

## 1 Corinthians 13:1-13: The More Excellent Way

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1 Corinthians / 1 Corinthians 13:1–13

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### Introduction

- <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2023/march/how-do-you-measure-love.html> - How do you measure love?
- How can you measure love? Or, can you even know what love is? Famous lyrics from Foreigner: “I wanna know what love is. I want you to show me. I wanna feel what love is. I know you can show me.”
- The church is the place where we should be able to say: “We know what love is!” The church should also be the place where we can say, “We can measure love. We can show you how to love in a way that makes an impact on the life of others.”
- You live in a world where it is difficult to find real love. The world defines love as a feeling, as romance, or as complete acceptance of someone else without any accountability and challenge for change.
- While it is difficult to find real love in the world, it shouldn’t be difficult to find real love in the church. This is the place to be loved, and this is the place to learn how to love.
- [1 Corinthians 13](#) is one of the most famous chapters in the Bible, a beautiful chapter to help us think well about love. A challenging chapter.
- Three truths from this chapter to help us to love in a way that honors Jesus.

## Love must take precedence in the ministry of the church.

- [1 Corinthians 12](#) = spiritual gifts, and Paul will resume his teaching on spiritual gifts in [1 Corinthians 14](#). Before he does, he scolds the church at Corinth for their lack of love.
- [1 Corinthians 12:31](#) - Spiritual gifts are great, especially the greater gifts - the ones that are most other-centered - but there's an even better way: the way of love.
- We most often hear this passage at a wedding. Not wrong to read this passage at a wedding, but if you were sitting in this church as a couple engaged to be married, when these words were read, you would not have looked at your fiancée and said, "Let's have this read at our wedding!" You would have said, "ouch."
- [1 Corinthians 13](#) is a rebuke. The Corinthian believers were unloving - they were divided, some were looking down on others, they weren't caring for each other.
- They were really concerned about spiritual giftedness, and some in the congregation looked down on others that were not as "gifted" as they were.
- Paul's point: So what if you're spiritually gifted if you don't have love. The problem is that these believers were using their spiritual giftedness to serve themselves instead of serving others.
- Vs. 1 - So what if you speak in angelic tongues? If you don't love you're just making noise. (It's annoying.)
- vs. 2 - So what if you have an impressive ability to speak a word of prophecy or able to understand the deep things of God or exercise tremendous faith? If you don't love, you're really nothing.

- vs. 3 - So what if you make impressive personal sacrifices? If you make sacrifices just so you can boast about how much you've sacrificed, you don't really gain anything.
- The spiritual gifts are given for the common good - the gifts are given as a way to show love to others, not so we can brag about how gifted we are. Two warnings from these verses:
  - **You won't love others well if you serve to receive instead of serve to give.** What do I get if I use my gifts for the Lord? The praise of man? Self-fulfillment? Happiness? Wrong motivation. If you serve to receive it's a sign of immaturity.
  - **If you serve to receive your service will be hollow, displeasing to God, and annoying.** If you're in it for you, God sees it, and so do others. Further, the lasting joy is found when you love. Lasting joy is not found when you live for your own glory.

## Love must be practical in the ministry of the church.

- Paul shows us the characteristics of love. Easy to see in this passage that love is other-centered, not self-centered.
- Paul lists fifteen characteristics of love, and he does so by showing us what love is and what love is not. Paul is showing us how we practically demonstrate love.
- As you look through these 15 characteristics, you're likely challenged:
- Love is patient - Corinthians weren't patient with each other. When you're patient you expect others to NOT be perfect and NOT to live up to all of your standards. You're willing to graciously endure the shortcomings of others because you know that's what God has done for you.

- Love is kind - Kindness is being considerate of someone else's needs - it's being genuinely concerned about the wellbeing of someone else. Was there much kindness in Corinth? (Think about how they were taking the Lord's Supper.)
- Love does not envy, nor does love boast. Paul has already called these believers out about this: ( [1 Corinthians 12](#), [1 Corinthians 13:3](#))- How do you respond when another believer gets what you want? When you love you don't gloat about all the things you've done. Instead, you rejoice in the ways God blesses someone else. You want to see God bless others.
- Love is not arrogant. Paul called this out in [1 Corinthians 5:2](#). To be arrogant is to focus on your rights. It's to think of yourself above others. It's self-entitlement.
- Love is not rude. Rude people dishonor people. Rude people don't care what they say because they use their words to scheme and manipulate. Rude people see others as a commodity to meet their needs.
- Love is not self seeking. Loving people put their goals and ambitions aside in order to sacrifice for someone else.
- Love is not irritable. How many of you are easily-triggered? When someone treats you poorly or you someone responds to you in a way that displeases you, do you respond with immediate anger and agitation?
- Love keeps no record of wrongs. When someone offends you, do you bring up the past and all the ways they have wronged you in the past? Loving people are willing to forgive and let things go.
- Love does not rejoice in wrongdoing. Loving people never delight when they see someone else struggle. Instead, loving people speak up when they see someone making mistakes that will hurt them. Love holds people accountable and seeks to bring people under the truth.

