

Avoid Empty Service: Embody Love - 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

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[0 : 00] Amen. I am grateful that you have come to worship the Lord together this morning.

We read in the book of Genesis, the Bible opens with this declarative statement, in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

God is the only one who can create something out of nothing. Satan comes then only to steal, kill and destroy.

Satan comes to distort, he twists, he enemies, that which is beautiful that God has made. Satan cannot create, he can only twist and mar.

Satan didn't create truth, he has twisted it and deceived Adam and Eve. He didn't create the world, but now the fallen world is under the sway of him.

[0 : 56] He didn't create sex, but he has found a way to destroy people's lives by the manner in which it is used. Satan has a way of taking and twisting and adding to something that God has just created beautifully.

He is a deceiver, he is the father of lies. And one of the things that Satan has twisted is love.

This thing that we will talk about today in this beautiful chapter in 1 Corinthians 13, love. And so our culture now defines love in interesting ways, sad ways.

Love is now twisted, love is now marred, love is now focused inward. And perhaps one of the most pernicious definitions of love is just this that our culture uses, love is love.

So our culture needs a better working definition of love. And so does the church. We too need to be reminded what love is, what love does and what love does not do.

[2 : 11] So I pray that you have come today, if you have your Bible with you, if you would turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 13. We have been looking at this wonderful beautiful book where Paul has been setting the church in order at Corinth and he has been writing a letter to them.

One of the things Pastor Eric did last couple of Sundays is preach on 1 Corinthians chapter 12. And we found beautiful spiritual gifts and God has given each believer in Christ a spiritual gift.

And that gift is to be used for the edification of the saints for the upbuilding of his church. It's a beautiful thing, this entrustment of gifts that we have been given.

Chapter 13 often, if you will, is disconnected from the context in which we find it. Oftentimes we read 1 Corinthians 13 or we hear 1 Corinthians 13, love is patient, love is kind, et cetera, et cetera. We'll either hear it at a wedding. Sometimes that passage is used at a wedding. Other times you will see it posted on a teenager girl's wall hoping that her knight and shining armor someday will love her like that.

[3 : 25] But I want to take it off of the wall. I want to take this love passage out of weddings and I want to put it in its proper context. Because chapter 12, chapter 13 and chapter 14 are all on spiritual gifts.

We will see this today. And sometimes we take chapter 13, this chapter that's in the middle sandwiched between spiritual gifts obviously in 12 and 14. And we take it out of that context.

But I want to put it back into that context and we will see today that Paul is declaring this is the more excellent way of using spiritual gifts in the context of the church.

It belongs here. This chapter belongs with us as we worship and we gather and we minister to one another. This is where the chapter belongs.

And so it's in this context it's most appropriate to hear. Pastor Eric did a great job. If you're in 1 Corinthians 13, look back with me one verse in chapter 12, verse 31.

[4 : 35] We see that Paul concludes that chapter and Pastor Eric did a great job when he's talking about this verse.

But earnestly desire the higher gifts, the greater gifts. And that isn't that one is Eric did a great job of making sure that we understood. It's not that one gift is better than all of the other or supersedes all the other.

It's that all of the gifts are the greater gifts when ministered well. And for the edification of the church, they're all great gifts. And then he concludes that verse with saying, and I will show you still a more excellent way.

So what is the most more excellent way? Love. How do we minister these spiritual gifts that we've been given and entrusted with in a loving way?

So this is love is the more excellent way. And so this is why we've entitled the message this. And if you would read with me chapter 13 in its entirety, and then we will begin in our text today.

[5 : 45] If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging simple. If I have a prophetic power and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and I have all faith so as to remove mountains, but I have not love, I am nothing.

If I give away all that I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but I have not love, I am, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind.

Love does not envy or boast. Love is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way. It is not irritable or resentful. It does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away. As for tongues, they will cease. As for knowledge, it will pass away.

For we know in part, we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child. I thought like a child. I reasoned like a child.

[6 : 51] When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. 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 am been fully known.

So now faith, hope, and love abide. These three, but the greatest of these is love. Lord, use your word today to have its intended effect.

