**The Church at Corinth**

**A Church Facing Inner Problems – #35 & #36**

**Love is the Higher Gift**

**1 Corinthians 13:1-13**

*Note: Our end-of-class carry-in dinner is Wednesday, Dec. 4, 2013, 6:30 p.m. in the E91 Community Room. Food sign-up sheets will be in class Nov. 13 and 20 (no class Nov. 27, Thanksgiving Eve). Contact Pam Walters, 317-727-7917,* [*nana.10554@yahoo.com*](mailto:nana.10554@yahoo.com)*.*

**1 Corinthians 13**

***1*** *If I should speak the (tongues) languages of men and of angels, but have no love, I am no more than a noisy gong and a clanging cymbal.* ***2*** *And if I should have the gift of prophetic utterance, and have the key to all secrets, and master the whole range of knowledge, and if I should have such perfect faith so as to be able to move mountains, but have no love, I am nothing.* ***3*** *And if I should distribute all I have bit by bit, and should yield my body to the flames, but have no love, I gain nothing.*

***4*** *Love is patient and is kind; love is not envious; love does not boast; it is not conceited.* ***5*** *It is not ill mannered (arrogant) or rude; it is not self- seeking; it is not irritable; it takes no note of injury;* ***6*** *it is not glad when injustice triumphs; it is glad when truth prevails.* ***7*** *Always it is ready to make allowances; always to trust; always to hope; always to be patient.*

***8*** *Love will never end. If there are prophetic utterances, they will become useless. If there are languages, they will be discarded. If there is knowledge, it will become useless.* ***9*** *For our knowledge is incomplete, and our utterances inspired by God are incomplete,* ***10*** *but when that which is perfect has come, what is incomplete will be useless.* ***11*** *When I was a little child, I spoke as little child, I thought as a little child, I reasoned as a little child. Now that I am grown to manhood, I have discarded my childish ways.* ***12*** *We see now by means of a mirror dimly, but then we shall see face to face. Now my knowledge is incomplete, but then I shall have complete knowledge.*

***13*** *So, we now have these three, faith, hope, and love, but the greatest of them is love.*

**The Structure of the Passage**

The word agape is used ten times, more than in any other passage in the NT. There is nothing similar to this passage in the Bible or in Judaism.

**Words for ‘Love’**

Four words were used for “love” in ancient Greek literature: ***eros***, ***philia****,* ***agape****,* and ***storge***with their cognate verbs.

***Eros****,* the most commonly used, meant love or desire generically as attracted by the goodness of the object, and specifically connoted the proper conjugal passion of a man and woman. ***Eros***was personified as the god of love. In Greek philosophical texts, ***Eros***was thought to motivate also the search for perfect truth and beauty in the world in their various degrees and manifestations. In the LXX, ***eros***occurs only twice (Prov 7:18; 30:16). In the NT, however, neither ***eros***nor its verb ever occur.

***Philia***meant “love, friendship,” especially that of equals, comrades, and members of a family. It is found only in James 4:4 “*friendship with the world*.” Paul uses its cogent verb, ***phileo****,* only in 1 Corinthians 16:22. This verb is found otherwise 28 times in the NT (Matthew, Luke, Titus, James, and especially in John, speaking of Jesus and his disciples).

***Agape***was a rare word in Greek. ***Agape***emerges first in the LXX, where it is used 18 times, often to translate Hebrew ***ahabah***in the sense of sexual love (Cant 2:5-7; 8:6–7), but also of the love of God (Wisdom 3:9); from there it spreads to other Greek/Jewish writings. The NT preference for ***agape***and its verb ***agapao***is to express love of human beings or of God. It can mean the “love” of husband and wife and express erotic passion, but in time, especially in Hellenistic Jewish and Christian writings, it acquired a more general, ethical connotation: a spontaneous inward affection of one person for another that manifests itself in an outgoing concern for the other and impels one to self-giving.

***Storge***was hardly ever used for sexual love, but it did express the love of parents for children, and vice versa. Neither it nor its verb is ever found in the NT; in the LXX, it occurs in 3 Maccabees 5:32 and 4 Maccabees 14:13, 14, 17.

