



On Love

2018

4 min read • 791 words

Themes: Spiritual



My little sister just got married — I was asked to present [1 Corinthians 13](#) at her wedding ceremony last weekend. I was touched at the thought, and decided to give a little presentation about the cliché passage, instead of just a standard recitation.

Here is a transcription:

In Paul's first letter to the quite imperfect Church of Corinth, he speaks of the church as being one perfect body, comprised of many imperfect members.

He speaks, in the section I'm about to read, on worship, which takes many forms, including, but not limited to, utilizing the many unique and individual gifts of the Holy Spirit — specifically, he refers to prophecy, which Paul alludes to as being "an excellent way".

He famously speaks, in this, my favorite passage contained within all scriptures, on Love.

Agape, from above.

There are many Greek words that we all refer to in English as "Love", and the one Paul explicitly chose to use throughout this passage is agape (ἀγάπη).

The Greeks distinguished four types of love: eros (romantic/sexual), philia (friendship), storge (familial), and agape (unconditional/divine). C.S. Lewis explored these distinctions in his book 'The Four Loves,' noting how agape represents selfless, sacrificial love that seeks the good of the other.

Agape, antonym of eros (ἔρως), is agreed to mean "the love originating from God for mankind". That is, "the love originating from perfection for imperfection".

With that in mind, I present 1 Corinthians, Chapter 13 from the English Standard Translation — which, by the way, was being continually updated until 2016 when the ESV Permanent Text Edition was released.

About a month later, a press release was issued abandoning that claim, stating that the text will continue to evolve to reflect "changes in English or textual discoveries over time".

This illustrates the ongoing challenge of biblical translation—balancing textual stability with linguistic evolution and archaeological discoveries. The tension between preserving 'eternal truth' and acknowledging the temporal nature of language reflects broader hermeneutical debates.

So, allow me to read from an ephemeral, and therefore imperfect translation of manuscripts written by imperfect people — manuscripts of the inerrant Word of God:

1 Corinthians 13, ESV (and surrounding verses)

But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.

When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For 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. So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.

Without love from above, agape, all that is excellent is merely a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal — separated.

As you two become one body, with many excellent gifts, let this be built upon a foundation of agape, from above, or it too will like a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal — for as above, so below.

'As above, so below' is a fundamental principle of Hermeticism from the Emerald Tablet, suggesting correspondence between different planes of existence. Kenneth's use here bridges Christian theology with hermetic philosophy, reflecting his spiritual eclecticism.

In the wise words of John Lennon and Paul McCartney— all you need is love.

P.S. —I do not consider myself to be a religious person (I'm a bit of a [hermetic](#)), but I do consider myself to both be quite interested in the spiritual, and also quite able to speak the language of those that are religious.

Generated from kennethreitz.org • 2025