

That 1 Corinthians 13 is known as the “Love Chapter” is rather odd, seeing as the word “love” is not used once in the entire chapter. God knows the word “love.” He used it over 300 times in the Bible, but 28 times He chose to use the word “charity” instead of “love,” and it is not an “unfortunate translation” as the so-called scholars would have us to believe (modern versions change “charity” to “love”). Those that object to the word charity in the King James Bible complain that people today think of charity as simply a handout to the poor. If we study Bible words in their context we will not need a dictionary since the Bible defines its own words. Using modern definitions for biblical terms is a great hindrance in understanding the Bible. According to the scripture, charity means much more than helping the poor, since Paul said it’s possible to give away all our goods to feed the poor and yet not have charity (v.3).

The word “charity,” as it is used in the scripture (21 of 28 times by Paul), is love of a certain spiritual quality that should be demonstrated among Christians. It is much more than an affection; it is an action. It is a love that abounds in spiritual knowledge and judgment (Phil. 1:9-11). It is contrary to human nature and can only be produced by the Holy Spirit through us. There are different kinds of love in the Bible, and the context always determines the meaning. We DO NOT need to know Greek to understand the differences in love. Most of us have heard about the different Greek words for love; especially *phileo* and *agape*. We are told that *phileo* always refers to human love but *agape* to God’s love. Actually, those words were used interchangeably in the Greek New Testament. Everything God wants us to know is revealed in the King James Bible, because it is the perfectly

preserved word of God (Ps. 12:6-7). Why would He hide things from us in the Greek? We don’t know Greek and neither do most of the teachers and preachers that claim they do!

Most preachers and teachers isolate this chapter from its context and pretend that it’s just a warm and fuzzy passage on love. Actually, the passage is a rebuke. This charity chapter is sandwiched between two chapters on spiritual gifts and so in order to understand it we must consider it in light of its context (12:1; 14:1). For example, when Paul said that knowledge shall vanish away (v.8), he was not referring to knowledge in general but to the spiritual gift of knowledge. It is interesting that the church at Corinth was a carnal church full of problems, yet it came behind in no spiritual gift (1:7). Spiritual gifts were not gifts that God gave to spiritual saints who prayed through to receive them. They were supernatural manifestations that the Holy Ghost gave to every believer (12:4-11). They were to be used for the edification of believers and as for signs to the unbelieving Jews (1:22; 14:20-22). The sign gifts are no longer given because they are no longer needed:

- The complete Bible is sufficient for our edification (2 Tim. 3:16-17).
- Israel has been set aside in judicial blindness (Rom. 11:25). The gospel of the kingdom is not being preached in this present age, so the signs of the kingdom are not being manifested.

Evidently the carnal Corinthians were competitively comparing their gifts and using them for self-promotion and glory instead of the edification of the church. They esteemed tongues (always refers to actual languages) as

the best gift, but Paul showed them that prophecy was better because it was more edifying (12:28-31; 14:39-40, tongues always listed last). In chapter 14, Paul laid down rules for tongues speaking and prophecy in the church (14:27-40). Just like the carnal Corinthians, those that claim to have the gift of tongues today magnify it as the best gift and are out of order in how they try to exercise it (women were not permitted to speak with tongues in the assembly). But we who rightly divide the word of truth know that NOBODY has the gift of tongues today, since all of the sign gifts have ceased. One of the last things that Paul wrote by inspiration of God proves that the sign gifts ceased after the Acts period (2 Tim. 4:20; he no longer had the gift of healing). When spiritual gifts were in operation, Paul taught the church to covet (i.e. desire, 14:1) the best gifts, which would’ve been those most edifying to the church. Yet, even then he said that there was a more excellent way. The gifts were good, but charity was and is the best way to serve the Lord. The gifts ceased, but charity remains.