It is this beautiful living and active word that is sharp to the division of soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and discerns the thoughts and the intents of our heart.

And so whatever way that is contrary to you today, may your beautiful living word convict and may we live lives pleasing to you.

And it's in your name, Jesus, we pray. Amen. You will find today that love is the more excellent way for four reasons. First we will find that today that love, without love gifts are worthless.

[8 : 01] Paul will make that point in the first three verses. Second, because of what love does and does not do, that's what makes it the more excellent way. Love does certain things and it doesn't do other things.

Fourth, thirdly, we will see that because of love as eternal, gifts are temporary. Love as eternal gifts are temporary and because lastly, love is the most superior of all the virtues.

We will see that that. And that is why Paul says in chapter 12 verse 31, this love is the more excellent way that Paul is going to show the church at Corinth how to use spiritual gifts amongst each other in ministry.

So let's look at this beginning in verse one. We'll look at this first point, without love gifts are worthless. In verse one we see this, if I speak in the tongues of men and of angels but have not love, I am a noisy gong and a clanging cymbal.

Without love, gifts encourage independence. In the first century, what was common as a gong or a clanging cymbal would be used and it would be used in the concert with other instruments.

[9 : 14] It would be like me back here banging on this cymbal and crash, crash, crash the cymbal time and time and time again. Over time it would get really annoying after like one crash of the cymbal.

But when it's played in a drum set, when it is played in concert with other instruments, all of a sudden you don't hear the cymbal, say, you don't hear the crashing of the cymbal or the gong. It's beautiful in that context. But so what is love, the absence of love in the ministry of gifts, what does that do?

It promotes and encourages independence. And Paul is saying that's not how you want to use. You're not supposed to be a lone ranger Christian, you're not supposed to be that person. You're supposed to be dependent upon one another for the upbuilding of the saints. That's how gifts are to be used, not independent from everybody else. So without love, your gifts encourage independence and that's one of the reasons why it's worthless.

[10:18] Second, without love, gifts are useless. Verse two, if I have prophetic powers, and I understand, notice the mention of the word all, all mysteries and all knowledge.

And if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but I have not love, I am nothing. I love how Paul is, first of all, what I want us to notice is that Paul is picking on certain gifts, tongues.

Notice what he has used in the first verse, tongues, prophetic powers, mysteries, knowledge and faith. These were the most, if you will, used and abused gifts that were being utilized in the church at Corinth.

And so he spotlights these and he's kind of poking the bear a little bit and he says, if I do, and I have all of it, I have all, all to the fullest extent, I have this gift, if I have all of it, but I don't have love. What does he say? I am nothing. It's worthless. In verse three, if I give, notice the emphasis in verse three is on personal sacrifice.

[11:33] If I give away all that I have, and if I deliver my body up to be burned, but I have not love, I have gained nothing.

I have gained nothing. What's interesting is, if these events truly happened, they would be wow type of events.

If someone said, I gave away all of my money, I have nothing, I've taken a vow of poverty and this is it, and I'm going to live for the Lord, we would think, wow, that is amazing. That person with that kind of gift of giving or that generosity, that is amazing.

If you had the faith, it says to remove a mountain, in order for those unreached people groups to be reached, let's just remove that mountain, kaplunk, it goes into the sea, we would think, wow, that is amazing.

And yet God's estimation of that without love, it's nothing. It's nothing. It amounts, it's worthless. It amounts to nothing.

[12:38] So love is the more excellent way because without it gifts are worthless. That's Paul's first point. Second is what makes love the more excellent way is because of what love does and what love does not do.

What love does and what love does not do. I want to be careful here because Paul is not necessarily defining love.

He is applying what love does. All of these are verbs. This is what love does, not necessarily what love is, but we find a hint at rounding out the definition of what love is in some other verses.

We find these verses in like in John 15, verse 13, greater love has no one did this, that someone lay down his life for a friend. And in Romans 5, verse 8, but God has shown us his love for us, that in while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

So what is at the core of love? It is a self-sacrificing pursuit of the beloved's greatest good. That's what love is. Love saves, love rescues, love helps.