In Judeo-Christian tradition the supreme object of love would be God (Deut 6:4-5; Mark 12:29-30), who is also said to love his people (Deut 33:3; 7:8, 13; Hos 3:1; 11:1, 8-9; 14:5; Isa 43:4). God’s love through the Holy Spirit is God’s highest gift that “*has been given to us*” (Rom 5:5), and this through Christ Jesus, who loved us when we were still sinners (Rom 5:8; 8:31–39; 2 Cor 13:11, 13; 1 Thess 1:4). According to Galatians 5:6, love is the way true Christian faith “works itself out,” because it is “a fruit of the Spirit” (Gal 5:22). This is why Paul can maintain, “*the one who loves another has fulfilled the law … for love is the fulfillment of the law*” (Rom 13:8–10). (Cf. the Johannine way of putting the same topic: John 3:16; 1 John 3:1; 4:7-12).

*Agape* is regarded by Paul as another *gift* and we can see this in the formula, “faith, hope, love,” which comes at the end (13:13), is unique.

**The Structure of Chapter 13**

Critics usually divide this into three “strophes” (stanzas).

* The first strophe (vv 1-3) with its triple repetition of “but have no love” is made up of three propositions comparing ***charisms*** 9free gifts of the Holy Spirit) with ***agape*** and forming an increasingly elevated progression. It expresses the absolutely unique value and necessity of charity.
* The second strophe (vv 4-7) points out the characteristics and beauty of agape. The effects on Christian conduct of love’s fruitful radiance are presented in three groups:
  1. What love does (two positive descriptions)
  2. What love does not do (eight negative descriptions)
  3. And again what love does (four positive descriptions).
* The third strophe (vv 8-13) exalts the perfection and eternity of love. It contains several antitheses (“now-then”; “imperfection-perfection”; “infancy-maturity”; “ephemeral-eternal” and culminates in the statement: “love is the greatest of all.”

**Roots in the Inner Life: Love is a Personal Transformation**

1. Love takes its roots in the personal life of every believer and is the transformation of the inner life, while the others gifts do not change our inner life in the same radical way as love.
2. The Spiritual gifts although are given by the Holy Spirit for the “edification” of the community. They can add life to the Church, but the “highest gift” is love: for prophecy is important but love is higher because of its eternal quality and also because love is the very nature and revelation of God.
3. Please note that Paul says, “*I am now going to point out to you the way by far the most excellent*” (1 Cor l2:31).” The word “way” was used for the Law in Psalm 119, and other parts of the OT refers to “*the way of the statutes or commands of Yahweh, the way of truth, or of justice*” (119:2-11; 32-34). The path is called “*the way of salvation*” because it leads to life and salvation. But here Paul reveals “the new way” (Heb. 10:20) to the Corinthians, the way of truth, life, and salvation reserved to disciples of Jesus Christ. Unlike the sages of the Old Testament, he does not qualify his way by the Law. He gives it a new name, the “most excellent” way. The Vulgate, Latin translation of the Bible, translates “a more excellent way,” as if love were simply the perfect life. This expression is not a comparative but is just pointing to what will last.

**From Abbot Sophronius:**

“It is the most excellent way, the true royal way because in love there is one Law and that Law is love itself. Love does not need a Law imported from outside love like many other things in this life. The Law of Love is Love because God is Love. Love is not a way of perfection in the sense of being a means; it is perfection itself. Whoever walks on this way becomes like God.”

**Examining the Text**

The first strophe teaches the unique value of love by describing a hypothetical person who has the spiritual gifts of tongues (v I), prophecy, wisdom, knowledge, faith (v 2), and service of others (v 3), but who has no love.

