

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

13 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ²If I have the gift of prophecy and know all the mysteries and have all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³If I give away everything I own, and if I give up my body that I may be burned but do not have love, I gain nothing.

⁴Love is patient. Love is kind. Love does not envy. It does not brag. It is not arrogant. ⁵It does not behave indecently. It is not selfish. It is not irritable. It does not keep a record of wrongs. ⁶It does not rejoice over unrighteousness but rejoices with the truth. ⁷It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

⁸Love never comes to an end. But if there are prophetic gifts, they will be done away with; if tongues, they will cease; if knowledge, it will be done away with. ⁹For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part, ¹⁰but when that which is complete has come, that which is partial will be done away with. ¹¹When 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 put away childish things. ¹²Now we see indirectly using a mirror, but then we will see face to face. Now I know in part, but then I will know fully, just as I was fully known.

¹³So now these three remain: faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love.

Love is...

I.

They liked success. They liked to be well thought of. Everybody does, I guess. People enjoy having their talents and abilities recognized; and they enjoy being praised for those things.

That's pretty obvious when you look at the culture. The explosion of social media is largely due to the fact that people seek attention. Update your status, and you are hoping for lots of "likes." Post a story...or even a comment *on* a story...and you expect glowing reviews from the keyboards of others. Criticism—*any* criticism—even from a total stranger, is a crushing blow.

It isn't just the culture, though, is it? This isn't a phenomenon only applicable to "the world." Paul identified those in the Christian church in Corinth who wanted recognition from others earlier in his letter. "Some have become arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. ¹⁹But I will come to you soon, if the Lord is willing, and I will find out about the power, not the talk, of those who are arrogant. ²⁰For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk, but in power" (1 Corinthians 4:18-20, EHV).

Success and attention, then, aren't just things non-Christians desire. These attitudes also infect the church.

Paul lists some things Christians of his day wanted to be patted on the back for. As he does so, he puts *himself* into the narrative, rather than anyone else, though these abilities seemed to be highly desired by the Christians living in Corinth.

"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels..." (1 Corinthians 13:1, EHV). Speaking in tongues was the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The Apostles spoke to the crowds in languages they had never learned. Paul doesn't bother to address whether this was likely or common by this time, just implies that those who seemed to have this ability wanted to be patted on the back.

"If I have the gift of prophecy and know all the mysteries and have all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to move mountains..." (1 Corinthians 13:2, EHV). Earlier in his letter Paul had identified himself and other pastors as: "Servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries" (1 Corinthians 4:1, EHV). God's mysteries refers to the message of the cross and salvation in Jesus. All the knowledge about God and these mysteries and the gift of

prophecy go together. While sometimes prophets looked into the future, a prophet is simply someone who speaks God's Word to people. Combine all that with a faith that can literally move mountains and you have something impressive enough to get a pat on the back.

"If I give away everything I own, and if I give up my body that I may be burned..." (1 Corinthians 13:3, EHV). Charity, and a willingness to die for something a person believes in are admirable. Some think it is worth dying to get recognition for their actions.

In each of those cases, we left out Paul's conclusion.

"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal" (1 Corinthians 13:1, EHV). Love means that a person will not speak in foreign languages, whether they are languages of this world or of the angels alone, just to impress others. To do so just to impress is just a bunch of worthless noise.

"If I have the gift of prophecy and know all the mysteries and have all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:2, EHV). To use God's Word in love means that one would not try to show off about all you have learned about God.

"If I give away everything I own, and if I give up my body that I may be burned but do not have love, I gain nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:3, EHV). Love doesn't care if anyone ever notices charitable acts. Charity is not to be done for recognition, but to give genuine help. That's the way love gives.

II.

Next Paul defines love. You've probably heard the definition given in these verses many times. They are popular at weddings.

How much have you used the definition to look at yourself and determine how loving you are? I'll put the passage on the screen. Put your own name in every place "love" is referenced. I'll read the passage with my name.

"Love is patient. Love is kind. Love does not envy. It does not brag. It is not arrogant.⁵It does not behave indecently. It is not selfish. It is not irritable. It does not keep a record of wrongs.⁶It does not rejoice over unrighteousness but rejoices with the truth.⁷It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Corinthians 13:4-7, EHV).

