

## **THE GREATEST THING IN THE WORLD**

### **– AUGUST 6. – 1 CORINTHIANS 13. –**

GODLIKENESS IN THE HEART, IN THE TONGUE, IN THE HANDS, IN THE THOUGHTS – LOVE THE ESSENCE OF THE DIVINE CHARACTER – DIFFERENT KINDS OF LOVE – THE SPECTRUM OF LOVE REVEALS THE CHARACTERISTICS ESSENTIAL TO MEMBERSHIP IN THE GLORIFIED BODY OF CHRIST – SUGGESTIONS FOR SELF-EXAMINATION – LOVE THE QUALITY WHICH WILL PERSIST THROUGHOUT ETERNITY – THE GIFTS OF HEALING, ETC., CEASE.

**"Now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; and the greatest of these is love." – Verse 13.**

LOVE is a quality which seems beyond the power of man to describe. The best that we can do is to describe its conduct. Those who possess this quality are able to appreciate it, but are not able to explain it; for it is of God – God-likeness in the heart, in the tongue, in the hands, in the thoughts, permeating all the human attributes and seeking to control them.

There are different kinds of love, however; and the Apostle is not speaking of general affection, but of that particular kind of love which belongs to God and to the New Creation, begotten of Him. There is an animal love, such as the brute creation exercise toward their young – a love which frequently leads to the sacrifice of life itself in its devotion. This kind of love inheres in the natural man, even in his fallen condition. It is all a more or less selfish love; for at times it is even ready to rob others in order to lavish good things upon those whom it favors. This is not the love which the Apostle describes, nor is he addressing the natural man. He addresses the New Creation, and informs them that the natural man will not be able to appreciate that which he presents. In order to have a clear comprehension of this love and a hearty acceptance of it as the rule

of life, it is apparently necessary that we be begotten from Above, by the Most High. – 1 Corinthians 2:9-14.

### **THE "MORE EXCELLENT WAY"**

The Church at Corinth had been founded for nearly five years, and had enjoyed a wide range of Divine providences. In addressing this Epistle to them, St. Paul was evidently considering well their needs, and seeking to minister to them the Divine Message of grace. He may not have realized how great a work he was doing and how far-reaching would be the scope of his instructions. Perhaps it was better for himself that he did not know how important was his service to the entire Church of the Gospel Age. Such a knowledge might have made him heady – the very condition of things which the Lord was warding off by permitting him to have still the "thorn in the flesh." – 2 Corinthians 12:7-10.

In this Epistle St. Paul has been gradually leading the minds of his readers up to a higher appreciation of the blessings which they were enjoying. In the chapter preceding today's Study he calls attention to the various "gifts of the Spirit" which were conferred upon the early Church for its establishment and development. He closes the chapter with the exhortation that while esteeming these gifts, each member of the Church should covet earnestly the superior ones. Then he adds, "Yet I show unto you a more excellent way" – something still better than any of those gifts of the Holy Spirit. Our Study pertains to this more excellent ambition which should actuate every child of God; namely, the acquisition and development of the spirit of Love, the Spirit of the Lord.

The gifts of the Spirit, which the Apostle discusses in the chapter preceding our lesson, took, with the early Church, the place of other blessings which we now enjoy. They had no Bibles, as we have, no Concordances, no helps in Bible study. Therefore they needed the miraculous "gift of tongues" to draw them together once a week to consider the Lord's Message. They needed that the

Message should come in this miraculous manner, in order that they might the better appreciate it and realize that it was of the Lord, not of themselves. This made opportunity for another gift, "the interpretation of tongues." Thus by the various gifts of the Holy Spirit they were drawn together and edified – built up – until such times as the books of the New Testament gradually accumulated. After the death of the Apostles and the consequent cessation of the gifts, these Divine providences of the written Word were quite sufficient, as the Apostle here sets forth.

After St. Paul had called attention to these various facts and to the oneness of the Church, he pointed out to the Corinthians that they were putting rather too high a value upon the "gift of tongues." While a gift had its proper place in the Church as a blessing, he explained, yet a still higher blessing lay in the ability to present the Truth in a well-understood tongue, or language. He declared himself able to speak with more tongues than could any of them, and yet pointed out that he preferred to speak in that tongue which would be understood by his hearers. Finally in his argument he came to our present lesson, which he gave as the climax to his hints preceding.

### **SUPERIORITY OF THE TONGUE OF LOVE**

Boldly the Apostle sets forth a great truth, which has come to be more and more recognized amongst Christian people everywhere, in proportion to their development in the character-likeness of their Redeemer, in proportion to their development as the children of God. St. Paul declares that not knowledge, not wisdom, not talents, not gifts of any kind are the things to be sought for above all else, but that love should be most highly esteemed.

God is Love; and therefore whoever would be pleasing to Him must develop this disposition; for according to the Divine Law no one will ever have full Divine approval or life everlasting on any plane of being without the full establishment in the heart, in the character, of this Divine quality of Love. Therefore "Love is the

fulfilling of the Law." (Romans 13:10.) The truth of this statement is obvious to all.

