

1 Corinthians 13

by Dick B.

(The Parts Dr. Bob Considered “Absolutely Essential”)

1 Corinthians 13 is often called the Bible's “love” chapter because it focuses on the importance of love in the Christian's life. In the King James Version, the word “charity” is used, but the underlying Greek word is *agape*, which is more properly translated “love.” And the most frequently quoted characteristics of love are contained in the following verses from the King James Version of the Bible (which is the version the A.A. pioneers used):

Charity [love] suffereth long, *and* is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth (1 Corinthians 13:4-6).

The New International Version, which is much used today, renders 1 Corinthians 13:4-6:

Love is patient, love is kind . It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

One of the most popular books in early A.A. was Professor Henry Drummond's study of 1 Corinthians 13. The title of the book, *The Greatest Thing in the World*, was taken from the last verse of the Corinthians chapter, which reads:

And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these *is* charity (1 Corinthians 13:13).

Drummond's book was part of Dr. Bob's library, and a copy was still owned by Dr. Bob's family when the author interviewed Dr. Bob's son and daughter several years ago. A.A. In much earlier years, A.A. Oldtimer Bob E. had sent a memo to Bill Wilson's wife, Lois, in which Bob E. listed *The Greatest Thing in the World* as one of three books Dr. Bob regularly provided to alcoholics with whom he worked. In fact, Dr. Bob's enthusiasm for Drummond's book is dramatized by the following remarks of the wife of A.A. Oldtimer Clarence S. Dorothy S. M. said:

Once, when I was working on a woman in Cleveland, I called and asked him [Dr. Bob], “What do I do for somebody who is going into D.T.'s?” He told me to give her the medication, and he said, “When she comes out of it and she decides she wants to be a different woman, get her Drummond's ‘The Greatest Thing in the World.’ Tell her to read it through every day for 30 days, and she'll be a different woman”(See *DR. BOB and the Good Oldtimers*, p. 310).

Henry Drummond himself had made a similar suggestion half a century earlier, at the close of the lecture in which he delivered his “greatest thing in the world” address (which later became incorporated in the best-selling) book. Drummond said:

Now I have all but finished. How many of you will join me in reading this chapter [1 Corinthians 13] once a week for the next three months? A man did that once and it changed his whole life.

Will you do it? It is for the greatest thing in the world. You might begin by reading it every day, especially the verses which describe the perfect character. "Love suffereth long, and is kind; loveth envieth not; love vaunteth not itself." Get these ingredients into your life (See Drummond, *The Greatest Thing in the World*, p 53).

The important Drummond influence on A.A. from 1 Corinthians 13 can be seen from Drummond's own simplified description of love's *ingredients*. Drummond listed nine ingredients of "love" as he saw love specifically defined in that portion of that chapter of the Bible (See Drummond, *The Greatest Thing in the World*, pp. 26-27). And we here set them forth with references to correlative A.A. ideas and correlative Bible verses:

Drummond's Explanation Authorized (King James) NIV Version A.A. Big Book 3rd ed.
Examples

1. Patience "Love suffereth long." Patient p. 67, 70, 83 111, 163.
2. Kindness "And is kind." Kind pp. 67, 82, 83, 86
3. Generosity "Love envieth not." Does not envy pp. 145, *cf.* 82
4. Humility "Love vaunteth not itself, is not Does not boast pp. 13, 57, 68, puffed up" 87-88
5. Courtesy "Doth not behave itself is not proud p. 69 unseemly"
6. Unselfishness "Seeketh not her own." not self-seeking pp. xxv, 93, 127
7. Good Temper "Is not easily provoked." not easily angered pp. 19, 67, 70, 83-84, 125, 118
8. Guilelessness "Thinketh no evil." keeps no record of pp. 19, 67, 70, 83- wrongs 84, 118, 125
9. Sincerity "Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but does not delight in pp. xiv, xxvii, 13 rejoiceth in the truth"
evil but rejoices with 26, 28, 32, 44, the truth 47, 55, 57-58, 63-65, 67, 70, 73, 117, 140, 145

Dr. Bob stressed that essence of A.A.'s steps could be simmered down to love and service (See *DR. BOB and the Good Oldtimers*, p. 338). He presented God as a God of love. (See *DR. BOB and the Good Oldtimers*, p. 110). Dr. Bob's wife, Anne, frequently quoted the "God is love" verses in 1 John 4:8; 4:16 (*DR. BOB and the Good Oldtimers*, pp. 116-17). Dr. Bob and Anne

both studied Toyohiko Kagawa's book, *Love: The Law of Life*, and Kagawa devoted an entire chapter of that book not only to 1 Corinthians 13, but also to Drummond's analysis of chapter Thirteen of 1 Corinthians in Drummond's *The Greatest Thing in the World*. Hence there was a great deal of emphasis among the A.A. pioneers of the spiritual principle of love as it is defined in the Bible. In fact, the Big Book itself talks repeatedly of the principle of love (Big Book, pp. 83-84, 86, 118, 122, 153).

Further explaining the great store placed in the Corinthians love principle is Jesus Christ's well-known message, as stated in Mark 12:30-31. These Gospel verses deal with what Jesus called the two great commandments:

And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength; this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.

The foregoing verses, from the Gospel of Mark in the New Testament, were cited for the standard of "Absolute Love," as it was discussed in AA of Akron's *A Manual for Alcoholics Anonymous* (one of the four pamphlets commissioned by Dr. Bob for use among early AAs). The Old Testament also contained the very same commandments to which Jesus referred, underlining the importance of love of God and of neighbor in the commandments of the Bible.

From examining 1 Corinthians 13; from the frequent mention of "love" in the Big Book; from studying the reading and remarks of Dr. Bob and Anne; from Bill Wilson's mention of Corinthians; and from the repeated mention of 1 Corinthians 13 in A.A.'s religious sources, the details of the Corinthians impact on A.A. seem quite clear. The love "ingredients" as they were summarized by Henry Drummond permeate A.A.'s basic text and can fairly be proclaimed to be among those "principles to be practiced" at the level of A.A.'s Twelfth Step. The basic principle is love. The component virtues are patience; tolerance; kindness; humility; honesty; unselfishness; consideration for others; and the avoidance of anger, jealousy, envy, pride, and wrongdoing.

As previously covered, almost every one of these virtues can be found as well in Jesus' sermon on the mount and the Book of James. In the sermon on the mount, from the standpoint of defining elements of seeking, receiving, and doing the will of God. And, in James, from the standpoint of action and service to God and service to others through reliance upon God.

These were also the very the principles of love and service of which Dr. Bob spoke in his farewell address and defined as the essence of A.A.'s spiritual program of recovery.