

**13:1a:** *If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels,*

As noted in the introductory comments, this chapter can be divided into three distinct sections, and each unit of thought contains an argument to show the superiority of love over first century spiritual gifts. Paul's first argument is in verses 1-3: Without love, spiritual gifts were useless. The second argument is found in verses 4-7: Spiritual gifts were inferior to love. Verses 8-13 affirm that spiritual gifts were temporary but love would remain. Since the Corinthians were fond of tongue speaking, this chapter opens with a reference to this gift, even though this ability was not the most valuable (see 1 Cor. 12:27-31 and the commentary on these verses).

The "*tongues of men*" is rendered "all the languages of the earth" in The New Living Translation. If most translations read something like the "languages of men" instead of the "tongues of men," all would immediately realize that Paul spoke about the various human languages used throughout the world. By appealing to both human and angelic speech Paul included the entire spectrum of languages. For more information on the *tongues of men* see the commentary on 1 Cor. 12:10b, the special study on tongue speaking at the end of the commentary on 1 Cor. 12, and the comments on 1 Cor. 14:2. Paul realized that many different languages exist in the world, but none of them "can be compared with the practice of love. The art of oratory, so highly valued at Corinth, could not surpass love" (CBL, First Corinthians, p. 427).

This opening verse does not say that Paul or any other human being has or can speak with the tongues of angels. Paul said "*if*" he could speak these other kinds of languages (this is a hypothetical case, just as Paul said "*if*" he could "know all mysteries," "*if*" he "had all knowledge," and "*if*" he had the faith to "remove mountains," verse 2). More hypothetical statements are found in verse 3 ("*if*" Paul "gave away all he owned" and "*if*" he "gave his body to be burned"). The point is somewhat similar to Gal. 1:8 where Paul spoke of himself or an "angel" preaching "another gospel." In a similar way people do not actually "speak in the tongues of angels." If this act were possible, even it would be worthless if the tongue speaker lacked love.

It is not difficult to discern what Paul meant, but members of the Pentecostal movement have often appealed to this passage to justify their so-called tongue speaking. Some claim to speak in a "heavenly language" that cannot be understood by "earthly people." Those who make this claim affirm that they speak with the "tongues of men" (their native speech) *and* they speak with the "tongues of angels" (some type of heavenly language that is "unknown" to others on the earth). Readers should notice that Paul did not say the "**tongues** of men" *and* the "**tongues** of angels." Rather than use the word "tongues" twice in this verse, the word *tongues* is used only one time. This implies that human and angelic languages have something in common—both types of language are known and understandable. When the first Christians used the gift of tongues, non-Christians heard a language they understood (Acts 2:8-11). Also, in 1 Cor. 14:23 Paul specifically condemned speaking in a language that people did not know (understand).

We certainly find Bible examples of angels speaking, but the *heavenly language* of angels was always a language that was also used and understood by men (see Lk. 1:13, 30; 2:10; Acts 12:8). We never find a single instance of angels speaking in a language humans did not understand. Thus, rather than divide languages into "known and unknown" tongues as Pentecostalism does, *all tongues are known languages*. The word *unknown* does appear in the KJV in 1 Cor. 14:2, 4, 13, 14, 19, 27, but this term is in italics because it is not part of the original text. *Unknown* means the person hearing the language did not understand that particular tongue (if we only speak English, the Spanish language would be an *unknown tongue* to us).

Those who now claim to speak in tongues usually say a few syllables or speak what is equivalent to 15-30 words to demonstrate their "gift." This author has never met anyone who "spoke in tongues" for an entire month, a full week, an entire day, or even used their "gift" for a solid hour. This is one more proof that modern claims are false. True tongue speakers used known human languages (Acts 2:3-4, 8) which they had never learned, and they were able to speak at length in these tongues (compare Acts 2:40). Finally, if the apostles had the ability to speak in foreign languages they had never learned for the purpose of evangelism, but the Corinthians or people today receive some type of additional and special heavenly

language—the *tongues of angels*, people today have a gift that was not possessed by the first century apostles.

**13:1b:** *but have not love,*

The word “love” (*agape*) is found 116 times in the Greek New Testament. While the KJV normally translates this term “love,” there are 28 places (one of which is here) where the KJV uses the word “charity.” We use the word *charity* to describe the assistance given to the poor and needy and these kind acts are certainly demonstrations of love. Paul’s word for love, however, is a comprehensive term. In other parts of the New Testament this term is applied to marriage (Eph. 5:28), a Christian’s dealings with others (Jn. 15:12; 2 Pet. 1:7), and even loving one’s enemies (Mt. 5:44). This is also the type of love Jesus and the Father have for each other (Jn. 17:24).

The Greeks had four words for *love*, one of which described the sexual love between husbands and wives. This term (*eros*) is the basis for the English word “erotic.” Barclay (New Testament Words, p. 17) illustrated *eros* in this way: “A brother does not fall in love with his sister, but somebody else falls in love with her; neither does a father fall in love with his daughter, but somebody else does, for fear of God and the law of the land are sufficient to prevent such love.” Spicq (1:9) defined *eros* as “a strong appetite for sexual pleasures,” “the desire of the wolf for the sheep,” and “above all unreasoning passion and desire.” Secular writers sometimes used this word to describe passionate ambition and intense patriotism.

A second Greek word for love (*storge*) described natural affection. Writers used this term to describe the relationship between parents and children or the love for a close relative. It was even used to describe a person’s love for his nation or a national ruler. In Rom. 1:31 and 2 Tim. 3:3 Paul used the negative form of this word to say some lack “natural affection.”

A third word for love (*philia*) described the love between friends; we might compare this term to our word “cherish.” This type of love “mainly denotes the attraction of people to one another who are close together both inside and outside the family; it includes concern, care and hospitality, also love for things in the sense of being fond of” (Brown, 2:538). This term was not only the most general term for love, its root (*phil*) is associated with many different Greek words. These words include: *philema* (kiss), *philosophia* (love of knowledge, philosophy), *philoxenos* (a love of hospitality), *philoteknos* (a love of children), *philotheos* (a love of God), and proper names like *Philippos* (a lover of horses, horse-lover).

Most understand that humanity cannot be saved by an erotic love (*eros*). Natural affection (*storge*) is good, but it is not sufficient to justify man. The third type of love (*philia*) is also wonderful, but even it is not powerful enough to rescue man from sin. Man needed a love that goes beyond the heart (emotions). Humanity needed the *agape* love that comes from God (Jn. 3:16). This fourth type of love is what Paul described in 1 Cor. 13. The word *agape* “was not common before the birth of the Christian Church, but it was known” (Beacon Bible Commentary, 8:438) and Christians helped show the world what this love is like.

*Agape* love causes someone to say, “No matter what any man does to me, I will never seek to do harm to him; I will never set out for revenge; I will always seek nothing but his highest good.’ That is to say, Christian love, *agape*, is *unconquerable benevolence, invincible good will*. It is not simply a wave of emotion; it is a deliberate conviction of the mind issuing in a deliberate policy of the life; it is a deliberate achievement and conquest and victory of the will. It takes all of a man to achieve Christian love; it takes not only his heart; it takes his mind and his will as well” (Barclay, New Testament Words, pp. 21-22).

“In contrasting *philein* and *agapan*, we might say that the former is a love of pleasure, the latter a love of preciousness; the former a love of delight, the latter a love of esteem; the former a love called out of the heart by the apprehension of pleasurable qualities in the object loved, the latter a love called out of the heart by the apprehension of valuable qualities in the object loved; the former takes pleasure in, the latter ascribes value to; the former is a love of liking, the latter a love of prizing” (Wuest, 3:112).

At the root of *agape* love is sacrifice. *Agape* love moves people to act without any hope or promise of reward. This type of love “casts aside emotions, likes and dislikes, and loves because of the worth of the object to be loved” (Jackson, Bible Words and Theological Terms Made Easy a Practical Handbook, p.

114).

“The pagan Greeks knew nothing of the love of self-sacrifice for one’s enemy which was exhibited at Calvary. Therefore they had no word for that kind of love. They knew nothing about the divine analysis of this love which Paul gives us in I Corinthians 13. So the New Testament writers seized upon this word as one that would express these exalted conceptions” (Wuest, 3:114). Even if the unsaved struggled to understand some of the doctrinal points associated with Christianity, they could understand agape love.

Spicq (1:11) described agape love as “the most rational kind” which “involves recognition and judgment of values.” He further noted (1:12) that “Unlike other loves, which can remain hidden in the heart, it is essential to charity to manifest itself, to demonstrate itself, to provide proofs, to put itself on display; so much so that in the NT it would almost always be necessary to translate *agape* as ‘demonstrations of love.’” This is precisely what we find with deity (Jn. 3:16). God saw a world full of souls made in His image—people who were valuable—and He took the necessary steps to save them, even though sinful man was His spiritual enemy (Rom. 5:6-8). God demonstrates His present love for man by continuing to offer forgiveness to the unsaved (2 Pet. 3:9) and by continually cleansing the saved from their sins (1 Jn. 1:7). God will demonstrate his love for man in eternity by making the redeemed His *inheritance* (Eph. 1:18).

Gromacki (p. 159) noted how the “Greeks elevated what a man knew (his intellect), the Romans worshipped what a man could do (his power), but Paul stressed what a man is (his character). The pinnacle of spiritual development is to love.” Hay “withstands fire better than the devil survives the flame of love. Love is stronger than a city wall; it is harder than steel. And even if you should think of some material stronger than these, love’s strength exceeds them all. Neither wealth nor poverty overcomes it” (The Church’s Bible, First Corinthians, p. 216).

A story is told about a young boy who was trapped inside a house that had caught fire. While bystanders looked at the blaze and wondered what could be done, one man came forward, grabbed a hot drain pipe hanging from the house, and climbed to the roof. He entered the house, rescued the child, and returned to the ground using the same metal pipe.

Since the boy’s parents were killed in the fire a custody hearing was held to see who should raise him. Several people from the community came forward and explained why they should be allowed to adopt the young man. One man said he had a farm and he could be teach the boy how to farm. A local school teacher said she could provide the young man with a good education. The local banker said he could provide a good home and a good education for the orphaned boy. Finally the judge asked if anyone else would like to adopt the child. A man from the back row said he would care for the boy. He did not own a large farm and he could not guarantee the boy a good education or material wealth. He could and would, however, love this child and his proof was in his hands. He was the man who had climbed the drain pipe to save the child’s life. His scarred hands proved his love for the child (compare Jn. 20:27).

True love is a beautiful and wonderful thing, but the world has often tried to pervert or redefine it. Some have taught that love is *toleration* (i.e. love means we accept whatever people want to do). The word love has also been used to deceive and seduce people. Many have thought they were in love with someone, but what was really being experienced was lust. Others view love as conditional – as long as someone does what another wants, he is “loved.” Love is also not a feeling or the expression of generous praise. In the following verses Paul gives many different descriptions of true love.

**13:1c:** *I am become sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal.*

If Christians do not possess true love they are like “*sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal*” (*tinkling*, KJV). “‘Brass’ (*chalkos*) denotes first metal, copper, and then any object made from it. Here it probably refers to a gong. ‘Sounding’ (*echon*) might be rendered ‘resounding.’ ‘Tinkling’ (*alalazon*) is rather clashing like the sound of heavy cymbals. The sound may be attractive and entertaining; it may be alluring and persuasive. But if action is not motivated by love, it is only noise, ‘sound without soul’” (CBL, First Corinthians, p. 427). “What Paul refers to here are large, empty bronze vessels placed at the back of stone amphitheaters which served as an amplification system” (The Victor Bible Background

Commentary, p. 387). Tongue speakers could make a lot of noise and create attention, just like ancient gongs, but that act in and of itself was hollow, empty, and ultimately useless. Without love, spiritual gifts were like a body without a soul. The present tense of both *sounding* and *clanging* makes the point especially vivid.

The imagery may involve more than chaos; Paul may have implied the Corinthians were imitating some of the things found in pagan worship. Barclay (First Corinthians, p. 131) noted how a “characteristic of heathen worship, especially the worship of Dionysus and Cybele, was the clashing and the clanging of cymbals and the braying of trumpets. Even the coveted gift of tongues was no better than the uproar of heathen worship if love was absent.” Kittel (1:228) also indicated that this is correct by saying the word translated *clanging* (*tinkling*, KJV) may be defined as “ecstatic noise.”

From this verse through the end of chapter 14 the verb “*speak*” (*laleo*) is used many, many times. While this term occurs only once more in this chapter (verse 11), it is found numerous times in chapter 14 (see 14:2-6, 9, 11, 13, 18, 19, 21, 23, 27, 28-29, 34-35, 39).

**13:2:** *And if I have (the gift of) prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.*

In addition to the gift of tongues (verse 1), the Corinthians also seem to have had the gift of “*prophecy*” (*propheteia*). As noted in the commentary on 12:10a, prophecy consisted of messages “inspired by the Spirit and given in a present situation” (CBL, GED, 5:361). Prophecy was so important it is listed next to the office of apostles in 1 Cor. 12:28. Here Paul combined this gift with knowing **all** mysteries and having **all** knowledge (i.e. possessing understanding in its fullest and greatest form).

The word “*know*” (*oida*—see the commentary on 8:1) is a perfect tense verb; this tense indicates a person had this information in the past and had continued to retain this knowledge. If a person could have a complete knowledge of God and His eternal plan regarding man, and this knowledge was combined with prophecy, he would still be nothing if he lacked love. As with the information in verse 1, this example also proves the essentiality of love.

Another important word is “*mysteries*” (*mysterion*). Sometimes this term describes all of God’s redemptive work (Rom. 16:25; 1 Tim. 3:16). In other places it denotes God’s inclusion of the Gentiles for salvation (Eph. 3:3-6). In Eph. 1:9 *mysteries* describes things men and angels did not understand while the plan of redemption was being disclosed (compare 1 Cor. 2:9-11). Here *mysteries* describes “*a hidden or secret thing, not obvious to the understanding*” (Thayer, p. 420). Thayer (p. 119) also offered a good definition for the word “*knowledge*” (*gnosis*): “the deeper, more perfect and enlarged knowledge of this religion, such as belongs to the more advanced.”

We now have revelation of all the *mystery* God wants us to have (2 Pet. 1:3), but there are still *deep things* which only belong to God (Rom. 11:33). We may know much about God and the gospel, but there is always more to learn. Here, for the sake of illustration, Paul gave a hypothetical situation where a Christian has a complete understanding of all spiritual matters. Paul pictured someone who knows everything God knows regarding things such as sin, salvation, and every other related subject. If we had all this knowledge, as incredible as this would be, we would still have and be nothing if we lacked agape love.

