

The More Excellent Way

1 Corinthians 13 Series, Part 1

Pastor George Stahnke, 06/08/2003

The Church at Corinth

The church had several problems, among them a leadership problem producing divisions in the church (1:10-17). Immoral practices were not being dealt with (5:1-6:20). A legalistic group was concerned about dietary laws (8:1-10:32). Some were abusing the Lord's Supper (11:17-34), and others were offering false teachings regarding the resurrection (15:1-58). These matters—in addition to its multiethnic makeup of Greeks, Romans, and Jews and a mixture of social classes including rich, poor, and slave—made for a unique and troubled congregation.

Occasion

Paul had been to Corinth and stayed for eighteen months (see Acts 18). During this time he had established the church. He possibly visited again for a short time between the Letters to the Corinthians and the time he was in Corinth when he wrote Romans. The apostle had received information from different sources concerning the conditions in the Corinthian church. Members of Chloe's household had informed him of the various factions in the church (1:11). Stephanus, Fortunatus, and Achaicus came to Paul in Ephesus to bring a contribution to his ministry (16:17).

Purpose and Theology

Paul dealt with several problems in this letter. He learned of these matters through the report from Chloe's people (1:11), common rumors (5:1), and from information received from the church (7:1; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1). Paul wrote to answer the questions the Corinthians had put to him, but he had other concerns as well. Although the church was quite gifted (1:4-7), it was equally immature and unspiritual (3:1-4). Paul wanted to restore the church in its areas of weakness. Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he expounded the Bible's clearest exposition on the Lord's Supper (11:17-34), the resurrection (15:1-58), and spiritual gifts (12:1-14:40).

Yet the focus of 1 Corinthians is not on doctrinal theology but pastoral theology. This letter deals with the problem of those who bring division to the body of Christ (1:11-3:4), with the treatment of fellow Christians who sin (5:1-13), with matters of sexuality in marriage and divorce (7:1-40), with propriety in church worship (11:2-34), and with disputes about food (8:1-11:1).

—Excerpts from the Holman Bible Handbook

The More Excellent Way

1 Corinthians 12:31 (NIV) But eagerly desire the greater gifts. And now I will show you the most excellent way.

Show: G1166 δεικνύω *deiknuō* [*dike-noo'-o*]

Thayer Definition: 1) to show, expose to the eyes, 2) metaphorically, 2a) to give evidence or proof of a thing, 2b) to show by words or teach

Way: G3598 ὁδός *hodos* [*hod-os'*]

Thayer Definition: 1) properly, 1a) a way, 1a1) a traveled way, road, 1b) a travelers way, journey, traveling, 2) metaphorically, 2a) a course of conduct, 2b) a way (i.e. manner) of thinking, feeling, deciding

RENEWAL MINISTRIES

of Colorado Springs

Love is a central reality of God's nature.

1 John 4:8 (NIV) Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

Love: G26 ἀγάπη *agapē* [*ag-ah'-pay*]

Thayer Definition: 1) brotherly love, affection, good will, love, benevolence

Romans 12:9-10 (NASB) *Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good.* ¹⁰*Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor;*

“Agape-love is a commitment to caring. Even more, agape-love is a commitment to act for the welfare of the person (s) loved.”

—Victor Bible Commentary on the New Testament

“True charity is greatly to be preferred to the most glorious gifts. To have the heart glow with mutual love is vastly better than to glare with the most pompous titles, offices, or powers.”

—Mathew Henry's Commentary on the New Testament

Romans 13:10 (NASB) Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of *the* law.

“Agape love is . . . profound concern for the well-being of another, without any desire to control that other, to be thanked by that other, or to enjoy the process.

—Madeleine L'Engle (1918-)

“Love is the fairest and best in himself, and the cause of what is fairest and best in all other things.”

—Plato, “Symposium,” 197

1 Corinthians 13:1-3 (NIV) If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ²If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

1 Corinthians 14:1 (NASB) Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual *gifts*, but especially that you may prophesy.