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# Paul's Hymn of Love

*by*

Charles R. Erdman

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# Paul's Hymn of Love

*First Corinthians Thirteen*  
*An Interpretation*

By  
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## I CORINTHIANS XIII

(American Revised Version)

**I**F I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am become sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And if I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and if I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing. Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own, is not provoked, taketh not account of evil; rejoiceth not in unrighteousness, but rejoiceth with the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Love never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall be done away; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall be done away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part, but when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I felt as a child, I thought as a child: now

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*that I am become a man, I have put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know fully even as also I was fully known. But now abideth faith, hope, love, these three: and the greatest of these is love.*

## I CORINTHIANS XIII

(King James Version)

**T**HOUGH I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.

And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up.

Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;

Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;

Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.



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

*But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.*

*When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.*

*For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.*

*And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.*

I


A HYMN OF LOVE

*Desire earnestly the greater gifts. And moreover a most excellent way show I unto you.*

I Corinthians 12:31, A. R. V.

# I

## A HYMN OF LOVE

O compose a song which will live forever in the hearts of men is a brilliant achievement; and more glorious still is it if the music of the song can transform those hearts, dispel discords, remove bitterness, still passion and inspire harmonies of sympathy and kindness, helpfulness and grace.

Such an illustrious achievement was that of Paul the apostle when he wrote to the Corinthian Christians those immortal lines which, because of their appealing message and rhythmic, poetic form, have become known familiarly as "Paul's Hymn of Love."

Surprise has been expressed that the Hymn should have been penned by this particular apostle. Yet the feeling is due only to a misunderstanding of Paul. He is often pictured merely as a writer of keen intelligence and relentless logic, one severe, cold, unfeeling and austere. In reality, he was a man of deep emotions, wide sympathies and warm affection, a man of true sentiment and devoted friendships, a human being of passion and tenderness and tears.

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Paul was characterized by a firm and inflexible will. The very strength and preëminence of the apostle consisted in the symmetry of his character. In him the powers of reason and feeling and of determination were combined in an unusual way. With all his clearness of mind and strength of purpose, there was with him no lack of heart. A man void of sympathy and affection never could have won the devotion of multitudes, as did Paul, nor could he have composed the world's greatest lyric of love.

Others, however, voicing surprise at the authorship of the Hymn, do so not on the ground that Paul was incapable of emotion, but that in his other writings he is concerned chiefly with the kindred grace of faith. This opinion may be a fair one, and it may be proper, following the popular classification, to distinguish Paul as the apostle of faith, and James as the apostle of works, Peter the apostle of hope, and John the apostle of love. Yet such a general statement should not make us forget that Paul's teachings are as remarkable for their balance as his character is for its symmetry; nor, further, that while the various writers may differ in their emphasis, they are all in perfect agreement in their statements as to the substance of Christian truth. James may be styled "the apostle of works," yet he repeatedly emphasizes the power of faith. Peter assures us that we have

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been begotten unto a living hope, to an inheritance reserved in heaven; but he assures us that we are kept by the power of God "through faith unto a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." John, known as the apostle of love, nevertheless declares: "This is the victory that hath overcome the world, even our faith."

Paul himself affirms that we are saved by grace "through faith." He reminds us more than once that "the just shall live by faith;" and he assures us that "being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ." Nevertheless, he proclaims with equal clearness that in the exercise of love, man fulfills all the requirements of God:

*"Owe no man anything, save to love one another: for he that loveth his neighbour hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not covet, and if there be any other commandment, it is summed up in this word, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: love, therefore, is the fulfilment of the law."*

Paul, therefore, is simply in agreement with his Master, who taught that love is the comprehensive principle of religious life:

*"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all*

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*thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second like unto it is this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments the whole law hangeth, and the prophets."*

In his message to the Corinthian Church, however, Paul is not discussing love to God, which is love in its highest exercise, nor does he refer to selfish and sensual passion, which may be love in its lowest form; he treats of that kind and sympathetic regard for men which makes one seek another's highest good.

Nor does he here discuss love in the abstract. He is urging a concrete application of what he regards as the controlling principle of Christian conduct. He is writing of "spiritual gifts" granted to the early Christians, and he is showing that the way to cultivate, to regard and to exercise these gifts is the way of love.

The gifts were quite diverse in kind. Among them were "gifts of healing," "workings of miracles," "prophecy," "discernings of spirits," "divers kinds of tongues," and "interpretations of tongues." Use of the gifts was threatening to divide the Corinthian Church. Their possessors were tempted to despise those of their fellow-Christians in whom they were lacking, and those who lacked the gifts were envious of any by whom

they were possessed. Certain of the gifts were regarded as more desirable than others, particularly because they made those who displayed them conspicuous and seemingly very important in the life of the Church, with the result that some persons grew proud in the display of their endowments, and others neglected and depreciated the lesser gifts which were theirs.

Paul assured the Corinthians that the gifts of the Spirit were granted, not for the gratification of their possessors, but for the edification of the Church. He reminded them that while in these gifts there was wide diversity, yet in the body of Christ, with its many members, there was a spiritual unity which must be recognized and preserved. Each member of the Church, he insisted, had a place to fill and a function to perform. Though, indeed, they should appreciate and desire the greater gifts, yet the supremely important matter was the way in which all gifts were sought and estimated and employed. "Desire earnestly the greater gifts," he urges, "and moreover a most excellent way show I unto you." Inevitably there then follows his immortal Hymn, in which he points out this incomparable way, the way of Christian love.

