



Lesson 8 October 24th, 2020

Love Divine

Study Scripture – 1 Corinthians 13

Background Scripture – 1 Corinthians 13

Key Verse:

But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.

1 Corinthians 13:13

INTRODUCTION

Our Study Lesson is from one of the most powerful chapters in Scripture which will force you to examine yourself to see if you are in fact in the faith.

The issue before us is whether or not you are in the people that God created for His names' sake. So how are you going to be known?

Strikingly, the night the betrayer Judas had left the gathering of the disciples at the Lord's Supper the night before Jesus died, He instructed His disciples and said:

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another”.

Note that here Jesus used the word **agapeo** which describes God's love for us and our love that we should have for God. The call therefore is for all to show God's love lived out through us as we love one another. The word **agape** therefore expresses the essential nature of God for God is love as we are told in 1 John 4:8.

It is to be noted that this word for Love has a very specific meaning. The Greeks and others in those days used the word **philia** to describe brotherly love or tender affection. They use the word **eros** to describe romantic love.

Our Lesson Study today not unexpectedly deals with a Chapter that is very often taken out of context and applied to romantic love or some discussion on sentiments. But it definitely isn't about any of these things and those interpretations are not based on biblical reality. They are the kinds of misinterpretations or misapplications that are common in biblical and non-biblical discussions.

This chapter is firmly set in Paul's discussion of spiritual gifts, as is indicated when one looks at the end of chapter 12 and through to Chapter 14.

When we examine ourselves, we should be honest with ourselves and look at where we came from, the kind of people that we are, and the motivations that our situation has us trapped in. If we are poor and then we come to Christ by the call of the Holy Spirit, we might still have those desires for material possessions, and which would mark us off from our previous circumstances. If we had been disrespected by others as we grow up and live, we very likely will have motivation and a drive to get to a situation where we can impress others and have others realize that we are pretty good or even great. We are what we are, and the Holy Spirit has a tremendous work to transform us into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is clear that the Apostle Paul has set up a contrasting situation with another group of believers so that we know what we should avoid if in fact we are serious about being people of God who show the love of God in our lives.

Let us remember that this Corinthian church was a 'loveless' church. The Corinthian brethren had deliberately chosen a path that meant they had abandoned the early apostolic teachings about "Christian love".

The reason for this was quite simple. They had not been able to pull themselves away from the pagan culture in which they had lived and accordingly, since they greatly valued the pagan standards of excellence, they became so caught up in certain spiritual gifts that they embraced a path devoid of Christian love.

The Apostle Paul described their background as being mostly the weak and the foolish (1 Corinthians 1:26-28) and so we know that they were not from the upper crust but from the lower rungs of the society. In fact, many of them were or had been slaves. So they were not used to being important.

But now that they had heard about Christ and accept Him as their Saviour, they realized that they had eternal significance for they had the presence of the Holy Spirit, God Himself was in their lives. They were now part of the long history of the historic people of God. They were joined to Abraham, the patriarchs, the prophets and were now inextricably part of the history of the people of God.

Imagine how they felt being free from the superstitions of Idol worship and realized that the great prophets and the magnificent Law of Moses and the beautiful position of the sons of God was now part of their history.

They were now gifted and privileged so much they didn't know how to handle it and so they became as one writer stated: **"competitive, immature, self-focused and cocky. They assume no one has ever been as smart as they"**.

So put yourself in their shoes. One writer points out how they must have felt:

"You have been a nobody on the fringes of society, with a dark religion, and now you've been given the Holy Scriptures as your heritage. Some of these people have never aspired to



leadership, and now they have been called to be pastors and shepherds, looked up to by others, and they are filled with a sense of importance that they have never had before. The Corinthians were enamoured with miracles and displays of power-- healings, visions, and the emotional overflow of ecstatic languages. They loved the dramatic. They revelled in these new experiences. It marked them off as important. They loved rhetoric. Their preachers refined their language and would speak with flourish and use powerful language to stir their hearers. They were competing with one another using religious displays to outdo rivals and ridicule outsiders. Shouting matches would interrupt worship. Someone would stand up and start speaking in a language no one knew, and no one would interpret. There was chaos when they met for worship, and competition to be at the center of the chaos. They were arrogant. They would get drunk when they met together for the Lord's Table. They winked at gross sin and championed pride. They were a community that did the opposite of what Jesus said is essential, loving God with all your heart and loving your neighbour as yourself".

