

CHRISTIAN LOVE

I Corinthians 13

This chapter is a beautiful dissertation on love, which was something that was woefully lacking in the hearts of the members of the church in Corinth. It sets forth three facts about love.

I. The Pre-eminence of Love. I Corinthians 13:1-3.

The list of endowments mentioned in these verses is a respectable one, and to enumerate them is to appreciate their worth. Eloquence, prophecy, wisdom, knowledge, faith, charity and martyrdom are of great value among men. However, these coveted gifts are without value apart from love, which is the essential ingredient in every Christian action.

Speaking in tongues was a cherished activity among the Corinthians, but Paul tells us that eloquence is powerless unless it is the expression of love. True eloquence is the language, logic and liftiness of speech set on fire by love. By prophecy is meant the ability to interpret and declare the will of God, but even this great gift was not worth anything unless it was exercised in love. Any prophet who spoke without love was simply making useless noise. To understand mysteries -- things once unknown but now revealed -- meant to have wisdom, but to have love Paul said was more important. Knowledge, which means information acquired, is good, but love is better. "Knowledge puffeth up, but love buildeth up" (I Corinthians 8:1). Paul knew that regardless of how profound one's knowledge might be, it would not be convincing unless it was conveyed in a spirit of love. There is a vast difference between a bubble and a building. Charity or benevolence is profitless unless the gifts are the outflow of love. Only love gives meaning and merit to martyrdom. Love makes life noble and sweet, so let it master your thoughts, feelings, and will. True love will add great value to each of these seven desirable and highly-praised gifts.

II. The Properties of Love. I Corinthians 13:4-7

True love will color the thoughts, prompt the speech, and direct the actions of the Christian.

1. Negative Properties of Love. I Corinthians 13:4-6.

(1) Love is not impatient. Verse 4.

Love suffers provocation and injury from others indefinitely. Because love is long-suffering, it is slow to resent and to retaliate. It is full of pity, sympathy and compassion. It is able to stand any strain without anger or despair.

(2) Love is not envious. Verse 4.

Envy is the begrudging admission of relative inferiority. It causes its possessor to want to deprive another of something he has. In contrast with envy, love is not filled with jealousy, nor does it have any ill feeling whatsoever at the honor, success or prosperity of others.

- (3) Love is not boastful. Verse 4.

Love is never inflated with self-conceit or arrogance. It never causes anybody to become a braggart. Pride and self-conceit never spring from love, but always from selfishness. Boasting is prompted by a desire for human praise. Instead of looking for applause, love is interested in the welfare of others. Self-inflation and boasting are an evidence and an advertisement of littleness.

- (4) Love is not rude. Verse 5.

Love is never discourteous or unmannerly. It always recoils from rudeness and strives to do good things in a splendid manner. It acts with due consideration for others.

- (5) Love is not selfish. Verse 5.

Love is self-emptying instead of self-seeking. It is never self-assertive. Love delivers from inbred selfishness and carnal self-seeking. It does not insist on its own rights or pursue its selfish advantage, but it seeks the welfare of others.

- (6) Love is not easily provoked. Verse 5.

Love is not irritable. It does not cause one to fly into a rage when exasperated by others. Love does not keep a record of the wrongs and injuries it has suffered and then give way to anger. Lack of love is what makes people sensitive, easily offended, and likely to think evil of others.

- (7) Love is not resentful. Verse 5.

Love is never fiery with resentment at slights, whether real or imaginary, but rather ignores them. It does not pay any attention to the injuries which others inflict. Love is always ready to give as charitable an interpretation as possible to the weakness of others.

- (8) Love does not take pleasure in evil. Verse 6.

Love never takes delight in others doing wrong. Instead of rejoicing over wrong, love rejoices in that which is right. No true follower of Christ ever rejoices in the fact that another person has fallen into sin.

2. Positive Properties of Love. I Corinthians 13:6-7.

- (1) Love rejoices in the truth. Verse 6.

Love always rejoices in the propagation, progress and triumph of the truth. Love causes one to rejoice when people accept the truth, live in conformity to it, and faithfully proclaim it. Love readily recognizes achievement and rejoices over it.

- (2) Love bears all things silently. Verse 7.

Love bears all hardships and trials uncomplainingly, and with triumphant courage and bravery.

- (3) Love believes. Verse 7.

Love seeks to avoid undue suspicion and believes the best rather than the worst about others. It trusts implicitly and completely in the promises of God.

- (4) Love is hopeful. Verse 7.

Love is optimistic in the face of all unfavorable appearances and adverse circumstances or situations.

- (5) Love endures. Verse 7.

This property of love is demonstrated by the aged mother who is waiting at the entrance of the penitentiary to take home with her a son who is soon to be released.

III. The Permanance of Love. I Corinthians 13:8-13.

Love is not a passing emotion that exhilarates temporarily and then is soon gone. Rather, love is permanent and imperishable. The heart and climax of this sublime chapter are found in the statement, "Love never faileth." The greatest thing that can be said about love is that it lasts. The time will never come when love will give way to some higher quality. Love will never cease to be. It is eternal. Greater than faith or hope, love survives danger, disaster and death. Love is immortal.