

Love, the More Excellent Way

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[0:00] The sermon text for today is 1 Corinthians 13.

! At the conclusion of the reading, I will declare, this is the word of the Lord, and the church, in joyful response to his revelation given to us, we'll together say, thanks be to God.

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.

Love is patient and kind. Love does not envy or boast. It is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way. It is not irritable or resentful. It does not rejoice at wrongdoings, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and doors 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 and 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. 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 have been fully known. So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three, but the greatest of these is love. This is the word of the Lord.

[2:07] Hi, good morning, Shoreline. I'm Jordan, one of the elders here at Shoreline. I don't preach that often, so I'm excited, and I hope this is useful to all of you. So today's passage is beautiful.

Many people, both Christian and non-Christian alike, are familiar with this portion of God's word. It is poetic, concise, powerful. It is seen as a beautiful celebration of love. It often warms the hearts and fosters loving feelings within the hearers. And thus it is frequently used at weddings and at funerals alike. However, when we read this text within the context from which it was written, it becomes clear that neither weddings nor funerals were the occasion for Paul's writing.

His aim was much different than these popular uses. He was writing to a specific church to address specific issues that he identified in their corporate life together. Thus, the original audience may have found it to be far more pointed than sentimental. Within the context, Paul aims, his aim seems to be as much about correcting as it is about inspiring. And if we apply it rightly today, we need to understand what Paul intended for the Corinthians to know, feel, and to do.

So that's what we'll set out to do this morning. But before we do that, I'll pray. Dear Heavenly Father, Lord, we thank you for your word. It is inerrant. It is accurate. It is perfect.

And it is what we need to understand you and to understand how to know you and live for you and how to understand how to love one another. And so, Lord, I pray that you would use this text in the hearts of the people here to build your church in love so that we can represent Christ and how we interact with one another and that we might be image bearers of Christ in this world, loving the way that he loved, bringing honor to him and glory to him because he is worthy of everything. He is worthy of lives spent living and following him. And so, Lord, we pray that you would help us to do that accurately as we understand your word and apply it to our lives. Amen.

[4:23] All right, before we break down today's passage, I want to just remind us all about some things that we know about the Corinthians. The first thing we know is the Corinthians was a gifted church.

They were particularly gifted in the areas of speech and knowledge. In chapter one, Paul says that they were enriched in Christ in all speech and in all knowledge. And he says that they were not lacking in any gift. Yet, despite of their giftedness, Paul has concerns about their maturity.

In chapter three, Paul says, but I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. Being a spiritual infant isn't necessarily a bad thing. It's actually a normal part of the Christian life. We all start somewhere. The problem is, in Corinth, they seem to be stuck in their spiritual infancy and they were unaware of their own spiritual immaturity. So it's okay to be new and young, but you don't want to stay there. We need to grow. The Corinthians needed to grow. Finally, I want to highlight that this chapter, chapter 13, is in the middle of an argument, a more extended argument that started in chapter 14, or chapter 12 and goes through 14 on spiritual gifts and the proper use of those spiritual gifts within the church. Right, so we have this text that is applied to the context of a local church, the Corinthian church, and it's applied specifically in this area of gifts and in the interactions amongst the members of that church. It seemed in Corinth that the Corinthians had been prioritizing certain gifts over others and using these gifts to promote themselves rather than exalt Christ and build up the church. In chapter 12, Paul level sets the Corinthians by teaching them that all spiritual gifts are gifts and that all Christians are essential to the health and proper functioning of the body. Each member and each gift are given to God to exalt Christ and build up the church. Therefore, the Corinthians should not exalt one gift or one member over another. Rather, they should realize that every member and every spiritual gift is a gift from God.

[6:40] And the church is healthy when each member is using his or her gift for the purpose of building others up and using those gifts in submission to Christ.

So Paul continues this argument, this conversation on gifts here in chapter 13. And we're going to go through verses 1 through 3. Here we're going to see love is prioritized.

And in this section, Paul is reminding the Corinthians that gift exercised without love fail to accomplish their God-ordained purposes.

So I'll read starting in verse 1. If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. So here, Paul is zeroing in on speech-oriented gifts in Corinth. The Corinthians prized themselves on their oratory skill and their gift of tongues. Paul pokes at this, pointing out that even the most beautiful, powerful, supernatural language spoken without love is just noise.

