

1 Corinthians 13

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Tape #8148
Pastor Chuck Smith

We come to the thirteen chapter now of 1 Corinthians.

Beginning with chapter twelve and through chapter fourteen, Paul the apostle, is going to be talking to the Corinthian church about spiritual. Corinth was a city that was given over to carnality. So people who were living in the midst of the carnality of Corinth, Paul is going to talk to them about spiritual things, about the Holy Spirit, about the manifestations of the Spirit, about the gifts of the Spirit. And so in chapter twelve, Paul lists many of the manifestations and many of the gifts of the Spirit in the believer's life.

As he talks about the various ministries of the Spirit within the church, he asks the rhetorical question, "Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?" And obviously the rhetorical question brings the answer, no. He has just talked about the body having many different members. Each part of the body functions in its place in the body. Thus every part is necessary but not all of us have the same part. There are diversities of gifts. There are diversities of administrations. There are diversities of operations, but there is the one body and the one Lord and the one Spirit and the one God.

So he closes off the twelfth chapter with the declaration, "But earnestly desire the best gifts." Last Sunday night we discussed that issue of what constituted the best gift and we discovered it all depends on what the need might be. But he said, "And yet I show you a more excellent way."

So we are still on the subject of gifts. And in chapter fourteen, he is going to discuss many of the gifts that people desire and that people exercise. But there is something even better or a more excellent way than the exercise of the gifts of the Spirit.

For years, I coveted earnestly the gift of working of miracles, the gifts of healing. I was intrigued by the Acts of the apostles. I would study it. I would read it all the time. Seeing the power of God that was manifested through the lives of the apostles. I desired that God's power be manifested in my life. Seeing how God used those gifts of miracles and those gifts of healing to draw so many people to the realization that Jesus rose again and was alive. And I coveted earnestly. I prayed earnestly. I fasted and prayed. I would go out into the desert and fast and pray, seeking these gifts of the Spirit in my life.

As I look back on my life, I can understand the wisdom of God in not answering my prayers. It would be extremely difficult to have that kind of power of God's Spirit working in your life. Unless you understood completely the message of death to self, because so often when God begins to use a person in a supernatural way, it does create a lot of attention and people are prone to put that person on a pedestal. And as I look back on my life, I realize that I would not have been able to have handled the notoriety, the attention that would be brought by exercising such gifts. And so I see the wisdom of God in not granting to me my prayers and my request.

As the years have gone by, I have matured extensively. That is as it should be. It would be something wrong if I hadn't matured Spiritually. And we have been blessed of God beyond measure! Sometime ago, probably five years now, it was on a Monday night when the Spirit of God had been moving in a very special way, when we had given the invitation, close to a hundred young people came forward and went back to the prayer room. It was one of those special nights where there was just that beautiful moving of God's Spirit in all of our hearts. We were, all of us, just standing here worshiping the Lord, rejoicing over the work that God's Spirit did that night and over the many who had come forward. As we were standing here worshipping together, just that conscienceness of God's presence in the midst of His people, I was standing here just like this at the pulpit. And I began to pray, thanking God for what He had done, thanking God for His marvelous Spirit in the church, just overwhelmed with God's goodness!

I brought up an old issue. I said Lord, I understand in my early ministry why you didn't give me the gifts of healings and the working of miracles, because that was wise, I realize that I could not have handled it, but Lord I think I have maybe matured to the place where maybe You could trust me with those now. We have

such a marvelous moving of Your Spirit and manifestation of Your gifts here in the church. How marvelous it would be if it was complete, that is, all of the manifestations, the working of miracles and the gifts of healing. I think perhaps, Lord, You could trust me now. So I am open and willing. And the Lord spoke to my heart very clearly. He said I have given to you the more excellent way! I said, thank You, Lord, closed subject! I've never asked the Lord again. I will walk in the way of love. I thank God for the privilege of walking in love.

So Paul opens the thirteenth chapter by showing the supremacy of love even over these exotic manifestations of the Spirit. He begins by the declaration, *Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels*, Now, he's been talking about the supernatural gifts of tongues and no doubt is continuing here talking about the supernatural gift of tongues. The gift of tongues is a very marvelous gift of the Spirit, a gift that enhances a person's personal prayer life tremendously. I feel much deeper than what I can express. I can understand what Paul the apostle meant when he talked about his experience of being in heaven (2 Cor. 12:2-4). Of hearing the glorious things there and realizing that this experience so far transcends anything here on earth, that words or language has not been created that can describe or express the unutterable glory!

