

Greater Love
The Need for Greater Love
1 Corinthians 13:1-3

February 1, 2026 am

HDBC

This morning we start a 3-part series based on 1 Corinthians 13. As you probably know this is the ***love chapter*** in the Bible. We last studied this chapter six years ago and I had to preach from my office into my phone and post it on FB. I knew then that I would want to come back to it again at some point when we could be together, in person. So, here we are.

The chapter naturally breaks down into three sections.

- 1 – The Need for Love
- 2 – The Picture of Love
- 3 – The Power of Love

The love of 1 Corinthians 13 is greater than all other kinds of love.

It is ***greater than*** friendship love, which can fade over time.

It is ***greater than*** romantic love, which can be fragile and temporary.

It is ***greater than*** family love, which is strong but is not unbreakable.

It is not wimpy, syrupy or mushy.

It is not weak, fragile or soft.

It is tough, unselfish, unconditional.

It is often painful and costly. But always worth it.

Few will embrace. But those who do will experience more fully God's love.

As we consider this passage, let's keep in mind the context. Chapters 12 and 14 deal with spiritual gifts. This is right in the middle of that topic. As Paul has written about the importance of using our spiritual gifts for the glory of God, he paused to offer a warning. As important as spiritual gifts are, there is something more important, and that is love, ***the greater love*** that is reflected in the word ***agape***.

When we consider the broader concept, we realize the church at Corinth was

in a mess. They were dealing with open sexual sin in the church, confusion over spiritual gifts, perversions of the Lord's Supper and much more. Paul was aware of these problems and this letter was designed to be corrective. Rebukes are never pleasant. They can reveal the ugliness of sin, which was the case in this letter. Then, in the midst of all that ugliness we find these beautiful words about love.

I agree with John MacArthur who wrote that chapter 13 is like a *breath of fresh air, an oasis in a desert of problems.*

Here we find the most beautiful words ever written by Paul. Even many who have no belief in the Bible as the Word of God acknowledge the beauty and greatness of this chapter. **READ 1 Corinthians 1:1-3 (Aiden Grimes ?)**

In the verse few verses Paul lays out a case for why we need this Greater Love. Three things are true when **greater love** is missing.

Without Love . . .

1. Our words are meaningless (1)

Even if you are bilingual like no other person (language of humans and angels), but without love your words have no meaning.

1) The tongues of men

The world is impressed by great communicators. **The Greek culture tended to be proud of its orators. Oration was considered to be one of the highest arts. All Greek leaders were great at giving speeches.**

Paul was criticized on exactly this account. In a second letter to these Corinthians, Paul had to defend his leadership. Even though he had started the church at Corinth and had led many of them to faith in Christ, he had to defend his leadership because of what they believed to be his lack of eloquence. They reasoned . . .

Paul isn't much of a speaker, so he must not be much of a leader.

Some men are great leaders but not great speakers. Others can give great speeches, but are poor leaders. You can be one without the others. So we must be careful not to make assumptions just because a person is great with a microphone.

But even if one is a great speaker and a great leader, if he or she lacks love, the **greater love** that Paul has written about, their words are meaningless.

2) The tongues of angels

This is an interesting phrase. Was Paul referring to a particular language spoken only by the angels? Remember the context. The church was struggling to understand the nature, scope and proper use of the spiritual gifts given to the church.

They were giving high praise to some gifts while ignoring others. The gift of tongues was considered a sign of spiritual maturity and apparently was greatly desired.

When Paul referred to the *tongues of angels* it is likely that he was making a reference to the gift of tongues. Some were claiming that it actually was the language of the angels. And those who practiced it had reached a higher level of maturity. This was creating division and confusion. Paul's point . . .

Great sermons without love are meaningless.

Practicing the gift of tongues without love is meaningless.

Communication without love is really a useless thing. Never truer than during this mega-information age. We are great at exchanging information. But are we really loving?

2. Our spiritual abilities are worthless (2)

The Corinthians had decided the gift of tongues was one of the more important gifts. Paul points out in the next chapter that even if you are going to elevate one gift over others, tongues would not be the one.

Paul then referred to three important gifts that were of great benefit to every church. Prophecy, knowledge and faith. Every church needs to find those gifts in operation. Yet, without the **greater love**, they are worthless. Let's take a quick look at the three.

1) Prophecy

Preaching the word of God. In Paul's mind, more important than tongues because more effective in leading people to Christ and building up the church. But even prophecy without love is nothing. Great preaching without love is worthless.

