

Loving Church: 1 Corinthians 13v1-13

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[0 : 00] 1,153, 1 Corinthians 13. Okay.

Love. And now I will show you the most excellent way. If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains but have not love, I am nothing.

If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient.

Love is kind. It does not envy. It does not boast. It is not proud. It is not rude.

[1 : 13] It is not self-seeking. It is not easily angered. It keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth.

It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.

But where there are prophecies, they will cease. Where there are tongues, they will be stilled.

Where there is knowledge, it will pass away.

For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child.

I thought like a child. I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection, as in a mirror.

[2 : 20] Then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part. Then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

And now these three remain. Faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.

Thanks very much, Mary.

Well, please keep your Bibles open there to 1 Corinthians 13. And we're going to pray. Amen. The greatest of these is love.

Father, please will you teach us afresh what it is to be a loving people, a loving church together.

[3 : 37] Father, please show us, Father, how we can serve one another in love so that the church is built up in faith, that it is motivated to reach out to our wider community, and that together we would become the holy church of God that you have called us to be.

Father, may everything that we look at this morning be done in love so that we are encouraged and strengthened.

we ask for your help to us today. In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, it seems the church in Corinth had everything they needed.

If you go back to chapter 1, verse 4, in his introduction, we'll see there that they had everything that they could possibly need.

1 Corinthians chapter 1, verse 4. I always thank God for you, so he's thanking God for the church, because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus.

[5 : 18] For in Christ, you have been enriched in every way. Verse 7.

Therefore, you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.

The church in Corinth were a very gifted church. But for all of their gifting, it was a church that was in a mess.

Go back to chapter 12. It seems that whenever the church gathered together, they were measuring their spirituality according to their gifts.

So, if you could heal someone or work miracles, and especially if you could speak in tongues, you were thought of as superior. You were above everybody else.

[6 : 21] You were treated with greater value. And of course, everybody else, those whose gifts they deemed as ordinary, like welcoming or set up, were considered of no value.

And you were made to feel inferior. And this kind of thinking was destroying and dividing the church, and it needed to be corrected.

So look at chapter 12, verse 18. He reminds the church that in fact God has arranged the parts of the body, that is, the people within the body of Christ, every one of them, just as God wanted them to be.

If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, many gifts, but yet one body.

So the eye cannot say to the hand, I don't need you. And the head cannot say to the feet, I don't need you. On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable.

[7 : 31] You see, there was to be no inferiority and no superiority within the church body. There is a diversity of gifts, and they all needed one another.

You see, for all of their gifting, and of all of their talents, they were missing one vital ingredient. Verse 29, chapter 12.

Are all apostles? No. Are all prophets? No. Are all teachers? No. Do all work miracles? No. Do all have gifts of healing?

No. Do all speak in tongues? No. Do all interpret? No. But eagerly desire the greater gifts. So what are the greater gifts?

We'll have a look at the very end of chapter 13. Verse 13. Look at the very last line. of the greater gifts. Of the greater gifts, the greatest of these is love.

[8 : 41] You see, what we have in chapter 13 is not a nice letter about how wonderful love is, although it is. It is a stern rebuke to a church that is unloving.

He's reminding them that you have every gift you need. You are incredibly gifted, but you don't have love. Again, look at chapter 13.

Verse 1. Chapter 13. Verse 1. And now I will show you the most excellent way.

Let me show you how love is essential when it comes to the body of Christ. Let me explain to you how vital love is when it comes to using your gifts.

He's going on to show us how love and gifts are inseparable. Love doesn't replace our gifts. It's like our gifts must be wrapped up in love.

[9 : 54] So we're going to look at three things this morning in relation to our gifts and love. First, gifts without love do nothing to build up the church.

Imagine we as a church had every possible gift we could think of. Imagine that each one of us had the most extraordinary and amazing gifts that we could ever desire.

We'll look at chapter 13. Verse 1. If, it's like, imagine, if I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, not just ordinary tongues or ordinary languages, but the tongues of angels, some heavenly language if it exists.

Imagine being able to speak and pray like that. Verse 1. But if I have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

Without love, all I am is a dreadful, irritating noise to the rest of the church body. Rather than build up the church, I am a hindrance to the church. Or what about verse 2?

[11 : 15] If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, not just the ability to speak God's word into people's lives, but imagine you had the gift of knowing every divine secret, all mysteries.

All mysteries. Imagine being able to understand what God's plan is in every situation. All knowledge. End of verse 2.

But if I have not love, I am nothing. Without love, it doesn't matter what I know or what understanding I have, it will be completely unhelpful and unproductive, I will be a waste of space within the church if I have not love.

Or look at the middle of verse 2. If I have faith that could move mountains, imagine faith so great that you could uproot Cairn, Tool and Kerry and move it all the way to Athlone Town.

Imagine the faith to work amazing miracles, to raise the dead even. But if I have not love, I am nothing.

[12 : 47] Without love, I might be able to do amazing things, but it will be of no value or no worth. Rather than build up the church, I am nothing.

