

TRUE LOVE

(I Corinthians 13)

The first twelve chapters of the First Corinthian letter of the Apostle Paul are full of pain, anguish, argument and distress. However, in chapters 12, 13, and 14, Paul deals with the subject of spiritual gifts. And this incredibly beautiful thirteenth chapter rests quietly, serenely and securely in the midst of the turmoil, tumult and divisions of the carnal Corinthian church. It is like a quiet valley nestling among several smoldering volcanoes.

There are three words in the Greek language which are usually translated by the English word, "love". The first of this Greek trinity of love-words is the word *eros*, which is the word used for strong (often sexual) passion, or lust, or sensual desire. This word is not used in the New Testament, and this silence may speak louder than words. The second of the three words for "love" is the word, *philos*, which is the base for such English words as "Philadelphia" ("delphos"- "city"; "philos"- "brotherly love"). This is the word for natural affection (as, say, between brothers in a family). This is the normal and impulsive human love we may have for one another. The third word is *agape*, which dominates the love-landscape of the New Testament and of most cultures which are familiar with these words. *Agape* is the word for self-giving, self-sacrificing love which forgets itself and devotes itself to the welfare of its object. This is the distinctive and exclusive word that is used in the New Testament for the love of God, and in passages which encourage Christian love as the lifestyle of every believer.

In the Christian community (as well as some other spheres), we often have discussions, some animated and maybe even heated, about which faith-feature of the Christian vocabulary is greatest. Would it be, for example, faith, hope or love? Some would say, "faith". A few would say, "hope". The overwhelming majority would (accurately) say "love". The assessment of this chapter, "The greatest of these is love", would be agreeable to most people, I'm sure. We must make a proviso that in such discussions, many, many people tend to vote out of the bias of their personal preference or according to their own greatest character strength, but this would probably not be overwhelmingly true if our choice were just between faith, hope and love.

Having studied Paul for years, and being a great admirer of Paul the Apostle and Gospel Pioneer, I still would say that it seems to me that love was not Paul's "strong suit", not his dominate character trait. But I must also add that his first letter to the Corinthians is not singular, peculiar, nor exclusive in singling out love as the "summum bonum", the supreme good among men. The Apostle Peter wrote in I Peter 4:8, "Above all things have fervent love among yourselves", and the Apostle John wrote in I John 4:8, "God is love". And you should easily recall Paul's words elsewhere, "Love is the fulfilling of the law" (Romans 13:10). That is, *if you love*, you will automatically and unconsciously fulfill the whole law. So, with regard even to the most outstanding Christians and Christian leaders, love seems to be an extremely attractive virtue, though it be also an extremely elusive goal.

It was the deliberate and decisive verdict of the Lord Jesus that it is better not to live than not to love. It is better not to live than to live and not love.

In I Corinthians 13, located between the *endowments* of spiritual gifts (chapter 12) and the *exercise* of the gifts (chapter 14) lies this great chapter on love, showing us that the only way to safeguard and rightly use our spiritual gifts is by administering them in the love of God.

As we move into the chapter, let me caution myself—and you—that it is not enough to analyze, or theorize, or theologize love. Love must be practiced, implemented, personalized, and loosed into the world of people through instruments like me and you. My life and your life are the stages, the platforms, from which the drama of Eternal Love is to be enacted. And this love must be unconditional, not dependent on the merit of its object, but solely dependent upon the love-motive of the subject (you, me). The motif is love, the Motivator is God (the first listed “fruit of the Spirit” in Galatians 5:22 is “love”), and the manifestation of that love waits on us who are Christians, the “carriers” and communicators of Him and His Love. Now, let us seriously, soberly, but serenely, happily, yes, joyfully and devotedly, analyze this love.

I. TRUE LOVE is INDISPENSABLE, 1-3

Paul begins by establishing what seems to be an incontrovertible statement that true love is *indispensable*. Though most people can only give unproven support to his words, and though many deny his words in practical life, most people still would consent that “love makes the world go around.” But Paul carries the issue far beyond mere consent. He makes Christianity answer for its life on the basis of whether the “Christian” loves or not. And it must register with us that the Apostle is not referring to *low, base* things here, but to very *high* things, each of which is attractive and valuable in itself. Paul says that a man, even a Christian, may possess any spiritual gift, but if that gift is unaccompanied by love, it is *useless, worthless, unprofitable*.

