

## 1 Corinthians 13 (ESV) – Love is patient, love is kind ...

**Main point:** Love is the greatest gift of all.

**Open with a short prayer, inviting God to teach us.**



**Background:** The apostle Paul wrote this letter to the early church at Corinth. Just before this section, Paul has been telling these new believers about how important it is that they are all members of the body of Christ, with different roles and functions. But then Paul says: “And I will show you a more excellent way,” and launches into this passage.

### **Focus of the study:**

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup>And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup>If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

<sup>4</sup>Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant <sup>5</sup>or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; love is not irritable or resentful; <sup>6</sup>love does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. <sup>7</sup>Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

<sup>8</sup>Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. <sup>9</sup>For we know in part and we prophesy in part, <sup>10</sup>but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. <sup>11</sup>When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. <sup>12</sup>For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

<sup>13</sup>So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

### **Questions:**

1. *v. 1: What does Paul say it's like when someone speaks without love? What would you be like if you could speak all the languages on earth fluently and beautifully but everything you said lacked love?*
  - a. A noisy gong or clanging symbol: *what are those like?*
    - i. Obnoxious! Lots of noise but no good effect, empty noise, useless, without profit or delight.
2. *Let's think about that: I wonder what Paul means by love, often translated "charity"?*
  - a. in Greek, *agape* – not just giving to the poor, but deep and sincere love for God and people
3. *v. 2: What are the gifts Paul describes next?*
  - a. Prophetic powers
  - b. Understanding all mysteries and knowledge
  - c. All faith, enough to move mountains
4. *If you knew someone with all of these amazing gifts, what do you think that person would look like to you?*
  - a. Powerful! Important, impressive

5. *BUT: Without love, what does Paul say about that person?*
    - a. "Nothing." God sets value not on great knowledge but on great love.
  6. *[could skip v. 3 for time:] Next Paul talks about someone who sacrifices himself/herself*
    - a. *What could that mean?* Sacrificial giving financially, service, even martyrdom
    - b. *But without love, what does that impressive sacrifice mean?*
      - i. "I gain nothing"
  7. *v. 4: Now Paul starts to describe love. What are the words Paul uses as descriptions for love? (Ask/spend time on what each of these words means; what are other ways to describe...)*
    - a. Patient: can endure evil and injury without resentment or revenge
    - b. Kind
    - c. Does not envy: not sad or angry at the good others receive
    - d. Does not boast: not conceited; raise up others rather than compare
    - e. Not arrogant
    - f. Not rude
    - g. Does not insist on its own way / seek its own (*what do we "seek" for ourselves?*)
    - h. Not irritable: control our temper, sharp tongue
    - i. Not resentful: doesn't hold a grudge, not jealous or suspicious
    - j. Does not rejoice in wrongdoing: takes no pleasure in revenge, hurt, or wrong
    - k. Rejoices with truth
    - l. Bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things
      - i. puts up with, holds firm though struggling, fortitude, benevolence
    - m. Never ends / never fails: permanent and perpetual grace; now and forever
  8. *It can be amusing and instructive to put your own name in place of the word "love" throughout this passage – let's try it: (use your own name and go through it, or use residents' names one at a time around the group, for humor effect 😊) So, how well do we fit these descriptions??*
  9. *v. 8: Paul goes back to his first description of powerful gifts: prophecy, tongues, knowledge. What happens to all of these things?*
    - a. They eventually pass away
  10. *v. 11-12: He compares understanding on this earth to being a child: speaking, thinking, reasoning. How does a child speak, think, and reason?*
    - a. Very basic, limited in language and understanding, can't see the full picture, can't even form words at first! Very self-centered, too; "it's all about me."
    - b. *Now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; know in part, but then fully. What might this mean/look like?* Everything is partial right now, dark and confused – but when the end comes there will be no need of all the other gifts because we'll be with God, in full maturity, light, knowledge and holiness.
  11. *What are the great gifts that abide? (What does "abide" mean?)*
    - a. Faith, hope, and love; they STAY
  12. *But what is the greatest? Why do you think love is named as the greatest gift?*
1. Ask for prayer requests for today.
  2. Close in prayer, naming people and needs listed.
  3. End with a song, e.g., first verse of Amazing Grace

## 1 Corinthians 13

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