The Supreme Importance of Promoting Equity, Kindness, and Humility: A Descriptive and Comparative Analysis of Micah 6:1–16 and 1 Corinthians 13:1–13

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Abstract

This journal article undertakes a descriptive and comparative analysis of Micah 6:1–16 and 1 Corinthians 13:1–13. One incentive for doing so is that both passages clarify in an expansive manner the Lord's command in Leviticus 19:18 for his children to show godly compassion to others. This priority is more fully developed in the major claim of the article, namely, that promoting equity, kindness, and humility is of supreme importance. A second incentive is that deliberating the meaning and significance of these virtues finds its inspirational and theological roots in the Judeo-Christian canon. A third incentive is that exploring and evaluating the intertextual dialogue between these two passages appears to be a major lacuna in the scholarly literature. This deficit in the academic research becomes even more acute when the focus is narrowed to the topic under consideration.

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1   The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

1. Introduction

From the earliest days of Paul's evangelistic ministry, he emphasised the supreme importance of promoting equity, kindness, and humility. A case in point is his letter to the Galatians, which many scholars think was one of the earliest of the apostle's epistles recorded in the New Testament.[2] In 5:13–14, Paul drew a contrast between two stark options. The first involved being controlled by one's aberrant desires, while the second alternative prioritized using one's God-given freedom in baptismal union with the Son as an occasion to minister to others with Christlike love.[3]

The Greek verb rendered 'serve' (v. 13) is a strong term often used for slavery.[4] Paul urged the Galatians not to enslave themselves to the Mosaic Law; instead, Jesus freed them to become bondservants of one another. Paul stated that when Christians love and assist others, they fulfil the essence of the Law (v. 14).[5] The apostle quoted from the Septuagint version of Leviticus 19:18[6] to stress that believers are closest to pleasing God and keeping each and every commandment when they sacrificially reach out to others with the Saviour's love.[7]

Paul's citation of Leviticus 19:18 points to a broader truth, namely, that promoting equity, kindness, and humility—which is the primary focus of this essay—finds its inspirational and theological roots in the Hebrew sacred writings. This is evident, for example, in verse 34, where the Lord, through Moses,[8] directed the Israelites to show 'love' to foreigners dwelling in the promised land.[9] Deuteronomy 10:19 incentivises this stance by adding that prior to Israel's exodus, they too were 'foreigners in Egypt'.

Outside the Pentateuch, Isaiah 1:16–17 discloses that the people of Judah were not left directionless concerning how the Lord wanted them to treat others. God commanded them to abandon wickedness and become people of integrity and virtue. This included fostering 'justice', especially by helping the downtrodden, and championing the cause of the destitute.[10] Similarly, Jeremiah 7:5–6 implores the people of God to be humane in their dealings with others, and discontinue exploiting the marginalised members of society. Likewise, Hosea 6:6 reveals that the Creator took immensely more delight in acts characterised by 'mercy' than in innumerable animal sacrifices.[11] In a corresponding manner, Amos 5:23–24 indicates that God more highly valued the presence of 'justice' and 'righteousness' than the clamour produced by singing and stringed instruments.[12]

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2 Cf. Brown and Mangum (2012).

3 In Galatians 5:13, Paul used the Greek noun ἀφορμή to refer to a 'pretext', 'opportunity', or 'occasion' in which one either gratified the 'flesh' or humbly reached out to those in need with unmitigated kindness and compassion; cf. Danker (2000); Louw and Nida (1989); Swanson (1997). In this verse, the noun, σάρξ, which is translated 'flesh', refers to a person's temporal existence that is totally controlled by sin; cf. Mangum (2014); Sand (1990); Spicq (1994).

4 Δουλεύω is the Greek verb Paul used in Galatians 5:13, with an emphasis on ministering to others with an attitude of humility; cf. Danker (2000); Louw and Nida (1989); Silva (2014).

5 Paul used the perfect passive indicative form of the Greek verb πληρόω to indicate that the Mosaic Law was not only fulfilled in the past, but also remained fulfilled in the present; cf. Heiser and Setterholm (2013).

6 Galatians 5:14 is one of 30 times in the letter where Paul quotes from the Old Testament; cf. Brannan and Jackson (2015); Silva (2007:809-10).

7 In Leviticus 19:18, the Hebrew verb, אָהַב, which is rendered 'love', denotes numerous forms of charity and goodwill shown toward a diverse range of individuals, including family members, friends, neighbours, and sojourners; cf. Els (1997a); Wallis (2015a); Jenni (1997).

8 Moses is the presumed author of the Pentateuch, through whom the Lord spoke (cf. Lev. 19:1).

9 The Hebrew noun, גֵּר, which is translated 'foreigner' (Lev. 19:34), refers to individuals whose lineage or ethnicity was non-Israelite; cf. Konel (1997); Mangum (2014); Stigers (1980a).

10 The Hebrew noun, מִשְׁפָּט, which is translated 'justice' (Isa. 1:17), concerns legal disputes and claims that are adjudicated by civil

authorities in an impartial, evenhanded manner according to the prescribed regulatory norms recorded in the Pentateuch; cf. Culver (1980a); Enns (1997); Johnson (2015a).

11 The Hebrew noun, חֶסֶד, which is rendered 'mercy' (Hos. 6:6), denotes personal relationships that are characterized by covenantal loyalty and commitment, along with forbearance and forgiveness; cf. Baer and Gordon (1997); Stoebe (1997b); Zobel (2015).

12 The Hebrew noun, צְדָקָה, which is translated 'righteousness' (Amos 5:24), refers to behaviour that conforms to the highest ethical standards found in the Mosaic Law, including the presence of honesty, rectitude, and trustworthiness; cf. Johnson (2015b); Reimer (1997); Stigers (1980b).

13 Cf. John 1:1, 14, 18. Keener (2010:281) proposes that the fourth Evangelist addressed a 'community of predominantly Jewish Christians' who, due to their 'faith in Jesus', had been 'rejected by most of their non-Christian Jewish communities'. One can imagine the religious élite of the day making the following claims: Judaism is a 'religion of Torah'; and, the 'prophetic, messianic Jesus movement has departed from proper observance of God's Word (particularly from orthodox monotheism)' (364). In turn, the fourth Evangelist responded in his Gospel with these counterclaims: the Messiah is the 'full embodiment of Torah' and completes 'what was partial (but actually present) in Torah'; the Son 'embodies the hope of Judaism' (417); the decision to become a follower of the Saviour 'entails true observance of Torah'; and, because 'Jesus himself is God's Word', no person is able to 'genuinely observe Torah without following Jesus' (364).

14 Cf. Pss 139:19-22; 140:9-11.

15 The Greek verb for 'love' in Matt. 5:43 and 44 is ἀγαπάω. The term is often used in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew verb אָהַב (cf. fn 7). Ἀγαπάω refers to unselfish compassion and unconditional

The preceding emphases on the supreme importance of promoting equity, kindness, and humility are likewise found in the New Testament. Worthy of mention is Jesus, who as the embodiment of the Torah,[13] stressed the value of the three preceding virtues flourishing among his followers. For instance, in Matthew 5:43–45, the Saviour drew attention to the common dictum of showing compassion to one's neighbours and despising one's enemies.[14] In contrast, Jesus not only commanded his disciples to be charitable toward their adversaries, but also to pray for those who abused them.[15] In turn, such merciful behaviour would demonstrate that Jesus' followers were legitimate children of their heavenly Father.

Consider, as well, an episode recorded in Matthew and Mark that occurred during the final week of Jesus' earthly ministry.[16] An expert in the interpretation of the Mosaic Law attempted to entrap Jesus with an intensely debated question. The query concerned identifying the foremost commandment in the Pentateuch. In response, Jesus gave pride of place to Deuteronomy 6:5, which stressed loving God with all one's being. Next, Jesus cited Leviticus 19:18 to underscore the imperative to love others unstintingly. Along with Galatians 5:14, Paul made a similar point in Romans 13:9–10. He noted that when the Saviour's love ruled in a believer's heart, that person never desired another individual's harm; instead, godly compassion for others leads to a fulfilment of all that the Mosaic legal code demanded.

James 2:8 gives further prominence to Leviticus 19:18 by referring to it as the 'royal law'. The reasoning underpinning this declaration is that the directive articulates the utmost desire of the Suzerain of the universe. Indeed, among all the commandments given by God, this one signifies the heart of whatever is taught and enjoined in Scripture. James 2:8 builds on the preceding theological truth by noting that the 'royal law' would become the guiding principle in the future messianic kingdom. The author observed that believers cannot heed the most important directive in Scripture and discriminate against others at the same time.

To recap what has been stated, the entirety of the Judeo-Christian canon accentuates the supreme importance of promoting equity, kindness, and humility. The preceding statement is the major claim of this essay. Galatians 6:10 puts a fine point on this issue by revealing that the Creator has provided strategic opportunities for believers to reach out to others in need. In turn, Jesus' followers should recognise these occasions and eagerly act on them. After all, helping unbelievers is an excellent way to witness, without using words, to God's goodness and grace. For all that, believers should be especially eager to come to the aid of other Christians, since they are part of God's spiritual family.

Along with the deliberation of relevant Old and New Testament passages undertaken thus far, there is value in exploring more deeply the central thesis of this essay by undertaking a comparative analysis of two representative passages of Scripture, one from the Old Testament and the other from the Christian New Testament. Admittedly, there are numerous worthwhile texts that could be chosen (and possibly made the focus of further research); however, the limitation of space in this journal article necessitates dealing with only two passages, namely, Micah 6:1–16 and 1 Corinthians 13:1–13. The reason for this selection is as follows.