[7:47] It was as if Paul was saying, if I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, or if I speak using the gift that you Corinthians so highly value, but I have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

Some commentators believe that gongs and cymbals here, Paul is referring to those used in pagan worship, to call people into worship. Taken this way, Paul is saying that if I speak in the tongues of men and of angels but have not love, I am no better than the pagans down the road.

Other commentators aren't comfortable pushing the analogy that far. Either way, the point is clear. Supernatural speech, spoken without love, will only produce spiritual noise.

So taken within the context of the Corinthians' value system, this is a poignant poke. Paul is saying that despite your giftedness, which you so highly value, you are missing the main point and therefore spiritually unfruitful.

Next, Paul takes aims at the gift of knowledge and prophecy and faith. I'll read in verse 2. Paul says, 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.

[9:12] This one ought to be a little bit of a shock to us. It's very contrary to the way the natural man thinks. These are strong gifts. Prophetic power, the understanding of all mysteries, the possessing of all knowledge, and mountain-moving faith.

Man, if anybody had gifts like this in the church, they surely, they wouldn't be nothing. They would likely be speaking at Christian conferences, gathering crowds, telling people about all these wonderful things, and moving mountains.

Surely, surely somebody with these kind of gifts would be a superstar in any church. Paul says, No. Even those who possess these extraordinary gifts, but use them independently of love, amounts to nothing.

And then in a dramatic end to this opening section, Paul addresses two things that on the outside appear to be the epitome of love. Starting in verse 3, If I give away all that I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Even someone who gives away all he has, or one who chooses martyrdom, can do so without love. And if done without love, these extraordinary gifts of self-sacrifice will gain nothing.

[10:29] Jeremiah says, The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick. Who can understand it? Friends, you can do extraordinary things for others, without actually loving them.

One can be dedicated to the point of giving their very life, but if done devoid of love, it will gain them nothing. It's a stunning beginning to this text, isn't it? Or to this passage.

Paul doesn't say that spiritual gifts used without love are less effective. He says they are completely ineffective. They gain nothing. Paul is not talking about what is optimal.

He's not saying what is better. The language is too strong for that. You either have love, or your gifts are worthless to God. And at this point, we need to realize that in the eyes of the world, this isn't a value system, right?

It is possible to do something, and be something, and be someone in the eyes of the world, without love. Selfish people do succeed, according to the standards of the world.

[11:35] There are many famous, wealthy, influential people who are devoid of character, devoid of love, self-indulgent, in many ways. Yet they have gained worldly esteem through their talents, and their abilities.

But this is not the way of the church. In God's eyes, character is crucial, and love is essential. Do not be deceived. It is possible to be gifted, and to obtain worldly success, while remaining a spiritual infant, and living a life devoid of love.

If love, not gifting, is a key mark to maturity and effectiveness, then it seems imperative for us to work to discern what Paul means in this passage by love. And for this, we'll turn to read verses 4 through 7.

In verses 4 through 7, love is characterized. I really like this, you know, it's like he gives us a picture. He illustrates for us what love is.

I think that was really helpful for the Corinthians. It's love in action. It's love described in action and attitudes. And this helps us and the Corinthians really discern the nature, the quality of the love that Paul is calling them to.

[12:48] Here he says, love is patient and kind. Love does not envy or boast. It 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. Now, I won't have time to go into each descriptor individually, but I will try to show and highlight a few things.

But the first thing I want us to see and recognize is that this list, while it is universally true, it was actually tailor-made for the Corinthian church, which makes sense.

Paul is writing a letter to the Corinthians. And we see this when we map this list and we map the language of the list against things that we know about the Corinthians from the rest of the book, when we map it on the content of what Paul has already told them.

So Paul says, love does not envy or boast. It is not arrogant or rude. In chapter 3, we see that envy and arrogance were at the root of strife within the Corinthian church.

[13:55] They were exalting one leader over the other. They were boasting in one leader and holding it up against the other, and that was leading to divisions. Paul says, reminds them there, to boast in Christ, not into men.

And here in chapter 13, Paul shows them that their envy and boasting was actually an indication of the absence of Christian love in their midst. In chapters 4, 5, and 8, Paul directly addresses the Corinthians' arrogance.