Paul further demonstrated the necessity of love by appealing to **all** “*faith*” (*pistis*) in the middle of this verse (the Greek literally reads **all the faith**). Thayer (p. 514) said this means ““all the faith’ that can be thought of.” This would be faith in its greatest and fullest form, just as the “mysteries” and “knowledge” are described in their fullest forms. The Church Bible (p. 215) suggested that rather than list all the spiritual gifts again as we find in chapter 12, the reference to *faith* describes “the mother and source of them all.” If this is correct, someone who had “all faith” possessed every available supernatural gift. An example of supernatural or perfect faith was the ability to “*remove mountains*.”

The word *mountains* (*oros*) is plural; this term described “great obstacles that human effort alone could not conquer” (CBL, GED, 4:391) or “something that seems impossible” (Gingrich and Danker, p. 582) The *faith to remove mountains* may be a hypothetical example to illustrate the importance of love, or it

may describe what seems to have been a miraculous degree of faith (see 12:9 and Mk. 11:23). However we understand the words *faith* and *mountains*, the point is the same. Paul described great power and abilities and contrasted these things with someone who lacks love.

Another key term is *remove* (*methistemi*), a present tense verb that meant “making possible what has been impossible” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 2:401). If anyone were endowed with the maximum amount of faith, but he lacked Christian love, he would still be “*nothing*” (*outhen*), a word that meant “*without any significance or value.*” “A full head with an empty heart is worth nothing” (Gromacki, p. 160). Robertson (4:177) said that instead of using the word for *nobody*, Paul used a term which described “an absolute zero.” Judas is a classic illustration of such a person. He was one of the original twelve apostles who had some miraculous abilities (Mt. 10:1), but he was *nothing* in the end because he lacked true love.

**13:3:** *And if I bestow all my goods to feed (the poor), and if I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profiteth me nothing.*

“*Bestow*” (*psomizo*) is only used here and Rom. 12:20. In Classical Greek this term meant “*feed by putting little bits into the mouth*, as nurses do to children” and “*give food by hand.*” It was even used of baiting a trap (these definitions are taken from Liddell and Scott, p. 2029). Here the word may describe giving away property bit by bit or feeding the needy (Gingrich and Danker, p. 894). If Paul or someone else were as generous as possible, but lacked love, all the charitable efforts would be a complete failure. The Corinthians had to realize that love “*surpasses great generosity of goods and self*” (CBL, First Corinthians, p. 429).

If Paul had spoken of giving away 25% of all he had, that would have been a lot. Had he spoken of giving away exactly half of what he had, that would be unthinkable to many. Paul could have used even higher figures (75% or 90%), but the text specifically speaks of giving away “*all*” he possessed.

If giving away *all* our “*goods*” (personal property) is useless without love, what about another type of sacrifice? What if a person were to give his “*body to be burned,*” perhaps in an attempt to save the life of another or in martyrdom for Jesus’ sake? Even in these cases such sacrifice is useless if it is not motivated by love.

Paul used the word *give* instead of the word *killed*. Stated another way, Paul could have said “*be killed*” instead of “*give my body.*” By using the word *give* Paul greatly emphasized the point (compare Jn. 15:13). He then stressed the thought even more by using the word “*burned*” (this is one of the most horrible ways to die). If we voluntarily surrender our life to help another, if we make the greatest possible sacrifice, but we do not have love, our sacrifice is worthless. True sacrifice must be based on love.

Instead of using the word “*burn*” (*kaio*), some Greek manuscripts, and this includes three important ones, have a term that meant “*boast*” (*kauchaomai*). If the word “*boast*” is the right idea, and this commentary does not favor this choice, the idea would be something like “*in that I may glory*” (Lenski, First Corinthians, p. 552). Stated another way, a person would give himself in such a way that his spectacular sacrifice would allow him to boast about it. Lenski’s conclusion on this variant reading is right. He said this textual alternative (boast) “*does not deserve enough attention to earn a place in the margin of the R.V. It ruins the thought, for self-glory is a decided evidence of the lack of love for others.*”

The word “*profiteth*” (*opheleo*) at the end of this verse meant “*works without love are useless*” (see how this same term is used in Mk. 8:36 and Gal. 5:2). Gingrich and Danker (p. 900) defined *profiteth* as “*what good will it do a man?*” “*The greatest gifts and the grandest deeds together with all their greatness and their grandness are nothing, make us nothing, and bring us nothing if love is absent*” (Lenski, First Corinthians, p. 553).

Some have wondered how verse 3 can be reconciled with Mt. 19:21 and Jn. 15:13. In Mt. 19:21 Jesus said: “*If thou wouldest be perfect, go, sell that which thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me.*” In Jn. 15:13 we find “*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.*” Since Jesus associated *perfection* with selling possessions in Mt. 19:21 and laying down one’s life for his friends in Jn. 15:13, how could Paul say these exact same acts

*profit nothing*? The answer is found in 1 Cor. 13. If these actions are not done with the right motivation (love), they are useless.

There is a very slight but important distinction in verses 2 and 3. At the end of verse 2 Paul said a person without love is “*nothing*.” At the end of verse 3 he said a person who did great things but lacks love is “*profited nothing*.” The word translated *nothing* is similar in each of these verses, but it is not the same term. Here in verse 3 the word is *oudeis*; in verse 2 it is *outhen*. The significance of this difference is found in the fact that by the third century A.D. (a time when people were still making copies of New Testament manuscripts), the word in verse 2 (*outhen*) was no longer a common word in society. This term had been replaced by the similar word for “nothing” used in verse 3 (*oudeis*). Even though the word in verse 2 was no longer generally used by people, those who were copying the Bible were so careful in their work they retained the original term (they did not try to “update things” as they copied the Scriptures). This fact is just one of the reasons why we have faith in the trustworthiness of the Bible, even though it is a very old book. Notice, too, that Paul did not say the *gifts* were *nothing*; he said the person who lacks love is *profited nothing*, even if he makes great sacrifices.

The next few verses (4-7) describe some of the qualities associated with agape love. “Instead of attempting a definition Paul gives us a rich description” (Lenski, p. 554) and this description is filled with verbs. Paul taught that love is not just something to be believed; it is something to be practiced and this often costs us time, patience, resources, etc.

If the Corinthians had practiced the agape love described in this chapter, they would have avoided or overcome many of the problems discussed in this book. Today agape love is still the answer to many of the difficulties faced by individuals and congregations. In fact, Doctor S.I. McMillen wrote a book entitled “None of These Disease” and on page 14 of this book he contrasted the “disease-causing emotions” in the world with the qualities associated with love in 1 Cor. 13. The following chart is adopted from what he wrote.

LOVE	ATTITUDES THAT PRODUCE DISEASE
Is patient	Frustration, discontent
Is kind	Aggressiveness
Does not envy	Envy, jealousy
Does not boast	Seeking attention
Is not proud	Overvalued body concept
Is not rude	Taking attitude
Is not self-seeking	Selfishness, greed
Is not easily angered	Anger, rage, irritableness
Keeps no record of wrongs	Resentment, hatred
Does not delight in evil	Death wishes for others, sexual fantasizing
Rejoices with the truth	Dejection, depression
Always protects	Competitiveness, anxiety, doubt striving for security, paranoia
Always hopes	Fear, despair, discouragement
Always perseveres	Irresponsibility, apathy

In addition to the contrasts in the chart, it may be useful to read through 1 Cor. 13 and replace the word “love” with the name “*Jesus*,” the word “*God*,” or even our name. How well does our life match up to the qualities listed in the following verses?

**13:4:** *Love suffereth long, (and) is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,*

As with most things in life, love may be described both positively and negatively and this is what Paul did. His first description of love is positive. Love **suffereth long** (*makrothumeo*), a present tense verb that literally meant *long-tempered* (see how this same term is used in Mt. 18:26 and Mt. 18:29, “patience”). There are “short tempered” people in the world but God expects His people to be *long tempered*. Stated another way, this quality means it takes people a long time to get angry.

Lenski (First Corinthians, p. 554) said this quality “has to do with injurious persons and does not let their ignorant, mean, or malicious actions arouse the resentment and the anger which they deserve.” The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament (2:381) described a *long suffering* person as someone who has “control of the wrath that easily boils over.” Thayer (p. 387) said, “*to be patient in bearing the offences and injuries of others; to be mild and slow in avenging; to be long-suffering, slow to anger, slow to punish.*” Brown (2:771) said, “something active which makes a man always prepared to meet his neighbors halfway and to share his life with him. In other words, human patience or forbearance in this sense is not a character trait but a way of life.” This quality is essential to making any relationship succeed, and it is not difficult to see why it is first in Paul’s description of agape love.

Although modern Christians may be very familiar with this term and what it involves, this was not a common word in first century culture. Moulton and Milligan (p. 386) said this verb belonged “to the common vocabulary of late Greek.” In other words, since this word is typically found in *later Greek*, it was Christians who really introduced the idea of being *longsuffering* with others.

Christians have demonstrated this quality in many ways and one illustration of this comes from West Africa. After missionaries had been coming to Africa for 100 years, there was a special celebration. Towards the end of the festival an old man came before the crowd. He said he would soon die but he had information not possessed by anyone else. He said the first missionaries who had come to Zaire had a strange message and tribal leaders wanted to test these missionaries to see if they really believed the gospel they preached. The African leaders planned to slowly poison the evangelists’ children. If the missionaries saw their children die but they continued their evangelistic work, the tribal leaders would be convinced the missionaries were sincere. The Africans carried out their plan, the children in the missionary families died in some very strange ways, and the evangelists stayed. These missionaries were *longsuffering* with those who tested them.

A story is also told of Dr. Thomas Cooper (he edited a dictionary and added an additional 33,000 words to this work). After working on this project for eight years Cooper’s wife (who was regarded as a “difficult woman”) went into his study and burned all his notes while he was gone (she believed this work was having a negative impact on his health). After returning home Cooper saw the destruction and asked who was responsible for the loss of his work and his wife claimed responsibility. Cooper heaved a deep sigh and said, “Oh Dinah, Dinah, thou hast given me a world of trouble!” He then sat down and began to replace what had been lost. Like the African missionaries, Thomas Cooper was *longsuffering*.

Normally *suffereth long* describes patience with *others* instead of things and circumstances. Trench (p. 196) said *longsuffering* is the “holding out of the mind before it gives room to action or passion—generally to passion.” “The idea of the word is that it takes a long time before fuming and breaking into flames” (Rienecker and Rogers, p. 432). We might compare the word to trying to light a fire with wet wood.

God wants His people to exemplify patience in their lives, but many find that this is not their first inclination. When we are provoked and irritated we may want to complain and fight back. The quality of *suffering long* means we strive for “an infinite capacity for endurance” (Beacon Bible Commentary, 8:440). We need this quality each and every day for our “world is full of evil men, and even in our brethren much evil meets us. When this evil strikes us, and our natural reaction would be resentment, indignation, anger, bitter words, blows perhaps, then love steps in, ‘suffers long,’ keeps calm, endures, and does this continually no matter how long the offenses may persist” (Lenski, First Corinthians, p. 555).

By using this single word Paul tells Christians to be patient with others: Their children, their mate, their friends, strangers, and even enemies. Christians need to hear this message because they, just like

everyone else, are often tempted to be impatient with others. Think of the times when we have said to someone, “Hurry up!” (in these instances we are not being long suffering). We often define love in terms of giving to and (or) helping others but here love is not associated with feeding the poor and clothing the needy. Paul said true love *suffers long*.

In life we often ask others to be *longsuffering* with us (Mt. 18:26), but we may not extend this same quality to others when they request or need it (Mt. 18:29-30). If we want people to be longsuffering with us, but we are not longsuffering with them, we are hypocrites. For additional insight on this word, see how it is used in 1 Thess. 5:14; Jas. 5:7; 2 Pet. 3:9. Too, in the LXX (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) *longsuffering* is associated with both God and Israel (see Ex. 34:6; Num. 14:18).

*Longsuffering* is used as a noun (*makrothumia*) in places such as 1 Pet. 3:20 (God was *longsuffering* in the days of Noah). Paul also used the noun form of this word when discussing the “fruit of the spirit” Gal. 5:22. We even find this word used one time in its adverb form (Acts 26:3).

*Suffer long* does not mean Christians accept and tolerate sin (compare Eph. 5:11). Neither does it mean God wants us to be “indifferent” about things. If either of these things were true, Paul would have never written this letter and tried to correct the problems at Corinth. *Suffer long* describes patience and self-restraint—qualities desperately needed by the Corinthians and all other Christians.

When we look at the overall contents of this letter, and especially the next chapter, it seems some of the Christians were not patient with each other in areas such as spiritual gifts and worship. In chapter 11 Paul had to tell them to “tarry one for another” (11:33). We know that some were suing fellow saints (6:6-7). Suspicion, jealousy, and unjust judgments were common in this congregation so this body of believers, just like most congregations today, had to learn how to *suffer long* with fellow saints.

**Love is kind.** The word *kind* (*chresteuomai*) is found only here in the New Testament. Although this term looks like an adjective in the KJV, it is a present tense verb (this is also a quality to be lived out in daily life). “Paul did not describe love as kind, that is, as only an attitude; rather, he stated that love performs deeds of kindness” (CBL, GED, 6:516). There are times when we may not want to *suffer long* (the preceding quality) or be *kind* because we are tired, someone irritates or annoys us, or we are “in a bad mood.” God says we do not display the qualities of love only when feel like it. Our general behavior is to be *kind* at all times and to all people. One ancient writer described *kindness* as being “sweet to all.” Being *kind* includes friendliness, compassion and generosity. Spicq (3:515) said true “love is good, kind, considerate, willing to help, benevolent.”

When others are kind and friendly to us, it is easy to be kind in return. As indicated in the preceding paragraph, those with true love are even kind to their enemies (compare Mt. 5:44 and 1 Pet. 2:21-23). Kindness has a type of “universal language” about it; even the Old Testament speaks about it (Prov. 19:22 says this quality makes people attractive). In describing the “worthy woman” (Prov. 31:10) the writer made reference to the “law of kindness” being on her “tongue” (Prov. 31:26). Unlike speech that is rash and hurtful (Prov. 12:1a) or threatening (1 Pet. 2:23), *kindness* causes people to speak words of health and healing (Prov. 12:1b).

*Kindness* is also associated with truth. In Rom. 16:18 Paul used the noun form of this word (*chrestologia*) to say false teachers used *smooth* (kind) speech to lead people astray. While some display kindness for evil purposes (kindness can certainly be misused), God intends for this quality to be used sincerely and used for good things. If this were done, physical and verbal abuse would be instantly reduced and eventually eliminated. People would have happy homes. Kindness would cause people to offer a “soft answer” and “turn away wrath” (Prov. 15:1) instead of scream and fight.

Men desire *kindness* in women and women want this quality in men. All children want *kind* parents. This quality is also needed in the church; the Corinthians certainly needed it. Rather than be jealous of the gifts possessed by others (1 Cor. 12), or sue and defraud one another (1 Cor. 6:8), or eat before others arrived (1 Cor. 11:33-34), the Corinthians were to be *kind* to each another. Today many church problems arise or persist because people fail to be *kind*.

