

1 Corinthians 13 – the love chapter

April 8, 2024

Intro:

I love those kids! Don't you? And I love my wife. And I love this church. And I love God. Love. Love Love. It's all about Love. And our message today is all about love. You know, Kelle and I discovered love in 1988 and were married in 1990. At our wedding, we liked the idea of kissing, but not tinkling glasses. Wanna see what we looked like? [Wedding Story](#). So we did this thing where we said we would kiss at the reception if a table came and sang us a love song or composed a love poem. It had to contain the word LOVE in the chorus or title. So, today, since we are talking all about love, we thought we'd do that with a twist. Today, you just shout out the line or a song from any top 40 hit or Christian song and one of these three will see if they can do it. So Tom Hinders, our college pastor has 2005 to today covered, Jed has 1985 to 2005 and Dawn can rock pre-1985. Who has one? [Tom Dawn and Jed](#).

BTW, Dawn will preach next week on 1 Cor 14. Don't miss it. And while they walk off of the stage, I want you to know that we are doing a [GREEN city update tonight in the chapel at 6pm](#). Usually, we have to talk in code about our locations because of the danger of being on the internet, but after spending a week there, the 6 person vision team will be bringing a no-hold-barred, fresh information, not on the internet update so come on out to the chapel and we will give you what you need to pray and support one of the coolest missions we have ever been a part of.

Alright, today we are jumping into the greatest love chapter of the Bible. 1 Corinthians 13. So turn there now while I give you some literary structure.

The Chiasm

If you want to understand 1 Corinthians 11-14, you need to know that these three chapters hold together as a unity. Paul wrote them in an ancient form of literary composition called a Chiasm. And Bible Scholar Kenneth Bailey explains it this way:

[A – Men and women in Worship: Prophets and their dress – 11:2-16](#)

[B – Order in Worship: Sacrament – The Lord's supper 11: 17-34](#)

[C – Gifts and the nature of the body 12:1-30](#)

D – The Hymn to Love 12:31-14:1

C – Gifts and the upbuilding of the body 14:1-25

B – Order in Worship: Word / Prophets and Tongue Speaking

A – Women and Men Worshipping: No Chatting in Church 14:34-40

Notice the mirrored structure – ABCDCBA – There are sections at the top and bottom about men and women worshipping, then two sections on order in worship, two sections on gifts and the climax of all of it is that LOVE is the most important thing.

For today, the most important part of this chiasm is that the context is worship. Paul's concern is men and women in the worship venue. It is not universal relationships, but how to behave in the worship venue and in the body of Christ.

In any Chiasm, the most important part is the pinnacle. In this case, point D. The hymn to love. So, when you are looking at the other sections, you have to ask **“What's Love got to do, got to do with it?”** What's love got to do with spiritual gifts? What's love got to do with order in worship? With men and women? In fact, Paul is communicating through the chiasm that Love is the defining element of Men and Women's relationships – if it is power or influence or prestige or even function, it will be a mess, Order in worship – what matters is not the number of speakers or style of music... it is love, and spiritual gifts – Paul is even explicit about spiritual gifts.

Now, if you are not familiar with the gifts passages, it is the setup for this one. The idea is that we are all like a body. You are a hand, you are an elbow. You are a spleen. You are a microorganism inside the small intestine. But we all do different functions and all need each other. If anybody stops doing their job, everything grinds to a halt in pain. So in the church if you are gifted in hospitality, we need you to do that. If you are gifted in prophecy, we need you. If you are an apostle, we need you. Jesus is our head and we are his body serving different functions. And it is after this chapter (and before a similar chapter) that love is the pinnacle of the discussion. Here is the text.

13 If I speak in the tongues^[a] 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,^[b] but do not have love, I gain nothing

Gifts are important, but the really big deal is love. Have you ever met anyone who is just super gifted at something and when you meet them they are just a big primadonna? In

today's vernacular Paul might say – if you have a PhD, but don't have love... if you have a million Instagram followers, or a full blown radio ministry, or can predict the future spiritually, but are not loving people, you got nothing. Bupkis, Nada, Zilch. That stuff is just noise.

When Kelle and I were 23 years old InterVarsity staff, we had the job of coordinating hotel housing for 8,000 people for the Urbana missions conference. One hotel was a disaster. The employee was drunk and the owner was nowhere to be found. So a volunteer from the conference took over to do their best. Another former missionary began to run the switchboard – cuz she knew how. They mistakenly put one person per room instead of one person per bed and were left with a line of 100 people who needed beds and they had to rearrange their whole deal to make it work. Most people – who had travelled all day to get there – were understanding. One of the 100 people, waiting in line, said "Do you know who I am. I am Pastor SO and SO! He was a big deal pastor from a big deal church in Wheaton IL and demanded to be put in a room right away. The volunteer helped him – in the order of his arrival – and when Kelle and I found out, thought of this verse. Fabulous gifting and not a lick of love. GOOONNNGGGG!

Paul is clear – even if you are an extremist – speaking in tongues, understanding mysteries, faith to remove mountains... there is one thing that is a bigger deal – Love.

The priority of love should not surprise us. Because the definition of love is this. God is love. When he says what he wants out of us, we get two big commands – love God and love people. If we are to become like God, we become loving. God's character – source of love.

And love flows from your connection to God. Let me picture it this way. If you count on your own love resources to get you through, you have a love tank that goes for a while and then gets empty. Mine does. Does your love tank ever go empty? But depending on God is like turning on a tap that flows in from the ocean. No limits. In fact, as we get to know God, we get to go swimming in love. An ocean of it - and then you have a supernatural connection that fills not only you, but bubbles over to the people around you.

