**THE GREATEST OF THESE IS LOVE**

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Key Verse 13

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

**Introduction**



First of all, let us recap what is going on in the book of 1 Corinthians. Paul preached the gospel in the city of Corinth during his missionary journey, and as a result Corinthian church was established. But after his leaving, he heard that so many problems arose in that church. So he wrote this letter in order to resolve the problems of the church. In chapter 12, Paul dealt with the problem of spiritual gifts because it caused disorder and troubles in the body of Christ. Now Paul said in 12:31b. “And now I will show you the most excellent way.” Then in chapter 13 he began to talk about love. So we must know that love is not the same as the spiritual gifts. But love is the most excellent way that God gave us so that we can build up the body of Christ through our spiritual gifts. May God bless us to know what love is and grow as men and women of love.

1. Read verses 1-3. Why is love more valuable than any other gift? (1-2) What does it mean for a person to gain nothing even if he gives all his possessions to the poor, without love? (3)

1-1, Read verses 1-3.

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. **2** If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge,and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. **3** If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

1-2, Why is love more valuable than any other gift? (1-2)

***If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.***

* Tongues of men are all kinds of human languages. Some people are more talented in learning foreign languages.
* In Paul's day, many Jews believe angels had their own language, and by the Spirit, one could even speak it.



* But even if we speak many languages and even the language of angels, we are only resounding gong or clanging cymbals without love.
* Gong and cymbals are music instruments that make big noise. It does harm than good when it is practiced without love.

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

* Gift of prophecy is about knowing all mysteries and all knowledge. Also, it is great to have such a faith that can move mountains.
* By saying, “If I” repeatedly, Paul implies that God gave him such a great gift and such faith. But what does he say? I am nothing without love. Nothing means zero.
* The Corinthian Christians were missing the motive and the goal of the gifts, making them their own end. Paul draws the attention back to love.
* It isn't an issue of love versus the gifts. We should never choose between love and gifts of the Holy Spirit. Rather Paul says about the goal of the gifts: love.

1-3, What does it mean for a person to gain nothing even if he gives all his possessions to the poor, without love? (3)

***If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.***

* The gift of giving is beautiful, and if someone even give his life to others, what a great thing it is. But Paul said that even by doing that, I gain nothing without love.
* It seems that giving all someone possess to the poor and giving over one’s body as a martyr is great!
* However it is quite possible that extreme material sacrifice or life sacrificing could be less than satisfactory from God’s standard whose name is love.
* Some early Christians were said to be so arrogant as to think that the blood of martyrdom would wash away any sin. They thought that it was the most important thing in the Christian life. It is important, but not the most important.
* Tongues are good. Prophecy and knowledge and faith are good. Sacrifice is good. But love is so valuable, so important, that apart from it, every other good thing is useless.
* Sometimes, we make the great mistake of letting go of what is best for something else that is good, but not the best.
* Christianity is to pursue what is best always. Many believers try to settle down with what is the second best. The better is the very enemy of the best!
* That is why we inevitably go through misunderstanding in family, church, and community.
* Therefore, without love even such great spiritual gifts of giving, such a great faith and great deeds mean nothing.
* By comparing love with other spiritual gifts, Paul emphasized the superiority of love. Love is what we have to focus as of first importance.
* In Greek, the word for love here is “agape,” although in English, there is only one word for love.
* Eros, or erotic love, is sensual love between a man and a woman. It’s often a selfish sort of love, a concern for a person who can do something for me.
* Philos, friendship, family love, is mainly concerned with those closest to us. It can be the highest level of human love.
* Agape is a rare word in secular Greek. It is derived from God’s love and means selfless, sacrificial and unconditional.
* In this passage Paul used agape when he talked about love. This agape love is the love of God. God is love, and love came from God.

1 John 4:8 says,

“Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.”

* We can come to know true love when we know the love of God. God’s love is selfless, sacrificial and unconditional love. This love of God was demonstrated through the cross of Jesus.

Romans 5:8 says,

“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we are still sinners, Christ died for us.”

* Until we know this love of God, our soul can never be satisfied. Eros love, and even Philos love cannot satisfy us.
* Only when we receive the love of God can we live truly happy life. When we have this agape love, we can have true love for others and build up the body of Christ and serve God’s purpose with spiritual gifts God gave us. This is the most excellent way to build up the body of Christ.

1. Read verses 4-7. What are the characteristics of love? (4-5) What does love delight in? (6) What does love always do? (7)

2-1, Read verses 4-7.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. **5** It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. **6** Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. **7** It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

2-2, What are the characteristics of love? (4-5)

***4 Love is patient,***

* In verses 4-7, we can learn about 15 characteristics of love. It is easy to think of love as abstract concept, for it is invisible and untouchable.
* But here Paul tells us very clearly what love is and what love is not. Paul is not writing about how love feels, he is writing about how it can be seen in action.
* True love is always demonstrated by action. “Love is patient, love is kind.” This is two positive aspects of love.
* It is interesting to know that ‘patient’ is on the top of the list. It is because patience is the most basic thing for us to grow in love. Patience means ‘longsuffering.’
* It takes time and effort to love others. But fruit of love can be produced through patience. We can see that all the great men of God bore fruits of love through patience, such as Abraham, Moses, and David. Jesus endured the most.

