

Some Gifts End, But Love Never Ends (1 Corinthians 13:8-13)

Please turn in your Bibles to 1 Cor 13 and this evening we come to the end of this love chapter, and our series comes to an end, but the point of this last section is that true love never comes to an end. There's a sense in which this study we've been doing on Sunday nights is to never end, our pursuit of love is a never ending pursuit, because 1 Cor 13:8 says '*Love never ends*' then at the end of this chapter, Paul continues in 14:1 '*Pursue love...*' This is about God's love, I've called it 'the love of Christ chapter,' but it's to be applied by us and pursued by us. God's love never ends and so that love inside us is to never end, but we have to pursue it and keep pursuing it (present tense verb)

I've been so blessed and refreshed by this study on Sunday evenings and I want to publically thank all the men for their labors of love to help pursue love which we all need. They've all been good and especially the last few messages have encouraged my heart, and so part of me wants this to never end. And there's a sense in which God wants it to never end, that's why He speaks of a kind of love that never ends and calls for never-ending pursuit of it. The goal of this chapter isn't just educational doctrine, it's our earnest desire to show God's love in action. That's Paul's goal in introducing this. Right before chapter 13, Paul tells the Corinthians in 12:31: *But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.* Paul then gives a whole chapter talking about the gift of love that is higher and greater and best of all. May God help us desire and pursue love unendingly

1 Corinthians 13: *If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.² And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.³ If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.⁴ Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.⁸ Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part,¹⁰ but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways.¹² For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.*

So now faith, hope, and love abide, these 3; but the greatest of these is love.

Our outline will be these 3 points:

1. Some gifts end
2. God's gift of love never ends
3. We must pursue never-ending love

First, Some Gifts End

⁸ *Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, [both are gifts in ch 12] they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.*

I don't want to spend too much time on this point for the purpose of tonight but there's no end to views of what people have written on the subject. And as Solomon said, of making books on this there is no end. Love never ends, but certain gifts would end because they had a limited lifespan and purpose. Before the full NT, prophecy declared the truth, gift of knowledge applied it

Look at 14:22 for what the purpose of tongues was: *Thus tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers...* The purpose of tongues was a sign, it was to show something, and Paul says the purpose was for unbelievers. The proof Paul just gave is in v. 21 from the OT, where *'it is written, "By people of strange tongues and by the lips of foreigners will I speak to this people, and even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord."* When you study the OT prophecy specifically it's a sign to unbelieving Jews who didn't listen to the message from God's spokesmen. The OT prophesied God would speak to His people Israel through other foreign tongues, but because they rejected the miracles and message of God, judgment from invading foreigners would come to destroy Jerusalem. As Pentecost came with miraculous languages when Galilean Jews spoke to all the language groups of Jews there, it was a sign to unbelieving Jews: if they wouldn't listen Jerusalem would be judged by foreign invading armies. Paul wrote of the purpose of tongues in 50s AD and foreign-speaking Romans destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD. The purpose in v. 21 ended, suggesting why 13:8 says tongues would end (verb matches)

[you don't need a sign of where you're going when you've arrived]

Think of signs on the freeway that show something is coming. After you get there and keep going you don't see signs for what's already past. Tongues is called a sign, it warned of the judgment coming in 70 AD and signaled that God was moving from Israel to the world. Its purpose ceased so it ceased. It also ceases from the pages of the NT after 1 Cor 12-14 and disappears from church history for 1800 years. When did tongues cease as v. 8 said? Church history gives the answer. In 96 AD Clement wrote 65 chapters to Corinth's church, no mention of tongues. Modern claims of it don't match up Acts 2.

Mark's gospel calls tongues a sign along with picking up poisonous snakes, but almost all charismatics recognize that gift or power to not die if a snake bites you isn't something we're to expect today (and those who try often die tragically). And most charismatics also recognize the gift of *apostle of Jesus* isn't for today, it was limited to a few in the NT church. In 9:1 Paul defends his apostleship with '*Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?*'

In 2 Cor 12:12, Paul tells the Corinthians that his miraculous abilities were signs associated with the apostles, gifts proving Paul had the gift of apostle: *The things that mark an apostle—signs, wonders and miracles—were done among you...* (NIV). Those who had the gift of apostle were a select few who saw Jesus and did miracles that marked the true apostles as opposed to false apostles (the context of 2 Cor 12). The apostle's miracles and wonders were signs, it says. In Acts miraculous gifts came through apostles and men connected to the apostles as signs that they were of Jesus as they wrote NT. 1 Cor 12:1 begins by introducing this whole section as '*concerning spiritual gifts.*' In 12:28 there was an order to the gifts: *And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues ...*³¹ *But earnestly desire the higher [or greater] gifts.* Then Paul shows the most excellent gift or way in chapter 13 by showing the inadequacy of tongues in v. 1 or prophecy and supernatural knowledge in v. 2 without love, and in v. 8 he says those gifts will cease or pass away, while other gifts remain, v. 13. Apostles are listed with gifts here and Eph 4:7, 11. Apostles were gifts that were limited to NT times and other gifts were linked to the gift of an apostle

