

1Cor. 13:1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become *as* sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

The “tongues of men and of angels” is a reference to the gift of speaking in languages that have not been learned (whether earthly or heavenly)—a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. In the previous chapter Paul has been focusing on the Holy Spirit’s supernatural empowerment to individual believers in areas of ministry that contribute to a healthy, vibrant, growing church that honors God through obedience and service with the intent of sharing the good news of the gospel with all peoples. As we have focused on those “giftings,” it is easy to see how the privilege of being God’s chosen instrument of ministry through any of these giftings can result in a spirit of pride. This pride results when one loses sight of the fact that one is just an instrument in the hand of God, no more important than any other instrument in the hand of God. Pride is a love of self, and a sense of self-importance that elevates one in relation to others in the body of Christ. This pride will eventually lead to division in the body of believers.

In this chapter Paul is going to explain that for a believer’s life to be characterized by love is far more important than any spiritual gift he/she may have been given. He starts by making a comparison of love to the gift of tongues. I think Paul started with this gift because of the importance the Corinthian church placed on this gift. Though this gift is very dramatic and impressive in operation, Paul states that it is to be compared to a loud reverberating noise or a loud piercing or small sharp sound that communicates nothing—a sound with no effective purpose or result—if practiced by someone who does not minister in love.

“charity” = agape = love, i.e. affection or benevolence..... from a root that states, “embracing especially the judgment and the deliberate assent of the will as a matter of principle, duty and propriety”

In today’s vernacular the word *love* has a broad spectrum of application. The Greek language has different words to express different types of love. The type of love being described in this chapter is a matter of the mind more than the emotions. That is why it is often referenced as “unconditional” love. It’s a love based on the choice of the person expressing that love to love as a matter of “principle, duty and propriety.” As believers, we have been commanded by the Lord to love one another.

Mark 12:29 And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments *is*, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord:

Mark 12:30 And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this *is* the first commandment.

Mark 12:31 And the second *is* like, *namely* this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.

The wellspring of that love as expressed by the believer to others finds its roots in the love that God has for us.

1John 4:19 We love him, because he first loved us.

His love toward us is unconditional, and our love for each other should be unconditional. The fact that God commands us to love tells us that it is based on a decision to obey Him or not. He would not command us to do something outside our ability to obey. When Jesus reiterated this command to His disciples, He identified it as a “new commandment.”

John 13:34 A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

What made it new? It’s new because it is a command rooted in the life example of Jesus--“as I have loved you.” His example was clear in expressing an unconditional love for each of His disciples. In fact, His love, a love of choice, led Him to lay down His life to die on the cross as the sacrifice for the sin of all mankind. If God’s love for us were dependent on our lovableness (which is how we usually make connection to loving), we would be hopelessly lost.

The stronger the bond of love in the body of believers, the more fruitful and effective will be our ministry to others. Jesus was very clear that it was our love for one another that would identify us as His disciples.

John 13:35 By this shall all *men* know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

In reading back through this section I just realized that Paul is presenting these truths from a personal perspective. He is not saying “if you”; he is saying “if I.” These are important truths for every believer.

1Cor. 13:2 And though I have *the gift of prophecy*, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.

In this verse Paul declares “agape love” to be greater than the gift of prophecy (both foretelling and forthtelling), the gift of wisdom to understand mysteries and knowledge, and the gift of faith. These are gifts that appear in men’s eyes to be more miraculous and powerful—gifts to be greatly coveted from the human perspective. In God’s eyes one who possesses those gifts but doesn’t have “agape love” for his brethren is *nothing*—no one of significance in His kingdom. This also reminds us that God doesn’t withhold gifting the believer until he/she meets certain spiritual criteria. His desire is that each one of His children serve Him with honor according to His will, and He empowers them accordingly. This verse also hammers home the truth that God doesn’t see a person according to what that person appears to be; He sees each person as he really is in his heart.

1Sam. 16:7 But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for *the LORD seeth* not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.

