

Call to Obedience #396
PO Box 299 Kokomo, IN 46903 USA
www.schultze.org

The Greatest of These is Love

By Reimar Schultze

And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity (1 Corinthians 13:13).

God said that the greatest thing about Christianity is love. If that is missing, you have nothing. **Any gift or virtue you may have is without eternity if it is not immersed, surrounded, and upheld by love.** It is as wood, hay and stubble, to be burned up on Judgment Day.

This is the basic message of 1 Corinthians 13. But before we get any further into this chapter, let us see how it fits in with the rest of the great documents of the Bible. **There are four ground-laying documents in the Bible** answering the most basic questions of the Christian. They answer the questions pertaining to God, godly living, prayer and love. Here they are:

1. The **Ten Commandments** tell us who God is; they reveal His character.
2. The **Sermon on the Mount** tells us how we shall live.
3. The **Lord's Prayer** teaches us what we shall pray for.
4. In **1 Corinthians 13**, Paul tells us how we shall love.

Know these documents well. The crowning document of these four is 1 Corinthians 13. If we do not have love, we are nothing, have nothing and profit nothing. Without love, nothing matters and nothing works in God's vast kingdom.

In an atmosphere of strife, division, doctrinal confusion and spiritual pride, the Apostle Paul lifts up love as the great panacea to everything in life. Let us look at what can destroy this symphony of love, line upon line:

1. The first thing Paul mentions is **tongues** (v.1). Following Pentecost, some erroneously believed that receiving the Holy Spirit is always accompanied with receiving tongues. Although that was true in three cases at the birth of the church - for good reasons - 20 years later when Paul came along, he dismantled this doctrine for the rest of the church age, laying down the following principals about the practice of tongues:

a. Although tongues were at the top of the list on Pentecost, Paul now relegated them to the bottom of the list, though not off the list (1 Corinthians 12:10, 28). Tongues (nor any other spiritual gift) do not give anyone spiritual superiority over anyone else.

b. Tongues are not for all church members, as any other gift is not for all (vv. 29-30).

c. Tongues without love are a nuisance. Without love they are like *sound-ing brass and tinkling symbols*: out of tune, annoying, disgusting and ruining the whole symphony. If tongues has turned you into a peacock, there is something wrong. God is not looking for peacocks but for servants. In conclusion, the evidence of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is love, nothing more, nothing less and nothing else.

2. In the next verse, Paul refers to **prophecy** (preaching): excellence in expository preaching, excellence in oratory, and in the presentation and administration of the truth. People who have this gift attract multitudes. Many believe that those preachers are really in tune with God. But Paul is saying that even though they may have these gifts, if they have not love, they are nothing. It is where the divine love of God is, where the Holy Spirit works, that is where you want to be (Galatians 5:22). Preaching without the divine anointing of love, is often nothing but a theatrical performance or a proud show of scholarly achievement.

3. As Paul puts tongues and prophecy in their place, so he does with **faith**. And Paul is not talking about little faith here. He talks about mountain-moving faith, such as casting out demons, raising the dead, the healing of cripples and quieting of storms. Miracles not birthed in love are nothing but flashes of light in time, having no eternal value in them. Jesus speaks of such miracle workers in Matthew 7:22-23, calling them workers of iniquity. Do not run to them. Run away from them because by them many will be deceived.

4. Next, Paul puts **sacrificial giving** in its place. *And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor...* (v.3). Look at all the charitable organizations which help the poor, the mentally ill, and the malnourished. You can give and give and give, but my friend, you get no credit for any of it unless your sacrifices are given out of love for the nail-scarred hands and feet, and the wounded side of the Lamb of God, **and at His direction** and not because of your choice. All charitable giving must begin in the house of God *with the least of these* (His ministers) (Matthew 25:44-45), with the widows and orphans, and with the poor we have amongst us. After that, charitable giving beyond the church should be at His direction. Divine love always abdicates all its choices to the throne of God. Again, never give to the charity of your choice, but always give to the charity of God's choice.

5. *If I give my body to be burned, it profits me nothing* (v.3). Thousands of believers go into **martyrdom** for religious reasons, many for the protection of their religious doctrines or institutions. The church has erected monuments to them. But upon careful examination, many of those martyrs have been found wanting when it comes to loving. Many have neglected their wives, children and love for their enemies. They have lived zealous lives, but not loving lives. Unless

we live in love, all our works will come to nothing. Christianity must begin in the home. If it does not begin in the home, it does not begin.

Now then, in his message of love, Paul goes on to what love is not, and what it is (vv. 4-8):

1. **Love has no envy** (v.4), meaning love does not want to have what others have. It is content with what it has and if it has God, it has all it needs at any given moment (Matthew 6:33).
2. **Love vaunteth not itself** (v.4), that is it does not parade itself. It does not show off. It does not exaggerate. It has no pride. Here the Corinthian Christians were parading their gifts. But there was no love. Paul calls them *carnal* because they were walking and behaving like unbelievers. They were on top with the gifts (1 Corinthians 1:7), but at the bottom in loving. The gifts did not make them spiritual. The gifts without love are like an engine without oil.
3. **Love is not puffed up** (v.4). Love does not draw attention to itself. It is not haughty.
4. **Love does not behave itself unseemly** (v.5). There is a place for etiquette and propriety in our lives. Anything from table manners, to our manner of conversation, to our conduct in the church sanctuary, to our way of dressing, should reflect divine love.
5. **Love seeks not her own** (v.5). The self-seeking life has a sentence of death on it. The Apostle Paul, having poured out his life for the church, had to say: *for all seek their own...* (Philippians 2:21).
6. **Love is not provoked** (v.5). That means divine love can be mocked, misrepresented, spat on, endure injustice and beatings, but it will not be offended, it will not have hurt feelings, it will not retaliate in any other way, than by love (Isaiah 50:6-7).
7. **Love thinketh no evil** (v.5). Thoughts of evil are negative thoughts. They destroy faith. Do not go there. Paul admonishes us to think about what is lovely and virtuous (Phil. 4:8).
8. **Love does not rejoice in iniquity** (v.6). This means divine love does not gloat over the failures and mishaps of those who oppose us.

Now let us go to Paul's list of what love does:

1. **Love bears all things** (v.7). That means it can put up with anything without getting upset or unsettled.

2. **Love believes all things** (v.7). That means it believes the best of every person.

3. **Love endures all things** (v.7). When others are quitting because of hardships, abuses, difficulties, love will not quit and it keeps on loving. When the wife is disrespectful, or the husband is neglectful, love does not retaliate. It continues to love and therewith serve the other. It fights and wins its battles through self-surrender and not through self-assertion.

4. **Love never fails** (v.8). This is why it is the greatest of all gifts. It surpasses all other gifts; it is the epitome of the Christian. Whoever has love is most blessed, and it makes the angels sing and the devils tremble.

And how do you get this great gift my friend, this choicest flower of heaven? Thank God that Paul does not keep this a secret: *And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us* (Romans 5:5).

Paul links love to the Holy Spirit. And what are the conditions to receive the Holy Spirit? Luke says **it is given to them that obey him** (Acts 5:32). And what comes with the Holy Spirit? The answer is: all His fruits (Galatians 5:22-23)! Friend, if you do not have love, your first love, you will lose your candle (Revelation 2:4-5). You will have no entrance at heaven's gate (Matthew 25:10-12). Please obey every leading of the Holy Spirit.

Call to Obedience #396
PO Box 299 Kokomo, IN 46903 USA
www.schultze.org