

Corinthians - the Most Excellent Way (3)

by J. Glyn Owen

The Apostle Paul teaches that love is the greatest gift and the most essential to the Christian life, and it will remain forever, while other gifts will pass away.

Duration: 52:36

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13:1

Topics: "Love", "The Primacy of Love", "Spiritual Gifts vs. Love"

Description

J. Glyn Owen emphasizes the profound significance of love as articulated in 1 Corinthians 13, arguing that without agape, all spiritual gifts and actions are rendered meaningless. He highlights that love is not only essential for the Christian life but also eternal, contrasting it with spiritual gifts that will eventually cease. Owen illustrates this through a powerful story of forgiveness and redemption, demonstrating how love can transform lives and relationships. He concludes that love is the greatest of all virtues, urging believers to prioritize love in their pursuit of faith and service to God. Ultimately, Owen calls for a deeper understanding of God's love and its implications for the church and individual believers.

Transcript

1 Corinthians 13 and the passage that begins with verse 8 and continues to the end of the chapter. I guess it will have come through by now that in studying this passage, I, for my part, have been amazed with something that I had not properly appreciated before recent times. Some considerable years ago, I guess when I must have been starting my training, I was listening to quite a renowned theologian.

And among the many other things he said, which I have later found to have been less than true, he made the remark that the Apostle Paul was--and this, of course, was quite accurate as far as it went--he made the remark that the Apostle Paul was so full of his subject here and there that he would develop a hymn or a song or, quote, a part of a hymn in the course of his dissertation. And this, of course, Paul does in a number of his letters. In the Ephesians and in the epistle to the Romans, he kind of loses himself and becomes so exuberant in thought and worshipful in spirit that he proceeds to open his heart, his great, his redeemed heart, in praise of the God of all grace.

Now, this is where the good man, I think, was wrong. He included 1 Corinthians 13 with that kind of thing, which, you see, as far as its implications involved, meant something like this, that there's very little logical connection between 1 Corinthians 12 and 1 Corinthians 13, or between 1 Corinthians 13 and 1 Corinthians 14. According to him, 1 Corinthians 13 is really something aside.

It's Paul opening his big heart and beginning to sing. And it is a hymn. It is a song.

Now, the thing that has gripped me in coming back to this chapter again has been the fact that its roots are so deeply embedded in the chapter that goes before, and that its application goes on into the chapter that follows, and that it really must be taken in its context. I shall not further enlarge on that now. The points that we have been seeing are these.

The first three verses of this great chapter tell us that everything in the Christian life lacks luster where there is no agape. Paul puts it very bluntly, I may speak with the tongues of men and of angels. Now, you have tongues of the highest order, not only human tongues, tongues practiced by humans at their best and most spiritual, but the tongues of men and of angels.

And if I don't have this, he says, well, it doesn't profit me anything at all. And though I go on and give my body to be burned and have not agape, it means very little. And though I do a whole multitude of things and my faith is such that I can move mountains out of their places, if I don't have this that is called agape, well, the whole that I have comes to very little indeed.

The sum and substance of verses one to three, then, is this. Without love, though I have many gifts, and though I do much philanthropic work, much that is good and much that is noble, and I am prepared to live sacrificially for my God, though I do all that, if I don't have love, I am nothing but noise and I profit very little. Now, beginning with verse four and going through verse seven, the Apostle seems to say the exact opposite.

Without love, he says in the first three verses, without love, everything lacks luster. In verses four to seven, he seems to say, now, if you've got love, then you can have all the multiplicity of your gifts and practice them without harming the unity of the Church. And so the divine ideal for the Church is practicable, if only along with whatever gifts you have, you've got love.

And the explanation of all that is, Paul puts it quite in a prosaic sort of a way, though it's part of his hymn, the explanation is found in the very nature of love itself. Last time, we dwelt with these aspects of love and what they mean and what they imply. And I'm aware I didn't quite finish it, but I'm going to take leave tonight.