1Cor. 13:3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

The thoughts in this verse get a little harder to understand. Paul states that unless we have “agape love” for one another, it matters not that we are willing to give away all we have to provide food for the poor or sacrifice our lives in service to others. That is a pretty powerful statement. It clarifies the truth that

people can be involved in such actions from a motivation other than love. That is a concept totally foreign to human thinking. We figure that anyone who is willing to give of themselves so unselfishly and so completely as surely the most loving people on earth. We would consider them as those most likely to receive the greatest rewards in heaven. Not necessarily so.

I have thought about this concept over time, and the only conclusion I can make is that people can be motivated to do such things out of pride if not out of love. The desire to “be somebody” and to win the praise of men is a powerful influence in the flesh. Those who have rejected God’s authority and determined that their eternity is determined by their works find a powerful motivation for self-sacrifice. Those who have fallen for the deceit of the enemy to follow false gods are motivated for the same purpose—to earn the favor of the god they have chosen. Whatever the reason, rejection of God and His authority in your life, is pride.

Psa. 10:4 The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts.

1John 2:15 Love not the world, neither the things *that are* in the world. **If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.**

1John 2:16 For all that *is* in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and **the pride of life**, is not of the Father, but **is of the world.**

1Tim. 6:3-4 If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, *even* the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud....

1Cor. 13:4 Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,

With this verse Paul begins an in-depth explanation of “agape love.”

- Love suffers long. – According to the Greek, this is a reference to patience and not being easily provoked. Boy does that haunt me as I reflect on my past. Patience has not been my strongpoint; but, by the grace of God, I have grown tremendously in this area. The part of “not being easily provoked” has often been dependent upon my physical condition (tired, stressed, etc.); but there are no acceptable excuses given for such qualifiers. The key to gaining victory in this area is to keep the focus of our being on the Lord in spite of the physical circumstances in which we find ourselves. When we are focused in faith on Him and His love and provision for us, we are compelled to show love to others through longsuffering.
- Love is kind. – The Greek for *kind* was enlightening, “to show oneself useful, i.e., act benevolently.” Webster defines benevolence as “promoting prosperity and happiness.” This describes love as a verb of action for the good or benefit of another.
- Love doesn’t envy. – This is a reference to covetousness and the wrong kind of jealousy. To covet is to want something that belongs to someone else or crave something that is forbidden. Jealousy is a reference to

suspicion or distrust in the motives of another. Our culture is dominated by covetousness, suspicion and jealousy because it is so focused on promoting “self” and providing for “self.”

- Love vaunteth not itself. – This is a reference to boasting. Love doesn’t boast because love is more concerned with serving than with recognition for that service. Christian love is rooted in the love of God and realizes that it is only through the empowerment of the Spirit that we are able to love and serve others unconditionally. It is the work of God in and through us. We have no basis for boasting.
- Love is not puffed up. – This is a reference to improper pride. “Love” that is motivated by pride is love of self—not love of others. Unconditional love for others can only find its source in God. If we are prideful in our acts of “love,” we are taking the credit for our actions. When we are serving in God’s love, we readily give Him the credit.

1Cor. 13:5 Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;

Paul’s description of love continues.

- Love doesn’t behave itself unseemly. – The Greek references behavior that is unbecoming—rude, insensitive, selfish. Again, the love of the believer for other believers is motivated by a desire to honor Christ. It is a realization that love promotes unity, and unity promotes strength and effectiveness.
- Love seeks not her own. – This is a reference to selfishness, which again points back to pride. Selfishness divides rather than unites. It weakens rather than strengthens. It discourages rather than encourages. It puts the focus on self rather than on the Lord and His will.
- Love is not easily provoked. – This ties back to longsuffering. It’s a very important character trait for the believer to possess and ties directly in context to selfishness. One who is selfish and is determined to get his/her own way is more prone to being easily provoked to anger.
- Love thinks no evil. – In looking at the Greek, I think the other translations are correct in translating this as “keeps no record of wrongs.” When one is following Christ’s command to love according to His example, you can’t separate love from forgiveness. When we forgive, we are to forget. When the Lord taught the disciples about prayer, He included an important truth: that we pray for forgiveness according as we have forgiven others.
Matt. 6:12 And forgive us our debts [faults], as we forgive our debtors.
Luke 11:4 And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.

