

Doctrinal Summary of Love: The Greatest Attribute for Service

In 1 Corinthians 13:13 Paul identifies three resources Corinthian believers can use to serve one another despite not yet having a full revelation of God's instruction.

"But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love."

The word "faith" is translated from the Koine Greek word πίστις ("pis-tis") which more literally means, "complete reliance upon someone or something to accomplish something specific on one's behalf, based on response." It identifies that someone or something is relied upon by an individual. The individual has put his faith upon someone or something which he has become convinced will carry out a specific action for him. Faith is based on the response of an individual to rely upon something to do what it claims it will do. Paul's usage of πίστις emphasizes the qualities and characteristics of what faith is. Thus, Paul is pointing out that faith, in its nature as a reliance or dependency upon something, remains available to the Corinthian believers in their service toward one another even though they do not have the complete revelation of God's instruction at that moment.

The word "hope" is translated from the Koine Greek word ἐλπίς ("el-pis") which more literally means, "confident expectation of a certainly future reality, based on response." It identifies an individual's expectation about receiving an activity or event that has been promised to come in the future. If the character of the promiser is credible and trustworthy, then an individual can rest at ease in full confidence that what has been promised or revealed will indeed occur. Hope itself is based on response to the character and ability of the one who has made the promise or revelation about the future. Paul's reference to hope puts emphasis on the qualities and characteristics of what hope is. Despite not having the full revelation of God yet, the Corinthian believers did indeed have the promises of God from which they could confidently expect their future and its eternal rewards as they fulfilled their role of service in the body.

The word "love" is translated from the Koine Greek word ἀγάπη ("a-ga-pae") which more literally means, "self-sacrificial, unconditional love that manifests itself in being given regardless of the response it receives because of the character and integrity of the one loving who pursues what is best for the one being loved, based on response." It identifies the highest form of love; a love which comes from the character of an individual towards others without any concern with the others' reciprocation or response. It is based on response in that it responds to the needs of the individual being loved and not his character or behavior.

The word "abides" is translated from the Koine Greek word μένει ("me-nei") which more literally means, "it really performs the continuous type of action to remain in a place wherein one makes his dwelling for a time." It identifies a semi-permanent or permanent dwelling place for something that acts as a home or base of operation.

Each of the attributes mentioned by Paul is focused on individually to identify that each of those three attributes continue to make their dwelling place in the Church Age while the revelation of God's instruction unfolds unto its completion. Each of the attributes can be used by believers in the spiritual life as they serve fellow members of the body of Christ. Yet, because the nature of unconditional love is the pursuit of what is best for another apart from his behavior, it is the greatest attribute for service.