It becomes obvious that the apostle was dealing with a temporary condition in a local church. Still, in discussing such particular problems, as was



his custom, he based his instructions upon principles of abiding validity; what he here says of love applies to all persons in all places and at all times.

The Hymn of Love forms a part of the pastoral teaching of Paul. Its first application evidently is to Christian ministers. Their predecessors were especially in the writer's mind. Those who have been granted gifts for the instruction of the Church, for its edification and for its leadership in worship and in work, are particularly in need of a spirit which is sympathetic, helpful, unselfish and devoted. They may sadly be tempted to use their advantages of place and prominence and power to minister merely to their own vanity and gratification; or, if conscious of the limitations of their gifts, they may tend to become jealous and bitter, suspicious and unkind. Today, also, the unity and growth of a local church, and even of larger Christian bodies, may be seriously threatened by any Christians who neglect the grace of love in their own lives to such an extent that in the exercise of their gifts they cause dissension among believers and bring disgrace on the name of Christ. —

But there is a more glorious aspect, also. The world never has seen more beautiful examples of patient, unrequited toil, or of sympathetic self-sacrificing service, than have been given by Chris-

## A HYMN OF LOVE

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tian pastors—servants of God who, in their tender ministries, have taught their people to follow in the footsteps of their loving Lord, having first of all followed Him themselves.

Not even the most brilliant gifts are of service to the Church if used to win power or praise or selfish gain; but the most lowly, the least gifted servant of Christ, when inspired by love's true sympathy, will assuredly find some sphere, some way, in which to manifest the spirit of his Lord, and to render valiant and valued service to His Church.

Paul's Hymn of Love, nevertheless, limits its glowing message to no one group, no society, no special class. In its charming cadences it carries the statement of a universal law. It sprang from the heart of an inspired apostle; it was occasioned by the need of an ancient church; yet as it has gone singing through the centuries, it has borne to men of every condition, race and clime, the assurance that satisfaction is to be attained, not along the path of self-seeking, but along avenues of service, and that the greatest talents or the humblest gifts can be of abiding usefulness only as man walks in the sunlit, Godlit way of love.

II

LOVE INDISPENSABLE

*If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am become sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And if I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and if I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing.*

I Corinthians 13:1-3, A. R. V.

## II

### LOVE INDISPENSABLE

**L**OVE is a Christian grace, according to Paul; it is not a "spiritual gift." Love is the "way," the spirit, the temper, in which spiritual gifts are to be regarded and developed and exercised; and it is so vital that without it spiritual gifts are of no use, of no value, to no profit.

Love is indeed one of the manifestations of the Spirit, and among those manifestations it is mentioned first and foremost. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control." Yet "spiritual gifts" is a term employed by the apostle to designate those mysterious, temporary endowments which were granted to certain members of the early Church to authenticate the Gospel message, and to establish and strengthen the Christian cause. Such were the gifts of miracles, of healing, of prophecy, and of tongues. Only in a secondary or figurative sense do we employ the word "gifts" when we sing:

*"Gracious Spirit, Holy Ghost,  
Taught by Thee, we covet most,*

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*Of Thy gifts at Pentecost,  
Holy, heavenly love."*

Although love is not, strictly speaking, a "gift" but a grace, it is so necessary in the exercise of all gifts or talents, whether of Pentecost or of the present day, that without it these enduements are meaningless and fruitless and void.

That endowment or "charism" most desired in the Corinthian Church was the "gift of tongues." This gift, so difficult to define, was not the ability to speak in foreign languages, an enduement which seems to have been granted to the Christians at Pentecost. It was rather a power of ecstatic, inarticulate utterance, which could be understood only by one who had the corresponding gift of the "interpretation of tongues." Probably it was popular because so surprising and spectacular that its recipients became conspicuous, admired or envied, among their fellow-Christians. A valuable gift it was, indeed. When properly employed it must have fulfilled a wise divine purpose, and in some real way have aided in the enlargement and the strengthening of the Christian brotherhood.

But what if it were exercised without love, used to minister to the pride of the speaker, or employed to obtain admiration and applause? So utilized, it was worthless, vain. "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am become sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal."

When Paul refers to "tongues of men" he means the highest conceivable powers of human utterance—such as indeed the gift of tongues was supposed to confer. "Tongues of angels" indicates such similar superlative forms of speech as might belong to the heavenly world. Yet these, even these, if uttered not in love, are like only a noisy gong, or a clanging cymbal. They are merely sound, confused babblings void of either sense or significance.

Modern life knows some today who claim to possess the gift of tongues. Should they not authenticate their claims, by such interpretations as prove to be of value to their fellow-Christians? Ought they not so to exercise their gift as to edify the Church, and not to tend to trouble or divide it?

