

1 Corinthians 13:1-13 PM

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[0 : 00] Amen. Yes, please be seated. I realize I didn't introduce myself before. If you're brand new, my name is Aaron. I'm the minister that looks after the service. Come and say hi afterwards. I'd love to meet you. So we're in 1 Corinthians 13. Many of you, like you know this passage.

If you've been around Christian stuff for a while, you guys would have heard this passage. Most likely you would have heard it at a wedding. It was the passage read at my wedding, which is great. It's a great passage. However, if you've been with us for a while now, you realize at this point that, you know, we've been going through 1 Corinthians for many, many, many, many months.

And you can probably guess with all that Corinthian knowledge in your brain now, when Paul wrote this section, marriage was not on his mind. He wasn't thinking about marriage when he wrote this. Neither is this just some random break in his, in his kind of argument where he sort of just randomly defines love. This chapter is actually a rebuke. He's, he's telling them off.

Remember the church in Corinth, they were really into very showy spiritual gifts because they thought if we can do all these, all this crazy stuff, that's, that's, that's what it looks like to be spiritual. And Paul says here, he says, look, you've got it all wrong. You might have the gifts, but, but you don't have a changed heart. You don't have a tender heart towards one another.

[1 : 35] And that's a big problem. So let's dive into it. There are three main sections, three main sections. The first section is verses one to three. Let's have a crack at it here. Verses one to three. This first section, Paul says, what he does is he goes, here are the things you're really good at. You're really good at these things, but, but, but they don't impress God if they don't have any love behind them.

Corinth was a very talented church, externally pretty impressive. They're pretty chuffed with themselves. If this church in Corinth was a church in Vancouver today, it would be the church. It'd be the church that everyone's moving to because it's, it's like lots of experiences and, and really talented, clever people. Now remember though, what was the gift that the Corinthians valued above all the others?

It was, it was speaking in tongues and we're going to get more into that next week. So Paul hits this one first when he talks about the things that they're really good at, but they're kind of missing the mark on other big things. So the first thing he says here, if I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I'm a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. So what's that, what's that all about? I mean, it's pretty self-explanatory, but it's helpful to know this. There were lots of temples in Corinth and, and it was a very religious place. And one of the things that the, um, sort of the pagan worshipers would do as part of their services is they would walk out of, walk out of their temples, walk out of their churches, and then sort of process around the town banging gongs and cymbals. Why? Because they believe they got the attention of God. And also it looks really cool for the onlookers. So the onlookers looking at them would think, goodness, they are very religious. So it was, it was kind of a look at me kind of thing as well. And Paul is saying here in verse one, he goes, there is a great danger. You can appear quite spiritual, but without love, it's just self-serving. It's just, it's just like, it's just loud noises, just loud noises. You're just like these pagans, just bringing your attention to yourself. It's verse one, verse two, verse two.

[3 : 43] It should be up behind me here. What's the next verse? What's the next spiritual thing that Paul brings up? The thing that they think is very, very spiritual. And it's, it's all about prophetic things, isn't it? You can have prophetic powers, you can understand mysteries, you can have all this knowledge, you can have amazing faith, but if you've got no love, it says, so I'm nothing.

You're nothing. It's very bracing, isn't it? It says, you're no use to the kingdom. If you can do all these cool things, but there's no love. Do you see, do you see what he's saying there? It's like, you

can have a very successful ministry, a public ministry like I do, like a public ministry, looks pretty good, where you can be like a lay person and you're really great at like kind of running a home group, great administrative skills, and you're pretty good at unpacking the Bible and stuff. You could, you could be a great, you could do all of these things, but God says, if you're operating system, like your heart, if there's no love, it's worthless. Worthless.

Now look at verse three. This one's a bit of a shock, because you can sort of understand those first two a little bit, but the third one's a bit of a shock. You could give away everything, deliver up your body to be burned, but if you have not love, I've gained nothing.

It says you can voluntarily become quite poor. You can become a martyr, but the Bible says that can be just another form of self-centeredness. Your life can look sacrificial in practice. You can be a social justice warrior, but it could be just for yourself. Could be, could be just for yourself. Could be that you just want to look good. Could be just for your own sake. It's a sort of this performative morality that presents well, but might not actually have love behind it. I mean, it might, but it might not. These first three verses here, they, I've heard them described as this. It's almost like they represent three different types of churches. So verse one, it's the one about sort of, you know, speaking in tongues. It's like charismatic churches. They can do miracles and amazing things, but if they don't have love, it's just noise. Verse two, this is all the one about like knowledge.