He says that they are puffed up in favor of one over the other. He alludes to some who talked big, had big talk, but lack spiritual power. In chapter 5, he critiques their arrogance in face of blatant and grievous sin within the congregation.

In chapter 8, Paul redirects their attitude towards knowledge, saying that knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. And here in chapter 13, Paul reminds them that their arrogance was actually an indicator of the absence of love within their church life.

In verse 5, Paul says, love is not rude. The meaning of this word rude is actually treating somebody in an unbecoming way, and the context was 1 Corinthians 7. There were men in the church who were not treating their betrothed in a way that was respectful.

[15:18] And he encouraged them, just go get married. And so, the concept here is that their passions were actually treating them or driving them to treat people in a less than honorable way.

So there are times in life when our passions, if left unchecked, will lead us to treat others in a way that is contrary to common decency. This is what was happening in this situation in Corinth. Verse 5 says, love does not insist on its own.

It is not irritable or resentful. In chapter 6, we learn that the Corinthians were defrauding one another and taking each other to court. In this chapter, Paul says, why not rather be wronged for the sake of the gospel?

Because they were basically making the church look bad, taking their court cases to unbelievers. And this was just a testament to the lack of unity that should, in a church that should be unified. And he says, why not suffer wrong than, you know, drag the community through this display? Paul reminds them that true, genuine love, and here in chapter 13, Paul reminds them that true, genuine love is patient and non-resentful.

[16:29] In chapters 8 through 10, we see that the Corinthians are insisting on their ability to exercise their gospel-given rights. And they were doing this at the expense of others. They were confusing people and they were causing other people to be harmed because they didn't understand.

So while they were right in exercising their gospel freedom, they were doing it in a way that was actually harming their brothers and sisters. In chapter 11, Paul accused the Corinthian church of despising the church of God by humiliating the poor in their midst.

The wealthy feasted during the Lord's Supper while the poor went hungry. They were guilty of not discerning the body. Is this not a failure of love and a byproduct of their own self-absorption?

So as I hope you can see and kind of the point of this is that many problems within the Corinthian church were exasperated by their immaturity and inability to live out this core Christian ethic of love. The second thing I want you to notice about this section is the decisive language that Paul chooses to use. He says, love is, love is not. Love does, love does not.

[17:44] It's written in black and white. Paul wants us to know that impatience, arrogance, irritability, or resentfulness do not coexist with genuine love.

Love is patient. Love is not arrogant. Love is not irritable. Do not be deceived. If you find yourselves to be irritable, you are off the path of love.

If your thoughts are self-absorbed, your responses abrasive or rude, your demeanor arrogant, or your heart impatient, you have wandered from the way of Christian love.

In this way, Paul provides this list for us that can be a litmus test that we can apply to our daily lives. We can run ourselves through it often. And when you see these negative characteristics present themselves, repent, seek the Lord's help, and ask him to help you love genuinely.

Third, we see that love is active and energetic. This is made more clear in the Greek where every word that sees this description is actually a verb. So Paul uses verbs to describe love.

[18:56] It's something we do. A person who loves does these things or does not do these things because it is coming from their character. Right? Paul also uses the present continuous tense.

This indicates that these are attitudes and actions that ought to be present and continuous in the life of a believer. The tense indicates that it's kind of an ongoing process where we are growing in love, practicing these things, becoming more and more like this picture here.

So we ought not to expect ourselves to be perfect in love, but we ought to expect ourselves to be growing as the Holy Spirit works within us. Fourth, love is concrete.

Love gets its legs in real relationships. Since it is others' focus, it must be worked out in actual life. You may say, duh, of course.

But I stop here because our culture, many in our culture believe that love is primarily a feeling. They believe that love is more defined by how you feel about somebody than how you treat them.

[20:08] They boil it down to good intentions and positive thoughts. Paul's characterization differs drastically. His list shows us that genuine love displays itself in the messy spaces of life.

The entire list is a testament to that. Why would love, why would genuine love present itself in patience if patience was not needed?

The very fact that people wrong us require us to be willing to bear all things. The reality that misunderstandings happen provides the opportunity for us to believe all things.