[13:58] And love does all of this, if necessary, at the cost of the lover, as it did with Jesus. And he modeled this perfectly. So are you loving?

Am I loving? So then Paul then personifies in verses 4 through 12, rather 4 through 7, he personifies love by describing what love does and what love does not do.

And he does so by 16 verbs where love is the subject of the verb. What was the church doing?

Why does Paul write to the church and say, you're missing it? You're ministering to one another, but you're absent in love. And so let me spend three chapters to talk to you about the proper use of gifts and why love is essential in the middle.

So look at all the things that we've already read about the church at Corinth. We've read in chapter 3, verse 21, they were boasting in men.

[15:07] They were saying, I'm of Paul, I'm of Apollos, and they were boasting in men. They were puffed up even with severe sin.

Remember the immoral man in John, 1 Corinthians chapter 5, the incestuous man. They were boasting that that person, they were so accepting and tolerant of that sin in their church.

They were unwilling to suffer and bear things, bear under all things so that they were taking each other to court in chapter 6.

Remember in chapter 8, they were each insisting on their own way. They were eating meat and causing others to stumble. They were acting in a rude way by not wearing the customary head covering that we talked about in chapter 11.

And they were insisting in their own way as they ate the meal, the Lord's supper, without any regard for others. They were absent in love. They were jealous and they were envious compared to other spiritual gifts that Eric talked about last week in chapter 12.

[16:15] This church at Corinth lacked love. So I wonder today how if Paul were writing to 4th Memorial Church what things he would indict us for and say, you're not loving.

So let us now look at what love does and does not do. And this is another reason Paul writes to say, this is why it is the more excellent way.

This says first, love is patient. We'll take these one at a time. Love is patient. Now I like to think of myself as patient.

That idea could be challenged. But I would like to think of myself as patient. And I'm pretty good at being patient with inanimate objects that have no personality.

Like sitting at a light, waiting for the light to turn green. I know it's going to happen. It's just not my turn yet. And I can just sit there just fine normally.

[17:16] But where my patience gets pressed is with people. And what's interesting about this word that Paul chose in 1 Corinthians when he says love is patient is that that word is only found in context with people.

There are other words he could have chosen to say love is patient, but this one is only used always with relation to people.

Love is patient with people. And no wonder he used that word because what is the point of this whole chapter is how gifts are to be used in the church. So love is patient with one another.

And what's the idea of being patient? It's this idea of bearing up under provocation or without complaint and to be patient to forbear with one another.

So it's the idea that you may be even being provoked in some way. It always refers to perseverance and endurance in the face of difficulty or difficult circumstance with others.

[18:24] Forbearing, persevering, patient love toward another person. It's a long suffering love. It is not being patient with inconveniences.

It's being patient with others. Love is patient. Patience the next word is love is kind. Love is kind.

Where patience is the responding to people, kind is the proactive response of love. Before I have to be patient with you, I need to be kind to you.

So one is responsive reacting to a difficult circumstance of another person. Kindness is just demonstrating love proactively.

Before I have to be patient with you. So it's proactively kind. It's loving. It's merciful.

[19:26] What I like about this is this. It's proactive. We all all called to be kind all the time with one another. Love is kind.

Love does not envy. Love does not envy. This is to have negative feelings over another's achievements or success.

When the church at Corinth was plagued with jealousy and quarreling, 1 Corinthians 3.3 affirms this, Paul called them worldly and acting like mere human beings due to their jealousy and due to their quarreling.

How easy for it is for us to give into the temptation of being envious of one another's success.

Someone comes to Christ with someone else's gift of evangelism.

Someone is disciplined well by a person using the gift of teaching or prophecy, the truth-telling.

Someone gets interviewed on stage because they said yes to the Lord in their gift of faith or something like this.

[20:28] Someone is asked to pray in a service because they may have the gift of exhortation. All the while someone with the gift of service or administration is sitting there thinking if it weren't for me, this room would not even be clean.