**VERSE 1 –** *If I should speak the (tongues) languages of men and of angels, but have no love, I am no more than a noisy gong and a clanging cymbal.*

The Corinthians especially prized the gift of tongues. Paul presents it in its highest form: “*speaking the languages of men and of angels*.” The expression could be a figure of speech to suggest every possible language, even the most perfect. It would then refer to the most sublime language of heaven itself. However, “the language of angels” may refer to a real angelic language, the language of worship. The way Paul has arranged the sentence according to the Greek, makes us consider angelic language as real a language as human speech, but of a higher order. Finally, the movement within the sentence itself is in parallel construction with verses 2 and 3. Verse 1 is the first step in a gradation, which increases little by little to reach its highest point at the end of the strophe. Speaking angelically is superior to speaking humanly. Then Paul presenting the case of a man who has the gift of tongues in its most perfect form and can speak earthly languages and the sacred heavenly languages is after all less than the person who knows love; to hit the nail on its head, this person is less than the one who communicates in the life of God.

Surely God alone could have given such a power, and yet if the master of tongues has no charity, he amounts to nothing. At the end of the sublime exercise of his power he is a dead thing, a sound that has died, “*a noisy gong and a clanging cymbal.”* The onomatopoetic effect is striking. In Greek, as well as in Hebrew, Aramaic, French, and English, the word cymbal reproduces the sharp, heavy sound of clashing. It is very possible that Paul chose this figure because the enthusiastic use of cymbals was part of the Jewish Temple worship. The same articles were used all over the ancient world and so here the point of comparison comes to its peak, earth, heaven and angels and love. Here Paul contrasts the utterances of the speaker in tongues with manifestations of love. To speak without agape is simply to make noises like some windy musical instrument, which will come to the deadly end when the music stops. He is a dead thing, without the supernatural life and “animation” that ***agape*** alone can give.

In other words, the phrase, “*if I do not have agape*,” does not refer just to the immediate exercise of the charism, but rather describes the speaker himself. All that his speech does is to display the emptiness inside him – emptiness because the speaker who does not have love, does not have God. The gift of tongues is among the lesser charisms, because it does not secure eternal life.

**Those Who had no Love in the Bible and Church**

**VERSE 2 –** *It is a great gift to be able to speak in different languages. To speak with the tongues of angels is even greater.*

But in order to show that none of this can be ascribed to merit and that every tongue is subject to the glory of God, Paul adds that a man without love is like a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

Balaam’s ass spoke a human language in order to demonstrate the majesty of God, and children sang the praises of Christ in order to confound the Jews. In fact the Savior went further and declared that even stones could cry out if necessary.

Balaam prophesied even though he was not a prophet, and Caiaphas also prophesied. So did Saul when, because of his disobedience, he was filled with an evil spirit. Judas accompanied the other disciples and understood all the mysteries and knowledge given to them, but as an enemy of love he betrayed the Savior. Both Tertullian and Novatian (early church writers) were men of no small learning, but because of their pride they lost the fellowship of love and falling into schism devised heresies, to their own damnation.

**Charity is Critical**

**VERSE 2 (cont.) –** *And if I should have the gift of prophetic utterance, and have the key to all secrets, and master the whole range of knowledge, and if I should have such perfect faith so as to be able to move mountains, but have no love, I am nothing*.

The gift of knowledge v 2: “*all secrets*,” “*the whole range of knowledge*” would be of greater value. Perhaps the gift of performing miracles through an intrepid faith would render its possessor perfect. Not at all, says Paul. His response is even more absolute than it was the first time. If the charismatic has no love, he is nothing. This expression is used for a pretentious, boastful speaker in tongues who is hardly likely to edify his listeners; but the prophet, the gnostic, and the miracle worker may enhance the life of the community. That does not make the slightest difference.

If the charismatic has no charity, he is spiritually zero. This blunt expression is probably the most correct translation of Paul’s words. Certainly, he does not care whether the influence of the charismatic on others is great or small. For him the only thing that matters is the unique Christian value, ***agape***. Before God, these men are nothing.

**VERSE 3 –** *And if I should distribute all I have bit by bit, and should yield my body to the flames, but have no love, I gain nothing.*

“Giving one’s body to be burned is not a license to commit suicide but a command not to resist suffering if the alternative is being forced to do wrong.”

– Augustine, Letter 173 to Donatus.

