



(For access to all available commentaries and sermons of Charlie's click [HERE](#))

1 Corinthians

...does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil;
1 Corinthians 13:5

Four more traits of the nature of true love are given from the pen of Paul in this verse. The first is that it "does not behave rudely." If someone is truly loving toward another, there will be no improper conduct towards that person. There will be due respect for the individual regardless of societal class. There will be an attitude of care regardless of nationality. The amount of money or the type of home a person has won't be a consideration in how that person is treated. There will always be a tone of decency and propriety in one's conduct towards others. If these are lacking, then the true heart of love is also lacking.

Love also doesn't "seek its own." Instead of self-gratification, there will be a desire to look out for the benefit of others. How often do we attempt to ingratiate ourselves with someone who is well-known or who possesses a certain talent so that we can seem more esteemed in the eyes of another! This isn't true love, but rather it is identification with someone for personal benefit. To seek the well-being of others for the sakes of their well-being, without any regard for self, shows that the heart is properly directed in that relationship.

Love is also "not provoked." Some translations say "easily provoked" but this statement is in the absolute sense and so adding the adverb gives a false sense of Paul's intent. True love overlooks faults, mistakes, misunderstandings, and the like. Rather than being offended or exasperated, love will stand firm and remain strong through the offenses which come from time to time. Love will not allow itself to be provoked.

Finally, Paul tells us that love "thinks no evil." Instead of looking for others' actions as suspect, and rather than finding "evil intent" in how people present themselves, love will accept the approaches of others in the best possible light unless there is a sound reason to consider them differently. This is not a naive attitude towards others, but it is giving them the benefit of the doubt in their conduct and actions.

Life application: There are times when we are to carefully consider the actions of others as being suspect. The Lord Jesus told us to be as "wise as serpents" in our interactions. And yet, we need to balance these considerations with a loving attitude. Because we cannot read the hearts and minds of others, we should give them the opportunity to demonstrate their faithfulness without being rude or curt in the process.

...does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; 1 Corinthians 13:6

In this verse a contrasting thought is given. This is similar to how many of the proverbs are structured. For example -

"Fools mock at sin,
But among the upright *there is* favor." Proverbs 14:9

This is a way of showing both a negative and a positive side of the same thing. In the case of love, it "does not rejoice in iniquity." In other words, love doesn't revel in that which is wicked. When someone does something perverse, harmful, or deceitful, a person who is truly loving won't stand back and applaud what they have seen. By doing so, they will only bolster the wicked intent of the wrongdoer and propel them on to more wickedness. The only possible result of this is a bad end.

Love also doesn't rejoice in the consequences of wickedness. When a person is punished for their wickedness, (a possible outcome of the previous scenario),

there should be no reveling in their downfall, but rather mourning and a desire for their restoration. Such is the nature of a loving attitude, even towards those who have acted in iniquity.

In contrast to this is that love "rejoices" in the truth. Where there is truth, love will rejoice in it, even if it is a tough pill to swallow. If someone's child has committed iniquity, a truly loving parent will be more satisfied in their conviction and punishment than that they "got away" with their wrongdoing. This doesn't mean there is a pleased demeanor in their punishment (which would belie what Paul just said in the previous point), but that it is better to see iniquity punished than for it to continue.

Also in this thought, Paul's words are more correctly stated that love "rejoices with truth." In other words, love and truth are being personified. This is a common biblical way of demonstrating to us the very character of these traits in a way that we can then apply to ourselves. A good example of such personification is found in the 85th Psalm -

"Mercy and truth have met together;
Righteousness and peace have kissed." Psalm 85:10

Life application: Paul's words today, if properly applied to our lives, will often ask us to act in a nature contrary to what our initial emotions may hint at. We wish to protect those we love, even if it means keeping them from some type of correction that they deserve. But in this, we are only harming them, not truly helping them. It is better to have the consequences of one's actions meted out than to find them in an even worse position later because they didn't learn their lesson the first time.

...bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

1 Corinthians 13:7

Continuing on with the attributes of love from the previous verses, Paul now mentions four more of them. First, it "bears all things." This is the Greek word *stegó*. It means "to cover closely." It is used in the idea of keeping water out. A well made rain-suit is designed to keep the contents within it dry. A ship's hull is made in a way which keeps water out in order to keep it from sinking. We may wear a mask, or even a full-body suit, to cover ourselves if there are germs present. The idea here then is to not disclose the faults or troubles of others, but instead to cover them and protect them. To act in a loving manner means to bear the burdens of others willingly, keeping them tightly sealed in the process.

