

Chapter 13

Love 13:1-13

1. The absence of love 13:1-3

v1 Suppose that I speak in the languages of people and angels. If I have no love, I am only like a loud gong (a kind of musical instrument). Or I am like another noisy musical instrument. v2 Suppose that I have the gift of prophecy. Suppose that I can understand all God's secrets. And I know everything about him. And suppose that I have enough faith to move mountains. If I do not have love, I am nothing at all. v3 Perhaps I give everything that I have to poor people. Perhaps I allow people to burn my body. If I do not have love, I get nothing at all.

Verse 1 The languages (tongues) of people would be foreign languages. But the language of angels can only mean speech that people cannot understand. The Christians at Corinth were not using this gift in the right way. Without love, their speech would be only a noise. Their speech would also be like a musical instrument that produces a loud crash, but no harmony. Pagans would use such instruments in their excited worship. A gong is a metal plate. It makes a loud noise when someone hits it with a stick.

Verse 2 The Christians at Corinth also emphasised 'knowledge'. But the person with the deepest knowledge and the greatest faith is worth nothing without love. 'To move mountains' was a way to say 'to overcome a very difficult problem'.

Verse 3 The most generous act to help poor people would be of no use without love. When he spoke about allowing people to burn his body, Paul may have thought about Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (Daniel 3). He was probably using picture language

for sacrifice that was the result of pride. This would be of no advantage.

2. The nature of love 13:4-7

The special New Testament word for 'love' is 'agape'. It is not the natural love for a friend or a relative. It is the kind of love that God shows to people. We do not deserve it and we can never earn it. So, when we know God's love, we should show that same love to other people.

v4 People with love are patient. They are kind. They do not feel jealous. They do not boast. They are not proud. v5 They do not behave badly. They do not look out for their own interests. They do not easily become angry. They do not keep a record of how people have hurt them. v6 They take no pleasure in anything that is evil. But they are happy with the truth. v7 They always protect. They always trust. They always hope. They never give up.

Verse 4a What love is like:

Patience and kindness show God's attitude to us (Romans 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9). Jesus showed great patience with his disciples. They were slow to understand what he taught. The 'fruit of the Spirit' includes patience and kindness (Galatians 5:22).

Verses 4b-7 What people with love do not do:

The first five examples refer to the way that some Christians at Corinth were behaving.

1. They do not feel jealous. In Corinth, people were jealous of each other's spiritual gifts. There were also groups who were competing with each other. They said that their leader was superior to the leader of other people. Paul had to show that leaders

were all God's servants. They were working together to make his kingdom grow (1 Corinthians chapter 3).

2. They do not boast. There was a Pharisee in the story in Luke 18:9-12. He told God what a good person he (the Pharisee) was. Some of the Christians at Corinth were boasting that they had wisdom and knowledge. It is not possible to boast and to love at the same time. To boast is to make people notice you. To love is to think about other people. And it is to work for the whole church.

3. They are not proud. A proud person thinks too much about his own importance. A Christian who shows love is humble. William Carey was a shoe-maker who went to India about 200 years ago. He translated parts of the Bible into many different languages. But he did not think about himself as more than someone who mended shoes.

4. They do not behave badly. To behave well means more than to be polite. Some Christians at Corinth were not respecting other people. Some people were greedy and they were not thinking about other people at the Lord's Supper. They were without shame. To love means to think about other people's feelings.

5. They do not look out for their own interests. Paul has already said that Christians should not use their freedom to act only for their own benefit (10:24). He repeated this advice to the Christians in Philippi (Philippians 2:4).

6. They do not easily become angry. Paul began his description of love with the word 'patient'. One kind of patience is to be able to keep calm when other people are angry. It does not answer insults with anger.

7. They do not keep a record of how people have hurt them. God in Christ does not keep a record of our sins (2 Corinthians 5:19). So,

the person who loves does not keep remembering an action or insult against him. Some people say, 'I will forgive but I will not forget.' This statement means that the person has not really forgiven his enemy.

8. They take no pleasure in evil things. They are happy with the truth. It is a sad fact that people like to hear about the failures of other people. Newspapers, television and radio often encourage an interest in other people's sins. A loving Christian does not try to find fault in other people. 'Love covers over a great number of sins' (1 Peter 4:8). Gossip can ruin a person's life. But a loving person is happy when anyone succeeds.

9. Verse 7 Paul ends his list by emphasising that love never changes. People with love do not talk about other people's faults. They do not give in to insults and difficulties.

Christians can trust God's promise to give them 'hope and a future' (Jeremiah 29:11). Christians can live with courage in every circumstance. This is because of their trust in God's love for themselves and for other people.

3. Love is permanent 13:8-13

v8 Love never comes to an end. But where there are prophecies, they will become of no use. Where there are tongues, they will become silent. Where there is knowledge, it will no longer be necessary. v9 We know only part of the truth now. And our prophecy is only partly accurate. v10 But that which is complete will come. And then what is not complete will disappear. v11 When I was a child, I talked like a child. I thought like a child. I used to reason like a child. When I became a man, I did not behave like a child any longer. v12 Now we see only a poor image in a mirror. Then we shall see face to face. Now I know only part. Then I shall know completely. v13 And now, these three

remain - faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

Verse 8 In verses 1-2, Paul spoke about three gifts. They were prophecy, tongues and knowledge. He said that without love they had no value. Here he contrasts love with these gifts. Love is permanent. These gifts will all become unnecessary.

Verses 9-10 In this life, our knowledge of God can never be complete. One day, we will no longer need anything that is not complete. That will happen in eternity when Christ comes again.

Verses 11-12 Paul uses two examples to show what he means:

1. An adult does not speak or think like a child. And he does not reason like a child. The behaviour of a child is only suitable while he remains a child. Spiritual gifts are necessary for the growth of the church. But they will no longer be necessary in eternity.
2. Corinth was famous for good mirrors. They did not have clear glass then, so they made them out of metal. But highly polished metal is not as good as a modern glass

mirror. It would reflect the image of a person, but not a perfect image. John said, 'We know that when Jesus appears, we shall be like him. Because we shall see him as he is' (1 John 3:2). God already knows us completely. In the next age, we shall understand God's ways. We cannot understand them completely in this life.

Verse 13 Faith, hope and love seem to have been a well-known group of qualities. Paul speaks about them in other letters. For example, 1 Thessalonians 1:3; Colossians 1:4-5. These three words explain the whole of the Christian life in this world. Christians have 'faith' that God will forgive them because of Christ's sacrifice. They have 'hope' for the future, because of Christ's resurrection. They live a life of faith and hope among Christian brothers and sisters whom they 'love'. Of these three, only love will remain into eternity. Faith will no longer be necessary. Hope will become knowledge. Love is the greatest, because God himself is love (1 John 4:8). A friendship with him will never end, but it will continue into eternity.

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