“Spiritual gifts are dangerous because they can lead to pride and schisms; but the way of love is safe because it is the way of God Himself.”

– Abbot Sophronius

“Love and eternal life are not two different qualities, because each has the other. They are like our two legs which we must have to stand up correctly, while we are here and in the next life.”

– Abba Philemon

Verse 3 describes the charisms of helpfulness (see 1 Cor 12:28). The gifts of teaching, after all, are not in themselves important. Christian values, for the kingdom of God does not consist in words but in the manifestation of love.

“Christ Jesus our Lord did not come to teach us great ideas about anything; He came to reveal love which we lack, but as for great ideas we can create. No great idea can create love in any human heart who does not know the love of God the Father revealed in Jesus Christ our Lord.”

– Abbot Sophronius

Next, Paul considers the case of a dedicated Christian who gives up all he possesses and does not hesitate to sacrifice himself for the good of the others. Surely this utterly generous service must be of value before God. Paul intentionally describes the most intense, heroic forms of charitable work. The verb he uses for giving up possessions is the Greek “***psomizã***”, which means to divide into small pieces or mouthfuls to give away, (see Rom 12:20). It is not about giving away something that one does not need (Matthew 6:1-5), but of reducing oneself to absolute beggary in response to the Lord’s invitation to help the poor (Matthew 19:21).

After all goods have gone, the person himself remains empty. He can go even further and dispose of his body by sacrificing his life. Some commentators believe that “to yield one’s body to the flames” is a reference to the mark that used to be branded on slaves with a red hot iron. After everything else has gone to the poor, the Christian can still give up his liberty, sell himself into slavery, and give away his price as alms. This interpretation, although it is plausible in itself, has no biblical parallel, nor does it take into account the strong force of the verb ***paradidômi*** (hand over). It ignores the frequent practice of voluntary death in antiquity and the probable reference to Daniel (3:95).

“Tell the brothers not to volunteer for martyrdom because this has a sense of self-seeking glory that is not to be remembered as martyrs. But if they are led to die for our Lord Jesus Christ, let them accept this with humility because no other death is greater than that of our Lord, who is holy and died for sinners.”

– Abbot Sophronius

Did Paul foresee the death of martyrs in the future? Or was he looking at the Greek Mythology where dying in the Wars as heroes was part of the glory of the ancient and our world? Whatever is the case, dying a glorious death is much easier than living daily and learning the Way of Love.

Paul brings the teaching of the Lord into focus. Chapter 13’s antithesis between the “if” clauses and the conclusions is influenced by the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 6:1-4 and 7:21-23). But the irony in Paul’s words cannot be ignored. The loss of all possessions, followed by death, is too trivial a suggestion for any advantage to be expected from it. However, the insertion of “*but have no love*” shows that if love is the true motive the value is “profitable” before God; it is a treasure infinitely greater because a true communion with God is established.

**VERSE 4 -** *Love is patient and kind…*

“The reason why love does not envy is because it is not puffed up. For where puffing up precedes, envy follows, because pride is the mother of envy.”

– Augustine, Letter 22, to Hornoitus

**VERSES 4 (cont.), 5, 6 –** *love is not envious; love does not boast; it is not conceited.* ***5*** *It is not ill mannered (arrogant) or rude; it is not self- seeking; it is not irritable; it takes no note of injury;* ***6*** *it is not glad when injustice triumphs; it is glad when truth prevails.*

Agape is patient: Agape was revealed in the Lord’s passion. Its importance in our Lord’s life shows that love is a truly Christian love different from every profane and worldly affection. Patience is among divine attributes often praised in the Psalms under the Hebraic form, “*being slow to anger*.” Patience is long-suffering in injuries, which it endures without trying to return them and without any display of temper. This is applied to Christ and by his life he revealed that he, God, who holds back his anger, in order to give sinners time to repent, so also those who seek to be like Chris must overcome their resentment and silence their desire for revenge.

“To be like God is not to punish but, like God, to forgive.”

