

# CHAPTER 13

In this chapter the apostle goes on to show more particularly what that more excellent way was of which he had just before been speaking. He recommends it,

- I.** By showing the necessity and importance of it (v. 1-3).
- II.** By giving a description of its properties and fruits (v. 4-7).
- III.** By showing how much it excels the best of gifts and other graces, by its continuance, when they shall be no longer in being, or of any use (v. 8 to the end).

## 1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-3

### ON SPIRITUAL GIFTS

Here the apostle shows what more excellent way he meant, or had in view, in the close of the former chapter, namely, *charity*, or, as it is commonly elsewhere rendered, *love* — *agape*: not what is meant by charity in our common use of the word, which most men understand of alms-giving, but love in its fullest and most extensive meaning, true love to God and man, a benevolent disposition of mind towards our fellow-christians, growing out of sincere and fervent devotion to God. This living principle of all duty and obedience is the more excellent way of which the apostle speaks, preferable to all gifts. Nay, without this the most glorious gifts are nothing, of no account to us, of no esteem in the sight of God. He specifies,

**1.** The gift of tongues: *Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal*, v. 1. Could a man speak all the languages on earth, and that with the greatest propriety, elegance, and fluency, could he talk like an angel, and yet be without charity, it would be all empty noise, mere unharmonious and useless sound, that would neither profit nor delight. It is not talking freely, nor finely, nor learnedly, of the things of God, that will save ourselves, or profit others, if we are destitute of holy love. It is the charitable heart, not the voluble tongue, that is acceptable with God.

The apostle specifies first this gift because hereupon the Corinthians seemed chiefly to value themselves and despise their brethren.

**2.** Prophecy, and the understanding of mysteries, and all knowledge. This without charity is as nothing, v. 2. Had a man ever so clear an understanding of the prophecies and types under the old dispensation, ever so accurate a knowledge of the doctrines of Christianity, nay, and this by inspiration, from the infallible dictates and illumination of the Spirit of God, without charity he would be nothing; all this would stand him in no stead. Note, A clear and deep head is of no signification, without a benevolent and charitable heart. It is not great knowledge that God sets a value upon, but true and hearty devotion and love.

**3.** Miraculous faith, the faith of miracles, or the faith by which persons were enabled to work miracles: *Had I all faith* (the utmost degree of this kind of faith), *that I could remove mountains* (or say to them, “Go hence into the midst of the sea,” and have my command obeyed, <sup><41123></sup>Mark 11:23), *and had no charity, I am nothing*. The most wonder-working faith, to which nothing is in a manner impossible, is itself nothing without charity. Moving mountains is a great achievement in the account of men; but one dram of charity is, in God's account, of much greater worth than all the faith of this sort in the world. Those may do many wondrous works in Christ's name whom yet he will disown, and bid depart from him, as workers of iniquity, <sup><41122></sup>Matthew 7:22, 23. Saving faith is ever in conjunction with charity, but the faith of miracles may be without it.

**4.** The outward acts of charity: *Bestowing his goods to feed the poor*, v. 3. Should all a man has be laid out in this manner, if he had no charity, it would profit him nothing. There may be an open and lavish hand, where there is no liberal and charitable heart. The external act of giving alms may proceed from a very ill principle. Vain-glorious ostentation, or a proud conceit of merit, may put a man to large expense this way who has no true love to God nor men. Our doing good to others will do none to us, if it be not well done, namely, from a principle of devotion and charity, love to God, and good-will to men. Note, If we leave charity out of religion, the most costly services will be of no avail to us. If we give away all we have, while we withhold the heart from God, it will not profit.

**5.** Even sufferings, and even those of the most grievous kind: *If we give our bodies to be burnt, without charity, it profiteth nothing*, v. 3. Should we sacrifice our lives for the faith of the gospel, and be burnt to death in

maintenance of its truth, this will stand us in no stead without charity, unless we be animated to these sufferings by a principle of true devotion to God, and sincere love to his church and people, and good-will to mankind. The outward carriage may be plausible, when the invisible principle is very bad. Some men have thrown themselves into the fire to procure a name and reputation among men. It is possible that the very same principle may have worked up some to resolution enough to die for their religion who never heartily believed and embraced it. But vindicating religion at the cost of our lives will profit nothing if we feel not the power of it; and true charity is the very heart and spirit of religion. If we feel none of its sacred heat in our hearts, it will profit nothing, though we be burnt to ashes for the truth. Note, The most grievous sufferings, the most costly sacrifices, will not recommend us to God, if we do not love the brethren; should we give our own bodies to be burnt, it would not profit us. How strange a way of recommending themselves to God are those got into who hope to do it by burning others, by murdering, and massacring, and tormenting their fellow-christians, or by any injurious usage of them! *My soul, enter not thou into their secrets.* If I cannot hope to recommend myself to God by giving my own body to be burnt while I have no charity, I will never hope to do it by burning or maltreating others, in open defiance to all charity.

