mankind (John 3:16; Rom 5:8). Jesus also commanded His followers to practice this type of love toward each other (John 13:34), as well as toward all other people (1 Th 3:12; 1 Cor 16:14; 2 Pet 1:7). One of the most amazing truths is that this word for love is used to express the very nature of God Himself (1 John 4:8).
- Today people are very confused about the nature of true love. This kind of love is obviously not just an internal feeling of affection, and it is not a natural response to something within the one being loved. If this kind of love is something that can be commanded, then it is definitely not a feeling but it involves an act of willing obedience to God. It is a deliberate choice; it is a decision; it is self-sacrificing in nature; it is not based on anything lovable in the recipient.



Great Spiritual Gifts are Useless without Love (1 Cor 13:1-3)

- This verse is the first in a series of Third Class conditional clauses which present cases that are proposed for the sake of argument. These are hypothetical conditions which are not intended to be true or false, but are strictly for the sake of argument. Paul paints a picture for us of a Christian who is supposed to possess each of these spiritual gifts in the most extreme possible degree, using himself as the example for the sake of argument.
- Speak with tongues = Paul chose to begin this beautiful chapter by mentioning the spiritual gift of tongues. This was the gift that the Corinthians thought was the greatest gift, but Paul had consistently mentioned it *last* in his previous lists of spiritual gifts. Here the apostle Paul puts the gift of tongues first in the list, but he is using it as the first in a series of *negative* examples.
- The tongues of men are obviously the kind of tongues discussed in chapter twelve. These are known languages spoken by men in various parts of the world. The tongues of angels are introduced here for the sake of argument and they represent the most extreme case of being able to speak in different languages -- those known to men, as well as those that might possibly be known among the angels.
- But do not have love = With this contrast word, Paul sets up a stark contrast between having the maximum amount of a spiritual gift vs. actually using that gift in Christian love. Here is a picture of what the greatest possible spiritual gifts are like when love is missing.
- I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal = *Noisy gong* is a translation of two Greek terms that mean sheets of metal which produce noises when they are struck. *Clanging cymbal* is a translation of two different Greek words which mean a pair of metal cups that are struck together to give off an echoing noise. What the Corinthians thought was such a beautiful-sounding gift was nothing more than irritating noise if it was not manifested for the right motives and in the right spirit.
- If I have the gift of prophecy (propheteia) = Paul used the same word that was listed in 1 Cor 12:10. This was the special ability to accurately predict future events for the purpose of confirming the truths that God was communicating through the apostles and prophets of the early church. It was a special speaking gift that was used to present truth, as well as to confirm the authenticity of that truth.
- And know all mysteries and all knowledge = This set of gifts correspond to the word of wisdom and the word of knowledge from Paul's earlier list (1 Cor 12:8). He described them here as the ability to perceive mysteries & knowledge which were previously unrevealed, but that God now desired to communicate to believers during the Church age (Rom 16:25-26). It was through the use of gifts such as these that the New Testament was communicated and recorded. Notice the use of the word all. Paul is taking these gifts to the extreme for the sake of argument.
- And if I have all faith = Here Paul listed the gift of faith, just as he listed it when he began his second group of gifts in 1 Cor 12:9. These gifts were primarily intended to draw attention to the greatness of God and His direct involvement in what was being communicated by His servants. So as to remove mountains = This is the kind of faith that resulted in miracles, but even the ability to work the greatest miracles such as this would be totally meaningless without love.
- But do not have love, I am nothing = As with the gift of tongues, all of the marvelous spiritual gifts listed here amount to nothing if they are not motivated by and used with love. The term translated *nothing* in this verse means "nil, non-existent, a complete

zero." What seemed so important to the Corinthians really amounted to nothing at all.

- And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor (*psomiso*) = to divide something into portions and dole out the parts in order to nourish other people. It was often used for feeding small bits of food to young infants. If a person were to take all his property and distribute it to help others, that would be an extreme example of the way the spiritual gifts of giving or of helps could be expressed.
- And if I surrender my body to be burned = In the previous phrase Paul talked about everything that a person *owns*, but that did not include the person's physical body. Here, however, Paul says that if a person were to go to the extreme of giving up his own body, it would not count for anything if the motivation of self-sacrificing love was missing.
- But do not have love, it profits me nothing = Even the extreme case of yielding all you possess (including your physical existence), if it is done without God's kind of unselfish love then it provides absolutely no profit or benefit.
- In these first three verses, the apostle Paul demonstrated the superiority of love by contrasting it with the greatest manifestation of the spiritual gifts. Even the most noble things done through the spiritual gifts are absolutely worthless if they are not accomplished in the spirit of self-sacrificing love.