A very real gift of eloquence, also, is occasionally found among Christian ministers, today. It is a precious, a priceless endowment. Rightly employed, it cheers broken hearts, calls wanderers home, summons men to noble service, and arouses the indifferent to heroic action. But without love, the most golden eloquence is mere sound—empty, ineffective noise. A man may be a master of rhetoric; he may compose the most polished periods; he may deliver the most finished orations, yet if he speaks without human sympathy, if he fails to manifest a passion for souls, his auditors are liable to remain listless, uninspired, unmoved.

Another's speech may be imperfect, faltering,

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crude, but if only his heart be aflame with genuine love, he may move his hearers to laughter and to tears, to high purpose and earnest resolve, and may send them forth to lives of higher endeavour comforted, cheered and renewed.

Man's gift of eloquence, in itself, unfortunately may prove to be a delusion and a betraying. It may tempt its possessor to seek satisfaction in praise and reward. With all its surprising achievements, with all its apparent impressiveness, it may in reality produce mere sound without meaning, noise without effect, like jangling metal or a clanging cymbal. If in modern pulpits, preachers and defenders of the faith, who otherwise possess real eloquence, evidence a lacking in sympathy, in kindness or in love, their utterances will come forth harsh, strident, metallic—totally lacking in helpfulness, in persuasiveness and in power. Their speech signifies nothing but selfishness and pride.

So, too, it may be with the "gift of prophecy." This gift was regarded by Paul as more valuable than the famous gift of tongues—if accompanied by love; but if not mated with love, in his opinion it was worthless. This prophetic endowment enabled its possessor both to understand and to interpret the truths of religion. Its essential function was not predicting the future, but explaining divine realities. Paul considered it superior to the gift of tongues because of its practical value in instructing



and guiding the hearers, in winning souls for Christ, and in strengthening Christian character. Tongues might be more spectacular, but they were far less useful. As Paul asserted, "He that prophesieth speaketh unto men edification and exhortation and consolation. He that speaketh in a tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church." Therefore, adds Paul, "I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that I might instruct others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue."

But prophecy requires love. Though, in the apostle's estimation, prophecy is the gift most to be desired, without love it falters. Though it be manifested in its very highest degree, in such a degree that its possessor can interpret the most profound truths of religion or even can predict future events; though in response to this gift one can understand all mysteries of divine revelation and possess all related knowledge, nevertheless, if lacking in love the prophet would amount in the sphere of Christian service to nothing. "If I have the gift of prophecy and know all mysteries and all knowledge . . . but have not love, I am nothing."

As for today, the gift of prophecy may have been "done away," yet its close parallel is found in the modern gift of ability to preach. Like prophecy, this gift may be regarded as the highest endowment granted to followers of Christ. Its exercise surely

may be expected to lead to edification and exhortation and consolation. Yet, if these and similar great ends are to be served, let the gift be exercised in love. Regardless of how much truth one may have discovered, no matter how much knowledge one may possess, though he combine the intellect of a philosopher with the insight of a prophet, if his preaching be not inspired by love, suffused with sympathy, and begotten by a heart of understanding, he will amount to nothing as a prophet.

In days of religious controversy we should keep in mind this estimate of the apostle. If it is right "to contend earnestly for the faith," is it not wrong to reveal bitterness and harshness, suspicion and pride? Fearlessly to proclaim the truth is a necessity, but one must also "speak the truth in love." Let one be lacking in this supreme gift, and he scarcely can hope to possess in reality deep knowledge of divine truth. Whatever doctrines or formulas he may be able to state or to defend, "he that loveth not, knoweth not God—for God is love." Of a truth, no amount of learning on the part of a preacher can compensate for any lack of sympathy on his part; but when his people know that he has a burning heart, a soul of love which yearns for their welfare, then even his most imperfect presentations of the simplest truths will establish, guide and console them. Loveless prophets in any church are powerless; they are "nothing."

Using the picturesque hyperbole which Christ employed in a similar connection, Paul proceeds to proclaim: "If I have all faith so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing." When he writes of faith as making its possessor nothing unless it is accompanied by love, he seems to be referring not to saving faith in general, which is the portion of all Christians, but to a special spiritual gift which had been granted to certain members of the Corinthian Church and which conferred the power of working miracles. If divorced from love, even such faith as results in miracle must not be taken as attesting Christian life. Such, too, was the teaching of Christ: "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not . . . by thy name do many mighty works? and then will I profess unto them I never knew you." An unloving worker of miracles, according to Paul, is "nothing."

If such be the case with tongues and prophecy and faith, such also is it with charity: "If I bestow all my goods to feed the poor and have not love, I am nothing." Even the beautiful act of alms-giving may spring from other motives than sympathy. One may be moved to it by a desire for fame or praise or to be seen of men, to win a reputation for generosity, to be freed from an annoying beggar, or to "lay up merit in heaven." Happily, however, the world today is brightened by countless instances of genuine self-sacrifice and generous ser-

vice. Thousands are saved from starvation and suffering; tender care is provided for the sick; the helpless are rescued by gifts and offerings. Unnumbered noble souls follow the footsteps of Christ in their gracious ministries; they let not the left hand know what the right hand is doing. These certainly will receive their reward from the Father who seeth in secret. Nevertheless, it remains true: If one be prompted to a deed of charity—even to the point of giving all that he possesses—by any motive short of the warmth of real affection, his reward will be wanting; it can profit him nothing.

