

1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-13 FEBRUARY 21, 2021

1 Corinthians 13:1-3. If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels

1. If I speak with the languages of men and of angels, but don't have love, I have become sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal. 2. If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but don't have love, I am nothing. 3. If I dole out all my goods to feed the poor, and if I give my body to be burned, but don't have love, it profits me nothing.

1a. "If I speak with the languages of men and of angels

Apparently, some Corinthian Christians count speaking in tongues as the most significant of gifts, and have become a bit arrogant about their ability to speak in tongues. In a later study of this book, we will see that Paul goes to great lengths to put that gift in perspective. I'll address those discussion later in this book.

Not here, but later, Paul makes it clear that prophecy, not speaking in tongues, is the superior gift. Paul says later in the book that speaking in unintelligible tongues does not benefit the church.

Paul will tell the people that the person who speaks in tongues should "pray that he may be interpreted" because such speech without interpretation is not helpful.

Paul places the gift of tongues and their interpretation last.

*Do you recall the study in Acts about Pentecost?
What happened there in relation to speaking in other languages?*

1b. "but don't have love

In the English language, the word "love" has a variety of meanings:

- Romantic or sexual love.
- Friendship or affection.
- A concern for the well-being of the other person.
- Or simple enthusiasm. I would probably say "I just love Blue Bell.

WHAT'S YOUR "ENTHUSIASM LOVE" OBJECT??

Here and in other New Testament books, authors use three Greek forms of words for "Love".

- *Eros* is more commonly found in Old Testament books.
- *Philos* is brotherly love—friendship love—companionship love.
- *Agape* has to do with a concern for the well-being of the other person.

1c. "I have become sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal

Paul is saying that speaking in tongues, in the absence of love, simply makes loud noises. While a loud noise can serve a purpose, constant loud noises merely irritate and distract.

2a. “If I have the gift of prophecy

As noted above, Paul singles out prophecy as a superior gift, second only to being an apostle, but prophecy without love has no value and ascribes no value to the prophet.

2b. “and know all mysteries and all knowledge

Keep in mind that Corinth is a Greek city, and the Greeks prize philosophy, wisdom, knowledge, and mysteries.

- Mysteries, as used here, has to do with Godly secrets that God has chosen to reveal to us.
- Knowledge, as used here, has to do with special God-given knowledge...spiritual understanding.

Note that Paul uses the word “all” three times—“all mysteries and all knowledge and...all faith.” He is talking about complete mastery of mysteries and knowledge and faith. I think it is like having Ph.D. degrees in these subjects.

No matter how complete the mastery, these virtues, in the absence of love, conveys no value to the one who has mastered them.

2c. “and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains

This language came from Jesus, who said, “Have faith in God. For most certainly I tell you, whoever may tell this mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast into the sea,’ and doesn’t doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is happening; he shall have whatever he says” (Mark 11:22-23).

I believe we have talked about this before, but this verse brings me to a mental picture of Paul setting at his desk with the writings of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John open before him as the reference points for writing letters to his New Church Startups.

ANY OPINIONS ON MY THOUGHTS HERE?

2d. “but don’t have love, I am nothing

Paul says that, without love, none of these things—the understanding of mysteries, the possession of knowledge, or even powerful faith—imputes any value to the one who possesses them.

WHICH KIND OF LOVE DO YOU THINK PAUL IS TALKING ABOUT IN THIS PASSAGE?
Eros, Philos, or Agape? What leads you to your decision?

3a. “If I dole out all my goods

The Greek word Paul uses means “a morsel or piece of food, particularly of bread.” When Paul speaks here of giving away all his possessions, the implication is that this charity is done on behalf of the

poor—to give food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, etc. I believe Paul is saying that even sacrificial giving on behalf of the needy means nothing on the donor if the giving is done in the absence of love.

3b. “and if I hand over my body so that I may boast

There is a textual problem here. Some manuscripts read, “if I hand over my body so that I may boast,” which could suggest selling oneself into slavery and using the proceeds on behalf of the needy. Other manuscripts read, “if I hand over my body to be burnt,” which suggests martyrdom by fire.

I really have no idea. Let’s just guess...THOUGHTS?

3c. “but don’t have love, it profits me nothing

But Paul says that even great sacrifice, in the absence of love, gains the person nothing. In other words, God will not reward a person for sacrificial giving done in the absence of love.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7. Love bears all things

4. Love is patient and is kind; love doesn’t envy. Love doesn’t brag, is not proud, 5. doesn’t behave itself inappropriately, doesn’t seek its own way, is not provoked, takes no account of evil; 6. doesn’t rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; 7. Bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

4a. “Love is patient

The Greek word is derived from two words, *long* and *anger*. His meaning is to be long-suffering—to endure irritants without allowing one’s anger to lash out in retaliation.

I believe God calls us to that same kind of long-suffering love for each other.

4b. “and is kind

The Greek word for “kind” is an action-word. It suggests being helpful—doing good works. The patience of verse 4a involves restraint or holding back like a negative action. The kindness of verse 4b involves action, stepping forward to solve a problem or to share a burden or to meet a need.

And oh wow, have we faced that lately. THOUGHTS?

4c. “love doesn’t envy

The word for “envy” is related to our word *zeal*, which can be either positive or negative. In the context of this verse, it suggests an intense desire for something that belongs to someone else—jealousy or covetousness or envy.

4d. “Love doesn’t brag

The person who is focused on the welfare of the other person cannot at the same time be self-centered and egotistical. Once again, love and boastfulness are like oil and water. They cannot abide together.

4e. “is not proud

This is the word that is sometimes translated “puffed up”. I believe Paul is saying that a person who loves another person with *agape* will try to build up the other person rather than trying to puff up his/her own reputation.