The Bible speaks about the joy that we have in Christ. It says it is a joy unspeakable or a joy indescribable (1 Peter 1:8). It's full of glory! And there are no words in any language, English or other, that can adequately express what heaven is like. So Paul the apostle, in making reference to his heavenly experience, having gone into the third heaven, there in the dwelling place of God, and then allowed to return to the earth. He said I heard such things that would be unlawful for man to describe. In other words it would be a crime to try and reduce it to human language. It transcends language. The deepest worship of God transcends language. Savinaroll has said when prayer reaches its ultimate, words are impossible. In seeking to express to God, my thanksgiving, my appreciation, the love, that which is in my spirit, I find that language, again, almost reduces rather than enhances expression. You have to reduce it to the language and language isn't adequate. So for this deep personal communion with God, for this expression of praise and of thanksgiving, the gift of tongues is a tremendous asset. For you can speak to the Lord in an unknown tongue, a *glossa*, and as we get into the fourteenth chapter, though my own understanding is unfruitful, unto God I'm speaking praise and glory, divine secrets. I'm worshipping God. I'm praising God. Paul said, indeed you praise God well. So if I speak with these tongues and the idea of men would be though I didn't know it, languages.

In the Book of Acts (Acts 2:1-13), they were all speaking in the *glossa*, as the Spirit gave them ability. But when the Jews gathered around from the various parts of the world, they marveled and they wondered, saying are not all of these that are speaking, Galileans? How is it that we hear each one of us in our dialects (*dialektos* in Greek)? We hear them in our own dialects as they are magnifying God, declaring the glorious works of God. So they were tongues of men though they were unknown to the person speaking. It was the gift of the speaking to God in a language that I did not know, that I had not studied. The tongues of angels would be perhaps, the heavenly language. Now what language do they speak in heaven? My father in law who was a Swede, insisted that they spoke Swedish in heaven. But what is the language of heaven? We don't know, but there are those that say the tongues of angels would be a reference to the heavenly language.

And though I could speak with the various dialects of man, by the Spirit or though I would have the gift that I would speak to God in angelic language, *but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal*. In other words, it is meaningless noise. The clanging of a cymbal is just a noise. And thus without love, this exotic gift of tongues is just noise. It's meaningless.

The word, love, in the King James is translated charity. It came from the fact that Wycliffe, translated the English Bible from the Latin Vulgate. In translating from the Latin Vulgate, he translated the Latin word, *charitos*. When the Latin Vulgate was translated from the Greek, the Greek word was *agape*. They translated into Latin, *charitos*, because the word *amour* in Latin, the word was a word for a carnal love, thus they didn't want to use the word *amour*. So they translated into the Latin Vulgate, the word, *charitos*, because it's the love that prompts you to give. So when Wycliffe translated from the Latin Vulgate into the English, he sort of directly translated it from the Latin, *charitos*, to the word charity. But through the years, the word charity has sort of changed in its usage and in its meaning.

We think of charity as putting a dollar in the Salvation Army pot at Christmas time or of giving to the

poor, giving clothes to the GoodWill, things of that nature. And thus because of the change of the usage, charity has the idea of sympathy, it is no longer a good word for translation.

Going back to the Greek word, *agape*, in the Greek there are three basic words for love. Now the Greeks understood that man existed on three levels, physical, emotional and spiritual. The Greeks really didn't understand the spiritual level, but they did understand the physical and the emotional. There is a weakness to language, especially the English language. The French sort of point up the weakness, talking about the superiority of the French language. They say you Englishmen when you want to tell your wife you love her, you are limited to just one word. We have a hundred ways to love you, you know! Of course they think of themselves as romantics.

But it is true that our English word, love, is overused. I love peanuts! I start eating them. I have a tough time stopping because I really love peanuts. I love my wife, but I can assure you that what I feel for Kay is far different than what I feel for peanuts. And yet I'm stuck with the word love. So our English word, love, has to describe a wide spectrum. Now in the Greek, love on a physical level, was the word *eros*. And Eros in Greek mythology was their God of love, the consort of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of passion and physical love. Hollywood, when it talks of love, is talking about the Greek word, *eros*. It's love on the physical level, which isn't always love. It is extremely self centered, seeking self-gratification. It would be better translated, lust. Physical love, it's that kind when a person says, let's make love. That isn't necessarily love at all.

