

The Greatest Thing in the World

1Cor 13

Introduction:

1. Hugh Hefner, "the Playboy king" was interviewed on the David Frost Show many years ago. David Frost asked one penetrating question. He said, "Hugh, now that you've got everything that a man could possibly want - all the fame, success and women - what would you like now?" There was a long pause as the camera zoomed in for a closeup of Hefner. Then Hefner slowly replied, "David, I'd give everything I own to find... true love." Here was a man who had everything the world could offer and yet he had not found true love.
2. There is no greater commandment than that of love - [Mk 12:30-31](#)
30 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. **31** And the second *is* like, *namely* this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.
3. The ability to manifest love is part of the fruit of the Spirit and is a product of consistent and long-term spiritual growth
4. Here in [1Cor 13](#), Paul sets forth a description of what divine love is.
5. Like a prism that breaks sunlight into a rainbow of colors, Paul breaks love into its component parts
6. This is the godly agape love

I. The Priority of Love - vs 1-3

- "Though I" is the language of imagination – 5x he uses this
- Since he is imagining, Paul uses considerable hyperbole / exaggeration
- Paul imagines a situation in which there are spiritual gifts but no love

A. *Speaking Without Love is Noise* – vs 1

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.

1. Speaking (or language) without love says nothing
2. Tongues was uppermost to the Corinthians so Paul begins there
3. They were proud of their gift of tongues
4. Noise gets on your nerves and is worthless
 - a) *The greatest truths spoken in the greatest way fall short if they are not spoken in love*
 - b) *No one goes to the music shop and says, "Give me a CD of noise"*
 - c) *Who would attend a concert at the Municipal Auditorium that had a two-hour cymbal solo*

B. Ministering Without Love is Nothing – vs 2

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.

1. Gift of prophecy - Gift of knowledge - Gift of great faith
2. All of these without love are nothing
3. A full head with an empty heart is nothing
4. People don't care how much you know, until they know how much...

C. Gifts Without Love Profit Nothing – vs 3

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.

1. Giving without love is wrong
2. If one gave away all his possessions but did not have love, he would be nothing
3. Outward works of charity are useless without love
4. Even if one died as a martyr, it would be useless without love

II. The Personality of Love - vs 4-7

- Love is hard to define – it is best seen in action
- So Paul here tells what love does and what it doesn't do

A. Positive Virtues

4 Charity suffereth long...

1. Love is Patient – vs 4 – “suffereth long”
 - a) *Love is longsuffering - love has a long fuse*
 - b) *It patiently continues to put up with the faults and insults of others*
 - c) *God's patience is the supreme example*
 - d) *One of Lincoln's earliest political enemies was Edwin M. Stanton. He called Lincoln a "low cunning clown" and "the original gorilla". "It was ridiculous for people to go to Africa to see a gorilla," he would say, "when they could find one in Springfield, IL." Lincoln never responded to the slander, but when he became president and needed a secretary of war, he chose Stanton. Lincoln's friends were incredulous and asked why Lincoln chose Stanton. Lincoln replied, "Because he is the best man for the job." Years later, as the slain president's body lay in state, Stanton looked into the coffin and said through his tears, "There lies the greatest ruler of men that the world has ever seen." His animosity was finally broken by Lincoln's long-suffering, non-retaliatory spirit. Patient love won out.*

2. Love is Kind – vs 4 – “kind”

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

- a) *Love has a mild attitude towards others - helpful and giving*
- b) *Just as love is patient and will take anything from others, it also gives to others, even to its enemies.*
- c) *One can be patient without being kind*
 - (1) Patience is passive endurance while kindness is active service
 - (2) Patience is love waiting with folded hands while kindness is love working with busy hands
 - (3) Patience is being good while kindness is doing good

3. Love is Truthful – vs 6

6 Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;

- a) *Rejoicing in truth is rejoicing in Gods' truth - God's Word*
- b) *Love cannot tolerate wrong doctrine*
- c) *If we really love someone, we want them to believe right doctrine*

4. Love Bears All Things – vs 7 – “beareth all things”

7 Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things...