## ✠ 1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-7

### CHARITY DESCRIBED

The apostle gives us in these verses some of the properties and effects of charity, both to describe and commend it, that we may know whether we have this grace and that if we have not we may fall in love with what is so exceedingly amiable, and not rest till we have obtained it. It is an excellent grace, and has a world of good properties belonging to it. As,

**I.** *It is long suffering* — *makrothymei*. It can endure evil, injury, and provocation, without being filled with resentment, indignation, or revenge. It makes the mind firm, gives it power over the angry passions, and furnishes it with a persevering patience, that shall rather wait and wish for the reformation of a brother than fly out in resentment of his conduct. It

will put up with many slights and neglects from the person it loves, and wait long to see the kindly effects of such patience on him.

**II.** *It is kind* — *chresteuetai*. It is benign, bountiful; it is courteous and obliging. *The law of kindness is in her lips*; her heart is large, and her hand open. She is ready to show favours and to do good. She seeks to be useful; and not only seizes on opportunities of doing good, but searches for them. This is her general character. She is patient under injuries, and apt and inclined to do all the good offices in her power. And under these two generals all the particulars of the character may be reduced.

**III.** Charity suppresses envy: *It envieth not*; it is not grieved at the good of others; neither at their gifts nor at their good qualities, their honours nor their estates. If we love our neighbour we shall be so far from envying his welfare, or being displeased with it, that we shall share in it and rejoice at it. His bliss and sanctification will be an addition to ours, instead of impairing or lessening it. This is the proper effect of kindness and benevolence: envy is the effect of ill-will. The prosperity of those to whom we wish well can never grieve us; and the mind which is bent on doing good to all can never with ill to any.

**IV.** Charity subdues pride and vain-glory; *It vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up*, is not bloated with self-conceit, does not swell upon its acquisitions, nor arrogate to itself that honour, or power, or respect, which does not belong to it. It is not insolent, apt to despise others, or trample on them, or treat them with contempt and scorn. Those who are animated with a principle of true brotherly love will in honour prefer one another, <sup><520></sup>Romans 12:10. They will *do nothing out* of a spirit of contention or *vain-glory, but in lowliness of mind will esteem others better than themselves*, <sup><1088></sup>Philippians 2:3. True love will give us an esteem of our brethren, and raise our value for them; and this will limit our esteem of ourselves, and prevent the tumours of self-conceit and arrogance. These ill qualities can never grow out of tender affection for the brethren, nor a diffusive benevolence. The word rendered in our translation *vaunteth itself* bears other significations; nor is the proper meaning, as I can find, settled; but in every sense and meaning true charity stands in opposition to it. The Syriac renders it, *non tumultuatur* — *does not raise tumults* and disturbances. Charity calms the angry passions, instead of raising them. Others render it, *Non perper... et pervers agit* — *It does not act insidiously with any, seek to ensnare them, nor tease them with needless importunities*

and addresses. It is not froward, nor stubborn and untractable, nor apt to be cross and contradictory. Some understand it of dissembling and flattery, when a fair face is put on, and fine words are said, without any regard to truth, or intention of good. Charity abhors such falsehood and flattery. Nothing is commonly more pernicious, nor more apt to cross the purposes of true love and good will.

**V.** Charity is careful not to pass the bounds of decency; *ouk aschemonei* — *it behaveth not unseemly*; it does nothing indecorous, nothing that in the common account of men is base or vile. It does nothing out of place or time; but behaves towards all men as becomes their rank and ours, with reverence and respect to superiors, with kindness and condescension to inferiors, with courtesy and good-will towards all men. It is not for breaking order, confounding ranks bringing all men on a level; but for keeping up the distinction God has made between men, and acting decently in its own station, and minding its own business, without taking upon it to mend, or censure, or despise, the conduct of others. Charity will do nothing that misbecomes it.

