

1 Corinthians 13

by John Nelson Darby

The sermon emphasizes the supremacy of divine love as the foundation of the Christian faith and life.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13:1

Topics: "The Nature of Love", "Spiritual Gifts vs. Grace"

Description

John Nelson Darby expounds on 1 Corinthians 13, emphasizing the distinction between gifts and grace, and the paramount importance of love in the Christian life. He illustrates that while one may possess faith and power, without love, these gifts are meaningless. Darby describes love as a divine, sovereign force that transcends the evils of the world, highlighting its characteristics such as patience, kindness, and the ability to rejoice in truth. He contrasts the temporary nature of spiritual gifts with the eternal nature of love, asserting that faith and hope will cease in heaven, but love will endure forever. Ultimately, he concludes that love is the essence of God and the highest calling for believers.

Transcript

In the beginning of chapter 12 the apostle supposes all manner of gifts, but no grace. (This is of moment, too, in the opening of Hebrews 6.) A person may have the faith here spoken of without reality. He is talking of faith to remove mountains, not of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ's person. We find power and grace constantly distinguished. We find the power and not the grace in the Old Testament, in such an one as Balaam for instance, but not exactly such instances in the New Testament: there we find Judas rather.

We have a blessed description of love in this chapter. "God is love." It is sovereign goodness, coming out of itself. It goes beyond "The love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost." It is the same love, but here it is in its different characters. "Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity (love), it profiteth me nothing." It is not a definition, but the way love works. But what we find here is divine love in the world; which is such a different thing from law. It is what is above all the evil that is round it, and therefore can feel for all the evil; love is affected, but never touched in itself by it. That is what I see in its working. So we see Christ going through this world. Love is a sovereign thing. There are two kinds of love, both divine: a downward love which is sovereign in its nature - God really - which is in our hearts in a certain sense through the Holy Ghost; and then I find another which goes upward, and there is a holy affection to which I am subject. We find an analogy to it in husband and wife. Thus, where divine love is working in my heart towards others, it goes downwards; but when I get the state of my soul, I must look up and I am subject. In "walk in love as Christ also hath loved

us, and given Himself for us," we have divine love. This is the giving up of myself altogether; and then I get to God, who is the object. And therefore it is said that we are light, but it is never said that we are love, because love is sovereign, and we cannot say we are that.

282 In our chapter we have love in the character of the Spirit of Christ working us. I must have a power that is above all the evil that is around me, and yet walk in graciousness through it all; and this is the reason the love of the law would not do for this world. If I love my neighbour as myself, it is not enough for a world of evil; there I must have a love that can go on, and be superior to all the evil, and this is what Christ was. It can feel all the evil too. Having no self in it, it has no self roused by all the evil that is around, and therefore it can feel for the people that are there. It "suffereth long," that is downward; it "seeketh not her own" - downward too. It is not merely that it delights in God, and in what is blessed here, but it is looking around in the midst of evil and selfishness .

"Rejoicing with the truth" (as it reads in the margin). It is in the truth, no doubt. The truth is there, and I rejoice with it, and take delight in it. Suppose the truth is being preached; my heart goes with it, and is delighted.

"Believeth all things" is not being suspicious: one believes readily. It "hopeth all things"; it does not mean ill, it does not think of evil. Evil tends to depress the soul, but God is above all that. I find constantly the danger of thinking the evil is greater than the good; but if I bring in God, He is greater than all opposed. Christ was here in the world with no thought of suspicion, and that is the spirit in which we are to walk through the world. If you are always suspecting people, who will trust you? I feel the great difficulty in seeing the evil, which is apt to get the upper hand of your mind; though it is no good deluding oneself that it is not there, because it is there. But love will go on in heaven when there is no evil to think about; prophecies will fail, tongues cease, and knowledge vanish away. "When that which is perfect is come" (v. 10) means the time of glory, when everything is perfect, and these partial things will have ceased. Knowledge now is in degree, "we know in part"; all that kind of learning will pass away. Learning is a proof of ignorance, and this will not be then. Even in divine things we learn, and all that is testimony to ignorance. It gives a great idea of the littleness of man in that way. All these partial instruments of communicating will be done with when I know as I am known: which is, I believe, God's way of knowing; it is not knowing in part; it is not so much the measure as the manner of God's knowing. God can create ideas. I know so far as things are knowable to be known. Now we see "darkly" what we do not see clearly. It is just as I see through a window, instead of seeing the object at once. It is an extraordinary expression; we do not see clearly, but in a mystery, not like plain open things. It is an enigma, though I do not like that word, because it does not suit divine things.

283 "Faith, hope, and charity," or love, are not put accidentally here. They are the three things that are characteristic of the Christian state now, "putting on the breastplate of faith and charity [the same word], and for a helmet the hope of salvation," 1 Thess. 5:8. Some ten times in the New Testament faith, hope, and love are put together. They are positive elements, faith and hope referring to the present state I am in, and charity to the present and eternal state. Faith lays hold of an object, and hope desires it. The word "charity" is an ecclesiastical word. Love is really what God is. He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and this never fails. When we possess a thing, we have done with faith and hope as to it: they have passed into positive fruition, as we say. There will be love in heaven, but we shall not have faith there, because there will be sight; and we shall not have hope there, because we have got possession. "Now abideth" shews the three as present things, but charity never fails.

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