This exact quality is not applied to Jesus, but this quality does characterize the Lord’s life. Jesus used this word in its adjective form (*chrestos*) to say His yoke is “easy” (Mt. 11:30). The adjective form of this word is also found in Lk. 6:35 (God is “kind” to His enemies). Compare, too, Eph. 4:32 and 1 Pet. 2:3 as



these verses have this same term.

The “*voice*” of the verbs used by Paul is also important. The first verb (*long suffering*) is expressed with the *passive voice* (this indicates a lack of retaliation). The verb translated *kind* is expressed with the *active voice*. This means Christians must take an *active part* in the process; they are to seek occasions when they can be kind. Bible love obligates us to bestow thoughtful words and deeds upon others while at the same time avoiding retaliation. These qualities have sometimes been demonstrated during times of great persecution. There have been instances where soldiers were sent to arrest Bible believing people for their faith and the believers fed the very soldiers who led them away in chains. There will surely be cases where our kindness is misunderstood or misinterpreted, but generally speaking, kindness is one way to be a light to the world (Mt. 5:14).

**Envy** (*zeloo*) is a word that described a strong emotion that can be positive or negative. *Envy* “basically signified a human emotion which leads to action. It shows the zeal of the Jews to stamp out Christianity (Acts 5:17, 18) and the warm zeal of Paul for the Corinthian church (2 Corinthians 11:2)” (CBL, GED, 3:25). The original term described “a strong, dedicated emotional attitude which causes people to act for or against a person, idea, or movement” (ibid). This same term is also used in 1 Cor. 12:31 and 14:1, 39 and in these verses the word has a positive meaning.

The basic difference between the negative sense of *envy* which is described here and *jealousy* (a sin described in Gal. 5:21) is that “jealousy” may not carry the connotation of bearing a grudge against someone (*envy* can be associated with feelings of bitterness. We resent people for what they possess or have accomplished). The object of desire or resentment could be virtually anything (another person’s job, boyfriend, girlfriend, spouse, health, wealth, house, etc.). Jealousy and envy may also involve something intangible such as attention or a person’s reputation. People in the same profession are sometimes guilty of envy (a doctor may envy a fellow physician or a lawyer may envy the skills of another attorney). Preachers sometimes envy other ministers. Many start with the sin of jealousy and find this sin later leads to envy.

Here *envy not* is a present tense verb and it reminds Christians about the need to “rejoice” with and for others instead of envying them (compare Rom. 12:15). This quality means we have “no petty feelings toward those, for instance, who are doing the same work, only better. Love is not displeased at the success of others” (CBL, First Corinthians, p. 429). True love is a controlling force in a Christian’s life; it causes God’s people to do things they would ordinarily not do and avoid things they might otherwise be tempted to do.

Based on 12:14-17, it seems some of the Corinthians *envied* the spiritual gifts possessed by fellow church members. Today there can still be envy in the church. In fact, we may not only want what others have, we may want *more* than what others have. Much of the advertising in the world is based upon envy (we see what someone else has or has achieved and the implied message is that we should desire the same or want more). Solomon recognized the problem of envy (Eccl. 4:4) and the Bible warns us that envy “rots the bones” (Prov. 14:30). One of the Ten Commandments involved envy (Ex. 20:17). Paul said the remedy for envy is love. “One may admire another for something that person is or has, and he may desire many of the same good things for himself. Jealousy and envy begin when admiration and desire turn to resentment of others for what they have” (Holman, 7:230).

**Vaunteth** (*perpereuomai*) is found in the middle of this verse and it may be defined as “unbounded arrogance” (Kittel, 6:94). The NKJV translates this as “*parade itself*.” Rienecker and Roger’s definition (p. 432) is a little fuller: “to brag, to boast, one who talks a lot and acts presumptuously; ostentation is the chief idea and ostentatious boasting leads easily to the next point.” Since the Corinthians were a “knowledge-happy” congregation (compare 8:1), it would have been very tempting for some of these Christians to *parade* their knowledge and be arrogant about what they had learned.

In Classical Greek a related noun (*perperos*) described someone who was “talkative, an exaggerator, constantly asserting himself, having an obsession with criticizing and wounding others with aggressive words” (CBL, GED, 5:171). *Vaunt* might be described as *pride in action*; it is the *verbalizing* of pride (if someone tells a good story, *vaunting* means we want to tell a better tale). The verb that Paul used comes from a term that meant *windbag*; those who brag are, as the old saying goes, “full of hot air.” Since this

verb is expressed with the present tense, Paul meant those who have love continually refuse to be a windbag. Christians do not continuously boast about who they are, what they possess, what they have done, what they can do, what they plan to do, where they have been, where they can go, where they plan to go, etc.

Boasting is an easy sin to commit and Christians are sometimes ensnared by it. Many like to talk about themselves instead of Christ and spiritual things (compare Gal. 6:14). James (4:13-16) spoke of people who planned to “*go into this city, and spend a year there, and trade, and get gain.*” People were boasting about their plans, but James warned that this boasting was wrong (4:14). At Corinth it seems there were also some “spiritual-show-offs,” but God said this was the wrong way to live. Compare, too, the rich farmer’s attitude in Lk. 15:16-20.

At Corinth a “faction in the church had become disruptive, defiant, and aggressive in its preference for uncontrolled speaking out in the assembly rather than showing a willingness to contribute to the meeting in a cooperative spirit. This faction was proud and boastful. Its adherents used their religious experiences as proof of their high spiritual status in the church rather than using them for the edification of the body. In his exhortation to covet the best spiritual gifts Paul reminded them that ‘charity *vaunteth* not itself, is not puffed up’” (CBL, GED, 5:171). Love causes people to direct attention and energy to others while boasting directs attention to self (compare Judg. 7:2).

Boasting is not only wrong, it can easily lead to lying. A German proverb says “boasters and liars are first cousins” and this is true. If we deserve to be praised for something, we should let others do it instead of boasting about our accomplishments (Prov. 27:2). We do not want to be like the preacher who was given a badge for being the most humble person in the congregation where he worshipped. This preacher decided to wear his badge to boast of his humility and the congregation took it back.

**Puffed up** (*phusioo*) is found seven times in the New Testament and six of these places are in this letter (for the other places where this term occurs see 1 Cor. 4:6, 18, 19; 5:2; 8:1; Col. 2:18). This final quality is also expressed with a present tense verb and it is directly related to the sin of “vaunting.” Whereas “vaunt” (the preceding quality) deals with the actual expression of pride (the “fruit” of a problem), *puffed up* deals with the “root” (the cause) of boasting. People often boast or engage in ostentatious behavior because they are “puffed up” (people possess a type of inward conceit that often makes them think they are better than others). In many cases a “puffed up person” has too much self-esteem.

At Corinth some regarded themselves as “spiritual hot-shots” (be sure to compare 1 Cor. 4:6, 8, 18; 5:1-2; 8:1). These additional verses illustrate how the Corinthians had become proud due to the knowledge they had, the teachers and preachers they knew, their willingness to accept immorality, and the spiritual gifts they possessed (readers may also wish to refer back to the commentary on 12:7, 11).

Those who are *puffed up* may not only see themselves as superior to others, they may think many rules do not apply to them. Some think they are “above the law” and they expect to be treated in a special way because of “who they are.” In extreme cases people with sinful pride may think they are too important to suffer criminal prosecution. This arrogant mindset can blind people to truths that are important and sometimes very plain (compare Mt. 7:3-4). Like bull-frogs, conceited people often *puff themselves up just before they croak*. Those who possess true love seek to have a humble spirit (compare Jas. 4:10).

A proud spirit is such a problem this topic is addressed throughout the Scriptures. For instance, God *resists the proud* but *gives grace to the humble* (1 Pet. 5:5). Instead of saying the “proud shall inherit the earth,” Jesus said, “the meek shall inherit it” (Mt. 5:5). James said God “resists the proud” (Jas. 4:6). In Prov. 16:5 an inspired writer said, “*Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to Jehovah.*”

Those who serve in a leadership role can be especially susceptible to pride. In 1 Tim. 3:6 (a passage that refers to elders—the leaders in a local congregation) Paul said, “*not a novice, lest being puffed up he fall into the condemnation of the devil.*” The Bible does not prohibit *self esteem*, but it does forbid thoughts and behavior associated with superiority and smugness. We must always remember that God “hates” pride (Prov. 6:16-19) and those who become involved with this sin should expect punishment (Prov. 16:5, 18). Rather than be *big-headed*, people with true love have *big hearts*.

**13:5:** *doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own, is not provoked, taketh not account of evil;*

Here are four more characteristics associated with love and each quality is negative (Paul continued to show what love is not). The first negative description of love is **unseemliness** (*aschemoneo*), a verb that occurs only here and 7:36. *Unseemliness* can be defined as *rude*. Gingrich and Danker (p. 119) defined it as “*behave disgracefully, dishonorably, indecently.*” The Berkley translation rendered this word “*unmannerly.*” Beck’s translation says love is not “*indecent.*” Rienecker and Rogers (p. 432) liked Plummer’s description: “to behave indecently or in a shameful manner.” True love is “tactful and does nothing that would raise a blush” (ibid). *Unseemly* means acting in a way that is “out of bounds” or “out of shape” (behavior that does not fit the circumstance or setting).

Perhaps the best definition for *unseemly* is offered by the CBL (GED, 1:479): Bible “love does not do anything which could cause shame or disgrace. Christian love is courteous, tactful, and becoming. Even in punishment it does not take pleasure in going beyond what might be unnecessary.” Those who have and display this quality never want to do anything that would bring shame or reproach upon themselves, their family, the name of Jesus, or their local congregation. This quality means Christians avoid unseemly activities, some of which are illegal drugs, intoxication, gambling, sexual sin, criminal activity, immodest dress, and failing to fulfill one’s family responsibilities.

When people engage in unseemly activities, disgrace often follows. Think of a husband who is arrested for soliciting a prostitute or his name appears in the local newspaper because of public intoxication. In these and similar cases the man, his wife, his children, and possibly his other relatives are shamed. If a man is supposed to pay child support but refuses to do so, he is guilty of unseemly behavior. The world often revels in unseemly things and sometimes finds *unseemly* activities to be financially profitable, but Paul said Christians want no part of *unseemly* activities.

Since the word *unseemly* is a present tense verb (on-going action), Paul meant Christians continually avoid rude and disgraceful behavior. The world should see God’s people exhibiting courteous and respectful behavior on a continual basis (Christians should be some of the best mannered people in the world). Paul is certainly a good model of what it means to avoid unseemly behavior. “No matter where he might find himself, among friends or foes, before people or before rulers and kings, he always knew how to act as became his station and the position into which he was placed. ‘Who taught this tentmaker such noble and beautiful manners, such perfect tact in all his bearing, that even the great in this world were compelled to respect him?’” (Lenski, First Corinthians, p. 557).

In addition to Paul, Joseph, the husband of Mary, also refused to behave in an *unseemly* (rude) way. Before Joseph understood why Mary had become pregnant, he could have acted in an *unseemly* way (he could have publicly shamed and disgraced her). Rather than act in this way, the Bible says Joseph intended to put Mary away *privately* (Mt. 1:19). People with true love refuse to be discourteous, even if they disagree with some things that are said or done.

The noun form of *unseemly* (*aschemosune*) is used in Rom. 1:27 and this form of the word allows us to make the following argument:

- Homosexuality is an *unseemly* act (Rom. 1:27).
- Unseemly acts are *not* associated with true love (1 Cor. 13:5a).
- Therefore homosexuality is not associated with true love.

Love **does not seek its own** is the next quality and this means people with true love are unselfish. As seen in the next chapter (14:4a), this quality was also desperately needed at Corinth. Some of the Corinthians were “speaking in an unknown tongue” and this “edified” the tongue speakers (the ones doing the speaking), but others in the assembly were not edified because they did not understand the language. The proper behavior is found in 14:4b (Christians should have sought or used gifts that *edified the church*). Compare, too, 12:7; 14:12, 26.

The word “*seek*” (*zeteo*) in 13:5 is a present tense verb and it may be defined as “*strive for one’s own advantage*” (Gingrich and Danker, p. 339). Another important word is “*own*.” Rather than thinking about what we want, what our needs are, or what we may be entitled to, true love means we focus on the needs or interests of others (compare 1 Cor. 10:24, 33; Phil. 2:4). A good secular example of unselfishness is found in the life of Booker T. Washington. Washington was born into slavery on April 5<sup>th</sup>, 1856; by 1881 he was free and he had formed an institute in the state of Alabama. His institute was built on farmland that was paid for by donations.

One contributor was a woman who was about 70 years of age. This woman’s clothing was little more than rags and she hobbled on a cane. This lady reportedly said: “Mr. Washin’gon, God knows I spent de bes days of my life in slavery. God knows I’s ignorant and poor. I knows you is tryin’ to make better men an’ women for de colored race. I ain’t got no money, but I wants you to take dese six eggs, what I’s been savin’ up, an’ I wants you to put dese six eggs into de eddication of dese boys an’ gals!”

Once the institute was opened Washington said, “I have received many gifts for the institution, but never any, I think, that touched me so deeply as the sacrificial gift of that noble women.” A poor woman put the good of others above her own (she was not selfish). The unnamed lady could have reasoned that she needed the six eggs for herself. She could have concluded that six eggs would not have made any real difference in paying for the school property. Instead of being selfish, she chose to be as generous as she could. Today there will be times when we must decide to be selfless or selfish. Selfishness destroys individuals, ruins families, and will be one of the reasons why people miss heaven.

The third quality of love in verse 5 is **not provoked** (*paroxuno*). The KJV adds the word “*easily*,” but this term is not part of the original text. Too, this additional word may leave the impression that it is okay to be *provoked* as long as this does not happen *quickly*. Some think the word *easily* is in the text because King James had a violent temper and this may be true.

Aside from here the word *provoked* is found only one other time in the New Testament (Acts 17:16). Brown (1:110) defined this term as “to become angry.” Gromacki (p. 161) said to “be ‘provoked’ is to be driven to wrathful anger caused by offense.” This quality means love prevents people from flying into a fit of rage. When people have this trait they are not “*carried away*, i.e. ‘in anger’” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 3:43).

While the world often scoffs at the information in the Bible, it does sometimes validate some of the Bible’s teachings and here is one such example. Unsaved people readily admit that anger causes serious problems. This point is so well attested to that the world offers “anger management counseling.” God’s solution to anger is love. Love keeps people from “flying off the handle.” God tells us to control anger before it controls us.

