

Love Unifies

1 Corinthians 13: 1-13 (June 7, 2020)

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1³If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2⁴And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 3⁵If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

4⁶Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant 5⁷or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6⁸it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. 7⁹It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

8¹⁰Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. 9¹¹For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; 10¹²but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. 11¹³When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. 12¹⁴For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. 13¹⁵And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

Historical Context

Corinth was a major port which also commanded the land route from the Peloponnesus peninsula to central Greece. An industrial and ship-building center, it was also a center for the arts. Its inhabitants came from far and wide. In this epistle, Paul answers two letters he has received concerning lack of harmony and internal strife in the Corinthian church, a church he had founded. Paul wrote this letter from Ephesus (now in Turkey), probably in 57 AD.

Theme: Love Unifies

Paul declares love the greatest power in a community that seems to be lacking it. The Corinthian Church was not a homogenous body. The Corinthian fellowship transgressed conventional social boundaries of ethnicity, gender, age, rank, status, and life situation. Unfortunately, the diversity among the Corinthians dissolved into discord and rivalry. This was a community fragmented, rather than enriched, by difference. Yet, Paul remains firm that this diversity is nonnegotiable. God has called this community to be diverse and to get along.

Paul's "poetic ode to love" was a call to action. The love Paul is talking about here is not passive and fluffy. This kind of love is an up at dawn, feet on the ground, tools in hand, working kind of love. It builds communities. It nurtures positive social interactions, and not just social networks. Paul's declaration of love unifies. Love is the way by which we talk to each other, eat with one another, fellowship together, and affirm all. Love transcends our self-imposed caste systems and personal biases. It forms whole and holistic people, who are anchored in the well-being of others. Love will not let us down if we *genuinely live in it together*.