Only a hypocrite will ask the Lord to forgive him/her when he/she is not willing to forgive someone else—especially a brother or sister in the faith.

1Cor. 13:6 Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;

Love that is rooted in God’s love takes no pleasure in immorality or wrongdoing (from the Greek for *iniquity*). It does, however, take great pleasure in truth—morality and righteousness. This is a principle often stated in scripture.

Psa. 97:10 Ye that love the LORD, hate evil:
Prov. 8:13 The fear of the LORD *is* to hate evil:

Psa. 11:7 For the righteous LORD loveth righteousness;

Prov. 15:9 The way of the wicked *is* an abomination unto the LORD: but he loveth him that followeth after righteousness.

1John 3:10 In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God....

I liked the translation from the CJB for the first part of this verse:

Love does not gloat over other people's sins....

I thought of this especially in the context of "the church." Whenever we see a brother or sister in the faith overtaken by sin, it should always grieve us. It is a disturbing aspect of human nature to take perverse pleasure in the fall of "the mighty." This should never be the heart of one believer toward another. Our attitude should always be, "There, but for the grace of God, go I." We should grieve over the moral failure of anyone who publicly associates his/her name with the Lord whether or not we agree with everything they stand for. Like it or not, their fall negatively impacts the effectiveness of our declaration of the message of the gospel. This is true no matter the public status of the person, because every person has a sphere of influence that is probably much larger than most of us realize.

1Cor. 13:7 Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

In my mind all of these phrases overlap one another, but the Spirit has seen fit to have Paul signify the importance of each in our relationship to one another.

- Beareth all things – The Greek for beareth states, "to roof over, i.e. (figuratively) to cover with silence (endure patiently)." This speaks to me of someone who isn't a complainer or gossiper; someone who recognizes when a defense will only worsen matters and is content to let the Lord handle the outcome. This also speaks to me of humility and submission. I found a quote from Charles Spurgeon that gives a beautiful word picture of the truth Paul is teaching.

"I would, my brothers and sisters, that we could all imitate the pearl oyster. A hurtful particle intrudes itself into its shell, and this vexes and grieves it. It cannot eject the evil, and what does it do but *cover* it with a precious substance extracted out of its own life, by which it turns the intruder into a pearl. Oh, that we could do so with the provocations we receive from our fellow Christians, so that pearls of patience, gentleness, long-suffering, and forgiveness might be bred within us by that which has harmed us."

- Believeth all things – This is a reference to faith that doesn't waiver with the circumstances. It's a faith that strengthens and encourages through the confidence it instills.

- Hopeth all things – Again, the Greek was enlightening. This is a reference to “expect or confide...trust.” This speaks of confident expectations in relationship based on trust. This should be the rule and not the exception in relationships among believers.
- Endureth all things – This speaks of staying the course and perseverance through trials. Love doesn’t abandon someone when the going gets tough or uncomfortable. It’s a sad thing to see people not only have to suffer through ongoing illness or other trials, but to see friends and family find excuses to distance themselves from their “loved” ones because they feel inadequate or uncomfortable is worse still. I even have a friend who has members of her family that have cast doubts on the very existence of her illness and have withdrawn themselves from her life—and the effects of her illness on her body are very obvious and have threatened her life more than once. The Lord will never abandon us; and if we are following His example, we will never choose to abandon one in need; we will seek to sacrificially serve.

1Cor. 13:8 Charity never faileth: but whether *there be* prophecies, they shall fail; whether *there be* tongues, they shall cease; whether *there be* knowledge, it shall vanish away.

Love never fails or drops away (from the Greek). This fits in with the thought that this type of love is a choice that is unconditional in nature. It loves in spite of, not because of. Agape love is a character trait that will permeate God’s Kingdom for eternity. Prophecy will become a thing of the past because truth will be universally accepted in God’s Kingdom and foretelling of future events will be unnecessary as a proof of God’s truth. In God’s Kingdom I believe we will all speak with a universal tongue/language; there will be no need for distinction between heavenly and earthly language.