First, a man may have the gift of “tongues”, but without love, it amounts only to artificial sound. The “gift of tongues” here may refer either to: (1) The gift of *languages*—actual international and inter-cultural, and inter-racial national, tribal and cultural dialects spoken by various national groups in a cosmopolitan setting; or (2) the gift of *verbal and vocal and lingual eloquence*. What a noble and admirable gift it is, properly motivated and used, to verbally address the minds, hearts and souls of men, seeking to lift them to lofty purposes and holy deeds. This seems to be the main meaning of Paul’s first statement (verse 1). Verse one says (NIV), “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.”

Second, a man may have “the gift of prophecy”, but without love, he is “nothing” (verse 2). Let me quote the entire second verse to get the full idea before us: “If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.” Here, the word “prophecy” refers to preaching, the preaching of the Gospel. Note that preaching is a gift exercised by God-called men. If a Christian is not called to preach, he should be careful in occupying “the pulpit” of his church. Of course, this does not at all mean that laymen cannot or must not preach, for they certainly can. Indeed, the pastor-teacher’s gift is designed “to equip (outfit) the saints to do the work of ministering”, especially in this case extending the pastor-teacher’s gift of preaching and teaching. So, in time, each saint in the local fellowship should be outfitted to

preach. But our verse tells us that if a speaker has great ability as an eloquent presenter of ideas, if he has great elocution, rhetoric and oratorical talent, he is *only a big noise* if he does it all without love.

Before we leave this idea, emphasize the word “nothing” in the verse. “*Nothing*” is a zero with the rim knocked off. In Greek and Hebrew and English, it means, “NOTHING”, “ZILCH”, “NADA”! That is, all the preaching in the world not backed by *agape* in the heart of the preacher, is EMPTY from God’s standpoint! Wow, I almost wish I hadn’t written that, because I am the first to be indicted by my own words. But that’s what the Book says!

Third, a man (Christian) may have the gift of intellectual knowledge, but without love, it is just so much knowledge wafted into the air (verse 2b). The text adds to the list of “tongues” and “prophecy”, the “fathoming of all mysteries and all knowledge.” The problem is that intellectual snobbery naturally tends to travel with intellectual eminence. The man who is learned is always in grave danger of developing a spirit of superiority toward himself and contempt for others. So, if I “understand all mysteries (!) and all knowledge(!)” and reveal this in my presentation of the Gospel, but do it *without love*, “I am NOTHING”. Thus says the Word of God, and I must agree with it. But, as one of my bright pastor-friends facetiously said, “That’s difficult *for one as smart as I am!*” I quickly reminded him that that was a locally limited opinion! And we are still steadfast friends (probably because I too-often demonstrate the same opinion)!

Fourth, a Christian may even have a passionate and persuaded faith, but without love, faith may be a cruel thing. Verse 2c even says, “If I have *all* faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am *nothing*.” After all, what is the purpose of faith? Simply put, it is to connect the individual who exercises it *with God*. And what is the objective of connecting a man with God? Biblically, it is that he may be “*like God*”. Ah, but God is *love* (I John 4:8), and even with all of its massive intention and purpose, if faith is without love, it is stripped of its incredible power. Faith, the *means*, is intended to produce love, the *end*. But without the appointed means, there will not be the intended end. Just as “faith without works is dead” (James 2:26b), even so “*faith without love is dead*”.

Fifth, a Christian may manifest great charitable giving, even to point of great sacrifice. That is, he may dole out his goods freely to the poor, but the truth is, for a poor person, there may be nothing more humiliating in all the world than to receive so-called charity *without love*. Either to give as a grim duty, or to give from a conspicuous position of eminence or with an air of personal superiority, is hardly to demonstrate Christian love. If I throw scraps of charity as to a dog, if I give with any semblance of contempt, if I accompany my giving with a moral lecture or a crushing rebuke, that is not charity at all—it is rather the rankest kind of *pride*, the *mother of all other sins*. And we must face the fact that pride is always cruel, because it knows no love.

Sixth, a believer may “give his body to be burned”, motivated to give his very life for Christ, but if the interior drive of the act is dominated by self-display or self-glory, then even martyrdom is stripped of any value before God.