So now the Apostle had to tell them that if they wanted to be recognized by God they had to make choices that will exceed and be more important than any other of the things that they prized, for this would put them on a path that they would come to learn was the significant path. He now had to guide them in a way that would allow them to be the kind of people that they were longing to be in their hearts and were foolishly failing to be. They had lost their first love, the love that they needed and wanted desperately. This was of course a dreadful situation.

Why can we say that? They abused the many spiritual gifts God had given them. They envied each other's gifts. They were selfish and brought lawsuits against other brethren before pagan judges. They were extremely impatient with one another at worship meetings and did not even wait on others to begin their love feasts. They did not share their bounty with other less fortunate brethren. They had even behaved disgracefully at Lord's Supper and dishonoured Jesus. They were even getting drunk! They did all this and more, despite having clearly been given many spiritual gifts.

This situation should give us modern-day Christians pause when we try to elevate and exalt the possession of spiritual gifts, and believe that the possession of these gifts, especially the more spectacular, somehow makes us super Christians and better than others.

Many of us fall into the same demonic trap like the Corinthian brethren. We consider ourselves holier than others, despite the fact that it is easily seen that our behavior smacks of many kinds of iniquity and is in fact without the essential Love.

The Corinthians, and we too, really have no excuse for that kind of behavior. The entire Old Testament Law was summed up according to Leviticus 19:17-18 and Matthew 19:19 by one word, "Love".



Love sums up the Christians' responsibility, It is considered the crowning virtue:

- Greater than any of the spiritual gifts,
- The distinguishing mark of the true Christian,
- Is the principle of life and
- Is the means God provides for us to live in harmony and unity despite disagreements and differences. It is therefore vitally important to every Christian.

There is no alternative to love. Love does not deal with surface issues but deals with who you are at the deepest level. It does not deal first with the surface issue of your vanity and what you imagine yourself to be, or to your intellect and what you think about yourself. It deals with you receiving God's love for that will change forever the core of who you are. You might be at the very bottom of society and people laugh at you and are thinking less about you. You might be at the top. You might be important or unimportant.

But when the core of your being is changed by Love, you can love God, receive love, and love one another as God requires.

We should note that the Scriptures however warn us in Revelation 21:8, that love can be easily lost because of many distractions. Love can slip away without a person realizing it. In the book of Corinthians we see that these brethren probably unconsciously were on the path that would make them abandon true love.

Scripture tells us that the world misunderstands 'love', and constantly distorts it, choosing to present God in such a way that facts like the existence of Hell and eternal torment are abhorrent to God.

Paul discussed this matter of spiritualities, i.e. the things pertaining to the Holy Spirit of God. After emphasizing that the Spirit required that all true believers live according to the Lordship of Christ, that is, always in His living presence, Paul taught that every believer is equipped with one or more spiritual gifts, so that he or she could successfully complete the ministry that God gives to every believer.

It is important to stress here that spiritual gifts are very important possessions and if a person has been given these gifts, and do not learn how to use them properly, that person will sabotage the program of God and damage their ministry in the body of Christ.

As we look at Paul's discussion in chapter 13, we really are looking at the 'fruit of the Spirit'.

Every indication from the Apostle in this chapter, is that the fruit of the Spirit which are: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, (Galatians 5:22-23) is far more important than the gifts of the Spirit,

So Paul, after discussing the gifts of the Spirit, which are important, states he intends to show us a more excellent way. **This way is the way of love.**



Remember that this is also the teaching of the Old Testament Scriptures. One can look at the many texts of Scriptures which address this matter of “love” to their great personal benefit

Paul teaches us about three aspects of love.

First, he tells us that love has pre-eminence over everything else.

Second, he tells us clearly and directly that love is practiced in a particular way.

Third, he tells us that “love” is permanent, it has enduring quality.

Also remember that when we talk about this matter of “love”, we are talking about the Spirit of God working in us to reproduce the character of Christ, for when God is in our heart we should have “love”, and the associated fruit of the Spirit.