– Abbot Sophronius

**VERSE 7 –** *Always it [love] is ready to make allowances; always to trust; always to hope; always to be patient.*

“Bearing all things, enduring all things for our love and hope regarding him, let us give thanks for all things, both favorable and unfavorable alike – I mean the pleasant and the painful – since reason often knows even these as arms of salvation.”

– Gregory of Nazianzus, on his brother Ceasariur, 27

“A man with this charity fears nothing, for charity casts out fear. When fear is banished and cast out, charity endures all things, bears all things. One who bears all things through love cannot fear martyrdom.”

– Ambrose Letter 49 to Horonatianus

“For what is it to hear about oneself from you but to know oneself? Who, then, can know himself and say “It is false,” unless he himself lies? But because “charity believes all things,” certainly among those whom it makes one, in intimate union with each other, I, also, O Lord, do even confess to you in such a way that men may hear, though I cannot prove to them the things I confess are true. But those whose ears charity opens to me, they believe”

– Augustine Confessions 10:3

“Out of long-suffering, love bears all things, whether they are burdensome or grievous, whether insults, lashes or even death.”

– John Chrysostom, Homilies of the First letter to Corinthians 33

**Love Endures All Things**

The greater the love of God that the saints possess, the more they endure all things for him.

– Augustine, On Patience 17

Only great love and great humility can give such a victory, especially since Christian patience must be practiced toward everyone and in every possible way. It presupposes great strength of soul, yet it envelops the charitable person in sweetness and tenderness. This alliance of strength with gentleness clearly proclaims the sovereign mastery in which the Christian lives. Patience is born in us when we have a taste of the mercy of God whom we offend but does not punish us.

Patience is never bitter; it is free from despair and fear that is why it does not motivate us to retaliate. Love is full of respect and generosity, even toward enemies. This is what we see in the Cross and we have it by participation, through the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22).

“No one can carry his cross without the power of the Holy Spirit, for even Jesus was anointed and became the Christ of God to ensure for us the same unction [anointing] which enables us to carry our crosses and follow him.”

– Abbot Sophronius:

**Agape is Kind**

The Greek verb “to be kind” χρηστεύεται (chrēsteuetai)is not found anywhere else in the Bible or in profane Greek. This verb suggests nobility and excellence (***chrestos***) first of all; then benevolence and affability (***chrestotes***); and finally generosity. It suggests the warm, generous welcome the Christian always gives others. Devoted and eager to be of service, he makes himself useful and does his utmost to be thoughtful, helpful, and kind.

Kindness is one of love’s most expressive manifestations, since the first meaning of the verb is to give cordial, eager, and hospitality. “To be kind” completes whatever may have been too passive in the verb “to be patient,” and confirms that love is active and forward-looking.

**What Love is Not**

“*Agape is not envious”* (***ou zëloi***): It goes without saying that magnanimous and generous ***agape*** excludes all the pettiness of jealousy.

“The reason why love does not envy is because it is not puffed up. For where puffing up precedes, envy follows because pride is the mother of envy.”

– Augustine: Letter to Honoratus, 22

Agape implies contentment and joy, but envy is basically unhappiness.

“Do not compare your life with others but only with the Lord Jesus and this will keep you away from envy.”

– Abba Philemon

**Envy**

*Agape is not envious.*

In the NT the verb “to be envious” – ***zëloã*** – and the adjective “envious” – ***zëlos*** – are sometimes taken in a favorable sense to mean fervor in the service of God or souls, and sometimes in a derogatory sense to mean the bitter zeal that turns into fanaticism and arouses persecution and treachery (Acts 7:9 John 2: 17; Rom 10:2; 2 Cor 9:2; Gal 1:14).

This spiteful, quarrelsome jealousy is the complete opposite of patient love, and was not always absent from Christian communities (James 3: 14; 4:2), where it brought on hot anger, discord, intrigues, and plots of all kinds. The Church of Corinth, in particular, was disrupted by party spirit, egotistical fervor, and harsh zeal. Its members were jealous and envied one another the possession of “better” charismas. Paul tells them that such feelings must be repudiated in the name of gentle, magnanimous love, which delights in acclaiming the greatness of the gifted while it rests content with whatever falls to its own lot.