### The Preeminence of Charity (vs. 1-3)

God is not only concerned about what we do but why we do it. He tries our heart. Everything we do in the ministry must be motivated by charity, or it is of no spiritual and eternal value (1 Cor. 16:14)! The things mentioned in these verses might impress men but not God! Eloquent speaking without charity is just a noise. Knowledge without charity puffs up (8:1). Could someone really give all their goods to feed the poor or even give their body to be burned without charity? Lost men have been known to do these things in a vain effort to earn salvation!

### A Portrait of Charity (vs.4-7)

Paul gives us 15 characteristics of charity (7 positive and 8 negative, balanced) to show us what it looks like. It is a portrait of Christ! All of these characteristics will be demonstrated in the life of a believer that is walking in charity. No wonder Paul calls charity the “bond of perfectness” (Col. 3:12-14). We will walk in charity if we are walking in the Spirit. Our self-centered flesh cannot live this way. God is more interested in us walking in charity than talking about charity. Charity is the solution to most problems in the local church, because it will cause us to put others before our self. These characteristics were lacking at Corinth because they were carnal. None of us have arrived in this area. We must continually follow after charity (14:1) and seek to abound in it (2 Thess. 1:3).

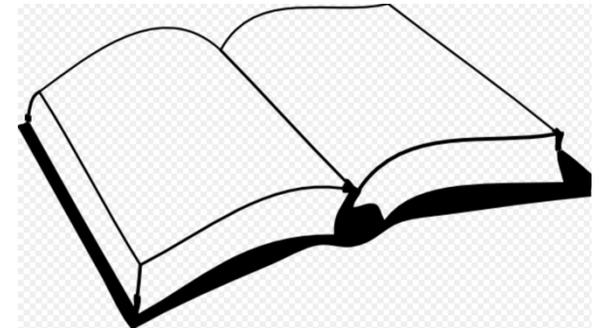
### The Permanence of Charity (vs.8-13)

In these verses Paul contrasts that which is in part (spiritual gifts) with that which is perfect, and he shows how the former was temporary and would give way to the latter when it arrived. When we have that which is perfect, we no longer need that which is in part. The big question is, what is “that which is perfect”? Many think its referring to the rapture and our glorification with Christ. If that be true, then prophecy, healing, miracles, and tongues are still in operation today. The gifts of prophecy, tongues, and knowledge were about divine revelation. But what God revealed to the saints through those gifts was only in part. Contextually, then, that which is perfect must refer to the same thing that was in part: REVELATION. Paul wrote this epistle during the transitional Acts period. He had already received revelations from Christ but was anticipating

more (Acts 26:16; 2 Cor. 12:1, 7). The full revelation of the mystery fulfilled the word of God (Col. 1:23-26). Regardless of when the books of Hebrews through Revelation were written (I personally think they were all written during the Acts period), they are in line with the prophetic kingdom program of Israel that had been spoke by the prophets since the world began (Acts 3:21). But the mystery was kept secret and hid in God since the world began until it was revealed through Paul (Rom. 16:25). With the full revelation of the mystery came the completion of God’s revelation to man. In vv. 11-12, Paul used two simple illustrations to show how spiritual gifts must give way to God’s perfect revelation. Just as a man should no longer speak, understand, and think as a child, we who have God’s perfect revelation have no need or desire for partial gifts. Just as those who can now see their image clearly in a mirror would no longer need a darkened mirror that they had to use in the past, so we who rejoice in the full revelation of the mystery have no need or desire for partial gifts. Those who seek the sign gifts today are acting like children, and their understanding is like a darkened mirror.

Faith, hope, and charity abide but prophecy, tongues, and knowledge have failed, ceased, and vanished away (signs will resume in the tribulation period after this age ends with the rapture, because the gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world; Matt. 24:14, Mk. 16:15-18). Paul mentions these three abiding virtues together at least eight times in his epistles. Charity is the greatest of the three because it energizes the other two and will outlast them. One day our faith will become sight and our hope will be realized, but charity will abide forever.

# Signs Ceased But Charity Abides



**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.**

**1 Corinthians 13:8**

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