St. Paul forcefully declares that if he had all the tongues of earth and of Heaven and could speak them with perfection and charming rhythm, even these would not constitute a proof of his acceptance to life eternal. Should he do all this in a perfunctory manner, even to the extent of speaking of the Divine character and in the interests of his fellows, he might still have no heart in the matter, but be merely like sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. The argument, therefore, is that tongues were not to be esteemed as a proof of Christian character.

The Apostle's declaration is introduced with an "if," which might be challenged, to a certain extent, by the assertion that no one could speak forth with power the Gospel of Christ unless he possessed the spirit of love. Although we have all heard public speakers who could deliver very beautiful essays upon Scriptural themes, we have generally perceived a hollowness in their teachings unless they spoke from the heart, prompted by love of the Truth – not by love of applause, nor for love of money.

Next he argues respecting prophecy – oratory – and the understanding of mysteries and knowledge and respecting the possession of mountain-moving faith. He asks, Would these abilities not signify a glorious development of character, **page 216** a full acceptance with God and an assurance of life eternal? Then he answers, No; precious as these abilities are, they would have no value whatever in the Divine estimation, would profit us nothing, unless based upon love. How the Apostle's argument exalts this quality of Love before our minds! He proceeds to say that although we should give all of our goods to feed the poor, and although as martyrs we should be burned at the stake, yet it would profit us nothing if the motive, the sentiment, behind the giving and behind

the endurance of martyrdom were not love. Without proper love as the mainspring of our conduct, there will be no reward.

## **LOVE'S CONSTITUENT ELEMENTS**

To those of the Lord's people who have never studied out the elements of love, its constituent parts, the Apostle's suggestions in today's Study will seem like a revelation. He enumerates nine component parts:

- (1) Patience – "Love suffereth long";
- (2) Kindness – "and is kind";
- (3) Generosity – "Love envieth not";
- (4) Humility – "Love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up";
- (5) Courtesy – "Doth not behave itself unseemly";
- (6) Unselfishness – "Seeketh not her own";
- (7) Good Temper – "Is not easily provoked";
- (8) Guilelessness – "Thinketh no evil";
- (9) Honesty – "Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the Truth."

Despite all our pains and aches physical, what a wonderful world this would be if every member of the race were perfect in these qualities enumerated! However, it would be a useless waste of time to weep over what we have not, or to chide unnecessarily our neighbors and our friends because they, like ourselves, are not perfect in love. Indeed, the more we come to understand the teachings of the Bible, the more sympathy we may have with the poor "groaning creation." In one sense of the word our sympathies are all for this glorious standard which the Apostle holds up before us. We cannot sympathize with the wrong, the error, the evil. It is uncongenial to us. But, understanding the situation, we can sympathize with our fellows and with ourselves as being in a fallen condition, in which none can do the things he would.

The Scriptural key to the situation is the fact that as a race we were born and shapen in iniquity, in sin did our mother conceive us. (Psalm 51:5; Genesis 3:20.) The calamity of sin, imperfection and death has injured the whole world mentally, morally and physically – has made us what the Apostle describes as a "groaning creation." (Romans 8:22.) This knowledge of the facts in the case, possessed by so few, understood by so few, should tend to make these few a peculiar people in their loving sympathy and kindness towards their fellows in distress. Alas, the difficulty is that even these few who know these facts from the Divine Word have selfishness so ingrained in them, and are so oppressed by the cares of this life, that often their sympathies are not all that they should be!

### **NEW CREATURES ALONE ADDRESSED**

It is for this reason that the Scriptures do not address the natural man; for his mind is so sodden with selfishness that his eye of pity and his ear of sympathy are well nigh closed. Instead of appealing to the natural man in general, the Scriptures represent that the Lord especially draws some who are possessed of certain qualities of heart and mind, and especially leads these to a knowledge of the Redeemer, leaving it open with them to accept or to reject the offer of Divine grace and forgiveness.

Such as respond are still further enlightened; and, if further responsive, they are treated as justified because of their faith in the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Then are granted further special opportunities, and exhortations to make a full consecration of themselves to God and to His service even unto death. If they still respond and make this consecration, they have then come to the place where the Lord is pleased to reckon them dead to earthly things, according to their profession, and to beget them of the Holy Spirit and the glorious promises of His Word, and to count them New Creatures in Christ – members of the Redeemer's Body, which is the Church.

Now they have reached the stage where, as children of God, they must go to school and develop in knowledge and in character, that they may be made actually fit, prepared, suitable, for eternal life and a share with their Redeemer in His Kingdom.

## **LESSONS TAUGHT IN THIS SCHOOL**

When we enter the School of Christ, the ultimate purpose of the course of instruction is set before us in the Great Teacher's words, "Be ye like unto your Father which is in Heaven." The same thought is presented to us in St. Paul's assurance that God has predetermined that only such as become copies of His dear Son – in character likeness – can be His joint-heirs in the promised Kingdom. (Romans 8:29.) When we entered the School of Christ, we did not know that so much would be required of us. We did not understand all that we did when we made our consecration even unto death in the service of righteousness. However, no advantage was taken of us; for what was presented to us, and what we consecrated to do, includes everything in our power – and no more – even unto death. So then, no lesson that can be set before us is beyond our covenant, or agreement to perform.