There is a second Greek word, *phileo*. The word means fondness. It means friendship. It means love. Sexual aspects are not involved. It's the love that you have for your children. It's the love that you have for your family. It's the love that you have for your friends, the *phileo*. Wives are told to love your husbands. There is the *phileo*. The older women are to teach the younger women to love their husband. There the word *phileo* is used, respect, fondness, love.

But when you come into the Christian realm and you come into the realm of the Spirit, which the Greeks did not know, which the world does not know, there is a depth of love that transcends human love. It's the love of God that has been shed abroad in our hearts by Jesus Christ. This love transcends all other love, much greater than the *phileo*! *Phileo* is usually is sort of reciprocal. *Eros* is purely selfish. *Phileo* is reciprocal. I love you because you love me. I love you because we get along well. We are able to relate to each other and understand each other. We like the same kind of music. We like the same kind of reading and so forth. We have these affinities. We complement each other. So I have this fondness and this love for you in the *phileo* realm. But that is sort of reciprocal, it's give and take.

But when you get to the spiritual depth of love, the *agape*, as we will find here in the thirteenth chapter, it is a giving love. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. It's a giving love. It's a divine love. It's God's love shed abroad in our hearts. So it was a word that was coined for the New Testament. It was a word that was created to express a depth of love that transcends physical love or emotional love, a self-sacrificing love. Thus the New Testament coined the word *agape*.

Now whenever you create a new word, it is also necessary that you create a definition for that word. Basically in Galatians chapter five and here in the thirteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians, what we actually have is a defining of the Greek word, *agape*. In the fifth chapter of Galatians (Galatians 5:22), Paul said now the fruit of the spirit is *agape*. Then he began to give words that help define what *agape* is—joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, the characteristics of *agape*.

So here in the thirteenth chapter, are the definitions and characteristics of *agape*. But he starts out with the preeminent, I show you a more excellent way, even greater than the gifting of the Spirit, such as tongues of men and angels. It's meaningless if I don't have the *agape*.

²*And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries* (The word of wisdom or the word of knowledge, I have the understanding,) *and all knowledge, and though I have all faith* (Now these are things that are listed as gifts of the Spirit in the previous chapter. The gift of prophecy, the gift of discerning of spirits, the gift of the word of knowledge, the gift of faith, though I have these gifts.),

And though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. This love is more important than faith that can move mountains! It's more important than your ability to understand

all of the innuendoes of the spiritual applications of the Scriptures.

³*And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor,* And here is where the *charatos*, you see, doesn't fit in because though I'm a very charitable person. And like Jesus said to the rich, young ruler, if you want to be perfect, go sell everything and give to the poor, come and follow Me. If I do that and yet if love isn't the motivator, I have not love.

and though I give my body to be burned, (I'm willing to be martyred for Jesus Christ. I'm willing to go to the stake, let them light the fire and be martyred for the Lord.)

but have not love, it profits me nothing. All of these wonderful, exotic things are not of any value at all, unless I have this *agape*.

Then he describes the characteristics of *agape*. First of all, *agape*, ⁴*Love suffers long and is kind;* The idea there is that it suffers long or is long-suffering, as it is described elsewhere. That is, it puts up and puts up and puts up. Now we usually have three as our number. That's the third time and now I'm going to do something!

Peter, thinking that he was really growing in grace, said, Lord, how often should I forgive a brother the same offense? He went beyond our three. He said seven times? Jesus said, no Peter, seventy times seven (Matthew 13:21). Oh no, four hundred and ninety? I'm sure Jesus figured that he would lose count before he got that far and would begin to understand that forgiveness is a matter of spirit, not of mathematics.

It's long suffering. That is, it puts up. But then, it's long suffering and is kind, after it puts up. Then it's kind! It doesn't say, okay, I've taken it enough. Now I'm going to do something! But it is longsuffering. At the end of this period of longsuffering, it's kind. It doesn't seek the retribution and vengeance. It's kind.

This (*agape*) *love does not envy; love does not parade itself,* It doesn't vaunt itself. It doesn't go around boasting of how loving I am. What is it that Shakespeare said? Thou protesteth too much. I'm always a little concerned when people tell me how much they love me. Sometimes I feel like Shakespeare, thou protesteth too much. I usually get a little leery because I've been burned by those who were protesting their tremendous love and devotion, you know. They are too flowery, too flattering. The *agape* doesn't flaunt itself. It doesn't brag about itself.

It is not puffed up; The Bible says that love builds up, but it isn't puffed up.

It ⁵*does not behave rudely,* It doesn't act weird.