I just want to turn away from that passage to the one that's going to occupy us now, by giving you what seems to me a lovely illustration of the truth that we have there at the end of verse seven. According to the NIV, love always protects. That's a beautiful thought, always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

It just happened that in the course of my reading, I came across this illustration. A certain T.R. Phillips, who is a new writer to me, I've never met him nor his works previously. He relates an incident showing a love which is something of this order.

He quotes how years ago during the Korean conflict, a young communist officer ordered the execution of a Christian civilian. When, however, the communist learned that the civilian that he had condemned to death was in charge of an orphanage and doing much good, he said, no, no, no, he says, you can't be shot. But someone must be shot because you've done wrong.

So he says, I'll shoot your eldest son. And the Christian's oldest son was shot in front of him, and the father was allowed to go on with the business of the orphanage. The boy that was shot was 19 years of

age.

Later, when the tide of events changed, this same officer was captured. The communist was captured. He was tried, and he was condemned to death for war crimes.

Now, don't ask me the details. The details are not given here. But before sentence could be carried out, the Christian father went to the courts, and he pleaded for the life of the communist who had killed his son.

He said, of course, that if justice were to be followed, this man would be executed. And he wasn't questioning what the court had adjudicated. But he says, since the young man was so young and so blindly idealistic, he probably thought that his actions were right.

And then he came to this. And he said, give him to me, he said, and I will teach him about the Savior. The request was granted.

And the father took the murderer of his son into his own home to sit at his table, to live under his roof, and loved him. The story, of course, doesn't end there. That man tonight is a Christian.

Not only is that man a Christian, that man is a Christian pastor. And he's occupying a strategic church in his own country. How did he come? He comes in exactly the way Paul says love works.

Now, that brings me to verses 8 to 13. The pursuit of love is the more excellent way in the third place, because there is nothing beyond it. There is nothing better than it.

There is nothing more precious. There is nothing more valuable. Love abides, not only in this life, but love will abide when everything else will have given way.

The chapter ends with three things abiding or remaining into the perfect state of the future. Now abide, says Paul, three things, and they're not the gifts of the Spirit, but they're the fruit of the Spirit. Now there goes on abiding faith, and hope, and love.

And the greatest of the three that abide through the present age into the future age of eternity, the greatest of the three, says Paul, is this agape. Now let's just try and examine what he has to say here altogether. Try to dissect that statement, that summary of it.

And may the Lord in his goodness give us what I think we all need, if we were honest, a new conception of love, of God's love for us, of the Savior's love for us, of the Spirit's love for us, and of the love that God the Father requires of us because of the work of the Son, and the ministry of the Spirit, and the teaching of the Word. May the Lord, by his grace then, teach us something of that tonight. Now look at the simple fact stated here in verse 8. Paul's words are clear.

Love never ends, he says, or as Moffat puts it, love never disappears. Now the King James Version, unfortunately, is wrong here. It says never fails.

And that's not quite the point. It's a lovely thought, love never fails, but that's not quite what Paul said. The word that is used should be translated of something falling or collapsing, and thus disappearing.

Paul assures us then that love will not disappear, it'll never disappear. Love is something that you will have now when you die, after you die. Love is something that abides when everything else is gone, apart from faith and hope.

That word never places love in a category quite separate and distinct from that in which we must include all the gifts of the Spirit. As we shall proceed to see. Now a moment's further thought here will serve to explain why it is so that love abides forever.

You see, when God by the Spirit creates love in us, he is giving us something of himself. Love is part of the divine nature given to us. Love is the fruit of the very Spirit that God is.

Not the Spirit that God has, but the Spirit God is. God is Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth, said Jesus. Now, the God who is, is love, says John.

And when he gives us love, he is giving us himself, his Spirit. So that you see, John in his first epistle can say this, by this we know that we've passed from death unto life when we love. And if any man doesn't love, he's still abiding in death, because love is as sure to show itself in us if we are born again, and if we have found God and God has come to us savingly, it is as sure to show itself in us as it shows itself in him, because it's his nature.

Now this is very important as a basic principle, but I'm not now going to stay with it. But if you ask why it is that love remains and abides when other things do not, then the answer as far as love is concerned is this. It is part of the very essence of the very nature of God.