- a) *"All things" is not a blanket statement*
- b) *Love does not bear jealousy, bragging, arrogance, unseemliness, selfishness, anger, resentment and unrighteousness*
- c) *Bear = stego - to cover or support and therefore to protect*
 - (1) Love bears all things by protecting others from exposure, ridicule and harm
 - (2) Genuine love does not gossip or listen to gossip
 - (3) Love never protects sin, but is anxious to protect the sinner
- d) *It does not condone the sins of others, but it covers them from public view out of sensitivity to the one who committed them*

5. Love is Optimistic – vs 7 – “believes all things”

- a) *Love is optimistic and hopes for the best*
- b) *It is not suspicious or cynical*
- c) *If there is doubt about someone's guilt or motivation, love will always opt for the most favorable possibility*
- d) *Love trusts, love believes, love has confidence*

6. Love is Hopeful – vs 7 – “hopes all things”

- a) *Even when belief in a loved one's goodness or repentance is shattered, love still hopes*
- b) *When it runs out of faith, it holds onto hope*
- c) *God would not take Israel's failure as final*
- d) *Paul would not take the Corinthian's failure as final*
- e) *A dog stayed at an airport in a large city for five years waiting for its master to return. Employees and others fed the dog and took care of him, but he would not leave the spot where he last saw his master. He would not give up hope that someday his master would return. If a dog's love for its master could produce that kind of hope, how much longer should our love make hope last?*

7. Love Endures All Things – vs 7

7 Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

- a) *Love perseveres and conquers*
- b) *George Matheson, a Scottish minister, exhibited this characteristic. After he discovered that he was blind, and that his fiancé had deserted him, he prayed that God would help him to endure his blindness with holy joy and a song of praise. No wonder he wrote, "O Love That Will Not Let Me Go"*
- c) *Love will not stop loving - it is not fickle*

B. Negative Virtues

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

1. Love is Not Jealous – vs 4 – “envieth not”

- a) *Love is not jealous of anyone*
- b) *Corinthians were jealous of the spiritual gifts of others*
- c) *Jealousy is still a problem for believers*
- d) *There are preachers who are jealous of other preachers who preach better than they do*
- e) *Jonathan is a good example of one who was not jealous.*

2. Love Does Not Brag – vs 4 – “vaunteth not itself”

- a) *"Vaunteth" - to put on a show, to parade an imagined superiority*
- b) *Love does not parade its accomplishments*
- c) *Love never shows off - it never has a superiority complex*
- d) *The Corinthian believers were spiritual show-offs - constantly vying for public attention*
- e) *Jesus never showed off or acted superior*

3. Love is Not Arrogant – vs 4 – “is not puffed up”

- a) *Love is not filled with pride*
- b) *Pride is an inflated idea of one's own importance*
- c) *The Corinthians thought that they had reached the pinnacle of Christianity - but all they had they received from the Lord*
- d) *William Carey is often referred to as the father of modern missions. He was a brilliant linguist who translated parts of the Bible into 34 languages and dialects. He had been raised in a simple home in England and in his early manhood worked as a cobbler. In India he was often ridiculed for his "low" birth and former occupation. At a dinner party one evening a snob said, "I understand, Mister Carey, that you once worked as a shoemaker." "Oh no, your lordship," Carey replied, "I was not a shoemaker, only a shoe repairman."*

4. Love Does Not Behave Improperly – vs 5

5 Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;

 - a) *Paul is saying that love has good manners*
 - b) *The loveless person is often careless, overbearing and often rude*
 - c) *Even when the Corinthians met together for the Lord's Supper, they were self-centered and offensive - 1Co 11:21*
 - d) *We need to only examine our Master's life and see that he was a perfect gentleman*
 - e) *Love means that a believer is not rude or crude*
5. Love Does Not Selfish – vs 5 – “seeketh not her own”
 - a) *Love for others means that we look out for their welfare*
 - b) *Somebody said, "Cure selfishness and you have just replanted the garden of Eden."*
 - (1) Adam / Eve rejected God's way so they could have their own
 - (2) Self replaced God
6. Love Does Not Become Easily Provoked – vs 5
 - a) *It guards against being irritated, upset or angered by things said or done against it – not touchy or sensitive*
 - b) *This is not saying that we should never get angry*
 - c) *Love does not rejoice in unrighteousness - vs 6*
 - d) *Love does not get upset when it cannot have its own way*
 - e) *It does no good to say that you love someone if you continually get upset and angry at what they say and do. "I lose my temper a lot, but its all over in a few minutes." Yes, and so is a nuclear bomb. But much damage is left behind*
7. Love Is Not Spiteful in Conduct – vs 5 – not resentful
 - a) *Logizomai - a bookkeeping term that means to calculate or reckon*
 - b) *The purpose of bookkeeping is to make a permanent entry that can be consulted in the future - In business it is needed, in personal matters this can be devastating*
 - c) *Now that we are saved, God is not keeping a record of our sins - Ro 4:8; 2Co 5:19; Ac 3:19*
 - d) *Resentment keeps careful records of things done against it, which it reads and rereads, hoping for a chance to get even.*
 - e) *Love keeps no record - it has no place for resentment or grudges*
 - f) *Love is forgiving - One preacher said that a wrong done against love is like a spark that falls into the sea and is quenched. Love quenches wrongs done to it, rather than recording them.*
 - (1) Love does not keep records of wrong done to it
 - (2) Love does not dwell on past sins
 - g) *In Polynesia, people hang objects from the roofs of their huts to remind them of the misdeeds that have been done against them that they intend to repay.*

