



Why Love is the Key to Serving One Another (1 Corinthians 12:31b-13:3)

- The church is a masterpiece of “*many members, but one body*” (1 Cor. 12:20), “*Christ’s body*” (1 Cor. 12:27). Each member of His body is gifted by the Spirit “*for the common good*” of our fellow members (1 Cor. 12:7). In order to stay healthy and functional, God wants a key virtue He calls “*a still more excellent way*” (1 Cor. 12:31b) to be flowing freely and thoroughly through every part of His body. This virtue is love.
- God tells us to “*let all that you do be done in love*” (1 Cor. 16:14). This love is God’s love, the highest form of love in existence. It defines the essence of God as “*God is love*” (1 John 4:8, 16). This love is “*the perfect bond of unity*” (Col 3:14), can “*cover a multitude of sins*” (1 Pet 4:8), fulfills God’s entire law (Matt. 22:37-40), and “*bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things*” and “*never fails*” (1 Cor 13:7-8a)
- God’s love defined is an attitude and action that willfully gives itself consistently and selflessly for the highest good of others. This is a virtue that God supernaturally embeds in our hearts (Rom. 5:5) and produces by the work of the Spirit in our lives (Gal. 5:22)
- In chapter 13, Paul will describe this supernatural love that must flow in and through His body for ministry that builds up the body and glorifies the Lord. So, Paul will describe love in three ways:
 - It’s an essential virtue (v. 1-3)
 - It’s an effective virtue (v. 4-7)
 - It’s an enduring virtue (v. 8-13)
- In verses 1-3, Paul highlights the essential nature of love and uses himself hypothetically as someone who can exercise certain selected gift at their highest level. But then, if love is not actively operating in and through those gifts, it brings a very sad and devastating conclusion (v. 1: “*I have become...*”; v. 2: “*I am nothing*”; v.3: “*It profits me nothing*”)

❶ Without love, your ministry will be incoherent (13:1)

- Paul first hypothetically uses the gift of tongues (known languages) to highlight its impact without love.
- Being able to speak in every known human language including the language of angels (a real language, not ecstatic gibberish. Possibly the “*inexpressible words*” of 2 Cor. 12:4) would seem to be an amazing benefit to the body of Christ.
- Without love, this amazing ability to communicate potentially to all languages becomes nothing more than an irritating, hollow, incoherent sound of confusion (“*a noisy gong or clanging symbol*”) instead of a source of benefit it was designed to be.
- Love would “*speak the truth in love*” (Eph. 4:15) or make “*the goal of our instruction is love...*” (1 Tim. 1:5).

❷ Without love, your ministry will be irrelevant (13:2)

- The “*gift of prophecy*” that could “*know all mysteries and all knowledge*” would be of spectacular benefit to the body. But what good would this gift be if it is exercised with a critical, harsh, and cantankerous spirit?

- The gift of faith that could exercise “*all faith so as to remove mountains*” would be an incredible blessing to growing the church’s ability to know and trust God who is able to do anything. But if love is lacking, Paul says hypothetically “*I am nothing*”. Not “*next to nothing*”, but “*nothing*” as someone insignificant, and worthless in the eyes of God).

③ Without love, your ministry will be inadequate (13:3)

- The gift of helps (12:28) is one of the most all-around beneficial gifts in the body of Christ. If it can be used to its highest potential level by giving up all possessions to feed the poor and surrendering one’s body “*to be burned*” or “*that I may boast*” (both are used in Greek manuscripts), that kind of sacrifice (martyrdom whether by burning or even driven by a self-serving motive) would be thought to immensely bless Christ’s body.
- But without love, this amazing gift would be unacceptable and be unproductive and inadequate for the person who exercises it for the body and before the Lord (“*it profits me nothing*”)

Lessons?

- Love is the bottom line and it honors God’s design, uses the gifted, and blesses the body.
- Love is what give our gifts value since they are designed to give the highest good for others.
- Love can’t be absent or it will reduce ministry down to a zero for you.