Or verse 3. If I give all I possess to the poor, not just what I usually give, but everything. If I were to sell my house, empty my bank account, cash in my pension, imagine the gift of giving like this. But not only that, look at the rest of verse 3. If I surrender my body to the flames, imagine you have the gift of going to North Korea with a box full of Bibles and preaching the gospel on the streets of Pyongyang or going to ISIS territory and speaking about Jesus to the leaders. Imagine you have the gift to surrender your life to death for Christ. God has not loved. But look at the end of verse 3.

But if I have not love, I gain nothing. You see, I'm quite sure we all dream because I do. And imagine about having the great and spectacular gifts.

[14:11] But whatever gift has been given to us, whatever gifts God has determined the church to have without love. They're nothing. All of our service, all of our giving, all of our speaking amounts to zero, zilch.

It does no benefit for the church. How sad is that? We can be the most busiest of people, extremely talented.

We can have titles and we can have roles. We can be whatever gift we want to have. But without love, we gain nothing.

And the people around us gain nothing. Rather than build up the church, it weakens, breaks, and divides the church. So gifts without love do nothing to build up the church.

Second, gifts motivated by love will build up the church. Remember, this chapter 13 is a stern rebuke to a church who has every gift but they lack love.

[15:34] You see, our love can be so easily misplaced, can't it? We love ourselves rather than loving others. Instead of building up the church, we're more interested in building up our own egos.

So verses 4 to 7 are to be read as a rebuke to the church. true love never has its focus on self. It's always focused on others. So it's as if he's putting love before us and saying, let's see how our gifts, when they are motivated by love, let's have a look at what it would be like within the body of Christ.

And as we go through, maybe there's one or two you want to pick out and pray for God's work in our own lives. He breaks them into three categories.

Love is, verse 4, love is patient. Love is long suffering with each other. We don't give up on people. Instead, we continue to use our gifts to serve others and build them up in faith.

[16:48] Love is kind. That is, love is gentle towards people who have offended us and those who have caused us hurt. Rather than respond in bitterness, we use our gifts to respond with acts of kindness.

So love is patient and kind. love is not. Love does not envy.

So instead of looking around the church family at the gifts of others and wanting what she has or what he has, well, instead we give thanks to God and we celebrate his good design in the way he's given us a diversity of gifts.

Love does not boast. When we serve one another we're not seeking to draw attention to ourselves. Oh, look at me. What great gifts I have.

How would the church ever survive without me? Well, we're not great. God is the one who is great by giving us the gifts that we have.

[18:06] Read on. Love is not proud. Love never says or thinks I don't need you or you know what I can just manage on my own.

No, we're not independent people. We are the body of Christ and each one of us needs the other. Love is not rude.

As we serve we don't plough on ahead with our own agendas. Ignoring others and taking over even if our way might be a little bit better.

It's not about doing what I want and the way that I want. Love takes into consideration others and how our service will bless them. Love is not self-seeking.

You know when we serve or give financially or plan an event we don't go looking for people's praise and thanks and go what did you think of that?

[19:14] We want people to give the Lord Jesus all the glory and praise. Love is not angered.

Love doesn't lose control or lose its cool. We don't shout or get frustrated or get annoyed. Love is slow to anger.

It brings a sense of calm and peace rather than a whirlwind full of chaos. Or what about this one?

Love does not keep a record of wrongs. love. You see we don't withhold our service to others because of what they said to me last week. And we don't think things like well I'm not going to help you fill in the name because of the way they treated me all those years ago.

[20 : 18] Love covers over a multitude of sins. We don't keep records. love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

When we speak to each other we don't ignore unrepentant sin or overlook sinful behaviour. Love speaks the truth gently so as to build one another up.

So love is, love is not and love always. love is look at verse 7, love always protects.

Love is always seeking what is best for the other person, building them up rather than tearing them down with our gossip and our words. Love always trusts.

it moves beyond questions and concerns about what if that person won't accept my gift or what if they're not going to receive my help or what if they take my encouragement in the wrong way?

[21 : 27] What if? Well, love always gives people the benefit of the doubt and moves towards them in trust.

Love always hopes. It acts in confidence that God will work out his purposes and God is ultimately in control.

Love uses gifts to reach out to others and reaches out to building up others in Christ. And fittingly, love always perseveres, comes at the end.

Love always gives. Love never stops. Love keeps on going no matter the knocks or hardship.

Love persists. Love never says or thinks, I'm giving up on you. love love So are we a loving church?

[22 : 40] Am I a loving person? Put your own name where it says love in verses four to seven.

Just put your own, insert your own name here. Johnny is patient. Johnny is kind. Johnny does not envy. Johnny does not boast.

Johnny is not proud. Johnny is not rude. Johnny is not self-seeking. Johnny is not easily angered. Johnny keeps no record of wrongs. Johnny loves. Or loves does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

Johnny always protects. Johnny always trusts. Johnny always hopes. Johnny always perseveres. Don't come to my house.

You see we don't have to go very far along the list before we all realize how we all need to stop and repent and ask God to make us more like his son the Lord Jesus the perfect man who truly was love.