**Bragging**

*Agape does not brag*

Bragging is the arrogant behavior (1 Cor 4:6) expressed in thoughtless words, ranging from idle frivolity to downright insolence. Agape works with humility for both are inseparable. Agape does not accept ambition or vainglory, but it refuses exaltation because agape is not self-seeking.

**Conceited**

*Agape is not conceited*

Love is not conceited, literally, it “is not puffed up.” The Apostle describes the vanity of those pious but not very perceptive persons who believe they are particularly virtuous and favored with gifts from God. They let the weight of their superiority and self-esteem be felt in the great airs they give themselves. This is the way the Corinthians behaved in their rivalries over gnosis, tongues, and other gifts. They “puffed themselves up” to seem more important, but their grandeur was made only of air. A real, solid love of charity never rebuffs or offends anyone. It knows how to live on the level of its most humble members of the community, and it detests all falseness, especially the tinsel of an undeserved reputation.

**Ill-Mannered**

*Agape is not ill-mannered*

To be ill-mannered can mean “to be lacking in propriety.” It avoids whatever might be shocking or scandalous and never speaks a disagreeable or insulting word.

**Self-Seeking**

*Agape is not self-seeking*

Love is interested in a goal other that just fellowship. Our Lord had told his disciples to give up their rights in certain cases (Matt. 5:38-42), to do what other people asked even when it was very difficult, and to lend even if there was no hope of getting their property back (Luke 6:35). Paul takes up this precept of the new justice and points out the radical opposition between love and egoism. He himself has renounced his right to live from the preaching of the Gospel, and he feels free to command the “faithful” not to assert their right to reclaim violently what belongs to them. They must even let themselves be cheated. “*I submit willingly to the injustice rather than rise up against a brother*” (1 Cor 6:7). Agape is not looking for its own advantage, but for the good of others (1 Cor 10:33).

“A true disciple of Jesus does not consider that his life is his but that his life belongs to Jesus; that means he should pay no attention to himself or work only for his own advantage. Self-forgetfulness is a rare practice and even unknown to those who never embraced the Crucified Lord. When we are all looking out for our own interests, we renounce our cross and even Christ.”

– Abba Philemon (Read carefully Phil 2:4ff and 1 Cor 10:24)

**Irritable**

*Agape is not irritable*

“to make sharp or pointed, to make acid or sour,” the verb ***paroxyno*** means “to sharpen” or, figuratively, “to irritate, to provoke to anger, to exasperate.” Paul knew the quarrelsome wrangling spirit of the Greeks and especially of the Christians at Corinth (1 Cor 1:11-17)

**Ignoring Injury**

*Agape takes no note of injury*

From “injuries” and its uses in the Septuagint LXX this could be translated, “love thinks no evil,” and mean either that love does not suspect its neighbor of evil or that it does not think about committing any evil itself. “Not taking note” brings to mind the sense “to reflect” (John 11:50; 1 Cor 13:11; 2 Cor 10:2,7,11; Heb 11:19). The verb also often means “to plan or plot” some evil scheme and the text may be a reference to Zachariah 8:17 “*And let none of you plot evil against another in his heart.*” The Psalmist says that accommodating evil belongs to the perverse and proud (Ps. 2:1 if.)

“Love Incarnate came to undo evil by revealing to us that God is our Father. Le us take his love as our road, for Jesus made his road this love to us.”

– Abbot Sophronius: ‘

**VERSE 9 –** *For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.*

Our knowledge is not perfect and even our teaching remains frail.

**VERSE 10 –** *But when what is perfect comes, the partial will be brought to naught.”* What is “the partial” is set in contrast to “the perfect” or “the complete,” a term that has been used (1 Cor 2:6) for the “mature” Christian.