We would not be prone to irritability, if something or somebody wasn't irritating. The point is this, genuine Christian love is not displayed in isolation, nor by the presence of good intentions.

No, the love that Paul describes here is formed and displayed in the rub of life in the normal Christian community. love. We'll move on to verses 8 through 12.

[21:16] Here we'll talk about love being rooted. In verse 8 we read, 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 and 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.

When I became a man, I gave up my childish ways. For now we see in a mere dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

In this section we see that love is rooted in eternity because it is rooted in God. In the opening line of this paragraph, Paul says, love never ends.

He then contrasts the unending nature of love with prophecies, tongues, and knowledge which will pass away. When will knowledge and prophecy pass away? When the perfect comes.

[22:16] Well, when is that? The text gives us clues. The partial in verse 9 gives way to the perfect of verse 10 and the fullness of verse 12.

Verse 9 says, for we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.

For now we see in a mere dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. When Christ returns, we see him and we see him face to face.

We will no longer need prophecy or knowledge because we will have him fully. What a gem of truth. What will partial knowledge of this life give way to?

A clear, beautiful, and unhindered relationship with Jesus Christ. Where we will know him fully, even as we have been fully known. Love is eternal because it is rooted in the eternal triune God.

Perfect, unveiled, unhindered, unending love awaits those who trust in Christ. And when the perfect comes, we will no longer need gifts of tongues, prophecy, and knowledge because our faith will have become sight.

[23:29] But the Christian life isn't simply about waiting. We have resources now. We see this in verse 12 a little bit.

In verse 12, we read, for 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. Though greater things are to come, we do know in part, we do know in part now.

And we are fully known now. Friend, if you are in Christ, you know God, and God, you know God now. Your knowledge is incomplete, but it is also sufficient.

You have been given the Holy Spirit as a down payment of your adoption into God's family. You are fully known now. And despite God's full and intimate knowledge of you, and all that you have done, you are fully forgiven and completely loved.

Your sin has been paid for and you have been welcomed into the very family of God. Brother and sister in Christ, the God of the universe knows you and fully loves you. And you are on a sure path to him where you will know him fully even as you have been fully known.

[24:44] I just, I think as we go through Christian life together, you know, we, I've seen this come up lots of times, right? We feel unseen, we feel unknown, we feel misunderstood, and that can actually make some of these relationships hard.

Because we're just, we're kind of like, loving people is hard. It's hard sometimes to figure out what the path of love is because it's confusing. We, we saw in, in chapter 12, right?

The body is diverse. Many members given many different gifts from different backgrounds. And it's hard sometimes to figure out what that path of love is within a congregation, right? It's confusing and it can be frustrating.

We can feel misunderstood. I just want to remind everybody with this truth. You are fully known by the God of the universe. You are seen, right?

And so when you're in these frustrating places of life where you're trying to figure out how to love one another well, you don't have to have that expectation that you will be fully understood in this life because you have a God in heaven who knows all things with all power and all love who knows you completely, right?

[25:54] And so we don't have to get that here in this community. There will be misunderstandings and that's why we have this list of love. We bear all things. We believe all things. We hope all things. We endure all things because we are not capable of fully kind of grasping all of this stuff and so then we plod forward in love.

We go into those hard conversations. We listen. We try to understand. We encourage. We bring the truth of God's word in and that can be difficult and confusing sometimes but we're not coming at this Christian life with a deficit of love, right?

We have been fully loved by the God of the universe, right? So we are coming into all of these relationships whether they're easy or hard, full of love. We are equipped.

We are overflowing with the love of the trying God, right? And so we are capable of loving. Sorry. It's my wife telling me to hold the mic up.

All right. So if you feel unseen, if you feel misunderstood, that's normal. Keep loving.

[27:03] Keep leaning in. Keep seeking to display these character qualities that we see here and trust that God knows, God sees, and that's sufficient. So loving others can be hard and frustrating and confusing but you're equipped.

Your capacity to love is eternally supplied by God himself. But we can forget these things and we can walk in the lesser. That is what was happening in Corinth.

Verse 11, Paul says, when 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 my childish ways. Some commentators see here in verse 11 that it's basically the same idea of verse 12, both illustrating that the old is passing, the new is coming, so childhood to adulthood.

