

The Greatest Gift Is Love

***Key Verse: "Now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity."
—I Corinthians 13:13***

***Selected Scripture:
I Corinthians 13***

He said love was of greater importance than the ability to comprehend the great mysteries of God, witnessing to the cause of Christ, or even sacrificing one's earthly possessions to benefit others. Without the genuine, heartfelt motive of love prompting such actions, they would be profitless.—I Cor. 13:1-3

Paul then articulates characteristics related to true charity, or "love" as it would be more appropriately rendered. "Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things."—vss. 4-7

After describing the qualities possessed by those who exercise the spirit of love, Paul contrasts the permanent nature of love with the temporary character of the various

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Corinth evidently placed great emphasis upon the outward manifestation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, these were important during the period of the Early Church. However, Paul emphasized that the indwelling spirit of love was of more surpassing excellence than these gifts.

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gifts of the Spirit. He notes that love “never faileth,” meaning it will continue throughout eternity, whereas the miraculous gifts were both temporary and partial. (vss. 8-10) Some Christians teach that the miraculous gifts which were prevalent during the Early Church continue to be manifested even today. Paul asserts in our lesson, however, that these gifts conferred by the laying on of hands from the apostles would cease. (Acts 8:18) They would no longer be necessary since the inspired writings of the Bible, when completed, would be acknowledged as the source of God’s truth.—II Tim. 3:15-17

Since the earth is to be “filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea,” the ability to accumulate information and understand God’s word will not cease. (Hab. 2:14) It is, rather, the miraculous inspirations and revelations of divine truths at the forefront of the Gospel Age which appear to be referenced in the Scripture passages of our lesson.—I Cor. 13:8-10

Paul also contrasts the gifts of the Spirit with the fruit of the Spirit. The former he likens to childlike immaturity in Christ. The mature believer, however, would focus upon an increased development of the Holy Spirit and its various fruits and graces as more desired qualities.—vs. 11

There are many Scriptures which emphasize love as being essential towards pleasing our Heavenly Father. During his earthly ministry, when questioned on this matter, Jesus indicated the importance of loving God supremely and loving one’s neighbor as himself as being the means of fulfilling the Law. (Matt 22:36-40) He also set forth the standard by which believers should measure their attainment of this all important characteristic. “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.” (John 13:34) Thus, in summary, our Key Verse emphasizes that the greatest of all gifts is the possession of “*agape*” love—the hallmark of an advanced Christian. Let us strive to attain that goal! ■