As with the other verbs that are used to describe love, *not provoked* is expressed with the present tense. This word is also used as a noun in the New Testament (*paroxusmos*) and one of these places is Heb. 10:24 (Christians are to “provoke” one another to love and good works). At Corinth Christians should have *provoked* one another in a positive way, but these Christians were agitating fellow saints and some of the Corinthians were apparently getting angry. The Corinthians needed to be reminded that “love is not touchy” (J.B. Phillips). “Love alone can overcome the real or fancied aggravations that a person experiences in life” (Beacon Bible Commentary, 8:442).

Many Bible characters were treated very badly but they were not *provoked*. The best example of this is Jesus (1 Pet. 2:21-23). The Lord refused to be provoked even though false testimony was given against Him (Mk. 14:57-58) and the charges were numerous (Mk. 15:3). In spite of all that was done and said, Jesus remained silent (Mk. 15:5). Compare, too, Jn. 19:1-3, 9. Joseph is another great man of God who demonstrated this quality. Even though he was hated (Gen. 37:4), his brothers thought about killing him (Gen. 37:20), he was sold into slavery (Gen. 37:28) and later temporarily imprisoned (Gen. 39:20), he graciously received and cared for his family—some of whom had treated him so badly years earlier (compare Gen. 45:4-7).

The 5<sup>th</sup> verse ends with **taketh not account of evil** (the KJV says “*thinketh no evil*”). *Account* or *think* (*logizomai*) is a present tense verb. Outside the New Testament this term was sometimes used to describe commerce (people wrote down debts on a ledger so they would not be forgotten). If Paul was thinking

about this background information, he meant love does not keep a running track of offenses (i.e. it does not “keep score”). “Love does not add up, or assign evil intentions and wrong designs to a man. Love does not credit other people with evil motives” (Beacon Bible Commentary, 8:442). The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament (2:355) said love does “not *calculate* the evil.” Rather than focus on what a person has done to us, love causes us to see the best in others and never try to plot any type of harm or revenge (compare Lk. 11:4). The Beacon Bible Commentary (8:442) offered this great quote from Godet: “Love, instead of entering evil as a debit in its account book, voluntarily passes the sponge over what it endures.”

True love should cause people to “forgive and forget,” but we often find people saying things like, “This is the third time he hurt me.” Or, a person may say, “I forgive you, but I will never forget what you have done.” These and similar comments describe a record of wrongs. Even though such a list may not be literally recorded somewhere, keeping such events in the mind does happen and God says this is contrary to true love.

The word translated *account* (*logizomai*) is very similar to our word *logic*. This fact should remind us that refusing to keep a record of the wrongs we have experienced is the *logical* way to live. Living in this way not only helps prevent bitterness, it guards our hearts against hate and seeking revenge. Resentment and grudges cannot coexist with agape love.

This quality, just like the others, is easy to understand but it is sometimes difficult to apply. Even some of God’s greatest servants have struggled to not keep a record of the evil they have suffered. One illustration of this is found in 1 Kgs. 2:1-6. David had come to the end of his life and he told Solomon of how Joab had wronged him (Joab had murdered Abner and Amasa, two of David’s military generals). While Joab had pretended these killings were the result of war, this was a lie and David knew it. David should have not held a grudge against Joab, especially at the end of his life, but he wanted Joab to suffer for what he had done. David wanted revenge so badly he asked his son Solomon to carry on his grudge against Joab and this was done (1 Kgs. 2:30-33). Today, some still try to continue a family feud or pass along ill feelings to future generations.

Since this quality is described with the present tense, those with true love *continually* refuse to keep a record of evil. This tense also reminds us that this quality (as well as the others) is an on-going choice. We can either continually try to remember the evil done to us by others, or we can seek to continually “forget the things that are behind us and stretch forward to what is before us” (Phil. 4:13). The latter choice is God’s will and this choice makes for the best life. Forgetting about how we have been wronged helps husbands and wives have strong marriages. This way of life helps children have good relationships with their parents. Too many spouses have grudges against their mates, too many children grow up with grudges against their parents, and too many Christians stay focused on how they were hurt by a fellow church member. If we want God to “forget” the wrongs we have done (Mt. 6:14), we must act in this same manner. This was how Jesus acted while on the cross (Lk. 23:34). Even though this way of life is not always easy, it is the right way to live.

The type of wrongs Paul had in mind are described as “*evil*” (*kakos*). Evil actions are things “incompatible with love” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 2:239). Gingrich and Danker (p. 397) said in this verse *evil* means “what is contrary to law; crime, sin.” Brown (1:563) noted how the word *evil* in the New Testament describes “evil, bad, destructive, damaging, unjust” acts. Paul used this same term in 2 Tim. 4:14 to say he had suffered much *evil* from Alexander the coppersmith. This word is also used in Rom. 12:17 to say we are to “never pay back evil for evil” (The Living Bible). If we concentrate on the evil done to us, we can develop a “root of bitterness” (Heb. 12:15) that destroys us and others.

In thinking about a record of evil it is important to realize that “Paul did not speak absolutely here. With no record of offenses, one cannot help others with many of their problems. Paul received reports on the wrongdoings in the Corinthian church. Someone had to keep a record in order to give him these reports. Yet, the purpose of the records was restorative, not vengeful or begrudging” (Holman, 7:232).

**13:6:** *rejoiceth not in unrighteousness, but rejoiceth with the truth;*

Love does **not rejoice in unrighteousness** (the KJV says “*Rejoiceth not in iniquity*”). “*Unrighteousness*” (*adikia*) occurs 25 times in the New Testament and it is the exact opposite of *righteousness*. Gingrich and Danker (p. 18) defined *unrighteousness* as “*wickedness, injustice*.” Thayer’s definition (p. 12) is “*unrighteousness of heart and life*.” Paul used this same word in Rom. 1:29 and then said those who choose this way of life deserve death (Rom. 1:32). He also said *unrighteousness* (same word) is not associated with God (Rom. 9:14). God is very willing to be merciful to man’s “*unrighteousness*” (Heb. 8:12—same word), but this mercy is conditioned on man’s obedience (Heb. 5:9). This obedience includes turning from sin (see 2 Tim. 2:19 where the word *unrighteousness* is also used). Those who do not obey the gospel are considered “workers of *iniquity* (same word, Lk. 13:27) and will one day be told to “depart” from God (Lk. 13:27).

This characteristic means love “does not participate in any personal sins or acts of unrighteousness. Nor does love rejoice over the vices of other men. It finds no pleasure when others are proved guilty of crime. Love never derives satisfaction when another falls into sin” (Beacon Bible Commentary, 8:442). While the unsaved often rejoice over the downfall of their enemies (“He finally got what was coming to him” or “He got what he deserved”), Christians are not supposed to reason in these ways. Even if Christians do not personally like someone, hearing how an enemy has experienced suffering or trouble gives Christians no pleasure. The unsaved often want vengeance in this life, but Christians “seek the things that are above” (Col. 3:1-2) and this means following the “golden rule” (Mt. 7:12).

The word “*rejoice*” is used twice in this verse by the ASV and KJV, but there are two different terms in the Greek text. The first word (*chairo*) is a present tense verb that is often used in the Philippian letter. A simple definition for this first word is “full of joy” (Kittel, 9:366). As stated in the preceding paragraph, those with true love do not find any pleasure in unrighteousness. The unsaved, on the other hand, not only practice and enjoy sin, they often boast about what they have done. Men may brag about their female conquests, how much they drank, or their latest barroom brawl. Non-Christians sometimes use unrighteousness as the basis for jokes and boasting. The world enjoys the filth of sin because it does not realize there is a better way.

Instead of *rejoicing over unrighteousness*, those with true love **rejoice with the truth** (people with true love want to know and do what is right). In the KJV the text says “*rejoiceth in the truth*.” Verse 6 affirms that truth and righteousness go together; this verse also implies that unrighteousness and falsehood (error) also go together. This latter point is also found in 2 Thess. 2:12 (“*that they all might be judged who **believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness,***” emphasis mine, BP).

*Truth (aletheia)* is the opposite of *unrighteousness*. Wuest (3:86) noted how the “Greek idea of truth is therefore that which is unconcealed, unhidden, that which will bear scrutiny and investigation, that which is open to the light of day.”

There are too many ideas associated with the word “truth” in the New Testament to list them all here, but a few points are too critical to overlook. Truth frees people from their sins (Jn. 8:32) when they obey it (1 Pet. 1:22). “Love and truth are twins in the household of faith” (Beacon Bible Commentary, 8:442). Kittel (1:156) described truth as “a power which is obeyed.” When people *rejoice with the truth* they have “*sincerity of mind and integrity of character, or a mode of life in harmony with divine truth*” (Thayer, p. 26). Today we often find cases where people do not want to *hear the truth*, do not want to *tell the truth*, do not want to *believe the truth*, and do not want to *obey the truth*.

The connection between love and truth disproves many of the popular ideas in our world. For example, some have said they desire religious fellowship with other groups, “even though there is disagreement on various doctrinal points.” This statement admits that someone is wrong (in error), but differing groups will be in fellowship with one another, often “in the name of love.” Paul said love rejoices *with truth*, not error. Those with true love do not want to be aligned with things that are false and this includes all religious groups that are involved with doctrinal error. Just as Prov. 23:23 says, “Buy the truth and sell it not,” so we are to know the truth and “hold fast” to it (1 Thess. 5:21). Paul told the Corinthians (1 Cor. 15:33) that “evil companionships corrupt good morals” (as noted in the commentary on this verse, this saying primarily involved false teaching). Because false teaching usually corrupts

those who know the truth, Jesus said to turn away from those who teach error (Mt. 15:14, “Let them alone”).

Many have offered clever slogans, such as “doctrine divides but love unifies” and we can have “unity in diversity.” These messages are popular, but they are not found in the Bible. God’s plan for unity is *relational* (there is “one shepherd” and “one flock,” Jn. 10:16, and all achieve unity by using Jesus and the one church He built). Unity is possible if all would simply follow the Scriptures (Jn. 17:20-21).

Many refer to the apostle John as “the apostle of love,” but they seem ignorant of the fact that John is also described as an *apostle of truth* (see 1 Jn. 1:8; 2:4, 21; 3:18, 19; 4:6; 5:7; 2 Jn. 1, 3, 4; 3 Jn. 1, 3, 4, 8, 12). Truth is a key component in the Christian life and a necessary part of true love. While adhering to the truth is sometimes very costly (Mt. 13:44-46; Mk. 10:29), we need it to properly “walk” with God (3 Jn. 3).

Truth is available and obtainable in virtually every area of life, but not everyone wants it. This author once worked at a factory where a cafeteria manager asked patrons to fill out a survey. This questionnaire asked about the quality of the food, the price of the food, the attitude of cafeteria employees, etc.

Although the cafeteria manager had promised to review every survey (he said he “wanted to know the truth”), he refused to read any of the unfavorable comments (surveys that offered legitimate criticism were discarded). This also happens with the gospel. Many claim they want to know the truth, but when they find it, they do not want to obey it (compare Gal. 4:6). Those who have true love and seek the truth (Mt. 7:7) may not get the answer they want, but they will accept and obey what the Bible says because they want to be Jesus’ friend (Jn. 14:15; 15:14) and be saved.

As noted in the initial comments on this verse several English translations have the word “rejoice” twice in this passage but the Greek text has two different words. Perhaps this is why the NIV translated the first word “delight” and the second word (which is also a present tense verb) “rejoice.” The second term in 6b (*sunchairo*) is used only seven times in the New Testament, two of which are found in Lk. 15:6, 9. This term is also found in 1 Cor. 12:26. MacKnight offers an enhanced translation to capture the thought: “*Doth not take pleasure in iniquity* committed by others, though he should reap advantage from it; *But jointly rejoiceth* with good men *in every virtuous action.*” The world *rejoices* with and in things that are wrong (greed, envy, gossip and revenge, etc.), but Christians rejoice with and in things that are right and true.

Truth is one of the things that separates the saved from the unsaved. The Bible says God’s people “love in truth” (3 Jn. 1), “walk in truth” (3 Jn. 3-4), work in the truth (3 Jn. 8), and speak the truth (Eph. 4:15). Jesus is “full of truth” (Jn. 1:14), so those who love Him are fully committed to the truth and this includes worshipping in truth (Jn. 4:24). Since we receive truth from the Scriptures (Jn. 17:17), our worship and every other act of service to God must be regulated by the Bible. The unsaved often try to hinder the truth (Rom. 1:18) or “exchange it for a lie” (Rom. 1:25), but God’s people “buy the truth and refuse to sell it” (Prov. 23:23). Satan knows the truth is powerful so he wants to keep people from it or ensure they only receive a part of it (Gen. 3:4; Mk. 4:15).

### **13:7a:** *bearth all things, believeth all things*

In this chapter Paul described love in both positive and negative terms; here stress is laid on the *positive* aspects of agape love. Paul listed four different actions and each of these actions is prefaced with the word “all” (*pas*), a term that occurs more than 1,200 times in the New Testament. This small word tells us that agape love really is the key to successful living. Everything we think, say, and do is to be based on agape love. Gingrich and Danker (p. 633) said in this verse the word *all* is used “four times as anaphora (rhetorical repetition).”

Agape love **bears all things**. *Bears* (*stego*) is a present tense verb that originally meant to “cover” and “conceal.” Early Greek literature used this word “to describe the act of ‘covering closely’ in order to keep a liquid within a container or from coming into a container; hence, ‘watertight, repel’; and in later Greek, ‘to ward off, to bear up, sustain,’ and thence ‘to endure’ or ‘to resist’” (CBL, GED, 6:108). While the NIV translated this word “protect,” it seems best to understand *bear* as meaning continuing with

undesirable and (or) unpleasant people and circumstances. This quality may also include keeping some things confidential (in some situations love causes people to create a “cloak of silence”). Vincent (3:265) said this quality “keeps out resentment as the ship keeps out the water, or the roof the rain.” Aside from here, *bear* is found only in 1 Cor. 9:12 and 1 Thes. 3:1, 5.

*Bearing all things* does not apply to life threatening situations or covering up things that are wrong (compare 1 Cor. 5; Phil. 4:2; 1 Tim. 5:20). Neither does it mean accepting false religion; in Mt. 15:4 Jesus noted how some were involved with false religion and He said these blind guides were to be *left alone*. Paul meant love covers everything that should stay concealed and love endures difficult circumstances (compare “suffereth long” in 4a). In cases where someone is involved with what is wrong, love tries to persuade the “wrongdoer” to “become a right-doer.” Lenski (First Corinthians, p. 560) said *bear all things* “should not lead us to think of a load that is placed upon and held up by the arms of love. The figure has reference to enduring and quietly suffering inflictions. Love never complains that it is made to endure and to suffer too much; its capacity for suffering is very great. Remember all that the Lord’s love suffered.”

All people face circumstances that make life very, very difficult. Common hardships include financial problems, health problems, religious persecution, family issues, etc. Here Paul meant true love “resists all attempts against it” or “endures all onslaughts” (CBL, GED, 6:108).

