

1 Corinthians 13:1–3

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[0 : 00] And as Abel for the reading of God's word. If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

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.

If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Well, good morning. And as you're settling in, I just want to give a special welcome to those of you who are visiting.

It is so great to have you here this morning, and we pray that you will have a personal encounter with the living God while you are here in this hour.

[1 : 02] It was in the month of May, 1984, that Tina Turner released that most memorable of songs, What's Love Got to Do With It?

It's a song that permeates all the way through to our present day. It's a song for which she received that year the Grammy for the number one single.

It's a song that anchored the album that she released that same year that gave her the second Grammy album of the year.

It is the song, I think, that propelled her in 1984 to be the female vocalist of the year. When released as a single in May of that year, it would go on to sell well over two million copies.

And she was on to something, even if she fell short of something. Let me explain. The lyrics with which the song opens go like this.

[2 : 15] You must understand, though the touch of your hand makes my pulse react, that it's only the thrill of boy meeting girl.

Opposites attract. It's physical. It's logical. You must try to ignore it means more than that. Old. What's love got to do with it?

Got to do with it. What's love but a secondhand? What? You don't know that song? What's love but a secondhand?

Okay, you're up. Or at least some of you are older than 1984. I said she was on to something while yet falling short of something.

The lyrics insightfully indicate that love is something more than physical chemistry.

[3 : 20] It's more than that. What's love got to do with this physical chemistry that we sense?

And yet she falls short of something because the very next line, what's love but a secondhand emotion? Let me say from my own perspective that it's nice to know that love, whatever that is, is more than physical chemistry.

Even though that's the thing that many of us run into in life, seek in life, want in life, and are disappointed when we learn that it must have been more than that for life.

But it's also more than an emotional connection. It's not just a secondhand emotion. Our emotions fluctuate, don't they?

They come, they go. Love, genuine love, is not emotional in the sense that, well, I have it for you for a bit, for a minute, but not any more than the moment.

[4 : 37] In fact, love is actually more, I think, than a romantic relationship. And so all of these things for us fall somewhere on the range of semantic meaning.

I love you, we say, when we have a physical attraction towards you. I love you when we have an emotional connection with you.

I love you when I am romantically receiving things from you. So what's love got to do with it?

I think Paul, in these three verses, will help all of us, Christians or non-Christians, consider what love is.

More particularly, what love's got to do with it. And if I had to title the sermon, I'd simply say, everything. What's love got to do with it?

[5 : 37] Everything. Everything. So how does Paul go about demonstrating in these verses that love is something beyond the things which we've discussed to this point?

Not only how does he go about demonstrating it, but what and where do we go to get it? I think there are three evidences, three truths, three ways that he tries to convince the readers of his conviction that love is everything.

Three verses, three different means that demonstrate his point. His point is simply going to be that acquiring love is more important than being gifted.

Take it in. We're going to sit on that all the way throughout. Acquiring love is more important than being gifted.

He argues that first in verse one, where he really begins to say that without love, your speech is little more than added noise.

[6 : 58] Let me read it. If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

Without love, one's speech is little more than noise. This idea of a clanging cymbal.

I think a couple of the Psalms, Pastor Pace could probably make us aware and join the church to come into worship with the sound of cymbals. But there's actually a lot of different kinds of cymbals.

Some of them are small enough to put on your thumb and your middle finger and make noise as you go about. Small noise. Quiet noise.

The kind of noise I had last night at a wedding reception with the tiniest of bells going ding, ding, ding, ding, ding. But that's not the kind of symbol that's envisioned here.

[8 : 00] What's envisioned here is that loud, big, two-hands-to-hold symbol that emerges like in Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony. And it's just bang, bang, bang, just this unceasing, big, clanging sound.

And what he says is, if you say and speak in the languages of men and of angels, but you don't have love, you are nothing more than noise.

And think of it. That's quite a statement. That's quite a statement. Because what he means by speaking in tongues of men and angels is this.

To speak in the tongue of a man in Acts 2, for instance, at Pentecost, is likened to somebody spontaneously being gifted by the Spirit to begin speaking in a human language that they'd never studied, they'd never learned, they didn't own a grammar book, they didn't take any fluency courses, they never downloaded an app like Duolingo or Rosetta Stone.

