



“All we need is love.” Is that a true statement? Well, it depends on what you mean by the word “love.” But, I do think that the ache of every human heart is to experience transcendent, everlasting love. We want a relationship where we can feel secure, a relationship where no matter what we do or whatever is found out about us, we will still be accepted and embraced. I’m sure you’ve felt this question with a close friend or a spouse, “Would they love me if. . .?” If I looked like this, would they love me? If they found out about my past, would they still love me? Would they love me if they knew I struggled with this or that thing?

Many humans don’t feel that deep sense of security in love, and yet we seek after it. From songs, movies, books, and plays; love is a major theme and focus. Then we come to 1 Corinthians 13. This chapter draws us in. It’s such a beautifully written chapter that clearly and concisely puts to words what our souls long for. So, this chapter is read at weddings, plastered on posters and greeting cards. When we want to know what love is, Christians often instinctively begin quoting at least part of 1 Corinthians 13. While I don’t think that’s wrong to do, I find something very intriguing about this chapter. Paul didn’t write these words to simply be read at wedding ceremonies. The main application of this chapter isn’t for marriages. These words were written down for the local church. Remember that when Paul wrote his letter to churches, he didn’t put down chapters and verses. We’ve put them here to help us work through the Bible. But there’s no divide from chapter 12 to 13 and 13 to 14. As we keep reading, we find that this chapter is placed in the middle of Paul’s discussion with the Corinthians about spiritual gifts.

At the beginning of chapter 12, we see the Corinthians were asking Paul about how the gifts might reveal one’s spirituality. And, again, Paul reveals to the Corinthians that they are again thinking sinfully. While gifts are God-given, Spirit-generated, Christ-glorifying, the purpose of the gifts aren’t to lift you up individually. Instead, they are intended to help the church grow in glorifying God. In essence, the gifts are given to us to enable us to love God and love one another even more! Do you hear that: to love.

Love is the point. Where the Corinthians were thinking the gifts were this great sign of the Kingdom of Christ, Paul says that *love* is the great sign of Christ’s Kingdom. People who have been forgiven and reconciled to God are a people who have experienced the eternal love of God. As a result, if you and I have received his love, we are now empowered and called to display that love to one another. Whether eating or drinking or exercising our spiritual gifts, we are to be compelled by the love of Christ and compelled to love you, my brothers and sisters in Christ.

This leads me to the main idea of chapter 13, which is, **Love is of more value than any “grace gift.”** This doesn’t mean that the grace gifts aren’t valuable, but without love, everything is meaningless. Before getting into the text itself, it may be helpful to understand **a few factors relating to this chapter**. First, **love is defined with verbs**. In four verses, Paul uses 15 verbs to describe love! Why does this matter? Well, verbs are action words. This leads some to translate the word “agape,” which is the Greek word used here as “demonstration of love” (see Garland, p. 616). Love isn’t primarily a feeling. Love isn’t

simply something you feel from others, like you know love when you feel it from someone else. Instead, this chapter doesn't highlight what others are to do for you, but instead Paul's emphasis is on whether or not *you* love. Which leads to a second point: **Paul is simultaneously praising love and confronting the Corinthians.** The words and phrases here are very specific. If you simply make these words say the opposite, you find that Paul is describing the flaws of many of the Corinthians. They were impatient, unkind, jealous, puffed up. They rejoiced in wrongdoing rather than the truth. So, this text should cause us to rejoice, but it's also meant to cause us to evaluate our own hearts: do you have love? Do I have love? Finally, **Paul is pointing us to God's love in Christ.** Many of the words Paul uses here are also used to describe God the Father and Jesus. Some words are used specifically elsewhere to refer to Jesus' sacrificial love. Again, this makes sense with Paul's purpose in this letter. He determined to know nothing among the Corinthians but Jesus Christ and him crucified. Therefore, as Paul is calling the Corinthians to evaluate themselves, they are evaluating themselves against the One who is Love and the One who so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, Jesus (Jn. 3:16). He's pointing to the One who loved and gave himself for Paul (Gal. 2:20).

Now, with this understanding, we can jump into chapter 13. Love is of more value than any grace gift. Ok, Paul, if you're going to say that, prove it. Each point of the sermon today is going to be Paul's reason why love is superior. And the first point is:

1. Without love, even extreme grace-gifts are worthless (vv. 1-3).

Let's read verses 1-3 again: If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not 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 have not love, I am nothing. ³If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. ¹

When you read these words, you realize that Paul is speaking with hyperbole. It's not simply if he speaks in tongues, but what if he speaks in tongues of men and of angels. It's not merely if he has prophetic powers, but if he also understands *all* mysteries and *all* knowledge, having *all* faith. It's not merely if he gives away all he has, but if he gives himself to martyrdom. Do you see how he's taking the gifts to the greatest extreme? He does this to show the superior value of love. Even the most extreme gift falls by the wayside if there's no love. Again, I'm not going to define the gifts here because the point isn't the gifts themselves. We can understand that Paul is speaking in extremes while focusing on his bigger point that love is vital and superior.