Sometimes the burdens we bear involve those who are closest to us. A judge once dealt with a couple who wanted to divorce (this couple had been married in Hell, Michigan). After hearing a sufficient amount of testimony this judge said, “The record shows that this marriage was celebrated in Hell, and testimony so far indicates it has continued to be that kind of relationship.” Some married couples *bear* much difficulty in their married lives, sometimes because of bad choices. Others *bear* hardships for different reasons.

A story is told of a soldier who served during the time of General Cromwell. Although this man’s fiancé had pleaded with the judge to spare her future husband’s life, this soldier was to be executed at the ringing of the curfew bell. Upon learning that a reprieve was impossible, the young woman secretly climbed into the belfry, grabbed the tongue of the bell, and waited for the deaf sexton to start pulling the rope. The sexton pulled the rope at appointed time and the woman’s body repeatedly silenced the bell.

When the sexton stopped pulling the rope the wounded and bleeding woman came down from the tower. A poet later recorded these words: “At his feet she told her story, showed her hands all bruised and torn; And her sweet young face, still haggard with the anguish it had worn; Touched his heart with sudden pity, lit his eyes with misty light: ‘Go, your lover lives,’ said Cromwell, ‘Curfew will not ring tonight.’” Love has caused many to *bear* untold suffering and anguish for others.

The qualities for love in this chapter stand in stark contrast to how the world thinks and lives. The unsaved often want to *uncover* the shortcomings, errors and sins of others. God and His people want to *bear* with and even *cover* the sins of others when possible. Christians want to take “all unpleasantness from other people” and extend a “cloak of love” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 3:272). In practical terms this means a husband does not broadcast his wife’s flaws to others or always remind her of them. He works to cover them, just as a wife does for her husband.

There are those who *cover things for a while*, but when they get angry or frustrated, what has been temporarily *concealed* is prominently *revealed*. In other cases people are not willing to cover things for even a little while. A groom was in the process of getting married and he was asked to take the traditional wedding vows. When the minister asked the groom if he would stay married to his fiancé “*for better and for worse*,” for “*richer and poorer, in sickness and in health*” he said, YES, no, YES, no, no, and YES. Like many today, this man was willing to commit to a few things, but he was not willing to demonstrate the type of love that would *bear all things*.

Today couples fail to *bear all things* when they “fall out of love” or they “find someone they like more.” Refusing to *bear all things* may also be applied to the place where we worship. There have been times when Christians left their church home and went elsewhere because there was someone or something they didn’t like. Some “endure a few things” or even “endure many things for a little while,” but they eventually quit. Those who bear all things are not quitters. Too many want to *bear all things*



when life is easy.

Spicq (3:290) offered the following insights which are worthy of inclusion: “Thus, in all circumstances, love is characterized by discretion; in particular, it keeps quiet about evils and does not record them on a balance sheet; it covers evil with silence and does not try to exploit it, as mothers excuse their children’s faults and as Christ begged pardon for his executioners (Luke 23:34). . . . Far from complaining about all of the dishonest and base deeds that may do him harm, the long-suffering charitable person conceals them, in a way, and thus overcomes evil with good (1 Thess 5:15; Rom 12:17, 21; 1 Pet 3:9).”

In addition to bearing all things, love **believes** (*pisteuo*) **all things**. *Believes* is also a present tense (continuous action) verb and this quality tell us to believe the best about others, unless we have evidence to the contrary. True love keeps people from unfounded suspicions and doubts, even in situations where such seems difficult.

This quality does not mean God wants Christians to be gullible (compare Mt. 10:16). Neither does it mean Christians believe the lies that people tell or that they foolishly expose themselves to dangerous situations. If a situation appears to be unsafe, there is nothing wrong with the “trust but verify” philosophy. First century Christians were warned against “believing every spirit” (1 Jn. 4:1) and told to “prove all things” and “hold fast to that which is good” (1 Thess. 5:21). Even in this chapter Paul said Christians “rejoice with truth” (verse 6). *Believing all things* means we basically have “confidence in the goodness of men” (Thayer, p. 512) and we refuse to believe that others are always out to hurt or take advantage of us.

The unsaved often assume the worst about things and other people, in part because assuming the worst is frequently the safest course (this lessens the chance of our being hurt, betrayed or surprised). Suspicion is common in the world and it is sometimes found in the church; it can even be found among some preachers, elders, deacons, and Bible class teachers. Certainly the “Corinthians were a suspicious crowd. They had difficulty in placing confidence in each other. Their rivalry over the various gifts had produced a gap in their trust. Paul reminds these spiritual problem-children that love **believeth all things**” (Beacon Bible Commentary, 8:443).

Today we can be just as suspicious as the Corinthians. If we see someone in a certain place or doing a certain thing, we may immediately draw a negative conclusion because we think of what *we would be doing if we were in such a place*. Before we jump to conclusions about someone or something, we need to have all the facts. There are many good illustrations of this, one of which comes from the book of Joshua. According to Josh. 22, the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh were preparing to settle on the east side of the Jordan River. These tribes built an altar by the Jordan River (Josh. 22:10), but this action was not understood by the rest of Israel (Josh. 22:12). The rest of the nation was so upset by what these three tribes had done (Josh. 22:16) that the other tribes prepared for war (Josh. 22:12). Peace prevailed when the matter was finally explained (Josh. 22:24-28), but the entire problem could have been avoided if the majority of the Hebrew tribes had *believed the best* about Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh (compare Josh. 22:30).

Job’s friends also show the folly of assuming the worst about people. Bildad (Job 8:4) claimed Job’s children must have sinned and thus deserved death. Eliphaz (Job 15:2) said Job was nothing but a “windbag” (Job 15:2) and there was “no end” to Job’s sins (Job 22:5). These men did not believe the best about their friend but they were wrong. True love *believes the best about others*.

As already indicated in the preceding comments throughout this chapter, people now often define love in terms of “what it is.” God describes love by *what it does* (compare Jn. 3:16). Here the “action” of love is trusting others. The next and final five qualities show that true love is also tenacious. While romance may come and go, and positive feelings for someone or something can decrease or disappear with time, true love cannot be conquered.

**11:7b:** *hopeth all things, endureth all things.*

**Hope** (*elpizo*) is a present tense verb and it “means ‘to put one’s expectation and trust for the future in

someone or something, to hope for something to come to pass, or to expect to be able to do something.’ It is a verb which deals with the future in an anticipatory and positive way” (CBL, GED, 2:384). Stated another way, “Love never gives up—it follows a man to the edge of the grave, always expecting the best. Love does not produce a kind of sentimental optimism which blindly refuses to face reality, but it refuses to take failure as final” (Beacon Bible Commentary, 8:443). Rather than say, “I do not think he will make it,” this quality causes people to say, “I believe with God’s help he will make it.” Rather than say, “I believe he did it and is guilty,” true love causes us to give people the benefit of the doubt and hope they did not do something wrong. We hold to hope until it is proven false or exhausted. True love creates an environment of optimism (Spicq, 1:489, called hope a “source of optimism”).

Spicq also (1:481) noted how *hope* was earnestly sought in the first century world, even to the point of having a “cult of hope,” but what the world offered did not fully meet man’s needs. In fact, as Spicq (1:481) noted, first century sculptures portray eyes that “express sadness, ‘a sort of desperate numbness’” and a common epitaph from this time was: “I was not, I came to be, I am no longer; it amounts to nothing.” When first century pagans saw the hope that Christians had, even during times of persecution, they were attracted to the gospel.

Hope “is one of the three great pillars of the Christian faith. It is on *hope*, here along with faith and love, that the whole Christian faith is founded (1 Cor. 13:13). *Hope* is characteristically the Christian virtue and it is something which for the non-Christian is impossible (Eph. 2:12). Only the Christian can be an optimist regarding the world. Only the Christian can hope to cope with life. And only the Christian can regard death with serenity and equanimity” (Barclay, New Testament words, p. 73). Since Paul described hope with a present tense verb, those with true love *regularly hope*.

Baker’s Dictionary of Theology (p. 271) noted how “(1) This hope relates to salvation and is an essential grace like faith and love (1 Cor. 13:13); but where faith refers to past and present, hope includes the future (Rom. 8:24-25). (2) Its object is the ultimate blessedness of God’s kingdom (Acts 2:26; Titus 1:2). (3) It produces the moral fruits of (a) joyful confidence in God (Rom. 8:28); (b) unashamed patience in tribulation (Rom. 5:3); and (c) perseverance in prayer. (4) It anticipates an actual righteousness (Gal. 5:5) and is thus good (II Thess. 2:16), blessed (Titus 2:13) and glorious (Col. 1:27). (5) It stabilizes the soul like an anchor by linking it to God’s steadfastness (Heb. 3:6; 6:18-19). (6) It was generated in the OT fathers by God’s promise first given to Abraham (Rom. 4:18), then embraced by Israel (Acts 26:6-7) and proclaimed by Paul as the hope of the gospel.”

It has been said that many of our relationships go through three stages. Whether we are dating someone, starting a new job, or have met a new friend, there is often an initial reaction of *hope* (people may comment on how “perfect” someone or something is). Time passes, reality sets in, and some of the initial hope is lost. As more time passes our initial hope may have decreased so much it seems completely gone. At this point people may look for someone else to date, start looking for a new job, or divorce the spouse they used to think was “so perfect.” Those who persist in hope often find that by “enduring all things” (the final quality in this verse) hope is renewed and restored. *Hope* encourages Christians to avoid pessimism and it gives them the strength to soldier on during the most difficult circumstances of life. Unless there is some real evidence to the contrary, we believe the best about others (see the preceding quality of love) and we continue to work and hope for the best. In cases where there is unfavorable evidence about someone or something, agape love still causes us to *hope* for the best outcome. *Hope* is to be an integral part of the Christian life.

True love also **endures all things**. “*Endure*” (*hupomeno*) was a military word that meant “sustain the assault of the enemy.” This is Paul’s most comprehensive description for agape love and here it is a present tense verb. This quality means people persevere “despite the fear that one feels...for the beauty of the deed” (Spicq, 3:415). Spicq also said (3:420) this *endurance* is the “indefatigable capacity to endure despite the ingratitude, vileness, bad conduct, and problems that all communal living involves.” This quality is “steadfastness and perseverance ‘under’ certain circumstances, and also to remaining expectant in the face of passing time” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 3:405). This word means love is tough and it helps people do what is right no matter what our circumstances are. In addition to describing endurance, this word is also joined with patience (see Rom. 12:12 and 1 Pet. 2:20

where this term is also used).

Jesus warned His disciples about the need to “*endure*” (same word) to the end (Mt. 10:22). Sometimes we must “*endure*” (same word) *chastening* (Heb. 12:7). In other cases we must “*endure*” (same word) *temptation* (Jas. 1:12). True love helps people face the “big problems” of life as well as endure the smaller daily struggles (compare 1 Cor. 16:13 and Eph. 6:14). Endurance describes “a quiet, stable reaction to people and events which do not merit patience” (Beacon Bible Commentary, 8:443). Even if there are times when *hope* seems impossible, we can still *endure*. Young people need to *endure* as well as the middle aged and those who have reached their final years. This quality is an essential and lifelong trait.

A Biblical example of *enduring* love is found in the Song of Solomon. In this book (see 8:6-7) the writer spoke about a love that is as “universal and irresistible as **death**, exclusive and possessive (in the sense of being genuinely concerned for the one loved) as **the grave**, passionate (as **blazing fire**) and as invincible and persevering as **many waters and rivers**” (Bible Knowledge, p. 1024). In 8:7b of this Song the text says all the wealth in the world could not purchase this type of love. Many marriages begin this way, but the love does not endure. Without love we are nothing (verse 1) and true love requires endurance.

Although Paul described love as enduring “*all things*,” this quality, as well as the preceding ones, does have some limitations. Christians have never been obligated to *endure* physical abuse from their spouse or anyone else. There has never been a duty to persevere with people involved in criminal activities. Joseph understood there was a time when he could no longer *bear* to be in the presence of Potiphar’s wife and he fled (Gen. 39:12). A similar truth is found with the quality of hope. While we “hope for all things,” this does not include hoping that Satan will one day be saved or that God will one day change His mind and save those who never embraced Christ. There are plenty of occasions for Christians to demonstrate the qualities associated with love, but true love must always be offered in conjunction with common sense and good judgment.

### 13:8a: *Love never faileth:*

Two main points are discussed in this chapter: Love and spiritual gifts. Paul described many of the qualities associated with agape love in the preceding verses and here he told the Corinthians that true love never *fails* (love will always be on the earth and it will certainly be in eternity).

The word translated “*never*” (*oudeis*) is a compound word. The first part of this term (“*ou*”) expresses an “unequivocal negative” (CBL, GED, 4:408). The addition of the next two letters (“*de*”) has the force of “not even.” The remaining part of this word (*heis*) makes the thought “no one, not even to the number one.” Paul meant love will never under any circumstances “*fail*.” Instead of “fail,” we could use the word “cease” to describe the thought (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 1:420). Love must and will continue, but the spiritual gifts would cease. For some of the other places in the New Testament that use the word translated *never* (and these passages help illustrate the word’s meaning), see Mt. 7:23; 9:33; 26:33; Mk. 2:12.

Our existing Greek texts vary on the word for *fail*; some manuscripts have a word (*ekpipto*) that is also used for chains “falling off” Peter’s hands (Acts 12:7), “falling” from grace (Gal. 5:4), and “falling” flowers (1 Pet. 1:24). Other places that have this term include 2 Pet. 3:17 and Rev. 2:5. Basic definitions for this word are fall off, fall from, drop away, lose, fail. In Classical Greek this word was “used of an actor who was hissed off the stage” (Vincent, 3:265).

Other manuscripts have a different term (*pipto*) that is a common New Testament verb. General definitions for this word would be “to fall, fall down, fall in ruins, fail, go astray.” Jesus used this word in Mt. 7:27 to describe a house that *failed*. In Heb. 3:17 this term is used to say bodies “fell” in the wilderness. The Hebrew writer also used this word in Heb. 11:30 to say the walls of Jericho “fell.” James (5:12) used this word to say we can “fall” into condemnation. Whichever word Paul intended to use, he meant the spiritual gifts would one day fail, cease, come to an end, stop, pass away, no longer be available, etc. If readers do not understand this basic point, they will not correctly interpret or properly

understand the final verses in this chapter.

Some have thought the first part of this verse means faithful Christians will “never fail” to express the kind of love described in the preceding verses, but this is incorrect. Christians *do fail* to act in accordance with the qualities associated with agape love and they *often fail* in this regard. James said we “all” stumble in “many things” (Jas. 3:2). Paul said we **all** “fall short” (present tense), Rom. 3:23. Many times our failings involve the tongue; James said “no man can tame the tongue” because it is a “restless evil” and a “deadly poison” (Jas. 3:8). Some of the most unloving acts ever committed have involved human speech. The *never failing love* described in this verse means love will always exist on the earth as well as in eternity.