I believe when the gift of apostle ended as they founded the NT, the related miraculous gifts that were signs of apostles also ended, like prophecy in the new revelation sense or the sense of predicting the future. Eph 3:6 says the apostles and prophets were those who wrote the NT, and Eph 2:20 says they were the foundation level of the church. NT Apostles and prophets laid the 1st century foundation for the church. A foundation is once for all, it's not to be repeated. You don't re-lay a foundation on the 20th story of a building, so it doesn't work and isn't necessary to have 20th century apostles or prophets.

[they were needed to found the early church before it had the NT]

In the 50s AD with only partial NT Paul wrote 13:9: *we know in part and we prophesy in part,*¹⁰ *but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.* That word perfect is usually translated 'mature' so some think as the early church matured that prophecy was no longer needed. In Eph 4:11-15 Paul also starts with prophets and moves from church infancy to maturity in love.

¹¹ *When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man [maturity came], I gave up childish ways*
[again you could compare that to Eph 4:11-15 for the maturity view]

It could also be that v. 10 is talking about when the perfect complete NT is come, then the incomplete knowledge and prophecy would pass away. The Corinthians as v. 12 says saw some of the biblical picture as ancient mirrors of polished metal, but in the complete NT it's as clear as seeing the face of our friend, we see a sufficient picture of Jesus as friend of sinners. We now have the full knowledge of God available as fully as others could know Paul
[v. 12 doesn't mention God, it may be an analogy on human level]

James was one of the few NT books the Corinthians could have known, and it uses this same image of a *mirror* for the Scripture that it calls *perfect*, and it says when we *see our face* intently in it we can have *full knowledge* of what kind of *man* we are (same key words as here). 'Face to face' was used for when God gave the OT Scripture to His people through Moses (Dt 5:4). Paul in 2 Cor talks about seeing Christ in the NT as a mirror and clear face: *unlike Moses, who put a veil over his face so that ... Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away ... we all, with **unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord** [i.e. the NT, 2 Cor 3:13, 18]*
[2 Cor 4 says in the gospel we see 'the face of Christ' and knowledge of God]

Others think 1 Cor 13:12 refers to heaven or the eternal state when we see Jesus literally face to face. Some define prophecy as proclaiming what God already revealed, which continues in that sense, but it's not new revelation. The book of Revelation was the last biblical prophecy of the future, but the word prophecy doesn't always mean foretelling, it can mean forth-telling or telling forth what God already revealed, applying it by a gift of knowledge. In that sense, preaching and knowledge that wasn't miraculous or revelation do continue to the end, miraculous revelatory gifts ended as Revelation ends

Some gifts end (point #1) but main point #2 is God's gift of love never ends
v. 8 KJV: *Love never fails. But whether there be prophecies, they will fail.*
One translation of v. 7 has: *Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.* ⁸ *Prophecy and speaking in unknown languages and special knowledge will become useless. But love will last forever!* (NLT, v. 13 says faith and hope with love outlast others)

Hope is something God gives us, faith is one of the gifts of the Spirit in 12:9 and so if you compare 12:9 with 13:13, faith is one of the gifts that remain. Some gifts abide, or keep living. Others in v. 8 were to die out in contrast to this love that never dies. Some gifts end, but God's gift of love never ends.

Prophecies cease, but love won't cease. The gift of tongues came to a stop, but God gives us love that never stops. The implication of v. 13 and v. 8 is that some gifts had an end, but gifts like faith and love remain until the end

- once we see Jesus and are with Jesus, we won't need faith, as faith will be sight (2 Cor 5:7) and I won't need hope when it's all fulfilled
- in v. 13 faith and hope that continue with love are future-looking till Jesus returns. They continue to the end of the age but revelatory miraculous gifts I believe were not to remain till the end of the age
- I do believe God can and does miracles, but *men working miracles like we saw in the days of the apostles* had a limited specific purpose [tongues in v. 8 was for the early church, v. 13 is for every church]