**VI.** Charity is an utter enemy to selfishness: *Seeketh not its own*, does not inordinately desire nor seek its own praise, or honour, or profit, or pleasure. Indeed self-love, in some degree, is natural to all men, enters into their very constitution. And a reasonable love of self is by our Saviour made the measure of our love to others, that charity which is here described, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*. The apostle does not mean that charity destroys all regard to self; he does not mean that the charitable man should never challenge what is his own, but utterly neglect himself and all his interests. Charity must then root up that principle which is wrought into our nature. But charity never seeks its own to the hurt of others, or with the neglect of others. It often neglects its own for the sake of others; prefers their welfare, and satisfaction, and advantage, to its own; and it ever prefers the weal of the public, of the community, whether civil or ecclesiastical, to its private advantage. It would not advance, nor aggrandize, nor enrich, nor gratify itself, at the cost and damage of the public.

**VII.** It tempers and restrains the passions. *Ou paroxynetai* — *is not exasperated*. It corrects a sharpness of temper, sweetens and softens the mind, so that it does not suddenly conceive, nor long continue, a vehement passion. Where the fire of love is kept in, the flames of wrath will not

easily kindle, nor long keep burning. Charity will never be angry without a cause, and will endeavour to confine the passions within proper limits, that they may not exceed the measure that is just, either in degree or duration. Anger cannot rest in the bosom where love reigns. It is hard to be angry with those we love, but very easy to drop our resentments and be reconciled.

**VIII.** Charity *thinks no evil*. It cherishes no malice, nor gives way to revenge: so some understand it. It is not soon, nor long, angry; it is never mischievous, nor inclined to revenge; it does not suspect evil of others, *oulogizetai to kakon* — *it does not reason out* evil, charge guilt upon them by inference and *innuendo*, when nothing of this sort appears open. True love is not apt to be jealous and suspicious; it will hide faults that appear, and draw a veil over them, instead of hunting and raking out those that lie covered and concealed: it will never indulge suspicion without proofs, but will rather incline to darken and disbelieve evidence against the person it affects. It will hardly give into an ill opinion of another, and it will do it with regret and reluctance when the evidence cannot be resisted; hence it will never be forward to suspect ill, and reason itself into a bad opinion upon mere appearances, nor give way to suspicion without any. It will not make the worst construction of things, but put the best face that it can on circumstances that have no good appearance.

**IX.** The matter of its joy and pleasure is here suggested:

**1.** Negatively: *It rejoiceth not in iniquity*. It takes no pleasure in doing injury or hurt to any. It thinks not evil of any, without very clear proof. It wishes ill to none, much less will it hurt or wrong any, and least of all make this matter of its delight, rejoice in doing harm and mischief. Nor will it rejoice at the faults and failings of others, and triumph over them, either out of pride or ill-will, because it will set off its own excellences or gratify its spite. The sins of others are rather the grief of a charitable spirit than its sport or delight; they will touch it to the quick, and stir all its compassion, but give it no entertainment. It is the very height of malice to take pleasure in the misery of a fellow-creature. And is not falling into sin the greatest calamity that can befall one? How inconsistent is it with Christian charity, to rejoice at such fall!

**2.** Affirmatively: *It rejoiceth in the truth*, is glad of the success of the gospel, commonly called *the truth*, but by way of emphasis, in the New

Testament; and rejoices to see men moulded into an evangelical temper by it, and made good. It takes no pleasure in their sins, but is highly delighted to see them do well, to approve themselves men of probity and integrity. It gives it much satisfaction to see truth and justice prevail among men, innocency cleared, and mutual faith and trust established, and to see piety and true religion flourish.

**X.** *It beareth all things, it endureth all things, **panta stegei, panta hypomenei**.* Some read the first, *covers all things*. So the original also signifies. *Charity will cover a multitude of sins,* ~~608~~ 1 Peter 4:8. It will draw a veil over them, as far as it can consistently with duty. It is not for blazing nor publishing the faults of a brother, till duty manifestly demands it. Necessity only can extort this from the charitable mind. Though such a man be free to tell his brother his faults in private, he is very unwilling to expose him by making them public. Thus we do by our own faults, and thus charity would teach us to do by the faults of others; not publish them to their shame and reproach, but cover them from public notice as long as we can, and be faithful to God and to others. Or, *it beareth all things*, — will pass by and put up with injuries, without indulging anger or cherishing revenge, will be patient upon provocation, and long patient, **panta hypomenei** — holds firm, though it be much shocked, and borne hard upon; sustains all manner of injury and ill usage, and bears up under it, such as curses, contumacies, slanders, prison, exile, bonds, torments, and death itself, for the sake of the injurious, and of others; and perseveres in this firmness. Note, What a fortitude and firmness fervent love will give the mind! What cannot a lover endure for the beloved and for his sake! How many slights and injuries will he put up with! How many hazards will he run and how many difficulties encounter!

