

# Chiastic Hymn to Charity

## 1Cor 12:31–14:1

- A** Seek after the *greatest* gifts, and indeed here is the *greatest* way:
- B** If I speak in *tongues* with men, yea even with angels  
But have not love  
I am but raucous bronze and rattling cymbals.  
If I have the gift of *prophecy* and know *mysteries* all and all knowledge  
But have not love  
I am nothing.  
If I give away all I have or lay down my body to get glory  
But have not love  
I have gotten absolutely nothing.
- C** Love is *patient* toward others  
*Mercifully* kind is love.
- D** Not greedy  
Not a show-off  
Not conceited  
Not shameless  
Not with ulterior design, selfishness or cliquishness  
Not irritable  
Does not rationalize wickedness  
Has no joy when things are not right  
But rejoices in truth.
- C'** Love is *patient* under all circumstances  
Always believing  
Always hoping  
Love endures to the end.
- B'** Love will never lose its importance  
But *prophecy* will come to an end  
Speaking in *tongues* will cease  
And some day knowing *mysteries* will be nothing special.  
For now we just know little bits  
And we prophesy of little glimpses  
But when Christ comes all will be perfectly whole  
And all our partial experiences will be no more.  
When I was a child  
I spoke as a child  
I had the intellect of a child  
I figured like a child  
When I became a man  
I had no more use for childish things.  
For now we just see faint images of our real selves  
But then we shall see face to face  
Now we just know little bits  
But then I shall know and be known completely.  
What lasts are faith, hope, love, these three,
- A'** But the *greatest* of these is love.

# Chiasmus in the New Testament

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## Explanation

Chiasmus and several varieties of inverted parallel structures are found in many places in the New Testament. In reading Bible commentaries, students will often encounter figures displaying chiasmic patterns. The following charts offer a few samples of such literary arrangements. Chart 15-18 lays out the elegant configuration of the Hymn to Charity (*Agape*) found in 1 Corinthians 13; Paul may have imported or modified this poetical unit from some other source. Chart 15-19 helps a reader to follow the logic of the Epistle to the Galatians, focusing especially on the central chiasm in Galatians 4:1–7. Chart 15-20 gives an overview of the letter of Paul to Philemon. The argument of the Epistle to the Hebrews also has a central pivot point, drawing attention to Jesus Christ as the new High Priest. These and many other examples show that Paul and other writers of the New Testament were skilled writers, conversant with the literary styles of their day.

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## References

- John W. Welch and Daniel B. McKinley, *Chiasmus Bibliography* (Provo, Utah: Research Press, 1999), 116–45.
- Nils W. Lund, *Chiasmus in the New Testament* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1942).
- John W. Welch, “Chiasmus in the New Testament,” in *Chiasmus in Antiquity*, ed. John W. Welch (Hildesheim, Germany: Gerstenberg, 1981), 211–49.
- On chiasmus in 1 Corinthians, see Lund, 176; Welch, 215–16; in Galatians, see Welch, 214; in Philemon see, Thomas Boys, *Tactica Sacra* (London: Hamilton, 1824), 65–67; Lund, 219; Welch, 225–26; in Hebrews, see Welch, 220.