To begin, the aforementioned pair are seminal, well-known, and highly-esteemed texts from each Testament of the Judeo-Christian canon that, in their respective ways, deal with the supreme importance of promoting equity, kindness, and humility. The descriptive analysis in the upcoming sections validates this assessment. Further incentive is connected with the realisation that there is a paucity of scholarly research attempting the upcoming endeavour.

On the one hand, each text in isolation receives considerable literary, exegetical, and theological treatment; yet, on the other hand, exploring and evaluating the potential intertextual dialogue between these two passages—particularly in the manner done below—appears to be a major lacuna in the scholarly literature.[17] This deficit in the academic research becomes even more acute when the prism is narrowed to the topic under consideration. There is, then, sufficient warrant for the study appearing in this journal article.

2. A Descriptive Analysis of Micah 6:1-16[18]

The politics during the latter part of the eighth century BCE, when Micah prophesied,[19] shaped his message. Both the southern kingdom of Judah and the northern kingdom of Israel had been previously enjoying a time of peace and prosperity; yet, rather than growing closer to God out of gratitude for this wealth, Judah and Israel had slipped into moral bankruptcy. Those who became prosperous during this time ruthlessly exploited the poor. Consequently, Micah foretold the fall of both Samaria and Jerusalem.

Of all people, the civil and religious leaders of Judah and Israel should have understood how important maintaining justice was to the social fabric of their respective nations. The magistrates often heard and settled disputes among the people, and the decisions made by the leaders were final. The people living in Judah and

kindness. Such love is prompted as much by will as by emotion. That said, as Ciampa and Rosner (2010:639) elucidate, 'while love is not just a feeling, it is not less than or other than a feeling'. Godly compassion seeks to reach out to others in need, even when the object seems unworthy of being loved; cf. Louw and Nida (1989); Schneider (1990a); Stauffer (1964).

16 Cf. Matt. 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-31.

17 The assessment is based on a search through EbscoHost, JSTOR, Sabinet, WorldCat, and Google Scholar, which includes print books, e-books, journal articles, theses, and dissertations in libraries worldwide. The endeavour involved culling through each of the databases while attempting to coordinate both passages, doing searches on the individual passages and combing through the results for some reference to the other passage, scanning through subject headings of each passage while looking for some subject that might possibly refer to the content of the other passage, and broadening out the query to include 'love and mercy' as well as '*misphat* and *hesed*'. The endeavour did not surface any studies exploring the potential intertextual dialogue between Mic. 6 and 1 Cor. 13.

18 The following are the representative secondary sources that have influenced the descriptive analysis of Micah 6:1-16: Allen (1983); Andersen and Freedman (2006); Barker (1998); Brueggemann (1997); Caird (1980); Chisholm (1991); Clark and Mundhenk (1982); Dyrness (1977); Feinberg (1979); Ferreiro (2003); Goldingay (2016); Gossai (1993); Hillers (1984); Jacob (1958); Kaiser (2008); Keil (1982); Master (2009); McComiskey (1985); Schreiner (2013); Simundson (1996); Smith (1993); Smith (1984; 1994); Smith-Christopher (2015); Vos (2000); Waltke (1988; 2007); Waltke and Yu (2007); Wolff (1990); Zvi (2000).

19 Cf. Mic. 1:1.

20 The Hebrew verb in Mic. 6:1 is שָׁמַע. The lexical emphasis is on paying attention to and heeding what is heard being declared; cf. Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm (2000); Rüterswörden (2015); Schult (1997).

21 Cf. Mic. 1:2; 3:1.

22 For a deliberation of the literary coherence of Mic. 6, cf. Allen (1983:364). The author explains that the 'passage is held together as a unit not only by the overall covenant theme, but also by the interlocking effects of repeated or complimentary terms and ideas.' Also, cf. fn 27 for an overview of the broad structural elements of the covenant lawsuit motif found in Mic. 6.

23 An examination of the academic literature indicates there is no scholarly consensus regarding the literary structure of Mic. 6. The author considers the basic demarcation appearing here to be a reasonable and serviceable approach for the purposes of this study.

24 Cf. Deut. 32; Ps 50; Isa. 1:2–3.

25 Cf. Lev. 26:16, 26; Deut. 28:18, 40, 51.

26 The Hebrew verb in Mic. 6:1 is רִיב; cf. Isa. 3:13; Jer. 2:9; Hos. 4:1; Bracke (1997); Brown, Driver, and Briggs (2000); Culver (1980b).

27 For a detailed analysis of the covenant lawsuit motif's juridical features, especially within the *Sitz im Leben* (or sociological setting) of the ancient Near East, cf. Davidson (2010); Huffmon (1959); Limburg (1969). When applied to Mic. 6, the broad structural elements are as follows: (1) introduction of the suzerain and call to judgment (preamble), vv. 1-2; (2) list of witnesses (mountains and hills), also vv. 1-2; (3) review of the suzerain's benevolent acts on behalf of the vassal (historical prologue), vv. 3-5; (4) review of the general covenant obligations, vv. 6-8; (5) violation of specific covenant obligations (indictments), vv. 9-12; (6) declaration of guilt (verdict), v. 13; and,

Israel looked to these rulers for equity. Regrettably, though, the princes of the southern and northern kingdoms perverted the administration of the Mosaic Law for their personal gain. The scales of jurisprudence especially favoured the wicked rich. Indeed, if the price was right, the courts would issue verdicts benefiting those offering substantial bribes.

The Hebrew verb rendered 'listen' (Mic. 6:1)[20] marks off the three major literary divisions of the book,[21] and signals that it records the Lord's judgment oracle, as delivered by his authorised spokesperson, Micah. Even so, there is no scholarly consensus regarding the literary structure and unity of Micah 6. As Clark and Mundhenk (1982) observe, some specialists think the passage is comprised of 'various paragraphs having little connection with each other'; in contrast, other specialists think the biblical text has a 'coherent flow of thought'.[22]

The second of the two preceding views is affirmed in this essay. In agreement with Andersen and Freedman (2006:501), from a literary perspective, the passage is divided into two main sections, as follows:[23] (1) the Lord's case against his people (vv. 1–8). Despite the nation's protestations and counter-claims, the evidence pointing to guilt was overwhelming and convincing;[24] and, (2) the Lord's verdict against his people (vv. 9–16). The judicial sentence is in keeping with the afflictions foretold in the Mosaic covenant.[25]

The Hebrew verb rendered 'plead your case' (Mic. 6:1) can also be translated 'defend yourself'.[26] It indicates that what follows in this chapter is a lawsuit speech in which the Lord presents the evidence and renders the verdict against his chosen people for violating the Mosaic covenant. The literary form is adapted from that found in international treaties used throughout the ancient Near East (especially among the Hittites) between suzerains and their vassals. In this cosmic courtroom scene, God is depicted as the plaintiff and prosecuting attorney, Micah is his accredited emissary, the mountains are the jury, and the covenant community is the accused.[27]

In verse 2, the same Hebrew noun is rendered 'accusation' and 'case' and has a similar range of meanings to the verb translated 'plead your case' in verse 1.[28] The noun signifies a controversy or complaint between two parties. In this instance, the Lord was bringing his indictment against his chosen people. This emphasis is reinforced by the verb rendered 'lodging a charge', which can also mean 'to dispute' or 'to contend' within a juridical context.[29] The idea is that God was establishing a legal proceeding against the covenant community based on irrefutable evidence.

The Creator called upon the 'mountains' (v. 1) and 'hills' to testify on his behalf in a cosmic court of law. Micah personified these inanimate objects as legal witnesses, who agreed with the Lord that his people violated the covenant.[30] In verse 2, the 'mountains' are paralleled by the 'enduring foundations of the earth'. Both were quite ancient and predated the history of Judah and Israel. Accordingly, they were sombre, quiet observers of what God's people had done. Waltke (2007:374) classifies Micah's dual reference to the 'lofty mountains' on land and the deep canyons in the oceans as a 'merism' that encompasses the entire planet. Similarly, Wolff (1990:147) explains that 'as the upper and lower outer limits, the two together point to the whole of the earthly cosmos'.[31]

Micah 6:1–2 reflects an ancient Hebrew conception of the universe in which God's people divided the world into heaven, earth, sea, and the underworld.[32] More specifically, they visualised the earth as being a flat, disk-shaped landmass that was surrounded by water. Pillars supported the ground, while mountains located on the distant horizon upheld the sky. The sky itself was thought to be a solid dome or tent-like structure on which the celestial bodies (namely, the sun, moon, and stars) were engraved and moved in tracks.

In this ancient three-tiered view of the cosmos, rain, hail, and snow (from an immense body of water located above the overarching sky) fell to earth through openings. God's temple was situated in the upper heavens, which in turn rested atop the sky (or lower heavens). The Jerusalem temple was the earthbound counterpart to the divine abode. The realm of the dead was considered a grimy and watery region located beneath the earth and called the underworld (or *Sheol*).

The reference in Micah 6:3 to 'My people'[33] served as a reminder of the covenant relationship between the Lord and the inhabitants of Judah and Israel. The two questions that follow suggest the southern and northern kingdoms accused God of failing to uphold his agreed-upon responsibilities. This mistaken notion is particularly evident in the Hebrew verb rendered 'burdened'.[34] The idea is that in some way the Lord had wearied and exhausted his people with his unreasonable demands.

Understandably, God did not want to leave room for either nation to claim that he—rather than they—was at fault. Neither Judah nor Israel could legitimately argue that the Creator had been unfaithful to his promises. Likewise, neither the southern nor northern kingdoms could rightfully claim that the stipulations of the Mosaic Law were either excessive or perverse. So, with the

(7) pronouncement of covenant curses (sentence), vv. 14–16.

