

READING

THE GREATEST OF THESE IS LOVE

First Corinthians Chapters 12 and 13

From the J.B Philips Translation

The Holy Spirit inspires men's faith and imparts spiritual gifts

Written by the apostle Paul to the Christians in Corinth, Greece

Together:

In the name I AM THAT I AM, in the name of the Christ, I affirm the words of the Apostle Paul, now the ascended master Hilarion:

Now I want to give you some further information in some spiritual matters.

You have not forgotten that you were Gentiles, following dumb idols just as you had been taught. Now I want you to understand, as Christians, that no one speaking by the Spirit of God could call Jesus accursed, and no one could say that he is the Lord, except by the Holy Spirit.

Men have different gifts, but it is the same Spirit who gives them. There are different ways of serving God, but it is the same Lord who is served. God works through different men in different ways, but it is the same God who achieves his purposes through them all. Each man is given his gift by the Spirit that he may make the most of it.

One man's gift by the Spirit is to speak with wisdom, another's to speak with knowledge. The same Spirit gives to another man faith, to another the ability to heal, to another the power to do great deeds. The same Spirit gives to another man the gift of preaching the word of God, to another the ability to discriminate in spiritual matters, to another speech in different tongues. Behind all these gifts is the operation of the same Spirit, who distributes to each individual man, as he wills.

As the human body, which has many parts, is a unity, and those parts, despite their multiplicity, constitute one single body, so it is with the body of Christ. For we were all baptized by the Spirit into one body, whether we were Jews, Gentiles, slaves or free men, and we have all had experience of the same Spirit.

Now the body is not one member but many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand I don't belong to the body," does that alter the fact that the foot is a part of the body? Or if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye I don't belong to the

body," does that mean that the ear really is no part of the body? After all, if the body were all one eye, for example, where would be the sense of hearing? Or if it were all one ear, where would be the sense of smell? But God has arranged all the parts in the one body according to his design.

For if everything were concentrated in one part, how could there be a body at all? The fact is there are many parts, but only one body. So that the eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" nor, again, can the head say to the feet, "I don't need you!" On the contrary, those parts of the body which have no obvious function are the more essential to health: and to those parts of the body which seem to us to be less deserving of notice we have to allow the highest honour of function. The parts which do not look beautiful have a deeper beauty in the work they do, while the parts which look beautiful may not be at all essential to life!

But God has harmonized the whole body by giving importance of function to the parts which lack apparent importance, which the body should work together as a whole with all the members in sympathetic relationship with one another. So it happens that if one member suffers all the other members suffer with it, and if one member is honoured all the members share a common joy.

Now you are together the body of Christ, and individually you are members of him. And in his Church God has appointed first some to be his messengers, secondly, some to be preachers of power, thirdly teachers. After them he has appointed workers of spiritual power, men with the gift of healing, helpers, organizers and those with the gift of speaking in "tongues".

As we look at the body of Christ do we find all are his messengers, all are preachers, or all teachers? Do we find all wielders of spiritual power, all able to heal, all able to speak with tongues, or all able to interpret the tongues? No, we find God's distribution of gifts is on the same principles of harmony that he has shown in the human body.

You should set your hearts on the highest spiritual gifts, but I will show you what is the highest way of all.

If I speak with the eloquence of men and of angels, but have no love, I become no more than blaring brass or crashing cymbal. If I have the gift of foretelling the future and hold in my mind not only all human knowledge but the very secrets of God, and if I also have that absolute faith which can move mountains, but have no love, I amount to nothing at all. If I dispose of all that I possess, yes, even if I give my own body to be burned, but have no love, I achieve precisely nothing.

This love of which I speak is slow to lose patience - it looks for a way of being constructive. It is not possessive: it is neither anxious to impress nor does it cherish inflated ideas of its own importance.

Love has good manners and does not pursue selfish advantage. It is not touchy. It does not keep account of evil or gloat over the wickedness of other people. On the contrary, it is glad with all good men when truth prevails.

Love knows no limit to its endurance, no end to its trust, no fading of its hope; it can outlast anything. It is, in fact, the one thing that still stands when all else has fallen.

For if there are prophecies they will be fulfilled and done with, if there are "tongues" the need for them will disappear, if there is knowledge it will be swallowed up in truth. For our knowledge is always incomplete and our prophecy is always incomplete, and when the complete comes, that is the end of the incomplete.

When I was a little child I talked and felt and thought like a little child. Now that I am a man my childish speech and feeling and thought have no further significance for me.

At present we are men looking at puzzling reflections in a mirror. The time will come when we shall see reality whole and face to face! At present all I know is a little fraction of the truth, but the time will come when I shall know it as fully as God now knows me!

In this life we have three great lasting qualities - faith, hope and love. But the greatest of them is love.

And in full Faith I consciously accept this manifest, manifest, manifest! (3) right here and now with full Power, eternally sustained, all-powerfully active, ever expanding, and world enfolding until all are wholly ascended in the Light and free!

Beloved I AM! Beloved I AM! Beloved I AM!