Love also "believes all things." This small portion of the verse could be misread in a way which would lead an individual to a state of naiveté which is unintended. The best way to interpret Paul's words here is that Christians should "give the benefit of the doubt" to others. When questioned about forgiveness, Jesus responded in the most gracious manner. The exchange is found in Matthew 18 -

Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" ²² Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. Matthew 18:21, 22

However, Jesus always ties forgiveness in with repentance. Without repentance, one cannot truly forgive another anyway. And so there is a balance needed in such actions. In the case of love, there is to be an extra effort made to believe others in order to keep the bond of love alive.

Paul proceeds with the notion that love "hopes all things." Rather than being gloomy and pessimistic about the future, about relationships, about finances, or any other issue, a truly loving person will demonstrate hope. God has made sure promises to His people and therefore we are to demonstrate hope in those promises, even when things seem to be falling apart around us. The reason for this is that a truly loving soul will, by their hopeful attitude, keep others afloat in the sea of hope as well. Without such an attitude, others will fall into their own gloom and depression.

Finally, Paul says that love "endures all things." If the preceding attributes in this list last only a temporary time, then they have ultimately failed the test of love. Endurance is an ongoing and essential attribute for any display of love. To endure in love is, in and of itself, an aspect of true love. In enduring all things, complaints are avoided, help is provided, hope springs eternal, and comfort is given.

Life application: The essential thing about the love that Paul speaks of is that its attributes are volitional. They require more than just a temporary emotion, but rather they demonstrate a mental attitude which is of the will. It is as if a race is set before us and we prepare ourselves for it, start off with the right attitude, and persevere through the challenge as it unfolds before us. Such is the nature of love.

Love never fails. But whether *there are* prophecies, they will fail; whether *there are* tongues, they will cease; whether *there is* knowledge, it will vanish away.

1 Corinthians 13:8

Paul now takes a new direction in his great discourse on love. He has been giving both positive and negative descriptions of love. They have been descriptions which define love and which are forever unchanging in the truth they convey. He will now contrast this with the nature of "gifts" which have been given to the individual members.

It must be remembered that this discourse on love is given based upon the previous discourse on gifts. He is specifically connecting the two issues to show the supremacy of love over that of gifts. Properly used gifts are dependent on love and will be based on love, but love is not dependent on gifts. As he closed out Chapter 12 he said, "And yet I show you a more excellent way." The "more excellent way" is love.

And why is this true? It is true because love (which he has just been defining) "never fails." The use of a gift is perfected in love, and when love is displayed in the use of a gift, it will always be used for the benefit of the entire body. "But

whether *there are* prophecies, they will fail." Prophecies, both foretelling and forth-telling, have their limits. There is a time when the gift of prophecy will be ended. There will be no more need for future prophetic utterances and there will be no need for searching the mysteries of the Bible and explaining them to others. When this time comes, love will still exist, for God is love.

Paul next tells us that, "whether *there are* tongues, they will cease." Tongues are a way of conveying information. At one time, there was but one language on earth. However, in order to effect His purposes for man in redemptive history, God divided the tongues of the people. There are now many languages and there is a need for tongues to be used to teach others the word of God, to build up those who speak a different language, and to unite churches into a cohesive body. However, some day, there will again be but one spoken language. The book of Zephaniah says that will occur among the Hebrew people during the millennium -

"For then I will restore to the peoples a pure language,
That they all may call on the name of the LORD,
To serve Him with one accord." Zephaniah 3:9

Eventually, all humanity will speak in one tongue again. When this occurs, there will be no need for instructing others. Tongues will cease.

Finally in this verse, Paul tells us that "whether *there is* knowledge, it will vanish away." He speaks here of earthly knowledge. It is the knowledge possessed by the teacher who must then instruct his pupil. Again, let us remember that he is contrasting love with the possession of gifts. Teachers, scholars, pastors, etc., all possess certain knowledge which must then be shared with others in order for that knowledge to be assimilated by them. This type of knowledge will pass away. In its place will be the pure knowledge which was from before the creation of the world. There shall be no need for the "gift" of knowledge because we will be in the presence of the One in whom is all knowledge. We shall learn, for all eternity, the workings of God. Thus, the gift of knowledge "will vanish away," but love will remain.