Now having said that, Paul goes on, and we have a picture here of love contrasted with the gifts of the Spirit in this respect. You look at verse 8, the second part, as for prophecies, he says, they will pass away. As for tongues, they will cease.

As for knowledge, it will pass away. Now the emphasis there upon prophecies, the gift of tongues, and the gift of knowledge is this, each one of them will pass away. Now please, Paul is not denying the validity or the value of these gifts in their proper place.

I don't need to say that, but let me say it in case somebody may think that we're forgetting that Paul did put a prize on these in their proper place. No, no, no, he's not minimizing their value at all, but he says they will pass away. Paul is clearly implying, then, that the very highest charismatic gifts, as well as those that the Corinthians wrongly thought were the most important, they will all pass away.

The highest short of love, the highest gift, according to Paul, in chapter 14, is the gift of prophecy. And knowledge is very closely related to the gift of prophecy. He tells them in chapter 14 to seek the better gifts and especially the gift of prophecy, because prophecy means proclaiming the gospel, declaring the word of God.

And if you want a gift for anything, well, get a gift, the gift of the Spirit, to declare what God has done in Christ and is doing by the Spirit and is offering men. This is a gift that we need, my friend. Many of us are dumb.

And I tell you, there are men sitting in our pews, perhaps in Knox here tonight, who really need a touch of this, because we've gone dumb spiritually. We just do not speak. We've plenty to say for politics and we've plenty to say for business.

We've plenty to say for sport. We've plenty to say about every other subject under the sun. But right here, we know nothing about what it is to prophesy in the name of the Lord Jesus.

The prophecies will cease. And tongues will stop wagging. And knowledge will pass away.

You see, the whole process is the process of passing away, passing away, passing away, ceasing, passing away. The prophecy, according to the Apostle, is quite an important gift of God, then. But we must take this seriously, that however important it was in the estimation of the Apostle Paul, he recognized the fact that it was going to pass away.

The word that he uses is an unusual one in this kind of context, really. Now, I'm not quite sure what the significance of it is. Is.

I know we've used the translation pass away. When I tell you that of the 27 times it appears in the New Testament, the King James Version translates it by 17 different English words, you will see that they're having a little bit of trouble with it. And there are words like that in the Greek language and in the Hebrew.

It's very difficult to pin them down. You know the area they refer to, but you can't you can't be all that precise. And the RSV does a little better.

It does cut seven of those out, but it has added a three extra. So it is 13 English translations for this one Greek word. Really, what it means is something like this, rendering something inoperative that it doesn't work.

If I were to knock this public address thing, it wouldn't work any further. Rendering something ineffective. In the age to come, prophecy will be rendered inoperative, ineffective, unnecessary.

Now, when you think about it, of course, this is this is this is all obvious. Whether we think of prophecy as predicting the future and eternal things that God has ordained or whether you think of prophecy as proclaiming his word and applying it to the to the issues of life. And the word prophecy has those two connotations.

Well, you see, when when the new age, the eternal age comes following the return of our Lord Jesus Christ and our resurrection from the dead, when we have entered into the eternal state and the period anticipated by Paul has come, there'll be no need for prophecy. Prophecy will have been done away with. It'll be rendered inoperative.

There'll be no need for it because we are in the eternities. Then it'll be unnecessary. It'll be rendered inoperative for this other reason.

There is need for a prophet in this world because we are in a world of sin and Satan and unrighteousness and iniquity of all kinds. So somebody must apply the word of God prophetically in that sense against the evils of the day. But you see, when that which is perfect is come, there will be no sin in the new Jerusalem and there will be no devil in the new Jerusalem, nor the defile shall ever enter in.

So you see, there is no need for the gift of prophecy in that sense either there. So it is rendered inoperative. And Paul may say it's the highest gift for the moment for the church because it declares the truth of God, the word of God to men.

All right. But however valuable it is in the present, there's coming a day when it'll be rendered inoperative. It'll pass away.