5a. “doesn’t behave itself inappropriately

I find it odd that this word is part of verse 5 rather than verse 4. It fits better with “boastful or arrogant” than with the words that follow.

The actions of the Corinthian Christians at the Lord’s Table are examples of inappropriate behavior (read - 11:17-22). Those who have food eat it while those who do not go hungry. Some of them become drunk on the communion wine. In doing these things, they show their contempt for the church and they humiliate the poor in their midst.

5b. “It does not insist on its own way

The person who loves another with *agape* love cannot at the same time be selfish and demanding of his/her own prerogatives. *Agape* love and selfishness are mutually exclusive.

5c. “doesn’t seek its own way, is not provoked, takes no account of evil

Not being irritable or resentful is related to patience. The person who is not irritable or resentful doesn’t have a quick temper—and doesn’t harbor resentments.

Again I see this as a characteristic of God, who is long suffering and who calls us to emulate this Godly behavior.

6a. “doesn’t rejoice in unrighteousness

There is something in us that enjoys seeing someone slip on the ice (ouch and be careful). There is something in us that loves to watch a powerful person take the walk to the squad car after being arrested. There is something in us that is happy to see a proud/arrogant person humbled. There is something in us that loves to gossip.

But none of those attitudes have been implanted in us by God.

6b. “but rejoices with the truth

The Greek word Paul uses generally means something that is true instead of false. However, in this context, it refers to behavior that is true to Godly standards—upright behavior.

7a. “bears all things”

Paul has been telling us what *agape* love does not do. Now he tells us what it does do. First, *agape* love bears all things. The commentaries convey this message two ways. The first is to cover or conceal something. The second is to forebear or to endure. The second meaning is probably what is intended here.

7b. “believes all things

The Greek verb for believes means to believe in something or someone—to trust. The person who “believes all things” is the opposite of a skeptic, whose basic approach to life is to doubt or disbelieve.

7c. “hopes all things

The person who loves with *agape* love doesn’t give up easily on the other person. I see two actions:

1. He/she can recognize that there is a problem, but hopes to resolve the problem.
2. He/she maintains an optimistic, positive attitude rather than a pessimistic, negative attitude.

7d. “endures all things

The Greek word endures comes from two Greek words (under) and (remain). It suggests a “hunkered down,” defensive posture that endures and perseveres in the face of hardship.

1 Corinthians 13:8-13. Love never ends

8. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will be done away with. Where there are various languages, they will cease. Where there is knowledge, it will be done away with. 9. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part; 10. but when that which is complete has come, then that which is partial will be done away with. 11. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I felt as a child, I thought as a child. Now that I have become a man, I have put away childish things. 12. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I will know fully, even as I was also fully known. 13. But now faith, hope, and love remain these three. The greatest of these is love.

8a. “Love never fails

Paul now contrasts love with three of the spiritual gifts prophecy, speaking in tongues, and knowledge. Love will never come to an end, but the need for spiritual gifts is temporary. Paul is thinking eschatologically. In this verse, he contrasts what we experience in this world with what we can expect to experience once the kingdom of God is fully realized.

8b. “But where there are prophecies, they will be done away with. Where there are various languages, they will cease. Where there is knowledge, it will be done away with

Unlike love, prophecy, speaking in tongues, and knowledge will come to an end when the kingdom of God is fully realized. It isn’t that they aren’t good gifts, but that they are useful only in this world. They won’t be necessary once the kingdom of God is fully realized.

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

Paul is letting the church know that even though the gifts of knowledge and prophecy are God-given, they are incomplete

10. “but when that which is complete has come, then that which is partial will be done away with

The word can be translated “complete,” “whole,” “unblemished,” or “undivided.” Once again, Paul is thinking eschatologically here.

This is a verse that has personal meaning for me. Paul indicates that when Christ comes again to usher in the kingdom of God in all its fullness, we will have no need for such things as prophecy, which constitute partial revelation for the time being.

11. “When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I felt as a child, I thought as a child. Now that I have become a man, I have put away childish things

It would be possible to read this verse as a rebuke to the Corinthian Christians, who have failed to “put away childish things.” That, however, is not Paul’s intent. He is instead contrasting the world as we know it now with the world that is to come.

12a. “For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face

Once again, Paul contrasts what we experience in this age with what we will experience in the age to come. The Greek word can mean “looking glass” or “mirror.” We need to keep in mind that people in Paul’s day didn’t have the kind of high-quality mirrors that we take for granted today. We are accustomed to looking into a mirror and seeing an exact reflection that tells us how we look.

In Paul’s day, however, the mirrors were usually made of metal, and the reflections that people would see in such mirrors would be much less helpful.

12b. “Now I know in part, but then I will know fully, even as I was also fully known

Once again, Paul contrasts what we experience now with what we will experience in the new age. We know imperfectly now, but in the age to come God will reveal the spiritual mysteries completely. Just as God knows us fully now, in the age to come, we will also know God fully.

I really like this interpretation of Paul’s writing. YOUR THOUGHTS?

13. “But now faith, hope, and love remain these three. The greatest of these is love

The Corinthian Christians, with their Greek heritage, prize philosophy, wisdom, knowledge, and mysteries. Paul, however, draws their attention to higher values—faith, hope, and love.

It seems surprising that Paul would introduce faith and hope at the end of this love-chapter. His only mention of faith so far has been to note that “if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but don’t have love, I am nothing” (v. 2). He hasn’t mentioned hope at all.

**AND SO ENDS THE LOVE CHAPTER WE OFTEN REFER TO IN SPECIAL EVENTS, MARRIAGE, ETC.
WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ABOUT TODAY’S LOVE STUDY?**

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The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine on you
and be gracious to you
and give you peace.

Numbers 6:24-26