You could be a word type church like us with brainy, brainy types, intellectual types, very clever. It's a bit of us, isn't it? But without love, you just have no use to the kingdom, it says. So verse one, charismatic churches. Verse two is like the evangelical type, brainy churches. Verse three, this is like the social justice churches. They can look fantastic, really inspiring, but without love, it could be just another dressed up version of self-centeredness.

[6 : 22] Now, how's everyone going? It's great to see you all tonight. So I live in church land, right? This is my job. It's my job. I live in church land. And if you're like, if you're in finance, or a doctor, whatever you do, you know, in your industry, you know stuff. And you know what's happening around the world. You know about stuff that's happening around the world in your industry. So in my industry, right? So you just know the news, church land news. So, and this is stuff you might know, but I know.

So in the last year, actually in the last few months, there's been a number of sort of pretty high profile ministers have been fired or stood down. Not at St. John's, other churches around the world, quite high profile ones. I'm not going to name any, but anyway, some high profile guys have been fired.

Turns out, not for the classic kind of stuff that you think they'd be fired for, they've been fired or stood down because it turns out they were bullies. And they'd been bullies for a really long time. And the question is, why were they in their position so long before they got called out? Like what, what happened? Why did it take so long for the board to take the accusation seriously, do a report, do an investigation and find out actually these guys were bullies? Well, I think this, this passage helps to explain this. See, I think, is this okay, Chris? It's all right. Okay, here we go. Because I think, I just think we're so impressed by the impressive, aren't we? We're so impressed by the impressive. Gifts, brains, this amazing sacrificial lives. We're so impressed by that stuff. We're so impressed by it, but sometimes we can excuse a lack of character. And I think that's what's happened with some of these leaders. They were very gifted up front, but people just gave them a pass on being a bully because they produced, they produced what people thought was spiritual. You know, doing the kind of stuff that I do, you know, great teacher or they're a prophet or they're like a social justice warrior. Behind the scenes, kind of jerks. See, God, God, it's, this is such a great passage because God says the fruit that really matters to me is love. And there's nothing wrong with being a great teacher or a social justice person or a prophet or whatever. There's nothing wrong with that stuff. But God says that what really matters to me is love. Are you loving well? Okay, that's the first section. Glad that's good. That one's, let's put the one to one side now. Okay, first section. Paul pinpoints the stuff they're good at. They're sort of markers of spirituality and says it counts for nothing without love, no matter how good you are at all these various things. So next section should be up behind me here. This is the one that's popular at weddings.

[9 : 26] Love is patient and kind. It does not boast, et cetera. It's not arrogant. It sounds like this is a little bit where Paul is trying to define love for us, right? That's what it sounds like. And it kind of is that kind of, but not really, because it's not a complete definition, is it? Because it doesn't talk about self-sacrifice, which is a really big kind of Christian thing when it comes to love. So if it's not really a

definition of love, like what is it? Well, what Paul is doing is he's pinpointing the areas in the church in Corinth where these folks were underperforming. It's like a nice way of saying it, perhaps. He's pinpointing the areas where they were underperforming. So you could read it like this. It's like, love is patient, not like you guys in Corinth, you know. Love doesn't boast. I know you guys in Corinth do that all the time and it's terrible. That's the kind of a sense of it. It's a list of traits they don't have.

I'll show you what I mean. A few examples. So like, love doesn't boast. Says that. Love doesn't boast. Up there in bold. Love doesn't boast. So you remember chapter three, there were people in the church aligning themselves with who they thought was the most impressive leader because they thought, you know, there's like some religious social climbing or something that was going like that.

And they would say, I belong to Paul. I belong to Apollos. In that chapter, Paul literally says, in chapter three of first Corinthians, we preach on this. Paul literally says, do not boast like that. But that's what they would do. He uses the same word there. Another example. Love does not insist on its own way. Verse five there in bold. It does not insist on its own way. You might remember chapter eight. The folks in the church were saying, I can eat whatever I want. I can eat stuff that was sacrificed to demons because it's food. It's food. It's just food. It doesn't matter. And other people were really offended by this, but they were insisting on their own way because they were like, my rights trump loving others, but love does not insist on its own way. Love is not rude. Verse five, love is not rude. In chapter 11, people stopped wearing these traditional cultural head coverings in the name of freedom. And that was very confusing for other people. And other people were kind of offended by that. It was really off-putting to visitors back in the days. It was rude. [12:04] Love is not rude. Last example, love is not arrogant. Love is not arrogant. In chapter five, we read about this so, it's just totally unsavory situation. There was a guy shackled up with his stepmother and they're all thinking this is really cool. And Paul literally says in 1 Corinthians 5, 1 to 2, he says, you are arrogant. Why are you letting this happen? Love is not arrogant.