[23 : 50] We need to stop and ask Lord change my self-loving heart. Forgive me for not loving as I should. Fill me with your Holy Spirit that I may love others as you loved me as you gave your life for me as you have persisted and pursued me never failing never giving up never keeping a record of my wrongs.

Lord help me to love with your love. No wonder love is called the most excellent way.

You see when our gifts are wrapped up in love and presented in our service to others they build up the church.

So gifts without love do nothing to build up the church. Gifts motivated by love will build up the church.

And then third gifts with love or gifts wrapped up in love will lead the church to perfection.

[25 : 11] Have a look at verse 8. love never fails. Or as some of your translation will say love never ends.

In other words love will just go on and on and on for all eternity. But as for our spiritual gifts that God has given to us and to his church look at the rest of verse 8.

But where there are prophecies they will cease they will come to an end where there are tongues they will be stilled they won't go on for eternity where there is knowledge it will pass away for now we know in part and we prophesy in part but when perfection comes the imperfect disappears so so so so so what is this perfection that he's talking about what's the perfection that's coming and and when will it come well

I think it's when the Lord Jesus is going to come again when he's going to change us and transform us to be like Jesus the church gathered with Christ and made pure and holy that's some of the things he's going to go on to in chapter 15 just have a sneak preview chapter 15 verse 49 as he talks about the coming of Christ when we're resurrected to be with him look at what happens

chapter 15 verse 49 just as we have born the likeness of the earthly man just as we are like Adam full of sin we fail so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven one day the Lord Jesus is going to come again and he is going to perfect us perfect the church and call us to be what we are meant to be back to chapter 12 then we're given two pictures in chapter 13 we're given two pictures as to what this perfection will be like look at verse 11 chapter 13 verse 11 when

I was a child I talked like a child I thought like a child I reasoned like a child when I became a man I put childish ways behind me you see adults do not behave like toddlers well we're not meant to at least they mature they change certain behaviors are left behind they grow up well that's like our spiritual gifts their purpose is to grow us up to grow the church body up so that we become the holy people of God so that when Christ comes again we will put childish ways behind us that is we will not need our gifts anymore because now we will be fully mature we will have grown up we will be like Christ he gives us another picture in verse 12 now we see a poor reflection as in a mirror then in the future when

[29 : 30] Christ comes again we shall see face to face now I think it's helpful for us to know that mirrors in the first century are not like your mirrors today they were made of polished metal so it's a bit like looking at yourself on a biscuit tin lid do you remember doing that and all the funny shapes you could get you could see your reflection but it's not very clear it's all a little bit hazy well God has given spiritual gifts to us and to the church to help us know God more to get a clear vision a picture of who God is but for all our gifts and for all our knowledge of God our understanding and our clarity of God is all still a little bit hazy it's like looking into a metal mirror it's not quite clear we can have the greatest teachers we can have the best theologians we can be able to communicate and understand all kinds of things about

God but we will not know him fully but when Christ come we will not need our gifts anymore for we will see God and know God fully look at verse 12 we will see as to face to face look at the end of verse 12 now I know in part then I shall know fully even as I am fully known just think about that just as God knows us fully and intimately now he knows us completely a day is going to come when we will know and experience God in all his fullness because we will be like him so our gifts wrapped in love are leading us towards our final goal the perfection of the church and when that day comes when

Christ comes again we will not need our gifts anymore no matter how spectacular they are instead as a church gathered with Christ we will live in a life of eternal love look at the end of chapter 13 verse 13 and now he says these three remain faith are faith today is in Christ trusting that his death is sufficient to deal with all our sin and guarantee our future with him hope because of the resurrection of Christ from the dead we look forward with absolute assurance that one day we will be with him love as we wait for Christ return we seek to love each other and love God with all the gifts that we have been given but the greatest of these is love you see when

Christ returns not only will we not need any of our spiritual gifts but we will no longer need the gift of faith we will no longer need the gift of hope instead we will have the gift of love for we will love God perfectly and we will love each other perfectly we will never get annoyed with each other we will never fail each other we will never wrong each other we will experience the love of God and the love towards each other in all its fullness for love never ends so until we get there let us take the gifts that God has given us to each one individually let us wrap them up in love and let us serve one another as we look forward to our final goal the perfection of the church may

God help us to love as he loved us let's pray father thank you for showing us through your words what love is like father would you please forgive us for the times we do not love as we should and so we come to you not only asking for forgiveness but asking for your enabling for the transformation of our lives filling us with your spirit that we would serve one another in love that we would do everything in love so that the church is built up so that we together reach that goal of one day being presented as perfect before

[35 : 09] Christ father help us to keep going to persevere just as love never fails may we never fail in our desire to reach that goal we pray it in Jesus name amen love divine or love excelling it's an old hymn but a great hymn that reminds us of that amazing love of God come down to us to change us let me just take you to the very last verse finish then thy new creation pure and spotless let us be let us see thy great salvation perfectly restored in thee changed from glory into glory till in heaven we take our place till we cast our crowns before thee lost in wonder love and praise that's the perfection

God is one day going to bring us where we are chained from glory into glory let's stand as we sing