Or put in their AirPods a month before they went to a foreign country on vacation so they could ask where the bathroom is. No, none of these things. Imagine standing and suddenly being gifted by the Spirit to speak in a human language you had never known.

[9 : 49] That's what happens. That's extraordinary. But evidently there are various kinds of tongues. It's not only being gifted by the Spirit to do that, but also being gifted by the Spirit to speak.

What does it say there, verse 1? Put your eyes on it. In the tongues of angels, which is something distinct from Pentecost. We will find in the coming weeks, particularly in 1 Corinthians 14, that the Spirit endowed individuals to suddenly speak in heavenly languages, unlearned, unknown, and therefore a need to be interpreted for anyone else to gain anything.

Imagine what it would be like to be overcome with a gift that suddenly permitted you to speak German never having learned it, or a gift that suddenly enabled you to give praise and prayers to God in the language of the created beings who actually circle His throne from everlasting.

I mean, that would fill you with adrenaline, if nothing else. But what Paul says here concerning that capacity, as he's explaining a more excellent way than giftedness in the church, is simply that if you had that capacity without love, you would be nothing more than a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

That's a good reminder for the Christian. It's also revealing something important for the non-Christian. Your voice may or may not be the most important thing going on in the encounters that you have between yourself and those around you.

[11 : 57] Now, it's good to find your own voice, but it doesn't mean that your voice or my voice, my praise or your prayers, somehow elevate you in ways that are extraordinary, even in the body of Christ.

Let me put it again as clearly as I can. He's arguing in verse 1 that acquiring love is more important than being gifted. Without love, we are nothing but noise.

And yet, he steps up the stakes in verse 2.

Evidently, there are greater downsides even than this as we would exercise spiritual gifts. Look at verse 2. Now, it's beneficial to just consider for a moment, why does he come up with tongues and prophecy?

Verse 1, it seems that he picks up the Corinthians' preferred gift that would, in a sense, provide elevated status in the church.

[13 : 26] So, he takes the rug out from underneath his readers. Verse 2 is striking, though, because he pulls the rug out underneath himself.

Lest the readers think, oh, you're just going to nail on our gifts so you can elevate your gift. No, no. He levels tongues beneath acquiring love just as he will level his own preferred gift to prophecy, to speak spontaneously.

Words from the Lord, led by the Spirit, that edify the body. And he goes, I could do all of that. And without love, I'm nothing.

What if I had faith so as to remove mountains? You know, you meet men and women who you go, I wish I had the faith that that person has. They step out in faith. They hope for things that they can't see.

They have a capacity to do it while we hang back and we wonder, am I really supposed to step out in faith? And he says, if you have all of those things, if you're one who can step forward or one you can speak out and edify, he says, you know, without love, even that which I prefer means I, what does it say?

[14 : 42] Am nothing. Now, that's an interesting distinction. The first one, you're just something but noise.

You're volume. The second one actually is a matter of identity. It's value. I'm nothing.

Now, this is important to consider for a moment because we often put value in our ability to speak words that are wise or even hear our capacity to have knowledge as that which elevates our standing.

I mean, that's just the way it is. You think of the University of Chicago, which is just down the block. Their motto wonderfully states a couple of things about the relationship between knowledge but the purpose thereof.

It says something to the effect that we are here to pursue knowing so that human life might be flourishing.

[15 : 59] See, they don't want to put knowledge there for knowledge's sake. Knowledge, knowing, wisdom, explaining, helping, encouraging.

They always have the outcome of the welfare of another. That's really then an indication of what love is. It's not a physical chemistry.

It's not an emotional connection. It's not merely some kind of romantic relationship. Love, at its core, is now diving down into the motivation that one has for the welfare of someone else.

Now, see, this is why I think Jerome, in the 4th century, when he was translating the Bible into Latin, which a translation holds all the way through the centuries, and even in the King James, the word holds the same.

It's that not without love, but he translates it without charity. Now, see, charity is interesting because he's trying to grasp something that moves love beyond a feeling or an emotion to something which actually is expressed for the purpose of being charitable to someone else.

[17 : 17] Love is going to be other-directed, not just self-absorbed. I love the bears. I know you don't, but if you said you did, that's something that, in a sense, is feeding yourself.