Or if it weren't for me, that worship folder wouldn't even be put together and no one would have any idea what the order of service is or what is even that guy's name preaching up in front.

This is why in Romans 12, 15, I believe it is more difficult to rejoice with those who rejoice than it is to weep with those who weep.

Those who rejoice to rejoice in someone else's success. I'm so grateful for how the Lord is using you.

How can I encourage you? How can I come along your side? How can I pray that you have even more success in ministry? That's often not the natural response.

[21 : 31] We have to pray, Lord, overcome this temptation in me to be envious. But love is the more excellent way because it does not envy.

It doesn't boast. The verb here means to heap praise on oneself, to behave as a braggart.

And if you remember in the church at Corinth, they thought of themselves as one who would even surpass spiritually Paul. And they thought of themselves as spiritually far superior.

And so Paul says, listen, church at Corinth, listen, church at fourth. It doesn't boast. Love does not boast.

And an antidote to boasting perhaps would be to thank the Lord and thank others who aid you and compliment you in the work of the ministry.

[22 : 30] Love is not proud or not arrogant. This is to have an exaggerated self-concept, to be puffed up, to be proud.

This is what prohibits me from having a concern for someone else's welfare is when I'm prideful. I get caught up in thinking this ministry cannot go on without me.

What would this ministry do or be without me? That's what pride says.

Pride is also a killer of delegation. Why would I need to delegate responsibility to someone when they can't do it as good as me anyway?

And this is what pride says. It's not loving. Loving people delegate. If people only knew how long or how much time I have been doing this ministry, has been given to me, they would see how invaluable I am.

[23 : 31] I had a shameful visit to Siberia, Russia with my wife one time. We were in our late 20s and we had spent 30-something hours traveling to Siberia and we were there over Christmas and New Year.

And if you were curious, is it true that Siberia is cold in the winter? Yes. I confirmed it, it was around 40 degrees below zero that night. We were there.

We took a two-hour car ride out to a village of just a few hundred people. And there were these missionaries. And there we were there to encourage.

We were there over Christmas and New Year. It was a lonely time. They're far from family. We were there to minister. And for whatever reason, I found myself that night when I was just reflecting on my day.

Even through the day, I wasn't pleased with myself. But what was it that I wasn't pleased with?

[24 : 34] And my wife that night, we were laying there in bed. And she leaned over to me and said, Scott, do you realize how many times you said the word, you used the pronoun I today?

I, I, I did this, I do this, I am that. And it was shameful.

And I was convicted that night deeply of pride. And it's the antithesis of love.

Love is not arrogant. Love is not rude. Love does not dishonor others.

It doesn't act contrary to a standard of decency. I am not pleased and I lament a bit of the shock jock language that is used by in many pulpits.

[25 : 35] And it's not rude. How we speak is important. How we utilize our tongue is important. It has the power to give life and death.

How we speak to others. Does it build up or tear down? Love is not rude.

And this is why love is the more excellent way. Love does not insist on its own way. Love does not seek its own. It's not self-serving interest.

It doesn't seek its own edification. We will seek the edification, the interest of others. Thank you.

So this is what love does. It seeks the well-being and the interest of others. It doesn't seek its own way. So when we're ministering with each other and alongside of each other, using our gifts together for the upbuilding of the saints, we're looking out for the interest of others.

[26 : 41] This is what love does. This is what love does. It's not irritable. It's not resentful. It's not easily angered.

It doesn't get carried away in anger. The one who loves is not easily provoked to anger.

This is why one of the qualifications of an elder is not one who is easily provoked by anger. Love does not rejoice in wrongdoing. Some of your translations say maybe keeps record of wrong. It doesn't do that. Why is it sometimes translated that way?

Because it's a mathematical or accounting term of keeping record. So love doesn't rejoice in wrongdoing or keep records of wrong. Love doesn't contemplate evil when someone is doing an evil act or suspecting others of doing evil.

[27 : 44] It doesn't rejoice in that. God in Christ does not consider our sins against us. So we are ones who must not keep count of sins against us.