28   The Hebrew noun appearing twice in Mic. 6:2 is רִיב; cf. Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm (2000); Mangum (2014); Swanson (2001).

29   Cf. Isa. 2:4; Mic. 4:3. The Hebrew verb in Mic. 6:2 is יָכַח; cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs (2000); Gilchrist (1980); Hartley (1997).

30   Cf. Deut. 4:26; 30:19; 31:28; 32:1; Ps 50:4; Isa. 1:2; 41:1; Jer. 2:12; Beck (2011); Ryken, Wilhoit, and Longman (1998).

31   Cf. Deut. 4:26; 30:19; 31:28; 32:1; Isa. 1:2.

32   Cf. Ps 82:5; Prov. 8:29; Isa. 24:18; Media, Hubbard, Ritzema, Watkins, and Wentz (2012).

33   עַמֶּ in the Hebrew text.

34   The Hebrew verb in Mic. 6:3 is לָאָה; cf. Bowling (1980); Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm (2000); Ringgren (2015a).

35 עֲנֵה בִי in the Hebrew text of Mic. 6:3.

36 Cf. Jer. 2:5.

37 The hiphil forms of each verb are הֶעֱלִתִיךָ and הֶלְאֵתִיךָ, respectively.

38 Cf. Exod. 13:3; Deut. 5:6; 6:12; Jer. 34:13.

39 Cf. Exod. 12:40–41.

40 The Hebrew verb in Mic. 6:4 is פָּדָה; cf. Deut. 7:8; 9:26; 13:5; Brown, Driver, and Briggs (2000); Mangum (2014); Stamm (1997).

41 Cf. Exod. 1:1–15:21.

42 Cf. Exod. 3:10.

43 Cf. Deut. 4:45.

44 Cf. Deut. 18:15.

45 Cf. Lev. 8.

46 Cf. Exod. 15:20.

47 Cf. Josh. 24:5; 1 Sam. 12:8; Pss 77:20; 105:26.

48 Cf. Num. 22–24.

49 Shittim was a plain in Moab on the east side of the Jordan River; cf. Negev (1990).

50 Gilgal was located on the west side of the Jordan River; cf. Hubbard (2005).

51 Cf. Josh. 3–4.

52 Possibly a priest or other religious official.

53 Allen (1983:369) observes that the discourse in Mic. 6:6–7 is comparable to an 'entrance liturgy' leading to the shrine in Jerusalem; cf. Ps 15:1; 24:3; Isa. 33:14.

statement 'Answer me',[35] God directed his people to confirm their grievances against him (that is, if they really could).[36]

In Micah 6:3, the Lord gave his chosen people an opportunity to substantiate how he had wronged them. The truth is that God had never been unreasonable or burdensome to Judah and Israel. In fact, he had lavished his unfailing love on both the southern and northern kingdoms. Simundson (1996:579) draws attention to the 'play on words' appearing in the Hebrew text of verses 3 and 4. When the hiphil form of the verb rendered 'wearied' (v. 3) is placed next to the hiphil form of the verb translated 'brought up' (v. 4), readers recognize that these terms 'sound very similar' in their pronunciation.[37] The accusation is that the 'great God who delivered' his 'people from Egypt has somehow become burdensome to them'; yet, as Allen (1983:366) portrays the divine response, 'I have not let you down—on the contrary, I brought you up'.

In verses 4 and 5, the Creator recounted at least four separate displays of his mercy toward the Twelve tribes during their infancy as his people. First, God mentioned how he had rescued them from slavery in Egypt.[38] Between the time of Joseph and Moses, the Israelites spent 430 years in Egypt.[39] The Hebrew verb translated 'redeemed' can also mean 'to ransom' and calls attention to all that God did on behalf of the Israelites to deliver them from servitude in Egypt.[40] This cruel taskmaster had forced the Israelites to do construction projects, but God used miracles to compel Pharaoh to let the Israelites go.[41]

Second, God mentioned the leaders he had given the nation. These individuals included Moses, the deliverer,[42] lawgiver,[43] and prophet;[44] Moses' brother, Aaron, the high priest;[45] and Miriam, their sister, a prophetess.[46] With such noteworthy servants of the Lord, the Israelites had exceptional guidance.[47]

Third, God recalled the incident in which he preserved the early Israelites from a threat presented by the Moabites. Balak, the king of Moab, had wanted the soothsayer, Balaam, to curse Israel, but instead God caused Balaam to bless the Israelites.[48] Fourth, God cited the young nation's final journey into the promised land, from Shittim[49] to Gilgal.[50] During that journey, God miraculously parted the Jordan River just as earlier he had divided the Red Sea.[51] By rehearsing these historic episodes, the Lord wanted his people to be certain of his upright acts, including how he had always treated them faithfully and fairly.

Previously, in Micah 6:3, the Lord asked his people what fault they found in him. Now, a new voice spoke in verses 6 and 7. God's envoy posed as an inquiring worshipper[52] at the access point to the Jerusalem temple.[53] As a representative of the entire covenant

community, he responded to God's accusation in a way that reflected the pathetic spiritual state of his chosen people.

The speaker wanted to know what kind of sacrifices the exalted Lord required to appease his anger for Judah's villainy and Israel's misdeeds.[54] The petitioner's suggestions begin with the typical, and quickly go to the extreme. Did almighty God want his people to bow before him with highly prized offerings, especially the choicest yearling calves? Or should they sacrifice to him a canyon filled with countless rams, along with endless torrents of olive oil? Or, in an act of desperation, should they martyr their firstborn children to pay for the trespasses they had committed?[55]

The last item warrants further comment. Child sacrifice, while probably never common, was known in both Judah and Israel. The pagan inhabitants of the surrounding nations carried out child sacrifices,[56] and this practice crept into the southern and northern kingdoms with the veneration of foreign gods and goddesses. For instance, the pagan deity Molech was especially associated with child sacrifice. Idolaters built a sanctuary to Molech called Topheth[57] south of Jerusalem, and there sometimes burnt children.[58] Undoubtedly, it was to Molech that the Judahite kings Ahaz and Manasseh sacrificed their sons.[59]

Micah 6:6–7 indicates that God's people were quite mistaken in thinking that he would take delight in their innumerable and extreme sacrifices.[60] Admittedly, the Lord had ordained the sacrificial system for the Israelites, and had even forbidden them to approach him without an offering;[61] yet, in this case, the people were using the system in a vain attempt to buy his favour. To be specific, they tried to carry out rituals in a sacrilegious, hypocritical way, but were not truly obedient when it came to dealing with others in an equitable, kind, and humble manner.

What could humans do to please the Suzerain of the universe? According to Andersen and Freedman (2006:560), that is the foremost 'question' in the heart of every person who approaches the Lord in heartfelt worship. The responses recorded in Micah 6:6–7 were theologically way off the mark, even though they reflected the thinking of pagan humanity living throughout the ancient Near East during the second and first millenniums BCE.

Against the backdrop of God's redemptive acts, he clarified in verse 8 what he really wanted.[62] The transcendent Creator had no need for meaningless religious acts performed by mere 'mortals';[63] instead, he wanted the thoughts, feelings, speech, and behaviour of his people to be characterized by ethical goodness, including the presence of such virtues as integrity, rectitude, and compassion.[64]

54 'Transgression' (Mic. 6:7) renders the Hebrew noun פֶּשַׁע, which denotes intentional, criminal, and treacherous acts, whether against individuals, nations, and/or the Creator, and that are prompted by a rebellious disposition; cf. Carpenter and Grisanti (1997a); Knierim (1997); Seebass (2015). 'Sin' translates the Hebrew noun חַטָּאת, which refers to any conduct, whether deliberate or unintentional, and whether involving thoughts, emotions, or words, that deviates from or falls short of God's perfect moral standard, as expressed in the Mosaic Law; cf. Averbeck (1997); Koch (2015); Livingston (1980).

55 Cf. fn 110 concerning the literary device known as defamiliarization.

56 Cf. Deut. 12:31; 2 Kings 3:26-27; 16:3; 21:6; 2 Chron. 28:3; Ps 106:38; Jer 19:4-5.

57 'Topeth' means 'burning place'; cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs (2000); Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm (2000); Swanson (2001).

58 Cf. Lev. 18:21; Deut. 18:10; 2 Kings 23:10.

59 Cf. 2 Kings 16:3; 21:6. Nowhere in the Old Testament did God ever condone or sanction child sacrifice. For a detailed consideration of human sacrifice in the Hebrew sacred writings, cf. Andersen and Freedman (2006:532-9).

60 Cf. 1 Sam. 15:22; Pss 40:6-8; 50:8-15; 51:16-19; Isa. 1:11-15; Jer. 6:19-20; 7:22-23; Hos. 6:6; Amos 5:21-24; Zech. 7:4-10.

61 Cf. Exod. 23:15; 34:20.

62 Cf. Ps 15:2-5; 24:4-5; Isa. 33:15-16.

63 Cf. the NRSV, Lexham, and NIV renderings of Mic. 6:8.

64 'Good' (Mic. 6:8) renders the Hebrew noun טוֹב, which denotes what is suitable and beneficial in any given situation. The term emphasises the presence of moral excellence in all areas of life, both

64 In Mic. 6:8 two Hebrew verbs are used in synonymous parallelism, with the second building on and extending the thrust of the first. 'Told' renders נָגַד, and signifies a pronouncement that is plainly known to those hearing it; cf. Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm (2000); Mangum (2014); Westermann (1997). 'Require' translates דָּרַשׁ and denotes a legitimate and mandated expectation; cf. Coppes (1980); Denninger (1997); Wagner (2015). Together these verbs indicate that the Lord clearly revealed his will to his people and was on solid legal ground in directing them to behave in a stipulated manner.

