

Everlasting Love

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- [0 : 0 0] found in page 1154 of the Church Bibles. It's taken from 1 Corinthians chapter 13, verses 1 to 13. 1 Corinthians chapter 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.
- If I have the gift of prophecy, I 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.
- 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.
- Love is patient. Love is kind. It does not envy. It does not boast. It is not proud. It does not dishonour others. It is not self-seeking. It is not easily angered. It keeps no record of wrongs.
- [1 : 1 4] Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. 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. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.
- But when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. 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. 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. And now these three remain. Faith, hope, and love.
- [2 : 1 7] But the greatest of these is love. Thanks David for reading.
- Good morning church. My name is Martin Ayres. I'm the lead pastor here. If we've not met before. I hope we get to meet after the service. And it would be a great help to meet if you could keep your Bibles open. At 1 Corinthians chapter 13.
- It was page 1154 in the church Bibles. And you can find an outline inside the notice sheet. If you find that helpful. As we look at this together. Let's pray and ask for God's help as we turn to his word.
- Mighty God and loving Heavenly Father. Father, we worship you for your holiness. And we thank you for making yourself known to us in the person of Jesus.
- By your Holy Spirit we ask that you will open our eyes to see Jesus afresh this morning. That you will open our ears to your voice in the scriptures. That you'll open our hearts.
- [3 : 2 1] That we might respond rightly to you. For we ask in Jesus name. Amen. Well this is a very famous passage in the Bible. And it stands alone as a very moving piece of writing about love.

I've officiated at weddings for people who don't normally come to church. And when it comes to asking, would they like a Bible reading? They'll sometimes say, what's that one about love?

And they mean this one. It's often read at weddings. And I've preached on it several times at weddings. Last time was James Lapping's wedding. Two years ago, those of you who remember James and Sarah. They had this read and preached on at their wedding.

But coming to it in a series, working through this letter, 1 Corinthians. Sheds a different light on these words. And why they were first written. When this letter was first delivered to this church in Corinth.

And the scroll was opened. And it was read out chapter by chapter to the gathered people, the Christians in Corinth. They wouldn't have been drying their eyes with tissues moved by the eloquence.

[4 : 29] They would have been shifting uncomfortably in their seats. And bowing their heads in shame even, as this was read to them. Paul is holding up a standard to this church.

And saying, this is what really matters for your life together as a church. And he does that to humble a church that was proud of being gifted.

Proud of ability given by God to them. But they've forgotten what's of first importance to God. Last week in chapter 12, we started a new section of the letter.

Where Paul is speaking to them about gifts. Given to them from the Holy Spirit. Just as the Spirit gives gifts to any of his people in any local church.

And this was an exceptionally gifted church in Corinth. In chapter 1, Paul said that he thanks God for them. And he says in chapter 1 verse 5. In Christ you have been enriched in every way.

[5 : 27] With all kinds of speech. And with all knowledge. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift. As you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. But the gifts had become divisive for this church.

Because they created distinction and differences across the people. And in Corinth if you had certain gifts you were thought of as super spiritual. And if you didn't have those things you were unspiritual.

And Paul wrote in chapter 12. We saw this last week. That what makes you a spiritual person. Is not the particular gifts that the Spirit has given you. It's how you respond to Jesus.

What do you think of him? Do you believe that he is Lord? And have you made him your Lord in your life? We saw that last week. That's what's a spiritual person. Then he talked about the diverse gifts that the Holy Spirit gives to Christians.

To serve one another for the common good. And he said it's a bit like a body. We're the body of Christ. And in the same way that our bodies have lots of different parts. Noses, eyes, hands, feet.

[6 : 30] In the same way the Spirit gives different gifts to his people. So we're different. But like a body we need each other. And we're to work together. So how do we use our gifts?

Well he ended that chapter saying. And I will show you the most excellent way. And that's what we've just had read for us. So our first point is this. Love is the essential ingredient.

Have a look with me at verse 1 again. 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.

Now we thought last week about what the gift of tongues might be. That it may well not be an actual different language. But sounds like it.

As the Spirit is at work in a Christian's life. And as they're praying to God. They are lifted. And they stop articulating words. And to someone listening. It sounds like a different language. But here Paul says.

[7 : 28] Even if it was. Even if your gift of tongues from the Spirit. Enabled you to speak a different human language. That you didn't know before. Or even if it allowed you to speak the languages of heaven.

If you didn't have love. It would be worth nothing. And Paul takes on language they would have been familiar with. As unhelpful. Clanging a cymbal. Hitting a gong again and again. I was going to do it.