Note however that we are talking about genuine love, as the Apostle insists in Romans 12:9. There is a deadly enemy of Christians which we can describe as “phony love”, which is a facade that makes one appear to be kind, gracious and so on. That enemy, which of course produces death, tries to appear as if it is really love but that is really hypocrisy.

It might be helpful here, before we go into the Text, to look at what Christian love is, the kind of love that the Apostle Paul is describing in this chapter.

THE FIRST ISSUE- WHAT THE WORD “LOVE” MEANS

Generally it is said that this word “agape” and its cognate verb “agapao”, was chosen to describe God's determination to seek good for His people therefore, involving His will, His decision.

It should be pointed out however, when we discuss what is distinctive about Christian love, that the word used is not the only word that linguistically captures the concept of the determined love of God that seeks the good of others.

Paul does not focus on distinguishing the Greek words for love, giving us a technical definition of love, even though there is a difference with different words.

What he does do is to describe love in such a way that we know what biblical love looks like. When we compare this to the behavior of the Corinthians, it is absolutely evident that the brethren there had lost their first love, and even lost it faster than the Ephesian brethren described in Revelation 2:1-7.

So in contrasting love with the behavior and way of thinking of the Corinthian brethren, in contrasting love with all spiritual gifts, and showing that these gifts are temporary while Christian love is eternal, Paul shows that love is what is required of Christians; it is the “**BETTER WAY**”.



Note that in teaching this lesson Paul uses “If”, indicating certain hypothetical possibilities, and as well as employing hyperbole. This is powerful and dramatic language, and it is used in a particular way to make sure the Corinthians and us understand love and the truth.

He uses this language, and the figures of speech, without assuming that any of these hypothetical possibilities are even remotely possible, to show that any gift, even if exercised to the highest possible level, has little or no value, if that gift is exercised without love.

We do insist that true spiritual gifts are important and necessary, and that they come from God. Nevertheless this should alert people who like to stress the importance of spiritual gifts, that they must put things in proper context, and not assume that the possession of spiritual gifts means that there is something “great” about them, which makes them somewhat more “holy” or “spiritual” than others that do not seem to have possession of spectacular gifts.

When we have love we will do the things that Paul listed and discussed. If we do not have love, the gifts we have will be of little benefit to us. Our actions will certainly show who we are and what we have. If our actions are bad, it will show that we do not have love, and we will thus be condemned by God as a hypocrite, and as Matthew 24:51 says we will be “*cut asunder*” and appointed our “*portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*”

Matthew 7:21-23 gives us this chilling warning: “*Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of Heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in Heaven.*”

Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”

This is of course a tough teaching for anybody to accept, for the flesh is certainly strong, and we can presume that the Corinthian brethren who were misbehaving because of their misinterpretations of the doctrines of God, for a while at least, had a hard time adjusting their behavior, so that they would become acceptable to God.

Many today have a difficult time accepting apostolic teaching in these matters, and from time to time we will hear people directly contradict the Apostles, as they try to tell us how great the gifts that they possess are, and as a result how great they are, as compared to us of course.

Remember though as we read through this, that we can understand the problem of the Corinthians. They emerged from a pagan environment, where the gifts of prophecy, speaking in tongues, healing, performing miracles, and other similarly spectacular abilities, were the hallmark or claim to fame of many of these pagan temples and their devotees. They earnestly craved these gifts, for possession of them brought great power and influence.



No wonder they loved these gifts and thought so highly of them, ignoring the essential and most important possession of love. That kind of love of course was not something the pagans emphasized or cared about.

The Corinthians were new believers who had been immersed in paganism and might have an excuse but since we are in possession of the Scriptures, and know what happened in those societies, we have no excuse for our foolish behavior, claims and inclinations.

THE TEXT

Verse 1. As he begins to show the Corinthian brethren the more excellent way, Paul first turns to the gift of tongues, a gift which some of the Corinthians craved. They would have thought that possession of this gift made them even more powerful than the pagan priestesses and priests which practiced a false communication gift with their gods.

This genuine gift from God, according to Acts 2, is the ability to speak in unlearned earthly languages. The Corinthians however seemed to be claiming that they had the ultimate gift of tongues which made them able to speak in a non-earthly language.