But, surely, when the author of our Hymn of Love comes to speak of the glorious martyrs of the Church, he will not withhold his praise.

*“When martyred saints, baptized in blood,  
Christ’s sufferings shared below,”*

may we not assume that their sacrifice rose far above the sordid plane of selfishness? One who voluntarily submits himself to bodily torture must be impelled by complete devotion to a divine Master, to some great cause, or to the welfare of his fellow-men. Yet even in the supreme sacrifice there may lurk spiritual danger. Some have sought for death out of pride, cowardice, or mere stubborn wilfulness; some, indeed, have been more ready to endure mortal agony than to show a human kindness to their brother men.

Long ago, in the time of Augustus, a certain zealot from India burned himself to death at Athens. In that Grecian city his tomb, visible in the days of Paul, bore this pompous inscription:

*“Zarmochegas, the Indian from Bargaosa, according to the ancient customs of India, made himself immortal, and lies here.”*

Such martyrdom for the sake of ambition was a fact of frequent occurrence even in the early Church of Christ. Cyprian tells us: “Even in prison, even when death was imminent, there were some of the confessors who were puffed up with vanity and pride, and seemed to think that the blood of martyrdom would avail them to wash away the stains of flagrant and even recent immoralities.”

Too familiar, also, is the distressing record of the presbyter who, when giving himself up for death as a confessor of the faith, was accompanied to the execution ground by a Christian with whom he was at variance and who asked to be forgiven before the doomed man should die. But the presbyter absolutely refused the reconciliation besought with such importunity. Arrived at the place of execution, the wretched man himself faltered and denied his Lord, while the other, in the presence of peril to any known Christian, boldly confessed, and perished in the coward's stead. Now, had the presbyter actually met death, but only because afraid

of being regarded as a coward, could his martyrdom have been either heroic or commendable? As for the one who suffered, he won his crown not only for his courage but also for his love.

Such a glorifying death in love was the martyrdom of Ignatius as he faced the ravenous lions, and of Polycarp as he endured the searing flames.

Yet Paul was right when he insisted: "If I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing."

This Christian law of love has a most practical reference to such a potential virtue as self-sacrifice today. There is no virtue in merely making one's self miserable. Suffering self-inflicted because of such unworthy motives as pride or stubbornness or anger or desire for unstinted applause, is utterly and shamefully profitless. Apart from love, self-sacrifice is vain.

A striking emphasis is seen in these successive phrases which Paul employs to describe the uselessness of prophecy and faith, of charity and sacrifice of life, unless the one actuating motive is love. The gift of tongues "signifies nothing." The influence of prophecy or faith "amounts to nothing." The offering of goods, or even martyrdom, "secures nothing." Love is absolutely necessary if life in any sphere is to be of value or profit or meaning. In the deeper Christian sense, not to love is not to live.

III

LOVE MADE MANIFEST

*Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own, is not provoked, taketh not account of evil; rejoiceth not in unrighteousness, but rejoiceth with the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.*

I Corinthians 13:4-7, A. R. V.



### III

## LOVE MADE MANIFEST

**L**OVE may be difficult to define; it is not difficult to discern. Paul attempts no definition, analysis or description; he pictures love in action. He shows what it does and feels, and what it refrains from doing. He records the ways in which it manifests itself. As he does so, he is noting these manifestations in a restricted sphere, and he is seeking the solution of a practical problem. He is concerned with the state of the Corinthian Church, disturbed and divided as it is by the way in which its spiritual gifts are being exercised and regarded and employed.

Paul has shown that without love spiritual gifts are useless; he now points out how the possessors of such gifts would think and act if they were to be animated by love. He has demonstrated that love is indispensable; he now indicates that love is unmistakable. He has declared love to be necessary; he now reveals its surpassing beauty, and displays its intrinsic excellence and charm.

Not of love in the abstract is the apostle treating, nor is he attempting a complete summary of its qualities or elements; yet what he says constitutes

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the most perfect panegyric of love ever penned. Although he is seeking only to dispel from the Corinthian Church its discords and divisions and strife, he succeeds in revealing as no other writer ever had done or has done, what love can do when allowed to rule in any heart or home, in any circle or church, in any community or sphere of the whole wide world.

Compare now the words which Grecian Plato had written of love five hundred years before the days of Paul: "Love is our lord, supplying kindness and banishing unkindness, giving friendship and forgiving enmity, the joy of the good, the wonder of the wise, the amazement of the gods; desired by those who have no part in him, and precious to those who have the better part in him; parent of delicacy, luxury, desire, fondness, softness, grace; careful of the good, uncared of the evil. In every word, work, wish, fear—pilot, helper, defender, saviour; glory of gods and men, leader best and brightest; in whose footsteps let every man follow, chanting a hymn and poining in that fair strain with which love charms the souls of gods and men."

Five hundred years later than the Hymn of Paul these words of Mohammed were recorded: "Every good act is charity: your smiling in your brother's face; your putting a wanderer in the right road; your giving water to the thirsty, or exhortations to others to do right. A man's true wealth hereafter

is the good he has done in this world to his fellow-man. When he dies, people will ask, What property has he left behind him? but the angels will ask what good deeds he has sent before him."