Are we beginning to see that there is hardly any passage in Scripture that demands such self-examination and humility from the Godly man as this passage does? The passage makes it crystal clear

that love is greater than *great eloquence, great prophecy, great wisdom, great knowledge, great faith, great charity, and great martyrdom*. In Heaven's scales, none of these has spiritual weight apart from love—BUT, love adds immeasurable value to each and all of these highly regarded traits and/or actions. Truly, "the greatest of these is love." I have a strange and haunting sense of fear in me as I recall the words of Jesus to the church at Ephesus: "I know your works (!), and your labor (!), and your patience (!), and how you cannot bear those who are evil (!); and you have tested those who say that are Apostles, and have found them to be liars (!), And you have carried burdens, and have patience (!), and for My Name's sake you have labored, and not fainted (!). *Nevertheless I have somewhat against you, because you have left your first love.*"

We must remember before we leave this first paragraph of I Corinthians 13 and go to the rest of the chapter that the four "thoughts" in verses one, two and three (and equivalent in each case to an "if") are closely accompanied by four "alls" (read and study the paragraph with great care). So this is a monumental assessment of the importance of love. In fact, since the passage deals with *six* characteristics, there could just as easily have been *six* "thoughts" and *six* "alls" in it. This passage requires far more and far better treatment than these poor paragraphs can offer it, but we must hasten on. We still have a long way to go to adequately and accurately deal with this great chapter.

II. TRUE LOVE is IDENTIFIABLE, 4-7

Second, the chapter indicates that true love is *identifiable*. It is *defineable*; i.e., *it can be easily defined*. It may be *identified* by its *ingredients*, and in this chapter, we may have a field day examining both the love itself and the ingredients that comprise it. In verses four through seven, Paul gives a "check-list" by which true love may be detected, observed, identified, and described. In fact, he lists no fewer than *fifteen* characteristics of true love, and the list is remarkably replete and testing. If you read it glibly, you may carelessly say, "Amen". But if you read it seriously and studiously, you may sigh, "OH, ME! WOE is me! That is, here a believer may place himself under the scrutiny of God to see how well he is doing in this task of being a Christian! Nothing is more important in our inventory of commodities, and thus this inventory of love in our lives may be extremely helpful to each of us. Let's quickly run the gamut of ideas together, but we must not let our *haste* lead to *waste*. Be careful as you study with me.

First on this list of love's "ingredients" is that "love is *patient*." Actually, this word is distinguished from several other words that translate by the same English word. This word for "patient" basically means patience *with people* and not merely patience with circumstances or occurrences. John Chrysostom, an early archbishop (A.D. 347-407) of the church in Constantinople, said that this word "*patience* is used of the man who is wronged and who has it easily in his power to avenge himself and yet he will not do it." Even though it suffers deep wounds and great injuries, true love does not strike back (watch Jesus and listen to Him while on the Cross). Biblically, it describes the person who is "slow to anger" (James 1:19). In fact, this same word is used of God Himself in His relation with men. And speaking of Jesus, Peter said, "When He was reviled, He reviled not again" (I Peter 2:23).

One political observer said that no one ever treated Abraham Lincoln with more contempt than did Edwin M. Stanton. Stanton called Lincoln "a low and cunning clown." He nicknamed him "the

original gorilla” and said that a certain African explorer of that day was a fool to wander around Africa trying to capture a gorilla when he could have found one very easily in Springfield, Illinois. In all of this tirade, Lincoln said nothing. Instead, he made Stanton his war minister because, as he said, Stanton was the best man for the job. He treated Stanton with every courtesy. The years went by. The night came when the assassin’s bullet murdered Lincoln in Ford’s theater. In the little room to which the President’s body was taken there stood Stanton the same night, and while looking down on the silent face of Lincoln in all of its ruggedness, Stanton said through his tears, “There lies the greatest ruler of men this world has ever seen.” The patience of true love had conquered at the end.