8. Love Does Not Rejoice in Iniquity – vs 6

6 Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;

- a) *Love would rather hear good news about someone, than bad news*
- b) *Love wants to believe the best about someone, not the worst*
- c) *Rejoicing in sin is wrong because sin is an affront to God*
- d) *Delighting in sin means that we are delighting in that which offends and grieves our heavenly Father*
- e) *If we love God, then what offends Him will offend us and what grieves Him will grieve us*

III. The Permanence of Love

A. Gifts are Temporary – vs 8

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.

1. When tongues, prophecy, knowledge are gone, there will still be love
2. Love cannot fail because it shares God's nature and God is eternal
 - a) *None of the gifts will have a place in heaven - no gift of teaching, preaching, helps, prophecy, discernment, knowledge, wisdom, tongues, miracles, healings, faith, mercy or leadership*
3. But there will be love in heaven - it is eternal
4. Tongues Shall Cease
 - a) *Cease is from pauo - to stop, to come to an end*
 - b) *This is in the middle voice which means that tongues will come to an end by themselves*
 - c) *Like a battery with limited energy supply and a limited life span*

B. Gifts are Partial – vs 9

9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.

1. Here on earth, the best that we can do is "in part"
2. Love is complete

C. Gifts will End – vs 10

10 But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

1. When the perfect comes, we will have no more need of knowledge, or wisdom, teaching or prophecy.
2. Some believe that the perfect is the completion of Scripture
3. When the perfect thing comes, then that which is imperfect passes away - it becomes obsolete and is superseded by the better thing

D. Gifts are Infantile – vs 11-12

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.

1. "Spoke as a child" - gift of tongues
2. "Understood as a child" - gift as knowledge
3. "Thought as a child" - wisdom and prophecy
4. Prophecies, tongues and knowledge are all childish thing
5. After the childhood years comes the adult years
6. In the infancy of the church sign gifts were needed but as the church grew and the Bible was given, these weren't needed

E. Love is Eternal – vs 13

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

1. In vs 13 Paul lists the great triad of graces
2. The greatest of them is love
3. Love is the greatest now and it will outlast the others
4. Gifts, ministries, faith, hope, patience, all will one day cease to exist because they will one day cease to have meaning or purpose
5. But in that perfect day, when we see our Savior face to face, love will just be beginning

Conclusion:

1. 14:1 – “Follow after charity”
2. Pursue it, chase it

The story is told of a chauffeur who drove up to a cemetery and asked the caretaker (who was also the pastor) to come to the car because his employer was too ill to walk. Waiting in the car was a frail old lady with sunken eyes that showed years of hurt and anguish. She introduced herself and she said that she had been sending money to the cemetery for the last several years for flowers for her husband's grave. "I have come in person today," she said, "because the doctors have given me only a few weeks to live and I wanted to see his grave for the last time." The minister replied, "I am sorry you have been sending money for those flowers." Taken aback, she said, "What do you mean?" "Well, I visit patients in hospitals and nursing homes and they dearly love flowers. They can see them and smell them. Flowers are like therapy for them because they are living people. Saying nothing, she motioned to the chauffeur who drove off. Several months later the minister was surprised to see the same car drive up but the woman herself was at the wheel. She said, "At first I resented what you said to me that day when I came here for my last visit. But as I thought about it I decided that you were right. Now I personally take flowers to the hospitals. It does make the patients happy and it makes me happy too. The doctors can't figure out what made me well again, but I know. I have someone else to live for."