Five hundred years ago Thomas à Kempis wrote this tribute: "Love feels no burden, regards not labours, would willingly do more than it is able, pleads not impossibilities, because it feels sure that it can and may do all things. Love is swift, sincere, pious, pleasant, and delightful; strong, patient, faithful, prudent, longsuffering, manly, and never seeking itself: it is circumspect, humble, and upright; sober, chaste, steadfast, quiet, and guarded in all its senses."

Significant are such expressions, beautiful and, in a certain degree, inspiring. Yet how imperfect, passionless and incomplete, compared with the peerless encomium of Paul!

In fifteen exquisite phrases the author of the Hymn of Love pictures vividly the operation of a principle which has power to transform all human life.

"Love suffereth long and is kind." These two comprehensive phrases describe the essential operation of love. Love makes one patient in enduring evil, active in conferring good. The evil referred to is such as emanates from provoking and injurious human beings; toward such persons love is magnanimous in the enduring of wrongs. It does

not give place to bitterness and wrath—it is long-suffering under injuries. It harbours no resentment. It forgives—not only seven times but seventy times seven.

Love does not return evil for evil. It is kind. It is not merely passive, it is actively engaged in doing good: It does kindnesses. Its kindly spirit is expressed in a certain familiar rule of life:

“ I shall pass through this world but once. Any good thing, therefore, that I can do, or any kindness that I can show to any human being, let me do it now. Let me not defer it, nor neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again.”

“ Love envieth not.” Itself generous, it does not begrudge others their gifts; and if at any time it is being outstripped by competitors, it harbours no irritation, feels no distress. It recognizes no jealousy when a rival receives the prize and praise.

“ Envieth not ”—yet who can say of himself, “ I know no envy ”? When Cain slew his brother, envy caused the first crime in the history of the human race, and doubtless envy is the last vice to be subdued in a Christian's heart.

“ Of all other affections, envy is the most importune and continual,” testified Bacon. “ For of other affections there is occasion given but now and then; but envy never takes a holiday, for it is ever working upon some or other. It is also the vilest

affection and the most depraved: for which cause it is the proper attribute of the Devil, who is called 'The Envious Man that soweth tares amongst the wheat by night.' "

That distressing strife and dissension in the church at Corinth was envy-born. A believer who spoke with tongues was envied by him who had only the marvellous gift of prophecy, he who prophesied was envied by him whose gifts were limited to the working of mighty miracles, and all three were subject to envy on the part of believers who possessed less notable gifts. And now, eighteen hundred years later, envy is one of the principal roots of bitterness in the world of today.

What, then, can relieve the grievous heart-ache which envy has caused? What heaven-sent remedy can avail to banish envy's bitter fruit of faction and pain and sorrow and loss? The Hymn of Paul answers: "Love—love envieth not."

"Love vaunteth not itself." Humble, not boastful, unostentatious, not anxious to display superior gifts or to attract unmerited admiration, this is love. Love is not arrogant toward inferiors—it is not "puffed up;" love never makes itself ridiculous by immodesty or irreverence or by any air of assumed superiority or sense of personal greatness.

It is the man who is not quite sure of his social position who stands on his dignity and insists upon deference from others. But love is self-forgetful,

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modest, self-effacing; eagerly it takes a lowly place if by doing so it can serve. Remember the Lord Jesus: When His disciples disputed over the chief place in the kingdom, Christ Himself, with incomparable majesty, rebuked them, and brought them to an ennobling humility; the Master became their servant, and washed their feet.

“Doth not behave itself unseemly;” love is true courtesy. The art of politeness cannot be learned exclusively from books of etiquette; it comes from within—it is inspired by sympathy, and is guided by consideration for the feelings of others. It is commonly a lack of love rather than a lack of knowledge that leads to bad manners, impropriety and embarrassing rudeness. Indeed, chivalry and courtesy cannot be manufactured by rule, they are the natural emanations of a sympathetic heart. Love cannot wound, love cannot distress, love can give no discomfiting embarrassment. Love is adverse to all unseemly contentions; the strifes which were disturbing the church at Corinth were not the fruitage of the courtesy which is love. For courtesy, by its very nature, suggests that it should have its own first expression in the dealings of Christians with those with whom they differ.

Love “seeketh not its own;” it is surpassingly unselfish. It is not the mark of love to be ever insisting upon its rights. Love refrains from demanding precedence, recognition, applause, even

the consideration which may rightly be expected. For love is deeper than justice.

Love is good-natured; it "is not provoked." Never is love irritable. That ill-temper which has been called "the vice of the virtuous" is often the one serious defect in characters otherwise noble. Sadly marring such nobility, it is indeed a pitiful fault, the cause of unutterable misery and pain. But there is a most excellent way of prevention; the infallible cure of an irritable temper, which reveals a heart dominated by self, is the persevering cultivation of unselfish love.

Love "taketh not account of evil;" it resents not. Storing up the memory of wrongs, of indifference, of contempt, of grievances, of wounds; making a rigorous record of the injuries received from others—this is not the way of the love which is of Christ. Love is able not only to forgive but also completely to forget.