The Characteristics of Love (1 Cor 13:4-7)

- Love is patient (*macrothumeo*) = to be long-suffering, slow to anger, slow to punish. It is the quality of self-restraint in the face of provocation which does not hastily retaliate. This shows how a loving person should behave when he or she is on the *receiving* end of offenses.
- Love is kind (*chresteuomai*) = to demonstrate grace and good nature; to act benevolently. This next quality shows us how a loving person should behave with he or she is on the *giving* end of the relationship.
- Is not jealous (*zeloo*) = to passionately covet for one's self the things which another person possesses; to burn with envy against another person. We might call this quality "selfish passion." This kind of attitude is sometimes produced by a deep sense of personal *inferiority*, and the apostle Paul had addressed the issue of inferiority in chapter twelve. But the attitude produced by God's kind of love is one of contentment and joy.
- Love does not brag (*perpereuomai*) = to boast about one's own greatness; to display one's self prominently. This kind of attitude is often produced by a sense of *superiority* over others, and it expresses itself through feelings of contempt or disregard for others. But God's kind of love would regard others with value and respect.
- Is not arrogant (*phusioo*) = to be inflated, puffed up with pride, haughty. This is the same term that was used in 1 Cor 4:6, 18, 19; 5:2; 8:1, and from these references we know that this was a large problem in the Corinthian church. In the previous phrase ("Love does not brag") Paul was describing the expression of an attitude of superiority, but here in this phrase Paul is describing the inward attitude that produces those kinds of expressions.
- The believers in Corinth were acting in ways that could be described as the *opposite* of the traits exhibited by Love.
- Does not act unbecomingly (*aschemoneo*) = to act in an inappropriate or unseemly manner. This is the verb form of the same word Paul had used in 1 Cor 12:23 to describe the less presentable members of the body which we keep covered from view. Here this verb means that we are to treat others with appropriate deference and to behave in ways that will not offend another person's sense of decency and propriety.
- It does not seek its own (*zeteo*) = to seek one's own interests as the primary concern. Paul used this same term when he made a similar statement in 1 Cor 10:24 -- "Let no one seek his own, but the good of his neighbor." There Paul explicitly stated what a man *was* to seek, rather than seeking after his own interests.
- Is not provoked (*paroxuno*) = not to be easily irritated or goaded into anger and indignation; is not prone to violent outbursts or rage.
- Does not take into account a wrong suffered (*logizomai*) = to keep a record of offenses. This term was actually an accounting or bookkeeping term, so it has the idea of keeping a detailed history or inventory of wrongs -- who did what to whom, and when and how. Not to keep such a record means that we will have short memories of wrongs that were committed against us, and this can only be accomplished by practicing true forgiveness.
- Does not rejoice in unrighteousness (*chairo*) = to be glad or to take pleasure in injustice or what is wrong.
- But rejoices with the truth = to be glad or take pleasure in what is true and right.
- Bears all things (*stego*) = This Greek verb is related to the noun *stega* ("roof"), so the verb means to cover or protect. Love keeps out resentment as the roof keeps out the rain. This means that in our interpersonal relationships there is a willingness to conceal or bear with the faults of others.
- Believes all things (*pisteuo*) = to place one's faith or trust in the fact that God is in control of all things. Love is able to trust that the unexplained things in a relationship may have a positive explanation. It cannot mean that a loving person is always gullible or that he should believe things that are obviously false. It must mean that in interpersonal relationships the loving person believes the best about another, at least until the other person might prove to be untrustworthy.
- Hopes all things (*elpizo*) = to have a confident positive expectation or anticipation of good. The implication is that the person is trusting completely in God, so he does not constantly despair or wallow in negative expectation.
- Endures all things (*hupomeno*) = literally, to remain under; to bear up under suffering or external circumstances that are unpleasant. The loving person suffers in silence without telling others all his personal troubles or giving way to selfishness under stress.
- Love never fails (*pipto*) = to fall or fall away. Love never falls away; it always holds its place. Love is of permanent, lasting value throughout time and eternity. Love is an essential aspect of the character of God Himself, and it will continue to endure.