In these first three verses, Paul is using himself as an example and says that if he has all tongues, but doesn't have love, he's a noisy gong and a clanging cymbal. The Greek behind these words are a little more confusing. The "noisy gong" in particular may simply be referencing noisy brass. We don't know if it's an instrument or not. Either way, Paul's point is that if you can speak in various languages, but if you don't have love, you're just making noise. It's loud, but for what purpose? Cymbals and gongs are to serve a purpose. Without love, tongues make no sense. Paul would be speaking, but to who? And for what purpose? Without love, Paul says he'd be annoying.

Paul moves on to the next few gifts of prophecy, understanding, knowledge, and faith. But without faith, Paul says he'd *be* nothing. He actually uses a term to refer to his identity. He doesn't simply say that without love, the gifts are nothing. He says, "I am nothing." Essentially, if he doesn't have love in him

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 13:1–3.

and animating him, he's worthless. Actually, this is the state of all human beings outside of Christ. In Romans 3, Paul quotes the Old Testament that says that all humans have become "worthless." The worthlessness is referencing how humans don't know, embrace and live God's glory. Without God's love in us, we are worthless. So, Paul is potentially stating that if he had no love, he's not even a believer. What about you? Do you long for the gifts more than loving others?

Finally, Paul gets to self-sacrifice – even to the point of martyrdom. Now, this is very interesting because as I just said, this whole letter is an emphasis on self-sacrifice. I've been preaching so much on sacrifice that this past week, my own sister said that sacrifice was my favorite word. But I've been using that word over and over again because that's been Paul's point, right? Since Jesus crucified is Jesus' sacrifice, and Paul is teaching us that we live on the basis of Jesus' sacrifice and we ourselves are to point to his sacrifice through our actions, then we recognize the privilege of self-sacrifice. But Paul goes so far as to say that even self-sacrifice and martyrdom doesn't matter *if you do not have love*. Whoa! Think about this again. Is self-sacrifice important? Yes! It's a major theme in this letter. But Paul says that self-sacrifice *without love gains nothing*.

At this point, you could say, isn't all self-sacrifice based in love? Not necessarily. People can die for pride. They can die for their name's sake. They can die to prove how good they are. Even if they might die because they love some person, the question is if they know God, who is Love, and if they love him. This reminds me of when Jesus talks about the Pharisees and their sacrifice. They prayed and fasted, but for what purpose? They really just wanted to be seen. They wanted to be elevated. This is what the Corinthians are doing. They're being "spiritually" so that they can be seen as very spiritual. Is that true spirituality? No. Do you want to be friends with someone who really just wants to use you to elevate themselves? Yet, that's how many people live – even people within the church. We can think primarily of how I'm being treated and how I want people to act towards me as opposed to *loving others*.

But even when we are serving, we can be more concerned about our image than other's good. Think about this. Do you do things for your image's sake? Do you teach in SS or preach or pray or serve for self-motivated purposes? Here's a great test to know if this is the case for you. It's a test I take myself through. When people don't acknowledge me and what I think was really good, do I get angry at them? Why angry at them? Because I was expecting them to give me something as opposed to truly loving them in the midst of the sacrifices. If I loved genuinely, then the sacrifice would be done for their good – not seeking my glory.

Paul says if we live this way of loveless sacrifice, we gain nothing. Again, this is exactly what Jesus says, "You have your earthly reward." Maybe people will think highly of you, but what does that mean when your body's 6 feet under the ground? What good did loveless sacrifice accomplish? Nothing.

So, without love, Paul would be annoying, nothing and gaining nothing. Love is more valuable than any grace-gift because we see that without love, even extreme grace-gifts are worthless. And we also see that:

2. With love comes extreme (and beautiful) others-centeredness (vv. 4-7).

⁴ Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. ²

Remember what I stated earlier. Love is described with fifteen verbs. Paul is both highlighting love while confronting the Corinthians – calling them to evaluate themselves and how they relate to each other in their own local church. Finally, these words are used to describe Jesus Christ and him crucified! So, we're going to walk through these phrases with these points in mind, and I beg you to not apply this list to others. I beg you not to say, "Yeah but so-and-so doesn't do this." That misses everything. In Corinth, many were not living out love and Paul calls each of them to live out love in their midst. Why? Because God's glory in Christ is worth it! How will the world see the light of Christ in us if we don't love one another in Christ?