Love creates charity toward all the faults and failures of one's fellow-men. Love "rejoiceth not in unrighteousness," is "never glad when others go wrong," finds no secret satisfaction in discovering the moral weakness or the hidden wickedness of a rival, is not eager to spread an evil report, glories not in the triumph of wrong.

Love "rejoiceth with the truth." When truth prevails, love shares the gladness of its victory. If one considers that the truth here indicated refers to

the Gospel, he sees that in the progress and vindication of that Gospel love finds keen delight. Or if one accepts the more probable meaning and views truth as contrasted with falsehood or righteousness contrasted with iniquity, once again he gazes upon love's triumph. Love rejoices when truth defeats calumny, when suspicions are proven unfounded, when wrong is vanquished and right prevails. "Love is gladdened by goodness."

Love ever is ready to make excuses for others; it throws a kindly mantle over all their faults. Love "beareth all things."

Love "believeth all things" that are good. It cherishes faith even in persons who are under suspicion. Love enables one to bestow an inspiring trust in his fellow-men and to take them at their highest and their best. And such showing of confidence often has an immediate reward; it discloses, even in the most depraved, unsuspected qualities of goodness and strength.

But what will be the case if dark days come when one is compelled to cease trusting, when what seems the very worst has been at last made plain—what will love do then? Even in such a crisis love does not despair; if no longer it can hope for acquittal, it looks confidently and impellingly for reformation and recovery, ultimate vindication and victory. For love "hopeth all things."

And love "endureth all things," undaunted, un-



discouraged, even to the end. Patient even in moments and days and long, long years when hope is deferred, love grows not weary. Under the burden of prolonged delay, it holds fast, hopes on, bravely perseveres and courageously endures.

These, then, are some of the manifestations of the grace we know as love. It is a grace difficult to imitate, counterfeit or conceal. More to be desired is it than any gift, however attended that may be by marvel or mystery or miracle. More than the exercise of any gift, its operation would unite and edify the Church of Christ. Under its complete control the humblest life becomes a radiant source of strength, of help, of harmony. By its victorious power the enthroned Christ will bring to the waiting world its destined age of glory and of gold.

IV

LOVE IMPERISHABLE

*Love never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall be done away; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall be done away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part, but when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I felt as a child, I thought as a child: now that I am become a man, I have put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know fully even as also I was fully known.*

I Corinthians 13:8-12, A. R. V.

## IV

### LOVE IMPERISHABLE

**L**OVE is immortal. In contrast with gifts and talents which have their place and purpose in time alone, love is a grace which through all eternity will continue to manifest its glorious power. As Paul continues his praise of this virtue, he now makes definite and contrasting reference to those gifts of prophecy and tongues and knowledge which had been granted for the strengthening and guidance of the Corinthian Church.

Love is indispensable in exercising these gifts, the apostle has shown, and, further, their possession may give fine occasion for the beautiful manifestations of love. Now he composes a new stanza in his Hymn of Love: He sings that love is to continue after all these gifts have passed away. "Love never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall be done away; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall be done away."

"They shall be done away." Let it be granted that the spiritual gifts which had been bestowed on the Corinthian Church were to be confined to the

apostolic age. Though Paul does not here so affirm, this limitation probably was a fact; it is rather certain that these exact gifts no longer exist. But the contrast in his Hymn of Love was not between the apostolic age and the present time, but between the present age as a whole and the future age which is to be ushered in by the return of Christ. Spiritual gifts were granted, at best, only for an era which was imperfect and preparatory, but love, love will continue, love will endure, love will be indispensable even "when that which is perfect is come."

In time or in eternity, love will never cease to be. Love is imperishable. "Whether there be prophecies, they shall be done away"—not because they are false and untrue, but because they all have had their perfect fulfilment, and because in the age to come there will be no occasion, no need for any prophetic gift. But love never faileth.

"Tongues . . . shall cease," but not love. The purpose of this most coveted gift of tongues was only the producing of a temporary effect and the giving of aid in the founding of the early Church. All necessity for its exercise is now gone, and surely in the future state this apparently mysterious form of unintelligible utterance will no longer be desired. But love never faileth.

"Knowledge . . . shall be done away." How and why, Paul makes brilliantly clear; at the ap-

pearing of Christ that which is partial and imperfect will inevitably vanish before that which is perfect and complete. All our knowledge, even such as that granted to the early Christians by special illumination, is fragmentary, temporary, provisional; "Knowledge . . . shall be done away." But love never faileth.

Into his immortal Hymn of Love the inspired composer introduces just here a double strophe. To make plain his meaning as to the vanishing of temporary gifts, Paul employs two comparisons—a child's knowledge, a mirror's reflection.

A child's knowledge, as every thoughtful adult knows, in due time gives way to the more perfect understanding of mature years: "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I felt as a child, I thought as a child: now that I am become a man, I have put away childish things." Normal human beings grow, progress, develop. Their resulting change in speech and disposition and mode of thought—transformations which the apostle himself experienced as he grew into manhood—forms a vivid picture of the passing away of our present imperfect knowledge, of its merging into mature and complete knowledge, in that glad day when Christ shall be revealed in glory. Then shall our eyes be opened to see the things which are abiding and eternal. Things of time cease to be, but love never faileth.