Second, the text tells us that “love is kind.” We all know that so many Christians are “good” but not *kind*. There seems to be in so many “good” people a consuming spirit of unkindness. But have you ever calculated how much of Christ’s life was spent in doing kind things? He spent a lot of time just making people happy, doing good to all kinds of people. Let it register deep within you that God has put the happiness of people around you in *your* power, and that their happiness can be greatly guaranteed just by your being kind to them. You see, to endure wrong might be just a triumph of stubbornness, but to be *kind to the person who has done the wrong* is a triumph of *grace*. A wise man said, “The greatest thing a person can for His Heavenly Father is to be kind to some of His other children.” How have we missed that? Shouldn’t we all be much kinder than we are? *How much does the world need it? How easily might it be done? How spontaneously might it be practiced? How infallibly and lastingly would it be remembered?!*

Third, “love knows no envy”. Love is not jealous. Love is not biased in self-favor, nor biased in *disfavor* toward others. Love does not engage in competition with others, but bows as low as necessary to fully cooperate with others. It is a simple fact that when/if you do a good work you will discover others doing the same work, and probably better. Don’t envy them! How does my tearing down a do-gooder increase the inventory of good in the world?? How does my cynical criticism of others enhance my own character? Indeed, it tragically *reduces* it. *Only one thing deserves a Christian’s envy, and that is the large, generous, rich, unselfish soul who “envies not”!* You see, envy was the seed of the first murder in human history (the murder of Cain by Abel), and envy has been a seed of murder ever since. Christian, beware!

Fourth and fifth, “love vaunts not itself, and is not puffed up.” The Moffatt translation says, “Love makes no parade.” True love is never inflated with its own importance. There is always a self-effacing, self-denying quality in true love. True love will always be more impressed with its own unworthiness than its own merit. Some people bestow their love as if they were bestowing a favor, and they expect equal favors in return. Napoleon Bonaparte, the French “little general”, always held a high standard—for *others*. Concerning himself, he said, “I am not a man like other men; the laws of morality do not apply to me.” You will find it to be the consistent mark of truly great men that they never think of their own importance.

Of all men, William Carey was surely one of the greatest missionaries and linguists the world has ever known. He translated at least significant parts of the Bible into no fewer than 34 Indian languages. Carey began his life as a shoe cobbler. When he went to India he was treated with dislike and contempt.

Once at a dinner meeting a snobbish man, with the idea of humiliating him, said in a loud voice, "I suppose, Mr. Carey, you once worked as a shoe-maker." "Oh, no, your lordship", Carey quietly replied, "not a shoe-maker, *only a cobbler.*" *Carey didn't even claim to MAKE shoes, just to MEND them!* "He who starts at the top of the ladder may have a long way to fall, but he who starts at the BOTTOM can only go ONE WAY!"

It would be easy to ignore the phrase, true love "is not puffed up," but we dare not so neglect it, even if we badly misapply it or abuse it. *True love does not vaunt (advertise, publicize, raise) itself.* May God help us as we deal with it only quickly and briefly. The Moffatt translation simply says, "Love gives itself no airs," and that is enough for us to "chew on" for the moment.

Sixth, true love "does not behave itself unseemly". But just what does that mean? We will appeal to several translations to help us here. "Love does not act *ungraciously*" (Barclay) "*Is never rude*" (Moffatt), "*or unmannerly*" (Revised Standard Version), "*isn't indecent*" (Beck translation). It is helpful to realize that in Greek the word for "grace" and the word for "charm" are the same word. So let's translate it for our ourselves: "True love is never *without charm.*" Or, to put it positively, true love is always courteous. Draw a contrast here; there is a kind of Christianity that seems to take delight in being blunt and almost brutal. There seems to be tremendous strength in it (though this is highly questionable), but there is absolutely no winsomeness, no attractiveness to it. Can anyone in his most daring mind imagine that this would represent the "Christianity" of Christ Himself?

Seven, true love "does not seek her own." True love does not insist on having its own way. True love does not insist upon its rights. Any time we start making radical claims for ourselves, we are adrift from true love. Courtesy is a Christian virtue that should be greatly coveted. Courtesy has been described as "love in the little things". True love makes the lover very polite in his demeanor toward any other human being. You can put an uneducated dunce into the highest society, and if he has a reservoir of true love in his heart, he will never be unkind or ungracious to others.

Be very careful to understand this seventh characteristic of true love. Note that true love does not even seek *that which its own*. Many, many people today seem devoted to securing their own rights. "If you seek your *rights*, you are a first-class *sinner*; if you fulfill your *responsibilities*, you are a first-class *saint*." You see, a man, any man, may at any time exercise the *higher right* of *giving up his rights, of deferring to OTHER PEOPLE—for GOD'S sake, for THEIR sake, and for HIS OWN SAKE!* But we must see that this text does not ask or demand us to give up our rights! True love strikes much deeper than that. True love insists that we *don't seek our rights at all*, that we *ignore them, that we eliminate the personal element altogether from our thoughts, plans, schedules, and daily lives!* ***The Big BOOK, GOD'S BOOK, says, "Look NOT every man on HIS OWN THINGS, but on the things of OTHERS"*** (Philippians 2:4). True love is not selfish, but self-forgetful.