I'm not going to do it. Clang a cymbal. Repeatedly. But think of the headache that would create. That's what they might have heard in a pagan temple. People clanging on gongs. Clanging on cymbals.

Thinking somehow that would summon God to action. Maybe writing today. The Apostle Paul would have said. If I do these things. If I could speak heavenly languages. Without love. I'm like a descant recorder.

In the hands of a child. You know the descant recorder. When a child goes round. Blowing on it. Or those annoying plastic musical toys.

[8 : 25] That children get. Often given at Christmas. By other people. Who don't live with the children. And they make these. Inane tunes. Repeatedly. Sometimes you can't switch them off.

Once they've started. You can't work out. How did it start? Why is it going again? And then the tune is in your head. All day. Well if you walked into church. And there were kids wandering around.

With toys like that. And blowing on descant recorders. You wouldn't go back. Would you? You wouldn't go back to that church. And Paul says. That is the value. Of this spiritual gift.

The gift of tongues. That you so esteem in Corinth. Without love. It's as useless as that. Then he turns to prophecy. The ability to speak the truth from God.

In a way that's appropriate. And pastorally sensitive. Whether because of something you've read in the Bible. Or because. Even because of some revelation. That you've had from God.

[9 : 19] Surely that's a valuable thing. Well Paul says verse 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. In verse 3. He turns to extreme generosity.

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. We might picture someone. Deciding that they need a new car.

They're going to buy a cheaper car. Than they could afford. They're going to give the money. That they save to Glasgow City Mission. They're not going to go on a foreign holiday this year. They're just going to go camping in Scotland.

They're going to give that money. To Glasgow City Mission. Then you find out. They're selling their flat. They're just going to give the money. To the poor. And I mean. What a wonderful thing.

[10 : 17] You'd be in awe of someone like that. Wouldn't you? Paul says. If you did that. And you don't have love. It is of no value to you. You've lost everything. You've given it away. You've gained nothing.

If you did that without love. Extraordinary. Thing to say. In other words. Love is indispensable. In our life together. Paul is not saying here.

That love is the thing. That makes you right with God. Maybe you're here this morning. And you're just looking in. Maybe you're here. And you don't know why you're here. You just walked in. You saw the people walking in. Well Paul's point here.

In chapter 13. Is not. That if you love people well. God will approve of you. Because you love people well. Rather. It's understanding what love is.

So Paul says. Elsewhere in Galatians chapter 5. What counts. Is faith. Expressing itself. Through love. In other words. Christian love. Is a demonstration. That we believe in Jesus.

[11 : 13] It's a demonstration. That we've put our trust. In him. And the fruit of that. Faith in God. And who God is. And what God has done. Is that we. Love each other.

The apostle John. Writes in 1 John 4. This is love. Not that we loved God. But that he loved us. And sent his son. As an atoning sacrifice. For our sins. But then he says.

We love. Because he first. Loved us. So the flow of love. Begins with God. Who is love. And in the Christian's life. The Holy Spirit.

Opens our eyes. This is true of every Christian. If you're a Christian today. The Holy Spirit. One day. Opened your eyes. And he opened your heart. To see that God loves you. And to grasp.

What it really means. That you are loved by God. That he showed that love. When you were alienated from him. By the way you treated him. And he sent his son to die. In your place.

[12 : 11] That's the demonstration of God's love. And because of that love. We can be welcomed back to God. And that love. It fills up our hearts. And flows out from us.

To other people. So that we can love each other. In the way God first loved us. The big thing that marks God's love out. As different from other loves.

Is not just that it's sacrificial. Though it is sacrificial. We'll be remembering that. As we share in bread and wine together. The sacrifice of God's love. But it's not so much. The sacrificial nature of that love.

That makes it distinctive. It's that it's self-originating. When we say about someone. That we love them. What we tend to always mean. At least in part.

Is there's something about them. That we love. Something in them. Moves us. To love them. But wonderfully. God sets his love on us.

[13 : 08] Not because of any particular. Property in us. Or quality in us. But rather because. He is love. And love just flows out from him. Because of his nature.

To lift us up. And embrace us. In this immense. Unconditional love. And Paul is saying here. This is what is most valuable. To any local church.

Any local group. Of believers. It might not be. What we would think. Is most impressive. In a church. We might be impressed. By a church. Because it's got thousands. Of people coming.

Every week. Or we hear. That they were going to have. A building project. And they raised 15 million pounds. In a week. For their building. We'd be impressed by that. Or we might be impressed. By a church's.