This is how bitterness is developed. Is we think that person has wronged us and then they wrong us again and we don't forgive and we're keeping record of wrong and then bitterness sets in.

And many are defiled by it. After mentioning the things that love does not do, Paul then turns the attention and says what love does.

It rejoices in the truth. It emphasizes, the emphasis is on the content of what is true. It contrasts with that which is wrongdoing. So between sinfulness and wrongdoing and righteousness and holiness, love exalts in that which is pure, lovely, true and righteous.

It rejoices in truth. Love bears all things. Love bears all things. The word to bear is the idea to bear up under difficulties.

[29 : 03] So love does not give up. Love does not give in. Paul demonstrates this kind of love to the church. There is pressures on him if you remember to take advantage of his right to receive financial compensation from the church but for the sake of the gospel he refused.

So what was that a demonstration of? He's bearing up under the weight that I have this right to ask something of you but because of the way you would receive it, I'm not going to do that.

He loved them and he didn't give in to the pressure. Love always bears up under pressure. Love always bears up under strain. Love is the more excellent way.

Love believes all things. This carries with it the idea of trust. Love always trusts.

This is nothing to do with naive credulity, like being gullible but when skepticism is gone and doubt and unbelief have no residence in a loving person.

[30 : 11] So let me give you an example. You would be like this when someone were to pray, Lord, this situation, this person is not who they ought to be. I trust you. I believe you can save.

I believe you can redeem. I believe you can restore. I believe you can cause repentance. I believe you can draw them to yourself. I believe that you can restore this relationship. I believe that you can cause your name to be great in their life once again and I take you at your word.

You can do this. Amen. And love believes all things and carries with this idea of trust.

So when we're ministering with each other and alongside of one another, we believe all things. It is the more excellent way.

And then lastly, love hopes all things and endures all things. This idea of hope is not some naive optimism.

[31 : 15] But what is it that provides us hope? Is we know the one whom we have entrusted our lives in for our future and our being empowered and emboldened by the hope of the one day seeing the Lord for who He is.

And so we have no problem taking risks in the lives of those around us because we hope all things. Love always hopes it is the more excellent way.

Lastly, love endures all things. Love always perseveres. It never gives up. It never quits. It never dies or comes to extinction.

It endures all things. As Christ on the cross did, love endures scorn, love endures failure of others, love endures ingratitude by those whom we expect it from, love endures ridicule, love endures being overlooked, love endures apathy of others.

This is why love is the more excellent way. We come to the third reason why Paul writes of love as the more excellent way.

[32 : 29] And it is this, that love is eternal and gifts are temporary. Look how he frames this. I like including verse eight, love never ends with this next section because that's his point.

Love never ends. Gifts will pass away, but love never ends. That's his point. So love never ends.

This prophecies, they will pass away. As for tongues, they will cease.

As for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when that which is perfect comes, the partial will pass away.

So look how Paul does this or how does he do this? How is he making the point that love is eternal, gifts are temporary?

He is highlighting this, that gifts are given as imperfect provisions for an imperfect or fallen world. That's why they were given. Let me use an example.

[33 : 26] We know that God created Adam and Eve and they sinned. They were removed from the garden and they had children. Humanity began to multiply as did pride. That pride was manifest by everyone was speaking their own language and they thought, let us build a tower to heaven and nothing can stop us.

Look how good we are. What incredible people we are. So the Lord then at the tower of Babel, he confused their languages. They couldn't communicate with each other and so all of humanity went their own way speaking different languages.

If you will, Pentecost was the reversal of that. What do you have? We have everyone around the sea of the Mediterranean Sea, all the regions around the Mediterranean Sea. The Jews going and the proselytes going to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover and at Pentecost what happened? They all heard the gospel in their own language and the gift of tongues was given, the gift of languages was given so that people could hear the gospel in their own language. This missionary gift was given.

But then we see in Revelation this beautiful passage. And then I looked and behold a great multitude and no one could number and every nation from all of our tribe, peoples and languages standing before the throne and before the Lamb, they're all there.

[34 : 47] Every tribe, nation and tongue, every language is represented around the throne of God. It no longer needs to exist. It's the people of God have been redeemed from every place.