2 Peter 3:8-9 reads,

But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. **9** The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

***love is kind.***

* Love is kind. When we become patient, God forms the character of kindness in our heart. Kind person is soft and humble and considerate of others.

***It does not envy,***

* Envy is one of the least productive and most damaging of all sins. It accomplishes nothing, except to hurt.
* Envy murdered Abel ([Genesis 4:3-8](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/genesis/4/3-8/s_4003)). Envy enslaved Joseph ([Genesis 37:11](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/genesis/37/11/s_37011), [28](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/genesis/37/28/s_37028)). Envy put Jesus on the cross ([Matthew 27:18](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/matthew/27/18/s_956018)).

***it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking,***

* Sometimes the people who work the hardest are apt to be boastful. This isn't love. it is pride looking for self glory by the mere appearance of love.
* Love does not make someone puffed up. To be puffed up is to be arrogant and self-focused. Love focuses on the true needs of others.

***it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.***

* Moses had hard time in terms of being angry. He failed to enter the promised land after all good works for the Israelites.
* Love does not store up the memory of any wrong. Love will put away the hurts of the past instead of clinging to them.

2-3, What does love delight in? (6)

***6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.***

* It is willing to want the best for others, and refuses to color things against others. Instead, love rejoices in the truth.
* Love knows that the ultimate truth is God’s truth, that besides the truth of God all truths are like lies or half truths.
* So love remains rooted in God and in his word, and in that way, it expresses the great act of love, the act of planting truth in another person’s heart.
* Love also does not side with one Christian against another, nor does it value one above the other. Nor does it criticize others. Love stands on the truth always. It stands with God.
* Love can always stand with and on truth, because love is pure and good like truth.

2-4, What does love always do? (7)

***7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.***

* When our hearts are filled with God’s love, we can always protect, always trust, always hopes, and always persevere in our relationship with others.
* Jesus set a good example to fulfill these four always. Jesus loved his disciples, and protected them even at the time he was taken to be crucified.
* He did not think of himself but of them, how to protect them from. He trusted them with the Gospel even when they were young and inexperienced.
* He hoped for them to the end to carry out the Gospel work after his departure. And he persevered with them as they grew into the great apostles of the world.
* Love protects trusts and hope, and persevere, that is the essence of love.

1. Read verses 8-13. In what respects does love never fail? (8-10) How can we outgrow childish ways? (11) What is the mature way? (12) What are the three things that remain? (13a, 1Th 1:3) What is the greatest of them all? (13b)

3-1, Read verses 8-13.

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. **9** For we know in part and we prophesy in part, **10** but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. **11** When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. **12** For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

**13** And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

3-2, In what respects does love never fail? (8-10)

***8 Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears.***

* There will be the time when prophecies cease, tongues are stilled, and knowledge passes away.
* This perfection comes in the time of Jesus` return. When Jesus comes again, all the imperfect things such as prophecy, tongues and knowledge will disappear. But love never fails.
* Love will remain forever because our God is love, and our God is eternal.

3-3, How can we outgrow childish ways? (11)

***11 When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me.***

* When we become adults, we leave our childish ways behind us because we realize that they are not so important as we thought.
* We come to know what is really important. In the same way, as we grow mature as Christians, we come to realize that love is what matters most, and the love of God is what we really need in our life.

3-4, What is the mature way? (12)

***12 For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.***

* At that time, mirror was made of bronze, and it was not as clear as what we have now. It had poor reflection and distorted image.
* That is how we understand God and his love at present. But when the time comes, we will see face to face, and know God and his love fully, as God knows us fully.

3-5, What are the three things that remain? (13a, 1Th 1:3)

***13 And now these three remain: faith, hope and love.***

***We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Th 1:3)***

3-6, What is the greatest of them all? (13b)

***But the greatest of these is love.***

* Faith and hope are important. We must continue to grow in faith, and we should never lose hope in the kingdom of God.
* But we must focus on love in our life because the greatest of these is love. When we love God and love our neighbors, we fulfill all the law of God, and we can truly become blessing to others and build up the body of Christ.

***Conclusion***



Love is greatest, for it will continue, even grow, in the eternal state. When we are in heaven, faith and hope will be fulfilled their purpose. We won't need faith when we see God face to face. We won't need to hope in the coming of Jesus once He comes. But we will always love the Lord and each other, and grow in that love through eternity. Paul here isn't trying to make us choose among three. But he wants to help the Corinthian Christians. Without love as the motive and goal, the gifts are meaningless distractions. If you lose love, you lose everything. **One word: Love never fails!**