

TITLE: THE FOUNDATION OF CHRISTIANITY

TEXT: 1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-13

INTRO: “For God so loved the world...” (Jn 3:16). It was love that caused God to create us, and to send His only to save us (Rom 5:8). This love became the foundation for His church (Christianity), and still is for us today. Jesus’ answer to the question regarding the greatest command was two-fold: love God and love others. One of the greatest statements ever made about a congregation is found in 2 Thess 1:3 – “their love toward one another abounded.” We can do **nothing** that God commands without love for Him AND for one another! This truth is what Paul speaks of as the “more excellent way” in 1 Cor 12:31.

I. NECESSITY OF LOVE (v. 1-3):

- A. (v. 1) *Though I speak in the tongues of men & angels* (whatever language they speak)... He starts w/tongues because it seems this was the most popular (coveted) gift at Corinth. Without love it’s all just noise! It’s useless!
- B. (v. 2a) *Though I have prophecy, understand all mysteries, and all knowledge* – even God’s direct words are useless w/out love!
- C. (v. 2b) *Though I have all faith to move mountains* (per Christ’s teaching)... *I am nothing!* Love is the *reason* to do such a thing!
- D. (v. 3a) *Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor* – Christ required this of the rich, young ruler (Mt 19:21). But love **MUST** be the motivating factor! Benevolence is useless (to the giver) without love.
- E. (v. 3b) *Though I give my body to be burned* – Even a personal sacrifice would be useless (what other motivation could there be?). If you’re not exercising these gifts out of love, then *why?* There is no other good & acceptable reason! These gifts were very important to them, since they didn’t have the completed word. So for us, we could say, “Though I have the Word, and may have memorized the whole thing, if I have not love, I am nothing!” This shows us the necessity of love in everything we do!

II. INFLUENCE OF LOVE (v. 4-7): the characteristics, actions, and influence of love

- (v. 4) **1** *Love suffers long* (patience, forbearance) – Love puts up with others. Aren’t we grateful for this **love** of others toward us?!
2 *Love is kind* (gentle); **3** *Love envieth not* (covet; jealous) – this is greed; it should never be in the church (desiring what others have (his/her gift); cf. focusing on godly things – the heavenly reward doesn’t need to be hoarded!). (*E.g., Phil 1:15-18)
4-5 *Love vaunteth not itself* (doesn’t boast or brag); *is not puffed up* (same as in 1 Cor 8:1 -knowledge puffs up, love builds up.)
- (v. 5) **6** *Love doesn’t behave itself unseemly* (inappropriate, indecent) – behaving this way ignores love. Love stops this behavior!
7 *Love seeketh not its own* (is not selfish; opposite of love) – **Jam 3:14-16** - *bitter envying & strife... confusion & every evil work.*
8 *Love is not easily provoked* (irritated) – He’s not saying you can’t get angry. Rather, love keeps us from getting angry quickly and flying off the handle (an elder is not to be soon angry - **Titus 1:7**).
9 *Love thinketh no [taketh not account of] evil* – It doesn’t keep an account of (calculate) flaws, bear grudges, etc. (this attitude is to be put away - **Eph 4:31; 1 Pet 2:1**). It doesn’t *ignore* sin, but it also doesn’t assume it. It gives the benefit of the doubt. How often people jump to conclusions before hearing the matter (**Prov 18:13**)!
- (v. 6) **10** *Love rejoiceth not in iniquity [unrighteousness], but rejoiceth in truth*. Christian love is about truth. We rejoice in the truth of God’s existence, the truth of His love for us, the truth of His Word (**Jn 17:17**), and the knowledge of good and evil it provides. Love then rejoices in what is good & true, but never in sin (that which is unrighteous). True agape love won’t let us rejoice when God’s laws are broken (**Eph 5:11**), but causes us to rejoice when they are obeyed.
- (v. 7) Summary – *bears, believes, hopes, endures all things* (all **GOOD** things)
 - 11** Love bears all things (“protects, covers, preserves”) – Love causes brethren to look out for, bear with, & protect one another.
 - 12** Love believes all things – believes the good in brothers and sisters (but not the negative if there are no facts to support it)
 - 13** Love hopes all things – desires and expects all good things in brethren (expect the best from your brethren)
 - 14** Love endures all things – perseveres and puts up with all things (love can outlast anything). It keeps marriages together!

III. ENDURANCE OF LOVE (v. 8-13): permanence of love

- A. (v. 8) What will and won’t fail: Love *won’t*, but spiritual gifts *will*. Prophecies (messages directly from God); tongues (ability to speak other languages in order to confirm the prophet’s word); knowledge (miraculous knowledge from God). These three gifts are representative of all the spiritual gifts, which will fail (end).
- B. (v. 9-12) Teaching and explanation regarding the temporary nature of spiritual gifts:
 - 1. (v. 9) We know in part and therefore prophesy in part (partially, not completely...yet).
 - 2. (v. 10) But, when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part (gifts–partial knowledge) shall vanish away. **When?**
 - a. What is the “perfect?” **Strong:** “complete.” **Thayer:** “wanting nothing necessary to completeness.”
 - b. Contrast is between ‘in part’ & ‘perfect.’ Since ‘in part’ is partial knowledge, then ‘perfect’ is **complete knowledge**.
 - c. Note: The ‘perfect’ is *not* Christ. The Greek word (“telios”) is neuter. Christ is **never** neuter, always masculine.
 - d. Jesus promised his apostles that the Holy Spirit would teach *them* ALL things, bring to *their* remembrance ALL Christ had said, & guide *them* into ALL truth (**John 14:26; 16:13**). Peter affirms that this had happened before the end of his own life (**2 Pet 1:3,14**). Paul here says they knew only in part still. If this “perfect/complete” is Christ’s return, then apparently the Holy Spirit never did for the apostles what Christ said He would do (and Jesus & Peter were wrong).
 - 3. (v. 11) A physical illustration– Physically speaking, I was childish as a child, but I grew out of it when I became a man.
 - 4. (v. 12) A spiritual conclusion– spiritually speaking, 1st century Christians were growing up as Christ’s new church, receiving little by little, as a child moving to solid food. **Jn 16:12** – “*I have many things to say, but you cannot bear them now...*”
- C. (v. 13) What will NOT pass away: faith, hope, love (v. 8); and the greatest is love. I can claim to have faith in God, hope of His coming – that I will be in Heaven with him. But I **cannot** truly have these things if I don’t have love (for God, brethren, & lost).

CONCLUSION: To Corinth: Don’t brag about spiritual gifts, which are temporary; pursue love, which is eternal and foundational! A congregation who truly loves God *and* loves one another fervently (1 Pet 4:8) can & will do great things. Each member should feel this love, acceptance, and encouragement at all times. Visitors feel this love and friendship when they’re here, and want to be a part of it. And certainly the non-Christian, with whom we’re studying, feels this love in our desire for him to be saved. These are all examples of Christ’s love being displayed in us! This love was so much greater than any spiritual gifts back then, and it’s more important than any ability you may have today.