

**Key words: I Corinthians 13****Love, prophecy, mysteries, rubies, faith, hope.****LOVE CHAPTER****I Corinthians 13*****“Love never fails.”*** (I Cor. 13:8)

Love is said to be “A Many Splendored Thing.” Years ago, the now deceased singer, Frank Sinatra, made that song popular. The lyrics are:

“Love is a many-splendored thing,  
It's the April rose that only grows in the early spring,  
Love is nature's way of giving a reason to be living,  
The golden crown that makes a man a king.  
Once on a high and windy hill,  
In the morning mist two lovers kissed and the world stood still,  
Then your fingers touched my silent heart and taught it how to sing,  
Yes, true love's a many-splendored thing.”

The “love that never fails,” is a higher form of love than the love described in the song quoted in the lyrics above. I will explain: The statement, “*love never fails*” is in a letter the Apostle Paul wrote to the church in the city of Corinth. The Christians in the church were squabbling. Yes, for the naïve, unfortunately, some churches have squabbles. Paul wrote the letter to correct the divisions within the church.

The Corinthian church was not a model church by any stretch of the imagination. Among the problems in the church was a division about spiritual gifts. Paul ends the 12th chapter with these words, “*Covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet I show you a more excellent way.*” (1Corinthians 12:31) Chapter 13, the Love Chapter, is “*the more excellent way.*” This chapter is the best discourse on the subject of love ever written.

His premise is this: if these Christians had the “love that never fails” they would not be split up but united. So, what is so special about “*the more excellent way*” – that is, “the love that never fails”?

It has to do with the difference in love words! You see, Paul wrote in Greek and in the Greek language there are several words for “love.” We have the one English word, “love” that we use for most all of our expressions of caring, fondness, affection, warmth of feeling, whether toward animate or inanimate objects. People say they love automobiles, ice cream, a man, a woman, sunsets, their home, etc.

The Greeks had several levels or degrees of love. One was “*philia*” and was used to express friendship, affection, respect, etc. When we say, “I like” certain persons or things we are talking about “*philia*” type of love. The next word the Greeks used was “*eros*” which was romantic love. It described passion, lust and sensual desire. That is not the word used in 1<sup>st</sup>

Corinthians 13. The third word was “*agape*” which is the highest form of love. It transcends all natural human emotions because it is the love that “*God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.*” (Rom. 5:5) The word “*love*” in Romans 5:5 is the Greek word “*agape*” – God’s love, holy love, the highest degree of love.

“*Agape*” – God-like love, is the love word used in I Corinthians 13. It is “*the more excellent way*” that Paul was writing about – it is the “*love that never fails.*” Paul is encouraging the Christians in Corinth and Christians everywhere to be engaged in the quest for the best!

What about this love is so special? Why is it so prized and praised? Join me as we explore the great love chapter in the Bible. We will review Its Elegant Worth, Its Evident Winsomeness and Its Eternal Witness.

### LOVE’S ELEGANT WORTH – Vs. 1-3

Paul makes three comparisons that clearly reveal the exceptional nature of divine love:

**It Is Worth More Than Grand Words.** *There is no power without it. v.1*

*“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.”*

This is the day for “Talk Shows” and wordy speeches. The Congressional Record grows voluminously every day as legislators verbalize their pros and cons. Telephones are abuzz with chatter. The saying, “Talk is cheap” has never been truer.

However, grand words spoken by the sincerest person intending to be helpful are as “*sounding brass or a clanging cymbal*” when issued from a loveless heart. Love has a language all its own and Godlike love has the superior language.

**It Is Worth More Than Great Wisdom.** *There is no purpose without it. v.2*

*“And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.”*

So you can prophesy, understand mysteries, have a head full of knowledge and faith, but are loveless – what are you? Says Paul: “nothing”! Loveless giftedness is like a jewel in a pig’s snout!

**It Is Worth More Than Generous Works.** *There is no profit without it. v.3*

*“And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.”*

The excellencies of “*agape*” love are worth more than extreme benevolence in giving away all one’s earthly goods; it is worth more than being martyred in defense of the truth for how can one show the love of God to mankind if one is dead? We are not to discredit martyrdom, however, Paul is making comparisons here and Godlike love, “*agape*” love, trumps sacrificing one’s body voluntarily to prove one’s love for God and others. The point is that self-flagellation, as well-meaning as it might be, “*profits nothing*” if it is void of divine love.

Review the gifts that are secondary to this divine love that Paul is writing about:

- Oratorical ability;
- Prophetical utterances;
- Knowledge;
- Faith;
- Generously;
- Self-sacrifice – All of the above “*profits me nothing*” if it does not flow out of the fountain of divine love.

Charles Spurgeon commented: "Gifts may be plentiful, and those of the highest order, and yet we may perish; grace in the heart is the only sure evidence of salvation. A man may prophesy and be a Balaam, he may understand mysteries and be a Simon Magus, he may have all knowledge and perish like Ahithophel, and he may have a mountain-moving faith, and be a son of perdition like Judas. Love to God and man there must be, or we have nothing good in us."