66 Cf. fn 10 concerning the Hebrew noun מִשְׁפָּט; Isa. 29:19; Jer. 22:16; Hos. 6:6; Amos 5:24; James 1:27.

67 'Love' (Mic. 6:8) translates the Hebrew noun אַהֲבָה, which signifies the presence of virtues that are esteemed and fostered in personal relationships. The Septuagint predominately uses the Greek verb ἀγαπάω to translate אַהֲבָה; cf. fns 7 and 15; Alden (1980); Els (1997b); Wallis (2015b).

68 Cf. fn 11 concerning the Hebrew noun, חֶסֶד, which is rendered 'mercy' (Mic. 6:8).

69 'Humbly' translates the Hebrew verb צָנַע. Contemporary scholarship indicates the term refers to a modest disposition that is demonstrated in mindful, sagacious behaviour, especially with respect to the Creator; cf. Dumbrell (1997); Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm (2000); Ringgren (2015b).

70 Cf. Lev. 26:16, 26; Deut. 28:15, 18, 40, 51; Hos. 4:10; 5:6; 8:7; 9:12, 16; Amos 5:11.

71 In Mic. 6:9, the Hebrew noun קוֹל (literally translated 'voice') is understood to function exegetically as an imperative and thus rendered as 'listen'.

In particular, God decreed[65] that the covenant community make the following three principles a priority in their lives: (1) to promote 'justice', that is, honesty and fairness;[66] (2) to so highly value[67] persistent acts of kindness[68] that these undergirded their dealings with one another; and, (3) to ensure that reverence, prudence, and obedience were the foundation of their relationship with the Lord.[69] These requirements progress from what is external to what is internal and from one's relationship to other people to one's relationship with God. Specifically, to be just toward other people, one must display loyal love. Also, such compassion necessitates a circumspect walk before the Lord that aligns with the expectations delineated in the Mosaic covenant.

Micah 6:9–16 comprise another prophecy in which God listed various crimes committed by his chosen people. These verses also described how the Lord would punish them, in what Hillers (1984:82) labels a succession of 'futility curses'. On the one hand, the 'guilty' engage in a wayward 'course of action'; on the other hand, they 'inevitably' become 'frustrated with it'.[70] The oracle begins with Micah's call for his peers to pay attention to the Lord's words.[71] The 'city' in verse 9 is most likely Jerusalem, which represents the entire covenant community.[72] The 'rod' Jerusalem was to heed was the punishment God would send. The people of Judah (as well as Israel) were far from walking in justice, kindness, and humility before God.

Verses 10 through 12 record a collection of social sins God's people were guilty of committing. For instance, some in Judah had amassed vast sums of wealth through nefarious means. Also, corrupt merchants cheated their customers by using a 'short ephah'.[73] An ephah was a dry measure equal to about three-fifths of a bushel of grain.[74] Evidently, sellers were defrauding buyers by measuring out less than the full amount on a balance scale.

In the ancient Near East, merchants used scales to measure goods and even money, since there was no standardized coinage. Scales consisted of two pans suspended from a crossbar. Vendors would put precisely weighted stones in one pan and place the item(s) for weighing in the other. Even though the Law of Moses forbade the falsification of weights and measures,[75] this fraudulent practice

72 Cf. Smith-Christopher (2015:201-2) concerning the unlikelihood of the reference in Mic. 6:9 being to Samaria.

73 אֵיפַת רָזוֹן in the Hebrew text of Mic. 6:10, in which the unit of measure was shrunken or scant when compared to the agreed-upon standard.

74 Cf. Thames (2016).

75 Cf. Lev. 19:35-36; Deut. 25:13-16; Ezek. 45:10; Hos. 12:7; Amos 8:5

sometimes occurred. One way to obtain an inaccurate measurement was to shorten the length of one of the arms of the crossbar. Another way was to use falsely marked stones. Some merchants even used two sets of weights in their transactions, one for buying and one for selling.

Micah 6:12 reveals that those who wielded power not only brimmed with material wealth, but also overflowed with destructive behaviour.[76] Furthermore, Jerusalem's residents peddled deceit[77] and trafficked in treachery.[78] These charges perhaps indicate that the élite in society were using force to steal property, and that individuals were committing perjury in court to support dishonest business practices. Verse 13 introduces a description of the ways in which God would punish his chosen people for their crimes.[79] According to verses 14 through 16, these consequences included hunger, loss, and futility. For instance, the people who tried to get wealthy by dishonest means would have to do without material goods.

The iniquities the people committed were not all social. Verse 16 indicates that some were religious. Specifically, the Lord condemned the covenant community for following the traditions[80] of Omri and Ahab, who were kings of Israel about 150 years earlier. This wicked father-son dyad engaged in and promoted idolatrous religion.[81] In Micah's lifetime, the people of Judah worshipped in the same ways as their counterparts in Israel. Because of this, God gave both the southern and northern kingdoms over to ruin.[82] Then, when Judah and Israel were overrun, their neighbours would ridicule them for their folly.[83]

3. A Descriptive Analysis of 1 Corinthians 13:1-13[84]

Andersen and Freedman (2006:504) identify Micah 6:8 as the literary and thematic centre of the chapter. According to the descriptive analysis articulated in the preceding section, the threefold emphasis is on promoting equity, kindness, and humility. These virtues are also what believers today ought to uphold. Indeed, as the following descriptive analysis of 1 Corinthians 13 indicates, God still expects his people to treat others with Christlike love and to live in devotion to him.[85] In agreement with Fee (1987:628), from a literary perspective, the passage is divided into three main sections,[86] as follows: (1) the 'necessity of love' (vv. 1–3); (2) the 'character of love' (vv. 4–7); and, (3) the 'permanence of love' (vv. 8–13).

In chapter 12 of the epistle, Paul wrote about the purpose and use of spiritual gifts. Throughout this letter, the Greek noun, χάρισμα,

[76] The Hebrew noun, חָמָס, which is translated 'violence' (Mic. 6:12), refers to the exploitation and oppression of the vulnerable and innocent members of society; cf. Hagg (2015); Stoebe (1997a); Swart and Van Dam (1997).

[77] The Hebrew text of Mic. 6:12 is literally rendered 'speak lies' (דִּבְּרוּ־שָׁקֶר), with the emphasis being on unfounded assertions and perversions of truth; cf. Austel (1980); Klopfenstein (1997); Seebass, Beyerle, and Grünwaldt (2015).

[78] In Mic. 6:12, 'deceitful' translates the Hebrew noun, רְמִיָּה, in which the presence of duplicity signifies a breach of trust between individuals or groups; cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs (2000); Carpenter and Grisanti (1997b); White (1980).

[79] Loken (2014) points out a textual discrepancy in Mic. 6:13. The Hebrew, when translated, reads, 'Also I will make you sick by striking you down'. The Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate, when translated, read, 'I have begun to strike you down'.

[80] The parallelism in the first half of the Hebrew text of Mic. 6:16 places a threefold emphasis on pagan 'regulations' (חֻקָּה) leading to heathen 'practices' (מַעֲשֶׂה) and 'plans' (מוֹעֵצָה). The divine indictment is that the people's atrocities signified a repeated, longstanding, and complete breach of their covenant with the Creator.

[81] Cf. 1 Kings 16:25-26, 30-33.

[82] Cf. Lev. 26:14-46; Deut. 28:15-68, which detail the curses of the Mosaic covenant the Lord promised to bring on his people for their disobedience. Tragically, the entire nation was guilty of stubbornly refusing to follow the Lord's will (Dan. 9:11); and because God was just in everything he did (v. 14), he had no other choice but to pour out on his wayward people the judgment solemnly foretold in the Mosaic Law. God had given his people a simple choice: either obey him and be blessed, or disobey him and

suffer terrible curses. Because Israel had chosen the second option, the people were dispersed and Jerusalem fell (Dan. 11:12). These horrible calamities were meant to bring God's people back to him, but they refused to respond (v. 13).

83 Loken (2014) notes that in Mic. 6:16, the Septuagint reads 'nations', rather than 'my people'. In the Hebrew text, the emendation involves the addition of a single letter at the end of the noun, that is, from (עַמִּי *ammi*, 'my people') to (עַמִּים *ammim*, 'nations'). Also, the parallelism in the second half of the Hebrew text places a threefold emphasis on the covenant community's experience of 'desolation' (שַׁמָּה) giving way to their pagan neighbour's words of 'derision' (שְׁרֵקָה) and 'reproach' (חֶרְפָּה). The divine decree was that as a result of the chosen people wallowing in a cesspool of depravity, they would be unmercifully taunted by the surrounding heathen nations; cf. Jer. 19:8; 25:9, 18.

84 The following are the representative secondary sources that have influenced the descriptive analysis of 1 Corinthians 13:1-13: Barrett (1968); Beale (2011); Bray (2005); Bruce (1986); Caird (1980); Ciampa and Rosner (2007; 2010); Collins (1999); Ellingworth and Hatton (1993); Erickson (2013); Fee (1987); Fitzmyer (2008); Furnish (2003); Garland (2003); Gill (2002); Godet (1977); Goldingay (2016); Grosheide (1984); Grudem (1994); Guthrie (1981); Hays (1997); Holladay (1991); Kaiser (2008); Keener (1995); Ladd (1997); Lowery (1994); Marshall (2004); Morris (1990; 2001); Ndubuisi (2002); Perkins (2012); Robertson and Plummer (1961); Sampley (2002); Sanders (1966); Schreiner (2013); Thielman (2005); Thiselton (2000); Vang (2014); Verbrugge (2008); Vos (2000); Witherington (1995).

