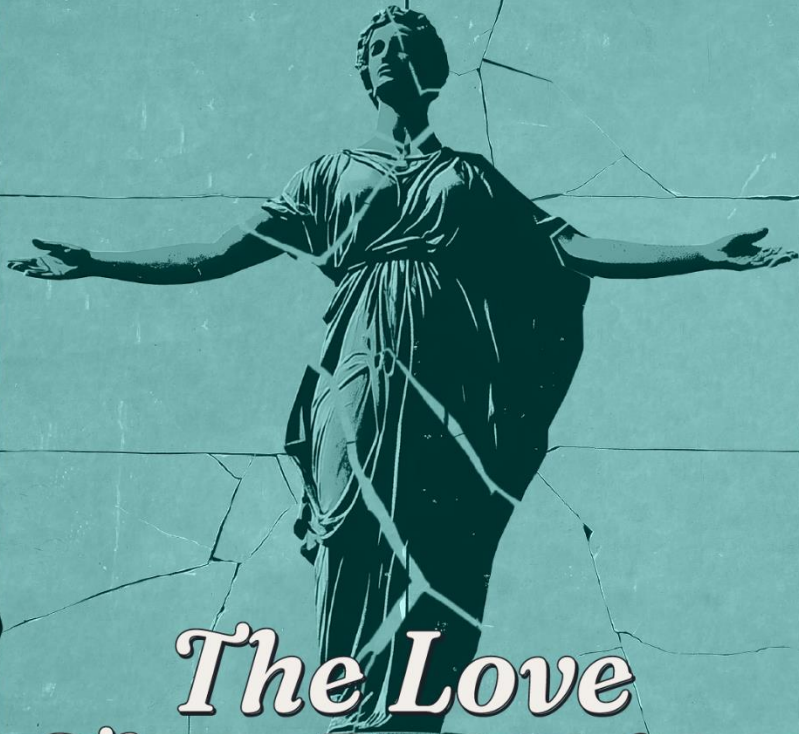


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*The Love  
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# **The Love That Remains**

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## **The Purpose of Spiritual Gifts**

## **Chapter 1 – The Context of Love**

When the Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, he wasn't writing to seasoned believers with decades of spiritual experience. He was writing to a young church, roughly five or six years old, still learning how to live out their faith in a world that was largely pagan and hostile to Christianity. These believers had recently come to know Christ and were navigating what it meant to live by the Spirit, not by the flesh. Paul had already written them once before—he even mentions a previous letter we don't have—and now he's responding to specific issues and questions they had. This wasn't just a theological treatise. It was a deeply pastoral and practical letter, written to help a struggling church mature in faith and love.

The church had written to Paul seeking clarity about several concerns: marriage, divorce, singleness, how to take communion properly, how to live as Christians in a pagan society, and particularly how to understand and use spiritual gifts. The second half of Paul's letter is his response to their questions. One of the most pressing issues they faced involved the use—and misuse—of spiritual gifts. People were confused. Some were prideful about their gifts. Others felt lesser or unimportant. And some were turning the gifts into a spectacle, not a service.

Paul begins his longest and most detailed teaching on spiritual gifts in chapter 12, where he tells them, “I don't want you to be uninformed.” He explains that spiritual gifts are distributed by the Holy Spirit, not chosen by individuals. They are not given to elevate one believer over another but to build up the body of Christ. Paul emphasizes that every gift matters. There are no “lesser” gifts. Each one is vital to the health and mission of the church. And just like the human body has many parts, each with a unique function, so too does the body of Christ. No one part can say to another, “I don't need you.”

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But Paul isn't finished with the topic in chapter 12. In fact, the next chapter—what we know as 1 Corinthians 13—is a direct continuation. This is often overlooked because we tend to isolate chapter 13 and read it at weddings. But it was never meant to be read as a romantic passage. It's not about the love between husband and wife. It's about the love that must motivate every action within the church, especially the use of spiritual gifts. Chapter 13 is Paul's way of saying: "Here's the foundation for all of it. If you don't have this, none of the rest matters."

Paul's introduction to chapter 13 leads us into one of the most beautiful and challenging sections of Scripture. He moves from the structure and theology of gifts to the heart behind them. And the heart, he says, must be love. Not just any love, but *agape* — a divine, sacrificial, unconditional love that mirrors the very nature of God. Without that love, even the most powerful, visible, and impressive spiritual acts are rendered meaningless. That's where Paul takes us next.