**13:8b:** *but whether (there be) prophecies, they shall be done away; whether (there be) tongues, they shall cease; whether (there be) knowledge, it shall be done away.*

Aside from Eph. 4:7-16, there is no better place in the New Testament to study the duration and cessation of miraculous gifts. Here this discussion is initiated with the word **prophecies** (this gift is explained in the commentary on 11:4a; 12:10a, 27-28; 14:31). People with this ability were “inspired by the Spirit and given in a present situation” (CBL, GED, 5:361). Prophets spoke for God (compare 14:3) and this speaking involved both making predictions and offering instruction. As important as this gift was, Paul said this ability would be “*done away*” (“*fail*,” KJV). **Tongues** (the ability to speak in different languages—this is discussed in the commentary on 12:10b) would “*cease*.” The miraculous **knowledge** possessed by Christians (this is discussed in the commentary on 12:8) would be “*done away*” (“*vanish away*,” KJV). For information on the word “charity” (the KJV translation), see the commentary on 13:1b.

The ASV describes miraculous *knowledge* and *prophecies* with the same terminology (“done away”) but the KJV describes the supernatural *knowledge* as *vanishing* and *prophecies* as *failing*. The KJV rendering implies a distinction in how these gifts would end, but there is no difference in the Greek text. The original text describes the cessation of prophecy and the cessation of supernatural knowledge with the same word (*katargeo*). This term has “the sense of ‘to render inactive,’ ‘to condemn to inactivity,’” and “put out of use” (Kittel, 1:452). This word is also used in verses 10 and 11; in verse 11 Kittel said this word means “destroy.” Two chapters later (1 Cor. 15:26) this term is again used to say death will one day be made *inactive*. We also find this word in Rom. 7:6 and 2 Cor. 3:14 (Paul said we are “*dead*” to the old law. That is, the Old Testament has been made inactive and we are no longer under that system of religion). This term is used to describe how death “looses” a woman from her husband (Rom. 7:2).

By using the word translated *done away* Paul meant a time would come when prophecy and miraculous knowledge would become completely inoperative, just as the Old Testament system given through Moses has become inoperative (Rom. 7:6; 2 Cor. 3:14). Paul looked forward to a time when Christians would still *know* things (verse 12), but this knowledge would come through the completed New Testament instead of supernatural gifts.

Paul associated the word *cease* (*pauo*) with tongue speaking and this term may be defined as “to stop oneself.” In Lk. 8:24 the word *cease* describes the ceasing of a storm. Luke also used this word to describe Jesus “ceasing” from prayer (Lk. 11:1). The Hebrew writer (Heb. 10:2) used this term in discussing the termination of animal sacrifices. Here *cease* tells us tongue speaking would end and it would end on its own. Thayer said the gift of tongues would “leave off” (p. 497). Gingrich and Danker said the tongues were to “come to an end” (p. 638). By using this word Paul meant a time would come when tongue speaking would simply fade away. Just as someone might stop speaking, so a time was coming when tongues would “lapse into complete silence” (Lenski, First Corinthians, p. 563). Bengel (2:243) suggested that tongues “were first on the day of Pentecost” (Acts 2), “but they did not continue in the primitive church so long as the other miraculous gifts.” Whether this is true or not, the following verses prove that spiritual gifts were limited to the first century and they were completely replaced by the full revelation of the New Testament.

More information about spiritual gifts as well as the distinction between “cease” and “done away” is

given in the following verses, but here it may be useful to offer a brief overview of supernatural gifts. God gave supernatural “gifts to men” (Eph. 4:8) because the first Christians did not have a completed New Testament. These miraculous gifts originated with the apostles; Jesus said these men would “receive the Holy Spirit” and the Holy Spirit would “guide them into all the truth” (Jn. 16:13-14). Jesus then repeated this promise to His apostles shortly before His ascension (Acts 1:2, 5, 8). The Holy Spirit did come to the apostles on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2) and these men had a wide range of spiritual gifts that allowed them to reveal (1 Cor. 12:8) and confirm (Mk. 16:20; Heb. 2:4) the information now recorded in the New Testament. The apostles were even able to distribute spiritual gifts to others through the “laying on of their hands” (Acts 8:18). This distribution further aided in the proclamation and confirmation of the truths now contained in the New Testament.

The Corinthians likely received their special gifts through Paul’s hands. Earlier in this book (9:2) Paul reminded these readers of how they were the “seal of his apostleship.” If Paul had given the Corinthians spiritual gifts (see Acts 8:18), that would have certainly proved he was an apostle. In 2 Cor. 12:12 Paul specifically said the “signs of an apostle” were demonstrated to the Corinthians (he was the one who had shown these signs). Since part of being an apostle was the ability to transmit gifts to others (Acts 8:18 and Acts 19:6), this is one more indication that the Corinthians’ spiritual gifts came through Paul. When the last apostle died, the ability to transmit spiritual gifts to others ceased.

By the time the first century came to an end, the “perfect” (verse 10) had come. The “faith” (the gospel) has been delivered “once for all” time (Jude 3). Peter told his readers that God had given “all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Pet. 1:3). Paul said God gave the Scriptures and these make people “complete” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Today some still seek the supernatural gifts used by the first century Christians, but those who want these gifts fail to realize that miraculous abilities were (1) a temporary measure and (2) inferior to the agape love that “never fails.” True love is the “new commandment” (Jn. 13:34-35; 15:12, 17) that all should earnestly pursue. Sadly, many ignorantly pursue the spiritual gifts Paul associated with spiritual infancy (verse 11).

The gift of tongues is just one illustration of how the completed Scriptures have replaced spiritual gifts. In the first century tongue speaking (communicating in a language one had never learned) was a “sign” (Mk 16:17) to “unbelievers” (1 Cor. 14:22). Now this “sign” along with all the other first century gifts has been replaced by the completed Scriptures (Jn. 20:30-31). This is also true for faith. People in the first century believed in Jesus because they personally saw Him, they spoke with Him, or they heard about Him through people who could perform supernatural signs (Mk. 16:20). Today we have faith in Jesus through the completed New Testament. Just as we no longer need to personally see Jesus to develop faith or see a supernatural sign to believe in Him, so all of our other spiritual needs are met by the completed Scriptures.

Some have asked why Paul listed only three spiritual gifts in verse 8. The answer to this question is found in the preceding chapter. Since Paul had just listed several gifts in 1 Cor. 12:28-30, there was no need to repeat all that information here (the three stated gifts represent all the spiritual gifts).

### **13:9:** *For we know in part, and we prophesy in part;*

This verse is a bridge between the information in verse 8 (the supernatural gifts would fail but love would continue) and verse 10 (the “perfect” was coming). In verse 9 Paul spoke of two gifts: *knowledge* and *prophecy*. Since the New Testament had not yet been completed, Christians had *partial* knowledge about the Christian faith (this knowledge came through supernatural abilities such as the gift of *prophecy* and the gift of *knowledge*). MacKnight rendered the first part of verse 9 this way: “*Besides, we inspired teachers know the mysteries of the gospel only in part.*” Inspired prophets were accurate in what they said, but they were only revealing part of the truth that we now have contained in the completed New Testament. This point is also expressed in 11-12, but in these later verses Paul used different contrasts (there he spoke of a “child versus a man” and a “mirror versus face to face”).

Spiritual gifts lasted for about 70 years after the church was established. About 100 A.D. they disappeared and their termination was so complete that some of the details about them will, at least in

this life, never be known. Chrysostom lived just a few hundred years after the first century (345-407 A.D.) and he commented on the difficulty in fully understanding what some of the gifts were because they had ceased. In his homily on 1 Cor. 12:1-2 he said, “This whole place is very obscure: but the obscurity is produced by our ignorance of the facts referred to and by their cessation, being such as then used to occur but now no longer take place. And why do they not happen now? Why look now, the cause too of the obscurity has produced us again another question: namely, why did they then happen, and now do so no more?”

When Paul wrote the First Corinthian letter it seems only three other New Testament letters were in existence (James, First Thessalonians, Second Thessalonians). The Ephesian and Colossian letters—books that help explain the church—were not written until later. The book of Romans—a document dealing with subjects such as justification, sanctification, and glorification—had not been written. A treatise on apostasy (Jude) had not yet been penned. A letter emphasizing forgiveness (Philemon) was unwritten, as was the book of Hebrews (a letter describing the superiority of the New Testament and the priesthood of Jesus). The four gospels had not been written. First and Second Peter, books that helped Christians face persecution and deal with false teachers, had not been written. An extended treatise on love (First, Second, and Third John) had not yet been written. Books about preaching and the church (First Timothy, Second Timothy, and Titus) were also unwritten when Paul penned First Corinthians. Because so much New Testament literature had not yet been put into written form, and because there was a limited number of apostles and prophets, and because Christians were scattered in so many places, there was a great need for supernatural abilities that could reveal and confirm the truths of the gospel. God thus gave the kind of miraculous abilities described in 1 Cor. 12-14 to help His people know what was right; this information also helped spread and confirm the gospel.

By the time the first century ended, the New Testament had been completed and it was in wide circulation. By approximately 100 A.D. people had the “completed Scriptures” (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:3) and the need for supernatural gifts had passed away. Polycarp (A.D. 70-150/160) lived in Asia Minor and he wrote a book called “Philippians.” In this book he made reference to at least 13 New Testament books. Origen (A.D. 185-254) was a prolific writer who mainly worked in Alexandria and Caesarea; in his writings he referred to various New Testament passages more than 5,700 times. Tertullian (A.D. 160-220) lived in Africa and he quoted from the New Testament more than 3,000 times. Since these three men were writing close to the time when the New Testament was completed, and they lived in very different areas, we may draw at least three conclusions: (1) The various books of the New Testament did exist, (2) Many were familiar with these books, (3) The New Testament books were accessible to people in many different areas. While the Bible was not formally bound together in the way we have it, the New Testament books were widely available. The “perfect law of liberty” (Jas. 1:25) was given and the “in part” (the spiritual gifts) ceased.

Someone has correctly said that supernatural gifts were **promised** (Mk. 16:17-20), **performed** (Acts 2:1-12), **propagated** (Acts 8:14-18; 19:1-6); their **purpose** explained (Mk. 16:20; 1 Cor. 14:22-25; Heb. 2:4); and then they **passed** away (1 Cor. 13:8-10; Eph. 4:11-15; Jas. 1:25; Jude 3).

In verses 9-10 Paul referred to the *in part* three times. These words serve as a contrast to the *perfect* in verse 10 and “*I know fully*” in verse 12. Since the Corinthians and other first century Christians did not have a completed New Testament, their knowledge about Christianity was *in part* (verse 9) and they *saw in a mirror darkly* (verse 12). The importance of the *in part* can be demonstrated with this simple graphic:



If we can identify what a “part” or “slice” of something is, we can identify the rest of the item (if we take a “slice” of pie, that piece allows us to identify the nature of the entire pie). Verse 9 specifically identifies the *in part* (the “slice”) as **prophecy** and **supernatural knowledge** (information about Christianity). Since the “in part” (the “slice”) refers to information about Christianity, the remaining part of what Paul described is the same thing (information about Christianity). When all the facts of the gospel were made available through the New Testament, the “in part” (the spiritual gifts being used to communicate New Testament truths) disappeared.

The word translated *in part* (*meros*) is also used to describe the *parting* of Jesus’ clothing (Jn. 19:23—these were distributed into *four parts*). John (Rev. 16:19) spoke of a city being divided into *three parts*. This word also occurs in 1 Cor. 12:27 (the church is a single body of people, but it has several *parts*). For more information on the *in part*, see the commentary on verse 10.

Today many mistakenly want to go back to the first century spiritual gifts (what was *partial*). If this could be done, people would return to the infancy stage of Christianity. Spiritual gifts were given so the New Testament could be completed and Christians could become a “full grown man” (Eph. 4:13). God gave the complete New Testament so Christians would “no longer be like children who are tossed about” (Eph. 4:14).

For first century Christians, owning a complete copy of the New Testament was unthinkable. People had to make do with spiritual gifts and Paul saw these gifts as a type of rudimentary tool to get people to a much better time—a time when people would have a full copy of God’s word. Today this time has come. We not only have God’s full and final revelation to man, we have the Scriptures in several translations, a variety of bindings, electronic formats, and we have many study helps to better understand and apply the New Testament. In many homes people have multiple copies of God’s word.

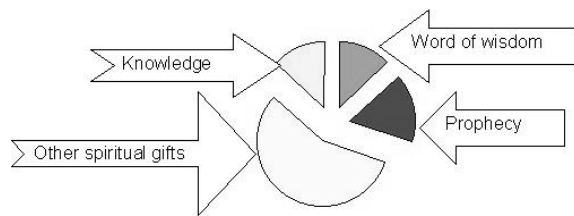
Some have asked why Paul mentioned prophecy, knowledge and tongues in verse 8, but there is no reference to tongue speaking in verse 9. The answer to this question is found in considering what the gifts accomplished. *Prophecy* and the *gift of knowledge* were used to unveil the gospel; gifts such as these were eventually replaced by the completed New Testament. Since the gift of tongues (verse 8) was designed to communicate with people instead of help reveal the New Testament, tongue speaking is not associated with the “in part” described here. As noted in the commentary on 8b, tongues would *cease* (fade away). They ended and were not replaced. Gifts such as prophecy and knowledge were “in part” (these were replaced by the completed New Testament. Compare Jn. 20:30-31 and Rom. 1:16).

**13:10:** *but when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away.*

As noted in the discussion on verses 8b-9, spiritual gifts were given for specific reasons and for a specific period of time (they were given to first century Christians so the New Testament could be revealed and confirmed). Since Christianity replaced the Old Testament system of religion (Rom. 10:4), people needed guidance for the new religion called Christianity. This guidance came through spiritual gifts and these gifts lasted until the New Testament Scriptures were completed. Until the New Testament Scriptures were finished, people were like small children (11a). After the New Testament was completed, the “childish things” (spiritual gifts, 11b) were removed and Christians used *the perfect* word of God (compare Jas. 1:25). The word *perfect* here in verse 10 is just another description for *the truth* (Jn. 17:17), the *word of God* (Acts 4:31), the *word of life* (Phil. 2:16), the *traditions* given to the Thessalonians (2 Thess. 2:15), the *pattern of sound words* (2 Tim. 1:13), and the *word of grace* (Acts 20:32). The perfect is also described as the *law of Christ* in Gal. 6:2 and the *royal law* in Jas. 2:8.

The word *perfect* in 1 Cor. 13:10 is the exact opposite of what was incomplete and partial (verse 9). As demonstrated by the following graphic, Christianity began with basic facts of the faith. It took several years and several New Testament authors to complete the New Testament, but when the New Testament books were finished, Christians had the *complete* (the full and perfect) revelation of God’s will, so the spiritual gifts ceased.