And tongues will cease. When we stand in the immediate presence of God at last, our mode of communication with our heavenly father and with his son and with the angels and with the redeemed hosts will not be by means of the various tongues of the charismatic order. They will be unnecessary and they will cease.

Now, please don't get cross with me for saying that. I'm not really saying it. It's the apostle Paul that's saying it.

And this doesn't mean to say that if God has given you that gift tonight, that it isn't a value to you. If it is, then thank God for it. But do remember that it is only of significance for the present and it has a purpose for the present and you must order it according to the divine word.

Now, we cannot concede that Paul is implying here the tongues were necessarily to cease immediately. Some of the expositors that I hold in the highest esteem myself, and they have been the greatest help to me, conclude categorically without any argument really, though they refer to people who differ from them, but in the end they come down with a very, very heavy hand and they say tongues ceased with the apostolic age or ceased categorically at a given age somewhere back there. Now, what I don't understand is that the great men that I'm thinking of do not see that tongues are here sandwiched.

I'm sorry, I don't mean to be funny. But I don't see a relationship between prophecy and knowledge as one of a triad, you see. And we have no reason to think that tongues are going to cease before prophecy ceases and before knowledge ceases.

There is no logical nor is there any grammatical reason for saying that tongues are going to cease before prophecy ceases. And we know that it was the purpose of our Lord Jesus Christ that right down until the end of the age we should evangelize, which is really a task of prophesying. When we speak of Jesus Christ as our prophet, we speak of him as our teacher.

The proclaimer, the exponent of the truth. And he has made us prophets, exponents of the truth. He's made us teachers.

He's made us evangelists. He's given us a message. He's made us witnesses.

I, therefore, cannot see the sense, I cannot see the logic of saying that no, no, there are no tongues. They've not been in the church since the days of the apostles. And especially of going on to say that they necessarily ceased before these other two would cease.

But what the apostle does say is this, however long they may last, there's coming a day when tongues will not wag anymore. They'll not be needed anymore. There'll be no necessity for them anymore.

And when you come face to face with God, when you see him face to face, when you enter into the glory, you'll not need a glossolalic tongue in order to communicate with him. You'll be able to communicate in another way entirely, he doesn't tell us how, but you won't need that. Now this brings up, you see, one very important principle.

One point of considerable significance, it seems to me. Namely this, it is the unavoidable conclusion that tongues are not essential to the perfect worship and the perfect service of our all-perfect God. Because in the new Jerusalem, in the great eternal beyond, tongues will be unnecessary.

Where we shall render perfect worship and perfect service, and we shall all be united in a unity that is perfect, tongues will be silent in the sense in which they were employed in, in Corinth. Oh, the redeemed of the Lord will sing a new song, the song of Moses and of the Lamb, but they will not have the glossolalic gift of which we read here. It'll be different, whatever it is, however different, never mind.

The point that Paul makes is this, they will have ceased before then. Therefore, you see, don't let's build too much on them. Don't let us elevate them out of biblical proportion if they're not necessary to perfect worship in the heavenly Jerusalem.

Don't let us say that they're necessary for perfect worship down here either, because this is an imperfect state and an imperfect church in an imperfect world. So then prophecy is going to pass away, tongues are going to cease, and knowledge too will pass away. We must remember that the apostle is still speaking of the charismatic gift of knowledge, which was a special knowledge.

A kind of intuitive knowledge, the kind of knowledge that Peter had, you remember, when Ananias and Sapphira tried to swindle or rather to deceive the Holy Spirit. No one told him. But he said to Peter, who put this into your heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, where did he get that knowledge from? Well, that's the gift of the Spirit.

There is a knowledge that comes directly from God, from God the Holy Ghost. Some people have it. And if we don't know anything about it, don't let's say that it doesn't exist.

Some have it. Now, according to verse 12, in our future state, we shall know, and this is a quote, even as we are known. Knowledge will be given us in the future state, knowledge will be given to us that we never had before, but it will not be conveyed by means of a charismatic gift as envisaged here in the Corinthian epistle.