Love is actually charitably hoping for the desires, the welfare of someone else. And so this is what's there. To love is to seek their welfare.

Fascinating, then. You can speak words that others need while your heart isn't actually moved with concern for their life.

See, this is where knowledge goes awry. This is where suddenly we begin to place value on what I've got for you without any real concern toward you.

You need to know the difference here between things that are instrumental and things that are intrinsic. Think about your speech to someone else.

[18 : 33] It is instrumentally helpful to them. It is not intrinsically the thing in and of itself. You can say things that are helpful to a friend, but void of the intrinsic value of friendship.

And what he's saying is friendship is what matters, not just how you might help someone and look friendly. Paul is saying without love, even though you're helpful, you're nobody.

Don't take pride in what you know, who you are. Oh, if they only listen to me, if they only heard my words, if you just put me in the room, I can solve the issue.

All is an indication that you intrinsically think what you have to offer is what everyone needs. And you can do all of that and not really care a moment's breath about the one that you're assisting.

So Paul is saying acquiring love is more important than giftedness. He goes on. He's got more to say.

[20 : 02] I mean, just take a look at the way he rolls here. Twice over now, he's been shown to prove his argument through this analogy of tongues and then prophecy as that which is preferred.

He moves beyond the noise we become or the nobody that we are. And look at verse three. Without love, we gain no advantage.

This is a fascinating verse. If I give away all that I have and if I deliver my body to be burned but have not love, I gain nothing. This is fascinating because there's a bit of irony here.

Don't we all think that, well, love is more than what you say, it's what you show. Love is known not by what you tell me but by your actions.

And that would hold for the verse one. It's got to be more than what you say. But here at verse three, it's actually something distinct from that which you do.

[21 : 19] In other words, it's more than simply philanthropy in this case.

Look at it there. If I give away all that I have, let that carry the way through. But have not love, I gain nothing. Evidently, love is deeper than that which we say to someone.

And evidently, it's even deeper than that which we do for someone. Well, that calls everything into question. When you consider what it is, what Paul is saying here is that the gift that most people prize above all other things without love is no gain to the one who gave it.

he's grabbing hold of that. See, you and I, even more than the value of making money, we value those who decide to move money and in particular toward us.

That's philanthropy. This is why all the tycoons of our day have capitalized on the strings of our heart to divest themselves of all that they have made by the time they die.

[22 : 42] And all of their names come because they have come to recognize, first of all, rightly, that money isn't everything. It's not intrinsic value. Money is instrumentally value.

And so those of us who think, I got to get more money to be more important, well, that's wrong. But now even here, I've got to be able to give more because when I give, then I have greater gain.

I might get my name on a building. And there are buildings on many names. I might get my name in a program. And there are names to let you know the value of gifts given.

I might get a sense of social status by giving more. I've been in meetings even on the south side, maybe some of you have, where the offering is taken and the individuals are asked to come forward.

And if you're going to give a gift today of under \$100, we're going to ask you to get on up and give. People get up out of the aisle and they give. Now if you want to give a gift today of \$1,000 and that person parades down, I've actually seen people say, now you're going to give \$10,000.

[23 : 53] We're going to have you up on the platform. You see this giving of money provides social status in the community. And in some places you can't sit down until you do demonstrate some capacity to give to others.

And while giving is good, generosity is great. What Paul is saying is you can do all that. And if you don't love people, you gain nothing.

Nothing. Which in some sense is why Jesus looked at the widow walking across the front of the church and dropping in her two coins and said she gave more than anybody else and everybody else combined.

Love, love is what's needed. Without love, your philanthropy is of no personal advantage. Wow, how revealing is that?

But he's not done, is he? He moves beyond what we as people prize more than anything else and he grabs hold of what the pious Christian will put forward as the ultimate act of love.

[25 : 16] There it is in the second half of verse three. He not only says if I give away all that I have, but he says and if I deliver my body to be burned but not have love, I gain nothing.

He's speaking now just to what people prize. He's speaking to what Christians prize. The self-sacrificial laying down of life for others.

Extraordinary to think about. You can give your life and gain nothing if it's not done having acquired love.

love. So this is critical stuff for us as we begin to walk. You can pay the ultimate price. What I'm trying to say is possessing love is more important than giftedness.