Life application: When all of our "gifts," which are given by the Spirit for this earthly dispensation, are brought into the presence of the Lord, they will no longer be needed. In their place will come the perfection of all of those gifts, directly from the One who bestowed them. The wonders of heaven are beyond our ability to grasp, so let us cling to this now and share our temporary gifts in love and in harmony with those we fellowship with.

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

It is good to remember that Paul's words here were given based on divisions within the church because of the possession of various gifts of the Spirit. In verse 12:28, Paul listed "prophets" as second in ranking only behind apostles. This then is an indication that the appointment as an apostle was limited only to a select few in the early church who were designated as such by Christ. And so, instead of showing the limitations of the position of an apostle, he shows the limitations of the next highest ranking appointment, the prophet, one which would continue on throughout the age.

Prophecy in this case is being tied to "knowledge" and therefore it is speaking of the gift of "forth-telling," not "foretelling." Foretelling is communicating the words of God when directly influenced by the Spirit. On the other hand, forth-telling is a gift which is based on knowledge of what God has spoken. Truly no one can fully comprehend the depths of the word of God. Even when studied day and night for a lifetime, there will always be more that can be learned from it.

Because of this, Paul says that "we know in part and we prophesy in part." This doesn't mean there is a certain defect in prophesying, but that it is never fully complete. Two thousand years of preaching has not used up the well of knowledge or fully plumbed the depths of what can be preached. God's word is a useful tool at all times, in all languages, and for any circumstance in any culture. It is wisdom, it is direction, and it is the power of God for salvation for all who believe.

However, there are aspects of God which are not recorded in the Bible. There are events in human history which pertain to biblical prophecy and yet they can only be determined to fit the prophetic scenario once they have happened. Others will become evident as they prepare to happen. But no matter what, our knowledge of the events is limited because the future is not fully known to us. For these, and for a host of other reasons, our knowledge is limited and our prophesying is incomplete.

So why did Paul include this statement? It is because the gift of prophesying is an incomplete gift. The prophet cannot claim all-knowledge or all-ability. He is dependent on others who possess other gifts. He is one part of the body and not the Head. Again, when taken in context of Paul's discussion about various gifts, the reason for this discourse on love becomes evident. The one who prophesies without love is truly just a clanging cymbal who is puffed up in and of himself. To prophesy with great knowledge but without love is to be ineffective at prophesying.

Life application: The preacher who possesses great knowledge in the word of God should be even more humble than when he knew little. With greater understanding of the word of God should come a greater understanding of how little one really knows about the word of God.

But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away. 1 Corinthians 13:10

Paul here speaks in an overall way concerning that which is imperfect in comparison to that which is perfect. As long as there is imperfection, that is all that is truly perceived. But when something perfect comes, it completely overshadows imperfection. This is even true in gradations of perfection. As an example, we can think of the development of the internet.

It first began with a single connection between two computers. The language was slow and very limited. Eventually, a larger network was developed and the less perfect system was overshadowed by the better. In due time, the internet grew into something that anyone could access, but it was limited to dial-up modems using the land-line phone system.

Along came higher speed land-line systems and they swallowed up the slower ones. Then came DSL and people forgot about land-lines. Then came cable, and after that fiber optics. Each step replaced that which was less perfect. The old systems were done away with.

Such is true with the gifts of the Spirit which we now employ. The Giver of the gift is perfect, but we are imperfect. Our prophecies may miss the mark; our tongues may mispronounce words as we translate languages; and our knowledge is riddled with misunderstanding and misevaluations of spiritual matters.

However, someday, there will be a perfect unity between the Giver of the gifts and the glorified saints. There will no longer be a need for that which is lesser because that which is perfect will swallow up the imperfection in its perfection, just as dial-up modems have been dispensed with and forgotten.

All "that which is in part will be done away" with at that time. This is the hope of the saints; it is the anticipation of the redeemed; and it is the joy which is set before us because of the work of Christ. His perfection will be realized in us. We ourselves will not be God, but we will have a direct and unstained access to that which is perfect. We shall walk in His presence and see His glory illuminating our path for all eternity.