## THE “IN PART” GIFTS



## THE “PERFECT”



In the New Testament the word *perfect* (*teleios*) is applied to both people and God. In 1 Cor. 2:6 and Heb. 5:14 this term is translated “fullgrown.” Jesus used this word in Mt. 5:48 to say God is “perfect.” Jesus also said a rich young ruler could be “perfect” (Mt. 19:21, same word) if he sold his possessions. In Eph. 4:13 Paul used this term to say the body of Christ could be built up into a “fullgrown” (*perfect*) man. Paul also used this word in Phil. 3:15 to say some Christians are “perfect.” Outside the New Testament the word *perfect* was applied to doctors and thieves. It was even used to describe unblemished animals used for sacrifice (Brown, 2:59). Brown also (same page) noted how a related form of this word was used to describe “fully-grown plants.”

Here in 1 Cor. 13:10, *perfect* means “whole” (Kittel, 8:75). The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament (3:342) defined *perfect* as “perfect, complete, adult.” “The idea of ‘wholeness, completeness’ is always inherent in *teleios*” (CBL, GED, 6:267). *Perfect* is an adjective. Adjectives modify nouns, but in 1 Cor. 13:10, there is no noun. The Greek literally reads “the perfect.”

When this author first read this passage shortly after his conversion, he, like many others, believed the word “perfect” must refer to Jesus, heaven or Jesus’ second coming. The preceding definitions for the word *perfect* plus the context show that Jesus, heaven, and Jesus’ second coming are not what Paul meant. Heaven will be a “perfect place,” but this chapter does not discuss heaven. Paul discussed Jesus’ final coming in his epistles, but this topic is not found in 1 Cor. 13. Jesus is certainly “perfect,” as are the Father and Holy Spirit, but this chapter does not deal with the Lord, the Father, or the Holy Spirit. Had Paul wanted to describe Jesus, he could have said “**He who** is perfect.” Rather than use the masculine, Paul used the neuter (“**that which** is perfect”).

There are some rare instances of Jesus being described with the neuter gender (see Mt. 1:20 and 1 Jn. 1:1-3), but this is normally done “when some quality is being stressed rather than the individual per se” (Expositor’s Bible Commentary, 8:281). Here that exception does not occur. Additionally, Paul clarified what he meant even more in verse 12. There he said the *perfect* was “seen,” but it was seen “darkly.” We do not “see Jesus” (even darkly) at the present tense time because He is in heaven. Rather than *see Jesus*, the Bible says we “walk by faith and **not by sight**” (2 Cor. 5:7, emphasis mine, BP). We can “look unto the Lord” (Heb. 12:2), but we cannot see Him because He is reigning in heaven. Peter specifically said we “now” “see him **not**” (1 Pet. 1:8, emphasis mine, BP).

In spite of the preceding information some try to cling to a related viewpoint; some think the word *perfect* describes a state (when people enter into a *state of perfection*, the spiritual gifts would cease). It is then argued that perfection will never be reached on the earth, so spiritual gifts will continue until the end of time. Others claim people did not witness or possess spiritual gifts after the first century because they “lacked faith,” they “were not properly taught,” or the gifts “were temporarily lost.” These arguments are untrue and are easily disproven by examining how the New Testament uses the word *perfect*. Readers may also wish to see some of the commentary on 13:11b.

In addition to the preceding information concerning the use of *perfect* in the New Testament (this word has sense of complete), it is useful to consider how the word *perfect* is later used in this book. This same term is translated “men” in 1 Cor. 14:20 (people are to be *men—perfect—fullgrown*—in contrast to babes). This same word is found again in Phil. 3:15 where it is also applied to human beings. It is used in



Jas. 1:25 to describe the Bible—God’s *perfect* law of liberty. Epaphras prayed the Colossians would stand “perfect” in God’s will (Col. 4:12). James spoke of being “perfect” and lacking in nothing (Jas. 1:4). Those who do not “stumble in word” are “perfect” people (Jas. 3:2). “Perfect” (same word) love “casts out fear” (1 Jn. 4:18). Translators could have chosen the word “complete” instead of the word *perfect* in 1 Cor. 13:10. Here and elsewhere the word *perfect* describes completeness instead of referring to Jesus, heaven, or a literal “perfect state” on the earth. In the final verses of this chapter the “perfect” (completeness) stands in contrast to the “imperfect” (what was incomplete).

Although first century saints had some knowledge about Christianity, and they certainly knew the basics of the faith, there were some things that only became fully clear when the New Testament was completed. For instance, there was a period of time when circumcision was not completely understood (Acts 15:1-31). There were also some difficulties in understanding how Gentiles and the physical nation of Israel were associated with the gospel (Rom. 9-11). Even the subject of death is much easier to understand through a completed New Testament (we know about Hades—Lk 16; what will happen to death at the end of time—Rev. 20:14, etc.). Many things have been “brought to light” through the gospel (2 Tim. 1:10).

Ryle (John, 2:306) noted how the “Old Testament views of the state after death were not nearly so well lighted and comfortable as ours. The removal of death’s sting, the resurrection and paradise, were things not nearly so well understood by the best saints before Christ, as they were after Christ rose again. To most of the Jews in our Lord’s time, we can well believe that death was regarded as the end of all happiness and comfort, and the state after death as a dreary blank. When Sadducees, who said there was ‘no resurrection,’ were chief rulers and high priests, we may well suppose that the sorrow of many Jews over the death of friends, was a ‘sorrow without hope.’ Even at this day, ‘the place of wailing’ at Jerusalem, where the Jews assemble to weep over the foundation stones of the old temple, is proof that their habit of weeping over crushed hopes is not yet extinct.”

If the book of Revelation was the last New Testament book written—and this seems probable—it is not surprising to find these words at the end of it: “*I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, if any man shall add unto them, God shall add unto him the plagues which are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life, and out of the holy city, which are written in this book.*” When John finished “the words of this prophecy,” the “that which is perfect” (1 Cor. 13:10) had come and the time for spiritual gifts had ended.

The end of verse 10 refers to “*that which is in part.*” Before the New Testament was fully revealed, Christians had what was *in part* (*meros*). As noted in the discussion on verse 9, this means their knowledge was “incomplete, fragmentary and transitory” (Brown, 2:304). When the Bible was completed, the “perfect” (God’s full revelation to man) had arrived and the *parts* (the information and supernatural powers made available through spiritual gifts) were “done away.” Paul was speaking about the revelation and confirmation of God’s word and the maturity of the church instead of Jesus or the “conditions in heaven.” This fact may also be demonstrated in chart form (the following graphic is adopted from Willis, p. 381).

The <i>in part</i> was:	The <i>in part</i> items would:	After <i>the perfect</i> came:
Prophecy	Fail	Prophecy would end
Tongue-speaking	Cease	Tongue speaking would end
Word of knowledge	Fail	The word of knowledge would end
Faith	Still abide	Faith would still exist
Hope	Still abide	Hope would still exist
Love	Still abide	Love would still exist

Allen (p. 165) correctly noted how not all the Bible books had to be bound into one volume before the miraculous gifts ceased. The *perfect* (the completed revelation) only had to be given in its entirety and this happened. By the time the last apostle died, the New Testament had been fully revealed. If the book of Revelation was the last inspired book God gave to the world (many date this book about 95 A.D.), the New Testament was completed before 100 A.D. From about 33 A.D. to 100 A.D., the church was in its “childhood” state (verses 11-12). From about 100 A.D. on, the church is compared to a “full-grown man.” With a completed Bible, Christians from about 100 A.D. onward were ready to live without spiritual gifts as well as without inspired men like the apostles and prophets.

### Introduction to 13:11:

Initially Christianity involved a small number of people, it was limited to a small geographical area, and it was initially governed by verbal direction from the apostles (Acts 2:42). Within 70 years of the church being established the Christian faith had spread far and wide (Mk. 4:30-32; Col. 1:23) and the New Testament was completed. Here in 1 Cor. 13:11 Paul described the initial period of Christianity with the word “*child*” (*nepios*), a term that described spiritual immaturity. There was a time when the church needed “*childish things*” (the spiritual gifts) because it lacked the completed New Testament. God used spiritual gifts to help establish and strengthen the New Testament church, just as construction workers often use scaffolding in the initial stages of their work. When the church was fully established and the instructions governing it were complete, the scaffolding (spiritual gifts) was removed. For several of the other places in the New Testament where *child* occurs see Mt. 11:25; Mt. 21:16; 1 Cor. 3:1; Gal. 4:1, 3; Eph. 4:14 and Heb. 5:13.

The temporary nature of spiritual gifts is also discussed in the Ephesian letter. In Eph. 4 Paul spoke of Christians who were “*tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, in craftiness, after the wiles of error*” (Eph. 4:14). Paul also spoke of a time when Christians would “*attain the unity of the faith*” which comes through the completed New Testament (Eph. 4:13). Until the New Testament was completed, Christians had to be content with “*gifts given unto men*” (Eph. 4:8) that helped build up and perfect the church (Eph. 4:11-12; Mk. 16:17-20). The following chart, which is adopted from Allen’s commentary (p. 166), shows the similarities between 1 Cor. 13 and Eph. 4.

<i>The Corinthians’ gifts — 13:8-10</i>	<i>The Ephesians’ gifts — 4:7-15</i>
<i>Apostles were placed in the church (12:28)</i>	Some were made apostles (verse 11)
<i>Different gifts were given (12:8-10, 30)</i>	A variety of gifts and offices were given (verses 7-8, 11)
These gifts would pass away (13:10)	The gifts would be taken away (verses 11-13)
This cessation is described by the word “ <i>when</i> ” (13:10)	The cessation is described by the word “ <i>till</i> ” (verse 13)

The gifts would cease when the “ <i>perfect</i> ” came (13:10)	The gifts would vanish when “ <i>unity of faith</i> ” came (verse 13)
“ <i>Then I shall know fully</i> ” (13:12)	“ <i>Knowledge of the Son of God</i> ” (verse 13)
The “ <i>knowledge</i> ” (13:9) would be <i>completed</i> (13:10-12)	The “ <i>fullness of Christ</i> ” would end the gifts (verse 13)
Those with miraculous gifts saw “ <i>darkly</i> ” (13:12a)	Carried about with every wind of doctrine (verse 14)
A completed New Testament would be “ <i>face to face</i> ” (13:12)	Measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (verse 13)

There are also these additional parallels:

**Before the New Testament was completed the church would be childlike.** 1 Corinthians 13:11a says, *When I was a child, I spake as a child, I felt as a child, I thought as a child.* Ephesians 4:14 says, *that we may be no longer children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, in craftiness, after the wiles of error.*

**There would be no more supernatural gifts after the church had all the information that made it mature.** 1 Cor. 13:11b says, *now that I am become a man, I have put away childish things.* Ephesians 4:13 says, *till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a fullgrown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.*

**13:11:** *When I was a child, I spake as a child, I felt as a child, I thought as a child: now that I am become a man, I have put away childish things.*

As noted in the introductory comments on this verse, “*becoming a man*” and “*putting away childish things*” further illustrate the information in verses 8-10 (the spiritual gifts were a temporary tool to help reveal and confirm the gospel. When the New Testament was completed, these miraculous gifts ceased).

Paul used himself as an example in verse 11 (“*I*”), but he was ultimately thinking of all Christians (notice the “*we*” in 12a). Until the New Testament was completed, Paul and all the other first century saints had some dependency upon spiritual gifts. A time was coming (the end of the first century—see again the commentary on verse 9) when these gifts were no longer necessary and God permanently deactivated them.

Some think there is a triple analogy between infancy and spiritual gifts. “Spoke as a child” has been compared to tongue speaking, “feeling as a child” (ASV) or “understanding as a child” (KJV) has been likened to the miraculous gift of prophecy, and “thinking as a child” has been equated to the gift of knowledge. Whether Paul intended a three point comparison or not, he was looking forward to the time when spiritual gifts would be replaced by spiritual adulthood (the completed New Testament). Many today, however, do not want spiritual adulthood. Many want the spiritual gifts used during the infant state of the first century church. In fact, most want God’s completed Word *plus* these gifts, but this chapter affirms that this is impossible. When the Bible was fully revealed, the gifts had fulfilled their purpose and were removed. This point is so important that, as noted in the preceding chart, it is also discussed in Eph. 4:7-15.

Allen (p. 167) noted how the “key verse in this comparison is Eph. 4:13 which states that the gifts were to continue ‘until’ (an adverb of time indicating when) the saints attained the unity of the faith. Some have understood this as a reference to the unity of all believers in Christ. They contend that the gifts will last until the sects and denominations become one united church. That view cannot be correct in light of Eph. 4:3 which urged the brethren to keep or maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. How could they keep what they did not have? The church was then united. That was a time before sectarianism, as we know it, had arisen. Thus, it is clear that Paul did not mean the gifts were to continue until all man-made churches are united.”

Allen also (p. 167) correctly noted how the word *faith* “is used in at least two ways in the New Testament. Subjectively (Rom. 4:9; 5:1), it refers to the trust in God one has in his heart (Thayer, p. 512). Objectively, it means the message of God, the thing to be believed (Thayer, p. 513; Vine, vol. II, p. 71). Subjective faith is not under consideration at Eph. 4:13. Rather than ‘the unity of faith’ it refers to the ‘unity of *the* faith.’ The New Testament message or system of faith is contemplated (see Jude 3; Acts 6:7; 24:24). At Eph. 4:13, Paul was saying God’s new revelation reached unity, oneness, completion or perfection when all parts of the faith had been given. He also concluded that the gifts would then cease. If the New Testament is complete, gifts have ended.”

The verb translated “*put away*” (*katargeo*) is important. As noted in the commentary on verse 8b, this word has “the sense of ‘to render inactive,’ ‘to condemn to inactivity,’” and “put out of use” (Kittel, 1:452). Kittel’s definition for this word in this verse is “to destroy.” Paul said God was going to do away with the supernatural gifts in their entirety—when this time came, the gifts would be 100% gone. This single word shows that spiritual gifts were for a specific time period and when this time period ended, the gifts would come to a permanent end. This point is reinforced with the verb “*become*” (a perfect tense verb). People *become* an adult and *stay* an adult—the state of infancy is past. Since this is how things work in the physical realm, Paul was able to use this principle to illustrate the duration of spiritual gifts. When the time of spiritual adulthood came (the New Testament was fully revealed), the things associated with spiritual immaturity (the gifts) would be permanently *put away*.

Based on what Paul said, the gifts used by the Corinthians and other first century Christians were not “lost” as people sometimes claim. Neither did these gifts lapse into a state of inactivity and people were able to “reactivate” them at a later time. It is also incorrect to say that people lost the ability to use gifts because they “lacked faith” or the gifts were not available because people had been “improperly taught”

about them. God took away these gifts around the close of the first century and they will never again appear on the earth. Anyone who now or in the future claims to have one or more supernatural gifts from the Holy Spirit is either lying or is deceived (compare 2 Thess. 2:9, 11). Any past claims about spiritual gifts that are associated with the middle of the second century and onward must also be regarded as false.