So they will cease when that which perfect has come. Now I will admit there is some debate about what is that which is perfect in verse 10.

Some have said it's the completion of the canon when the Bible was assembled in its final form of the 66 books when the canon was completed.

Some say when the church has been matured so after the apostles died off shortly after that, the church is matured and so some of these gifts may have ceased. Others will say it's the Lord's return when the perfect comes found in verse 10.

The partial things will pass away, meaning the gifts. Which is it I don't know and I don't want to declare definitively on that but I do believe we have a hint in verse 12.

[36 : 04] For now we see in a mirror dimly but then face to face. Now we see in a mirror dimly and then we see face to face.

What is that an image of when we see face to face the Lord? We see in numbers perhaps Paul is reminding himself of what Moses wrote in numbers.

We read this. When there were prophets of the Lord among you reveal myself to them in visions. I speak to them in dreams. But this is not true of my servant Moses.

He is faithful in all of my house. With him I speak face to face clearly and not in riddles. He sees the form of the Lord.

You see there that it says the Lord spoke to Moses face to face but with other prophets he says I spoke to them in visions and in dreams. So perhaps this is saying Paul is saying listen there is a time when that which will pass away when we perhaps see the Lord face to face.

[37 : 09] And all these things that we have beheld in a mirror dimly and that mirror is not like our mirror today that we have in our homes that pretty give a pretty good likeness of who we are.

The mirrors back then were polished bronze and so there would be some discoloration. So all that to say what we know and see today is dimly as in a mirror and these things will pass away but boy there is going to come a day when we will see the Lord face to face.

And perhaps it's like this with Moses saying the Lord saying to him with him Moses I speak face to face clearly and not in riddles.

He sees the form of the Lord. And so perhaps that is when the perfect comes and we will see him face to face. And all these gifts are temporary and will give way to that which is permanent and what remains love and this is why love is the more excellent way.

Lastly we come to this last verse in this chapter. So now faith, hope and love abide these three and the greatest of these is love.

[38 : 21] I like what O'Donnell said in his commentary. He wrote this. He says, the faith that in the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ God has initiated the future events leading to the new age which enable the present and future life of the faithful.

The hope that enables the faithful to endure sufferings and other troubles and continuing present age. The love of the faithful have for one another which holds the community together in anticipation of God's fulfillment when he returns.

Here's what I love. These three virtues faith, hope and love are mentioned often in God's word. But we're told the one that is superior to all the rest.

The greatest of these is love. Faith and hope are great but love is superior. And so let's put this in his proper context.

Paul said, listen church at Corinth, there is a way to minister with and among one another for the upbuilding of the saints together and that is this in love.

[39 : 32] I'm going to make that point to you saying that without love gifts are worthless. I'm going to share with you what love doesn't and doesn't do and that is why love is the more excellent way.

And thirdly, love is eternal, gifts are temporary. And then fourthly, because love is superior to all the other virtues. And so Paul makes this argument.

So you say Scott, what's the application to us today? May it not ever be lost on us.

The privilege we have to gather together, use gifts among and with each other for the upbuilding of the church and we get to do that in love.

And anytime we find ourselves not acting in love, we are not choosing the more excellent way. And we are given into the same problems that the church at Corinth had.

[40 : 34] I have done this, you have done this at times, but may we think to ourselves, remind ourselves on the way to church each and every morning on Sunday and when any other time that we gather.

Lord, may it not be lost on me, the privilege to minister in the most excellent way in a loving way.

May that never grow old. May that concept never get lost on us. And may we strive to remind ourselves of this.

Let's pray. Lord, thank you for this privilege this morning to declare your word. Lord, thank you for what love does and does not do.

Thank you for the reminder that love is patient and kind. It does not envy or boast. It is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way.

[41 : 37] It is not irritable. It is nor resentful. It does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

It never fails and there is no end. Lord, thank you for the privilege to minister among one another in a loving manner.

Thank you for the reminder today of what love does and doesn't do. You are to be praised today, Lord, and we worship you. Amen.