The gift of knowledge is imparted by the Spirit for the present enrichment of the Church. Corinthian Christians had overpriced this gift. They were forgetting that knowledge puffs up whilst love builds up, to quote Paul in chapter 8, verses 1 to 3. Valuable though the gift of knowledge may be in the present, however, it is to be ultimately superseded.

It will pass away whilst love will live on and on. Now, having thus referred to these three gifts singly, that is, those of prophecy, tongues and knowledge, Paul then adds, you notice, that in the case of prophecy and knowledge, leaving tongues out for a moment, in the case of prophecy and knowledge, both will be superseded by something better, even by that which is perfect. For our knowledge, he says, at the present time, the knowledge that we have as the gift of the Spirit, it is imperfect.

At best, our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect. But when the perfect is come, the imperfect will be done away with. So, what Paul is conceding there is this, that our present knowledge and our present prophecy, they are alike imperfect.

And one day, our imperfect knowledge and our imperfect prophecy, both are likewise going to be done away with. Now, he illustrates what he means very beautifully, I think. And I just want to spend a moment with these two illustrations because they save us from getting some wrong impressions here.

You notice the first illustration that Paul gives, it's taken from the experience of growing up. He puts it like this, in verse 11, when I was a child, he said, I spoke like a child. I thought like a child.

I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. Now, what's he saying? What's he talking about? What's the context? Well, you remember now.

I hardly need to repeat it again. Paul is thinking of this present age, in the Christian's experience, as the age of our spiritual childhood. We have children underage, you see.

We're still in the kindergarten, where your experience of the Lord in his grace and in his gifts may be amazingly precious and vast and deep and real, but with all your experience of the grace of God, the most mature among us is in the childhood state only. We are still in the spiritual kindergarten. In comparison with that which awaits us.

Moreover, just as on the natural level, Paul left his child life behind him, putting away the kind of behavior that was appropriate only to that stage, so also does he anticipate the spiritual child stage of the present and imperfect condition of things, giving way to the maturity of the future and of the perfect state. Moreover, since Paul uses the very same verb to speak of the child giving up his childish ways, as he had previously used in verse 8 with relation to the cessation of prophecy and of knowledge, he uses exactly the same word, a difficult word to translate, we can hardly avoid the conclusion that the childish ways or childish things to which he refers are the employment of such gifts of the Spirit as he had been referring to. They will pass away.

The very highest and best of the charismatic gifts, then, are only meant for this imperfect, immature stage of our present life in this world as followers of our Lord Jesus Christ. They may be real, they may be genuine, but they're only meant for the moment, for the time being. When we grow out of our childhood state, state, says Paul, or stage, we'll shed them behind.

That's the first illustration. A second illustration is this. For now, he says, we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face.

The apostle's illustration of the imperfect nature of our present experience is given now in terms of seeing things dimly reflected in a mirror. This stands, you see, in sharp contrast to seeing someone face to face, particularly when you have in mind the kind of mirrors that they would have had in Paul's day. It's necessary for us to remember that the kind of mirrors that we had today were not found in the world before the 13th century.

That's a little bit of history that I learned. I don't know why. I can never remember dates, but I can remember that.

Some queer things remain in your memory. If there's a psychologist here, he'll have something to say about that. At any rate, until the 13th century, the kind of mirror that Paul is talking about here in Corinth was the kind of mirror for which Corinth at this time had become very well known, quite renowned.

They were polished metals. But you see, when you looked at yourself in these so-called mirrors, they were not precise. Your outline could be seen, but not all the details of your face or the color of your eyes.

Nothing would be perfect. And so, says Paul, it's exactly like that now. With all our vast experience of the grace of God in this present world, we see things through a glass, he says, in a glass or through a glass, and it's vague, it's indistinct.

It has nothing of the clarity about it of seeing a person face to face, eyeball to eyeball. Those two ways of seeing are really in contrast, the one to the other. Now, he says, I see in a mirror and that very dimly, but then face to face.

What's he mean? Well, what he means is this. You see, his knowledge of the grace of God is real. His knowledge of God's purposes is such as he can say that it is the word of the Lord.

