

**TEXT- 1 Corinthians 12:31** *But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.*

**INTRO** – The book of First Corinthians was written by the Apostle Paul to correct a number of errors and problems within the church. The church was largely carnal which resulted in division. The primary issue was people were puffed up (proud) of their spiritual gifts they exhibited to show their spirituality while in reality they were carnal not spiritual. Chapter thirteen was written to teach them the most important aspects of spirituality centers on charity.

It is tragic when the world takes a chapter like this (as it does) and divorces it from its true Christian meaning. The unsaved man can no more experience this kind of love than can a marble statue! It takes the indwelling of the Spirit of God in the life, and the empowering of that Spirit, for anyone to display this kind of character in daily life.

Paul is still dealing with the question of spiritual gifts. Here he is emphasizing the fact that gifts without graces are nothing. The fruit of the Spirit ([Gal 5:22-23](#)) is more important in the Christian life than the miraculous gifts of the Spirit. Whenever the church strives for miraculous experiences rather than Christian holiness and character, there will be division, confusion, and carnality.

In the Greek language, there's a different word for each type of love.

- A. Storge: The relationship between the members of a family
- B. Philos: The relationship between friends
- C. Eros: The romantic relationship between a man and woman
- D. Agape: The relationship between Christ and his Church

Paul is talking about the fourth type of love which is “agape”. Interpreted charity. How does agape be different from storge, philos, and eros? In a nutshell storge, philos and eros are mostly to do with me while agape love is all about you! Paul showed us what this love is like?

### **I. Love Is Essential 1Cor 13:1-3**

The word “charity” means “love” in action. It is not simply an emotion; it is the heart reaching out to others. “Charity” today makes us think of giving away old clothes or making gifts to “charitable institutions.” These activities can be Christian love in action, but Paul is demanding much more. The word he uses for love is *agape*, which is love that sacrifices for the good of others. Notice how he takes up some of the spiritual gifts of [1Co 12:8-10](#) and shows their emptiness apart from love. Tongues apart from love become mere noise, like the clanging of a cymbal. Prophecy without love makes the prophet nothing. This application can also be made to knowledge (spiritual insight given immediately by the Spirit) and faith. Paul is not minimizing

these gifts; he is simply saying that they will have no good effect on the individual or on the church unless there is love in the life of the Christian in the exercise of his or her gifts. We might go so far as to sacrifice our body, but apart from love, this act would amount to nothing. Love is the measure of all things.

It is evident that the Corinthians were using their spiritual gifts and offices with an attitude of competition and not of love. The church was divided, and the situation was getting worse because the very spiritual gifts that were supposed to build the church were doing more harm than good! Preaching without love is just so much noise. Praying without love becomes an empty speech. Giving without love is just a ceremony. Is it any wonder that Christ asked Peter, “Do you love me?” ([Joh 21:17](#))

**Love is the rod for measuring spiritual maturity**

### **II. Love Is Effectual 1Cor 13:4-7**

Gifts have no spiritual effect on the life of the church if there is no love, for it is love that the Spirit uses to build the church. “Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up,” says **1 Corinthians 8:1** *Now as touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth.*

- **Note the qualities of love:**

#### **A. Love is patient and kind vs. 4**

Love rises above petty things and is generous in the way it treats others. It is easy to “love” when people are lovable; how difficult it is to love when they injure or attack us in one way or another. Think of Christ’s patience with Peter after the times Peter sinned against Him, and you have some idea of what this means. Love not only patiently bears with wrongs, but it positively acts in deeds of kindness.

#### **B. Love never simmers with jealousy vs. 4**

Envy is a terrible sin; Cain envied his brother and killed him! How do we react when other Christians receive blessings or benefits that we lack? Do we allow the sparks of envy to burn and then come to a full flame?

#### **C. Love is not boastful or proud vs. 4**

“Puffed up” refers to the inward feeling; “vaunteth” refers to the outward displays of self-importance.

#### **D. Love is not rude or self-seeking vs. 5**

There is a graciousness about the person who acts from Christian love, a charm that the world cannot give. True love seeks only the good of others; it is unselfish. Can you see this love displayed in Christ’s life?

#### **E. Love is not provoked, nor does it harbor evil thoughts vs. 5**

The word “easily” does not belong here. Christian love shows no irritation, as the flesh too often does. Love does not keep account books of the evil

things people do, or the hurts received from them. In fact, love is never glad when others get involved in evil, but love is always glad when others are walking in the truth.

#### **F. Love gives victory vs. 7**

Through Christ's love in us, we can bear up under anything, have faith, and continue in hope. "It gives us power to endure in anything" 1Co 13:7, (WMS). Love always leads to victory!

In these verses, Paul gently rebuked the sins of the Corinthians. They did not have patience with each other in the assembly (1Co 14:29-32); they envied the spiritual gifts others possessed (1Co 14:1); they were proud and critical (1Co 12:21-26); they did not have modesty or grace in their behavior (1Co 12:2-16); they sought to uphold their own rights (chaps. 8-10) even if it hurt others; they were easily provoked, and even sued one another (1Co 6:1-8); and they rejoiced at sin when they should have judged it (1Co 5:1-13). We can also see in these verses a picture of Christ who alone perfectly manifests the love of God to us. We can substitute the word "Christ" for "charity" in this chapter.

### **III. Love Is Eternal 1Cor 13:8-13**

The Corinthians were spiritual babies, and, like babies, they were striving for the temporary and neglecting the permanent. They wanted passing spiritual gifts instead of lasting Christian character. Love will never "fail" (cease to have force or authority). These other gifts will pass away; prophetic utterances would be replaced by the written Word of God; tongues would no longer be needed; gifts of special knowledge would be put aside for the teaching ministry of the Spirit from the Word. But love, and the graces it produces, will last forever.

Paul explains that these special gifts were necessary during the infancy period of the church. Special manifestations of the Spirit were the credentials of the apostles (Rom 15:18-19). God did not always use miracles to attest His truth, but often He did. In Thessalonica, for example, the Spirit revealed Himself in the mighty preaching of the Word, and not in miracles (1Th 1:5-6). In 1Co 13:11, Paul uses a simple example from childhood. We do not condemn a child because he talks like a child, but we do condemn an adult for using baby talk. "It is time," says the apostle, "for you babies to grow up and start talking like adults! Tongues and other special manifestations belong to spiritual childhood. Grow up!" Paul in 1Co 14:20 again tells them to quit acting like children.

There will always be room for growth in the church, and while we are growing, we will know and see imperfectly. Corinth was famous for its metal mirrors, so Paul used that as an illustration. One saw only a dim reflection of the real person in those mirrors, just as we see only a dim reflection of God

today. But when Christ comes, we shall know Him as we are known by Him! And we shall be like Him!

The church grows closer to perfection through love: believers loving Christ and one another; holding the truth in love; practicing the truth because they love Him. "Building the body up in love" is the way Eph 4:16 puts it, and this is a ministry all of us share.

Faith, hope, love — these abide forever; and love is the greatest, for "God is love" (1Jn 3:18).

**CONCL – Love is the noblest of sacrifices we can offer**

Are you committed to walking in "The More Excellent Way of Love?"