Patient. This honestly is one of my favorite Greek words. In the English, we simply say "patient," but this is the Greek word for longsuffering. I'll say it again, I wish this word would come back into common English language. I say that because to suffer-long is the point, and this is the first verb to qualify *love*. Do you suffer long with people in this church family? Do you know people well enough in this church that you actually suffer alongside of them? Or, are you so resistant to pain and difficulty that you'll be like the Corinthians and let those in pain deal with their own issues while you're enjoying yourself? This is anti-Christlike behavior. In Matthew, Mark and Luke, Jesus is recorded as saying, "How long am I to be with you, suffer with you, endure with you?" This was before Jesus' death, and he describes his time with this world as one of endurance and even suffering. That doesn't mean that he didn't love the people, but it's a stated reality of the patient, enduring love that he had for the people.

You could be tempted to think that this word for "patient" is then a woe-is-me kind of attitude. Some of you might say, "Oh yeah, I've suffered a lot with people! I definitely love," but as we go on to the next word, we find that longsuffering isn't something that gives us a martyr-complex and a feel-bad-for-me attitude. Instead, we suffer long because we love – and we suffer long because love is. . .

Kind. Ephesians 4:32 tells us that we are to be kind to one another in the church like God has been kind to us! This kindness knows that every person faces difficulties and pains. We don't need to be mocked and derided and looked down upon. We need kindness, and the local church can give this kindness because we've experienced the greatest kindness of all. Whereas God could have marked our sins against us and in the grand courtroom of Heaven could have declared us eternally guilty and deserving of eternal punishment, bound in our sinfulness forever – Jesus came to this world and took the consequences of our sin on himself! Wasn't that kind? Does the word "kind" seem like such an understatement? Yet, it's the word we have! And because of Christ's kindness, we can be kind to one another.

Interestingly, this past week, I discovered that Christians during the second century so surprised the unbelievers around them with their kindness to fellow Christians that, according to an ancient church leader, named Tertullian, the world called the Christians *chrestiani* rather than *christiani*. It's a play on words. *Chrestiani* is the Greek word for mildness or kindness. These Christians were known as mild and kind by the world. Ventura, can that be said of us? Would the world look at us as Christians and say, "They are mild and kind!" If they spent time with us as a church, would they see how kind we are to each other. Not simply how we smile at each other on Sundays, but how we live out the longsuffering

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 13:4–7.

and forgiveness and care that we all need. So, to get specific, are you kind like Jesus to fellow members of Ventura? If you're like me, you might feel the weight of these words. You might even start defending yourself and say, "Yeah, but. . ." And then Paul goes on to more words:

Does not envy or boast. This word translated envy refers to having a zeal against someone. If you have strong feelings against someone's wellbeing or good, you are not loving. To boast is to elevate yourself. It's no wonder these words are put together here. I put someone down and I elevate me. In some ways, I feel like this has become the nature of social media. Actually, recent studies on the algorithms of Facebook reveal that Facebook works specifically in order to highlight, create and enhance division. How does it do this? Elevate you and your view and lead you to be zealous against others and their views. We see how attractive social media is, don't we? Yet, within the church, we shouldn't be like Facebook or Twitter. No envying and no boasting. We are to treat others as more significant than ourselves and we are to boast in the Lord Jesus Christ! We do this because Jesus himself, who could have elevated himself on this earth, humbled himself. He wasn't zealously against people, but zealously for them! Praise his name. Now, Ventura, let's rejoice and live in this reality together.

Not arrogant or rude. The word for arrogance appears in 1 Corinthians 6 times, and this word is only found in the New Testament a total of 7 times! The Corinthians are arrogant. Yet again, Jesus was not arrogant. He didn't lift himself up, but he went down in humility. And, in love, Jesus built people up. You see, "building up" others is the opposite of building up yourself (which is arrogance). Do you build up others in the church? Do you encourage them and do they know that when they talk to you, they're going to be strengthened in seeking the Lord? Or, are you rude? This basically means that you act contrary to the standards. And the standard is Christ. Elsewhere in this letter, Paul said that he seeks to please everyone. . .not seeking his own advantage (see 10:33). This is the calling of all of us here as Ventura! Pursuing Jesus together means we will live out this love! And, we will

Not irritable or resentful. To be irritable means that you're easily annoyed. Problems arise and you're quick to be irritated. Or, maybe it's just a person who behaves a certain way and you are simply annoyed quickly with them. Praise the Lord, he wasn't irritable with us! He was consistent in his behavior. And, also, praise Jesus he wasn't resentful. If Jesus were resentful, he'd never save us! He'd be saying, "You put me on the cross! You think I'm going to save you?" Yet, sometimes Christians can act this way. We can say, "You did this or that thing, I can't forgive you." Remember what Jesus says, if you don't forgive others, you reveal you're not forgiven. Resentfulness holds people to account to you, but in reality, Jesus is the Judge. You are free to let go and know Jesus' love. Are you making others pay to you? What about in the church? Are you holding on to what you think people have done to us? A gospel community is quick to forgive and knows that love covers a multitude of sins. Therefore,