- Love bears all things. Love is patient endurance of the immaturity of others. Not excusing, but not getting angry. (This is hard with family, children, etc.) Loving people understand the process of sanctification in the lives of others.
- Love believes all things; hopes all things. Loving people don't give up on others because they know God is able to work miraculously in the lives of people. So, they keep enduring, keep praying, and keep investing even if it's costly.

These fifteen characteristics of love summarized:

- **When you love you will think less about what's best for you.**
- **When you love you will think more about what is best for others.**
- Easier to do with family, your spouse, your children, etc. But, Paul writing to a church. Real love is supposed to be lived out among us. It needs to be practiced among this body in the way that we treat each other, the way that we sacrifice for each other, the way we help each other, the way we disciple each other, pray for each other, etc.
- If you think about these 15 qualities, would you consider yourself a loving person? Do you think less about what's best for you and more about what is best for others?

## **Love must be the permanent marker of maturity in the ministry of the church.**

- [John 13:35](#) - "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." NOT by spiritual giftedness but love.
- Love never ends. There will come a day when spiritual gifts are no longer necessary because spiritual gifts are intended to help the church fulfill its mission. There will come a day when the mission is done, but

love will not be done. For all eternity, we will live in a love relationship with God and with each other.

- Spiritual gifts are temporary, and spiritual gifts are partial. We may see God at work through spiritual gifts, but they don't show us everything about God. When Jesus returns (the perfect vs. 10), there will be no more need for the partial. (E.g., a word of prophecy doesn't show us everything about God. It's only partial.)
- Two analogies: Right now, we know God, but not like we will know God someday. We're like children who have yet to matured. We operate out of our partial knowledge. But, in eternity, we will know God more fully. We will put away what's temporary (the spiritual gifts), and we will more fully know love.
- It's like looking in a mirror - it's not the full view. Right now, you see God. You see Him in His Word, in the way He is at work in you and through you, but not like you will one day see Him. One day you will enter His presence and you will know love even more greatly than you do now.
- What is central to the Christian faith is NOT the spiritual gifts but faith (trusting God for what you cannot see), hope (expecting God to do what He has promised), and love (willing to sacrifice your life for the good of someone else even if they don't deserve it.) BUT... faith and hope are both temporary. One day your faith will become sight, and your hope will be realized. Love is even greater because love will last forever.
- When you choose to love today, you are living out the eternal calling of God today. Let's use our spiritual gifts, but let's make sure our service to the Lord is motivated by love.
- This all sounds good, but how do you actually grow in love? How do you become a loving person?
  - **Receive the love of Jesus and constantly think about His love.** You can't put your name in [1 Corinthians 13](#). (E.g., you can't say,

“Tommy is patient. Tommy is kind.” But, you can put Jesus’ name in [1 Corinthians 13](#). Jesus is patient. Jesus is kind. Jesus is the embodiment of [1 Corinthians 13](#) for you. He demonstrated His love for you by living the life you could not live, dying in your place, and rising again. If you have not placed your faith in Him, trust Him today. Follower of Jesus, we grow in love for others as we constantly think about Jesus’ love for us. We can’t move on from what Jesus has done for us. (Why Lord’s Supper is important, why the spiritual disciplines are important.) How are you reminding yourself of the love of Jesus?

- **Ask God to help you love like Jesus.** You’re not going to grow in love without the help of Jesus. How often are you actually asking Jesus to give you a loving heart, especially toward those you have a hard time loving.
- **Look for evidence of love in your life and ask God to help you grow in specific areas.** When these 15 qualities are growing in your life here’s what you’ll begin to see in your life:
  - You’ll be more willing to have your life complicated by the needs and struggles of others.
  - You’ll be less critical and judgmental towards others, and you’ll look for ways to encourage others.
  - You’ll be more willing to overlook minor offenses ([Proverbs 19:11](#)).
  - You’ll be more willing to admit your own faults instead of constantly nitpicking the faults of others.
  - You will be humble and approachable rather than defensive and argumentative.
  - You’ll be more willing to give your time to others rather than hoarding time for yourself.

- **Seek forgiveness if you have been unloving.** Seek forgiveness from God, and those you have hurt because of an unloving heart.