

## THE PRE-EMINENCE OF LOVE

### TEXT: I CORINTHIANS 13:1-13

#### INTRODUCTION:

1. First Corinthians chapter 13 is often called “the love chapter,” though the word “love” is not used in our King James Bible.
2. The Greek word translated “charity” is *agape*, and that word is usually translated “love.” The word “charity” is found nine times in chapter 13, and then again in 14:1.
3. Jesus said in John 15:9, “As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.” Same word: *agape*.
4. W.A. Criswell said this, “When the Latin Vulgate was made by Jerome, Jerome translated out of the Greek language the sacred Scriptures into Latin. And the Latin Vulgate, as his translation was called, came to be the Scriptures of all the Western world. Wherever Christianity went west, it carried with it the Latin Vulgate. That is the official Scriptures of the Roman Catholic Church today.

Now when Jerome translated that Greek word for love, *agape* – when he translated it into Latin, the usual Latin word for love is *amor*. But the word for love in Latin, *amor*, was so identified with Venus and with all of the sexual orgies by which the ancient Roman worshipped those unspeakable goddesses; so, when Jerome came to translate the Greek word for love into the Latin word for love, he turned aside from the usual Latin word *amor*, and chose rather the Latin *caritas*, which is also a Latin word for love, but not that kind of love. *Caritas* is the word for precious in Latin, for endearing, holy, sanctified, sublimated love. So when the King James Version translated from the Greek and other translations, it’ll say, with the other revisions diligently compared and revised – when they translated the Greek word for love into English, the word “charity,” which is built upon the Latin word *caritas*, had then the same feeling in English that it had in Latin. ‘Charity,’ in 1611, was a word for the endearing, precious love of God and as we have for one another, so, he took the word and made it English here. But as the years have passed – as three hundred years have passed – why, the word, love – charity – has become so identified with our service and our ministry to people who need us, that it has finally come to mean just this gift of love and ministry alone. But it’s a beautiful word. And if you’ll remember its background, you can still read it charity – love, a sublimated

love, a precious love, godly love – and you’ll get the idea exactly as Paul wrote it.”

5. Here in this chapter, love is not defined. Love is displayed.
6. Someone said it is very difficult to define love. It is like trying to define the beauty of a sunset.
7. First John 4:8 and 16 says, “God is love.”

1. **THE PRE-EMINENCE OF LOVE**
2. **THE PARTICULARS OF LOVE**
3. **THE PERMANENCE OF LOVE**

## **I. THE PRE-EMINENCE OF LOVE**

1. Some preachers preach with great power. They are great orators, and they “speak with the tongues of men and of angels” (13:1).
2. But if they have not love, God says they are “as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal” (13:1).
3. The power of expression is not determined by the breath and depth of a man’s vocabulary, but by the breadth and depth of his heart.
4. Poetry, humor, sentimentality, and great speaking skills cannot compensate for the lack of divine love.
5. Language without love is noise without melody – “a sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal” (13:1), not the beautiful sound of a piano or organ, etc.
6. Paul goes on to say that a man may have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge, and have the faith that can remove mountains, but if he doesn’t have love he is nothing (13:2).
7. W. Graham Scroggie said, “Loveless faith may remove mountains from its own path, only to set them down in its brother’s path.”
8. First Corinthians 8:1 says, “Knowledge puffeth up, but charity (love) edifieth.” Love “is not puffed up” (13:4b).
9. “Prophecy” refers to inspirational power.
10. “Understanding all mysteries” refers to spiritual discernment.
11. These are “spiritual gifts” (cf. 12:1), but they are “nothing” without love (13:2).
12. Love alone is the proof of true spirituality. Love alone is the touchstone of true Christian character.
13. A Christian without love is a poor testimony, and is a stumbling block.
14. First Corinthians 13 is poetic. God does not want us to give our bodies to be burned (13:3). Paul is speaking here of the ultimate sacrifice.

15. W. Graham Scroggie said, “Here the searchlight of love is thrown upon man’s great powers of emotion, and intellect, and will, and each of these at its best is seen to be valueless without love.”
16. Our Lord commended the church of Ephesus for their works, and their labour, and their patience, and how they could not bear them which are evil.
17. But our Lord added, “Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love” (Rev. 2:4).