This however was in line with their high regard for eloquence, oratory, and communication which they brought from their culture and their pagan environment.

In addition, in that culture, the pagan priests and priestesses claimed the ability to speak in the language of the gods, and to communicate with them. This is well documented in history. One can imagine that when some of the Corinthian were given this ability to speak in unlearned languages, the jump was made to claiming the ability to also speak the language of angels.

But in fact it is sheer speculation, and an arbitrary assumption for anyone to say that the gift of tongues constitute the 'tongues of angels'. We know that angels have the ability to communicate, but the Scriptures simply do not tell us anywhere at all how they communicate. They can talk to men in our language, but it is never revealed how they talk among themselves, and most of the kinds of things that interest them.

Paul never says that the gift of tongues enables you to speak with the tongues of angels. Paul is simply saying that even "If" one assumes the hypothetical though unreal possibility that one could speak every human language, and even the tongues of angels, being a loving person is more important than being able to speak in all the languages of earth or Heaven. It is therefore essential that we learn to love. Communication without love is useless.

Paul here makes that point and introduces an expression which compares what was happening in the Corinthian church to what was happening in the pagan temples in Corinth.

In these temples there would be large gongs or cymbals hanging at the entrance. We see that today in certain pagan temples.



And when the worshippers came in, they would bang on these to attract the attention of the gods so that the gods would respond to them. They would understand this illustration since they themselves often did this action in the pagan temples.

Paul showed them that this moving Christian eloquence arising from this 'gift of tongues', was nothing more than an empty pagan rite if it was exercised without love.

We can understand the attraction of this gift to people, especially to immature Christians, as were the Corinthians.

Let us also note that Paul says in chapter 14 that the gift of languages or the gift of tongues was given as a sign to grab the attention of unbelievers. So they would understand how great, amazing, and magnificent God was, as happened on the day of Pentecost when the visiting Jews heard the one hundred and twenty disciples speaking in their native languages, praising God, and speaking the wonderful works of God.

The gift of languages has a beautiful point to it. It is designed to attract the attention of unbelievers so that they will listen and understand that God is at work. It is an action of love designed to lead others to God. There is no indication it is there for any other purpose. Actually, Paul emphasizes in chapter 14:14-17 that apart from interpretation it has no value to those who hear it, or even to the speaker.

It must be exercised with love, and as well, according to the restrictions set down by the Apostle Paul, so that tongues can edify.

Self-promotion and self-serving, is really a prostitution of that gift, for in that kind of approach there is no edification, no serving others to their benefit.

Verse 2. Paul now examines the next highly prized gifts, that of prophecy, knowledge and faith.

Prophecy is the ability to obtain knowledge from God by divine revelation. With it comes the speaking gift, a powerful gift which can be corrupted by self-interest, the desire for praise, promotion, or advantage over others. Balaam is a perfect example of this kind of corruption. The pull to corrupt is terribly strong indeed.

Carried to the ultimate, the gift of prophecy would enable someone to know all knowledge and understand every mystery, to answer every question, and every riddle.

A person with this gift could tell you definitely why God does not simply kill Satan, why He allows accidents, injustice and tragedies, and answer all kinds of tricky, inscrutable questions which God does not answer in the Bible. But, says Paul, if one possessed this gift without love, it would contribute nothing to the faith. The person with the gift would be a nobody.



Even the gift of faith, practiced to the ultimate so that one could not only move mountains but remove them, would make a person a zero in the eyes of God if there were no love.

Let us go back to the case of Jonah the prophet who preached and every single person in Nineveh repented. He was successful in that work. Sadly he had no love and did not want that success. Since he had no love, he was angry at his success and at God, and so his legacy, how we remember him, is that of a 'loveless prophet'. His is an unenviable legacy, quite a bad scene and a bad reputation.

Paul wanted to draw the Corinthians back to love. They had been missing the motive and the goal of the gifts, and that had to be reversed. Otherwise they would be nothing, absolutely Nothing!

Verse 3. Paul continued that even though one made the supreme sacrifice, the greatest imaginable sacrifice, if there was no love, at the judgment seat of Christ it would be regarded as just wasted effort.