85 Cf. the extended discussion concerning this observation in section 1.0 of the essay.

which is rendered 'gifts', refers to a special ability the Spirit graciously bestows on believers to accomplish God's will.[87] Witherington (1995:264) elucidates that, in chapter 13 the apostle digressed from his main argument. As an example of 'epideictic rhetoric',[88] he temporarily stepped aside from the subject of spiritual gifts to discuss the nature and intent of Christlike 'love'. The latter renders the Greek noun, ἀγάπη (or *agapē*), which generally refers to unselfish and unconditional displays of compassion. Along with the term's verbal counterpart ἀγαπάω,[89] the noun points to affection that is prompted just as much by volition as by feelings.[90]

Garland (2003:603) draws attention to 12:31, which reveals that Christlike love is not a spiritual gift; instead, it establishes the manner in which all Spirit-bestowed endowments should be used. According to Sampley (2002:951), 'love' is a 'way of living' prompted by divine 'grace' and produced by the Spirit. Perhaps for this reason, in Galatians 5:22, godly compassion appears first in the ensemble of 'fruit' produced by the Spirit. Fee (1987:625) clarifies that Paul's objective in 1 Corinthians 13 was to set the issue of these special abilities within an ethical 'framework'. Evidently, he discerned the Corinthians were too enthralled by their spiritual gifts—particularly speaking in tongues—[91] and had lost sight of a more basic concern, namely, demonstrating *agapē*.[92]

'Tongues' in 12:10, 28, and 30 could be a reference to human languages or dialects unknown to the person speaking them.[93] A

86 As with Mic. 6, so too an examination of the academic literature indicates there is no scholarly consensus regarding the literary structure of 1 Cor. 13. The author considers the basic demarcation appearing here to be a reasonable and serviceable approach for the purposes of this study. It is also possible to include 12:31 and 14:1 as transitional verses leading into and out of (respectively) Paul's excursus on Christlike love. Also, cf. fn 97 regarding chap. 13 being categorised as an encomium in its literary composition.

87 Cf. 1 Cor. 12:4; Danker (2000); Louw and Nida (1989); Silva (2014).

88 Keener (1995:107) explains that 'epideictic rhetoric' was an oratorical style involving the use of 'praise or blame'. One subcategory entailed the use of 'encomium', that is, 'praise of a person or subject' or even a specific 'virtue'; cf. fn 97.

89 Cf. fn 15. Thiselton (2000:1035) assesses that *agapē* signifies a 'stance or attitude' that is demonstrated in 'acts of will' prompted by a 'regard, respect, and concern for the welfare' of others. *Agapē* is exemplified at Calvary, where the Messiah sacrificially died to atone for the sins of humankind.

90 Cf. Mangum (2014); Schneider (1990); Stauffer (1964).

91 The Greek noun γλῶσσα, which is rendered 'tongues', appears 19 times in 1 Cor. 12-14, of which 15 are in chapter 14 cf. Silva (2014).

92 Cf. 1 Cor. 1:4-7; 12:10, 28; 14:1-40.

93 Cf. Acts 2:1-12; Danker (2000); Louw and Nida (1989); Swanson (1997).

second option, based on a consideration of 13:1, is that 'tongues' denotes some form of enraptured utterance or celestial dialogue voiced in worship, whether corporate or private.[94] A third alternative is that Paul was speaking in exaggerated terms to include every conceivable type of speech. In any case, it seems these forms of communication are unintelligible to both the speaker and the hearers, that is, unless they have the gift of interpretation and are directed to God as prayer or praise.[95]

Robertson and Plummer (1961:285) articulate a longstanding view that chapter 13 is a 'psalm in praise of love'. Ndubuisi (2002:134) echoes this sentiment by referring to the passage as a 'poetic rhapsody'.[96] Barrett (1968:299) adds that the passage has a 'rhythmical' quality, making it according to Godet (1977:662) 'lyrical' in 'tone' and powerful in content.[97] Fee (1987:626), however, issues a useful corrective by asserting that only the first three verses 'fit a poetic mold'. He regards the majority of the chapter to be an example of 'ethical instruction' having an exhortative or 'parenetic thrust' (627). *Agapē*, then, is not a sentimental abstraction; rather, as epitomized in the Messiah at Calvary,[98] *agapē* incarnates and actualizes the *charismata*.[99]

Because chapter 13 stands well on its own, one view is that an unidentified early Christian writer (or team of writers) composed it, and Paul later inserted it in this letter. Adherents think the apostle used transitional clauses in 12:31 and 14:1 to help chapter 13 better fit into its present context. In contrast, a second more likely option is that Paul composed this passage at the same time he wrote the rest of the letter. Advocates maintain that the composition fits too closely with what appears before and after to be a work created at an earlier time.

In verse 1, Paul named certain representative gifts and actions, and then indicated how they are worthless unless undergirded by and utilized in love. The first item, as noted above, was the special endowment of tongues-speaking, which his readers most highly prized. Despite this, as the apostle declared in reference to himself, if he was completely devoid of Christlike compassion, his speech would have been a useless, infuriating noise, like that produced in a chaotic, heathen ritual or theatrical performance from a deafening 'gong' or a rattling 'cymbal'.[100]

Paul next referred to three other representative spiritual gifts: 'prophecy' (v. 2), 'knowledge,' and 'faith'.[101] 'Prophecy' refers to the proclamation of revelations from God, including predictions of future events.[102] One possibility is that 'knowledge' denotes information received through supernatural means in order to fathom the profound mysteries of the Christian faith.[103] A second

94 Cf. Pss 103:20; 148:2; T. Job 48:3; 49:2; 50:2; 4Q400; 4Q401; 4Q403; Dautzenberg (1990) points out that, 'on the basis of the phrase λαλεῖν γλώσσῃ, this spiritual gift is called '*glossolalia*'. Behm (1964) clarifies that this Greek term is not used in the New Testament.

95 Cf. 1 Cor. 14:2, 14–16.

96 Gill (2002:167) draws attention to the irony that Paul's soliloquy on 'love' was addressed to residents of a 'city whose patron deity' was 'Aphrodite, the goddess of love'. The deity's shrine was located on the 'Acrocorinth', which due to its strategic, elevated location offered a panoramic view of the city (103).

97 Sampley (2002:951) considers the genre of 1 Cor. 13 to be an 'encomium' or a paean to *agapē* (cf. fn 88). Admittedly, as Garland (2003:606) stresses, this is not a consensus view among specialists. For instance, Lund (1931:276) maintains the chapter is a 'chiasmus' in its 'disposition'. Regardless, if Paul used the Greco-Roman 'rhetorical device' (Sampley 2002:951) known as 'encomium' to sequence his eulogy, the following are possibly its main elements:
(1) a 'prologue' (vv. 1-3);
(2) a 'reference to actions as a clue to character' (i.e. *ethos*; vv. 4-7);
(3) a 'comparison and contrast with other virtues' (vv. 8-12); and,
(4) an epilogue containing an 'appeal for emulation' (v. 13). For a detailed analysis of this chapter as an example of encomium, cf. Sigountos (1994); Smit (1991).

98 Cf. John 3:16; 1 John 3:1; 4:7-12.

99 Cf. Holladay (1991:98) for a consideration of Paul's use of 'self-referential language' and its Greco-Roman 'parenetic function' in 1 Cor. 13. Ciampa and Rosner (2010:624) equivocate that, in advancing a crucicentric perspective, the apostle was 'not speaking of his actual actions, gifts, or attributes, but of what his condition would be under such hypothetical conditions'. Collins (1999:479), however, indicates that Paul 'enjoyed' such *charismata* as 'tongues' (12:10), 'prophecy',

option is that 'knowledge' points to the effective application of biblical teaching in people's lives.[104] While all Christians have saving 'faith', the reference here is to the display of amazing trust in God regardless of the circumstances.[105]

Paul envisioned being able to deliver spectacular messages from God. A second possibility involved the apostle having insight into all sorts of divine secrets and enigmatic truths. A third scenario involved him manifesting such strong belief that he could dislodge 'mountains' (v. 2) from their foundations.[106] Admittedly, from a human standpoint, these remarkable abilities would be impressive; yet, Paul argued that in the absence of Christlike love, he was 'nothing'.[107] From the Creator's standpoint, the apostle would be a metaphysical cipher. After all, if no equity, kindness, and humility were present, there likewise would be no efficacy to the gifted individual's prodigious actions.

In verse 3, Paul referred to two pious initiatives he might undertake. The first of these involved giving whatever he owned to the indigent. Scripture is replete with admonitions to help those who lack what they need materially. The manuscript evidence is divided concerning the second action Paul listed. Brannon (2014) summarizes the two prevailing options as follows: (1) 'in order that I will be burned';[108] and, (2) 'in order that I may boast'.[109] Presumably, the first reading denotes martyrdom by exposure to flames; yet, when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, this form of execution was hardly known for either Jews or Christians. Accordingly, there is some doubt about whether this is the original biblical text and meaning.

Concerning the second reading, Paul's intended meaning is less obvious. One option is that he was referring to delivering up his body to slavery or death and boasting in the Lord for doing so. Another option is that he was talking about serving others without regard for his own welfare and receiving acclaim for such an altruistic deed. In either case, the apostle's point remains the same. He taught that regardless of the nature of the pious acts, if he did not have Christlike love, he would be spiritually bankrupt. Expressed differently, he would not gain anything through what he sacrificed, no matter how laudable the offering. The absence of

'knowledge' (v. 8), and 'faith' (v. 9). Holladay (1991:91) advances the discourse by arguing that Paul's intentional 'choice of language' throughout the passage 'shows how thoroughly' his 'apostolic understanding has been transformed by his theology of the cross'. Consequently, *agapē*, not hubris, is the 'primal impulse motivating his apostolic behaviour' (92).