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### **Chapter 2 – The Priority of Love**

Paul begins 1 Corinthians 13 with a powerful declaration — one that instantly reframes everything the Corinthian believers were arguing and confused about. He writes, "*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.*" This was a direct hit to a congregation where the gift of tongues had become a status symbol. Some believers were using spiritual gifts not to build up others, but to elevate themselves. And Paul essentially says: even if you had the most supernatural, heavenly gift of language imaginable — without love, it's just noise. Empty, hollow, and annoying.

He continues the list, escalating the intensity of the examples. "If I have the gift of prophecy... if I understand all mysteries and all knowledge... if I have a faith that can move mountains..." These

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are incredible spiritual accomplishments. Imagine someone who not only speaks powerfully and prophetically but also has deep wisdom and supernatural understanding. Someone who is bold in faith, even able to perform miracles. In our modern church culture, we'd call this person an "anointed leader," maybe even a spiritual superstar. But Paul stops us in our tracks. Without love? *"I am nothing."*

It doesn't end there. Paul goes even further — "If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames..." He's referencing extreme sacrifice, generosity, and martyrdom. These are the ultimate acts of spiritual devotion. But again, the verdict is the same: *"But do not have love, I gain nothing."* This is both sobering and clarifying. You can give away everything you own, even die for your beliefs, but if it's not driven by love — true, godly, agape love — it's worthless. It doesn't count in God's eyes. It doesn't move heaven.

What Paul is doing here is stripping away every spiritual performance, every public act of religiosity, and exposing the motivation behind them. It's not what we do that matters most — it's why we do it. Are we driven by love for God? Are we compelled by compassion for others? Or are we trying to impress, manipulate, or build a reputation? These are uncomfortable questions, but they are vital. Paul is urging us to stop measuring spiritual success by external displays and start measuring it by the presence (or absence) of love.

This chapter isn't about reducing the importance of spiritual gifts — Paul has just spent the entire previous chapter affirming their value. Instead, he's revealing their foundation. Love must be the starting point, the fuel, and the goal. When our spiritual lives are not rooted in love, we become noise-makers and self-promoters, not Christ-followers. The message is clear: without love, nothing we say, nothing we do, and nothing we give will ever matter in the eyes of God. The Christian life is not primarily about talent, gifting, or activity. It's about love. Love is the engine of all

Kingdom work. And that love is always a response to God's love for us.

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### **Chapter 3 – The Portrait of Love**

After making the case that love is more important than any gift or act of sacrifice, Paul shifts from why love is necessary to what love actually looks like. And instead of giving a theological definition, he paints a practical, relational portrait — a picture anyone can understand and everyone can apply. He doesn't say, "Love feels like butterflies" or "Love is emotional connection." He lists behaviors. Choices. Actions. Because biblical love, agape love, is not a feeling — it is a decision to act for the good of another, even when it costs us something.

Paul starts with two positive declarations: "*Love is patient, love is kind.*" These two simple statements carry massive weight. Patience is love's response to frustration. It's the ability to absorb delay, insult, or immaturity without retaliation. Kindness is love's active expression — doing good, speaking gently, showing grace. These two traits are the foundation of godly love. Imagine how our marriages, friendships, and churches would change if we were simply more patient and more kind. These are not dramatic gifts — they're quiet strengths. And they are powerful.

Then Paul moves into a list of what love is *not*. It "*does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.*" All of these come from insecurity — from the need to compare, compete, and be noticed. Love doesn't envy because it celebrates the success of others. Love doesn't boast because it's not driven by ego. Love isn't proud because it knows everything good comes from God. He continues: "*It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.*" These are choices we make daily. To speak with respect, to put others first, to control our temper, to forgive — even when we've been hurt. Love releases. Love serves. Love honors.

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This portrait of love confronts the way most people view relationships. In our world, love is almost always tied to feelings — “I love you because you make me happy.” But Paul says: love is what you do when people aren’t making you happy. Love is what remains when emotions fade. Love is the decision to choose humility over pride, grace over resentment, forgiveness over revenge. Love does not keep score. It doesn’t wait for the other person to change first. It initiates healing. That’s what makes love powerful. That’s what makes it divine.

And this kind of love is the mark of Christian maturity. It’s not how much Bible you know or how gifted you are — it’s how well you love. Paul is clear: this is the kind of love that must define our relationships, our leadership, our ministries, and our spiritual life. If we want to reflect Jesus, we must love like Him. That means being patient with people who are difficult. It means forgiving people who have hurt us. It means serving those who may never thank us. It means loving even when there’s no guarantee we’ll be loved in return. That is agape love — and it’s what the world is desperate to see.

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### **Chapter 4 – The Permanence of Love**

As Paul brings his thoughts in 1 Corinthians 13 to a close, he offers a final, eternal perspective on love. After explaining that love must be the foundation and the motivation for all spiritual gifts, and after describing in detail what love looks like in practice, Paul now makes a stunning claim: “*Love never fails.*” This isn’t poetic exaggeration — it’s a theological reality. While every other spiritual gift, experience, and even earthly virtue will one day pass away, love will remain forever.