No wonder it is “*the more excellent way*” for it is more valuable than the other noble traits mentioned. Let us make certain that our mouths, our minds and our hands are motivated by this divine quality of love about which the apostle writes to the Corinthian Christians and to us!

### LOVE’S EVIDENT WINSOMENESS

There are seven statements dealing with divine love in its relationships with others in verses 4-7. “*Agape*” love is shown by its attitudes, v.4-5a, and by its actions, v.5b-8.

**Its Winsomeness Is Seen In Its Attitudes.** *There is no environment too demanding of love.*

Attitudes are internal while actions are external. We may not always perceive one's attitude, however, actions are obvious. "The love that never fails" impacts both our attitudes and our actions. There are seven statements that deal with the attitudinal impact of divine love:

- “*Love suffers long and is kind;*
- *love does not envy;*
- *love does not parade itself,*
- *is not puffed up;*
- *does not behave rudely,*
- *does not seek its own,*
- *is not provoked.”*

**Its Winsomeness Is Seen In Its Actions.** *There is no encounter too difficult for love.*

If divine love has worked its way inwardly, affecting one’s attitudes, that divine love will be displayed in its actions outwardly. Notice seven statements that describe loving actions in human relationships:

- “*thinks no evil;*

- *does not rejoice in iniquity, but*
- *rejoices in the truth;*
- *bears all things,*
- *believes all things,*
- *hopes all things,*
- *endures all things.”*

Like the wind, no one has ever literally seen love, although all of us have seen the evidences of it. And the evidences of divine love are so attractive that it is winsome – drawing others to the heart of God in order to receive, experience and express this “love that never fails.”

Having established the Worth and Winsomeness of “*agape*” love, Paul concludes his masterpiece on love by emphasizing its Eternal Witness in verses 8 through 13.

### **LOVE’S ETERNAL WITNESS**

When Abraham Lincoln was engaged to be married to Mary Todd, he visited Chatterton's jewelry shop, in Springfield, Illinois. He ordered a gold wedding ring. Mary and Abraham had agreed that the words "Love is Eternal" were to be engraved in it. They were married on November 4, 1842.

The love about which Paul writes in this great treatise is eternal love. God’s love, like God, is eternal. Many cannot define love, although everyone desires it. God’s desire for all to experience His love is both universal and individual. He has demonstrated His love and desires that everyone individually first receive and then give His love. The eternal witness of the “love that never fails” is seen as follows:

#### **That Which Will Fail. v.8**

*“Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away.”*

“Prophecies are done away in the sense that they are worked out to fulfillment. Tongues as signs and methods of praise cease when the necessity for such ends. Knowledge as inquiry is done away as it merges into the knowledge of full or revelation. All the things referred to are great things, and things that tend to edification, but which cease when the edifice is completed.” (G. Campbell Morgan)

#### **That Which Will Fade. vs. 9-11**

*“For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will 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.”*

#### **That Which Is Faint. v.12**

*“For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.”*

#### **That Which Is Forever. v.13**

*“And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”*

Faith, hope and love will abide. Faith and hope will not come to an end when we exit time and enter eternity, when we exit earth and enter heaven. Our faith will yet be firmly fixed in our Lord and Savior, who saved us by His grace through faith (Eph. 2:8-9), and our hope in Him and His promises and provisions will not be diminished in the least. And, our love, which like Peter’s is often fickle, (John 21:16-17) will blossom into full bloom in the presence of Him Who is love personified!

### **That Which We Are To Follow.**

Wait! There is more! The very first words in chapter 14 are: *“Follow after love”* (KJV); *“Follow the way of love”* (NIV) and, *“Go after a life of love as if your life depended on it – because it does”* (*The Message*).

The word *“follow”* which Paul uses in I Cor. 14:1 is the Greek word *“diōkō”* which means to “pursue, to press toward.” It connotes the necessity to engage in something that is strenuous. Paul used the word when he said, *“I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”* (Phil. 3:14) The word translated *“press”* is the same Greek word translated *“follow”* in the KJV and *“pursue”* in the NIV.

A passionate devotion and a determined effort are required if we are to follow, pursue and press toward attaining the measure of love articulated in first Corinthians chapter 13. No one of us would claim to have attained to the ultimate degree of *agape* love in our daily lives. Let us therefore, *“Follow after love!”*

### **Conclusion**

Love’s worth, winsomeness and witness cannot be easily dismissed as being of secondary importance. The last words of Paul in chapter 12 were, *“But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.”* If you are in the quest for the best then the best is the quality of love defined, described and demonstrated in the thirteen verses in chapter 13 of Paul’s first letter to the Corinthian Christians. There is nothing better than the best!

It is a rather common saying in Christian circles that, *“The world is dying for a little bit of love.”* I venture to say that it is the fault of Christians who, having experienced the *“love that never fails,”* have become reservoirs harboring love, rather than rivers sharing that love.

It is God’s design and desire for the loved to be loving. Let us exhibit to a watching and waiting world *“the more excellent way.”* The greatest exhibition of love divine was when .....

***“God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”*** (John 3:16)

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