Love

The Most Excellent Way

1 Corinthians 13:1-13
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Text:

1 Corinthians 13:1-13,

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.
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.
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.
4. Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,
5. doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;
6. Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;
7. Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.
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.
9. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.
10. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.
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.
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.
13. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

Introduction:

I. Against the background of confusion and strife which troubled the believers at Corinth, especially now in regard to spiritual gifts, Paul turns to “the most excellent way” . . . love!

II. 1 Corinthians 13 is one of the most respected, admired chapters in the Bible and, perhaps, one of the least practiced.

III. Chapter Divisions (after Coffman).

   A. The absolute necessity of love. (vs. 1-3)
   B. The characteristics of love. (vs. 4-7)
   C. The permanence of love. (vs. 8-12)
   D. Conclusion. (vs. 13)

IV. Words in this chapter such as “tongues, prophecy, knowledge, faith so as to move mountains” make it clear that Paul has in mind the Corinthian dispute regarding spiritual gifts. (Coffman)

Commentary:

Necessity of Love

1 Corinthians 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.
I. *Tongues of men and of angels*, languages human and divine (Hodge via Coffman), may refer to the nature of the *gift of tongues*.

II. Have not love . . .

   A. Three Greek words are translated *love*, viz.,

      1. *eros* (erotic love)

      2. *philo* (affection)

      3. *agapao* (the word used in this chapter) (to hold in high esteem, high regard.)

III. *Sounding brass or a clanging cymbal*

   A. Barclay via Coffman states that this banging of gongs was characteristic of the worship of pagan deities such as Dionysus and Cybele.

   B. The Corinthian speaking in tongues without love was like heathen banging of gongs.

   1 Corinthians 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.*

I. Spiritual gifts; namely,

   A. prophecy

   B. mysteries

   C. knowledge
D. faith to remove mountains, a maximum amount of faith, ability to solve difficult problems (Jewish proverb) and/or literal mountains, highest degree of miracle working faith (John Wesley.)

1. Matthew 17:20, And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.

2. Luke 17:6, And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you.

3. Matthew 10:1, And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease. (This included Judas Iscariot.)

II. without love, avails nothing.

Note: Faith without love is worthless and will not save the soul!

1 Corinthians 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.

I. If I bestow all my goods (morsels of food) to feed the poor . . .

A. Evidently, Paul here is speaking of a long term commitment to benevolence, giving a little over an extended period of time.
II. If I give my body to be burned . . .

   A. Daniel 3:23, And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.

   B. Athens had a famous monument honoring an Indian who had burned himself publicly. (Barclay via Coffman.)

   C. Christians were later burned in considerable numbers.

III. But have not love, it profits me nothing, I gain nothing.

   A. Motive, the reason behind the action, validates or invalidates the action.

   **Characteristics of Love**

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

   I. Love suffereth long, is patient.

   II. Love is kind.

   III. Love envieth not.

   IV. Love vaunteth not itself, does not boast.

   V. Love is not puffed up, proud.

   **Note:** These characteristics of love stand diametrically opposed to the pride, envy and resentment of the Corinthians in regard to spiritual gifts.

   1 Corinthians 13:5-7, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth
not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

I. Love is not rude, does not behave itself unseemly.

II. Love is not self-seeking.

   A. The world would be better if humans were more concerned with discharging their duties and less concerned with ensuring their rights. (Barclay via Coffman.)

   B. Our society is known for its intense selfishness.

III. Love is not easily angered, is not provoked.

IV. Love keeps no record of wrongs, takes no account of evil.

V. Love does not delight in evil, rejoice in unrighteousness.

VI. Love rejoices with the truth.

VII. Love always protects, bears all things.

VIII. Love always trusts, believes all things.

IX. Love always hopes.

X. Love always perseveres, endures all things

Permanence of Love

1 Corinthians 13:8-10, 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. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.
I. Love never fails, ends.

   A. Love is eternal.

II. Prophesies will be done away, cease.

III. Tongues shall cease, will be stilled.

IV. Knowledge will be done away, will pass away.

V. We know in part,

VI. We prophecy in part,

   1. The supernatural gifts of the first century confirmed, proved the truth of the gospel.

      a. Mark 16:20, And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen.

   2. The things which had so fascinated the Corinthians were temporary, fleeting, transient. Love which was of little importance to the Corinthians is eternal. Do we make this same mistake today; that is, strive for the temporal and neglect the spiritual?

VII. When that which is perfect is come, when perfection comes.

   A. *That which is perfect* refers to the completely revealed gospel, the New Testament.

      1. Psalm 19:7, The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.
B. *That which* is not *he who* and, therefore, could not refer to the second coming of Christ.

C. Some think *heaven* is meant by *that which*, but this is not the view held by this editor. Knowledge will not be done away in heaven. Therefore, heaven could not be meant by *that which is perfect*.