I don't really find that view that compelling because I don't believe that we're intended to stay in childhood and so that just analogy, that application of that analogy doesn't seem to resonate.

Plus what we've seen in 1 Corinthians is this theme of maturity. Right? We saw it in chapter 3. We'll see it again in chapter 14. In chapter 14, Paul encourages the Corinthians to be infants and evil but in their thinking to be mature.

[28:25] So I think what Paul's aim is here is to point us towards maturity. children. And I think the analogy is pretty good.

Children. Sorry, I've completely lost my place. So we think Paul is encouraging the Corinthians towards maturity and how they hold, handle, and value the spiritual gifts.

And in this, he's not saying that spiritual gifts or the use of spiritual gifts are immature. Chapters 12 and 14 encourage the pursuit and proper use of these gifts. What he's saying is that the Corinthian Christians were using these gifts in childish ways.

And this is a good illustration because children are notorious for misunderstanding the value of something. We had a birthday in our house, yes sir, this week. When was that?

Ava. On the 11th, Ava turned seven. Yes. And we had the same conversation that we have about eight times a year.

[29:37] We had the same conversation that despite the number of presents, the other children got a fair birthday gift as well.

And so our kids want to always kind of lean towards the number of presents to be the value of the presents. And we have to remind them, no, no, the value is actually in the gift. So more presents doesn't always mean more value.

It doesn't mean that we spent more money on Ava than you because she got more presents. It's all about the worth, the value of those presents. But kids have trouble understanding that. And we just

have the tendency to, or my kids, have the tendency to like the number and the size of the presents equal the value of the presents.

Right? And I think the Corinthians were doing the same thing. Right? The number and size of the gifts were equaling the value of the gifts in their minds. And they were forgetting the purpose of the gift was to love the church and build up the church.

And so they were immature in how they were handling the gifts that God had given them because they were exalting the gift itself without value, without putting proper value on what was actually valuable, which was using that gift in submission to Christ in the building up of the church.

[30:50] And so I think this is a good analogy. The mark of children is not to realize the value of things.

And so it was with the Corinthians. They were assigning value to the number and size of the gifts they had received rather than recognizing the real value was found in loving and using those gifts in the building up of the church. So these are children because they overvalued gifts and undervalued the purpose of the gifts.

They desired what was temporary gifts at the expense of what was eternal, love. They undervalued what was secondary or they overvalued what was secondary and undervalued what was primary.

And so in this way, I think Paul is calling them towards maturity. All right, we'll go to verse 13 now.

Verse 13 says, so now faith, hope and love abide, these three, but the greatest of these is love.

I believe the closing statement serves to summarize the driving point of 1 Corinthians 13. When Paul uses these words, faith, hope and love, he is using shorthand to describe the Holy Spirit's work in a person's life.

[32:05] We'll see this. I'll read it here in Colossians 1.3 and then in 1 Thessalonians I'll show you. In Colossians 1.3, he's encouraging the church there. He says, we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ when we pray for you.

Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. So here Paul is basically saying, hey, I'm confident that you're Christians because I see the fruit of your Christian life in your faith, in your hope, and in your love towards the church.

So here this is just shorthand of Paul saying, the Holy Spirit's at work. He's doing a regenerative work. You are his. You are legitimate. You are Christians. In 1 Thessalonians 1.2-3, he says, we give thanks to God always for you, constantly mention you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

So coming back to verse 13 when Paul talks about faith, hope, and love, he is talking about the work of God in the soul of a believer. And he says that this work will remain.

Of course it will because he's working his likeness in us. Love is exalted. We see Paul say, but the greatest of these is love because faith, hope, and love are the evidence of the Holy Spirit's work in our life all through to remain.

[33:32] God's work will remain. But why does he say that love is the greatest? To answer this, one commentator suggests that we ask a few questions. He says, does God have faith?

Well, no. For God to have faith would mean he's trusting in something other than himself, right? And then he would cease to be God. He'd be putting confidence somewhere else.

Does God have hope? Well, no. Not really. He's the Alpha and Omega. He's the beginning of the end. He controls all things, knows all things. He is the one, the sovereign entity entity in the universe.

So hope doesn't necessarily fit God either. But does God love? Yes. The Bible tells us emphatically that God does love. In fact, the Bible tells us that God is love.

