

The Greatest of These is Love

The Vision / April 2010

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1 Corinthians 13:1–13 (NKJV) “*Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. ² And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³ And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. ⁴ Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; ⁵ does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; ⁶ does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; ⁷ bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. ⁸ Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. ⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part. ¹⁰ But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away. ¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. ¹² For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. ¹³ And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”*

What you do is not as important as *why you do it*. Man looks on the outside, but God looks at the heart (1 Samuel 16:7). Paul begins chapter thirteen by making this point. Someone may say, “I speak with tongues!” Yes, but are you trying to prove a point or get attention? Someone may say, “I can prophesy!” Yes, but do you abuse prophecy to manipulate and control? Are your conversations more like Jesus or the devil? Someone may say, “I understand the deep mysteries of God!” Yes, but how does that translate into how you treat others? Are you a restorer or a destroyer? Someone may say, “I have knowledge!” Yes, but do you come across as a “know-it-all”? Someone may say, “I have faith to move mountains!” Yes, but do you allow the mountain of offense in your heart to remain?” Someone may say, “I am a giver!” Yes, but do you give in order to control or gain influence? Someone may say, “I am a martyr, suffering for righteousness sake!” Yes, but do you spotlight your suffering to gain sympathy and attention from others? Paul makes his point clear: what we do is not as important as why we do it.

What should be the motivation of our heart? It is LOVE. Love is the king of all virtues. Love for God and love for others are like the two train rails upon which every other gift, virtue, or ministry travels. Without love, we get nowhere. Paul says that without love we become an irritation to others—like sounding brass or clanging cymbals. Without love we are nothing, i.e. of no significance on God’s radar of kingdom importance. Without love, everything we accomplish in this life will be regarded as wood, hay, and stubble—a total loss.

What does love look like? In verses 4-8, Paul describes the love of God. Let me amplify these characteristics for you:

- Love suffers long: Love is patient under trial. Love endures the test of time. Love does not give up, but loves to the finish line. Love is committed. Love allows God time to work.
- Love is kind: Love is sympathetic and tenderhearted. Love is cordial and friendly toward others. Love is generous and benevolent, always ready to do good. Love gives a helping hand and is hospitable, accepting with joy its inconveniences. Love is the Good Samaritan---it takes action and cares.
- Love does not envy: Love does not harbor hatred or ill will toward others who gain advantage in possessions or position. Love does not despise another person's success or profit. Love does not begrudge another person possessing or enjoying things that they need or deserve. Love does not boil over with jealousy. Love rejoices with others.
- Love does not parade itself: Love is never boastful or braggadocios. Love is not vainglorious. Love does not seek out the places of honor. Love does not promote itself or show off. Love does not flaunt itself. Love is humble, and seeks the promotion of others.
- Love is not puffed up: Love is not arrogant or haughty. Love is not lifted up in pride. Love does not walk with an air of superiority over others. Love is not egotistical. Love is not inflated with self-importance. Love is not stuck up or conceited. Love is not cliquish. Love esteems everyone as equally precious in the sight of God.
- Love does not behave rudely: Love has manners. Love shows respect and consideration for others in thoughtfulness, conversation, and in behavior. Love is never crude, offensive in display, coarse, vulgar, distasteful, discourteous, forceful, abrupt, or savage.
- Love does not seek its own: Love is not selfish and demanding. Love considers the welfare of others in its choices. Love does not insist on its own way. Love is not self-seeking or stubborn. Love seeks its own inconvenience rather than another's.
- Love is not provoked: Love is not irritable or touchy. Love is not easily offended. Love does not wear its feelings on its sleeve. Love does not walk around with a "chip" on its shoulder. Love does not hold a grudge. Love does not harbor anger or resentment. Love responds rather than reacts. Love seeks to get along with people. Love is a peacemaker.
- Love thinks no evil: Love keeps no accounts of evil done to it. Love keeps no "black books" or "black lists." Love does not rehearse or nurse offenses. Love remembers that we wrestle not with flesh and blood, but with evil spiritual powers that influence people. Therefore love is quick to forgive every time and pray for its enemies. Love keeps its "account books" clear of the debts of others.
- Love does not rejoice in iniquity: Love never carries an inward smile when evil befalls another. Love never expresses approval or pleasure when people settle things outside of God's righteous standards and instructions. Love is never happy when God's word is disregarded in the choices of life. Love never participates in or entertains ways of harming, defrauding, deceiving, or destroying another.
- Love rejoices in the truth: Love is at peace in the truth. Love will not spread lies or misinformation. Love seeks both sides of the story. Love does not sympathize with a lie, but rejoices when truth prevails. Love will always speak the truth and insist on truth in others.
- Love bears all things: Love is not gullible, but it never succumbs to a spirit of negativity that blocks the positive potential of God. Love never condemns or makes final assessments of people. Love never allows itself to become blind to the good in even

the worst of people. Love is always willing to give people the benefit of the doubt. Love chooses to believe the best about people as God is at work in them.

- Love hopes all things: Love never fades in hope. Love expects that good can and will prevail over evil when God's principles are applied. Love never gives up on people or writes them off. Love never loses hope in God's mercy and grace. Love keeps a positive outlook on even the worst of situations. Love never loses hope in God.
- Love endures all things: Love will stand its ground. Love doesn't back up or back off. Love is not destroyed by setbacks and disappointments. Love accepts the challenges and hardships along the pathway to victory. There is nothing too powerful or difficult that love cannot overcome.
- Love never fails: Love never fades or comes to an end. Love will always be the eternal principle, for God is love. Love will always be on demand. Love will never become obsolete or unfashionable. Love is eternal and the greatest of all.

Love looks and acts like Jesus! Love is the greatest of all virtues. Things that we think are important now will one day pass away. Tongues and prophecy will cease. Our hunger for knowledge will be satisfied. Our faith and hope will give way to sight. But love will never cease. Everything spoken or done in love will shine forever. Paul says that spiritual children don't understand this. As a result they speak and behave like immature children. However, as we mature in Christ, we put away our childishness. Love is Christ's command and must be our supreme motivation. We must all grow up in love—and we ALL have room to grow! Nothing else matters and love never fails!