

CORINTHIANS - The MORE EXCELLENT WAY

STUDY 16

REMAINING

But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet I shew unto you a more excellent way ... And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love. 1 COR.12:31, 13:13

Study 16a: LOVE – not GIFTS, not even FAITH (13:1-3)

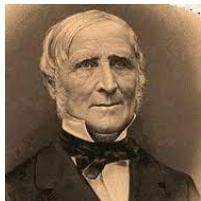
13:1 How does Paul apparently view the more spectacular (i.e. noisy) gifts? (14:18)

Hitherto the apostle had put the gift of tongues at the end of each of his lists (12:10,28,30). Here he puts it foremost, because now he rises from the least valuable to the most useful gift. To give assurance of his perfect impartiality in the valuation he proceeds to make, he supposes himself exercising this gift, as indeed he really possessed it in a rare degree (14:18). And to express its insufficiency more forcibly, he does not consider it only as it appeared in the Church of Corinth,

& was an object of ambition to its members; he raises it hypothetically to the most magnificent realization of it possible. Paul supposes himself in possession of the languages of all thinking & speaking beings, terrestrial & celestial. [Godet 663]

[v.1, on gong & cymbal] ... such as were used in various well-known cults, producing much sound but little sense. [Bruce 125]

[v.1] There may be plenty of noise in a gong, but there is nothing more ... The sound of gongs and cymbals would have been familiar at Corinth from their frequent use by devotees of Dionysus or Cybele. [Morris 182]



Frederic Godet

13:2,3 Even miracle-power faith, even the ultimate sacrifice, are useless without the pure motive of love of God and neighbour (Matt.22:36-40; Romans 5:1-5)

[v.3] ... what is called 'charity' today is no substitute for 'charity' in the AV [King James Bible] sense. [Bruce 125]

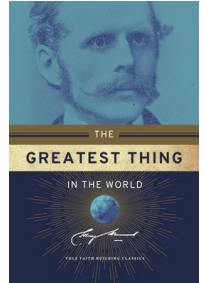
[v.2] In our day, too, one may be a celebrated theologian, the instrument of powerful revivals, the author of beautiful works in the kingdom of God, a missionary with a name filling the world; if in all these things the man is self-seeking, and if it

is not the Divine breath of charity which animates him, in God's eyes this is only *seeming*, not *being*. [Godet 668]

13:4-7 While we inventory gifts, why not test ourselves on the 15 characteristics of love?

[v.5] 'It is not touchy' (Phillips), not ready to take offence ... Love is always ready to think the best of people, and does not impute evil to them. [Morris 184]

"Love is not easily provoked." Nothing could be more striking than to find this here. We are inclined to look upon bad temper as a very harmless weakness. We speak of it as a mere infirmity of nature, a family failing, a matter of temperament, not a thing to take into very serious account in estimating a man's character. And yet here, right in the heart of this analysis of love, it finds a place; and the Bible again and again returns to condemn it as one of the most destructive elements in human nature. The peculiarity of ill temper is that it is the vice of the virtuous. It is often the one blot on an otherwise noble character ... This compatibility of ill temper with high moral character is one of the strangest and saddest problems of ethics. The truth is there are 2 great classes of sins – sins of the *Body*, and sins of the *Disposition*. The Prodigal Son may be taken as a type of the first, the Elder Brother of the second. Now society has no doubt whatever as to which of these is the worse. Its brand falls, without a challenge, upon the Prodigal. But are we right? We have no balance to weigh one another's sins, ... but faults in the higher nature may be less venial than those in the lower, and to eyes of Him who is Love, a sin against Love may seem a hundred times more base. No form of vice, not worldliness, not greed of gold, not drunkenness itself, does more to un-Christianise society than evil temper. For embittering life, for breaking up communities, for destroying the most sacred relationships, for devastating homes, for withering up men and women, for taking the bloom off childhood; in short, for sheer gratuitous misery-producing power, this influence stands alone. Look at the Elder Brother, moral, hard working, patient, dutiful – let him get all credit for his virtues – look at this man, this baby, sulking outside his own father's door. "He was angry," we read, "and would not go in." Look at the effect upon the father, upon the servants, upon the happiness of the guests. Judge of the effect upon the Prodigal – and how many prodigals are kept out of the Kingdom of God by the unlovely characters of those who profess to be inside? [Drummond 30-33]



Study 16b: EXULTING in the ETERNAL (13:8-13)

13:8-10 Is it not amazing that we spend more time debating WHEN the gifts cease than we do analyzing WHY love never fails?! (cf. Rom 12)

[v.8] But if ... the total abolition of gifts cannot take place before the end of the present economy, there may come about a modification in their phenomenal manifestation. The very figure which the apostle uses in v.11 easily leads to the idea of a gradual metamorphosis, which will pass over their mode of manifestation. For the *speaking* of the child, its mode of *feeling* and *thinking*, do not give place suddenly to the analogous faculties of the mature man; the change in these three respects takes place insensibly and progressively. So the spiritual gifts granted to the primitive Church, while accompanying and supporting the Church to the very

threshold of the perfect state, need not do so necessarily in the same form as at the beginning. Prophecy may be transformed into animated preaching; speaking in tongues may appear in the form of religious poetry and music; knowledge continue to accomplish its task by the catechetical and theological teaching of Christian truth. [Godet 678]

13:11-12 Why, finally, are prophecy, tongues, even knowledge, 'childish things'?

[v.11] The present phase of our existence is to that coming as childhood is to maturity. The mind and practice which are appropriate to childhood are inappropriate for maturity ... The Corinthians must recognize that the things to which they attached paramount importance were the transient concerns of spiritual immaturity and learn to set the highest value on the things that endure for ever. [Bruce 128]

[v.11] Man's natural growth is a figure of that of the Church; both follow the same law, that of development and transformation. In proportion as the faculties, in course of development, acquire a higher mode of activity, the previous mode ceases of itself ... The gift of tongues corresponds in the Divine domain to the babbling of the child in its first joyous experience of life. [Godet 680-81]

**"Putting away
childish things"**

13:13 Why is love even greater than faith and hope? (Romans 5:1-5)

[v.13] We have just seen that faith and hope abide continually, but undergoing incessant transformation, the one into sight, the other into possession. It is not so with charity. Love does not see, does not acquire, it *is* the Divine. God does not believe nor hope, but He loves. [Godet 690]

LOVE – the uniqueness of the Christian virtue

Agape ... was not in common use before the New Testament, but the Christians took it up, and made it their characteristic word for love. It is a new word for a new idea ... It is a love for the utterly unworthy, a love which proceeds from a God who is love. It is a love lavished upon others without a thought of whether they are worthy to receive it or not. It proceeds rather from the nature of the lover, that from any merit in the beloved. [Morris 181]

But how can such acts [v.3] be done otherwise than from love? The sacrifice of goods may be carried out in the spirit of ostentation, or may proceed from a desire of self-justification, and consequently be dictated from a wholly different feeling from love. It may be so likewise with the sacrifice of life. Witness the funeral pile ... of the Hindoo who had himself burned at Athens, under Augustus, and whose tomb was pointed out, according to Strabo, with a pompous inscription, relating how "he had immortalized himself" ... What was intended to assure me of salvation, has no value in the eyes of God, whenever the object of it becomes self, in the form of self-merit or of human glory. Love accepts only what is inspired by love. [Godet 670-71]

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