Professional services. Their counseling service. Or their parenting courses. Or we might be impressed. By a church. By the people who go there. We might find out. That there are football stars.

[14 : 03] Who go there. Or celebrities. Or politicians. But Paul says. If a church is not marked. By love. Love that it's other people.

That it's people have for each other. It's nothing. It's worthless. And then put more positively. If we're a community of believers. In the Lord Jesus.

Who don't have any of those things. That the world would find impressive. You know. And if. If our screen keeps breaking. And you know. It's all sometimes a bit. You know.

Incompetent. But we have. But our faith. Is working itself out. In love for each other. Then we're in the best of health. As a church. That's what marks out.

A healthy church. Is love. So that's our first point. So what does that love look like? That's our second point. Love is profoundly practical. In verses four to seven.

[14 : 56] So Paul tells us what love is. And for the first audience. Paul seems to want them to think. Not first and foremost of Jesus. Although Jesus is these things. But of the culture in their church.

And the ways they're getting so much of this wrong. So he says. If you have a look at verse four. Love is patient. Love is kind. But we've heard in one Corinthians.

That the Corinthians are divided. About which leaders they follow. In chapters one to four. And when they meet for the Lord's Supper. In chapter 11. They eat without thinking of anyone else. They're not patient.

He says in verse four. As we go on. It does not envy. It does not boast. It is not proud. But in Corinth. We know there was so much boasting going on.

They boasted about the leaders they followed. They boasted about their freedoms. And the Christian life they wanted to live. We hear they're boasting about the gifts they've got. In verse five. Love does not dishonor others.

[15 : 56] And is not self-seeking. And it keeps no record of wrongs. But in chapter six. We heard that the Christians in Corinth. Were so keeping a record of wrongs. They were having lawsuits against each other.

In verse six. It says love does not delight in evil. But rejoices with the truth. But in chapter five. We heard that they were boasting about sexual immorality in the church.

That even other people outside the church would have been ashamed of. And in chapter six. They don't seem to think that what you do with your body matters. Even sex with a prostitute. So the chapter of this letter.

That we think of as most eloquent and poetic. Is actually Paul's way of knocking his original hearers down onto the canvas. At the same time for us.

As we overhear this stinging rebuke of the way they were living. What we get is an inspirational picture. Paul painting a picture for us.

[16 : 55] Of what love could really look like. In the community of God's people. And it's a picture we need. Because when we hear the word love today. We can so easily misunderstand it.

When we hear love. We might think of Love Island. Or Taylor Swift's love story. Or the kind of images when you go into a card factory.

And you get these mugs and cards and fridge magnets. And they have these like fluffy bears on them. And they're holding heart balloons. In our culture. The word love tends to be about sex.

Or sentimentalism. It's about intense sexual desire. Or about twee romanticism. So that most of us. Are much more likely to use the word love.

About a thing. Or an activity. Than we would about a person. No wonder we find it hard. To engage with the idea. That God is love. And he calls us to love each other.

[17 : 53] So it's so helpful for us. That the Apostle Paul. Gives us 15 qualities. In this chapter. Of Christian love. We can't go through all of them. It's due our reflection in our own time.

But notice. The patience of love. The first one. Verse four. Love is patient. You might think of yourself as a loving person. Are you a loving person? I think lots of us would say.

Yeah I'm a loving person. Are you patient with people? Or do you get frustrated too easily. With other people? Do you lose your temper? Can you bear with people who you find awkward?

Or do you just avoid them? Another theme is the joy of love. In verse six. Love does not delight. That's rejoice in evil. But rejoices with the truth.

In the Christian community. We're called to be honest. And sincere with each other. No hidden motives. No scurrilous gossip. Because what we rejoice in is the truth. And we're rejoicing ultimately.

[18 : 54] In the man who said I am the truth. In Jesus. Even when his truth is costly. Even when his truth is challenging and confronting. We rejoice in him.

And the truth he brings. Think about the humility of love. In verse four. He says love does not envy. So it doesn't want things for itself. It does not boast.

It is not proud. It is not proud. So picture a community. Where people are genuinely rooting for each other. You know there's a well-known phrase. Every time a friend succeeds.

A little something in me dies. And it's this idea that we have. That sometimes when you hear of someone close to you. Doing really well. You can get a sinking feeling. In our worst moments.

Because you wish it was you doing really well. Well a spirit-filled community. The church. Should have such familiar love for each other. That we can genuinely be rooting for each other.