Some believe that giving away their possessions, feeding the poor, being generous, sacrificing one's self, things which would bring the favour and approval of those watching, prove we have great love. But Paul does not accept this and says people often do these things for self-serving reasons, not for the love of others.

Remember that the people of Nineveh were saved, even though Jonah did not like them. They certainly benefited from his preaching, despite Jonah's intense desire that they not benefit.

Their salvation did not benefit Jonah and didn't bring personal blessings to him. Similarly, if I feed the poor, give away all my possessions, become a martyr, these acts of sacrifice do not really benefit me if there is no love in me.

Christian history teaches us the amazing thing that when persecution came into the early church, some believers sought after martyrdom in order to become famous. The writings from the early second century and onward showed that some thought that they would have special credit in Heaven for that sacrifice.

We are warned! Irrespective of the kind of sacrifice we make, once there is no love, once we are motivated by self-interest and pride, our activities have no spiritual value. Love is the only true measure of spiritual achievement.

In the next two verses Paul does not give us a technical definition of love, but to benefit the Corinthians he describes what characterizes love and tells them the things that are not characteristic of love. He thus goes on to tell them that their conduct was incomplete, and in what areas they were seriously lacking.



In other words, Paul shows us that Love is not just a theory that we talk about, something up in the air, but is something practical, and must be shown, and we can all be tested as to whether we have love or not by looking at how we operate in the real world.

Paul gives us some **Fifteen Practical** ways of testing love.

Love is described by action words and is shown by actions.

Remember though that we are not the ones that produce this love in our lives. It is produced when we truly accept Christ, experience the Cross, then the Resurrection, and so automatically are indwelt by the Spirit and live under the Lordship of Christ. So make sure we don't just only talk, show a lot of emotion, even though showing emotion is all right with God, and do behave as mandated by the Spirit.

Verse 4. First, Love is 'long-suffering', or as described by some, 'patient'. Some differentiate the two words. Long-suffering is said to mean self-restraint when provoked; with no hasty punishment or retaliation. It is generally associated with mercy when used of God as in Exodus 34:6 and Romans 2:4. God is the only one who is said to be long-suffering.

Patience means the quality of never giving up under trial; there is no despondency but only hope. The specific word is generally never used of God, even though it is sometimes so translated in Romans 9:22, 1 Peter 3:20, 2 Peter 3,9,15 and other passages.

This was a slap to the Corinthians, who had little patience with others. They had forgotten that patience is one of the fruits of the Spirit and was therefore not optional.

We want to note and follow the attitude of David, who though Saul constantly tried to kill him, he endured, and instead of killing Saul when he had the chance, did what was right and good, showing mercy and kindness.

We nowadays do not want to accept ill-treatment from anybody, believers or unbelievers. But that is what long-suffering is about. Remember Jesus endured abuse from the world silently, and He is our pattern.

Second, Love is kind. Long-suffering or patience is the passive side of Love, while kindness is the active side. The heart is inclined to help whenever it sees the need. This is the "Good Samaritan" quality which does not need anyone to tell one what to do, and it does not involve seeking any way of escape from neighbourly obligations to help.

Kindness is therefore not just a feeling, but it is a verb which speaks of active goodwill. This is a characteristic of God. See Romans 2:4, Luke 6:35, Ephesians 2:7, 4:32, Titus 3:4-7 and other passages.



Third, Love is not jealous or envious. Jealousy or envy means we resent someone because of what they have or what they have succeeded in, and so we want what they have.

Jealousy is really 'earnest desire' and it can be good or bad. It causes us pain, sadness or sorrow when someone is successful. This cannot lead the jealous to seek the benefit or well-being of another, which is what Love means to do.

Jealousy or envy is a bad thing. David in Psalm 37:1 warns us that we should not be jealous of the wicked. It was jealousy or envy that made Cain kill Abel, and that made Haman seek to kill Mordecai. It was envy that made the scribes and Pharisees go against Jesus' popularity and power. It is incompatible with love.

We are told that God is jealous but remember that He is jealous over what belongs to Him. He has a right to earnest desire that we worship and obey Him. That is good jealousy. We too are to be jealous over good things and behave in good ways.

