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not only in resurrection body, but in that wondrous holiness and beauty of character, both of spirit and of soul, which are His. Thus this section of the chapter reaches its climax. We shall be 'conformed to the image of His Son' (Rom. 8:29).

THE PRE-EMINENCE OF LOVE

(1 Cor. 13)

R. NORTH

Our English word 'charity' commonly denotes tolerance, benevolence, or almsgiving which, as 1 Cor. 13:3 shows, may be without love. 'Love' is the word used in the N.T. for the highest form of love: the love of the Father for His Son, the love which the Father has given to us, the love that His children should have for one another. We could not say 'God is charity'. God is love.

The gospel and epistles of John are so full of love that we might almost imagine 1 Cor. 13 came from the pen of the apostle John. Yet it is in perfect harmony from what we know of Paul from his other writings. For in many of his epistles we can almost hear and feel the throbbing of his heart, as he longs after the saints in the tender mercies of Christ Jesus. Moreover, this chapter fits in very beautifully with its setting. In chapter 12 the apostle writes concerning spiritual gifts; in chapter 14 concerning the exercise of spiritual gifts, and of godly order in the church of God: chapter 13 comes in between to show the spirit in which every gift is to be exercised—the spirit of love. The Corinthians were in danger of coveting the lesser gifts, such as healing and speaking with tongues. The apostle tells them to desire earnestly the greater gifts (12:31). 'Since ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church' (14:12). We ought to desire to be able to speak unto men to edification, to exhortation, and comfort; to build up, to stir up, and to cheer up. Yet there is a way of more surpassing excellence, a pathway upon which everyone of us must tread, whatever our gifts or place in the church, if we would be of any value in the service of God, and of any blessing to the saints: *the way of love*.

Occupied with the one main theme, chapter 13 divides itself into three parts: v. 1-3 the necessity for love; v. 4-7 the character of love; v. 8-13 the permanence of love.

The necessity for love

With characteristic humility, the apostle says: 'Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am become sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal'. The word 'sounding' is used, in the only other N.T. passage where it occurs, of the 'roaring' of the sea (Luke 21:25). We all know that the sea and waves, as they roar and roll, make a tremendous noise. They may even arouse wonder and admiration, but in time may become distressing and monotonous. 'Sounding brass' is simply a piece of metal which, when struck, will make a noise. The only other occurrence of the word translated 'tinkling' is in Mark 5:38, where it is used of the 'wailing' of the professional mourners in the house of Jairus. One does not expect much depth of grief from an undertaker's man who assists at a funeral, but his sympathy is respectable compared with that of people who gain their livelihood by 'wailing' around the bed on which lies the corpse of someone they probably never knew. These are the words used of the man who speaks with eloquent lips, without the love of God burning in his soul.

If the Corinthians set their heart upon speaking with 'tongues', the apostle valued the 'gift of prophecy'. Yet in verse 2 he says: '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 love, I am nothing'. Whatever I may be in my own estimation, or in the estimation of others, I am really 'nothing'.

In verse 3 he goes farther still, and says: 'Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing'. Elsewhere he pleads for liberality in giving. In his 2nd epistle he finds pleasure in making known to the church of God in Corinth the liberality of the churches in Macedonia. He knew how Barnabas, and others who believed, having land, sold it and laid the money

at the apostles' feet; and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need (Acts 5:32-37). In Romans 12:20 he uses the same word as in 1 Cor. 13:3: 'if thine enemy hunger, *feed* him'; but here he is warning against ostentation in giving. I may dole out all I possess in charity, but if love is not the motive 'it profiteth me nothing'. I shall receive no commendation at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Whatever the advantage to others, I profit nothing. I may even 'give my body to be burned', but if love is not the compelling motive it profiteth me nothing. In Daniel 3 we read of three men who gave their bodies to be burned rather than worship the golden image which Nebuchadnezzar had set up; and we know how wonderfully God preserved them. In the early days of the church's history, many of the martyrs were burnt at the stake rather than recant and deny their Lord. When Polycarp, as a very old man, was called upon to deny his Lord, he said: 'For 80 long years have I served that blessed Master, and He has never given me any cause why I should deny Him'; and he gave his body to be burned. There was LOVE behind that. It was the love of Christ that enabled Latimer and Ridley and many others to go to the stake; yet these words of 1 Cor. 13 formed the text from which Dr Smith preached at their martyrdom. In verses 1 to 3, therefore, we see the supreme necessity for love. Apart from love I produce nothing (v. 1); I am nothing (v. 2); I profit nothing (v. 3).