You see, faith and hope are our responses to God. But love is God, is of God, and from God. He implants his love in us, and he is remaking us into the image of Christ who laid down his life and love for the world.

[34:41] Therefore, the grace of these is love, for it is the key quality that God imparts in us. So this means that the Christian life and that the Christian love is very practical.

It is quite simply Christian maturity. It is godliness in us. It is Christ being formed in us. And this is the very thing that was lacking in Corinth.

And if delayed maturity is possible in Corinth, then it's possible here as well. So the Corinthians were just kind of showing that, you know, when we went back, a lot of the problems in the Corinthian church was really because they didn't embody the love of Christ.

They had received, they had believed, but it hadn't worked its way out in their life. So they were arrogant, they were self-indulgent, they were insisting upon their own way, and they were hurting one another and stirring up strife and disunity.

Right? So they were immature in this core Christian ethic of love. Right? And I think that's what Paul is really trying to point out in this chapter 13 and really all throughout the book and encouraging them to embody the gospel-shaped life that he had called them to.

[36:07] So I think we need to onboard that encouragement. Love must govern our corporate life together. If it does not, we will use our gifts to serve ourselves rather than to serve Christ and build up his church.

And our gifts will not only become useless, they may even push others away like a loud, obnoxious gong. Without love, arrogance will create strife and division within the church as we align ourselves with one member over another.

Without love, our knowledge will lead us to be puffed up, and we will be prone to use our knowledge to serve our own purposes. Without love, pride will cause us to be self-absorbed, and we will be unable to discern the needs of the body.

Without love, our passions will lead us to mistreat others. Without love, we will be resentful, impatient, irritable, and rude. These things all happen in Corinth, and without maturity, they will happen here.

But with love, we will be able to bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, endure all things. Genuine Christian love is not something that we can produce, but it is something that we can pursue.

[37:21] We pursue it when we recognize its importance in the Christian life. We pursue it when we pray for its growth in our hearts and in others. We pursue it when we renounce and repent when we see impatience, envy, arrogance, irritability, resentment exert themselves in our relationships.

in summary, the message of 1 Corinthians 13 is grow up into the maturity of Christian love. The evidence of maturity is our love.

The evidence of our maturity is our love for one another. You can't separate those two. I think that's one of the big things we need to learn. You can't separate love from maturity biblically because a mature Christian will image our Savior who is love and who laid himself down in love.

If you take away one thing, take away this. if love is not a key characteristic of our lives, we are walking in immaturity.

We can trick ourselves. We can say all kinds of things. We can line up our successes, sit on top of our gifting. We can do all these things.

[38:34] Our hearts are deceitful. What Paul wants the Corinthians to understand, he wants us to understand, that without love at the center of our Christian ethic, we are immature because that should be the thing that is growing most in us.

We need a love that enables us. The evidence of our maturity is our love for one another, a love that endures the rub of life, a love that binds a diverse body together, a love that enables us to rejoice when one member is honored and to suffer when another member suffers.

Grow up into godliness because godliness is other people centeredness. And this, my brothers and sisters, will make god-honoring fellowship possible. But if we try to operate as a church without the Christian maturity described in 1 Corinthians 13, particularly in verses 4 through 7, our congregation will inevitably divide.

So as we close, I just want to say I do think that our church is loving, right? Paul says this to the 1st Thessalonian church. He's like, everybody knows of your love, pursue it all the more, right?

But I think this is a strong warning from Paul in 1 Corinthians. It says, hey, if you lose the path of love, all these other things are going to fall apart in your corporate life together, right?

[40:01] And so I think the encouragement for us is pursue love. You know, measure our love against the picture we have here in 1 Corinthians 13. And when we fail, repent and go back to the Lord.

Because that love is not something that we can generate, it's something that he works in us. But as we'll see in the next chapter, we're also called to pursue it. So we can pursue love. And don't isolate when it gets hard, right?

Love is defined within the spaces of life where we bump shoulders and interact with one another. Right? And so I think God calls us to be a body, to be joined, to be unified, to pursue him together. And that's going to be hard sometimes. That's going to be confusing. But we persevere in love. We endure all things, bear all things, hope all things, believe all things. Because we have a God who's loved us and has equipped us to love one another.