

Student Guide

1 Corinthians 13 – Church Talk, A Still More Excellent Way

Introduction: Spiritual Passion vs. Spiritual Maturity

In 1 Corinthians 12, the church is alive—vibrant with gifts, activity, and expression. Tongues are flowing. Prophecy is active. Faith is bold. But beneath the movement, something is missing. There is **power**, but not **peace**. **Expression**, but not **unity**. Gifts are celebrated, but people are being wounded.

Paul sees this and asks a series of sobering questions:

1 Corinthians 12:29–31 (ESV)

“Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?

But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.”

Reflection:

- Are there areas in your church or life where gifts are celebrated but love is missing?
- How do you know if a gift is being used with love?

Illustration: The Musical Instrument

Imagine a **well-tuned instrument** resting on a stage. Its craftsmanship is flawless. The strings hold endless potential.

- In the hands of a **two-year-old**, sound comes out. It is noticeable, loud, but chaotic and unshaped.
- In the hands of a **skilled musician**, the same instrument produces depth, balance, and beauty.

Application:

- Spiritual gifts carry tremendous potential. God gives them freely.
- **Love** is what teaches us how to hold them. Love shapes the sound and turns noise into music.

I. Love Is Greater Than Gifts

1 Corinthians 13:1–3 (ESV)

“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... but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have... but have not love, I gain nothing.”

Paul emphasizes three truths:

1. What we **have** does not make us anything.
2. What we **give** does not earn us anything.
3. **Love is the “measuring line.”**

Types of Love in Scripture

- **Storgē:** Natural affection, the bond of family. (Romans 1:31; 2 Timothy 3:3)
- **Philēo:** Affectionate friendship; love built on mutual understanding. (John 21:15)
- **Eros:** Romantic, sensual love.
- **Agapē:** Unconditional, undeserved love. This is the love Jesus requires (John 13:34–35).

Reflection Questions:

- Which type of love comes naturally to you?
- How can you cultivate agapē love in your relationships and ministry?

II. Agapē Is Greater Than Self

1 Corinthians 13:4–7 (ESV)

“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. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

Key Takeaways:

- Love is **patient with people**, not just situations.
- Love **does not envy** or strive for recognition.
- Love is **disciplined**, not moody or self-focused.
- Love **bears, believes, hopes, and endures** even through offense and hardship.

Reflection Questions:

- How does love help you respond to offense in your church or family?
- What is one practical way you can bear, believe, hope, or endure today?

III. Love Is Eternal; Gifts Are Temporal

1 Corinthians 13:8–12 (ESV)

“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... then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known."

Paul reminds us:

- Spiritual gifts serve a purpose: edifying, strengthening, building.
- They are **temporary, partial, and incomplete.**
- **Love** is eternal; it shapes eternity.

1 John 3:2 (ESV)

"Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is."

Reflection Questions:

- How does understanding the temporary nature of gifts affect how you value them?
- How can love shape your ministry and relationships for eternity?