Sixteen Characteristics of Love

What love does (POSITIVE & self-less)	What love does not do (NEGATIVE & selfish)
Is patient	Is not jealous
Is kind	Does not brag
Rejoices with the truth	Is not arrogant
Bears all things	Does not act unbecomingly
Believes all things	Does not seek its own interests
Hopes all things	Is not provoked
Endures all things	Does not hold a grudge
Never fails	Does not rejoice in unrighteousness

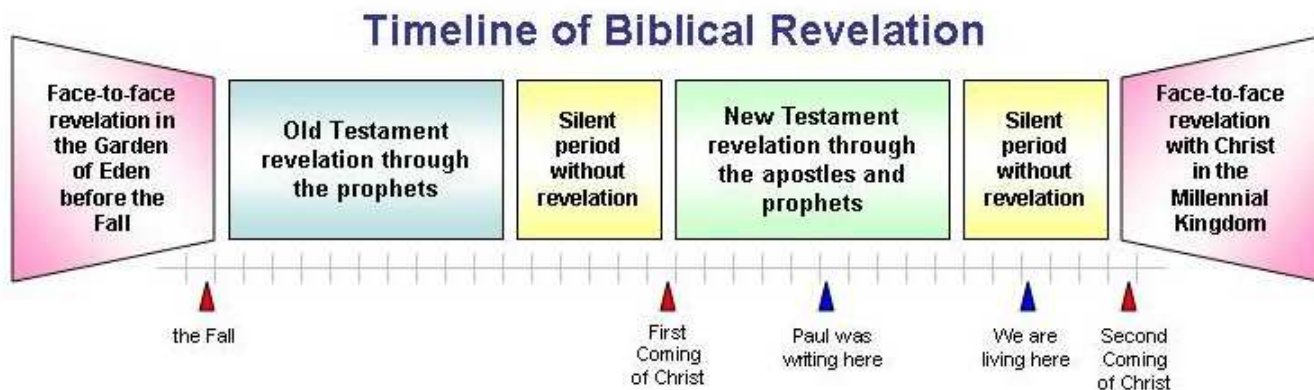
The Permanence of Love Contrasted with the Temporary Spiritual Gifts (1 Cor 13:8-13)

The Spiritual Gifts for Revelation & Confirmation Will Pass Away (1 Cor 13:8b)

- Paul selected three spiritual gifts that represented the three groupings of special confirmatory gifts from 1 Cor 12:8-10. By choosing these three gifts, he is focusing attention on their use in bringing the new revelation that was coming to the early church at the time Paul was writing to the Corinthians.
- If there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away (*katargeo*) = to render inactive or inoperative; to cause something to have no further efficiency or power; to cause to cease, put an end to, do away with, annul, abolish. Both times this verb is used in this verse it is in the passive voice, and this indicates that the action is accomplished by something outside of the thing itself.
- If there are tongues, they will cease (*pauro*) = to cease, end, or stop. This verb is in the middle voice which indicates reflexive or self-causing action. The action is somehow accomplished by the thing itself. Here Paul is saying that the gift of tongues will automatically stop or cease all by itself. By using a different verb and a different voice for that verb, Paul is showing that the spiritual gift of tongues will end in a somewhat different way than the gifts of prophecy and knowledge. Prophecy and knowledge will come to an end, but the gift of tongues will have ceased by itself at an even earlier time.
- If there is knowledge, it will be done away (*katargeo*) = Here we see the same fact stated about the spiritual gift of knowledge as was given concerning the spiritual gift of prophecy.

A Brief History of God's Revelation

- It might be helpful here to look at a brief history of biblical revelation. We could chart on a time line how God has chosen to reveal Himself to people at various times throughout history.



This Group of Gifts Provided Partial or Incomplete Value (1 Cor 13:9)

- For we know in part (*meros*) = Paul provided additional explanation for what he had just said in verse eight about the temporary nature of these spiritual gifts. The Greek word *meros* refers to the parts that when put together will constitute the whole. Here Paul is saying that the pieces of knowledge provided by that spiritual gift were *parts* that would eventually make up the *whole* body of knowledge that God wanted the church to have.
- We prophesy in part = Paul said the same thing about the important revelations being given through the spiritual gift of

prophecy in the early church. At the time Paul was writing, before the completion of the New Testament, God's revelation to the Church was being given "in part" -- here a little and there a little. Receiving revelation from God was a wonderful and important thing, but even the inspired prophets could only claim to know part of all that could be known about God and His plans.