To what “the perfect” refers is much debated. The Greek ***to teleios***has been understood as Christian maturity (1 Cor 2:6), the end, or “the Day of the Lord” (1:8; 3:13; 5:5) or as“end” (of the present era – ***telos***,1 Cor 15:24). In Matthew 5:34-48 we read, “*be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect … when you love your enemies and give to the wicked and the good …*”

**VERSE 11** – *When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I thought as a child*

Or, *I reasoned as a child.* Paul used ***nepos****,* which means “reasoning of a child,” or governed by the wishes and dreams of tiny childhood.

**VERSE 11 (cont.)** – *When I became a man, I did away with childish things.*

The contrast is between “child” and a mature person, the mature manhood, and old age.

**VERSE 12 –** *We see now by means of a mirror dimly, but then we shall see face to face.*

Having contrasted in verse 11 the past (childhood) with the present (adult manhood), now in verse 12 Paul further contrasts the present time with what is to come *in the future*. So, we are looking at something that “is not clear” (RSV, NRSV, and ESV translate it “dimly”; the NAB, “indistinctly”; the REB, “puzzling reflections only”). Because the ensuing phrase, “face to face,” expresses clarity of vision, this phrase seems intended to say the opposite of such clarity; hence “dimly” or “indirectly” seen. The “mirror” in the days of Paul was made of “bronze” so what is reflected is not very clear. .

**VERSE 12 (cont.) –** *Now my knowledge is incomplete, but then I shall have complete knowledge.*

Or, “When the Lord comes, then we will have the complete knowledge of me.”

**VERSE 13 –** *So, we now have these three, faith, hope, and love, but the greatest of them is love.*

This is the best of Paul for he draws his description of love to a close with this, “*but the greatest of these is love.*” Literally, “the greater of these is love.”

“Jesus came to us because of his love, Jesus is the revelation of divine love and thus nothing can be greater than Him.” – Abba Philemon

Love is superior to the other two, faith and hope, not because love will be with us eternally, and we will not need either faith or hope in the life to come.

“Love is greater than faith and hope because God is Love.” – Abba Philemon

**A Letter from Philemon**

**(This previously appeared in handout #37, 9-11-13)**

**Knowledge is part of love but love is greater than knowledge …**

Brother George,

May the love of God be in you always, for this is what is eternal; our faith is no longer useful in the life to come, so also whatever we know now will be shown to us as imperfect when we see the Lord face to face. But love, that greatest gift of life that the Lord gave to us by the Holy Spirit, is what will be in us as long as we are in eternal life.

As for your question, Is there a kind of knowledge that comes from love? Yes and it is stated in (1 Corinthians) 13:1-9. The holy apostle is negating evil knowledge in verses 4-6, and in spite of the fact that the word ‘knowledge” was not used at all and Paul seems to be speaking of actions of the will, the will does not function without knowledge.

See the warning that whoever speaks in the tongues of humans and of angels, but has no love, such a person is a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. Knowledge fails those who have prophetic powers because [knowledge] lacks love and when it lacks love, it leads those who possess such a knowledge not to God who is Love but to pride and seeking power. Those who have the understanding of all mysteries and all knowledge, but have no experience of faith that leads to humility and obedience will know what they want but not God who is known only by his love. Love is patient because love hopes and seeks what knowledge cannot seek: the victory of good. Love is kind because love has the touch of Jesus. Love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude for all these are the actions of those who knew not God. Love gives and thus does not insist on its own right; love is not short-tempered and is very hard to be aggrieved because it has the power to forgive for Jesus. Love does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth for there is one Truth that is the Lord who came to redeem all sins. Those who carry their cross with Christ can bear all things and so believe all the promises that were revealed by Jesus and so hope for their fulfillment. This gives them the courage to endure all things.

As Jesus is our eternal Savior who rules forever, his love will never end.

Love is our commitment to the Father, and is the power that engulfs the whole inner life. Just think of what those who have human love do and say and ask; what is the power that makes them live their love? It is not just knowledge but that inner power in us which is part of the Image of God in us. This power is in the will, the feeling, the perception, and the imagination which is magnified in the Son of Sons.

“I am for my beloved and my beloved is mine” says the bride (Song of Songs 2:16).

Pray for me

Philemon

17 Feb 1966

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