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Who can fail to catch the significance of the second comparison? The imperfect image reflected in a mirror, how unsatisfactory it is at best, when compared with immediate and perfect vision! "For now we see in a mirror, darkly; but then face to face." While things are as they are, our present apprehension of divine things must be indirect, indistinct. Broken outlines, dim impressions, vague, shadowy and tantalizing glimpses—how strikingly they contrast with that direct intuition, that instantaneous full knowledge, which we shall enjoy in the future state of glory!

As for mirrors and their faulty reflections, Corinth knew them. The ancient city, indeed, was famed for its mirrors, highly developed instruments made of polished metal. But even their most perfect reflections were dim and clouded when compared with the direct sight of the eye. Our present knowledge of God similarly is dim with baffling mysteries.

We see "darkly" in our present age, as in a riddle, as in an enigma; but then shall we see the Lord immediately, even as now He Himself sees us. Never can our knowledge be so complete as is His, indeed, but it will be as direct as His own. In contrast with its present incompleteness, it will be worthy of comparison with God's present perfect knowledge of ourselves: "Now I know in part; but then shall I know fully, even as also I was fully

known." Present knowledge, which is only in part, shall be done away; but love never faileth.

Incomplete and partial though our present knowledge be, let us not, however, fall into the fatal error of concluding that it is delusive or vain. What we know now presents great realities as the objects of our faith, and as the ground of our eternal hopes. It does not deceive us. A divine bestowal, it is to be received gratefully, to be developed continually and to be used wisely. Only by living in its light shall we be prepared for the enlarged conceptions and clearer visions of a celestial day. For our present needs it is sufficient.

Yet so imperfect is our knowledge that it should never become an occasion for vain boasting, for assumed superiority, for pride, or for strife. With all its limitations and imperfections it should not be a ground for envy, pride, division and debate. Why should one greatly rejoice in the praise of temporary gifts which so soon are to disappear? Rather let us cultivate, let us display, that virtue which will outlive all time, which will make its possessor meet for the highest service of God.

That which is in part shall be done away, but that which is perfect shall ever continue in its triumphant work; love never faileth.



V

LOVE PRĒMINENT

*But now abideth faith, hope, love, these three: and the greatest of these is love.*

I Corinthians 13:13, A. R. V.

*Follow after love.*

I Corinthians 14:1, A. R. V.

## V

### LOVE PREËMINENT

**R**IGHTLY called “the greatest thing in the world,” love is also the most glorious thing in heaven. That it will outlast the gifts of time, Paul has shown; he now declares that it surpasses the graces which continue through eternity. Not only is it superior to the things that perish, it is supreme among the things that abide. Of the three cardinal Christian graces, love is and ever will be chief.

*“Now abideth faith, hope, love, these three:  
And the greatest of these is love.”*

On this confident, exultant note, the apostle brings his exquisite Hymn to its climactic close.

“The greatest of these”—in what, then, does this supremacy consist? Not, surely, in any greater permanence possessed by love as compared with faith or hope. By some students of the Hymn the word “now” has been taken to imply that at the present time, during the present age, faith, hope and love are abiding, but that in the age to come faith and hope will cease to exist, and of the three

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only love will remain. So Bishop Wordsworth has taught us to sing:

*“ Faith will vanish into sight;  
Hope be emptied in delight.  
Love in heaven will shine more bright,  
Therefore give us love.”*

Is it not better to understand Paul as affirming that faith and hope are as permanent and abiding as love? “These three,” he emphatically asserts, “these three” are equally immortal, but “the greatest of these is love.”

Will faith change to sight, or will it be needed in the perfect and heavenly state? The answer may depend upon the definition of faith. No doubt we shall then have a clearer vision of divine realities, a “vision beatific.” Yet if by faith we mean trust in God, confidence in God, dependence upon God, surely this will never cease; the clearer vision will issue in more perfect trust, in a confidence which no shadow of doubt shall ever cross.

Hope’s large realization of future glory may be expressed, in some sense, by saying that it is changed to glad fruition; yet, if by hope we mean the expectation of future good, then hope can confidently be depended on to continue adding its brightness to all the expanding horizons of the ages to come.

Faith, hope and love are all to abide, yet the greatest will ever be love. Though why this pre-

ëminence exists Paul does not explicitly explain, earlier in his Hymn he has suggested one reason. Faith without love is imperfect; it may be merely the cold assent of the mind, or the inactive submission of the will, and it may lack in warmth of devotion of the heart. Hope without love may be self-centred or impure. But true faith and true hope find their completeness in true and perfect love. Love is their ultimate purpose, their complete fulfilment, their highest aim, their utmost goal. It is the most blessed fruit of faith, it is the greatest good anticipated by hope.

Love has its manward side, as well. Faith may bring one into right relation to God, hope may put one into a right attitude toward the future, and love keeps one in right relation to his fellow-men. Of value in the individual life, it also brings help to others, it strengthens the Church, it gives light and gladness to all the earth; love verily is the greatest thing in the world.

But what need to seek other explanations of the supremacy of love? Is not the all-sufficient reason the one great fact that love is of the very nature of God? Faith and hope and love all are immortal, but love is divine. Faith and hope bring us into right relation to God, but love is of His essential being. God does not "believe;" God does not "hope"—He loves. Love is supreme for the one reason that "God is love."

