

1 Corinthians 13 – Love is patient, love is kind ...

Main point: Love is the greatest gift of all.

Props: A piece of aluminum foil or polished bronze.

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



Background: The apostle Paul (St. Paul) wrote this letter to one of the first churches, in the city of Corinth in ancient Greece. 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 still more excellent way,” and launches into this passage.

Focus of the study:

¹If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ²And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

⁴Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant ⁵or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; love is not irritable or resentful; ⁶love does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. ⁷Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

⁸Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. ⁹For we know only in part and we prophesy only in part, ¹⁰but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. ¹¹When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. ¹²For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.

¹³And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

Questions:

- (Read v. 1 again.) What does Paul say he would be like if he spoke without love? What do you think you'd be like if you could speak all the languages on earth fluently and beautifully but everything you said had no love?*
 - A noisy gong or clanging symbol: *what are those like?*
 - possible answers:* Obnoxious! Lots of noise but no good effect, empty noise, useless, without profit or delight.
- Let's think about that: I wonder what Paul means by love?*
 - (let the group respond)*
 - in Greek, the word for love is *agape* – it means generous love, full of thoughtfulness and concern for another person. It describes how God loves us!
- (Reread v. 2.) What are the gifts Paul describes here?*
 - Prophetic powers
 - Understanding all mysteries and knowledge
 - All faith, enough to move mountains
- If you knew someone who had all of these amazing gifts and abilities, what do you think that person would look like to you?*
 - possible answers:* Powerful! Important, impressive
- BUT without love, even with all those gifts, what does Paul say he would be?*

- a. "I am nothing." God sets value not on great ability or 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's the result of that impressive sacrifice?* "I gain nothing."
7. *(Reread 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 problems and suffering without resentment or revenge
 - b. Kind
 - c. Not envious: not sad or angry at the good things others receive
 - d. Not boastful: not conceited; raise up others rather than compare or tear down
 - e. Not arrogant
 - f. Not rude
 - g. Does not insist on its own way
 - h. Not irritable: control temper, sharp tongue
 - i. Not resentful: doesn't hold a grudge
 - j. Does not rejoice in wrongdoing: takes no pleasure in revenge, hurt, or wrong
 - k. Rejoices in the truth
 - l. Bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things
 - i. puts up with, holds firm though hardship, courage, persistence, tolerance
 - m. Never ends: permanent and perpetual; 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 😊)*
9. *So, how well do we fit these descriptions?? We're not there yet! But God wants to help us become like this over time.*
10. *(Reread v. 8.) Paul goes back to his first description of powerful gifts: prophecy, speaking in other languages, knowledge. What happens to all of these things?*
 - a. They eventually come to an end.
11. *(Reread v. 11.) Paul compares understanding on this earth to being a child: speaking, thinking, reasoning. How does a child speak, think, and reason?*
 - a. *possible answers:* 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."
12. *(Reread v. 12.) I wonder what Paul means here by "seeing in a mirror dimly." In Paul's day, a mirror would only be as good as a piece of foil or polished bronze (hold up prop if using). What does your reflection look like in something like that?*
 - a. *possible answers:* Distorted! Unclear, fuzzy, dim.
 - b. That's what knowledge of God is like for us now: partial, not the whole clear picture. But eventually we won't need reasoning or knowledge about God, because we'll be with God face to face, experiencing complete love in relationship with God.
13. *(Reread v. 13.) What are the great gifts that abide? What does "abide" mean?*
 - a. Faith, hope, and love; "abide" means that they last forever.
14. *I wonder why Paul calls love the greatest gift of all?*

- Ask for prayer requests for today.
- Close in prayer, naming people and needs out loud.
- End with a song, e.g., first verse of Amazing Grace

1 Corinthians 13 (New Revised Standard Version)

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