Does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. This is how Jesus lived. He is the way. He is the truth! He never celebrated sin. He lovingly addressed it in others, with longsuffering. And he rejoiced with the truth so much so that tax collectors and sinners befriended him. Similarly, within the church, we shouldn't be like Corinth that boasted in a man's sin. We shouldn't sweep sins under the rug. We should weep, but we should also rejoice in the truth of the gospel that promises that all who come to Jesus are forgiven and given grace to grow in obedience! Nobody here should ever try to project that they're perfect and sinless. We should all be open and transparent as brothers and sisters in Christ. And nobody here should shame people into thinking they're hopeless causes. As a result,

Bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Put these phrases together and see the glory of God's love in Jesus. Jesus even bore our sins. Jesus *believed* all things. This doesn't mean

Jesus was gullible. This isn't a verse that calls us to believe anything anyone says. This means that you have faith in the midst of all things. You trust God and his word. Even though Jesus was going to the cross, he believed the Father that the greatest act in human history (the death on the cross) would lead to his exaltation and the rescue of creation! Therefore, there is hope. This word for hope means to have assurance in God's promises. If you have assurance, you'll endure. Well now, how does this relate to the local church?

Well, almost a year ago, I preached a message that in it I asked you all to turn to one another and say, "I'm a mess." Then say, "You're a mess." I simply did that so that we all acknowledge we are still broken in many ways. We sin in many ways. But, in this world of cancel culture, we are to be a contrast to the world. We walk like Jesus. We bear with one another even when we disagree. We believe God's way of unity and obedience and patience is right. We have assurance that God will work his will through us as we pursue Jesus together. Therefore, we endure.

Ventura, what would our church be like if we emphasized *love* above the gifts? This isn't to downplay the gifts, but to emphasize that we ought to be a people so filled with God's love that we want to love one another and display God's glory to one another in all things. To have and express love means we are part of a greater Kingdom. To love reveals we have been saved by Jesus. Even 1 John says you know you've passed from death to life if you have love for one another – and he's talking about our special love for fellow believers. So, let this list cause you to rejoice in Christ's love and let this list also challenge you in relationship with this local church. Do you live this out? Ask others in this church if you do. Pray to the Lord for greater repentance and grace so that we are living out love! What a great sign that the Spirit is in our midst.

At this point, we could think Paul's argument is over, but he still has one more point. Love is of more value than any grace-gift because:

3. Love will continue on in eternal life, but even the supernatural gifts will not continue (vv. 8-12).

Verses 8-12 read, ⁸Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. ¹¹When 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. ¹²For 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. ³

Love never ends is the main idea here. Prophecies will pass away. Tongues will cease. The special gift of knowledge will pass away. These phrases refer to their death. Whereas love never dies. Why? Because God, who is Love, will never die. But Paul begins verse 9 with a "For." In other words, he gives another reason why the special supernatural gifts will cease. He says now we prophecy in part. Prophecy is speaking about and pointing to a future day. But when that future day comes, there's no need for prophecy. Now, some make an argument here that the future day Paul is talking about is the completion of the New Testament. Therefore, prophecy is no longer a gift today. I don't believe the phrase "when the perfect comes" is talking about the completion of the New Testament because Paul talks about *when* he will know fully. And he wasn't alive when the New Testament was completed.

³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 13:8–12.

The perfect coming is when Jesus comes again and all things rescued by him and he brings the New Heaven and New Earth. So, Paul is saying that we live in this in between time period. You can liken us to being like children. In this time period, it's appropriate for children to behave like children. There are things they know and things they don't know. But when we have matured, we put away those things we no longer need as children. So, Paul says in verse 12, now we see in a mirror dimly. But someday we'll be face to face with our Savior. Now we know partially, but someday we will know fully and completely!

Even with our Bibles we don't know fully. But someday, we will know and be fully known! Someday, we will be home with our God, and imagine being secure completely in his love then. As Paul says in verse 13: ¹³So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love. ⁴ In eternity future, we will depend on our God. Forever, we will have steadfast assurance in him and the eternal life he gives. Forever we will love.

In light of forever, let's live out our security today. Are you afraid of loving relationships within the church? Do you wonder if we'd love you *if* something was known about you? Do you strive to project yourself in the best possible light? Do you serve in order to maintain feelings of acceptance? Oh, I pray we'd lay down these things. **Love is of more value than anything else we can do. May we be a loving community who truly lives in and lives out Christ's love.**

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⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 13:13.