

Love Comes First

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

love is chiefest of all character traits which the follower of Christ must develop. The Apostle Paul mentions it first when he lists the fruits of the Spirit as recorded in Galatians 5:22,23. The Apostle Peter, when enumerating the Christian graces to be added to our faith, mentions love as the final crowning grace to be added above and beyond all others. (II Pet. 1:5-7) Thus love is both first and last, encompassing all other Christian virtues—the beginning and the end of all character traits to be developed by the Lord’s people. In today’s lesson, Paul devotes an entire chapter to this most important subject.

Paul begins this lesson by immediately getting to the heart of love’s importance. He says that one might possess every other talent and gift—speaking in foreign tongues, prophecy, understanding mysteries, having all knowledge, displaying supreme faith, giving to the poor, even laying down our life in sacrifice for others—and yet if any of these are done without love, “it profiteth me nothing.” (I Cor. 13:1-3) Love must be the motivating force behind any good work we might do. This leaves out any thought of pride or self-glory, making it critical that we each examine our motives continually to be sure that it is only love which prompts the good words and deeds rendered in our Christian walk.

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Paul lists in this lesson many actions, some which do, and others which do not result from the exercise of unselfish love. He says, "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres." (I Cor. 13:4-7, *New International Version*) Here again we each need to examine our actions to see if they are such as are motivated by love, or if they are of the kind that love does not prompt. If we find vestiges of fallen tendencies like envy, boasting, selfishness, anger, or other like qualities being displayed in our actions, then we must quickly go to the Lord in prayer, asking both for forgiveness as well as for the needed assistance to overcome our evident lack of love.

One of the important things to remember about love is that it is never-ending. Many of the other gifts of the Spirit ended when the apostles fell asleep in death. Other things, such as prophecies and knowledge, will be eventually all fulfilled, and open for each to fully understand without searching. Love, however, will abide eternally—it "never faileth." (I Cor. 13:8) For the endless ages of eternity, God's intelligent creation will have the privilege of showing love to their Creator, his Son Jesus, and to one another. The exercise of love will never become passé, nor lose any of its positive force among any who gain eternal life, whether in heaven or on earth. Love will become the single most important governing force in Christ's coming kingdom.

The Key Verse provides a fitting conclusion to this lesson, declaring that three key qualities—faith, hope, and charity [love]—are vital to the Christian's success. Yet, even among these, the greatest is love. How true ring the words, "He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love."—I John 4:8 ■