



## How Vital Love is to our Service (1 Corinthians 13:8-13)

- The virtue of God’s love (His divine gift) enables believers to give willfully, selflessly, generously, and sacrificially for the highest good of others regardless of their attractiveness, deserving or not, and even when it is not felt. This is the “*more excellent way*” of God’s love working in and through the body of Christ.
- The only way to truly experience God’s agape love is through a saving relationship with Jesus Christ (1 John 4:9-10). This means that all who follow Christ can do what the Lord expects you to do: “*love one another just as I have loved you*” (John 15:12)
- In chapter 13, Paul outlines three major statements about God’s love:
  - Love is an essential priority (v. 1-3)
  - Love is an edifying practice (v. 4-7)
  - Love has an enduring permanence (v. 8-13)
- In verses 8-13, Paul contrasts the temporary nature of spiritual gifts with the timeless nature of love. Vitally needed and God-given spiritual gifts won’t last, but God’s selfless love will. Paul compares and contrasts spiritual gifts and love in a way that dramatically reveals the enduring presence, permanence, and primacy of love.

### ① God’s love is indispensable (13:8a, 13)

- Paul bookends the timeless and crucial presence of love working in and through our lives.
- In verse 8a and 13, Paul communicates two important truths about love.
  - a) Love never stops existing (v. 8a: “*love never fails*”). The word Paul uses means to fall or fall down. In this context, Paul looks into the future at the end of all things and reveals how superior love is to spiritual gifts.
    - To fall is synonymous with the words “to do done away” (3x in v. 8, 10) and “to cease” (v. 8) and the word “abide” or “remain” (v. 13).
    - Love is eternal and spiritual gifts are temporary. Love doesn’t fall or fail because it is forever, but spiritual gifts will come to an end.
  - b) Love never stops excelling (v. 13).
 

The triad of faith, hope, and love appear ten times together in the New Testament (Rom. 5:1-5; Gal. 5:5-6; Col 1:4-5; 1 Th. 1:3; 5:8; Eph. 4:2-5; Titus 2:2; Heb. 6:10-12; 10:22-24; 1 Pet 1:3-9).

    - All three are the result of God’s work in the heart of the believer.
    - All three are a reminder of the nature of Christian maturity (1 Th. 1:3; 5:8; Col 1:4-5)
    - All three “*abide*” or “*remain*” as a reality that exist forever (found in heaven and on earth). Faith will be turned to sight, but on display in heaven (Eph. 2:7-9); hope will be realized through the promise kept (Rom. 8:24-25), but is seen in heaven (Col. 1:5), but “*the greatest of these is love*”
- Why is love “*the greatest of these*”?
  - Because God is love (1 Jn 4:8, 16)
  - Because without love, we wouldn’t have faith or hope (Jn 3:16; Rom 5:8; 1 Jn 4:9-10, 19)

- Because love has a wider application: faith and hope are both directed toward God alone, but love is first to God and then to others, including believers and unbelievers

## ② God's grace gifts are dispensable (13:8b-12)

- While love doesn't stop existing, spiritual gifts do. Paul makes four statements about the limitations of gifts in contrast to the limitless nature of love that "*never fails*".
  - a) Gifts are impermanent (v. 8b), but love is permanent and "*never fails*" (v. 8a). Gifts are temporary and cease at different times and by different means as indicated by the grammatical voice and action of what is called "*the perfect*" thing (v. 10).
    - Prophecy and knowledge "*will be done away*" (passive voice) when "*the perfect*" thing comes (v. 10). The perfect will act upon prophecy and knowledge to cause gifts to stop.
    - Tongues "*will cease*" (middle voice) and stop by themselves with nothing actin upon it to stop them.
  - b) Gifts are incomplete (v. 9-10), but love is always complete. Gifts are viewed as that which is "*partial*" as Paul points out four times (v. 9, 10, 12).
  - c) Gifts are immature (v. 11), but love is mature and makes ministry function like a responsible adult. Gifts a like a child that is immature, but will grow and become more mature, but not to the same level as love.
  - d) Gifts are in-between during the "*now*" time (v. 12: "*for now we see in a mirror dimly*"), but love functions "*then face to face*" when we "*will know fully*" and be "*fully known*".
- When does tongues cease? It appears that tongues toward the end of the first century, but why?
  - a) Because the purpose of tongues has been fulfilled. It's revelatory was fulfilled when the Scriptures were completed (Jude 3; Rev. 22:18-19), it's confirming purpose as a sign was completed for the apostles and prophets (Heb. 2:3-4; Eph. 2:20), it's validating purpose was fulfilled as God baptized the early believers with the evidence of speaking in tongues with the Jews (Acts 2), Samaritans (Acts 8), Gentiles (Acts 10-11) and the Ephesian disciples (Acts 19:6), it's judicial purpose to unbelieving Israel was fulfilled in 70AD when Jerusalem was destroyed and Judaism disrupted as Paul said fulfilled Isaiah 28:11 (1 Cor. 14:20-21).
  - b) Because tongues are left out of verse 9 (because they will have ceased) when Paul teaches on how prophecy and knowledge will be ended by the perfect in verse 10.
  - c) Because the testimony of history reveals tongues ceased (No mention of tongues after 57-58AD, the early church fathers either didn't list it with other gifts or said it had ceased, and the few times it appeared in the name of Christianity, it was connected to either heretics or groups outside the mainstream of Christianity before it allegedly showed up in 1901 in Kansas at Bethel Bible College, then move to Azusa street and Van Nuys in California in 1906 and spawned the Pentecostal and charismatic movement.
- What is "*the perfect*" thing that will act upon prophecy and knowledge (along with the rest of the gifts) to cause them to "*be done away*" (cease operating)? The word "*perfect*" (telion) means the state of being complete, fully developed, and without defect or blemish.
  - Some think it's the completed Scriptures of the Bible
  - Some think it's the snatching away (rapture) of the church
  - Some think it's the second coming of the church (after the tribulation)
  - Some think it's the full maturity of the church based upon v. 11.
  - Some think it's the eternal state when everyone is fully complete