[19 : 52] Wanting others to succeed. Not even thinking of ourselves. Other than how we can help build other people up. And let's notice the perseverance of love.

From verse seven. The way he uses the word always. Again and again. It always protects. It always trusts. It always hopes.

It always perseveres. And then a climactic never. Verse eight. Love never fails. In other words. Love is something you can rely on. Long term. It's constant.

Dependable. When someone loves you like God loves you. You know that that love will still be there next year. It will still be there tomorrow. Whatever happens. Could we love each other like that?

So Christian love is very practical. It's not stoic. It's not you know. It's just about what you do. And it's not about what you feel. It's not like that. Because it's not less than a feeling.

[20 : 48] But it's not just a feeling. And what do we do if we don't feel that we love our church community. Our church family. Should we then read verses like verse three.

And think well I better not give anything then to the poor. Because I don't really love the poor. And I don't feel love for them. Well when you're doing kind of. When you're preparing to get married. The advice for a couple preparing to get married.

Is that if you go through seasons where you don't feel you love your spouse. Serve them. Because you love the people you serve. So it's as you step up and serve your spouse.

That you start loving them again. We love the people we serve. And there's something of that in the church as well. That if you don't feel that you love your church. Don't stand on the fringes coming occasionally.

Waiting to see if your love warms up for them in isolation. No get on with serving them. And as you serve them you'll find that you love them. You speak to some of the people in our children's ministry.

[21 : 48] There's people who do our children's ministry at church. Who I know when they started in children's ministry did not love the kids. They did it because they loved Jesus. And they saw the need.

But now some of them. You speak to them and they love the kids. Because they've got serving them. And their love for them has grown. So we've heard about church life. Love is the essential ingredient.

Love is profoundly practical. And we also see in this chapter that love is a glimpse of heaven. That's our third point. Love is the one thing that lasts. So Paul's point in verses 8 to 13 is a simple one.

It's that we should value love more than spiritual giftedness. Because love is the thing that will last forever. In the new creation. From the day of Christ onwards. Look at verse 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. In fact when Paul wants to talk about the Christian life.

[22 : 51] He often talks about a triad of faith, hope and love. You see that again and again in his letters. Faith, hope and love. But if we just look at the end of the chapter. He prioritizes love. Verse 13.

And now these three remain. Faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. Why? Well because it will last. One day our hope will be replaced with fulfillment.

Our hopes. What we've been waiting for in the Christian life. Will be realized. And we won't need to hope in heaven. And one day our faith will be replaced with sight. We won't need to trust in God's promises.

Because we'll be with him. With those promises fulfilled. But love is the thing that will last. Or in the words of the great Christian preacher. Of the 18th century Jonathan Edwards.

Heaven is a world of love. That's the big idea. But let's notice how there is a wonderful richness here. In how Paul describes heaven.

[23 : 55] He uses the word in verse 9. Complete. Well verse 10. Completeness. So look from verse 9. For we know in part. And we prophesy in part. But when completeness comes.

What is in part disappears. Now that word completeness. Is a word that you could translate. It's a word that's kind of about the goal of things.

It's kind of fulfillment. Fulfillment. What we've been aiming for will be reached. What everything has been heading towards. Completeness. In other words. Heaven is what we were made for.

It's the place where all our longings for home will be realized. Everything we've been searching for in this world. And in this life. Will be finally found. When Jesus comes back.

And that's taken up. In being with God. So that our knowledge of God now. Whether through studying the Bible ourselves. Or spirit given experiences. Or insights in our life.

[24 : 53] They're a bit like tortures. That you might use in the darkness of night. And heaven will be like the sun rising at dawn. And we won't need the tortures anymore. I wonder if you would use that word.

To describe your picture of heaven. That it's a place. Where completeness will come. The goal of everything will be reached. He uses the picture of maturity in verse 11.

He compares being. Life now before heaven. As living like a child. And the future in heaven. With maturity coming. And then he tells us why.

It's because of who we'll be with. In verse 12. Have a look. Verse 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. First century mirrors were polished metal.

[25 : 53] So they gave a likeness. But it was a distorted likeness. And that's what our knowledge of God is like now. We can know true things about God. We can know everything we need to know.

From God's word. What we know is true. But it is limited. And Paul says one day. We will be with him face to face. We will be face to face.

With the glory of God. In the face of Jesus. It's what our very souls were made for. Moses asked if he could see God face to face. And God told him no.