It is reliable. But there are mysteries here that he doesn't understand. He can't understand everything in the purpose of God.

He can't explain everything that he's even proclaiming. There are certain shades and shadows that even the mighty apostle Paul couldn't explain. He says, now we see through a glass dimly, but wait a moment, he says, then we shall see face to face.

And he goes on and he adds this, now I know in part. This is another way of saying it. The same thing, but the emphasis is different.

I don't know everything now. I only know a part of the truth. There are aspects of the truth.

There are sides to the truth. There are emphases or implications of the truth that I don't now know and no Christian knows. But he says, oh, we are moving toward a day when we shall know.

And now listen to this translation, and this is really correct. Now I know in part. When I shall understand, not just know, understand fully, even as I have been fully understood.

In comparison with our present knowledge, however great that may be, that which awaits us in our future state is different altogether. The RSV translation that I have just given serves to bring into focus Paul's change from a simple form of the verb to know, *ginoskein*, to the compound form *epiginoskein*. And that's how it's translated differently.

The simple verb means just to know. But the compound form *epiginoskein* means not just knowing in a general sense, but understanding. Let me give you an illustration.

Let's say for a moment that we have an automobile factory here. You've never been inside an automobile factory. And I am able to take you in.

Let's say that I have some say there, and I can take you in. And I take you through. And you see for the first time in your life, this is hardly true of any of us, perhaps, but you see how the little other car begins in a small, small way.

I don't know how they start until the final product emerges. And you say, I've seen a car made. Well, you know how a car is made.

It started with a tiny little thing here, and then it evolved and something was added to it and so forth, and it had four wheels. And by the time it came out, well, it was all there. But you still don't understand it.

To understand it, you've got to have someone who understands every part and everything that is done to take you by the hand and teach you the lesson and go through all the technicalities and the details and explain to you. Then you understand. Now, says Paul, now I know.

And the knowledge I have is only in part. But then, I shall understand as fully as I am understood by God. That's the implication.

Now, that brings me to the last main thrust of this great passage. Some things are going to pass away. My friends, they may be precious, they may be important in season, but don't let us give them such importance as the Bible only gives to the things that are going to last forever.

Over against such imperfect knowledge as we now have, love belongs to the more excellent order of things. It does not pass away like the gifts, but abides into the age of our maturity and of our perfect knowledge. And it is the highest of the graces even in that ultimate and durable estate of the future.

So, faith, hope, love, abide. You hear the contrast, don't you? If you remember the verses here, this is passing away and this is stopping and ceasing. But now these things are abiding.

They are abiding. Faith, hope, love, abide. These three.

And of the three that abide forever into the eternal future, says Paul, the greatest of the three of them is love. Paul was set on course toward making this conclusion when earlier he affirmed love never fails or never ends or never falls down. In contrast with the gifts of the spirit, which as we have seen belong to a passing age, love belongs to the present and the future.

One of the older commentators has a few words which are very helpful here and will save me saying the same thing in a multitude of words. Let me just quote. Gifts are merely the implements of the divine husbandry.

Graces are the seeds themselves. Difference between gifts and graces. Gifts are merely the implements of the divine husbandry.

Graces are the seeds themselves. When the great harvest time comes, the instruments, however useful, will be cast aside altogether. He is referring to the gifts of the spirit.

The seeds, the fruit of the spirit. The seeds giving forth character, bringing forth character. The seeds will, by the very process of death, be transfigured into blossoms and fruits and in that perfected form remain forever.

Now you will observe that there is one familiar hymn, which I think we sing here, which doesn't tell us all the truth. It's a hymn by a good Anglican bishop. And one verse says this.

Faith will vanish into sight. Hope be emptied in delight. Love in heaven will shine more bright.

Therefore give us love. And the implication of that, of that verse is you see that faith is not eternal. We only need faith in this world.

Hope doesn't go on, it doesn't abide. The only thing that abides is love. That's quite contrary to what Paul is saying here.

