

Love Bears All Things

1 Corinthians 13:4–7

I lived in Naha City, Okinawa Prefecture for four years in the latter half of the 1980s due to a transfer in my former employment. It was at Naha Baptist Church that I began my journey as a believer. I fondly recall a gospel café in Kumemachi called Agape (the love of God).

When Paul speaks of love (agapē), he points to the death on the cross that God revealed in Christ. It is the self-sacrifice by which God handed over His only Son to death in order to love humankind, created in His own likeness. This love is conveyed to us through the Holy Spirit. Agapē is the love revealed in the atoning death, which cannot be understood apart from the Holy Spirit. Agapē is patient and kind; it does not envy. Paul does not attribute these verbs to human beings, nor even to Christians — such is the strength of this love.

In the Corinthian church at the time there were those known as Gnostics. They were selfish, puffed up by their own knowledge, and unhesitatingly ignored those in weaker positions. Knowing this situation, Paul wrote to them that agapē does not boast or become proud. Agapē, in verse 7, “believes all things and hopes all things”;

that is, it embraces both faith and hope. Christ bore all things upon the cross. Even enduring God's abandonment, He accomplished human salvation through His atoning death. Finally, in 13:13, Paul emphasises "faith, hope, and love"; and of these, agapē is the greatest.

When one is told to put such love into practice, the words "the stumbling block of the cross" (Galatians 5:11) naturally come to mind for those who are no more than ordinary human beings. Modern society too is filled with a worldview similar to ancient Gnosticism. Yet love never ends. It bears all things and leads to the completion of salvation. Even in our life in this world, Paul teaches us to walk towards the kingdom of God, overflowing with love.