The character of love

In verses 4 to 7 we virtually have a presentation of the character of Christ, set in contrast to the spirit exhibited by the church of God in Corinth. The apostle personifies love, and enumerates her graces in contrast to the deformities of character often displayed by those 'called saints'. All these traits of love were seen to perfection in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. If we were to substitute 'I' for 'love' in these verses, our shortcomings would be exposed immediately. No less than 15 characteristics of love are mentioned: seven positive and eight negative.

'Love suffereth long and is kind'. Longsuffering is love passive; kindness is love in activity: both are the precious fruit

of the Spirit. Someone has said: 'what we can do for another is the test of power; what we can suffer for another is the test of love.' Love has long patience, for which we ought to be eternally grateful. Our Lord not only suffered men to heap indignities upon Him: He never lost an opportunity of showing kindness. Since we have 'tasted that the Lord is kind', we should be 'kind one to another', and, as we have opportunity, do good unto all men. So shall we be 'sons of the Highest', like Him in character, 'for He is kind to the unthankful and to the evil' (Luke 6:36).

'Love envieth not'. Love is never jealous of others. Of course, there is such a thing as godly jealousy. In his second letter the apostle says 'I am jealous over you with godly jealousy; for I have espoused you to one Husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ' (2 Cor. 11:2). In a good sense he applies this word to the desire for spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:31; 14:1; 14:39). Here he uses the word in a bad sense, for the 'desire to have' the best gifts, the desire to excel to the edifying of the church, exposes one to the danger of being emulous of others. The patriarchs moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt (Acts 7:9). Saul envied David: 'they have ascribed unto David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed but thousands; and what can he have more but the kingdom?' And Saul eyed David from that day and forward. Envy, in a Christian, is a mark of carnality. 'Ye are yet carnal', said the apostle in ch. 3:2: 'for whereas there is among you envying and strife and divisions, are ye not carnal and walk as men?' James tells us 'where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work' (3:16).

'Love vaunteth not itself'; is not insolent and vainglorious; makes no parade of its own success; does not seek the admiration and applause of others. 'Is not puffed up'; is not conceited. The Corinthians were puffed up, even when there was gross immorality in their midst. The fact that Paul had used this word five times already in this epistle shows how he had noted these ugly symptoms of pride. 'Doth not behave itself unseemly'; is never rude or ill-mannered; its whole department is decorous and becoming. 'Seeketh not her own', but seeks the good of others at whatever cost to itself. 'All seek their own, not the things of

Christ Jesus', wrote the apostle to the saints in Philippi. Timothy was a notable exception, having cherished the disposition that is in Christ Jesus. 'Love is not provoked'. I understand the word 'easily' which occurs in our A.V. is not found in any M.S. When roused to bitterness or anger, we may feel proud of the fact that we are not 'easily' provoked. Love is not provoked. 'Thinketh no evil;' does not impute evil. We are apt to impute wrong motives to others, to put the worst construction upon what other people do and say. Love credits others with the best of motives. It does not harbour resentment for injuries received or imagined; nor make a mental note of them with a view to retaliation; 'Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth with the truth'. There is an unholy temptation to gloat over the wrongdoing of others, or at least to talk about it with relish. Love never does that. Instead of finding pleasure in the iniquity of others, love mourns over it and feels with God about it. 'Beareth (or covereth) all things'. 'Believeth all things' is not the credulity of the easily deceived, but the absence of suspicion from the nature. Instead of suspecting the worst of other people, love is eager to believe the best. Even when there is reason for doubt, love 'hopeth all things'; and, if the hope meets with repeated disappointment, love 'endureth all things'. The word 'endureth' is a military word, and means to sustain the assault of an enemy. The final proof of love is its ability to endure.

