

Paul's Song Of Love.

Text: 1 Cor 13:1-13

Suggested Hymns:

165, 609, 164, 286, 354

1) He Compares Or Contrasts Love

2) He Analyses Love

3) He Proclaims The Durability Of Love

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is 1 Corinthians 13:1-13, *¹ Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.*

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, but have not love, I am nothing. ³ And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.

⁴ Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; ⁵ does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; ⁶ does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; ⁷ bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

⁸ Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. ⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part. ¹⁰ But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.

¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke 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 in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.

¹³ And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love. (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Paul, the writer of our Epistle, is the great expounder of the doctrine of justification by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The nucleus, the heart and soul, of his teachings is the divine truth, that in no other way can a person reach heaven than by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And what do we hear in our Epistle? Paul sings the praise of love. Our text is a glowing tribute to love. In the Apostle's mind there is nothing in the world to surpass love.

At times he seems to be at a loss how to find ample words with which to express the greatness and supremacy of love. And finally he reaches the climax when he ranks love higher than anything else, even higher than faith, when he says ¹³ *And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.*

Does not Paul contradict himself when he places love above faith? Does he not oppose those words which he wrote to the Romans in Romans 3:28, ²⁸ *Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.* And to the Ephesians in Ephesians 2:8, ⁸ *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God?* Indeed Paul does not contradict himself.

There is not a word in our Epistle to justify the conclusion that, according to Paul's teaching, love will lead to heaven. That which effects our salvation is, and always remains, God's grace in Christ apprehended by faith.

But faith is not what so many take it for. Faith is not a dreary thought in the brain or a mere conviction in the mind. Faith is a living power in the heart. Faith generates love. Faith and love are two inseparable things. Love is the test of faith. Where love is missing, there faith is lacking. This is the reason why Paul attaches such importance to love and sings the song of love.

Let us consider, then *Paul's Song Of Love*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. He Compares Or Contrasts Love.

Love is the word which the Apostle employs. But he uses the word in quite a different sense than it is generally used nowadays. What do we call love? An

act of love or a charitable deed, in our estimation, is giving to the poor. Paul means more than that. He means love, love in its fullest sense, true love to God and the neighbour, love resting upon, and emanating from, a true faith.

Look at his comparisons, and you will see that Paul means love and nothing else. First he compares love with eloquence. *“¹ Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.”*

Eloquence is a glorious gift of God. But what is the greatest orator without the fire of love in his soul? Let the blood-thirsty anarchist, terrorist or dictator preach death and destruction with fierce and fiery words, and what good does he accomplish? Or let a man speak in the highest terms of divine things without the spirit of love, and how dull will he be as a sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal!

Paul compares love to more things. *“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, but have not love, I am nothing.”*

He compares love with prophecy, with mysteries, and with faith. Why is love greater than prophecy? Because love is the mark of saving faith, and a man may be a prophet, or an expounder of sound doctrine, and still be without a spark of love and hence without personal faith.

Balaam was a prophet, and a true prophet, too, but of what avail were his prophecies to his own unbelieving and unloving heart when he attempted to curse Israel?

And why is love greater than mysteries and knowledge? Because a man may be a great thinker, and solve mysteries, and learn a great many things, and even know all about his own soul's salvation, but at the same time be an unbeliever who lacks the mark of faith, which is love.

Be he ever so wise and learned, God does not accept him, while He accepts the ignorant who cling to Him in a child-like faith and show their simple faith by the deeds of love.

And why is love greater than faith, greater than that faith which works wonders? Because a man may possess this wonder-working faith, and still be

without the saving and justifying faith, may be an unbeliever, a dead instrument in the hands of God to accomplish His ends, as was the case with Balaam.

Paul continues to compare. “³ *And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.*” Feeding the poor — this is exactly what we call charity in our days. And to show how far we have drifted away from real true love, people in our days will arrange and attend what they call charity balls, charity suppers, charity fairs, and the like, when their real object is to have a good time and to earn the praise that they have helped the poor.

Paul compares love with charity. And why is love greater than charity as we understand it? Because charity at its best is but a little bit of love; yes, there is a great deal of charity without love altogether. How much easier to drop a coin in the beggar’s hat on the street than to pass him by! In this way we often purchase relief from the sympathetic feelings aroused by the spectacle of misery. Love will act the part of the good Samaritan.

So we have seen that all those things which people consider great in this life are as nothing compared with love. Love is greater than eloquence, prophecy, mysteries, knowledge, faith, yes, even greater than martyrdom; for Paul says “*though I give my body to be burned*, that is, though I did this not from love based on faith, but for fame and glory, “*it profits me nothing.*”

2. He Analyses Love.

In the second part of our Epistle Paul analyses love as a noted English writer has said whose exposition we will follow in this second part of our discourse. Paul tells the different parts of love. He does not define love itself.

At a synodical meeting a minister wanted an exact definition of love. Dr. Walther answered him: We shall not attempt to define love. Love is like a beautiful rose which will be spoiled and destroyed if you pick it to pieces. But there is a difference between analysing and defining love.

Have you ever taken a glass prism in your hand, and held it up to see the beam of light pass through the glass? Then you will have noticed that the beam of light came out at the other side broken up into its component colours, the colours of the rainbow.