Number eight, true love "is not easily provoked". That means that true love always has a good temperament. It does not *lose* its temper. True love, Christian love, *God's* love, never becomes exasperated with people. Exasperation is always a sign of defeat. When we lose our tempers, we probably have already lost everything else. Bad temper is always dismissed as a "peccadillo" (a tiny sin)

by insensitive and unaware people, or by weak and carnal Christians. It is thought to be very harmless, but again, we must think again, and this time, more accurately. One irate person said, "I explode with temper, but the blast subsides quickly." His astute and bold friend quietly replied, "You just gave the perfect description of a *shotgun!* *But that one blast can kill another person close-up, and FOREVER!*" We sometimes dismiss temper as a "family flaw," but *so is sin!* Are we thus to glibly disregard it and assume that it is "OK"? Your temper may be one of the best barometers which registers the true state of your person! The peculiarity of bad temper is that it is often *the vice of the virtuous*, but, my brothers and sisters, "these things ought not so to be." "He who cannot control his temper likely cannot control any other feature in his out-of-control character." One dark spot on a bright white sheet of paper will receive *all of the attention of an observer*. Temper simply **MUST** be TEMPERED BY GRACE! **TURN YOUR TEMPER PROBLEM OVER TO JESUS TODAY**, and you will likely discover what David meant when he said of God, "*His gentleness has made me great*" (II Samuel 22:36).

The ninth listed characteristic in "Paul's great hymn of love" is that it "thinks no evil". True love will never keep a record of wrongs it has suffered with the intent of getting even. Love keeps no list of 'dastardly deeds done to me'. It has better things to do than to pamper itself by itemizing the evils other people have perpetrated upon it. True love has an amazing power to forget. The Lord Jesus Christ came to blot out our transgressions and to remember them against us no more forever—and we should emulate his mission. With regard to sins committed against us, we should use our memories *to forget with!* True love does not store up the memory of any sin it has received against itself. The term "store up" is an accountant's word. It is the word that is used for entering up an item in a ledger so that it will not be forgotten. That is precisely what many over-sensitive people do when they are wronged (as if they never wronged anyone themselves). But *one of the greatest achievements of human life on earth is for each person to learn and remember what to forget*. One author told how "in Polynesia, where the natives spend much of their time fighting and feasting, it is customary for each man to keep some reminders of his hatred. Articles are suspended from the roofs of their huts to keep alive the memory of their wrongs, whether real or imaginary." Many people hug their anger to be sure it stays warm, but this will not characterize true love. It is tragic to find even David, near the close of his life, remembering the wrongs done to him by Joab and Shimei. He seems to have stored up those wrongs through the years. They had added misery to his life, but true love does not keep such records.

Ten, true love "rejoices not in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth." True love never delights in exposing the weaknesses of other people. It never rejoices over another's sin as if '*his sin makes me superior to him*'. In fact, each Christian is reduced a bit by the sins of others, because the "common stock" of humanity drops when any one person sins. He should weep over any sin, and be broken-hearted over any failure. Remember that Jesus, in His interview with the "woman taken in adultery" (John 8), did not *condone* her sin, but *neither did He condemn her* ("*neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more*"); *He rather protected and forgave her*. And if we are to follow Him, we must "go and do likewise."

Again, we must not hurry. Notice the "but rejoices in the truth" clause under number ten. Job said about God's Word, "I have not gone back from the commandment of His lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth to be more than my necessary food" (Job 23:12). When I was in college, I wrote in

the flyleaf of my Bible, *“No Bible, no breakfast”*, and I steadily maintained that course throughout many tempting situations on a state college campus, and I am now forever glad I did! *“Thy Words were found, and I did eat them, and Thy Word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart”* (Jeremiah 15:16). You see, either *the Bible will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from the Bible! Which course will you wish you had taken a million years from today?* *“Sin kept me from the Bible”, or “The Bible kept me from sin”?* The days are fleeting by, but our options are still open. O God, adhere us, your children, to Your Word!