I have known men who were really good preachers, but who seemed to be deficient when it comes to love. Pastors or teachers who . . .
 . . . cut themselves off from their people,
 . . . elevate themselves in their own minds,
 . . . preach with harshness and condescension (all judgment, no grace),
 . . . express little or no compassion to hurting people.

2) Knowledge

Mystery refers to truth that was once hidden, but now has been revealed, like OT to NT. If you could get clear handle on all the mysteries of God, and have complete grasp of the observable, knowable facts, it would be useless without love. I've known some people like this. They seem to know something about everything and everything about some things. They're not fun to be around.

Knowledge puffs up, but loves builds up. It's better to have a right heart than it is to have a right head. **We're in a knowledge explosion.** The world is exploding with information and knowledge. You can't keep up with it. Yet are any of man's basic problems being solved? No. The world is not looking for more knowledge; the world is looking for the greater love. **People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.**

3) Faith

No one had better appreciation for faith than Paul. **It was his battle cry.** Even mountain-moving faith was no good without love. Ability to trust God to do mighty things, even when they seem impossible.

Jonah had great faith, but no love. This is why he resisted preaching to the Ninevites. They saw a great miracle from God, but the preacher was a big nothing. As one of my HS teachers loved to say, he got a goose egg. **It takes love to make spiritual ministry stick.**

Without love . . . Our words are meaningless.

Without love . . . Our spiritual abilities are worthless.

3. Our sacrifices are pointless (3)

Paul mentions 2 levels of sacrifice. Each one is pointless without love.

1) Giving

Word means *to dole out in small quantities*. Social ministry good, but it is not all the Lord requires. He wants our ministry to be motivated by loving hearts. Some give long-distance because it eases conscience, relieve pressure, provides a tax break, or makes us feel good. You get no credit with God if it is not motivated by love.

2) Dying

This is the ultimate sacrifice. Even giving dying for another or for the Lord will be of no Heavenly profit if it is not motivated by love.

Honestly, this is a bit shocking. A person can die for Jesus, but if love is not involved, it will be pointless. **WHAT A STAGGERING THOUGHT!**

I can rack up a list of impressive achievements, I can succeed in all kinds of great accomplishments, I can even sacrifice my life for the greatest cause in the world -- the kingdom of God -- but without love it won't matter zip! It's wasted effort.

Jesus said the entire law could be summarized by this: love God and love your neighbor. Success without love is empty.

Gale Sayers was the best running back the Chicago Bears had ever had. He was black. Brian Piccolo was the other running back. He was white. Not unusual even in 1967. But these two were different. Roomed together on road trips. That was a first for pro football.

Sayers had never had a close relationship with a white man, except George Halas the coach. Brian Piccolo had to admit, he had never really known a black man. But over the course of two years a friendship developed.

Relationship was strengthened in spite of the fact that Piccolo was diagnosed with cancer during 1969 season. Fought to play out the season, but spent more time in hospital than on playing field. Sayers often flew to be by the bedside of his best friend. Within months the ominous threat of death grew close.

They and their wives planned to sit together at sports writers banquet in NY where Sayers was to receive the George S. Halas award as most courageous player in professional football. But Brian was too sick to attend. As Sayers rose to accept the award tears filled his eyes. This is what he said:

You flatter me by giving me this award, but I tell you here and now that I accept it for Brian Piccolo. Brian Piccolo is the man of courage who should be receiving the George S. Halas award. I love Brian Piccolo and I'd like you to love him. Tonight, when you hit your knees, please ask God to love him too.

That is a fine example of the kind of love Paul was writing about. But the greatest example of that kind of love is found in a scene in the Bible that is filled with pain and suffering, brutality and violence, agony and death. It happened in a place commonly known as Calvary, where men were nailed to crosses to die for their crimes. But in this scene there was a man who died not for his crimes but for our sins. He died in our place, so that we might find

forgiveness from God. His death, at Calvary, is the perfect example of the **Greater Love** that we are called to embrace.

Everyone needs love, the greater love, the greatest love. The love identified in this passage. We're going to dig deeper in the next two weeks. But don't wait. Get started. Find practical ways to love others, as Christ love you.

No one wears a sign on his chest, saying “love me, please.” But if you look closely. If you dare to get involved in the life of another person, you will know.

Think more about giving love, than receiving love. It is in the giving of it, that we often begin to receive it.