The Liberty Commentary (p. 418) noted how Paul illustrated “his point by likening it to the maturation of a person from infancy to manhood. A child speaks, reasons, and assimilates knowledge at the level of his maturity. Paul’s use of **spake...understood...thought** seem to correspond respectively to ‘tongues,’ ‘prophecy,’ and ‘knowledge’ above. If this is the case, it is reasonable to expect changes to occur.” These *changes* were the end of spiritual gifts and the complete revelation of Scripture. The spiritual gifts were “fragmentary and only a means to an end” (ibid).

Howley, Bruce, and Ellison (*A New Testament Commentary*, p. 405) said: “The tenses employed give force to the illustration; three imperfects—**spoke, thought, reasoned**—denoting habitual action in the past (the *imperfect tense*, BP), followed by a perfect—**when I became a man**...giving the sense of completeness.” Just as childhood is a necessary part of life, so spiritual gifts were a necessary part in the founding of the New Testament church.

**13:12a:** *For now we see in a mirror, darkly; but then face to face:*

Building on the information in verses 10-11, the first part of verse 12 provides additional information about the ancient spiritual gifts. Paul told the Corinthians they could “*now*” “*see in a mirror, darkly*.” The word *now* (*arti*) described the moment this letter was written. The word *see* (*blepo*) is a present tense verb and it is plural (note the pronoun “*we*”). The words *now* and *see* tell us that when this letter was written the Christians had a knowledge of Christianity (this was being partially accomplished by spiritual gifts), but there were some things about this faith that had not been fully revealed because the New Testament was not yet complete (this point is more fully discussed in the commentary on 13:10).

*Darkly* (*ainigma*) occurs only here in the New Testament; in Classical Greek this term described a “‘riddle,’ a statement whose meaning required some explanation in order to be fully understood” (CBL, GED, 1:105 and compare Ezek. 17:2). The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament (1:40) defined *darkly* as a “blurred outline.” Lenski (First Corinthians, p. 568) said the “ancients used metal mirrors, yet we should not suppose that these mirrors were dull and offered only a dim reflection; they were bright enough.” The first Christians had sufficient information to let them do what needed done (consider again the quote from Lenski), but it was only when the New Testament was completed that people saw “*face to face*” (i.e. they had the completed New Testament and were thus able to “discern perfectly his nature, will, purposes,” Thayer, p. 551).

The contrast between *seeing clearly* and *seeing darkly* is parallel to the previous material in this chapter: A *child* eventually becomes a *man* (verse 11) and the *in part* was to be replaced by the *perfect* (verse 10). When the *perfect* came (10a), the *in part* (*the child* or *dark mirror*) would vanish (10b, 11b, 12b). The image of a mirror was an ideal object to express this truth. Paul may have also chosen the mirror illustration because Corinth was famous for producing bronze mirrors. Today the completed New Testament serves as a perfect *mirror* for all people (compare Jas. 1:23-25).

In the middle of this verse the text says, *then face to face*. Some understand this expression to mean Christians will one day see God “*face to face*,” but this is incorrect. *Face to face* is another way of saying God has given us *all things that pertain unto life and godliness* (2 Pet. 1:3). *Face to face* describes an “intimate relationship” (Baker’s Dictionary of Theology, p. 208). A similar expression is found in Num. 12:8 (God spoke to Moses “mouth to mouth”). This means Moses had close, intimate fellowship with God. Spiritual gifts were useful, but they could not fully provide the close, intimate fellowship with God we now achieve through the 27 books of the New Testament. Although those who now claim to speak in tongues say their “gift” gives them closeness and intimacy with God, Paul said true and full intimacy would come through the completed Scriptures. While the saved will surely learn even more about God and have greater fellowship with Him in eternity, that point is not discussed here.

The CBL (First Corinthians, p. 433) noted how *mirrors* (*esoptron*) “were a specialty of Corinth, but

they were made of polished brass so the image was dim at best. Silvering glass was not discovered until the 13<sup>th</sup> Century. This makes the point of Paul's illustration most obvious." As noted in the preceding paragraph, Paul told the Corinthians a time was coming when God would give something (the completed New Testament) that would allow people to see fully and completely ("face to face").

Aside from here, the word for *mirror* occurs only in Jas. 1:23. It is also interesting to note that in the Old Testament the Hebrew word for *mirror* is identical to the word for "visions" (compare Num. 12:6).

**13:12b:** *now I know in part; but then shall I know fully even as also I was fully known.*

In the latter part of this verse Paul continued to contrast the temporary supernatural gifts with the future completion of the New Testament Scriptures. He said he (and by implication others) "*knew in part*" (*meros*). Thayer (p. 401) defined *in part* as "in part, partially, i.e. *imperfectly*." Until the faith was *once for all time* revealed (Jude 3), Christians had to make do with partial revelation and spiritual gifts. This was even true for the apostles. These men received many special powers from the Holy Spirit, but even they had to work without a completed New Testament.

Some have said we cannot "*fully know*" things in this life, so the reference to "knowing fully" must be associated with Jesus' second coming or heaven. This argument, just like the preceding arguments involving the word "*perfect*" (see the discussion on verse 10), is based on using English definitions for Greek words.

The term translated "*fully know*" (*epiginosko*) is used twice in verse 12 as well as many other places in the New Testament. When this word is studied, it is readily apparent that God says we can and we do "*fully know*" many things in this life. Here are some of the other passages in the New Testament that have this same term:

- Mk. 7:16 — You shall “know” them by their fruits
- Lk. 7:37 — A woman “knew” Jesus was at someone’s house
- Lk. 23:7 — Pilate “knew” Jesus was of Herod’s jurisdiction
- Acts 12:14 — A woman “knew” Peter’s voice
- Acts 19:34 — They “perceived” (knew) he was a Jew
- Acts 22:29 — A man “knew” Paul was a Roman
- 2 Cor. 1:13 — “Acknowledge” (know) *to the end*, not *after* the end.
- 1 Tim. 4:3 — Believe and “know” the truth
- 2 Pet. 2:21 — People have “known” the way of righteousness

As these preceding references show, especially 1 Tim. 4:3 and 2 Pet. 2:21, the word translated *fully known* and *know fully* in verse 12 is used to say that we can and we do *know* many things in life. Paul used this term here because it was the perfect word to describe the completed New Testament. If the completed New Testament does not give us full knowledge about Christianity, God has not given us all the information we need to love and serve Him. We do not have the “perfect law of liberty” (Jas. 1:25) that “completes us” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Neither do we have “all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Pet. 1:3). Furthermore, if spiritual gifts are still available, the following questions remain unanswered.

- Why claim that only some gifts are now available or now in use? Why do people claim gifts like tongue speaking, but no one raises the dead? Why do people never drink deadly poison without harm? Why do we not find instances of people handling deadly snakes without suffering injury or death (Mk. 16:18)? If people still have the power first century Christians had, they should be eagerly and willingly demonstrating their gifts because Jesus said these supernatural abilities would “confirm the word” (Mk. 16:20).
- If the “*perfect*” is not the word of God and spiritual gifts are still available, how do we know if the Bible is complete? How do we disprove claims that say God is still revealing His word? Since supernatural signs were directly linked with the revelation of the Scriptures, if the signs have continued, the revelation of the Scriptures is still incomplete.
- If God is still giving inspired messages to man, who are His spokespeople? Do we look to Joseph Smith? David Koresh? Mary Baker Eddy? Jim Jones? Mohammed? How do we determine who is an inspired spokesman for God and who is not? Also, are the “new revelations” from God superior to the 27 books of the New Testament, inferior to these books, or equal to these books? If the supernatural gifts have not ceased, the canon of the New Testament is still a work in progress.

**13:13:** *But now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; and the greatest of these is love.*

This is the last verse in this unique chapter, but many do not understand its significance. Based on the preceding verses, miraculous gifts were given by the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:8-11) and they were given for a limited period of time. Paul said these special abilities would last “*till*” the perfect (the completed New Testament) came (Eph. 4:13 and compare 1 Cor. 13:10). The gift of tongues would “cease” (verse 8) and other gifts such as prophecy and supernatural knowledge would be replaced by the “*perfect*” (God’s completed word), verses 10-12.

Even though the supernatural gifts would disappear, “*faith*,” “*hope*,” and “*love*” would “*abide*.” Most do not dispute that faith, hope and love would continue and the spiritual gifts would disappear. People usually disagree about *when* faith, hope and love would continue to abide and when the spiritual gifts would disappear. Paul has already discussed this matter in verses 10-12 (the spiritual gifts were limited to the first century, but faith, hope and love would continue to be part of the Christian faith till the end of

time), but it seems he spoke of this topic one more time in this final verse, perhaps because it was such an important point.

*Faith, hope and love* are for life on earth (the here and now). These three qualities have continued to abide on the earth, even though the spiritual gifts terminated with the first century church. The earthly nature of *faith* is seen in the fact that this quality is required for salvation (Heb. 10:39) and it is based upon the unseen (Heb. 11:1). We “walk by faith” because “sight” is not currently available to us (2 Cor. 5:7). Peter said the “end of our faith” is the “salvation of the soul” (1 Pet. 1:9). We receive *faith* through God’s word (Rom. 1:16) and the Scriptures help us maintain that belief until it is realized in eternity.

A similar thing is true for *hope (elpis)*; this quality is for life on earth, not eternity. *Hope* is “an anchor of the soul” (Heb. 6:19) and it continues until it is finally realized in heaven. God’s people will not need or have any *hope* in eternity because heaven will fulfill all hope (Rom. 8:24-25; Col. 1:5). The temporary nature of hope is also expressed in 1 Cor. 15:19. *Love* is the final quality in verse 13 and this, in some respects, is also limited to life on earth (compare Eph. 5:25 + Mt. 22:30). *Faith, hope, and love* are listed together because they are qualities Christians are to practice on the earth (see 1 Thess. 1:3; 5:8; 1 Pet. 1:21-22; Col. 1:4-5). Righteous people display *faith, hope and love* while the unsaved display *unbelief, despair, and hate*. Since *faith, hope, and some aspects of love* continue in this life and not eternity, these lasting qualities stand in contrast to the temporary nature of the spiritual gifts in the first century church. Faith, hope, and love now “abide” on the earth, but the gifts are gone.

Some understand the word *abide (meno)* to mean “eternity,” but this is incorrect. *Abide* is a common New Testament word and it meant “continue, dwell, remain, and tarry.” In Mt. 26:38, 40 this term describes *abiding* for just an hour. In Acts 21:7 *abide* refers to a single day. In Jn. 4:40 the word *abide* describes two days. It describes a few days in Jn. 2:12. Luke used this word to describe many days (Acts 9:43), three months (Lk. 1:56), and a period of two years (Acts 28:30). *Abide* is also used in Phi. 1:25; Paul wanted to *abide* with the Philippians. This *abiding* would last for a while, but it would end when Paul “departed to be with Christ” (Phil. 1:23). These references demonstrate that *abideth* may describe a period of time that is as short as an hour.

*Abide* can and sometimes does mean “forever” or “eternity,” but in these instances translators generally rendered this word “forever” (for illustrations of this usage see Heb. 7:24; 1 Pet. 1:25; 1 Jn. 2:17). When translators interpreted 1 Cor. 13:13, they did not believe Paul described eternity so they correctly used words such as *abide* or *remain*. These translations correctly express the thought because Paul was dealing with life on earth, not eternity.

It is important to remember how this chapter begins; the first half of this chapter speaks of how love causes people to act *on the earth*. Paul said love causes us to “suffer long,” “be kind,” avoid “envy,” refrain from “vaunting” and being “puffed up.” Love keeps people from behaving in an “unseemly way.” Love causes us to “not seek our own,” it encourages us to not be “provoked,” or “take account of evil,” or “rejoice in unrighteousness.” Love causes us to “bear all things, believe all things, and hope all things.” All these “love qualities” are associated with life on earth, not in eternity.

At the end of this verse Paul said “*the greatest of these is love.*” Paul did not say why love is greater than faith and hope, but some believe it is greater because faith and hope are 100% limited to this life. Some aspects of love are limited to this life (see the preceding paragraph), but some aspects of love will also exist in eternity. Love is also greater than faith and hope because it is the foundation for faith and hope (verse 7). Love is “the fulfillment of the law” (Rom. 13:10), as well as the foundation for the law and the prophets (Mt. 22:37-40).

The Beacon Bible Commentary (8:438) suggested love is the greatest because (1) It is the most essential gift, 1-3; (2) It is the most Christlike gift, 4-6; (3) It is the most comprehensive gift, 7; (4) it is the most permanent gift, 8-13.” Maybe the best answer as to why love surpasses all is because it makes us like God (compare 1 Jn. 4:7, 12, 16). Love is certainly more important than anything *we say* (verse 1), anything *we have* (verse 2), and anything *we do* (verse 3). We must have and demonstrate the qualities of true love because it affects what we say (Eph. 4:15), it governs the use of what we have (1 Jn. 3:16-18) and it motivates us to do God’s will (Jn. 14:15). This chapter closes by underscoring the *greatness* of love. Love is greater than faith or hope (verse 13).



Bengel (p. 245) observed how “God is not called *faith* or *hope* absolutely, he is called *love*.” He also noted (p. 244) that Christians can be Christians without the spiritual gifts but we cannot be Christians without faith, hope, and love. Barclay (First Corinthians, p. 140) said, “faith without love is cold, and hope without love is grim. Love is the fire which kindles faith and love is the light which turns hope into certainty.”

Strauch (Biblical Eldership, p. 172) offered this great quote from Francis Schaeffer: What “divides and severs true Christian groups and Christians—what leaves a bitterness that can last for 20, 30, 40 years (or for 50 or 60 years in a son’s or daughter’s memory)—is not the issue of doctrine or beliefs that caused the differences in the first place. Invariably, it is a lack of love—and the bitter things that are said by true Christians in the midst of differences.”

A fitting summary is offered by Lanier (The Timeless Trinity for the Ceaseless Centuries, p. 351): “First, the miraculous demonstration that attended the giving of the law of Moses was not given to every following generation. The people were to teach their children what God had done, and they in turn were to teach their children; the word was to be passed from one generation to another. Next, the miracles Jesus performed were written that we may believe in Jesus as the Son of God, and that believing we may have life through him (John 20:30, 31). Jesus said to Thomas, ‘Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed’ (John 20:29). This implies that people are expected to believe without seeing Jesus and his miracles. One might as well demand to see Jesus before believing as to demand to see a miracle before believing.” If people are not willing to listen to the completed New Testament (compare Lk. 16:29), no supernatural sign (compare Lk. 16:31) will convince them to believe or obey the truth.