Here is an enumeration of the qualities and characteristics of love that should convince the most casual reader that true love is not the sickly, sentimental thing often depicted by the world, or allowed to pass among professing Christians. It shines in all its glory, radiant and triumphant, wholesome and attractive, on the sacred page. It has been displayed in the life of the Lord Jesus, and will be seen in us in the measure in which Christ is seen. God has given us many a true token, here and elsewhere in the Scriptures, that we may know what love really is.

The permanence of love

From the positive and negative qualities of love described in verses 4 to 7, the apostle turns in verses 8 to 13 to speak of the

permanence of love, in contrast to the transient nature of the gifts on which the saints in Corinth set so much store. They had an exaggerated estimate of the value of gifts, particularly of the lesser but more showy gifts, and undervalued the qualities of faith, hope and love, which abide eternally.

'Love never faileth' summarises all that has gone before, and connects with all that follows. Prophecies may fail, tongues may cease, knowledge may vanish away, but love will always remain. New Testament prophets were one of the two foundation gifts of the Ascended Lord, before the canon of scripture was completed. With the completion of the scriptures the need for prophesying, by direct revelation, no longer exists, and has therefore passed away. Teachers, though in some respects resembling the prophets, are expressly distinguished from them (cp. Acts 13:1; Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:29). We are not to expect any fresh revelation. If anyone today professes to have received a fresh revelation it is a false profession; the man is a false prophet. 'Whether there be tongues, they shall cease'. If not, why the labour of missionaries learning other languages? As a matter of fact, the gift of tongues was about the first gift to be discontinued.

In verses 11 and 12 the apostle employs two illustrations to teach us the difference between the present and the future. One is derived from the difference between childhood and maturity (v. 11); and the other from the difference between seeing through a window obscurely, and seeing face to face (v. 12). It may be that, in verse 11, the apostle is referring to the infantile condition of the saints in Corinth; and that he is enforcing his argument with an illustration applied to himself, so that these vainglorious Corinthians might judge their childish ways and think and act as men of full Christian growth and ripe spiritual maturity. That the whole of this present age is likened to natural childhood, the perfect state not having yet arrived, is confirmed by verse 12. 'For now,' during this present time, 'we see through a glass darkly, but then', when that which is perfect is come, 'face to face'. The only other occurrence of this word 'glass' or 'mirror' is in James 1:23, where it is a question of beholding ourselves. Here it is a question of beholding the Lord. The

word is used for the window through which men looked at objects outside the house, which were made, not of clear transparent glass, as now, but of semi-transparent materials (vide footnote to a new translation by J.N.D.). During this present time we have the privilege of seeing Christ in the scriptures; in type, in shadow, in symbol, in prophecy; in the law of Moses, the prophets and the psalms; in the gospels, the Acts, the epistles, and in the revelation of Jesus Christ. But, however great the privilege of seeing Christ in all the scriptures, it is only partial vision compared with what it will be to see Him face to face. The allusion is to Numbers 12:8. Of an ordinary prophet God said: 'I will make Myself known to him in a vision, and speak to him in a dream'; but of Moses He said: 'With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark sayings, and the form of Jehovah shall he behold'. 'Now I know in part', says the apostle, 'but then shall I fully know, even as also I am fully known'. We shall see Him then, no longer through a dim window obscurely, as through the ancient mirrors, but face to face.

'And now abideth faith, hope, love: these three: but the greatest of these is love.' The word 'now' does not mean during this present life, in contrast with the future. It is the conclusion of the whole argument. It is often said that faith will give place to sight, and hope to fruition; but the same permanence is attributed to faith, hope and love. 'These three' are contrasted with transient gifts and knowledge. There will always be new and endless manifestations of the glory and love of God to lay hold upon, and to anticipate: therefore faith and hope will always abide. Faith, hope and love will abide, even when that which is perfect has come. They are linked together at least ten times in the New Testament; but the greatest of these is love, for 'God is love'.