And it *does not seek its own*, or her own way. It doesn't insist that you do it "my way". If you don't let me be captain, I'm going to go home and I'm not going to play with you anymore. Love doesn't insist on its own way.

And is not provoked, (Wait a minute, easily. No, sorry about that. Easily was added by the translators in the old King James translation. It's not there in any original manuscripts, not any. But I guess the translators, when they got to that, thought wow. That's hard to handle! So to make it a little easier, they put in the word, "easily". I've heard a lot of people say, well, I do get provoked but it takes an awful lot. I'm not easily provoked. Sorry, this true love just isn't provoked.

It *thinks no evil;* It doesn't look for hidden motives. It isn't looking to find some kind of hidden agenda. There are people who are always looking for some hidden agenda. I had a lady in a church that I pastored who always come up later and say, now, when you said, hello, what did you really mean? I meant hello! But she would always take some phrase, what did you really mean by that? She was always looking for some subtle, hidden, meaning. I'm not that smart to speak in subtleties. I just have to say what I mean and mean what I say. So love doesn't think evil.

It ⁶*does not rejoice in iniquity,* If someone who has been doing you a lot of dirty things, just wrecked his brand new car, how do you feel? Love doesn't rejoice in iniquity.

but rejoices in the truth;

⁷*bears all things,*

It believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. In the Greek, it is just bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. The characteristics of this *agape*.

And then sort of the culmination of it all, ⁸*Love never fails.*

Now here is a place for self examination. Paul the apostle, back in the eleventh chapter (1 Cor. 11:28), talking about the communion, said that let a man examine himself for if we would judge ourselves we will not be judged of God.

Here is a tremendous opportunity now for self examination. By going back as we have just read the definition of this love, take out the word love, or charity, and insert your name. Chuck suffers long and is kind. Chuck does not envy. Chuck vaunteth not himself. Chuck is not puffed up. Chuck doesn't behave himself unseemly. He doesn't seek his own and is not provoked. He thinks no evil. He rejoices not in iniquity. But he rejoices in the truth. He bears all things. He believes all things. He hopes all things.

As you start getting down the list you begin to gulp and say, oops, it doesn't fit! Chuck never fails! Okay, laugh, but put your name in it!

Now, let's go back once more. Let's put the name of Jesus in place of *agape*. Jesus suffers long and is kind! He envies not! Jesus doesn't vaunt Himself. He is not puffed up. He does not behave Himself unseemly, seeks not His own, is not provoked. He thinks no evil. He rejoices not in iniquity but rejoices in the truth. He bears all things. He believes all things, hopes all things and He endures all things. Jesus never fails! It flows doesn't it? It fits!

So this can be a great test of how far I am down the road towards what the Lord would have me to be. This is describing how God wants each of us to be! He wants this love to be working in our lives. If I don't have it, all of the Spiritual giftings that I might have are meaningless.

Now love never fails, but there are those things, the gifts, that are not lasting. They are for us now. We need them now. They are important to us now, but these gifts will one day pass away because we will no longer be needing them. So he is going to deal now with that which is transient, that which is temporal. He is going to compare it with that which is lasting, that which is enduring.

But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; In other words, the day will come when we no longer need this divine gift of prophecy.

whether there are tongues, That is, the gift of tongues, again.

they will cease; They will no longer be necessary in my worship of God.

whether there is knowledge, That is, the word of knowledge, the gift of the word of knowledge.

it will vanish away.

⁹*For we know in part and we prophesy in part.*

¹⁰*But when that which is perfect has come,* (Or that which is complete. So the contrast is between in part and the complete. When that which is complete shall come.) *then that which is in part will be done away.*

Now obviously this is a reference to the coming again of Jesus Christ. As you will find in the context. But you will also find in the promise of the Holy Spirit. For in the Book of Joel (Joel 2:28-32), where God's promise that in the last days, that it shall come to pass, says the LORD, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh. And your sons and daughters shall prophesy. When? In the last days when I pour out My Spirit upon all flesh. Your sons and daughters shall prophesy. Your young men shall see visions. Your old men shall dream dreams. Upon my servants and my handmaidens, will I pour out of My Spirit in that day, saith the LORD. And it shall come to pass in that day that whosoever shall call upon the name of the LORD shall be saved. And there shall be blood and fire and a vapor of smoke. The moon shall be turned into blood and the sun into darkness before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD. So this prophecy of Joel is of the last days. He is speaking about the gifts of prophecy. Your sons and daughters shall prophesy. God's Spirit shall be poured out upon all flesh.