Some gifts end, God's gift of love doesn't. Ps 136 *His love endures forever.* Ps 103:17: *the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting.* It's the never-ending love of Jer 31:3: *I loved you with an everlasting love.* Or in Lam. 3 *'love of the Lord never ceases, mercies never come to an end.'* 1 Cor 13:8 ESV: *Love never ends.* v. 1-7 can be outlined as the preeminence of love (it's importance, what it is and isn't), v. 8-13 covers the permanence of love. In v. 13 love is part of what abides or remains, unlike some gifts, so it ends where v. 8 begins, love never ends, love remains but other things end

So the bookends and big idea of v. 8-13 is love is permanent, unlike certain gifts that were temporary. Some versions of v. 8 say love *never fails*. Earlier in chapter 10 Paul used this Greek word for OT believers who fell in death, who died out in the wilderness (10:8), and he also used it for falling beyond recovery (Rom 11:11 NIV). Hebrews uses it for the fall of Jericho's walls as they came to an end and had no more purpose, and also for bodies dying out of lives that ended (Heb 11:30, 3:17). It's used in Acts when Ananias and Sapphira fell in death (Acts 5:5, 10) and Jesus used it for a grain of wheat falling to the ground and dying (Jn 12:24). God's love will never do that, it will never fall like a leaf to the ground that withers, His love won't die out.

[men with miracle-working powers died out, but God's love won't]

Which takes us to our last point: We Must Pursue Unending Love

1 Cor 14:1: *'Pursue love.'* NIV: *'Follow the way of love.'* NLT: *'Let love be your highest goal.'* An expanded Greek translation: *'Be constantly pursuing this love, earnestly endeavoring to acquire it.'* One paraphrases *'Go after a life of love as if your life depended on it.'* This word means to chase or hunt after love, like Saul of Tarsus once chased down Christians. It's translated seek to or practice (Rom 12:13). Paul also uses it for pressing forward to the finish mark as an Olympic runner. It starts with wholehearted love to Jesus. Eph 6:24 NIV *Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus...with an undying love.*

Go to 1 Cor 16 where we see both loving the Lord and loving our neighbor:
²² *If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed.* [love for the Lord is where it starts, it marks believers]...¹⁴ *Let all that you do be done in love.*
 Jesus summed up the whole point of the Bible as loving the Lord with all in us, and loving all people God puts in my path (neighbors) like I love myself

How do we pursue unending love? There's an endless supply of application in chapter 13: love is patient (a patience that never ends), love is kind (never ending kindness). Take any aspect of that passage and pursue it, never give up, excel still more. Pursue love by pursuing people who are hard to love, show them unceasing kindness, God's unlimited patience. If we know the love of God who does all of 1 Cor 13 for us in Christ His love in us can bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, endure all things and never end

Rom 12 just a few pages back shows us how that can look very practically:
¹⁰ *Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor...*¹³ *Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality* [lit. love of strangers, it must be shown and in v. 20 love shown to enemies, not just needs of saints, feeding hungry enemies, meeting needs of enemies]

How is that possible? Remember Rom. 5, we were God's enemies, *but God* showed unending love to us in Christ. Remember the love Rom 8 ends with: *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ...I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

God's unending love in Rom 8 empowers our love in Rom 12 to keep going

When we have exhausted our store of endurance,

When our strength has **failed** ere the day is half done ...

Lean hard on the arm **everlasting**, availing...Our Father's full giving is only begun ...

His love has no limits, His grace has no measure, His power no boundary known unto men;

For out of His infinite riches in Jesus He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again.

George Matheson was able to pursue unending love even when his eyesight came to an end. He was engaged to be married but when his fiancée found out about that he was gonna be blind, her love for him ended. She broke off her engagement. But he trusted in the love of Christ from 1 Cor 13:8, a love that never ends. He continued to pursue love despite his handicap and pain, he kept abiding in faith, hope, and love; he became a blessed beloved pastor

He wrote when he was alone and his sister married ‘Something happened to me, which was known only to myself, and which caused me the most severe mental suffering. The hymn was the fruit of that suffering. It was the quickest bit of work I ever did in my life...the whole work was completed in five minutes...never ...any retouching or correction...this came like a dayspring from on high.’ Some think he was thinking back on his fiancée’s love that abandoned him when he wrote: O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go

O light that followest all my way, I yield my flickering torch [going blind?] to thee;
 My heart restores its borrowed ray, That in thy sunshine’s blaze its day
 May brighter, fairer be.

O Joy that seekest me through pain, I cannot close my heart to thee;
 I trace the rainbow through the rain, And feel the promise is not vain,
 That morn shall tearless be.

O Cross that liftest up my head, I dare not ask to fly from thee;
 I lay in dust life’s glory dead, And from the ground there blossoms red
 Life that shall endless be.

God’s love never ends, so let’s never end in our pursuing love together, and when human love fails and feelings go, trust His love that will not let us go.