All that to say, Paul here is not, his goal here is not to define love completely. He's applying love to the Corinthian situation and he's saying, you're falling well short here. You look impressive. It seems like you want to be like Jesus and like the miracles and stuff and all the, all the, all the, all the outside stuff, but the inside your hearts, you're in trouble.

And we've been picking on Corinthians here. So let's think for ourselves. And I was really thinking hard this week and this was one that came to me and maybe it's because it's for me, but I'll give one more example and just apply it to us. Maybe I'm just applying it to me.

It is not irritable or resentful. It's not irritable or resentful. Those two phrases, they go together. They're kind of bedmates. A person who gets easily angry is probably the kind of person who keeps a mental record of all the ways they perceive somebody has done them wrong. [13:37] Do you know this? You're an angry type person. You kind of, people bug you and stuff. You probably sort of keep a little bit of a mental list. It's like an accounting term and you let your brain run a bit wild. Maybe, maybe you might fantasize, but how you can get this person back. Maybe fantasize a bit about their failure. They'll come crashing down one day. It's going to be a great day.

See, Paul, you know, what's really interesting about this is Paul, this word resentful, this list making, they've done this to me. They've done this to me. They've done this to me. They've wronged me this to me. Paul uses that verb to describe God's attitude towards our sin in Romans 4, 8. I'll read this to you. Blessed is the person against whom the Lord will not count his sins. That not count word, that's the resent word. That's the keeping score word. That's the making the list of all the ways you've been wronged word. God doesn't resent us. He doesn't keep a list. He doesn't hold things against us. He forgives. Let's be like that. That's hard though, right? That is so hard.

That is so hard. Okay, a little summary so far. First section, Paul lists the things that the church is good at and says none of that matters if there's no love. Next section, he says here's what love looks like, implicitly saying you're not acting in loving ways. And as they would have heard that read to them, they could have thought of all the examples and the ways they're not doing it. Last section, very, very quickly this last section, verses 8 to 13. Paul's big point here is he just wants to point out the lasting importance of love compared to all the other things the Corinthians were on about. Love never ends. As for prophecies, they'll pass away. As for tongues, they will cease. As for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part, in prophecy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. The gift of the spirits, the gift of the spirit, they belong to this age. They're useful for

now. Great gifts to the church. Praise God for them. But in the next stage, they won't be needed. But love, the need for love, that will never go away.

That will always be around. I'm going to jump straight to tell you something interesting here.

Whatever happened to this church in Corinth? Whatever happened to these guys? That's a good question, right? About half a century after Paul wrote this letter, a bishop called Clement wrote to them about 50 years later.

[16:26] And we have the letters. And he wrote addressing the same things 50 years on, half a century later, after Paul wrote these letters. This church lacked love. They were divisive. They were territorial.

And we also know from history that this church never really developed or grew too much. Why am I telling you this? I'm not telling you this to depress you.

But I think history has a warning here for us. Let's take these words of Paul quite seriously. The Corinthians seemed like they didn't.

Let's take these words of Paul quite seriously. Examine your heart. Do you mistake gifts and talents for God's approval in your life?

I'm great at running a Bible study. I'm great at doing this. I'm great at doing that. Do we demote love down because we're really good at these other things? Have we elevated theological intellect, for example?

[17:34] These things are the grand litmus test for what it looks like to be spiritual and stuff. And actually, God says love. He puts love right at the center.

Loving well. Because love bears and believes and hopes and endures all things. In John 13, Jesus says this, A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another just as I have loved you, and you also are to love one another.

Which sounds very, very difficult. I fail at this every day. Which is why I think my final exhortation to you for tonight is not, you know, go and try harder now.

Just get out there and give it a good college try. Is it a saying? I don't know. Give it a good college try. Try really hard. I'm not saying that. I think the action point here is we must entrust our hearts to the transforming work of the Holy Spirit.

And we should pray to God. We should pray, pray, pray. I know I have a significant lack of patience in my life. And it's something I really struggle with.

[18:56] But the Lord has changed my heart in quite significant ways in the last year. Not in patience. I need to work on that one. But in other ways. This is what the Holy Spirit does.

The Holy Spirit actually does change us. So, if these things that Paul has talked about, this love, this strange attitudes we might have around gifts and stuff, give them to the Holy Spirit and say, God, just help me.

I want to be a loving person. I want that to be the center of my life. God, change me. Change my priorities. Make me loving. So that we can reflect God's love to others. I think that's the challenge for us.

Amen.