Life application: At this point in time, we perceive all things from a faulty perspective. This is because we are fallen and thus we often misperceive spiritual matters. However, this doesn't mean that we should sit on our hands and wait for our glorification before seeking out perfection. We should always strive to learn more from God's word. We should attempt to commune more closely with God at

all times. And, we should fix our eyes on Jesus who is our model for perfect living as we walk in this fallen world.

When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

1 Corinthians 13:11

In this verse, Paul is making an analogy between spiritual immaturity and spiritual adulthood through the use of the natural growth of an individual. He has been discussing spiritual gifts and the need to use them in connection with love for them to have any true value. In the previous two verses, he showed that eventually those gifts will be done away with altogether.

In his analogy then, he says, "When I was a child, I spoke as a child." Babies have their own sounds which develop into short sentences and then into the talk of teens. Each is discernable and shows a lack of development. Eventually though, most people learn to speak as adults. Sentences are more complex and they convey the higher thoughts necessary to accomplish the challenges of adulthood.

In a similar fashion, Paul says that, "I understood as a child." Children look at the world in a completely different way than adults. Adults have had experiences which allow them to hopefully make wise decisions. Children don't have such experiences. They may touch hot surfaces, they may get swindled out of their school lunch, or they may step on sandspurs because they didn't know that sandspurs existed. Their understanding of the world around them has limited their ability to think in more developed ways.

And this leads to the next thought of Paul which says, "I thought as a child." Without experience, thoughts will be naive about the world around us. Without a developed language, our tongues will only speak either unintelligible or rather simple sentences. And without experience, we cannot make rational choices about our future, how to care for our present needs, or how to empathize with others when they suffer.

In contrast to this, Paul tells us that "when I became a man, I put away childish things." This state is analogous to what he said in verses 8-10. The connection is obvious when one looks at how Paul has cited his examples. "I spoke" relates to the gift of tongues, "I understood" relates to the gift of prophecy, and "I thought" relates to the gift of knowledge. Paul showed us in those previous verses that each of these gifts were temporary and would be done away with. Thus he has equated that time of spiritual maturity to being a man. In adulthood, we have put away the ways of childhood; and in our glorification, we will have put away these lesser gifts.

Isaac Newton, one of the greatest intellectual minds in all of human history, understood this to be true when he wrote these words -

"I do not know what I may appear to the world; but to myself I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the sea-shore, and diverting myself by now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, while the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me."

Life application: Those gifts which we cherish now, and which we too often use to the harm of others rather than to their edification, will someday be done away with. Keeping this in mind, let us use our gifts for building others up, not attempting to tear them down.

For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. 1 Corinthians 13:12

Paul has been contrasting the imperfect world in which we live with the purity of the world to come. He has been doing this by comparing that which is temporary and physical with that which is eternal and spiritual. With that thought in mind, he now gives a description of what our knowledge is like at this time in comparison to what it will be like in the future. In order to do this, he uses words concerning a mirror which would have been perfectly understood by anyone in the church at that time.

However, in his words, he is certainly using an example from the Old Testament as the basis for his thoughts. In Numbers chapter 12, the Lord spoke these words to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam -

“Hear now My words:

If there is a prophet among you,
I, the LORD, make Myself known to him in a vision;
I speak to him in a dream.

⁷ Not so with My servant Moses;
He *is* faithful in all My house.

⁸ I speak with him face to face,
Even plainly, and not in dark sayings;
And he sees the form of the LORD.

Why then were you not afraid
To speak against My servant Moses?” Numbers 12:6-8

Knowing that this is Paul's point of reference will help to explain his words to the Corinthians. He begins with the word "for" as a conjunction to the previous statement. What is earthly will be explained first. In this earthly existence (now) he says that "we see in a mirror, dimly." Mirrors of Paul's time were made of highly polished metal. They reflected an image, but it was far less perfect than our modern glass mirrors. When looking at such a mirror, just as when looking at a mirror of today, it appears that the image is standing on the other side of the mirror.

But the reflection in those ancient metal mirrors would have had imperfections which skewed what a person actually looked like. They could get the general sense of how they looked, but it wasn't perfect. Hairs which were out of place may have gone unseen, lipstick might have been off a wee bit, and the teeth might not have been as clean as one hoped for. Such a mirror wasn't capable of giving a perfect reflection and so imperfection in actual appearance was to be expected.

Paul shows that this is comparable to what is spiritual. We now see God's plan only partially. We now study the Bible with preconceptions and using faulty logic. Our minds are dull in understanding many aspects of Scripture and we are incapable of seeing some things which would otherwise be obvious. But in this earthly existence, they are hidden.