Again, the James Moffatt translation helps us at number ten. It says, *“Love is never glad when others go wrong; true love is always eager to believe the best.”* That is, true love always seeks to give the benefit of even the slightest doubt to the other person. Note the great words *“glad”* and *“eager”* in that translation. These are scintillating words, alive with positive emotion. Would we not do well to aspire after those words as our desire for social assessment of us? If so, those who knew us would testify that we always seemed happy, even *eager*, to highlight OTHERS instead of OURSELVES.

Eleven, true love *“bears all things”*. True love can endure very, very much. I have not been very good at demonstrating this, but I have clearly seen it over and over in some wonderful brothers and sisters in Christ. Some people show us that true love gets solidly under the load of life and persistently bears it to the finish line. They seldom seem to waver, and they don’t seem to notice that they are doing anything exceptional. They just carry big loads, and bear big burdens, and with the incredible dignity and durability that only Jesus can give. The Lord Jesus Christ modeled this lifestyle for us during the days of His Incarnation, patiently bearing all the wrongs and injustices He regularly faced, and then He prayed from the Cross, *“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing.”* True love always breeds among men a high-level faith directed toward the one who practices it. Simply, true love has true faith in its fellow man. These words do not imply that love is foolishly gullible but rather that there is a full supply of faith in human hearts that have been touched by the Master. That love is not suspicious. Cynicism, pessimism, slandering, and defaming others does not belong to true love.

Twelve, true love *“believes all things”*. True love always bends over backwards to take the kindest possible view of others in every circumstance, and it does it as long as it possibly can, even if its own interests are not advanced. How many of us can remember some special spot *“along life’s way”* when some strong man or woman took our hand in a sturdy handclasp and said sincerely, *“I believe in you.”* What needed words in the life of every child, every young person, every middle-aged person, every mature adult, every aged saint! *We should practice saying these words in front of the mirror each morning, and then look for a likely candidate to speak them to each day! I believe in you!*

Thirteen, true love *“hopes all things”*. Jesus constantly astounded people with His optimistic hope for all sorts of individuals. There were no *“hopeless cases”* with Him. There was no one *“past the limit”* with Him. There was no one *“off the radar screen”* with Him. *“Incorrigibles”* were consistently raised up and rehabbed by Him. Diseased people were made well, possessed people were set free, guilty people were forgiven, even some dead people were brought back to life—and all of these are *“types”* or pictures of the same miracles being reconstructed in people’s lives over 2000 years later, today. You see, Jesus *“knew all men, and needed not that anyone should testify to Him about any*

man, for He knew/knows what is in man” (John 2:24-25). He always saw hidden virtues, potential victories, untapped resources, and eternal qualities in each person, and all of this always made for a great and profound hope. How I thank God today that I am a Christian, and have been one for *most of my long days on earth. Where would I be without the Lord?*

Fourteen, true love “endures all things”. Here is a subtlety. In the same verse, the text says both that true love “bears all things” and “endures all things.” Is this mere repetition? Oh, no, not to a person who has steeped himself in the ways and words of Scripture! It is the same kind of “repetition” as used when the Bible speaks in one place of “eternal life” and in another of “everlasting life.” Mere repetition? If you say “yes”, I humbly beg to differ with you—but my differing with you is based on a radical realization. The term “eternal life” refers to the *quality* of the life—the life that *has God in it NOW*, while the term “everlasting life” point to its *length or duration*—the life that *will last FOREVER in HEAVEN*.

True love is marked by *stickability*, or *stick-to-it-tiveness*, even if I DO create or coin a word. True love will never abandon ship. It will not “leave you in the lurch.” It will “stay through to the bitter end”—ah, no, to the *better end, the Better End, the BEST END!* With the Gospel, the “back end” is always just “the front end”, for the Best Is Yet to Be! I am now 81 years of age, but TODAY is “the first day of *the rest of my life*”, and according to *The Book, I have an entire (entire.....) Eternity yet to go!* So don’t ever say Goodby to me—unless you insist on continuing to reject Christ, and end up in.....HELL..... You may resent this, and resist this, but if you are a Child of God, YOU KNOW IT IS TRUE, and if you are NOT, you can become a Child of God at this very moment! In that case, I would like to be the first one to welcome you to the FOREVER FAMILY OF GOD! What I have been trying to say at this point is that true love can and will bear you up with sweet grace and incredible enduring strength. True love carries on in sunshine and in shade, in prosperity and in adversity, in all the changing scenes of life, and then *throughout Eternity!*

Though I misplaced one or two characteristics in the fast pace of writing this message (there are 15 of them Biblically), we have already covered a LOT of ground, and all of it is THE WORD OF GOD. So I am implicitly confident as I share such Truth, that God will endorse and use it for His Eternal purposes.