Let me bring it together. So what's love got to do with it? evidently for Paul everything. For who among us this morning wants to walk away from here and spend the rest of your life exercising your gifts and extending your generosity in ways where your speech only adds to volume.

[26 : 43] Your ego ends up without value. Your philanthropy no advantage. your self-sacrifice no gain. I mean who here would want that?

Hopefully none of us. We all want gain. We all want value. We all want to be helpful. We all want to experience through our own voice praises that it would extol the living God.

And so therefore the only question we need to ask from this text is where do I go to acquire it? I'm not going to ask what it looks like.

You've got to come on back next week but this week where do I go to acquire love? Where can I get it? if it's more important than my praise?

If it's more important than my helpful words? If it's more important than my ability to step out in faith? If it's more important than my giving and my generosity?

[27 : 58] If it's more important than my self-sacrifice? If it's more important than laying my life on the line? Where do I go? Tell me where do I go? The Bible will be clear.

God is love. You've got to come to God. What am I trying to say?

I'm trying to say that God is the source that will take us beyond chemistry, attraction, connectedness, relationship, love.

God is love. We've got to find our way to the source if our lives are to find the shape that loves.

We've got to understand the person who is love before we can walk in a pattern that appears to be loving. 1 John 4, 7 through 9, and beloved, let us love one another for love is from God and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.

[29 : 14] Anyone who does not love does not know God because God is love. In this, the love of God was made manifest among us that God sent his only son into the world so that we might live through him.

your life, your love is bound up in knowing God. In experiencing then first his love for you.

To acquire love, you need to come to know God. Let me put it clearly. In Christ, all other noises cease.

in Christ, all creatures stand silent. In Christ, all who are nobodies become somebodies, not because of what they say or do, but because of what he did and there now for proclaims over you.

Don't you want that? And having that, don't you want more of that? In Christ, namely, in his richness, I'm talking about his generosity, I'm talking about his giving, you have all advantage.

[30 : 42] In Christ, self-sacrifice, you stand to gain everything. So that's the invitation. If you are not a Christian this morning and you continue to, because we live in this world, chase significance of some sort, purpose in life under some rubric, I want to invite you to love, the one who loves.

love. I want to ask you to now knowingly repent of these misguided, uninformed efforts that we think are love.

love. I want you to say, I am done with trying to elevate myself that I might stand on the pedestal that others would value, or that others would see.

I want to actually be the recipient of love. I want to step off and bow the knee. I want to come to the foot of the cross and discover, here's what you discover at the foot of the cross, just how valuable you really are.

That's where I find my value, at the foot of the cross, at the cross, at the cross, where my Savior bled.

[32 : 19] That's where I know I'm loved. That's where I learn of love. That's where I receive love. That's where I don't have to put on the air of love any longer.

That's what rises above all the other things I've been trying to grasp. I hope I'm talking to many this morning. I'm inviting you to move from a misguided effort to find love in your life to the one who loves you.

And in loving you and receiving his love and believing that through his love you receive forgiveness of all your misguided efforts and your sins, then you rise off your knees and ask according to his spirit to enable you to begin manifesting the love which is already in him and now dwells in you.

what a morning it would be. Yeah, from Tina Turner to your conversion to Christ.

Well, I went to church this morning. Pastor opened up on Tina. Boy, I love that song. Walked out of church this morning singing a song that went straight up to him.

[33 : 51] Everything to Jesus. And if you are a Christian this morning, well, he left this here for you.

He ascended into heaven. He sitteth at the right hand of the Father. He intercedes for you and yet he knows that you need to know just how loved you are.

how loved are you? He gave his life. He shed his blood. Not that it would somehow just emulate in his greatness, but he had something underneath that sought the welfare of those he served.

And Jesus, by faith, is here to serve you again today. Our Heavenly Father, as we prepare to partake!

partake of these emblems which speak of your love, they make us consider again the fullness of your charity towards us.

[35 : 12] A charity that truly has our welfare at heart. heart. So may many this morning depart from the road and the wandering and the unfulfilled expectations, the misguided efforts.

We seek the right thing, but in the wrong ways. May we come to the foot of the cross. and for those of us who do know you, may we come again and be strengthened that we might love rightly in his name.

Amen.