VIII. that which is imperfect, in part will be done away, disappear.

A. That which is in *the past* clearly refers to supernatural spiritual gifts represented in this passage by prophecies, tongues and knowledge.

B. Paul clearly stated that these gifts would cease and told when; that is, “when that which is perfect is come.”

**1 Corinthians 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.**

I. When I was a child,

A. I spake, talked, as, like a child.

B. I felt as a child.

C. I thought like, as a child.

D. I reasoned like a child.

II. Now that I am a man, when I became a man,

A. I have put away childish things, I put childish ways behind me.
III. The meaning of these normal, obvious facts is:

A. The Corinthians should grow up, mature and not continue to act like children, selfish and immature.

1. 1 Corinthians 14:20, Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men.

B. It is also a fact that the childhood era of the church would be exchanged for a more mature era.

1 Corinthians 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.

I. Now we see in a mirror, darkly, a poor reflection,

A. Before the New Testament was fully given.

B. Before heaven is reached by the faithful.

C. Scriptures:

1. 2 Corinthians 4:4, In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

2. Colossians 1:15, Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature:

3. 1 John 3:2, Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.
II. We will then see face to face,

III. Now I know in part,

   A. Even Paul, the greatest mind of the first century church, only knew in part.

   B. Beware of present day theological snobs who think they have it all figured out.

IV. Then will I know fully even as also I was fully known.

V. These statements appear to have a dual application,

   A. the age of the church maturity when the New Testament had been fully revealed.

   B. Heaven.

   C. Scriptural examples of this dual application principle:

      1. Matthew 2:15, And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son.

      2. Matthew 2:18, In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.

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

I. Now (in this present age), these three abide, remain; supernatural gifts would not abide, remain:
A. faith
B. hope
C. love

II. The greatest of these is love because:

A. Faith will no longer be needed. Heaven will be a reality.

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

B. Hope will no longer be needed. Heaven will be a reality.

1. Romans 8:24, For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?

C. Love...

1. Romans 13:10, Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

2. John 14:15, If ye love me, keep my commandments.

3. Mark 12:28-31, And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all? And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: 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. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy
neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.

4. Galatians 5:22, 23, But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

   a. Love heads the list of Christian graces.

Conclusion:

I. Love is the best way, certainly better than the rancor over spiritual gifts characteristic of the Corinthians.

II. Love is the best way for this generation as well, better than riches, pride, honor, position – anything!
Questions

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

1. Against the background of ___________ and ___________ which troubled the ___________ at ___________, especially now in regard to ___________ ___________, Paul turns to “the most ___________ ___________, ___________!”

2. 1 Corinthians 13 is one of the most ___________ , __________ chapters in the ________________ and, perhaps, one of the ___________ ___________.

3. Into what four categories, divisions can 1 Corinthians 13 be arranged? ____________________________________________  
   ____________________________________________________  
   ____________________________________________________  
   ____________________________________________________  
   ____________________________________________________

4. Words in this chapter such as “__________, __________, __________, __________” so as to __________ ___________” make it clear that __________ has in mind the __________ ___________ regarding ___________. (Coffman)

5. __________ of ____________ and of ____________, __________ ___________ and __________ may refer to the nature of the ____________ of ____________.
6. What three Greek words are translated *love* in the New Testament? What does each mean? Which Greek word is translated love in this chapter? _____________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________________

7. To what did Paul make reference by the expression “sounding brass or a clanging cymbal?” ______________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________________

8. Who is the most infamous person of whom you know who had been a possessor of supernatural spiritual gifts? ______________

9. What is the meaning of the phrase “faith so as to remove mountains?” ___________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________________

10. ____________ without ____________ is ____________ and will ____________ ____________ the ____________.

11. What good would it do to bestow all our goods to feed the poor and our bodies to be burned if we don’t have love? ____________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________________
12. How important is helping the poor and being willing to give our lives for our faith? ___________________________________
_____________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________

13. Give sixteen characteristics of love. If a person claims to love you, but does not evidence these characteristics toward you, does that person love you? ___________________________________
_____________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________

14. These _________ of _________ stand __________ to the ____________, _________ and __________ of the ___________ in regard to ____________.

15. Spiritual gifts were to end, but love is eternal. Are supernatural gifts present in the church today? When did/will supernatural spiritual gifts end?_____________________________________
_____________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________

16. What were the purposes of supernatural spiritual gifts in the early church? __________________________________________

17. What point was Paul making by the use of the “when I was a child” illustration? ____________________________________

18. What point was Paul making by the use of the “we see in a mirror darkly” illustration? ____________________________

19. ____________ is the best way for this ____________ as well, better than ______________, ______________, ____________ , ____________ - ____________!

20. Why is love greater than faith and hope? ________________________________