Likewise St. Paul passes this divine beam of light, love, through the prism of his inspired intellect, and it comes out on the other side broken up into its elements. This is what we may call the analysis, or the spectrum, of love. The spectrum of love, according to St. Paul, has nine ingredients: patience, kindness, well-wishing, humility, courtesy, unselfishness, good temper, harmlessness, and sincerity.

The first is patience. “*Love suffers long,*” and as Paul says further below, “*bears all things, endures all things.*” Love will put up with many insults and neglects. It will endure evil and injury and provocation, and not fly up in indignation and resentment, but wait in true patience and rather suffer the wrong.

The second is kindness. “*And is kind.*” Love seeks to please. Love seeks to make others happy. Have you ever noticed how much of your Saviour’s life was taken up in doing kind things? Wherever He found an opportunity He would make others happy. Follow His example! You will find opportunities everywhere. Kind words, kind features, kind deeds are the outgrowth of a heart overflowing with love.

The third is well-wishing. “*Love does not envy.*” You may see around you people blessed with riches while you are poor; people healthy and happy while you are sickly and miserable; people gifted and talented while you have no such gifts and talents. Do not envy them! Envy is a contemptible feeling of ill-will, of discontentment with your lot in this life, of begrudging others of what they are and possess. Wish well to all, friend or foe, and rejoice in their happiness!

The fourth is humility. “*Love does not parade itself, is not puffed up.*” After you have been kind, after love has come forth and done its beautiful work, go back into the shade again and say nothing about it. We learn in Matthew 6:3, ³ *But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.* For *Love does not parade itself, is not puffed up.*

The fifth is courtesy. Love ⁵ *does not behave rudely.* This is love in its relation to etiquette. The rules of etiquette change according to the custom of the times, and they are different in the different countries. But a person with a heart filled with love, no matter how untutored, will not behave rudely, even if he would transgress the standing rules of society.

The sixth ingredient is unselfishness. Love *does not seek its own*. By nature we all seek our own, our own comfort, our own pleasure, and our own welfare. True love will undergo many hardships, and deprive itself of its own comfort, and find pleasure in serving others, remembering that it is better to give than to receive.

The seventh is good temper. Love *is not provoked*. Bad temper is generally considered an excuse. If a person has been provoked and in his anger says and does things which he ought not do and say, we are quick to excuse him and to say; *His temper got away with him*.

But love is not easily provoked. Love suppresses those angry words that rush to our lips when we have been wronged, and stays the hand that is ready to strike when insults have been heaped upon us.

The eighth is harmlessness. Love *thinks no evil*. There are people who delight in hunting up and raking out the faults and hidden sins of others. These are cold, loveless people. True love will hide the faults of others and not expose the sins of other people, but draw a veil over them, and not give way to suspicions, but put the best construction on everything.

The ninth and last ingredient is sincerity. Love ⁶ *does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth*. In other words the Apostle is telling us that love refuses to make capital out of others' faults and to listen to slanders and defaming reports about the neighbour. It will not believe such evil reports until they are confirmed. It will feel sorry to find them true, and glad to find them unfounded.

So these are the ingredients of love. This is the true analysis of love. What a glorious place to live in this world it would be, if true love dwelled among us!

3. He Proclaims The Durability Of Love.

In the last part of our Epistle Paul proclaims the durability of love. The heading, the theme, of the entire latter part he frames in these words: ⁸ *Love never fails*. What does he mean? He is saying that love lasts, and he proclaims the durability of love.

There are great things which seem to be of a lasting duration. There are wonderful spiritual gifts in the kingdom of God. But all these things shall fail and pass away.

God says through St. Paul, *But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away.* ⁹ *For we know in part and we prophesy in part.* ¹⁰ *But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.*

And to illustrate these last words, he continues, ¹¹ *When I was a child, I spoke 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 in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.*

And finally he reaches the climax in the song of love, and finishes with the majestic words: ¹³ *And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.*

From these words we see that everything is temporary, fleeting, and vanishing. There is nothing that will last. Heaven and earth shall pass away. The agencies for the purpose of building up God's kingdom shall pass away. Some of them have ceased long ago. No prophecies, no new revelations have been brought forth since the visions and prophecies have been sealed up and the Scriptures have been completed with the book of Revelation.

The wonderful gift of speaking with tongues, of speaking languages never learned, ceased with the death of the holy Apostles. And what of these three that abide in the Church, faith, hope, and love? The time will come when we need faith no more, because it will be changed into sight when our eyelids close in death.

The time will come when we need hope no more, because it will be changed into fruition, and we shall be in actual possession of all those precious things which we hoped to receive in heaven.

But never will there be a time when love shall cease, and fail, and pass away. It endures forever. What would heaven be without love? God is love. There we shall love God. There we shall love one another.

And as imperfect as our love, both to God and the neighbour, is upon this earth, so that constantly it needs to be improved upon, in heaven our love shall be perfect and never fail.

May the Lord grant us all, His grace that from Him who first loved us, loved us unto death, we learn how to love, and increase in love until we shall be received into the realms of eternal bliss. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.