



LESSON VIII.—FEBRUARY 22.

1 Corinthians xiii., 1-13.

Golden Text.

Now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity. 1 Cor. xiii., 13.

Home Readings.

Monday, Feb. 16.—1 Cor. xiii., 1-13.
 Tuesday, Feb. 17.—1 John ii., 1-11.
 Wednesday, Feb. 18.—1 John iii., 14-24.
 Thursday, Feb. 19.—1 John iv., 7-21.
 Friday, Feb. 20.—1 John v., 1-11.
 Saturday, Feb. 21.—John xv., 7-17.
 Sunday, Feb. 22.—Rom. xiii., 1-14.

(By R. M. Kurtz.)

1. Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

2. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.

3. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

4. Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up.

5. Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil.

6. Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;

7. Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

8. Charity never faileth; but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.

9. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.

10. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

11. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish thoughts.

12. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face; now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

13. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

TIME, PLACE AND CIRCUMSTANCES.

Two weeks ago we took up for study Paul's work at the city of Corinth, and last week the lesson was taken from his first epistle to the Corinthian church. We learned then that one must be willing to give up doubtful indulgences, not alone for his own personal good, but for the sake of his influence upon his fellow men. Last week's lesson was a sort of negative view of this Christian virtue; we were shown there what we must not do, if we would follow Christ and seek to protect one another from falling into temptation. This week we take up the positive side of the matter. The time and place are the same as for last week's lesson. Paul is writing from Ephesus, about the year 56 or 57 A.D. He is giving instruction to the Christians at Corinth as to their lives and conduct, and God has preserved these letters to us for our benefit as well. As we study it, let us keep in mind the godless, wicked and cruel age in which it was written. What a wonderful and new teaching it was for those times!

Before taking up the particular verses of the lesson, let us glance at the chapter and see what its general idea and its plan are. The subject is 'charity,' or more correctly, 'love.' The word here translated 'charity' occurs over a hundred times in the New Testament and in most of those places is translated 'love.' Paul proceeds to show the great worth of love as compared with six distinct Christian virtues and characteristics.

Eloquence, the gift of tongues.
 Prophecy, insight into the future.
 Knowledge, power to solve mysteries.
 Faith, to accomplish great things.
 Benevolence, giving freely to the poor.
 Self-sacrifice willing to suffer martyrdom.

After he has shown what this love surpasses, Paul then proceeds to tell us how it manifests itself, and how permanent it is. In the first verse, he says, that, even though he be gifted with the tongues of men and angels, it amounts to little, unless he has love with it. A mere gift amounts to little. Much eloquence is devoted to unworthy purposes, or the speaker is not sincere, or perhaps speaks only to please and entertain his hearers. But if he has with it the love of which Paul speaks, he will have a yearning to help and uplift men with his voice and to spread truth among them. The very spirit of a man enters into what he says, and appeals to others as no beautiful words could do alone. The same truth applies to other things as well. Prophecy and knowledge and even faith amount to little without the quality that gives warmth and light and fruitfulness to our lives. The prophet may be able to foretell the future and still not himself live more than a cold and empty life. The philosopher may penetrate some of the mysteries of the world about him, but what does it amount to in his relation to God and his fellow-men, if he have no love in his heart? Again, one may have such faith in God's power and in his willingness to answer prayer that he can perform miracles, yet even this is a small thing without the spirit of love. A man can give all he has for the poor and be willing to suffer martyrdom, still it does not follow that he has a genuine love in his heart. He can be a great giver, yet his motive may be wrong. He may feel conscience-stricken at so much poverty and suffering about him and give for its relief, because he cannot be at peace unless he does so. Or he may love the name of a philanthropist and give for that reason. The Pharisee could say as he prayed, 'I give tithes of all that I possess,' yet this could not purchase the favor of God. Even to sacrifice one's life is not enough. Among the heathen are those whose lives are spent in self-inflicted torture, because they hope thereby to secure a better lot in the future yet is this a Christian virtue?