**XI.** Charity believes and hopes well of others: *Believeth all things; hopeth all things*. Indeed charity does by no means destroy prudence, and, out of mere simplicity and silliness, believe every word, ~~2445~~ Proverbs 14:15. Wisdom may dwell with love, and charity be cautious. But it is apt to believe well of all, to entertain a good opinion of them when there is no appearance to the contrary; nay, to believe well when there may be some dark appearances, if the evidence of ill be not clear. All charity is full of candour, apt to make the best of every thing, and put on it the best face and appearance? it will judge well, and believe well, as far as it can with any reason, and will rather stretch its faith beyond appearances for the

support of a kind opinion; but it will go into a bad one with the upmost reluctance, and fence against it as much as it fairly and honestly can. And when, in spite of inclination, it cannot believe well of others, it will yet hope well, and continue to hope as long as there is any ground for it. It will not presently conclude a case desperate, but wishes the amendment of the worst of men, and is very apt to hope for what it wishes. How well-natured and amiable a thing is Christian charity? How lovely a mind is that which is tinctured throughout with such benevolence, and has it diffused over its whole frame! Happy the man who has this heavenly fire glowing in his heart, flowing out of his mouth, and diffusing its warmth over all with whom he has to do! How lovely a thing would Christianity appear to the world, if those who profess it were more actuated and animated by this divine principle, and paid a due regard to a command on which its blessed author laid a chief stress! *A new commandment give I to you, that you love one another, as I have loved you, that you also love one another,* ~~John~~ John 13:34. *By this shall all men know that you are my disciples,* v. 35. Blessed Jesus! how few of thy professed disciples are to be distinguished and marked out by this characteristic!

## ~~1~~ 1 CORINTHIANS 13:8-13

### CHARITY COMMENDED

Here the apostle goes on to commend charity, and show how much it is preferable to the gifts on which the Corinthians were so apt to pride themselves, to the utter neglect, and almost extinction, of charity. This he makes out,

**I.** From its longer continuance and duration: *Charity never faileth*. It is a permanent and perpetual grace, lasting as eternity; whereas the extraordinary gifts on which the Corinthians valued themselves were of short continuance. They were only to edify the church on earth, and that but for a time, not during its whole continuance in this world; but in heaven would be all superseded, which yet is the very seat and element of love. *Prophecy must fail*, that is, either the prediction of things to come (which is its most common sense) or the interpretation of scripture by immediate inspiration. *Tongues will cease*, that is, the miraculous power of speaking languages without learning them. There will be but one



language in heaven. There is no confusion of tongues in the region of perfect tranquility. And *knowledge will vanish away*. Not that, in the perfect state above, holy and happy souls shall be unknowing, ignorant: it is a very poor happiness that can consist with utter ignorance. The apostle is plainly speaking of miraculous gifts, and therefore of knowledge to be had out of the common way (see <sup>446</sup>1 Corinthians 14:6), a knowledge of mysteries supernaturally communicated. Such knowledge was to vanish away. Some indeed understand it of common knowledge acquired by instruction, taught and learnt. This way of knowing is to vanish away, though the knowledge itself, once acquired, will not be lost. But it is plain that the apostle is here setting the grace of charity in opposition to supernatural gifts. And it is more valuable, because more durable; *it shall last, when they shall be no more; it shall enter into heaven, where they will have no place, because they will be of no use, though, in a sense, even our common knowledge may be said to cease in heaven, by reason of the improvement that will then be made in it. The light of a candle is perfectly obscured by the sun shining in its strength.*

**II.** He hints that these gifts are adapted only to a state of imperfection: *We know in part, and we prophesy in part*, v. 9. Our best knowledge and our greatest abilities are at present like our condition, narrow and temporary. Even the knowledge they had by inspiration was but in part. How little a portion of God, and the unseen world, was heard even by apostles and inspired men! How much short do others come of them! But these gifts were fitted to the present imperfect state of the church, valuable in themselves, but not to be compared with charity, because they were to vanish with the imperfections of the church, nay, and long before, whereas charity was to last for ever.

