

## THE INCOMPARABLE EXCELLENCE OF AGAPE LOVE

a) The Indispensability of Love 12:31-13:3

1 Cor 12:31-13:3

<sup>31</sup> But earnestly desire the higher gifts.

And I will show you a still more excellent way.

What is the “more excellent way”?

What is more excellent than boasting about your gifts?

Why not strive for the best thing?

**13** If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup> And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup> If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. ESV

What does “love” mean?

There are three different Greek words that are translated “love” in English.

*Eros* is erotic love and is not used in the Bible;

*Philia* is affection, brotherly);

*Agape* is unselfish, not expecting a response in kind.

Without *agape* the spiritual gifts meant nothing!

What is the connection of these words about love with the preceding passage on gifts of the Holy Spirit:

“Seek gifts, and moreover, I will now describe a way which is still better than the exercise of gifts, even the best, that whereby alone the possession and exercise of gifts will truly become a blessing.” [Godet]

Gifts are nothing without the grace of love.

Christianity is love in action; something that was missing in Corinth.

Vs. 1 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

**“If...”** Neither Paul nor the Corinthians could speak with ‘tongues of angels’ but supposing he did? To exercise such a gift would be as a noisy gong, or as a clanging cymbal, if he should still lack love.

“That all the virtue that is saving, and that distinguishes true Christians from others, is summed up in Christian love.” [Johnathan Edwards]

Vs. 2 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

**And if...** Even if he had the gift of prophecy to such a degree that he understood all the mysteries of God and had such faith that he could move mountains, yet all these powers could not make up for the absence of love in the heart.

**I am nothing...** Paul concludes his hypothesis with the utter destitution of the graceless man, even though he may have certain gifts.

“Salvation is promised to those who have the graces of the Spirit, but not to those who have merely the extraordinary gifts. Many may have these last, and yet go to hell. Judas Iscariot had them, and is gone to hell. And Christ tells us, that many who had them, will, at the last day, be bid to depart, as workers of iniquity [Matt 7:22-23]. And therefore, when he promised his disciples these extraordinary gifts, he bade them rejoice, not because the devils were subject to them, but because their names were written in heaven; intimating that the one might be, and yet not the other [Luke 10:17ff]. And this show that the one is an infinitely greater blessing than the other, as it carries eternal life in it.”

[Johnathan Edwards]

Vs. 3 If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

No form of self-sacrifice will make up for the lack of love.

“Natural, unrenewed men would be glad to have something to make up for the want of sincere love and real grace in their hearts; and many do great things to make up for the want of it, while others are willing to suffer great things. But, alas! How little does it all signify!” [Johnathan Edwards]

... and if I deliver up my body to be burned,...

This is not suicide, but a pretence of love for others, and goes beyond giving away all of your possessions.

... I gain nothing.

Compare this with verse 2, “I am nothing...”

No personal sacrifices or acts of generosity, even death, have any value in the matter of human merit. “I am nothing and I profit nothing!”

## b) The Essential Characteristics of Love                      13:4-7

Compare six translations.

1 Cor 13:4-7

<sup>4</sup>Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant <sup>5</sup> or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; <sup>6</sup> it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. <sup>7</sup> Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.                      ESV

1 Cor 13:4-7

<sup>4</sup>Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. <sup>5</sup>It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. <sup>6</sup>Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. <sup>7</sup>It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.                      NIV

1 Cor 13:4-7

<sup>4</sup>Love suffers long *and* is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; <sup>5</sup> does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; <sup>6</sup> does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; <sup>7</sup> bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.                      NKJV

1 Cor 13:4-7

<sup>4</sup>Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, <sup>5</sup>Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; <sup>6</sup>Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; <sup>7</sup>Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. KJV

1 Cor 13:4-7

<sup>4</sup>Love is patient, love is kind, *and* is not jealous; love does not brag *and* is not arrogant, <sup>5</sup>does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong *suffered*, <sup>6</sup>does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; <sup>7</sup>bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. NASB

1 Cor 13:4-7

<sup>4</sup>Love endures long *and* is patient and kind; love never is envious *nor* boils over with jealousy, is not boastful *or* vainglorious, does not display itself haughtily.

<sup>5</sup>It is not conceited (arrogant and inflated with pride); it is not rude (unmannerly) *and* does not act unbecomingly. Love (God's love in us) does not insist on its own rights *or* its own way, *for* it is not self-seeking; it is not touchy *or* fretful *or* resentful; it takes no account of the evil done to it [it pays no attention to a suffered wrong].

<sup>6</sup>It does not rejoice at injustice *and* unrighteousness, but rejoices when right *and* truth prevail.

<sup>7</sup>Love bears up under anything *and* everything that comes, is ever ready to believe the best of every person, its hopes are fadeless under all circumstances, and it endures everything [without weakening]. AMP

Fifteen phrases; seven positive and eight negative.

Without these traits we have not agape.

Let's discuss each trait.

<sup>4</sup> Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant <sup>5</sup> or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; <sup>6</sup> it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. <sup>7</sup> Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love is patient

Love to God will cause us to imitate Him, and therefore be long-suffering.

“The long-suffering of God is very wonderfully manifest in his bearing innumerable injuries from men, and injuries that are very great and long-continued.” [Johnathan Edwards]

and kind;

The kindness of Jesus Christ was predominant in His dealing with the lowly and needy.

love does not envy

Envy is a result of dissatisfaction with our own condition in comparison with others.

or boast;

“Love is no braggart or windbag.” [Arndt-Gingrich]

“Behind boastful bragging there lies, conceit, an overestimation of one’s own importance, abilities, and achievements.” [Lenski]

it is not arrogant

Apparently arrogance [puffed up] was a besetting sin of the Corinthians. Cf. 1 Cor 4:6, 18, 19; 5:2; 8:1.