100 Devotees of Cybele (the mother of the gods) and Dionysius (the god of wine) used huge brass cymbals in their pagan rituals; cf. Aniol (2016); Porter (2000); Ryken, Wilhoit, and Longman (1998).

101 Cf. 1 Cor. 12:8-10.

102 The Greek noun used in 1 Cor. 13:2 is προφητεία; cf. Friedrich (1964); Schnider (1990); Silva (2014).

103 'Mysteries' (1 Cor. 13:2) renders the Greek noun μυστήριον. It generally denotes what is hidden or secret. For Paul, a 'mystery' was a deep theological truth that previously was concealed but had now been revealed through the Messiah; cf. Dan. 2:19-23, 28; 4:9; 1 En. 41:1; 52:2; 61:5; 63:3; 68:5; 71:4; Bornkamm (1964); Krämer (1990); Mangum (2014).

104 The Greek noun used in 1 Cor. 13:2 is γνῶσις; cf. Bultmann (1964c); Louw and Nida (1989); Schmithals (1990).

105 The Greek noun used in 1 Cor. 13:2 is πίστις; cf. Barth (1990); Danker (2000); Spicq (1994).

106 Cf. Isa. 54:10; Matt. 17:19-20; Mark 11:22-24; Luke 17:6.

107 In 1 Corinthians 13:2, Paul used the Greek adjective οὐθείς, which is translated 'nothing'; cf. Louw and Nida (1989); Müller (1990); Swanson (1997).

108 The Greek verb in this textual reading of 1 Cor. 13:3 is καυθησομαι; cf. KJV, NKJV, NASB, ESV; GNT; CEV.

109 The Greek verb in this textual reading of 1 Cor. 13:3 is καυχήσωμαι; cf. NRSV, NET, NIV, CSB, NLT. The change between καυθησομαι and καυχήσωμαι involves only two letters, namely, θ to χ and ο to ω; cf. Metzger (2005:497-8).

equity, kindness, and humility would rob such Christian service of its eternal value.[110]

In verses 1–3, Paul spoke autobiographically about his own ministry experience; next, as Ciampa and Rosner (2010:640) note, in verses 4–7, the apostle personified *agapē* for his readers. Collins (1999:473) surmises that, from a literary perspective, this section is the 'theological core' of the chapter. Fitzmyer (2008:495) clarifies that Paul's intent was to demonstrate that 'love is not a mere feeling'; just as importantly, *agapē* 'evokes a mode of action'. Paul advanced his argument by using both positive and negative terms to describe godly compassion. Most likely, the apostle chose his words carefully to implicitly censure errors committed by the Corinthians.

Paul began with the Greek verb rendered 'patient', which denotes a forbearing spirit,[111] whereas the verb translated 'kind' points to acts of benevolence.[112] In a manner of speaking, believers are to have a long fuse to their temper. Similarly, they must not retaliate when wronged; instead, they are to remain steadfast in spirit, consistently responding to others in a gracious and considerate manner.

After describing godly compassion using two positive terms, Paul next listed a series of expressions to indicate what love is not and does not do. The apostle led off with the Greek verb rendered 'envy', which signifies being enflamed with jealousy.[113] Christians are not to resent what others are or have, nor wish to seize those things for themselves. The verb translated 'boast' refers to those who brag about themselves, especially by using flashy rhetorical skills.[114] Believers should never gloat over their own achievements. The verb rendered 'proud' literally means 'to puff up'.[115] The idea is that Jesus' followers must not be inflated with arrogance.

The Greek verb translated 'rude' (v. 5) means to act in a despicable or disgraceful manner toward others, including, as Vang (2014:182) proposes, 'sexually lewd behavior'.[116] Christians were prohibited from being churlish, regardless of the social setting. The reference to 'self-seeking' points to an egotistical mindset that borders on narcissism.[117] Believers were not to be exclusively concerned with getting their own way or demanding what was best for them.

The verb rendered 'easily incensed' denotes an irritable disposition that becomes livid at the slightest inconvenience.[118] Jesus' followers were to resist the temptation of being provoked to rage by what others said or did. The verb translated 'resentful' brings to mind individuals who scrupulously maintained an inventory of

110 Thiselton (2000:1043) draws attention to the 'concept or device' known as 'defamiliarization'. It involves 'rereading what had appeared familiar or ordinary' within an anomalous frame of reference, namely, one that seems peculiar or abnormal. The intent is to 'shock' readers into reassessing an idea or practice. Arguably, both Micah 6:7 and 1 Corinthians 13:3 function 'in this way' by proposing what is outlandish (e.g. offering one's firstborn and sacrificing one's body, respectively). One rhetorical outcome is that equity, kindness, and humility receive greater prominence and serious consideration as worthwhile, alternative options. For a detailed consideration of defamiliarization, cf. Thiselton (1992:117-20).

111 The Greek verb in 1 Cor. 13:4 is μακροθυμέω; cf. Hollander (1990); Horst (1964); Silva (2014).

112 The Greek verb in 1 Cor. 13:4 is χρηστεύομαι; cf. Danker (2000); Spicq (1994); Weiss (1964).

113 The Greek verb in 1 Cor. 13:4 is ζηλόω; cf. Louw and Nida 1989); Popkes (1990); Stumpff (1964).

114 The Greek verb in 1 Cor. 13:4 is περπερεύομαι; cf. Braun (1964); Danker (2000); Swanson (2001).

115 The Greek verb in 1 Cor. 13:4 is φυσιόω; cf. Danker (2000); Louw and Nida (1989); Mangum (2014).

116 The Greek verb in 1 Cor. 13:5 is ἀσχημονέω; cf. 5:1-2; 7:36; Fiedler (1990); Silva (2014); Swanson (2001).

117 The Greek phrase in 1 Cor. 13:5 is ζητεῖ τὰ ἑαυτῆς; cf. Danker (2000); Greeven (1964); Larson (1990).

118 The Greek verb in 1 Cor. 13:5 is παροξύνω; cf. Louw and Nida 1989); Seeseman (1964); Swanson (2001).

119 The Greek verb in 1 Cor. 13:5 is λογίζομαι; cf. Bartsch (1990); Heidland (1964); Silva (2014).

120 The Greek phrase in 1 Cor. 13:6 is χαίρει ἐπὶ τῇ ἀδικίᾳ. The verb χαίρω emphasizes taking delight in something; cf. Berger (1990); Conzelmann (1964); Mangum (2014). In this verse, the prohibition is against raving about malfeasance, as pointed out by the usage of the noun ἀδικίᾳ; cf. Danker (2000); Limbeck (1990); Schrenk (1964).

121 The Greek noun in 1 Cor. 13:6 is ἀλήθεια; cf. Bultmann (1964a); Hübner (1990a); Spicq (1994). Köstenberger (2009:437-8) explains that in the first century AD, there were differing perspectives on the nature of 'truth'. To illustrate, in 'Greek philosophy', the notion of 'truth' was linked to a precise way of making sense of 'reality'. Likewise, the Romans associated 'truth' with a 'factual' depiction of phenomenon in nature and activity among people. In the Hebrew literature–both the Old Testament and the writings of Second Temple Judaism–'truth' was equated with 'God's faithfulness to his covenant'. The Gospels carry the concept further, in which Jesus of Nazareth is declared to be truth incarnate. Put differently, Jesus does not just bear witness to the truth, but is the truth in his very person. Moreover, Jesus' life, ministry, and atoning sacrifice are the superlative manifestations of God's commitment to fulfil His redemptive promises. 'Truth', then, is more than factually accurate, propositional statements. 'Truth' is a 'personal', 'relational', and ontological / existential reality that has its source, movement, and culmination in the Messiah; cf. John 1:14-18; 8:31-32; 14:6; 17:3.

122 Collins (1999:481) indicates that Paul's statement in 1 Cor. 12:6 makes the 'biblical notion of justice' implicit in the meaning of the Greek noun, *agapē*. Hence, the term connotes both 'right relationships with God and other people'.

123 The Greek verb in 1 Cor. 13:7 rendered 'bears' is στέγω; cf. Kasch (1964); Louw and Nida (1989);

how others allegedly harmed them.[119] God's children should not obsess over offences (whether real or perceived) and keep a scorecard of how many times others hurt them.

'Rejoice in unrighteous' (v. 6) could also be translated 'be glad about injustice'.[120] Believers were never to luxuriate in the cesspool of iniquity; instead, promoting equity, kindness, and humility necessitated taking pleasure in God's 'truth', especially as it was revealed in the Gospel.[121] Accordingly, Christians were to be filled with joy when others advocated for what was ethical and equitable in God's eyes. Some people seemed to take a perverse delight in evil. They were elated when someone succeeded in lying, cheating, or stealing; yet, that was not to be the way of cross-bearing discipleship. Jesus' followers were neither to promote sin nor encourage its practitioners; rather, God's children were to cheer on goodness, justice, and veracity.[122]

Verse 7 closes Paul's paragraph with four examples of what godly compassion always did. In this way, as Collins (1999:482) observes, the apostle delineated the essence of 'authentic Christian existence'. Together, these illustrations indicated that, when planted in the soil of equity, kindness, and humility, believers had the God-given strength to face whatever trials came their way. For instance, the statement that love 'bears all things' refers to Jesus' followers braving troubles and maltreatment for the sake of the Gospel.[123] A less likely rendering is that love 'always protects', suggesting that Christians should strive to keep others from evil.[124]

The translation '[love] believes all things' is preferred over 'always trusts'.[125] This does not imply, as Morris (2001:182) points out, the notion of being 'gullible';[126] rather, the idea is that Jesus' followers should have such faith that they search for what is finest in people and commend what is best about them. Love 'hopes all things' indicates there does not have to be any limit to the believers' confidence in God's promises or certitude in his ability to fulfil them.[127] 'Endures all things' signifies that when tragedy strikes, godly compassion refuses to collapse or quit; instead, it has the

124 Cf. the NIV. The CEV reads, 'love is always supportive'. In contrast, the GNT and NLT both read, 'Love never gives up'.