In the spectrum of love given us in today's Study the Apostle is delineating the various parts of this one great lesson of Christ-likeness, which is God-likeness. He is pointing out what constitutes such a character as God has predetermined that we must have, in order to be worthy of the gift of God, which is eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ. – Romans 6:23.

## **LOVE VIEWED IN COMPARISON**

"Love beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things." Its elements of patience and gentleness are love in the sense of willingness to endure under all sorts of opposition, wherever it sees a proper subject for its sympathy. Love "believeth all things" in the sense that it is not given to doubt, to disbelieve, to

impugn the motives and the truthfulness of its fellows. Only after full and convincing proofs to the contrary will it cease to exercise faith. Love "hopeth all things" in the sense that it desires a blessing for all with whom it is in contact; and in harmony with its desire it is continually striving to do them good. Love "endureth all things" in the sense that it cannot be quenched wherever there is anything upon which it can properly exercise itself.

Viewed from another standpoint, these qualities might be interpreted thus: Love "beareth all things," as enduring pressure on every side without being crushed. It "believeth all things," as being full of faith in the Divine promises and arrangement, doubting nothing. It "hopeth all things," in the sense that this perfect love toward God enables the heart to be filled with confidence in the Almighty, in whose love it reposes. It "endureth all things," in the sense that the soul which is united to God by the link of love cannot be vanquished, cannot be overcome; for this is the Divine will and arrangement. God will not suffer any of these little ones to be tempted above that which they are able to bear, but will with every **page 217** temptation provide a way of escape. – 1 Corinthians 10:13.

The Apostle institutes a comparison between love and some of the gifts of the Spirit which the Corinthian Church properly held in high esteem. He would have us all see how infinitely higher love is than any of the gifts in which the early Church rejoiced. Love is not a gift, but a growth. It is a fruitage which must be developed in the garden of our souls, and which must be tended with much care, in order to its proper development. He says that love never fails, but that the other things will fail; namely, the power of prophecy – oratory – the gift of tongues, knowledge, etc. They would lose their value as changing conditions would comparatively do away with their necessity. Prophesying would be done away with, tongues would cease, and knowledge would vanish.



The argument advanced by St. Paul is that all these things would necessarily come to an end, when perfection would come in; for all our gifts and talents are imperfect. Surely with our glorious "change" in the First Resurrection and with the ushering in of the Millennium our conditions will be so different that many things now highly esteemed under present unfavorable circumstances will then be valueless! Just so flints were once valuable for the striking of a light, but are now never used, having been supplanted by matches, electric lights, etc. Many of those gifts, however, including the gift of tongues, perished long before the morning light of the Millennium. Shortly after the death of the Apostles they ceased altogether; for they were imparted only by the Apostles.

### **"GIFTS" VS. "FRUITS"**

Next the Apostle compares the gifts of the Spirit with the fruits of the Spirit, and shows that the former, when contrasted with the latter, were as the toys of childhood in comparison with the valuables of manhood. "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." So the gifts of tongues, interpretation of tongues, etc., were given to the Church in its infancy, and served useful purposes then. But they were put away as the Church emerged from infancy to the strength and development accruing from a greater knowledge of God's great Plan. The milk of the Word and the strong meat of the Word were purposed by God to develop the members of the Body of Christ, until they all come to the stature of manhood in Christ. The more advanced the Christian, the more surely would he know that the gifts of the Spirit were merely like a childish plaything, to be supplanted by the fruits of the Spirit, much more valuable to the Church in its developed condition. – Hebrews 5:12-14.

St. Paul points us further to the fact that we are living not merely for the present, but especially for the future; and that

whatever will last us into the eternal future must certainly be the most important matter for us to acquire. He would have us see that to the Christian that most important thing is the Love which he has described in our Study. Our knowledge, our tongues, etc., of the present time are mere shadows of the great powers which will be ours if we attain to the glorious blessings of the First Resurrection. Whatever clearness of sight we have at the present time we shall then find to be darkness in comparison with the full light of the glorious Millennial Day. Where now we see as through an obscure glass, then we shall see face to face. Now we know in part; then we shall know even as we are known.

The Apostle would have the Church see that faith, hope and love – three fruits of the Holy Spirit – are far superior to all the gifts of the Spirit; for these fruits will abide throughout the Age. Until the Millennial Morning we shall need faith, hope and love. We cannot get along without them. We cannot make any progress in the Master's footsteps without these qualities. But if we seek to contrast these imperfect qualities amongst themselves, he points out that the chiefest of these is love.

Love is the Divine quality without which we should still be unsatisfactory to God, even if we possessed all the other qualities which go to make up Christian character. Love is the quality which will persist to all eternity. If we would abide in Divine favor, we shall need always to have Love. As for faith and hope, excellent qualities though they be, the time will come when they shall be swallowed up by sight, by the actualities of the glorious condition of fellowship with the Lord. But love will never fail. Amongst all the graces of the Spirit it stands supreme and eternal.

