

1 Corinthians 13:1-13 *If I speak in the tongues 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, but do not have love, I gain nothing. 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. 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. 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. ¹³ And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.*

Love's Supreme Value

1. We are nothing without love
2. Love's qualities
3. Love endures

When the great Russian poet, A. S. Pushkin, finally married in 1831, it was, he said, the 113th time he had fallen in love! (Robert C. Shannon, 1000 Windows, Cincinnati, Ohio: Standard Publishing Company, 1997) Love is the most misunderstood quality in the world today. Many people think that they are in love, when there is little more than lust in their hearts. Most people think of love as an emotion, but it's more than an emotion; it's an attitude and an action. Most people associate it with being soft, but it's really very hard. Many think it can happen at first sight, but, like a flower, it takes time to take root, grow and bloom. True love is a commitment rather than a hole in the ground that you just happen to fall into. In the thirteenth chapter of his first letter to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul teaches us the importance of love. He shows us Love's Supreme Value.

What are you good at? Are you a good musician? You can play several instruments and often don't even need the music in front of you? Can you sing like an angel or belt out a ballad? Are you smart? Maybe have your Ph.D. or MBA? You really like to think things through and analyze problems until you find an answer? Are you hardworking? I can remember my vicar year a long time ago. The pastor said I was not the smartest vicar he ever had, but I was the hardest working. A complement, I think. Are you fun to be around – the life of the party kind of person? Are you artistic? Do you enjoy painting or making things with your hands?

Who are you? Are you proud of your heritage? Are you proud of the long line of Christians in your family going back to the old country? In the chapters before this one, Paul discussed spiritual gifts. It seems some of the Corinthian Christians looked down at other Christians who didn't have the gifts like they had and that's what prompted Paul to write this chapter. *If I speak in the tongues 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, but do not have love, I gain nothing.*

Without love all that we are amounts to nothing. Without love, even faith becomes hollow and empty. It becomes a shell – hard on the outside, empty on the inside. Faith, where it is genuine, expresses itself through love.

And without love, all that we do amounts to nothing. Do you help clean church? Do you help mow the lawn at FVL? Do you give generously to the church budget and to special projects? Do you give your time serving on a committee or board? Do you volunteer or do other acts of service? Without love, it's all just a bunch of empty noise. It gains nothing.

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. Love doesn't focus on itself. It keeps a low profile and doesn't draw attention to itself and the things it does.

Love is concerned about others. Love is like a sponge absorbing the ill will of others. Whether it's the misspoken word or even a vengeful attack, love is slow to lose patience. Love is like Teflon: the greasy accusations of evil roll off

and don't stick. Love seeks to inject kindness into any relationship. It seeks a way of looking at things in the kindest possible way, whether it be a word poorly spoken or a gesture wrongly made. Love is not rude, that is, it does not behave disgracefully. The ancient church father, Chrysostom, said, "As a spark falls into the sea and does not harm the sea, so harm may be done to a loving soul and is soon quenched without disturbing the soul."

Love keeps no record of wrongs. God is all-knowing. God knows whether you have thought, said or done anything wrong. If anyone could keep a record of wrongs, God could. He could list them all and hold them up to condemn us on the last day. But he doesn't. God lost his "ledger" with all our wrongs in it when he nailed them with his Son to the cross. He buried them in an empty tomb, never to be seen again. God said through the prophet, Jeremiah, "I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." (Jeremiah 31:34) He forgets.

Then, why do we remember what it was that someone did against us? Why do we recall what it was that once hurt us? Why keep a record and list every wrong? Even the "big" ones we did disappeared in that ledger lost in the empty tomb, never to be found again.

Love is patient, love is kind. We sometimes like to think that love is some grandiose act on our part. We buy a big diamond ring or something like that and call it love. That's not love. Love is hard work. Love was Harold Oswald. Some of you remember Harold and you might remember when Barb became sick and crippled. She could no longer take care of herself so who did? Harold. He would dress her on Sunday mornings push her wheelchair to his truck, put her in the truck – in the modified seat he had installed – drive her to church and then repeat the process. He would push her into church and worship his Lord with no amount of self-pity or feeling sorry for himself. Then he would go through the whole process to take her home. And if you don't know the rest of the story, they died in the nursing home only hours apart, holding hands.

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. Who can say that their love never fails? I can't. None of us can. Our love is like a Wisconsin spring, warm one minute and cool the next. But the One who is love, loved us perfectly without fail and that love forgives us completely. Jesus himself said, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16) The Apostle Paul put it even more dramatically: "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8) That is love. Love that loved us when we were unlovable. Love that loved us so much that it died for us. Love that removes the stain of our lovelessness. Love that rescued us from hell and gives us heaven. The word used for love in this chapter is the same one used in John 3:16. It's a love that loves for no reason. It's a love that loves with action. You could replace "Love" in this chapter with the name, "Jesus" and it would make perfect sense. Jesus came down to this earth to die on the cross. There was no self-interest or self-promotion in what he did. He didn't do it for himself. He did it for us. He did it to take away the punishment we deserved for our sins.

If we want to know love, get to know Jesus. If we want to love, be close to Jesus. Love is like a rechargeable battery. Unless you plug into God's Word often, your love will quickly run out. What happens when your phone battery dies? It's useless. Everything that we are and do is also useless without love. So, plug your love into Jesus by plugging into his Word and sacrament often. And with the love of Jesus in us, we can love one another.

Love never fails. Everything else will come to an end. Speaking in other languages ended with the Apostolic age. Prophecy and knowledge won't be needed when Jesus returns. Even faith and hope have their end – when Jesus returns, they won't be needed. But love – love will endure for all eternity. Don't you look forward to experiencing the love of God perfectly, infinitely, eternally? That's what God wants for you. May you always cling in faith to Jesus' love and may you live lives of love with faith and hope in God.