125 The Greek phrase in 1 Cor. 13:7 is πάντα πιστεύει; cf. fn 82.

126 Ciampa and Rosner (2010:650) indicates that Paul's statement in 1 Cor. 12:7 'has nothing to do with a naïve optimism'. Similarly, Hays (1997:228) remarks that 'love does not make its adherents into foolish Pollyannas'.

127 The Greek phrase in 1 Cor. 13:7 is πάντα ἐλπίζει; cf. Bultmann (1964b); Mayer (1990); Silva (2014).

fortitude to persist through whatever hardships it encounters in life.[128] Put differently, the Spirit enables God's children to remain strong to the end of the ordeal.

Next, Paul revealed that unlike spiritual gifts, Christlike 'love' (v. 8) would never at any time[129] come to an end.[130] While one day even the most spectacular abilities would become defunct, the opposite was true of godly compassion. Expressed differently, even though special endowments would pass from the scene, such *agapē* -inspired virtues as promoting equity, kindness, and humility would remain valid and essential. In keeping with Old Testament revelation,[131] the apostle declared that 'prophecies' would be discontinued; similarly, 'tongues' would terminate; likewise, 'knowledge' would be set aside.[132]

Paul was contrasting two eschatological eras of human existence— an earlier one in which the spiritual gifts were needed and a later one when the need for them would expire. That said, interpreters differ over the time scheme the apostle had in mind. One view is that the first period extended between Pentecost and the completion of the New Testament (or the close of the apostolic age and the maturation of the church), with the second period occurring after that. Another more exegetically viable option is that the first period is the time between Jesus' first and second comings (or the interval between when individual believers live and die), with the second period commencing thereafter.[133]

In verses 9 and 10, Paul explained that the difference between the first and second eras of redemptive history is like the distinction between the partial and the complete, or between the imperfect and the perfect. For instance, the spiritual gifts of knowledge and prophecy put believers in touch with God only in a fragmentary and limited way; yet, in the later eschatological period, Christians would eternally exist in full and perfect fellowship with the Creator.[134]

Next, in verse 11, Paul illustrated his meaning by drawing an analogy involving childhood and adulthood. He said, in reference to

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[134] As in 1 Cor. 13:8, the special endowments of knowledge and prophecy are paired in verse 9 through the use of the Greek noun μέρος. The term refers to a smaller portion or share in relationship to a larger whole; cf. Nebe (1990); Schnider (1964); Swanson (2001). Intriguingly, tongues-speaking does not appear either here or in verse 10. Once more μέρος is mentioned, but this time as the antithesis of the adjective τέλειος. The term denotes what is mature, complete, and perfect; cf. Delling (1964b); Hübner (1990d); Silva (2014). Its arrival results in the dissolution of what is immature, incomplete, and imperfect. As in verse 8, the Greek verb καταργέω is used in verse 10 with respect to the spiritual endowments of prophesying and knowing.

[128] The Greek phrase in 1 Cor. 13:7 is πάντα ὑπομένει; cf. Danker (2000); Hauck (1964); Radl (1990).

[129] In 1 Cor. 13:8, Paul used the strong temporal adverb οὐδέποτε.

[130] The Greek verb in 1 Cor. 13:8 is πίπτω, which literally means to 'stumble', 'falter', or 'fall down' and conveys the ideas of total collapse, defeat, or failure; cf. Michaels (1964); Palzkill (1990); Silva (2014). The sense of οὐδέποτε πίπτει is expressed in differing ways by various translations, as follows: 'never ends' (ESV, NET, CSB); 'never fails' (NKJV, NASB, NIV, CEV); 'last forever' (NLT); and, 'is eternal' (GNT).

[131] Cf. Isa. 54:13; Jer. 31:34; Zech. 13:3–6.

[132] In 1 Cor. 13:8, the Greek verb καταργέω is used in reference to 'prophecies' and 'knowledge', which are the first and third terms in the triad. The second of the three, 'tongues', is paired with the verb παύω. Most likely, Paul used this rhetorical approach to draw particular attention to tongues-speaking, especially since the Corinthians had excessively stressed its perceived value. In brief, even what they so highly prized would cease to be uttered. For καταργέω, there is the dual sense of being not only inoperative, but also invalidated; cf. Delling (1964a); Hübner (1990b); Silva (2014). For παύω, the nuance is a bit stronger, namely, that of being terminated; cf. Danker (2000); Louw and Nida (1989); Schneider (1990b).

[133] For an objective analysis and refutation of the cessationist polemic against the miraculous *charismata*, cf. Grudem (1994:1031 –46). He deduces that all the gifts of the Spirit, including speaking in tongues and prophesying, 'continue to exist' and are 'useful for the church, throughout the church age, including today, and right up to the day when Christ returns'.

135 The Green noun in 1 Cor. 13:11 is νήπιος, which denotes a young person around 3 or 4 years of age; cf. Bertram (1964a); Légasse (1990); Louw and Nida (1989).

136 The Greek verb in 1 Cor. 13:11 is λαλέω, which is a general term denoting all types of human utterance; cf. Hübner (1990c); Mangum (2014); Swanson (2001).

137 The Greek verb in 1 Cor. 13:11 is φρονέω, which refers to a mental attitude or cognitive disposition; cf. Bertram (1964b); Paulsen (1990); Silva (2014).

138 The Greek verb in 1 Cor. 13:11 is λογίζομαι (cf. v. 5; fn 119). In v. 11, the term denotes making inferences, categorizing information, and considering alternative options; cf. Bartsch (1990); Heidland (1964); Silva (2014).

139 In 1 Cor. 13:11, the activities of speaking, formulating ideas, and making decisions seem roughly analogous to the three Spirit-given special abilities mentioned in verse 8.

140 The believers in Corinth had misunderstood the place and purpose of speaking in tongues. So, in 1 Cor. 14:20, Paul told them to no longer be infantile in their outlook and reasoning; instead, they needed a more mature understanding of spiritual gifts and especially of *glossolalia*. The apostle stated that when it came to depravity and malice, childlike ignorance was desirable. The situation was far different, though, concerning spiritual gifts. For this reason, he urged his readers to be discerning, not myopic, about the *charismata*. In brief, they were to be Christocentric, not egocentric, in their mindset.

141 The Greek noun in 1 Cor. 13:12 is ἔσοπτρον; cf. Danker (2000); Kittel (1964b); Spicq (1994).

142 The Greek noun αἴνιγμα is expressed in differing ways by various translations, as follows: 'darkly' (KJV); 'dimly' (NKJV, NASB, ESV); 'indirectly' (NET,

himself, that when he was a 'child',[135] he 'talked',[136] 'thought',[137] and 'reasoned'[138] as a child;[139] yet, now that the apostle was an adult, he had put that immature state behind him.[140] Childhood is like the first period, and childlike ways are comparable to spiritual gifts. Just as naïve and juvenile behaviour is prototypical for a young person, so spiritual gifts are paradigmatic for believers in the first period; but then (to follow the analogy further), adulthood is like the second period of redemptive history. At that time, Jesus' followers would set aside their special abilities, since these would no longer be suitable and necessary.

In verse 12, Paul used an analogy involving a 'mirror'.[141] In his day, this would have been a flat piece of highly-polished silver or bronze attached to a handle. As Robertson and Plummer (1961:298) point out, the image this metal disc reflected would be quite inferior to the mirrors in use today. In a spiritual sense, the glimpse of God that believers received in the first eschatological period, as he was made known through the exercise of their Spirit-given endowments, was comparable to the imprecise and obscure image produced by a mirror;[142] however, in the second period of redemptive history, the Christians' vision of God would not be mediated by their *charismata*, for their encounter with the Creator would be 'face to face'. This phrase signifies it would be direct, intimate, and pristine in nature.[144]

Specialists disagree over Paul's exact meaning in verse 12. For instance, was he saying that the vision obtained using a mirror was either blurry or reflected? More to the point, do the believers' special abilities give them a flawed impression of who God is, or do these endowments leave Christians with an indirect sense? Either way, the contrast between the believers' vision of God (involving their spiritual gifts) in the first eschatological period and their vision of him (apart from their *charismata*) in the later era of redemptive history still stands.

Next, Paul switched from the language of sight to that of knowledge. He explained that he (like all believers in the first

Lexham); 'only a reflection' (NIV, CSB); 'imperfectly' (NLT); 'like a cloudy picture' (CEV); and, 'like a dim image' (GNT). The term refers to what is seemingly inscrutable or enigmatic; cf. Kittel (1964a); Louw and Nida (1989); Silva (2014).

143 In 1 Cor. 13:12, the Greek phrase is πρόσωπον πρὸς πρόσωπον. Ciampa and Rosner (2007:739; cf. 2010:658-10) see an allusion here to Numbers 12:6-8. On the one hand, 'other prophets receive revelation through visions and dreams' (cf. Joel 2:28); on the other hand, Moses encounters the Creator in an unfiltered and unrestricted manner (cf. Deut. 34:10; Isa. 40:5; Lev Rab 1:14).