Paul begins to list the gifts that will cease. “*Where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.*” These are all legitimate spiritual gifts, given by the Holy Spirit for the building

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up of the church. But their purpose is temporary. They are for the “now,” for the season before Christ returns. But when “*the perfect comes*” — meaning the fullness of God’s Kingdom — we won’t need these tools anymore. In heaven, we won’t need prophecy, because we’ll see God face to face. We won’t need tongues or supernatural knowledge. We’ll be with Jesus in His glory, complete and whole.

To illustrate this transition from the present to the eternal, Paul gives a beautiful metaphor: “*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.*” In other words, spiritual gifts belong to this life, this current age — like the developmental tools of childhood. But love? Love belongs to the mature. Love belongs to eternity. When we step into the presence of Christ, the gifts of childhood will fall away, and only the fullness of love will remain.

Paul continues, “*Now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face.*” In Corinth, mirrors were made of polished bronze and offered only a dim, imperfect reflection. Paul’s audience would have understood this metaphor well. In this life, we only see glimpses of God’s truth, glimpses of His glory, glimpses of each other. But one day, that will change. One day we will know fully — “*even as I am fully known.*” What an incredible hope. We will be fully seen, fully understood, fully loved. And in that perfect vision, only love will still matter.

That’s why Paul concludes with this timeless sentence: “*And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.*” Faith is essential — we live by it daily. Hope is vital — it anchors our soul. But both will one day give way to sight. When Christ returns, we will no longer live by faith; we will live by presence. We will no longer hope for restoration; we will experience it. But love — love is eternal. It’s the one thing that will never be replaced. The reason love is the greatest is because it is the only one of the three that will last forever.

## Chapter 5 – Conclusion & Call to Action

As the message of 1 Corinthians 13 reaches its final note, Paul isn't merely calling us to admire love — he is calling us to live by it. The purpose of this chapter isn't to give us something beautiful to read at weddings. It's to realign our hearts and actions with the heart of Christ. Paul was addressing a church full of passion, talent, and spiritual activity — but also filled with division, pride, and performance. His words were a correction, but also a loving invitation: *Let everything you do be done in love.*

Love, according to Paul, is not an abstract virtue. It is the most powerful force in the life of a believer — because it flows from the very heart of God. Every act of obedience, every moment of worship, every spiritual gift exercised in the church only has value if it is done in love. Without love, Paul says, we're just making noise. Without love, our gifts are self-serving. Without love, our sacrifices gain us nothing. Love is the measurement of spiritual maturity. Love is the fruit of the Spirit. Love is the reflection of Christ in us.

This is why Jesus, in Revelation 2, spoke to the church in Ephesus with both praise and warning. He told them, “I know your deeds... your hard work... your perseverance.” But then came the rebuke: *“Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first.”* They were doing the right things. They were defending the truth. But they had lost the heartbeat of it all — their first love. And what did Jesus tell them to do? Not “feel more deeply,” but *“do the things you did at first.”* Real love is shown in what we do. Real love is active. Real love returns to action, not emotion.

So how do we apply this to our lives today? We start by returning to love as the reason for everything. Before we teach, serve, post, share, plan, lead, or give — we ask: *Am I doing this in love?* If you're a parent, your greatest calling is not to manage your children's behavior — it's to love them as God loves you. If you're

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in ministry, your greatest impact won't be through performance or perfection — it will be through sacrificial love. If you're in business, your success will echo in eternity not because of profits, but because of how you loved people along the way. Love is how heaven measures greatness.

So let this message shift you. Let it renew your priorities. Let it strip away the need to impress, and stir in you the desire to serve. Let love be what guides your words, shapes your habits, and fuels your purpose. Ask yourself honestly: *What am I doing that shows my love for God?* Not just what you feel — what you choose. *What am I doing that expresses love to others?* Not just what you post — but what you give, how you forgive, how you stay present. *And how am I loving the city around me — the lost, the hurting, the unseen?* Because the truth is: love that isn't expressed is love that isn't complete.

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### **Final Prayer & Charge**

Lord, thank You for showing us what love truly is. Thank You for Your Word that corrects, encourages, and transforms. Help us to not only admire love but to walk in it. May we be a people who live with purpose, serve with humility, speak with grace, and give with joy — not out of performance, but out of a deep and unshakable love for You. Let this love be our foundation. Let it be our legacy. And let it be what remains.

In Jesus' name, amen.

Go now — and love well.  
Because love never fails.

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