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It is in the nature of God, and in the recognition of His love, that love for Him, and for others alike, has its origin and source and constant support. "We love because he first loved us." This last revealing sentence from the Epistle of John furnishes us the clue in our continuing quest for love; and to this quest we are divinely called. Paul's matchless Hymn was not penned merely to gratify a sense of beauty, to rebuke us for our loveless lives, or to awaken a sentimental regard for a tender passion or a Christian grace; it was written to arouse us to instant and continued action. Inevitably it is followed by the brief, insistent command: "Follow after love"—press eagerly forward on this supremely excellent way.

Love can be cultivated. It can be developed, by continuous practice, as can any similar gift or grace. Irritating and annoying situations in human affairs can wisely be regarded merely as opportunities for testing and developing a quality of soul which suffers long, and is kind.

Then, too, love begets love; and as the recognition of the love felt for us by human friends tends to awaken a response in our own hearts, so it is with the love of God. To realize and to remember His love for us is the divinely appointed method of developing this supreme and indispensable Christian grace.

The love of God—we trace it through all the

lights and shadows of our changing lives. We scan its glory in the sky above and earth below. We read its records in His written Word. And in hours of secret prayer, in times of social worship, in the silence of the solemn sacrament, "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts."

*"O love of God, how strong and true!  
Eternal, and yet ever new;  
Self-fed, self-kindled like the light—  
Changeless, eternal, infinite:  
We read Thee best in Him who came  
To bear for us the cross of shame—  
Sent by the Father from on high,  
Our life to live, our death to die."*

There is, then, one happy season of the Christian year when the quest for love should be most fruitful and most glad—the season which calls to mind the Saviour's birth. Then amidst the joy of little children, reminded anew of the priceless affection of friends, breathing the atmosphere of good-will, inspired by messages concerning God's unspeakable Gift, it should be vastly easier to forgive our enemies, to forget our wrongs, to overcome our envies, to share our blessings, to seek the good of others, and in our generous sympathies to express something of a love which is divine.

Let us renew the quest. No searching, no adventure in all of life, is more noble, more worthy,

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more rewarding. For in time or in eternity there will be nothing greater, nothing better, nothing more glorious than love.

“A most excellent way show I unto you”: Love is kind; love rejoiceth; love beareth; love believeth; love hopeth; love endureth; love never faileth.

*“Now abideth faith, hope, love—  
These three:  
And the greatest of these  
Is love.”*



## I CORINTHIANS XIII

(Translated by James Moffatt)

**I** MAY speak with the tongues of  
men and of angels,  
but if I have no love,  
I am a noisy gong or a  
clanging cymbal;  
I may prophesy, fathom all  
mysteries and secret lore,  
I may have such absolute faith  
that I can move hills from  
their place,  
but if I have no love,  
I count for nothing;  
I may distribute all I possess in  
charity,  
I may give up my body to be burnt,  
but if I have no love,  
I make nothing of it.

*Love is very patient, very kind. Love knows no jealousy; love makes no parade, gives itself no airs, is never rude, never selfish, never irritated, never resentful; love is never glad when others go wrong, love is gladdened by goodness, always slow to expose, always eager to believe the best, always*

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*hopeful, always patient. Love never disappears. As for prophecy, it will be superseded; as for "tongues," they will cease; as for knowledge, it will be superseded. For we only know bit by bit; but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will be superseded. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I argued like a child; now that I am a man, I am done with childish ways.*

*At present we only see the baffling  
reflections in a mirror,  
but then it will be face to face;  
at present I am learning bit by bit,  
but then I will understand, as  
all along I have myself been  
understood.*

*Thus "faith and hope and love last on, these three," but the greatest of all is love.*

## I CORINTHIANS XIII

(Translated by Richard Francis Weymouth)

**I**F I can speak all the languages of men and of angels, but am destitute of Love, I have but become a loud-sounding trumpet or a clanging cymbal. If I possess the gift of prophecy and am versed in all mysteries and all knowledge, and have such absolute faith that I can remove mountains, but am destitute of Love, I am nothing. And if I distribute all my possessions to the poor, and give up my body to be burned, but am destitute of Love, it profits me nothing.

Love is patient and kind. Love knows neither envy nor jealousy. Love is not forward and self-assertive, nor boastful and conceited. She does not behave unbecomingly, nor seek to aggrandize herself, nor blaze out in passionate anger, nor brood over wrongs. She finds no pleasure in injustice done to others, but joyfully sides with the truth. She knows how to be silent; she is full of trust, full of hope, full of patient endurance.

Love never fails; but if there are prophecies, they will be done away with; if there are languages, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be brought to an end. For our knowledge is imperfect, and so is our prophesying; but when the

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*perfect state of things is come, all that is imperfect will be brought to an end. When I was a child, I talked like a child, felt like a child, reasoned like a child: when I became a man, I put from me childish ways. For the present we see things as if in a mirror, and are puzzled; but then we shall see them face to face. For the present the knowledge I gain is imperfect; but then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And so there remain Faith, Hope, Love—these three; and of these the greatest is Love.*

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