Fourth, Love does not brag or boast. It is not the possession of a windbag, boasting about our own worth, demanding praise for kindness done. This behavior is a sinful response to one's success or prosperity, often implying that a person is responsible for one's success, even one's salvation.

Fifth, Love is not arrogant, inflated or puffed up, claiming more than what is due. This says Paul in chapter 4, is the big sin of the Corinthians. They were conceited about their doctrine, their spiritual gifts, and their famous teachers.

Verse 5. Love behaves in a certain way. So Paul says, sixth, Love means that one behaves decently, not rudely, behaves courteously, not discourteously, caring for the feelings or rights of others, behaving graciously, not gracelessly.

Seventh, Love does not behave obsessively, demanding, self-serving, or self-centered. It does not seek to satisfy the desires of one's own flesh, insisting on its own way.

Eighth, Love means that one is not easily aroused to anger, quick tempered, easily upset, exasperated by petty things, flaring out at a tiny provocation, touchy or short fused. The Corinthians were everything that love was not, for they took each other to court and acted destructively in their meetings and so on.

Ninth, Love does not store up the memory of anything wrong that had been done to them. Love did not keep records of slights, hold a grudge, always feeling victimized, and remembering real or imagined affronts. It held no man in the bad books and did not want revenge.

Verse 6. Love did not take pleasure in unrighteousness or injustice and was never happy when it occurred, laughing over another person's sinful misfortune. Love means that a person will never resist the truth. Those that love take no pleasure watching people die in their sins. They will do everything to stop the sinner from sinning. Those with love will not enjoy unrighteous movies, television programs, gossiping about others and sharing unwholesome rumours.



In contrast, Love rejoiced in the truth and built people up, being glad when truth took center stage, when people followed good things and triumphed over evil. It encouraged people with stories about truth.

Verse 7. Love covers and supports people, protects people's reputation, protects them from harm and evil accusations. It keeps people protected and secure. It does not divulge things to bring personal distress. As Peter said, it covers a multitude of sins. It tries its best to give another person every possible chance to change and do what is right.

Next, 13th, Love is always willing to give people the benefit of the doubt, to believe the best of others. This does not mean that one is gullible or naïve.

Love behaves like Jesus, who, when He was in the Garden of Gethsemane and Judas came and kissed Him, did not tell Judas what a beautiful kiss it was, but since He understood that this was a traitor carrying out an act of treachery simply said: "Betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss? Then He refused to smite with the sword, as the disciples seemed to want to do.

Neither did Jesus hold it against Peter for denying Him, refusing to trust him anymore. But notice that Jesus was quite firm and insistent with Peter, not letting him get away with anything. Love would always seek to give someone another chance, understanding the reality of human nature. Love never gives up.

14th, Love is always optimistic in godly fashion, never gives up, but lives expectantly, confident that God would be gracious, and that human failure is never final.

Remember that we must have faith in God that He would change those that do iniquity. One must always have faith even though life might not seem to indicate that things would work out. Love has that tremendous optimism.

So, 15th, love stays firm under pressure. This word 'endures' is the military word meaning to hold one's position at all cost even to death. So Love stays put, never gives up on anyone, will not stop loving even when one is rejected.

Obviously these fifteen verbs describe an unnatural kind of love, not a human kind of love. Why? Its source is God, it defines a way of life that is impossible unless the Spirit of God dwells within us and empowers us.

Actually many scholars believe that the Apostle is listing the characteristics of the Lord Jesus. He is the sum of Love. Following Him will take you to that path and keep you on the path of Love.

Note carefully that God is presenting these lists of qualities before us so that we can look at our life, and we likely find it condemns us.



But then, if we have the Spirit, we would remember that God has committed Himself to perfect this kind of love in us. God will change us rapidly and steadily. Accordingly He has given us the life of Christ which contains all of these attributes of love.

He has done the impossible. This is no joke. He wants us to grow in love and demonstrate this in a practical way, right in front of everyone. If we do not, we will be condemned.

Verse 8. Paul now moves to contrast love with spiritual gifts, tells us that love will outlast all of them. He has described love as permanent, and now looks at the transitory nature of spiritual gifts.

So he begins, Love never fails. This love, please remember, is from the Spirit. Love always has faith, it always endures, it always hopes, it always bears up. It is eternal. It is never out of use. It is therefore preferable to all gifts that the Corinthians so desired.