Paul now turns to describe how love makes itself known. You will notice that he does not give an exact definition of love, as one of our text books at school would define anything for us. But when it comes to a definition of God himself we are told that 'God is love.' In these three words we have the grandest truth that can be spoken. So love is then the very being of God! No wonder that Paul is content with showing its manifestations, and does not seek to limit our conception of it by a definition! God is thus, through his inspired writer, leading us to cultivate the divine nature within ourselves, for we are invited and privileged to become his sons.

In describing to us the way that love manifests itself Paul says, that it 'suffereth long, and is kind.' This is a simple statement, but what a test of character it contains! Most of us are kind to friends who treat us well, and even to strangers against whom we know nothing. But how many will persistently show forth love and helpfulness in spite of ill-treatment, or of the dislike of anyone. There are thousands of 'fair weather Christians,' who do many good things as long as their Christian love and patience is not tested. When the storm comes they fail. But this love is long-suffering and kind. It is not envious, in other words, it is unselfish. True love and selfishness cannot dwell together. It 'vaunteth not itself,'

that is, does not desire worldly admiration and applause.

Then love prompts good behavior, as we find from verse 5. It is not self-seeking, nor does it stir up trouble, and it 'taketh not account of evil,' as the Revised Version puts it. Love not only is not given to making trouble, from low or selfish motives, but it does not take evil into account. A person whose heart is full of this love, so that the life is guided thereby, does not govern his relations to others according to their treatment of himself, or their general conduct. He is equally ready to help and do good to all alike. Christianity, instead of narrowing a person's active virtues to a small circle of friends, to whom he may be indebted, broadens his life till he can see the importance and the value of a generous love that is ready for a kind word or deed at all times to all men, friends, enemies or strangers.

Moreover, this love is not pleased with unrighteousness but rather with the truth. A person full of this Christian love will replace the delight in iniquity with a delight in truth and uprightness.

Again love beareth all things. The original word conveys the idea of covering for protection, as a roof covers the house, to protect it from the rain and snow. It believeth all things; it is not given to doubt and suspicion. A trustful nature is usually found to be a loving one. Likewise it is hopeful and enduring. The cheerful burden bearers of the world perform a great mission for mankind. They not only accomplish hard tasks without grumbling, but they are so good-natured and hopeful about it that they save the world from falling into despair.

Now Paul turns to show how permanent this quality is. Love never fails. The time comes when prophecy is not needed, when the speaking in other tongues shall cease, and when our present knowledge shall vanish away. Now our knowledge is imperfect, but in the great future it shall be perfect. This idea is further illustrated by the child, whose small knowledge is to be laid aside for that of a grown man, and the mirror, in which one saw himself imperfectly. The mirrors of the ancients consisted mainly of small disks of polished metal, which reflected the light poorly and were often uneven, so that the image was distorted. But Paul looks forward to the time when he shall see and know perfectly.

Love and hope and faith shall continue forever. They are not alone elements of imperfect lives here on earth, as are other gifts mentioned, but are qualities of the soul, and shall be eternal. The greatest of them is love.

In connection with this lesson read the discourse on love in 1 John iv., 7-21.

C. E. Topic.

Sunday, Feb. 22.—Topic—An evening with home missions. Acts i., 6-8.

Junior C. E. Topic

LESSONS FROM THE ARK BUILDER.

Monday, Feb. 16.—Noah's obedience. Gen. vii., 5.

Tuesday, Feb. 17.—Noah's righteousness. Gen. vi., 9.

Wednesday, Feb. 18.—Noah's salvation. Gen. vii., 23.

Thursday, Feb. 19.—Noah's doves. Gen. viii., 8-12.

Friday, Feb. 20.—Noah's offering. Gen. viii., 20.

Saturday, Feb. 21.—Noah's rainbow. Gen. ix., 16.

Sunday, Feb. 22.—Topic—What the ark-builder teaches me. Gen. vi., 11-22. Heb. xi., 7.

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