“There are many ways of manifesting pride; and love is incompatible with them all. Love is concerned rather to give itself than to assert itself.” [Morris]

or rude {does not behave itself unseemly}

“When pride puffs up the heart, unseemly bearing and conduct naturally follow.” [Lenski]

It does not insist on its own way;

“Love not merely does not seek that which does not belong to it; it is prepared to give up for the sake of others even what it is entitled to.” [Barrett]  
Cf. 1 Cor 10:24, 33.

it is not irritable or resentful {it is not provoked}

Love does not “fly off the handle.”  
“Love is not embittered by injuries, either real or imagined.”  
[Robertson and Plummer] Cf. Gal 5:22-23

NIV says “it keeps no record of wrongs.”  
Even when the injury is real, love does not register it and keep it for later use.

6 it does not rejoice at wrongdoing

“To rejoice at iniquity, when seeing it in others, is a sign of deep debasement.”  
Cf. Romans 1:32 [Findley]

but rejoices with the truth.

“... Love must take sides with the Truth, which is here personified.” [Fausset]  
Cf. Ephesians 5:15

7 Love bears all things,

“This refers to inward distress, whereas ‘endures all things’ points to outward affliction. [Fausset] Cf. 1 Cor 9:12

believes all things,

“All that is not palpably false, all that it can with good conscience believe to the credit of another.” [Fausset] Cf. Philemon 21

hopes all things,

“While the first pair of ‘all things’ relate to present experience, the second look more to the future. Here the thought is not that of unreasoning optimism, which fails to take account of reality. It is rather a refusal to take failure as final.”

[Morris] Cf. 2 Cor 1:7

endures all things.

“This is that cheerful and loyal fortitude which having done all without apparent success, still stands and endures, whether the ingratitude of friends or the persecution of foes.” [Robertson and Plummer] Cf. Eph 6:13

c) The Enduring Nature of Love

13:8-13

1 Cor 13:8-13

<sup>8</sup> Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. <sup>9</sup> For we know in part and we prophesy in part, <sup>10</sup> but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. <sup>11</sup> When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. <sup>12</sup> For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

<sup>13</sup> So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three;

but the greatest of these is love.

<sup>8</sup> Love never ends.

Love never comes to an end. “While the gifts of the Spirit are a *means* of grace, divine love is *grace itself*, and therefore remains when the means to it cease.” [Johnathan Edwards]

As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.

### **prophecies...tongues...knowledge**

“These faculties inspired, ecstatic, intellectual, are the three forms of Christian expression. The abolition of **prophecies and knowledge** is explained by vss. 9ff as the superseding of the partial by the perfect; they ‘will be done away’ by a completer realization of the objects they seek, viz., by *intuition* into the now hidden things of God and of man [14:24ff], and by adequate *comprehension* of the things revealed. Of the **tongues** it is simply said that “they will stop,” having like other miracles a temporary significance [Cf. 14:22]; not giving place to any higher development of the like kind, they lapse and terminate.” [Findley]

<sup>9</sup> For we know in part and we prophesy in part,

<sup>10</sup> but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.

What we know now is imperfect because it is partial. This is a degree of completeness not of the validity of what we know in part. What we know of God by revelation is indeed truly known, for it is infallibly communicated. But when this fragmentary disclosure at last gives place to the beatific vision of God in Christ, ‘then that which is in part shall be done away.’

<sup>11</sup> When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways.

“Our progress from infancy to maturity serves to illustrate this truth, ie., 9-10. Paul does not deny that the child is father to the man, for he was the same ‘I’ in childhood as he is now in manhood; he merely asserts that as a man he has no desire to become a child again. Although even now we are sons of God, yet we are still little children. Our present views of Divine things are not untrue but inadequate. Hereafter things will be very different. It is no part of the apostle’s object to unsettle our confidence in what God now communicates by his word and Spirit to his children, but simply to prevent our being satisfied with the partial and imperfect.” [Hodge]

<sup>12</sup> For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face.

“Our present understanding is like peering into a primitive metal mirror with its imperfect reflection. Cf. 2 Cor 5:7 But then, in the next life, we shall see face to face. Cf. 1 John 3:2; Numbers 12:8 [Hillyer]

Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

“As God’s direct and all-penetrating knowledge takes into account every one of his children already in eternity and, of course, through all of life, so we too, shall at last know God directly and completely to the highest degree in which this is possible for his children.” [Lenski]

<sup>13</sup> So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Paul concludes by saying that when every gift has passed away [vs. 8ff], this familiar triad of Christian virtues eternally abides.

Cf. Romans 5:1-5; Phil 1:9-10; Col 1:4-5; 1 Thess 1:3; 5:8; 2 Thess 1:3-4

“Some exercises of faith and hope are peculiar to the present state, while others will never cease. Certain it is that there will always be room even heaven for confidence in God, and hope of the ever advancing and enlarging blessedness of the redeemed.” [Hodge]

but the greatest of these is love.

“Of these eternal virtues love is the greatest, because love alone is Divine. God does not believe nor hope, but He loves. Love belongs to His essence. Like God Himself, it could not change its nature except for the worse. Love is the end in relation to which the two other virtues are only means, and this relation remains even in the state of perfection.” [Godet] Cf. 1 John 4:16, 19