The word translated 'fails' is literally from a word which means 'to fall'. This word is also used to describe the twenty-three thousand that fell dead in the wilderness because of their immorality, and of Ananias and Sapphira, who fell dead at Peter's rebuke. The word is used to mean that Love does not die, and does not come to an end, but keeps on going and going.

He tells the Corinthians that the gifts, including the three spiritual gifts they most cherished, would eventually be done away with. Paul's emphasizes that, knowledge will be done away with, and the gift of prophecy would be done away with. These gifts were never intended to replace Love or become predominant over Love.

An argument has arisen because the word used to describe the cessation of tongues is different from that used to describe the other two gifts.

Greek scholars explain that the verb used for the passing of prophecy and knowledge is passive in voice, while that used to refer to 'tongues' is middle in voice. Therefore some interpret that to mean that the gift of tongues would cease after the days of the Apostles and before the cessation of prophecy and knowledge.

But really the Scriptures say that 'tongues' will cease, not that tongues have necessarily ceased, and it does not specifically say the time it will cease. In chapter 14 Paul expressly tells us not to forbid others to speak in tongues, and we cannot lightly set aside that command.

God gave us the gift of tongues and He will have people use it when He wishes. We might say that we believe that tongues may have ceased, but we have to grant the possibility of the gift of tongues still existing.

Of course not everything that is called the gift of tongues is biblical tongues. We know that the temples of the pagans practiced tongues, and we know that there are Muslim and Hindu cults



today that speak in tongues. When you hear recordings of this cult speaking, and see it written down it sounds completely like what is practiced in some Christian circles. But we do know that the Scriptures define for us what 'tongues' are, and we should stick to that meaning, and reject the innovative redefinition of tongues.

As a minimum, anyone who claims to have the gift of tongues, cannot exercise it without an interpretation by an interpreter. Invariably those that claim to speak in tongues ignore this or make some excuse for their misbehaviour. When interpretation is done, what is said can be tested to see whether it is demonic or not. After all, we must, we are commanded, to try every spirit to see if they are of God.

Verse 9. We are given the reason why Love is superior to all spiritual gifts. Love is permanent, it lasts forever while spiritual gifts do not.

Paul explains why spiritual gifts must be temporary and not permanent. The reason is that they are not perfect, they are partial. They, including prophecy are incomplete. It is not that it is wrong or inaccurate it is simply incomplete. They are okay for our present time but not for all time.

We know this when we look at the ancient prophets who spoke of the coming, the sufferings and the glories of the Messiah. They told us a lot about Him but not everything. That is why it was so difficult for many to be convinced that Jesus was the expected Messiah. For even though He did the things Messiah was supposed to do, He did not immediately bring the power and glory to Israel. The people had difficulty understanding that Messiah had to suffer first, and then afterwards, after an indeterminate time return in glory.

Similarly, even though we are told that God would bring tremendous benefits to Gentiles, the revelation that both Jew and Gentile would become one in Christ the Messiah, had to await the revelation of that 'mystery' by the Apostles. See Ephesians 3 for an inspired and good discussion on some of these mysteries revealed.

So the perfect inspired prophets did not know everything. Similarly, the gifts are intended to actually reveal God, allows us to do His work, which we do not even completely understand.

Verse 10. Paul indicates know that there is a time coming when the 'perfect' would come, and the things which are partial or incomplete will be done away.

Some argue that the "perfect" means the completion of the canon of Scripture, and so they argue that all of the gifts have become unnecessary and have faded. Some believe that this verse means that Paul is referring to heaven as the "perfect" place, and that when we go to "Heaven" the perfect will have come, and complete knowledge, and so on will exist.

Of course, there is some element of truth in both views, but to be precise, given the context, it seems to indicate that when our Lord comes to establish His kingdom, the gifts as practiced



now will become obsolete and unnecessary, for then we will see all things as they are. Believers will at that time be translated. The context seems to indicate that the “perfect” is the kingdom of God for which we eagerly wait. Then we will as verse 12 says, know even as we are known.

Verse 11-12. Paul uses a figure of speech to indicate how we should view our spiritual gifts, and in so doing rebukes the Corinthians for their pride and arrogance and their feeling that they had all wisdom and understanding.