So we will need these supernatural gifts while we are journeying through our pilgrimage now, but there will come a day when we come to the end of our earthly pilgrimage. We'll enter into the presence and the glory of the Lord. At that time we won't need any of these gifts any longer. So the prophecies will fail, the tongues will cease, that is the supernatural giftings. And the knowledge will vanish away because these things at best we only know in part, we prophesy in part, but when that which is perfect or complete has come, (Jesus Christ when He comes), these things which are in part will be done away.

¹¹*When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child;* We still are in that spiritual infancy state. There is so much about the Spirit, so much about God, so much about the things of

God, that we don't know. We have a partial knowledge. We're like children in Spiritual things. One day I'll have a complete understanding when I am with the Lord, but not until then! But when He comes, then we'll have that complete and full understanding. But right now we are like children in Spiritual things. So when I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child;

but when I became a man, I put away childish things. ¹²*For now we see in a mirror, dimly,* Presently it's obscure, the truths of God are obscure. We don't see them fully, completely, perfectly.

but then face to face. But one day it will be face to face, no more obscurity! The face to face, Peter speaking of Jesus (1 Peter 1:8), said, whom not having not seen, yet you love. Even though you do not yet see Him now, yet you rejoice with the joy, a hope that is filled with joy.

Now I know in part, So we know in part, we prophesy in part, but the day is coming when we see our Lord face to face and all of the mysteries will be removed, that which is perfect has come.

but then I shall know just as I also am known. I'll know it all. Now you see to say that, which is perfect is the complete canon of Scripture, would then be to declare that I know everything now. But I don't. There is a lot I don't know. But I'm looking forward. I will know even as I am known.

Now those are the things that are in part. They are going to pass away when that which is perfect has come. These aids that God has given us. These helps by the Holy Spirit that God has given us to enable us to go through this earthly pilgrimage. These things, when we get to the end of the road will be done away with. We won't need them anymore. We will be with our Lord face to face!

But there are three things that will abide even through eternity. The three planks of the Christian experience. These which in part will be done away, ¹³*And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.*

Our faith in God, that abides. Without faith it is impossible to please God. Our faith in the Word of God, our faith in the promises of God, our faith in the promise of salvation through Jesus Christ, that abides.

The hope that we have in our hearts, the hope of the heavenly kingdom, the hope of eternal life with our Lord, that abides.

The agape, this love of God shed abroad in our hearts through Jesus Christ. This love, it abides. It's eternal.

Faith, hope, love, but the greatest of these is love.

Now the thirteenth chapter really doesn't end here. You have to go into the first part of chapter fourteen, where he said, pursue or follow after love. That's the command. This is what love is all about, but now follow after or pursue love. God help us!

Testimony of Ljuban Bilbija, Pastor, Calvary Chapel, Subotica, Yugoslavia

Ljuban Bilbija, is a Yugoslavian who has been trained and has taken over our church in Subotica. Now he is the pastor. The goal of our missions is for the missionaries to work themselves out of a job, to go in, to establish a church and then to train the local fellows there. And then ultimately to turn the ministry over to them so that if in years to come, there comes a change in government and they want to put out foreign missionaries, the Word of God will still go on and be taught. So we are glad to have Matt and Ljuban. So come on up and share with us about what the Lord is now doing in Subotica.

Actually I was hoping that Chuck was going to forget. Chuck never fails. I fail though. Because my English is so lousy, I ask my sister to translate for me. And so I am going to speak in Yugoslavian. Anybody know Yugoslavian here? This is going to be a lot of fun, a lot of fun. Yugoslavian, maybe somebody knows it and God is going to bless you. If you are Yugoslavian, or Croatian, or Bosnian, that if you know of, you can understand this language, if not, then just listen to my sister.

First my name is Ljuban, as Chuck said. I don't know exactly what God is doing in Subotica, but He is doing a big work! It's very interesting, I'll tell you how the church came about if somebody doesn't know.

A missionary from here went 10,000 kilometers with a guitar and the Bible. He went out to the streets of Subotica, a city in Yugoslavia where we are serving. And he started singing songs of verses. His heart was for the youth. He thought that God was going to touch on that way the youth. And God did! Pretty soon we had this little group. There were between ten and fourteen people. As the time was passing by and Mike was playing his guitar, you guys know Mike Harris, God started blessing the whole ministry. Little by little hundreds of people started coming and listening to the Bible studies. A lot of them stayed. (Then the tape ends.)