## II. THE PARTICULARS OF LOVE

1. W. Graham Scroggie analyzed I Corinthians 13 this way. Love is:
  - Not hasty, but patient – “suffereth long” (13:4)
  - Not inconsiderate, but benevolent – “is kind” (13:4)
  - Not Envious, but content – “envieth not” (13:4)
  - Not boastful, but unostentatious – “vaunteth not itself” (13:4)
  - Not arrogant, but humble – “not puffed up” (13:4)
  - Not rude, but courteous – “Doth not behave itself unseemly” (13:5)
  - Not selfish, but self-forgetful – “seeketh not her own” (13:5)
  - Not irritable, but good-tempered – “is not easily provoked” (13:5)
  - Not vindictive, but generous – “thinketh no evil” (13:5)
  - Not malevolent, but high-principled – “Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth” (13:6)
  - Not rebellious, but brave – “Beareth all things” (13:7)
  - Not suspicious, but confident – “believeth all things” (13:7)
  - Not despondent, but undiscourageable – “hopeth all things” (13:7)
  - Not conquerable, but indomitable – “endureth all things” (13:7)
    1. Love “is kind” (13:4). Scroggie said that, “You can no more have love without kindness than you can have springtime without flowers. The greatest thing a man a man can do for His heavenly Father is to be kind to some of His other children.”
    2. Love “envieth not” (13:4). Where there is no love, there will be envy. Joseph’s brothers hated him, and they could not speak peaceably unto him, and they sold him into slavery. Acts 7:9 says, they “moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him.”
    3. Mark 15:10 says that Pontius Pilate “knew that the chief priests had delivered (Christ) for envy.”

4. But love “envieth not” (13:4). Proverbs 27:4 says, “Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous; but who is able to stand before envy?”
5. And love “is not easily provoked” (13:5). Psalm 119:165 says, “Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them.”
6. Love “thinketh no evil” (13:5). Love remembers the good things, but chooses to forget the bad things. It is said of Abraham Lincoln that he never forgot a kindness, but that he never remembered when anyone wronged him.
7. Abraham Lincoln determined that he would remember to forget the wrong.
8. Love “rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth” (13:6). Love is never glad when others do wrong. Love is always happy when people do right.
9. Love “Beareth all things” (13:7). *Strong’s Concordance* says the word translated “beareth” means, “to cover with silence (endure patiently), forbear, suffer.”
10. Love suffers wrong without retaliating.
11. First Peter 2:23 says, Christ, “when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.”
12. First Corinthians 9:12 says, we “suffer all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ.”
13. “Believeth all things” (13:7) does not mean we are to be *credulous* or gullible. It means love is not suspicious, and love is not cynical.
14. Albert Barnes said, “this cannot mean, that the man who is under the influence of love is a man that makes no discrimination in regard to things to be believed; and is as prone to believe a falsehood as the truth; or that he is at no pains to inquire what is true and what is false, what is right and what is wrong. But it must mean, that in regard to the conduct of others, there is a disposition to put the best construction on it; to believe that they may be actuated by good motives, and that they intend no injury; and that there is a willingness to suppose, as far as can be, that what is done is done consistently with friendship, good feeling, and virtue. Love produces this, because it rejoices in the happiness and virtue of others, and will not believe the contrary except on irrefragable evidence.”
15. John Wesley said love, “puts the most favorable construction on everything, and is ever ready to believe whatever may tend to the advantage of any one character.”

### III. THE PERMANENCE OF LOVE

1. Chapter 13 is in between chapters 12 and 14, which deal with spiritual gifts. This chapter emphasizes the permanence of love in contrast to certain gifts, which are temporary (cf. 13:8).
2. “Whether there be tongues, they shall cease” (13:8). W.E. Vines said, “The gift of tongues was about the first to be discontinued. All attempts to reintroduce it are either fraudulent or the outcome of deception; they are contrary to Scripture and are void of the actual operation of the Spirit of God” (*I Corinthians*).
3. These temporary gifts ceased, but love will endure forever. “For God is love” (I John 4:8, 16).
4. “For we know in part...” (13:9; cf. 8:2).
5. “But when that which is perfect is come...” (13:10). The margin of the *Scofield Study Bible* has a reference to I John 3:2, which refers to the second coming of Christ, and that is the most popular as well as the most logical interpretation.
6. “When I was a child, I spake as a child...” (13:11). John Phillips says, “I spake as a child” refers to tongues because we speak with the tongue. “I understood as a child” refers to knowledge, and “I thought as a child” refers to prophecy.
7. “But when I became a man, I put away childish things” means the gifts of tongues and knowledge and prophecy were operative in the early days of the church, but they were only temporary (cf. 13:8).
8. There is a contrast in verse 12. “For now...but then...now...but then” (13:12). Like verse 10, this verse seems to refer to the second coming of Christ.

*Face to face with Christ, my Savior,  
Face to face—what will it be,  
When with rapture I behold Him,  
Jesus Christ who died for me? – Carrie E. Breck*

9. “Glass” (13:12) refers to a mirror or a looking glass. The mirrors of Bible times were usually made of polished metal.
10. Exodus 38:8 and Job 37:18 refer to looking glasses made of brass.

11. In Paul's day, they would take a piece of metal and they would flatten it out. But even after they flattened it and polished it, it still looked a little wavy.
12. So, when people looked into it, they saw "darkly" (13:12, "dimly").
13. But when we are face to face with Christ, we shall see clearly. Then shall we know even as also we are known (13:12).
14. Then partial knowledge would be displaced by the perfect knowledge of God.

### **CONCLUSION:**

Matthew Henry said, "How lovely a thing would Christianity appear to the world, if those who profess it were more actuated and animated by this divine principle (love), and paid a due regard to a command on which its blessed Author laid a chief stress."