

The Love That Never Fails

Introduction. In the controversy in the church at Corinth over spiritual gifts, the apostle Paul injected teaching on love in order to show the proper reasons for desiring and using spiritual gifts. The Corinthians consistently had their eyes pointed in the wrong direction. They were infected by sin. Can you imagine the bitterness and jealousy in the church over something supposed to be good? But they learned that love is a "more excellent way" (1 Corinthians 12:31). Of faith, hope, and love, "the greatest of these is love" (1 Corinthians 13:13). This lesson will show why love is greater than faith and hope, and what results are produced from this love.

I. ***A Definition Of Terms***

A. "Greatest."

1. Thayer says, "Of great moment, of great weight, important ... A thing to be highly esteemed for its excellence."
2. Vine adds, "Excellent; a throwing beyond, hence, a surpassing." In the Old Testament, the word is used in Exodus 11:6, Isaiah 9:6-7, and Joel 2:11.

B. "Love."

1. Love can be known only from the action it prompts. Love had its perfect expression among men in the Lord Jesus Christ (John 3:16). This love was not produced by the goodness of its subjects. It was an exercise of the divine will in deliberate choice, made for no reason except what is prompted by the nature of God Himself.
2. Love, whether exercised toward brethren, or toward men in general, is not an emotional impulse; it often runs against human thoughts. Love works no ill to anyone and seeks to do good to all men (Romans 13:8-10; 15:2). It manifests itself in many truly wonderful qualities (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).

II. ***Why Love Is The Greatest***

A. Love will exist in heaven whereas faith and hope will cease to exist at the second coming.

1. Faith will end with sight (2 Corinthians 5:7; Hebrews 11:1).
2. Hope will stop with realization (Romans 8:24-25; Colossians 1:27).
3. Love will only be perfected in the state of glory when we see Christ (1 John 3:2). Because faith and love have no purpose in heaven, where everything true will be known and everything good will be possessed, they are not equal to love.

B. Faith and hope spring from love (1 Corinthians 13:7). David Lipscomb wrote, "Faith is not an end; it is faith in a divine deliverer and in His promise of salvation; it is the means toward eternal life. Hope is not an

end; it is hope of final and eternal fellowship with God; it is the means to steadfastness and to heaven. But love is an end in itself. It is the bond of perfectness; beyond this even the gospel cannot carry us. As faith and hope realize their purpose when they produce love, it is obvious that the virtue which is their final purpose is greater than they."

C. Love is the great underlying principle of the universe.

1. The Bible's simplest description of God -- and therefore God's own description of Himself -- is "God is love" (1 John 4:8).
 - a) Love is inherently greater by being the most God-like (Matthew 5:43-48).
 - b) God does not have faith or hope, but "God is love."
2. God's word is undergirded by love (Matthew 22:35-40).
 - a) Love is a fruit of His Spirit (Galatians 5:22).
 - b) To love is to conform to the laws of God (John 14:15; 1 John 2:5; 2 John 6). John MacArthur wrote, "Don't throw God a bone of your love unless there's the meat of obedience on it."

D. Love moves us to action with an almost irresistible power.

1. "Love is as strong as death" and "many waters cannot quench love" (Song of Solomon 8:6-7). "Love never fails" or will never "die out" (1 Corinthians 13:8).
2. No one can have greater love than the one who gives up their life for their friends (John 15:13).
3. This principle is demonstrated by the women who came to the tomb of Jesus.
 - a) They had watched Jesus die on the cross and had seen His body laid to rest in the tomb.
 - b) They were moved to go to the tomb early Sunday morning because they wanted to anoint His body (Mark 16:1; Luke 24:1).

Why?

 - (1) Faith? If they had believed what He had said repeatedly, they would have been going out to meet the risen Christ instead of going to anoint His dead body (Matthew 16:21).
 - (2) Hope? Their hope was probably as dead as that of the two men with whom Jesus talked on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:21).
 - (3) It must have been love. You can tell that these women loved Jesus.
 - (a) They did not know how the great stone they thought was still on the door could be moved, but they pressed on.
 - (b) They did not know how they could get the soldiers, who they thought were still guarding the tomb, to let them inside, but they pressed on.

4. Love never fails if it is strong enough. When faith is weak and hope is almost gone, love will move us on.

III. ***The Results Of Love***

- A. You will realize what true religion is all about.
- B. You will obey whether it makes sense to you or not.
- C. You will follow Jesus and hold to Him in times of doubt.
- D. You will have the proper attitude toward God, Christ, the Bible, your brethren, your family, your neighbor, your enemy, and the lost.
- E. You will do what the Lord wants you to do in spite of insurmountable obstacles.
- F. You will make the Lord, His will, and His church first in your life, and being with Him in eternity your main goal.

Conclusion. It is tragic that in many churches, as in the one in ancient Corinth, the love that is basic to Christian character does not characterize the membership or the work (cf. Revelation 2:4-5). Love's superiority is easily seen. Therefore, follow the advice of Paul to "follow after charity" (1 Corinthians 14:1). The more we love, the more we are like God, and the more we will be pleasing to Him.