In contrast to this, someday we shall see "face to face." In Numbers 12:8 (above), the term the Lord used when speaking to Moses is *peh el peh*, or literally "mouth to mouth." There was direct and intimate dialogue between the two. The Lord hid nothing from Moses when He spoke to him. This is the way it shall be for us when we are glorified. Until then, we still see dimly and our understanding is therefore obscured.

This word, "dimly," is from the Greek *en ainigmati*. It means "in an enigma." Everything is somewhat obscured in some way or another. Again, this is comparable to what was said to Moses with the words "in dark sayings." When God spoke to the prophets of old His word was given in such a way that they often had no idea what God was speaking about. It was as if a dark shadow were cast over the eyes of their minds to keep them from fully realizing what was intended by the words they uttered or wrote down.

This is no different even today. Although we have clarity that the prophets didn't, particularly about the work of the Lord Jesus, there are still aspects of the Bible that are completely hidden from us. We can understand the surface meaning of the words, but the true depth of the wisdom and knowledge of God which is found in the Bible is beyond our ability to fully comprehend. This is confirmed in Paul's words which continue on by saying, "Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known."

We have the Bible, and with it we can know how to be saved through the work of Jesus. It also tells us about the sure return of Jesus for us someday. But it doesn't tell us when that will happen. Nor does it tell us an infinite number of details that we might like to know. Instead, with it we can only know in part. However, when we stand in the presence of the Lord in our glorified state, we will have a much

more perfect understanding of the Lord and of His work, just as He at this time fully knows all about us.

Life application: Just because we cannot fully know all the mysteries of the Lord in this life, it is no excuse to not do our very, very best to study the Bible and seek out the mysteries which are hidden there. What a shame to spend our time learning an infinite number of sports statistics while knowing almost nothing about the riches contained in Scripture! Study your Bible.

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

1 Corinthians 13:13

Paul concludes his discourse on love in this verse by beginning with "And now..." Among scholars, there is division over what this means. Some take it as a temporal sequence which would place it in opposition to the "then" of the previous verse. What that would mean is that "now" isn't speaking of our present existence in comparison to the future, such as - "And at this time abide faith, hope, and love, but someday only love will abide." Instead, it is speaking of the logical nature of the summary thought; it is the conclusion of everything he has said. "And now when every other gift is done away with, faith, hope, and love will remain."

Other scholars will argue the opposite by stating that only love will remain in the future. Faith will no longer be needed because it will be swallowed up in sight, and hope will no longer be needed because we will have possession of our hope in the joy of the Lord. Thus, only love will remain.

The first argument is correct; all three will remain. They are all permanent and they are all essential, even in the eternal state. What Paul is telling us here is that the "gifts" which the believers at Corinth had been arguing over were temporary and that they would pass away, even gifts such as prophecy. On the other hand, the three individual components of faith, hope, and love would continue on forever.

If eternity is set before us and yet our eternity is based on God's willingness to maintain His created order, then our faith will remain in God who continues to sustain our existence. Tied into this is hope which will always remain as an anchor for the soul of the redeemed. It will never find its completion, but will always exist. Because God is infinite, we will infinitely hope to see more of His infinite goodness as He ceaselessly reveals Himself to us.

Despite these being eternal though, the facet of love is greater than they are. It is not greater in duration (which is impossible because all are eternal), but in logical order. The Pulpit Commentary explains why love is greater than faith and hope in four ways -

"1. Love is the greatest, because it is the root of the other two; 'we believe only in that which we love; we hope only for that which we love.'

2. And love is the greatest because love is for our neighbours; faith and hope mainly for ourselves.

3. And love is the greatest because faith and hope are human, but God is love.

4. And love is the greatest because faith and hope can only work by love, and only show themselves by love. Thus love is as the undivided perfection of sevenfold light. Faith and hope are precious stones of one colour, as a ruby and a sapphire; but love, as he has been showing us throughout the chapter, is a diamond of many facets."

Life application: Paul has shown a "more excellent way" in 1 Corinthians 13. Rather than arguing over who has the better gift, and rather than having feelings of either jealousy or contempt towards others because of their gift, we should express gratitude to God for His provision and demonstrate love towards God and others as we await our final call to eternal glory.