

1 Corinthians Chapter 13

NKJV Notes by Pastor Bob Caldwell

The Greatest Gift

v. 1 Tongues of men and of Angels - The word used for tongue here is “glōssa” (Gk.), and it refers to language. In their encounters with human beings described in the Bible, angels speak in a way that the person can understand. So, this may be Paul’s way of saying “languages beyond anything we can imagine.” In 2 Corinthians 12:2-5, he recounts his experience of being “caught up to Paradise” where he heard “inexpressible words” that man is not permitted to tell.

Love - Paul uses a very special word for love in this chapter. In the Greek, it is “agapé”. This is not merely some kind of romantic or good-willed sentiment, but rather a divine love rooted in the very character and nature of God.

Sounding Brass - This is a gong.

v. 2 Nothing - The word used here is “ouedís” (Gk.), and it literally means none or no one. The concept here isn’t just that lacking love diminishes something, but rather that it prevents it even existing.

v. 3 Give my Body to be Burned - This is means to die as a martyr for Christ.

It Profits me Nothing - This means he does not gain anything.

v. 4 Love Suffers Long - This means that love is patient.

Love does not Envy - Envy or coveting is not “jealousy.” Jealousy can be linked to love, which is a completely fitting emotion when it is toward inappropriate and wrongly directed love, attention, and devotion. In the Bible, God is “jealous” when His people go after idols. But coveting or envy wants something or someone for oneself without considering God’s perspective or what’s best for the other person. It is an attempt to “possess” and control things or people without respect for proper boundaries.

Love does not Parade Itself - Love is not boastful or self-centered.

Not Puffed Up - Love is not conceited and arrogant.

v. 5 Does not Behave Rudely - Love handles others gently and does not purposely embarrass them or act cruelly.

Does not Seek its Own - Love is not rooted in its own interests or constantly striving to always get the “best piece of the pie” for itself.

Is not Provoked - This means love is not irritable and easily angered.

Thinks no Evil - The phrasing in the Greek here literally means love does not reckon up wrongs done to it.

v. 6 Iniquity...Truth - The Bible contrasts evil and truth. According to 1 John 1:6, having fellowship with God means “living by the truth”.

v. 7 Bears all Things - The Greek word for bears is “stegó” and it means to cover up or to endure patiently. The idea here is that love overpowers and covers over any wrongs done to it.

Endures all Things - The Greek word used for endures here is “hupomenó”, and it is distinct from the word previously used for “bears”. It literally means to remain behind, or to stand up against. This conveys the idea that love persists against things that intend to destroy it.

v. 8 Prophecies will Fail - This does not mean that prophecies are not accurate, but rather that they will cease when the fulfillment of all things has come.

Tongues will Cease - This indicates that speaking in tongues will no longer be needed.

Knowledge will Vanish Away - This also implies that the gift of knowledge will also no longer be needed.

v. 9 In Part- In this verse, Paul pictures our present state and situation as being is “incomplete”—that is we only see a portion of things to come.

v. 10 Which is Perfect has Come - When perfection comes, that which is imperfect disappears. Paul explains in verse 12 that the contrast is between “now” and “then.” This is true not only for him, but for all believers.

v. 11 When I was a Child - This is the time of our “childhood”. We talk, think, and reason like children. Paul looks forward to the day when we will be fully mature and put all this behind us.

v. 12 Mirror, Dimly - Paul is conveying a powerful picture here. Instead of seeing God directly, we currently only see Him indirectly, as through a reflection. The word dimly is “ainigma” (Gk.), which literally means a riddle or an enigma.

Then Face to Face - The “then” that Paul is writing about is when we see God “face to face.” First John 3:2 describes this: “Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”

Now I know in Part - Paul contrasts our present partial “knowing” (through a dim or obscure image) with knowing then fully or completely, just as God knows us.

v. 13 Faith, Hope, and Love - These three virtues are the things that will go with us from “now” into “then,” from our present state of dimness to knowing God face-to-face. Of these three, the greatest is love.