

First Corinthians
Chapter Thirteen
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Christian Love

Christian love cannot be counterfeited. It is a love that reaches out to others regardless of their interaction toward us. It is very interesting that Paul put this chapter between two chapters on gifts for he is emphasizing the importance of practicing love over gifts. It is very important to remember how he ended the previous section that we call chapter 12:

1Cor 12:31 "But earnestly desire the greater gifts. ¶ And I show you a still more excellent way."

He now proceeds to show us the more excellent way.

1Cor 13:1 "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

1Cor 13:2 And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

1Cor 13:3 And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing."

1John 4:16 "And we have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him."

Since God is love we must always try to demonstrate that love to everyone for otherwise we are not correctly being an ambassador for Him. It is easier to do much church work than it is to show love. This was so important to Jesus for us to show that obedience that He gave a new commandment for His disciples:

John 13:34 "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

John 13:35 "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

This is a commandment for us in our attitude toward other disciples. No matter what else we do for the Kingdom, if we do not do such in love toward each other then our efforts are in vain. There is no scriptural evidence for some special angelic language so what Paul is saying is that even if our eloquence is that of the angels we still must show the love of God. The pagan rituals were full of loud gongs and other noise makers so Paul is talking in a way that the people can understand fully. If we do not show the love of God in our works then we are no better than the pagans in their worship. We could even freely give ourselves over to be burned and not show the love of God. Paul is using

extreme hyperbole to clearly state that having the love of God is essential to being a disciple of Jesus Christ. Now he is going to clearly discuss the properties of this love. The Greek word for this love is agape.

1Cor 13:4 “Love is patient, love is kind, and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant,

1Cor 13:5 does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered,

1Cor 13:6 does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth;

1Cor 13:7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

It is very important to understand that the aspects of God’s love are active and not passive. This love is not a feeling; it is an active aspect of our being. We are to demonstrate patience and kindness; not just do such internally. It is because of God’s perfect patience and longsuffering that He waited for you and me to be saved before He destroys the world. How easy it is for us to brag, be arrogant, and be jealous rather than demonstrating love. Our natural instinct is to do just the opposite of allowing God’s love to permeate our mind and to be the driving force in our reactions to others.

Love does: show infinite patience, demonstrate kindness to all, rejoices with the truth, bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things.

Love does not: show jealousy, brag, demonstrate arrogance, act unbecomingly, allow us to be provoked into an ungodly act, seek its own (this means putting our selfish desires first), take into account a wrong suffered (take revenge), or rejoice in unrighteousness.

I am afraid that I must admit that my actions show more in the “not column” than in the “do column”. Take some time now to write some concrete examples of how you can act in each category and then start each day with a concern to practice love in all your actions.

1Cor 13:8 “Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away.

1Cor 13:9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part;

1Cor 13:10 but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.”

Only love will follow us from the grave. There will be no need for prophecy when we are face-to-face with God. There will be no need for any special language when we are before God Who knows our every thought. There will be no need for any knowledge when we are before God Who knows everything. The best we can hope to attain in this world is a partial understanding of God and His universe. When Jesus comes again or when we die we will then be totally one with Him and will have no need for any of the partial understandings.

1Cor 13:11 “When I was a child, I used to speak as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things.

1Cor 13:12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known.”

There is a set time in the Jewish life when a child becomes a man and that is celebrated at his bar mitzvah. Paul seems to be using that analogy here. As a human being there is a limited amount of information that I can understand. Jesus said that we could not understand the deeper things of reality but when we cease to exist in this biological form we will be complete and we will be capable of understanding fully. In that wonderful future existence we will have no need of any of the helping gifts that God gives us here to help us cope with existence here. Now we see ourselves imperfectly but God sees us as we will be. At that time I also will fully understand myself in a glorious way.

1Cor 13:13 “But now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”

While we still exist here we have need of as much help as God will give us and faith and hope are desperately needed. But after our death we will no longer have need for the faith and hope but we will continue to have love and that love will be perfected in us. Praise the Lord!

References

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