144 As Fitzmyer (2008:500) observes, this face-to-face encounter with the Creator is sometimes referred as the 'beatific vision' or in Latin *visio beatifica*; cf. Gen. 32:30; Num. 12:8; 1 John 3:2.

eschatological period) was aware of God only partially and incompletely.[145] Even so, the apostle looked forward to the upcoming era of redemptive history when he would recognize God fully and completely.[146] To be sure, as Beale (2011:932) clarifies, Paul was not suggesting that human beings would ever have knowledge equalling that of the Creator. After all, he is not limited, as believers are, by the conditions of the first era. Indeed, the Lord already knew Paul (and all other believers) with infinite perfection.

Finally, Paul revealed that the trio of 'faith, hope, and love' (v. 13) eternally abided for the benefit of God's children.[147] In this regard, the threesome sharply contrasted with the triad of *charismata* listed in verse 8. Specifically, the first triplet would endure throughout the endless ages to come, while the second triplet would expire at the terminus of the present era. Moreover, the three virtues listed in verse 13 summed up the Christian life. 'Faith' denoted trust in the Saviour and commitment to his teachings.[148] 'Hope' signified an unshakable confidence that the Son would ultimately fulfil the Father's promises.[149] Paul's preceding explanation articulated what 'love' entailed. Of all the godly virtues, 14:1 reveals that 'love' was the *summum bonum*,[150] which, as 16:14 discloses, undergirded every human endeavour.

An alternative view is that Paul included 'faith' and 'hope' in 13:13 to remind his readers that Christlike 'love' was for now, just as were the other two virtues; yet, when the apostle went on to say that the 'greatest of these is love', he signalled that godly compassion—which promoted equity, kindness, and humility—was superior to faith and hope, especially since *agapē* lasted forever. In contrast, faith and hope (like the spiritual gifts) were transitory, being only for the present era.[151] According to this view, faith was superfluous in eternity because then believers would dwell in God's immediate presence. Likewise, hope was unnecessary in the upcoming eschatological age, for then the Creator's redemptive promises would be fulfilled.

4. A Comparative Analysis of Micah 6:1–8 and 1 Corinthians 13:1–13

Section 1 of this essay maintains that promoting equity, kindness, and humility are a major emphasis in both the Old and New Testaments. In this regard, Leviticus 19:18 is comparable to a hinge around which other portions of the Hebrew sacred writings (or Tanakh) and the Christian New Testament pivoted. A brief consideration of selected passages from the Pentateuch, prophetic

145 In 1 Cor. 13:12, 'know' renders the Greek verb γινώσκω, which denotes experiential perception and understanding (i.e. involving the use of one's senses, such as seeing, hearing, and so on); cf. fn 104; Bultmann (1964c); Louw and Nida (1989); Schmithals (1990).

146 In 1 Cor. 13:12, 'know fully' translates the Greek verb ἐπιγινώσκω. Here the term has an intensive force and refers to cognition that is distinguished by phenomenal acuity; cf. Luke 24:16, 31; Acts 12:14; Rom. 1:32; 2 Cor. 6:9; Hackenberg (1990); Mangum (2014); Silva (2014).

147 For examples of the triad being used elsewhere in the New Testament, cf. Gal. 5:5–6; Eph. 4:2–5; Col. 1:4–5; 1 Thess. 1:3; 5:8; 1 Pet. 1:3–8; Heb. 6:10–12.

148 Cf. fn 105.

149 Cf. fn 126.

150 Latin for the 'the highest goal' or 'greatest good'; cf. fn 62. Furnish (2003:99) affirms the 'necessity of love' by pointing out how 'essential' it is 'for human flourishing', as well as being 'definitive for human existence'. This explains why Godet (1977:691) described 'charity' as the 'way *par excellence*', and why Hays (1997:221) designates 'love' as the '*sine qua non* of the Christian life'.

151 Cf. Rom. 8:24; 2 Cor. 5:7; Heb. 11:1.

writings, Gospels, and apostolic letters confirms this observation. Such interrelated activities as championing the cause of the indigent, serving others in a deferential and sacrificial manner, and endeavouring to be people of integrity are aptly encapsulated in the directive to show godly compassion to others, regardless of whether they are friend or foe.

Sections 2 and 3 respectively, provide a descriptive analysis of Micah 6:1–16 and 1 Corinthians 13:1–13. The reason for doing so is that these two seminal texts, in their distinctive ways, showcase the supreme importance of promoting equity, kindness, and humility. The latter is the major claim of the essay. This emphasis is further developed in the present section by engaging in a comparative analysis of these two passages. The envisioned intertextual dialogue involves deliberating and articulating the highlights arising from the preceding examination of Micah 6 and 1 Corinthians 13.

To begin, both passages were shaped by the distinctive historical contexts in which they were written. For instance, Micah lived at a time when God's people championed iniquity. One especially atrocious outrage involved the wicked rich taking advantage of the destitute. In Paul's day, self-promotion among the believers at Corinth was lauded as a virtue rather than labelled a vice. One noteworthy transgression entailed an elitist group touting the more dramatic *charismata*, while at the same time either ignoring or demeaning other believers whom the Spirit gifted in different, less overt ways.

Both Micah and Paul witnessed how narcissistic tendencies among their peers were shredding the social fabric of their respective faith communities. God wanted his children to treat each other in a charitable way; yet, an objective analysis of the contexts involving the prophet and the apostle indicates that groups of people were routinely handled in an inhumane manner. The evidence in each case revealed that the fundamental directive recorded in Leviticus 19:18 was being transgressed.

The presence of inequity, selfishness, and hubris ran counter to the ways in which the Creator had blessed his people throughout redemptive history. His unmerited favour included rescuing the Israelites from Egypt, as well as gifting them with capable civil and religious leaders to guide them successfully in their journey to the promised land. Centuries later, the premier display of the Lord's mercy involved the incarnation of the Son, whose sacrificial death at Calvary made it possible for believing sinners to receive the divine gift of salvation.[152]

152 Cf. Rom. 5:8; 8:37; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 5:2.

Regardless of whether it was the faith community in the time of Micah or Paul, the members of each had descended to a pathetic spiritual state. In each instance, it would be absurd for the Lord's children to imagine that they could rehabilitate their respective situations. Neither extreme displays of sacrifice nor lofty demonstrations of acclaimed abilities were sufficient. Only the Creator could empower the members of his covenant community to live in a way that was characterized by godly compassion.

The preceding truth is exemplified in both Micah 6 and 1 Corinthians 13. For instance, Micah 6:8 draws attention to the importance of God's children being characterized by justice, lovingkindness, and modesty. These virtues are the same ones that believers today ought to cultivate. Indeed, as 1 Corinthians 13:4–7 indicates, God still expects is people to treat others with Christlike love and to live in devotion to him. On the one hand, there is never any place for covetousness, egotism, demeaning others, belligerency, and degeneracy; on the other hand, there is abundant room for equity, kindness, and humility to take root and thrive in the soil of the Creator's vineyard.

Admittedly, during the interim between Jesus' first and second advents, Christians fall short of displaying a forbearing spirit, responding in a charitable manner to antagonists, and spreading the joy of the gospel to others in word and deed. Even so, the priority of cross-bearing discipleship necessitates such a countercultural response. In truth, Christlike love is the catalyst for doing so. When Micah 6 and 1 Corinthians 13 are objectively considered, the irrefutable deduction is that adversity can never extinguish godly compassion, for it always remains supportive, hopeful, and loyal. It is the premier virtue that enables equity, kindness, and humility to thrive in the present and endure throughout eternity in the glorious presence of the everlasting Creator.

5. Conclusion

This journal article undertakes a descriptive and comparative analysis of Micah 6:1–16 and 1 Corinthians 13:1–13. The supreme importance of promoting equity, kindness, and humility is the major claim linked to this endeavour. It is conceded that the respective historical contexts and faith communities for each passage are different; nonetheless, the concerns and emphases are correspondent. In each case, the Creator rejects external forms of religiosity and affirms the supreme importance of demonstrating godly compassion.

Concerning Micah 6, the Lord disputed with his people over whether he had somehow wronged them. In reality, it was they who had aggrieved him by violating the stipulations of the Mosaic covenant. This included their disregard for the many ways God had blessed them, along with their contemptuous treatment of one another. The solution was for them to jettison the preceding vices and replace them with rectitude, faithfulness, and meekness. There was no offering people could make that would serve as an adequate or acceptable substitute.

Regarding 1 Corinthians 13, Paul's readers had succumbed to a comparable misunderstanding. They deluded themselves into thinking that the Creator would extol their ability to speak with rhetorical flare, probe the deepest conundrums of the universe, and flame out as a sacrifice to God; yet, none of these antics mattered to the Lord, especially when Christlike love was missing. Conversely, when believers treated others in a humane, considerate, and deferential manner, they fulfilled the essence of the Mosaic covenant, as expressed in Leviticus 19:18.

The supreme importance of promoting equity, kindness, and humility is seen in Jesus' reiterating their value to the hypocritical religious leaders of his day.[153] Accordingly, behaving in a just manner calls for believers doing God's will. This entails adoring him with every aspect of their being and caring for their neighbours as much as they do for themselves. Also, Christians are resolved, with God's help, to advance the cause of justice. This includes revering him, honouring their commitments to him and others, and defending the rights of the innocent.

To prize mercy involves more than treating others in a detached, neutral way. It signifies unfailing compassion, which is a key attribute of God, who abounds in love.[154] Moreover, the Lord's type of mercy shows empathy to the undeserving, offers spiritual resources to those who are less fortunate, donates to charitable causes, and actively shares with others in need. Relating to God in a humble way means recognizing that his children have sinned and are only saved by his grace. Finally, submission to the Creator involves fellowship, namely, spending time with him and devoting one's motives, goals, and integrity to fulfil his will and thereby glorify his name.

[153] Cf. Matt. 23:23; Luke 11:42.

[154] Cf. Exod. 34:6; Neh. 9:17; Ps 103:8; 1 John 4:8.

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