So, what is love like? This is familiar turf for us, so let's just read it out loud together.

⁴ 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.

⁸ Love never fails.

Maybe the best definition of love ever written. Let's look at the whole for a minute.

IS: Patient, Kind, rejoices in truth, bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things endures all things, never ends

NOT: envious, boastful, proud, dishonor others, self seeking, easily angered, recordkeeping wrongs, rejoicing in wrongdoing

Now, don't pass over this moment because it is familiar ground. Because this is not kindergarten loving that you can learn and get past. This is Graduate level loving. It is the kind of thing you can revisit and renew and reevaluate with every stage of life. In fact, if you are a healthy person, your love grows into new forms as time goes by. Because the older you get, the more your tribe grows. You have kids and grandkids. You have 'old friends' in cities around the country. The breadth of people you touch grows. And you find the more you HAVE loved, the more deposits you have in emotional bank accounts around the world.

But as you get older, the scope of your LOVE gets bigger too. Because your concerns are not just for this month or this year, but you think in terms of generations and history and eras. You ask – what is best for the nations, for the emerging culture, for the direction of the church or the family or the country. And it brings up a whole new list of what it means to love.

And here is your homework. Go back through the verse and put your name in the blank. So for me: Mark is patient, Mark is kind – he does not envy, does not boast... etc. And see if there is any point where you get a twinge of pain. And wherever you cringe, that is your growth point for the week. Wanna hear mine?

Patient – pretty good. 29 years of child rearing and 34 years of ministry knocks a lot of impatience out of you. Kind, yup. Rejoices in the truth. Super easy. What about irritable? This translation say not easily angered and I felt pretty good, but another good translation said irritable... and that made me feel irritable. Cuz I got convicted. Truth is as a pastor, you work with a lot of people right after they did something boneheaded. And I want to say "Well, that was stupid... guess you're gonna have to pay the consequences." Or customer service departments that take four phone calls and 63 minutes to answer a simple question about my bill. Irritable. Or people who just are not doing their job. Irritable. Guess I have some growin to do.

The other bad one for me is “keeps no record of wrongs.” Sheesh. Especially now that I have been in town for 18 years. “Ya know what he did to deserve that back in 2008 is...” or “Yeah, I am not sure I trust that guy... you know what he said to me twice?” I recordkeep on people and that is just not love.

In fact, I am the worst with people closest to me. Kelle is my worst case scenario. “I mighta done the whopdee doo, but you did the blabbety blah 14 times!” At least in my mind I say that... cuz I am scorekeeping. And I am a notoriously bad scorekeeper. Here is the truth – we are far more likely to judge other people on their actions and ourselves on our intentions. That means when we scorekeep, we consciously or unconsciously track others viciously and ourselves gently... so the score always tilts in our favor. Your spouse is doing the same thing. So, in marriage counseling, both spouses play the victim and vilify the spouse.

But what if we just loved enough to stop keeping score on our roommate, our schoolmate, our boss, our teammate. What if we just loved them?

Homework: fill in your name, where do you cringe?

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.

Here is a thought that brings perspective. Some things are temporary. Prophecies, tongues, knowledge. Some things last forever. Like Love. When the completeness comes – that is the New Heavens and New Earth – completing God’s cycle of redemption – all that other stuff will disappear. But love won’t. And your investment in love will last for eternity.

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.

So guys, ladies, students... it is time to put the childish stuff away. Bad thinking, wrong priorities, addictions, stupidity. Cuz there is a lot of stupid phrases out there that adults give up. Like “Follow your heart.” Or “you do you” – to justify any stupid action. Or painting your rims orange and putting stickers on your car... nah, that’s just cool. When we know that the heart is deceitful above all things and we will lie to ourselves to do what we want every time. And focus on the big deal stuff. Love for sure. But Paul, interestingly, expands this a bit. He grows it to faith, hope and love.

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

Music Starts Here

OK, last verse of the chapter and it is one of those verses that just summarizes so much. I mean, the Bible extols a lot of virtues – generosity, patience, kindness, sacrifice... but here Paul succinctly picks **the big three**.

Faith Hope and Love are the spirituality of **past present and future**. Faith is based on what Jesus HAS done. Love is what he IS doing now. Hope is confidence in what he WILL do. There are actually four verses that Paul uses to talk about this.

1 Thessalonians 1 – **Faith Hope and Love** are not just ethereal qualities, but they result in action – Faith produces work, love prompts labor and Hope inspires endurance. I think you can see the connection there... People of great Faith, Hope and Love are people who do stuff. Faith hope and love does not mean becoming a monk and hiding from humanity. Just the opposite... there is no love without an object to love. People of faith acted on their faith. People who hope keep loving for the long run because of what is coming.

But the **greatest of these is Love**. I don't know if you have ever thought about how love ties it all together. But it is love that drove Jesus to the cross. His deep desire to have flawed humanity redeemed and reconciled made him endure the cross so we have something to place our faith in. Love of course is critical to love – straight up. And we have hope because we believe a loving God is telling the truth – that Jesus resurrection will result in our resurrection – that the New Heavens and New Earth really are coming – that there really is a place in his family for us.

And it is because of his infinite love for us that we can love each other and love our city. Let's do that in Jesus' name!

FAITH – in the past	Produces work	LOVE of the cross
LOVE – in the present	Prompts labor	LOVE straight up
HOPE – in the Future	Inspires endurance	LOVE assures our future.