

Now and Then, Love Is Preeminent

REVIEW: Love for others is the trademark of genuine Christianity (John 13:35). Paul tells us what love is by describing what love does (15 descriptive phrases). All other spiritual gifts from God are insignificant when compared to the grace of loving. The measure of our maturity is our increasing understanding of love's importance. Love endures forever; it never fails, it is the glue of all our relationships forever.

"Now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love."

I Corinthians 13:12-13

Mirrors in Paul's day were made of polished brass or other metals. There wasn't the ability to make glass as we know it today. Looking at yourself in polished metal you see "dimly." The text indicates we look to Christ "dimly." We don't see Him as He really is. Our conception of Jesus is a poor reflection of reality.

We also don't know other people – their background, hurts, and pains. This is why we wait for the LORD.

"Bless those who persecute you. Avenge not. Vengeance is Mine, says the LORD" (Romans 12:14-20).

I. Here and now God loves me fully, but only then (heaven) will I love others as He loves me (v. 12).

The language of I Cor. 13:12 is often overlooked by Christians. The word "know" speaks of deep, intimate love for me. "Adam **knew** Eve and she conceived." What is God's knowledge of me?

A. God's knowledge is penetrating ... "you have searched me and known me" (Psalm 139:1).

B. God's knowledge is pervasive ... Psalm 139— movements (v. 2), motives (vv. 3-4), mistakes (v. 5), and each moment of your life is known fully by God. People known like that flee. That is what David does. He wishes to run (v. 7). But where can he go?

C. God's knowledge is personal ... "For you formed me" (Psalm 139:13), "you possess me."

"How precious are your thoughts unto me, O God!" (Psalm 139:17). This word "precious" means "rare." God's thoughts toward you are rare in nature (kind), not in number.

Nobody who knows you deeply and intimately loves you radically and unconditionally – but God.

APPLICATION: We aren't perfect people here in terms of love; we never will be.

1. Quit looking to other people for the love only God can give you here and now.
2. Stop blaming people for your inability to love them—that defect is in you.
3. If you want a little piece of heaven on earth, grow in your love for people.

II. Faith, hope, and love are the trilogy of true Christian living, but the greatest of these is love.

In v. 13 the verb is singular, and the three nouns (faith, hope, love) form a plural subject. This would normally be incorrect grammar (i.e., "we is going to the store") were it not the language of essence.

"Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one" (Deut. 6:4). In the Hebrew, Elohim is plural. *Our Gods is one.*

A. Faith, hope and love are one in essence.

Do you have faith in Christ? Is your faith planted in God who delivers sinners by His grace? If so, then out of faith will rise hope and love. In fact, there is no genuine faith without hope and love. Alexander MacLaren says, "Faith, hope, love, these three are a trinity in unity."

B. Love is the greater than faith and hope because it endures forever.

Whereas hope is set aside when that which is hoped for is received, and faith is no longer needed when that which is not seen is revealed, love continues forever, love endures forever.

C. Love is the mark of real Christianity. "By your LOVE all know you are My disciples" (John 13:35).