Zeph. 3:9 For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent.

I know that in context Zephaniah is talking about the millennium; but if the Lord’s purpose is to establish a pure language for His earthly kingdom during the millennium, why would that purpose be any different for His heavenly kingdom for eternity? The next phrase is a bit harder, but in context with the following verses I think the apostle is speaking of knowledge necessary to understanding God’s truth. I don’t necessarily think this means that learning will cease, but that learning will immediately be accompanied by understanding and wisdom.

I believe Paul is making a contrast between love and the gifts of the Spirit. The gifts are a means by which God expresses His love for the church. We are to be vessels of His love toward each other and a sinful world. These gifts will no longer be necessary in God’s eternal kingdom because it will be a kingdom permeated with love.

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

In our current body of flesh we can only know in part and prophesy in part. The part we know and prophesy is dependent upon divine revelation. Isn't it interesting that this implies that we can love "in full" or completely. We don't need divine revelation to love; we have the divine command.

1Cor. 13:10 But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

I don't see how this verse can be referencing anything other than the coming of Jesus. He is "the way, **the truth** and the life." He is the Word in flesh. He is perfection embodied. When He comes, we will be resurrected to be like Him. He will come to reign for 1000 years on planet earth, a time when Satan is bound but people will still be reproducing children with a sin nature. This again reminds us that this message is to the church, a separate body of believers unique to the time between Christ's resurrection and His coming to take them home to the Father as described by John and later in chapter 15 of this letter to the Corinthians. At that time we will be in full possession of our inheritance as joint-heirs with Christ.

John 14:1-3 Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if *it were* not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, *there* ye may be also.

Cor. 15:51-53 Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality.

1Cor. 13:11 When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

This is an easily understood illustration of our spiritual growth. A child has to learn to speak and is taught using simple words to produce basic understanding of truth. As he/she grows, the language gets more complex and understanding is broadened to embrace more difficult concepts. As one matures in language and understanding, they don't spend much time contemplating the simple truths. They want the challenge of gaining understanding of more and more complex truths and being able to apply those truths to their lives.

1Cor. 13:12 For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

Spiritually speaking, we remain but children compared to what our understanding of God's truth will be when we are with Him. Paul compares our understanding of God's truth now to a person who is looking in a mirror that gives only a vague reflection of the image. The Greek for *darkly* references obscurity (unintelligibility, uncertainty). Once we are with Christ, we won't be wrestling with a dark image; it will be as though we are looking through transparent glass. In fact, we won't be using glass at all; we will be in His presence. We will then have complete access to the things of Christ with whom

we are joint-heirs. I wonder how many of us actually spend time meditating on such an amazing truth. It's something that I have given more and more thought to as I continue my journey through the Word. There is nothing about us that is hidden from Christ now; there is nothing about Christ that will be hidden from us then. How is it the Father can love me that much? Although I don't begin to understand the whys behind His creation and His provision for me/us through His Son, I know that His love for me/us finds its roots in His love for His Son.

1Cor. 13:13 And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

Abideth is a reference to enduring, remaining, and continuing. *Now*, at the present time, we focus on faith, hope and love. Faith is the evidence of things not seen.

Heb. 11:1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Hope is the confident expectation of what is to come (according to the Greek).

Lam. 3:26 *It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD.*

Heb. 6:18-19a That by two immutable things, in which *it was* impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which *hope* we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast...

Love we have already defined as an unconditional expression of affection and commitment. As I look at the definitions for these three, it becomes apparent why charity or love is the greatest. It is the one that will endure for eternity. Faith and hope will find fulfillment once we experience the reality of the physical presence of Christ. Love, however, will continue as part of that reality.

The Holy Spirit tells us in scripture that God is love—not faith or hope.

1John 4:8 He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

Love is greater because it is Who God Is. When we express love, we are giving expression of God in and through us.