Because the holiness of God would have struck him down. When the prophet Isaiah got a glimpse of the vision. Of the likeness of the glory of God. In the temple. He cried woe is me.

But the promise here is that one day. We will find everything our hearts have ached for. And longed for. In seeing Jesus face to face.

[26 : 48] The writer C.S. Lewis spoke about how. This is what every unfulfilled desire in this life. Is pointing us to. He wrote about how we have a sense in this universe. That we're like strangers.

Because we have longings that are not fulfilled. And surely one day. We will be welcomed into the heart of things. The door on which we have been knocking all our lives.

Will open at last. Heaven is a place of finally being home. Of seeing God face to face. And it's a place of love. Notice the way that.

Paul. I'm sure quite deliberately. Uses the word love at the end of the chapter. As the last word. Heaven is not a place of eternal rest. If by rest.

What we mean is inactivity. You know when we say. About someone who has died. They're at peace now. We're not to think that they. There will be nothing to do forever.

[27 : 43] That it will be a place where people are inactive. Heaven will be a place of active delight. As God's love embraces us. And we respond face to face with him.

In love and delight. Don't let your soul settle for anything less. Don't allow yourself to kind of fill up your soul. With a lesser thing in this world.

And Paul's big idea follows. That the way the church can most bring heaven to earth. The way we can display heaven on earth today. The way the spirit can be manifest among us.

Is through us loving each other. The ultimate way that God is manifested. Among a group of his people. More than miracles. More than healings.

More than tongues and prophecy. Is that we love each other. And this principle is key to understanding. So much of what Paul is trying to say in this letter. To the Corinthians. He said how do you use your freedom.

[28 : 40] As a Christian. We have so much freedom. In chapter 8. He said he lays down his freedom. In love for others. So that they will be built up. What about our rights? Don't we have rights Paul?

Paul says in chapter 9. He lays down all his rights. He gives them up. So that other people might turn to Jesus. And know him. And have faith in him. Here in chapters 12 to 14.

How do we use our gifts Paul? Am I more spiritual because of my gifts? He says use your gifts. To love other people well. When we do that. The church becomes a glimpse of heaven.

A foretaste of the future. And surely folks. This is what our world needs. Isn't it? I'm reading a book at the moment. I'm not that far through it. It's called Generations. By Jean Twen.

She's a psychologist. Talking about the different generations. And how we understand each other. Millennials. Gen Z. Gen X. And so on. She's talking in the book. About how technology.

[29 : 36] Has changed. What it means to grow up. In the world today. She says that we've never been more connected. And we've never been more isolated. Everyone has their own screen.

Most people have their own noise cancelling headphones. As they walk down the street. And everyone is like in their own universe. Cut off from everybody else. And so it's creating this extreme individualism.

And isolation. Well what do we need in a world like that? What do our children need if we have them? Surely we need the church more than ever. And we need it to be a community of love.

Remarkably John Stott. The Christian writer. Writing 40 years ago in 1982. Predicted that this is what the world will be like. He said the world will become like this with technology.

And he said this. In such a dehumanized society. The fellowship of the local church will become increasingly important. Where members meet each other physically. And talk and listen to each other.

[30 : 38] Rather than on a screen. This human context of mutual love. Will become most necessary. For the preservation of our humanness. Isn't that striking?

To value our church. You know in our neighborhood. Where we live. People think that what their kids need on a Sunday. Is more activity. More rugby. More hockey.

More tennis. Fencing classes. Japanese lessons. Tapas cookery lessons. If you think what your kids need is achievement. Then you won't come to church with them.

Because you think. Church is the thing that gets in the way of the next class. So that they can get on and achieve. But God made us for relationship with him.

And when we come to church. We have the opportunity to glimpse. Our future. In our love for each other. And love is the thing that will last. That's what we need.

[31 : 35] Heaven will be a world of love. And so Paul is saying. Love is the thing to strive for. In church life today. And in our own lives. Patience. Forgiveness.

Rejoicing in the truth. Protecting each other. Trusting each other. Persevering with each other. Never failing each other.

It's the essential ingredient. And it's the thing that will last. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father.

We praise you and thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ. That he. Is love. And his life. So exemplifies.

Love. As we come. To share. In the Lord's table. We ask that your spirit. Will impress deeply on us afresh. Your love for us in him.

[32 : 37] Displayed at the cross. As you paid. All our debts. So that you would keep no record of them. And you could welcome us. To be with you face to face.

Father. By your spirit. Would you transform us. By these truths. So that we might be a community. Marked by divine love for each other. For Jesus name's sake. Amen.