In what sense faith abides into the future, Paul doesn't tell us. But into the ages of eternity, surely the children of God will be children with faith in him through Jesus Christ his son. I guess one of the characteristics of the atmosphere of the new Jerusalem is this, that no one will ever doubt our heavenly father, and we'll never doubt our savior, and we'll never doubt one another.

Faith surely will be one of the characteristic features of the new Jerusalem. And so will hope. That is the hope that God's will will be fulfilled to the nth degree as long as eternity shall last.

But whatever about faith and hope in eternity, Paul sums it up and says, they have therefore their importance, and they're certainly to be graded of more importance than the gifts of the spirit, which abide only for one season. But, he says, the very greatest of these abiding virtues and graces is agape. Love, then, is incomparable.

It is essential as it is eternal. Its pursuit ought to be given primacy over every other quest in the Christian's life. It is the more excellent way, and every Christian ought to seek it.

And not only ought we to seek it, but to give it the priority that the scriptures give it. Without love, there can be no real harmony among men. Faith makes things possible.

Only love makes them easy. The moment I have faith in God as he is revealed in Christ and in the Holy Spirit and in the word of God, that moment I can do things for God. I can only do it with joy and gladness and rejoice in the sufferings involved if I have love in my heart.

Faith makes things possible. Only love makes things easy. And there are people who fall by the wayside in the Christian faith.

They take on duties and they can't continue. They promise this and they can't fulfill. They've got faith, they've not abandoned faith, but they've got so little love they can't see things through.

Without love, there can be no real harmony amongst men, no deep fellowship, and no consistent moving forward together in the unity of a body. And that is the image that we have in the background here. All must be universal chaos in the absence of love.

Apart from its presence, we are still also in death. And the last word that I will say is this. There is something in this quality of love that masters us into a willingness to do the will of God.

I was pursuing this thought this week and came back again to that very remarkable statement in 2 Corinthians 5 and 14 where Paul says, according to the King James, it says that love of Christ constrains me. Now there are many words again used to translate that Greek word, but what it means is the love of Christ hedges me in. It's the idea of you're driving your very big eight-cylinder car, automobile, and you're going into a country lane, and the hedges are coming nearer and nearer, and there's no room for you to go anywhere but forward.

The love of Christ hedges me in. I can't turn back. It propels me forward.

It woos me. It draws me. It entices me.

And it sends me. It dynamites me from within. It draws me from without.

It compels me. It is the generative dynamite of the Christian life. Love never.

My dear friends, I thank you for listening so patiently. I confess to you that having been living in 1 Corinthians 13 these last few weeks, I've never felt myself to be such a hopeless preacher as I've tried to be on these Sunday evenings, because I feel I haven't touched the fringe of the imponderable things that there are in this chapter. Dig into it yourself.

Get hold of a commentary. Don't take what I've given you and forget three quarters of it and more. Get hold of the Bible for yourself, and I'm quite sure you will find things here to stagger your mind, to search your soul, and most certainly to feed your spirit in an evil day.

And I trust to sweeten your heart and your spirit in every evil hour. Let us pray. O God, our Heavenly Father, we thank you for your Word.

It's very precious to us, becoming increasingly precious as we see its relevance for the day in which it was written and its continuing relevance for us, for us as a congregation, for us as individuals. When we realize that without this key and the application of it, we shall at best live with some distance separating us, and therefore incapacitate it from being the best for you. But we thank you, our Heavenly Father, even more when we remember that the very man who penned these words was once a man who threatened the Church of Jesus Christ with slaughter.

And we read those awful words in the book of the Acts of the Apostles that he breathed out slaughter and threatenings, infused against the believing community. But by this time the great miracle had taken place. And you had made him your own, and his heart the dwelling place of your love, as well as his life enriched by the gifts of your Spirit.

Heavenly Father, manifest yourself in our day, changing hate into love still, winning over the enemies of the cross and of the Christ, that they may become thereafter the agents of your truth and the servants of your purposes. Receive us, bless us, and enable us in the privacy of our own hearts and lives further to apply these truths to ourselves, through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord. Amen.

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