

1 Corinthians 13 (The Love Chapter)

13:1 If I speak in the tongue of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³ If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Paul continues his discussion with “Spiritual Gifts”. The obvious purpose of our spiritual gifts is to use them to serve God. Here he points out that love has to be the foundation of all of the spiritual gifts or the gift is nothing. Matthew 22:37-39 tells us that Jesus did a similar thing with the 10 Commandments. All of the 10 Commandments can be boiled down to 2 commandments with love as their focus. Here the spiritual gifts also require us to love God and love each other.

In 1 John 4, John goes into great detail regarding the topic of love. John says:

Verse 7. *Love is from God.*

Verse 7. *To love is to know God.*

Verse 8. *If you don't love then you don't know God.*

Verse 8. *God is Love.*

Verse 8-9. *God loved us so much that He has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him.*

Verse 18. *There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear.*

Verse 19. *We love because he first loved us.*

Verse 20. *For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen.*

Verse 21. *And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.*

Throughout his first letter to the Corinthian church, Paul has tried to get them to realize that to a Christian, love should be the most important thing. The Corinthians put high value on spiritual gifts. Just as Paul has said throughout this letter, love trumps everything. In John 13:35, Jesus said “*By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*” With all of the divisions in the Corinthian church, Paul wasn't sure that they did more than tolerate each other.

"People of little religion are always noisy; he who has not the love of God and man filling his heart is like an empty wagon coming violently down a hill: it makes a great noise, because there is nothing in it." (Josiah Gregory, cited in Clarke)

Paul says that if I don't have love then the spiritual gifts are meaningless. In Ecclesiastes Solomon says something similar, he said without God in your life, everything is meaningless. Logic says that "If God is love and life without God in it is meaningless then without love everything is meaningless."

In verse 3, Paul expands what he has been saying to more than just spiritual gifts. He says that "*if we give everything we have to feed the poor and endure hardship* (NIV) or *to be burned* (NASB)", and don't love then we have nothing. Sounds like Ecclesiastes to me. "*To endure hardship*" or "*to be burned*" implies that even if we are martyred and don't have love we wasted our life.

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

These verses are read at more weddings than any other verses in the Bible. They define what we think the relationship within a marriage should be. These verses define what God says love is.

Love is:

Patient

Kind

It does not envy,

It does not boast,

It is not proud.

It does not dishonor others,

It is not self-seeking,

It is not easily angered,

It keeps no record of wrongs.

Love does not delight in evil

But rejoices with the truth.

It always protects,

Always trusts

Always hopes,

Always perseveres.

Love never fails.

"Paul is using the Greek word agape. The ancient Greeks had four different words we translate love. It is important to understand the difference between the words, and why the apostle Paul chose the Greek word agape here."

“i. **Eros** was one word for love. It described, as we might guess from the word itself, erotic love. It refers to sexual love.”

“ii. **Storge** was the second word for love. It refers to family love, the kind of love there is between a parent and child, or between family members in general.”

“iii. **Philia** is the third word for love. It speaks of a brotherly friendship and affection. It is the love of deep friendship and partnership. It might be described as the highest love of which man, without God's help, is capable of.”

“iv. **Agape** is the fourth word for love. It is a love that loves without changing. It is a self-giving love that gives without demanding or expecting re-payment. It is love so great that it can be given to the unlovable or unappealing. It is love that loves even when it is rejected. Agape love gives and loves because it wants to; it does not demand or expect repayment from the love given. It gives because it loves, it does not love in order to receive.” But it can be defined as a sacrificial, giving, absorbing, love. The word has little to do with emotion; it has much to do with self-denial for the sake of another. (Guzik)

Most people associate “agape” love with “God’s love” but Guzik says that it can’t be or God’s love is the perfect version of this kind of love because the Greek word “*agapaō*” was used to describe sin and the world.

John 3:19 – “*This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved (agapao) darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.*”

Luke 11:43 – “*Woe to you Pharisees, because you love (agapao) the most important seats in the synagogues and respectful greetings in the marketplaces.*”

⁸ Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰ but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears.

In these verses, Paul points out that even the spiritual gifts given by God are temporary. Consider that each of these gifts are only necessary or of value because of our current circumstances, living on the earth. We only need to prophecy because we don’t know what is coming. We only need to speak in tongues (actual languages and not babbling) because we all speak different languages. These things won’t matter when we are in heaven or beyond.

Paul says that “*when completeness comes, what is in part disappears.*” Paul is saying that there will be a time when these gifts disappear but love will never end. The NASB says, “*when the*

perfect comes". Can you imagine a perfect time of completeness? When we become completely like Jesus.

John Calvin was one who thought the "*will cease*" spoke of the eternal state. "But when will that perfection come? It begins, indeed, at death, because then we put off many weaknesses along with the body." (Calvin)

¹¹ When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. ¹² For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

Paul points out that when we were young our thought processes were different than they are now. What was important when we were young is not as important to us as adults. As a young Christian, we might rely on spiritual gifts but as a mature Christian they will become a part of us and we will not focus on them, however, love is important regardless of your age.

The mirrors of Paul's day were polished pieces of metal. At their best, they showed a fuzzy reflection of everything. In verse 12, Paul says that at this current time the best that we can hope for is to see God around us in the people we encounter, in nature and in ourselves. Still our view of God is fuzzy at best.

Exodus 33:11 says that the Lord spoke "face to face" with Moses and Exodus 33:20 says that Moses could not see the Lord's face. Today we could not look directly at God but there will come a time when we will see God. Paul is referring back to 1 Cor. 13:10, in that perfect time or that time of completeness. Then we shall see Him, just as He is. 1 John 3:2 says, "*Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.*"

Regarding "Now *I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.*" "God knows everything about me; this is how I also am known. But in heaven, I will know God as perfectly as I can; I will know just as I also am known. It doesn't mean I will be all-knowing as God is, but it means I will know Him as perfectly as I can." (Guzik)

¹³ And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

Just like the Corinthians, sometimes we get caught up on the details of living a Christian life. Paul boils the pursuit of a perfect Christian life down to three things. Faith, hope and love. Without faith we have no salvation. Our salvation comes through our faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the Living God. As the song writer put it, "Our hope is built on nothing less than

Jesus Christ, my righteousness; I dare not trust the sweetest frame, But wholly lean on Jesus' name." Throughout this letter to the Corinthian church, Paul has told them that love is above everything. He told them in the last few chapters that we have give up our rights because love is more important.

Earlier we took a brief look at 1 John 4. Verse 8 says, that love is an attribute of God. ("*God is love.*") If we are to try to be like God, then we are to love as God has loved us. As humans, we cannot reach that kind of love but it should be our goal.

"But the greatest of these is love: Love is greatest because it will continue, even grow, in the eternal state. When we are in heaven, faith and hope will have fulfilled their purpose. We won't need faith when we see God face to face. We won't need to hope in the coming of Jesus once He comes. But we will always love the Lord and each other, and grow in that love through eternity." (Guzik)