He refers by analogy to the present, where the things that are valued now are to be compared to things that children long after, things that are appropriate for children, and not to grown men.

He put spiritual gifts in perspective. They are really good but, in a sense, they are the tools, some say toys, of our childhood. Keep in mind that we will one day be perfected, fully grown up, fully mature. When Jesus comes, we will be transformed, and we will not need those gifts.

Can we just imagine how different we will be in that state of perfection and holiness; seeing clearly, not just in glimpses and little portions! Let us make our salvation sure. Begin to behave properly. Listen to this Spirit. Do not grieve the Spirit.

The contrast is that now we are ‘children’, understanding as children, thinking as children, given things that are appropriate for our stage of childhood. The Corinthians were certainly ‘children’. But as they grew up, they were expected to behave more and more like adults, understanding what was most important, and not priding themselves on the things of children. At the very minimum they should not be elevating the spiritual gifts and forsaking the far superior love.

There is nothing wrong with being a child, for that is a necessary stage we all must pass through, but we as well as the Corinthians must understand that the mark of maturity is the ability to love, loving even the unlovable. And love is an action word.

The quality of Christian life is not in showmanship, but in the ability to love the weak and the foolish, the lost and the hurting.

Verse 12. Paul looks forward to the dawning of a new day. He uses an analogy to teach us that what we believe as reality comes from looking into a mirror which very imperfectly tells us what reality is.

We are told that the mirrors in ancient days were simply highly polished metal which did not give a clear picture but a fuzzy one. It is only later that technology gave us the kind of mirrors that we have today. So the Corinthians would understand that the fuzzy, unclear picture given by their mirrors would eventually be replaced by a clear, perfect, glorious picture brought by the light of Jesus. Much of what was like a puzzle, something not so clear, would eventually be replaced, says Paul.



We will see God and know Him much better, and He will see us and be with us in our transformed state.

Verse 13. Paul summarizes that faith, hope, and love will always be present with us. But the greatest of these three is love.

We remember that faith is our human response to what God has provided and will provide. God will continue to provide for us throughout eternity, and faith will continue because it is our simple, committed response to what God will do for us throughout eternity. We will always lean on Him.

Hope will also continue for we will live throughout eternity, confidently expecting that more is yet to come. God's mind and ability is so great and infinite that even when we are with Him in paradise, we will continue to enjoy ever increasing revelations of His bounty. He will continue to open new adventures for us, present us with new things to do that we in our finiteness could never think of, and we will continue like that forever because God is infinite.

So hope will abide.

But God is love, and we will continue to learn to love as we get closer to God. So love is the greatest. God is not faith, or hope. That is something that we God's creation have. God is love and He lasts forever, without beginning and without end. Love therefore is the greatest.

God is infinite, and we will enjoy that infinite blessing when we obey Him and are with Him.

CONCLUSION

Paul's advice is found in the first verse of the next chapter. Follow after love, literally pursue it with all your heart, and work at it, never give up.

Without love, possession of the gifts is meaningless, and simply acts as a distraction for us.

Every Apostle and ever prophet taught that Love is the most important thing, and Jesus Himself taught that. This is the Pearl of great price.

Pursuing after Love is not something we do automatically or easily. We only have it when we pursue it at all times.

If we examine ourselves and find that we are deficient, we should go to the source, for love comes from God alone. Remember He loved us first. Love comes from Him.

Let us not be fooled. If we love God, we will keep His commandments. That is how we demonstrate our love for Him. Our heart must always be to please God by keeping His commandments.



Then, as we pursue love, we will exercise our gifts in a way that will benefit and edify others. If we find ourselves in self-promotion, thinking highly of ourselves, stop, for we are going in the wrong direction. We are just unprofitable servants.

So please repent truly, and do not try to fool others by pretending or saying that we are particularly holy because of our spiritual gifts.

If you are reading this, and you're not a Christian just consider the massive love God has for you as shown in His Son Jesus Christ, who though you are a sinner and an enemy of God, He bore the penalty for your sins, and died for you to give you eternal life. So simply call on Him, and He will help you. Then trust Him, and He will certainly keep you.