Paul tells us here that true love is a versatile, multi-faceted, compound thing. It is like light. You may have seen a scientist take a beam of light and pass it through a crystal prism, and when he does, it comes out the other side of the prism broken up into its component colors—such as red, and blue, and yellow, and violet, and orange, and all the colors of the rainbow—so Paul has passed this thing, true love, Christian love, *God’s love*, through the magnificent prism of His Divinely inspired intellect, and it comes out on the other side broken up into its elements. So in these few but eternally powerful words we have what could be called the spectrum of true love. True love, the *agape of God*, is clearly identifiable.

III. TRUE LOVE is IMPERISHABLE, 8-12

Paul has one more out-of-this-world point to establish about this true love, *God’s agape love*. Having said that it is *indispensable and identifiable*, He finally tells us that this love is *imperishable*.

Because I did not place the entire chapter with the text cited at the beginning of the message, I would like to include this part now. Here are verses eight through twelve: “Love never fails; but if there are prophecies, they shall fail; if there are tongues, they shall cease; if there is knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child, but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass (mirror) darkly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then shall I know even as I am known. And now remains faith, hope, love, these three, but the great of these is love.” Dear friend, these are the best words in this chapter—*hear ye them!*

Paul strongly states the *permanency* of true love. When all the great things in which glory and pride themselves have disappeared in oblivion, true love will still stand. The Bible says, in The Song of Solomon 8:7, “Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it.” The one unconquerable and unquenchable thing is love. When a person enters into true love, there enters into his life a relationship against which the assaults of time are helpless, and which transcends even death. Paul said “love never fails”, and we must remind ourselves that “never” is quite a long time! *No conclusion can ever come to true love, no end will draw a final line there. True love is ALWAYS “in season”.* It never falls to the ground in final defeat. It never fails to reach the full completion of its purposes. True love is of God, and it is as Eternal as God Himself. Love began with God at the “front end”, and it will endure with God throughout Eternity, having no “back end”! God is “That which was, is, and shall be”, and so also is true love. “And now abides (REMAINS) faith, hope, and love, these three”—that is, all three of these are to remain and have full place in all of the vast reaches of ETERNITY FUTURE. Not one of the three will ever be needless or useless. “Faith” will ever become clearer, stronger, richer, and more satisfying than we could possibly imagine. “Hope” will continue looking to the *future FOREVER*. This means that “at every turn of the road” in Heaven, the child of God can still look with full expectancy for limitless vistas of eternal beauty, reality and fulfillment. And “love”, true love, is in the same Trinity of Virtues that will last forever.

No wonder, then, we are counseled to “follow after love” (I Corinthians 14:1). In the very next verse after I Corinthians thirteen ends, the Bible says, “Follow after love”, and the word translated “follow” is in the present tense and the imperative mood in Greek—that is, it is a command given by God *to be fulfilled in every “NOW-MOMENT”* of a Christian’s life. True love is to be the absolute “pursuit” and “goal” of every Christian, moment by moment, hour by hour, day by day, week by week, month by month, year by year, decade by decade, YES, century by century, millennium by millennium, millennia by millennia, YES, THROUGHOUT ETERNITY! *AND IF THAT’S NOT LONG ENOUGH TO SUIT YOU, ADD ONE AND KEEP GOING.....!*

You see, True Love is an EFFECT, and the CAUSE is GOD. If you are a child of God, He is the One causing YOU to LOVE, and thus you are blessed to *deliver His Love to others*. Do you think HE is going to RUN OUT of LOVE? Well, He ain’t done so yet, and I don’t think He will begin to do so today or tomorrow... (: <)) <>< If you are saved, thank God that “the love of God has been BROADCAST throughout your heart by the Holy Ghost Who has been given to you” (Romans 5:5)—and be forever grateful that God does not withdraw His Gifts! Dear Spirit of the Living God, I ask You to broadcast

YOUR LOVE through US, TODAY! And would You kindly lead men everywhere to “tune in” to Your Broadcast Today!!!