

THE WAY OF CHRISTIAN LOVE

I Corinthians 13

This is one of the outstanding chapters of the Bible. It is a masterpiece of literature. It has proved to be inexhaustible as men through the centuries have brought forth its precious truths in many choice expositions.

This profoundly rich chapter should never be divorced from its context. In the preceding chapter Paul discussed "gifts", which had been bestowed by the Holy Spirit. He made it clear that each believer in Christ is the recipient of a spiritual enablement or a capacity for specific service. In this chapter Paul shows that the supreme motive for and the superior value of these gifts are found in love. The gifts are the manifestations of the Lord's power, while love is the manifestation of His nature. All spiritual gifts are without value apart from love.

There are those who emphasize the fact that the name of the Lord does not appear in this chapter. This reminds us of the fact that in Washington D. C. there is a beautifully engraved copy of the Constitution of the United States in which the lettering has been shaded so wonderfully that when one stands back and looks at it as a whole the face of George Washington appears. In like manner, this chapter is arranged in such a manner that, although Christ is not mentioned, His face appears clearly when the passage is viewed as a whole. In this connection James H. Brookes said, "It is the only chapter in Paul's Epistles that does not directly mention the Lord Jesus Christ in one or more of His names or titles. Yet this is no exception to the rule, for he draws a portrait of the Master so exquisite in coloring, so lovely in its lineaments that no one can fail to recognize the striking likeness even without the name attached." Truly, this is a beautiful dissertation on love, which was something that was seemingly lacking in the thoughts and conduct of the church members in Corinth.

I. The Preeminence Of Love (I Corinthians 13:1-3).

Life has many excellent gifts and men desire to have them. 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, all of these coveted gifts are without value apart from love. Paul emphasizes the preeminence of love by saying that it is greater than eloquence, prophecy, wisdom, knowledge, faith, benevolence and martyrdom. Love adds great value to each of these desirable and highly praised gifts.

II. The Properties Of Love (I Corinthians 13:4-6).

1. Negative properties of love (I Corinthians 13:4-6).

- (1) Love is not impatient, (verse 4).
Love suffers provocation and injury from others for a long time.
- (2) Love is not envious, (verse 4).
Envy is the grudging admission of relative inferiority. Being the very opposite of jealousy and envy, love has no ill feeling whatsoever at the honor, success or prosperity of others.
- (3) Love is not boastful, (verse 4).
Just as love does not begrudge the endowment of others, so it is not eager to make a display of its own. 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.

- (4) Love is not rude (verse 5).
Love is not discourteous or unmannerly.
It always recoils from rudeness. (
 - (5) Love is not selfish (verse 5).
Love is self-emptying instead of self-seeking. Love is never self-assertive.
It delivers from inbred selfishness and carnal self-seeking, and seeks the welfare of others.
 - (6) Love is not easily provoked (verse 5).
Love does not keep a record of the wrongs and injuries it has suffered and then give way to anger. It is the lack of love which makes people sensitive, easily hurt, and likely to think evil about others.
 - (7) Love is not resentful (verse 5).
Love is never fiery with resentment at slights but rather ignores them. (It is always ready to give as charitable an interpretation as possible to the weaknesses of others.
 - (8) Love does not take pleasure in evil (verse 6).
Instead of rejoicing in things that are wrong, love rejoices in that which is right. No faithful Christian ever rejoices over the downfall of another.
2. Positive properties of love, (I Corinthians 13:6-7).
- (1) Love rejoices in truth (verse 6).
Love always rejoices in the propagation, progress and triumph of the truth. Love rejoices when people accept the truth, live in conformity to it, and faithfully proclaim it.

- (2) Love bears all things silently (verse 7).
Love bears all hardships and trials without complaint.
- (3) Love believes (verse 7).
Instead of suspecting or surmising, love believes the best rather than the worst about others.
- (4) Love is hopeful (verse 7).
Love looks at things in the best light instead of the worst. It is optimistic in the face of all unfavorable appearances and adverse circumstances.
- (5) Love endures (verse 7).
This sort of love is exemplified by the poor old mother who was seen waiting in the entrance of the penitentiary to take home with her a son who was soon to be released.

III. The Permanence Of Love (I Corinthians 13:8-13).

Love is permanent and imperishable. In a splendid manner these verses bring out the glorious truth of the eternal durability of love. It simply never fails. It began with God and will go on with Him through eternity. The time will never come when love will give way to some higher quality. It will never cease to be, for it is eternal.