When I read these verses with my own name in place of love, it's laughable. I'm imperfect in every category—at best. If you didn't notice your own flaws and faults when Paul talked about some particular spiritual gifts, perhaps you will agree that you find yourself lacking when love is defined, as I do.

III.

When you think of the word love, there are quite a few nuances, aren't there? Love can describe the way you feel about your favorite pastry, or your favorite sport, or a band. Love can describe the emotions you feel about an individual person or group of people, like your family. Love can refer to a passion; we use love to describe sexual attraction and the act of sex itself.

The Greek language has several different words for the different kinds of love. Only two are used in the New Testament. One is the brotherly kind of love: φιλέω (phileo). The city of Philadelphia gets its name from that word. The word used most often for love is αγαπή (agape). Αγαπή is the kind of love that loves, even when love isn't deserved.

Jesus loved us, even when we didn't deserve it. You can put *Jesus'* name in for every piece of the definition of love. Let's read it again.

"Love is patient. Love is kind. Love does not envy. It does not brag. It is not arrogant.⁵It does not behave indecently. It is not selfish. It is not irritable. It does not keep a record of wrongs.⁶It does not rejoice over unrighteousness but rejoices with the truth.⁷It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Corinthians 13:4-7, EHV).

There was no desire for a pat on the back that sent Jesus to the cross. While he sacrificed

his body there, it was in total and complete love. Remember his words from the cross?

Love is patient. Jesus begged his Heavenly Father to give those who crucified him more time to repent.

Love is kind. Jesus assigned John the task of taking care of his mother after his death.

Love does not brag. There was no false bravado on the part of Jesus during his trial or as he hung on the cross. He just carried out what needed to be done.

Love is not selfish. If Jesus were selfish, he would have come down from the cross as those who taunted him suggested. He didn't need to die for his own sake, but for the sake of the world.

Love does not keep a record of wrongs. The thief hanging one cross over knew his own record. He didn't deserve mercy of any kind. But Jesus gave the assurance that the thief would be in heaven that very day. Jesus died so that your record would be wiped clean, too. God sees you as perfect and holy because of Jesus' payment for you.

Every lack of love you can possibly imagine in your life has been paid in full by Jesus.

IV.

In the gospel for today, Jesus says: "A new commandment I give you: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, so also you are to love one another" (John 13:34, EHV).

Was it a new commandment? When asked which was the greatest commandment, Jesus said: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' ³⁸This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹The second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Matthew 22:37-39, EHV). Love God above everything, and love your neighbor as yourself. Love one another. It would seem that love was *always* the summary of God's law.

Jesus made it a new commandment by the way in which love was employed. "Just as I have loved you," he told them. Jesus loved us all with a self-sacrificing love, as we mentioned. The new commandment meant that they wouldn't seek their *own* glory by showing love, but instead would reflect *Jesus'* glory.

Paul says that in our text. "Love never comes to an end" (1 Corinthians 13:8, EHV). He speaks about those gifts of the spirit that are so sought-after by Christians and says all of them are finite—all will come to an end. Love never will.

"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 put away childish things" (1 Corinthians 13:11, EHV).

Keep growing in your faith. As you grow to adulthood, you don't need your crayon drawings posted on the refrigerator anymore. As you mature spiritually, you don't need a pat on your back for using the spiritual gifts God has given you. You *want* to use those things in love.

"Now we see indirectly using a mirror, but then we will see face to face. Now I know in part, but then I will know fully, just as I was fully known" (1 Corinthians 13:12, EHV). All that knowledge about the mysteries of God's salvation that you have right now is incomplete. What God has given in his Word is all that is needed for your salvation, to be sure, but your understanding is limited for now. When you reach heaven, you will see God face to face. Then you will know fully, and you will be fully known.

"So now these three remain: faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love" (1 Corinthians 13:13, EHV). Faith and hope will come to completion. As Paul said in the previous verse, you will reach heaven. Faith believes without seeing. Hope recognizes there is something still to come. Love never ends.

May your love in Jesus and for Jesus define you and govern you for the rest of your life on earth and forever in heaven. Amen.