- Why is Tongues not mentioned in this list? The gift of tongues was not primarily for receiving & delivering biblical revelation. Also, as we saw in the previous verse, tongues will have ceased by itself and probably at an earlier time. Only knowledge and prophecy carry over from verse eight to verses nine & ten, because they were gifts for delivering biblical revelation.

These gifts will be superceded at a time coming soon (1 Cor 13:10)

- But when the perfect (telion) comes = The Greek word *telion* means perfect, complete, or mature. The best choice for its meaning here is "mature." In contrast with the "partial" it does not refer to perfection in *quality* but to completeness in *quantity*. Paul is referring to a time in the future when a point of maturity would come in the life of the church, and at that point in time the spiritual gifts for providing new revelation would be rendered inactive by God. This point in time would correspond to that point in Old Testament history which began the four hundred silent years between the testaments.
- The partial will be done away (katargeo) = In the second half of verse eight we saw that it was the gifts of prophecy and knowledge that will be "done away," and the passive form of this same verb was used there. So here we can conclude that "the partial" is referring to the partial or sporadic revelation that was being given in the history of the early church through the use of those two spiritual gifts.

The Illustration of Growth Toward Maturity (1 Cor 13:11)

- Paul illustrated this time of maturity in the church age by comparing the time in which he was living, when revelation was still being given through these special spiritual gifts, to the period of childhood in human development. When Paul was writing to the Corinthians, you might say that the church was in its childhood. But at the point when all of this new revelation would be completed and made available to the Church in the New Testament, that time is compared to the time of official manhood. In Paul's Jewish background "manhood" would happen at the age of thirteen when a boy was declared to be a man. This did not mean that there would be no further growth or development in the life of that young man, but it simply pointed to a time when official adulthood would come.
- The three spiritual gifts roughly correspond to the activities of childhood that Paul mentioned here: speaking, thinking, and reasoning. Speaking (laleo) means uttering sounds using the voice. Thinking (phroneo) includes the aspects of feeling and desiring along with the use of the mind, while reasoning (logizomai) is more often used for purely intellectual or knowledge-related activities. The idea in Paul's illustration is that there would come a time of maturity when a person's speaking, thinking, and reasoning would change into the speaking, thinking, and reasoning of an adult who now has complete use of his fully developed faculties. In a similar way as with human development, the Church would also experience a time of "coming into its own" -- of having the entire body of revelation that God desired it to have during the Church Age.

The Ultimate Face-to-face Revelation (1 Cor 13:12)

- Here Paul is taking his illustration to an entirely new level. What he had said up to this point about attaining the fullness of God's revelation for the Church Age made him think of that even more glorious future time when we will have no further need of revelation through intermediaries, but instead we will once again have face-to-face personal interaction with God Himself.
- For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face = By way of analogy, Paul is saying that our present knowledge of God is like looking at a poor reflection in a mirror. Even at the time when the New Testament writings were complete, they still only express the things of God in words which are sometimes difficult to understand.
- Now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known = Here we see that another of the three spiritual gifts has dropped away and we are left only with knowledge. As Paul said earlier, his knowledge of God was partial, and even after the completion of the New Testament writings our knowledge of God is still incomplete. Our limited knowledge of God now through the writings of intermediaries, however, is nothing compared to our first-hand experience and understanding of Him at the time when we will see the Lord face to face.

The Abiding Nature of Love (1 Cor 13:13)

- But now = Paul might also have written, "Now, since these things are so..." Since the spiritual gifts for revelation were to pass away, what are we left with? Paul's answer here at the end of this chapter is that faith, hope and love abide or remain.
- Faith, hope, love, abide these three = *These three* forms a contrast with *those three* (tongues, prophecy, and knowledge). Even after some of the special enablings of the Holy Spirit are gone, there are Christian virtues that will continue throughout the Church Age.
- The greatest of these is love = Finally we see that the greatest of all these great Christian virtues is the lifestyle of Christian love. Love will outlast all the other virtues.