**III.** He takes occasion hence to show how much better it will be with the church hereafter than it can be here. A state of perfection is in view (v. 10): *When that which is perfect shall come, then that which is in part shall be done away*. When the end is once attained, the means will of course be abolished. There will be no need of tongues, and prophecy, and inspired knowledge, in a future life, because then the church will be in a state of perfection, complete both in knowledge and holiness. God will be known then clearly, and in a manner by intuition, and as perfectly as the capacity of glorified minds will allow; not by such transient glimpses, and little

portions, as here. The difference between these two states is here pointed at in two particulars:

**1.** The present state is a state of childhood, the future that of manhood: *When I was a child, I spoke as a child* (that is, as some think, spoke with tongues), *I understood as a child; ephronoun — sapiebam* (that is, “I prophesied, I was taught the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, in such an extraordinary way as manifested I was not out of my childish state”), *I thought, or reasoned, elogizomen, as a child; but, when I became a man, I put away childish things.* Such is the difference between earth and heaven. What narrow views, what confused and indistinct notions of things, have children, in comparison of grown men! And how naturally do men, when reason is ripened and matured, despise and relinquish their infant thoughts, put them away, reject them, esteem as nothing! Thus shall we think of our most valued gifts and acquisitions in this world, when we come to heaven. We shall despise our childish folly, in priding ourselves in such things when we are grown up to men in Christ.

**2.** Things are all dark and confused now, in comparison of what they will be hereafter: *Now we see through a glass darkly (ev ainigmati, in a riddle), then face to face; now we know in part, but then we shall know as we are known.* Now we can only discern things at a great distance, as through a telescope, and that involved in clouds and obscurity; but hereafter the things to be known will be near and obvious, open to our eyes; and our knowledge will be free from all obscurity and error. God is to be seen *face to face*; and we *are to know him as we are known by him*; not indeed as perfectly, but in some sense in the same manner. We are known to him by mere inspection; he turns his eye towards us, and sees and searches us throughout. We shall then fix our eye on him, *and see him as he is*, <sup><GRB></sup>1 John 3:2. We shall know how we are known, enter into all the mysteries of divine love and grace. O glorious change! To pass from darkness to light, from clouds to the clear sunshine of our Saviour's face, and in God's own light to see light! <sup><FRB></sup>Psalm 36:9. Note, It is the light of heaven only that will remove all clouds and darkness from the face of God. It is at best but twilight while we are in this world; there it will be perfect and eternal day.

**IV.** To sum up the excellences of charity, he prefers it not only to gifts, but to other graces, to faith and hope (v. 13): *And now abide faith, hope, and charity; but the greatest of these is charity.* True grace is much more

excellent than any spiritual gifts whatever. And faith, hope, and love, are the three principal graces, of which charity is the chief, being the end to which the other two are but means. This is the divine nature, the soul's felicity, or its complacential rest in God, and holy delight in all his saints. And it is everlasting work, when faith and hope shall be no more. Faith fixes on the divine revelation, and assents to that: hope fastens on future felicity, and waits for that: and in heaven faith well be swallowed up in vision, and hope in fruition. There is no room to believe and hope, when we see and enjoy. But love fastens on the divine perfections themselves, and the divine image on the creatures, and our mutual relation both to God and them. These will all shine forth in the most glorious splendours in another world, and there will love be made perfect; there we shall perfectly love God, because he will appear amiable for ever, and our hearts will kindle at the sight, and glow with perpetual devotion. And there shall we perfectly love one another, when all the saints meet there, when none but saints are there, and saints made perfect. O blessed state! How much surpassing the best below! O amiable and excellent grace of charity! How much does it exceed the most valuable gift, when it outshines every grace, and is the everlasting consummation of them! When faith and hope are at an end, true charity will burn for ever with the brightest flame. Note, Those border most upon the heavenly state and perfection whose hearts are fullest of this divine principle, and burn with the most fervent charity. It is the surest offspring of God, and bears his fairest impression. For God is love, ~~Gen~~ 1 John 4:8, 16. And where God is to be seen as he is, and face to face, there charity is in its greatest height — there, and there only, will it be perfected.