

THE LESSON OUTLINE.

A Study in Charity.

I. THE INDISPENSABILITY OF LOVE.

*Though I have all faith and have not charity,
I am nothing.* v. 2.

Love is the fulfilling of the law. Rom.
13. 10.

Without me ye can do nothing. John 15. 5.

II. THE TRAITS OF LOVE.

*Suffereth long, and is kind . . . thinketh no
evil.* v. 4. 5.

Love worketh no ill to his neighbor. Rom.
13. 10.

Love covereth all sins. Prov. 10. 12.

III. THE PERMANENCE OF LOVE.

Charity never faileth. v. 8.

Many waters cannot quench love. Sol.
Song. 8. 7.

I have loved thee with an everlasting love.
Jer. 31. 3.

IV. THE GREATNESS OF LOVE.

The greatest of these is charity. v. 13.

He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God.
1 John 4. 16.

Everyone that loveth is born of God, and
knoweth God. 1 John 4. 7.

EXPLANATORY NOTES.

This lesson, like the last, is selected from Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians. The church at Corinth was torn by factions, and misunderstandings had so multiplied that the graces of Christian character were in danger of dying away. Usually when Christians "lose their first love" they do not become out-and-out sinners; and often "backsliders" are the most eager and combative advocates of the forms and shows of religion. It need not surprise us, therefore, that in Corinth some of the quarrelsome Christians aspired to the miraculous gift of tongues, some claimed to be prophets and others to be miracle workers, some made great sacrifices of worldly goods on behalf of the poor, and others showed eagerness to be persecuted for righteousness' sake. Meanwhile genuine Christian love was imperceptibly slipping out of their hearts. Many a modern church has had episodes in its history like this of the church of Corinth; and such episodes are immeasurably perilous. The readiness of the Corinthian Christians to turn to Paul as arbitrator and religious guide was, however, a wholesome symptom. They seem to have formulated their troubles into a series of questions which covered many phases of ecclesiastical, social, and domestic life. In answering these questions Paul evades nothing, makes clear distinction between his own judgment and revelations by the divine Spirit, and marshals his facts and arguments in masterly fashion. Then, in the midst of his discussion, he suddenly unveils the one essential trouble of the Corinthian church—lack of love. The tones of the debater soften as he chants this matchless psalm of love. Here is the underlying virtue of all Christian life. The chapter divides itself into three paragraphs, which prove the worthlessness of every virtue if love be wanting, present a beautiful picture of love, and contrast our progress through transient developments with the permanence of the three graces, Faith, Hope, and Love; "and the greatest of these is love."

Verse 1. *Though* ["If"] *I speak.* Christianity has always placed a high estimate on consecrated speech. *The tongues of men and of angels.* The miraculous "gift of tongues," like most other spiritual gifts, had been occasionally used for mere ostentation. Most that we know of this early Christian phenomenon comes from Luke's account of the pentecostal blessing and from Paul's recurring allusions in his epistles. The phrase "of angels" would indicate that the words spoken under superhuman pressure were not always in human language. *Have not charity.* By a gradual change in meaning "charity" now stands for love in endeavor rather than for the principle or passion which starts the endeavor. When our Bible was translated the older meaning was the popular one, and "charity" here means not alms nor any sort of beneficence, but LOVE. *Sounding brass* *Spain*

bronze or copper. Brass, as we know it, is a modern invention. The allusion here is not to musical instruments such as are used by our "bands," but to the unmusical noise made by a large thin piece of echoing metal. *A tinkling* ["clanging"] *cymbal.* The metal cups called cymbals when struck together give forth noise rather than music. To no one without refined musical taste would such similes as these be apt to come. The entire verse may be paraphrased as follows: "The highest eloquence about the Gospel without love in the heart is empty words."

2. Prophecy. Inspired teaching, here as often elsewhere including the foretelling of the future. *Understand.* "Know." *Mysteries and knowledge* are a pair of phrases which together comprehend all the deep things of God. The false religions of antiquity had their "mysteries" as