

- I. Introduction
- II. The first and final word
 - A. Verse 12:31b
 - 1. "And I will show you a still more excellent way."
 - 2. Paul is about to reveal something that is more important than anything he's just talked about. In fact, it is the thing that brings the content of this entire letter together.
 - B. The preeminence of love (verses 1-3)
 - 1. Love is the quality control/mark/stamp on everything we do as we follow Jesus Christ.
 - a. Greatest command: love God, love others (Love God first because only in Him can pure love flow outward. Loving Him as He loves us determines the kind of love we love others with.)
 - b. When we grow in this love, it is the Holy Spirit reproducing the character of Christ in us.
 - 2. The prerequisite of love
 - a. Communication without love is a useless thing (tongues).
 - b. The power to know and do without love is also useless (prophecy, knowledge, and faith).
 - c. Self-sacrifice without love is a waste of effort (give away, body burned).

*The absence of love in my endeavors means that I am changed for the worse - I have become hollow. Love defines my actions.

- C. The practice of love (verses 4-7)

- 1. Love defined
 - a. Patient: "a great suffering"; enduring some suffering in order to let another have a chance to work out their problem
 - b. Kind: gracious; pleasant to others; does good
 - c. Honest: willing to hear and speak truth; not afraid or self-protective; accepts truth; keeps it pure and exults in all its triumphs

*This is the love that God so loved the world with: He recognized the truth of the human condition and, with great kindness, sacrificed His Son and suffers long (is patient) for us to respond to His pursuit. That is the love we've been loved with and the love we are called to love with.

- 2. The hurdles to loving
 - a. Envy: spiteful and short with others

- b. Boastful: cannot wait to listen to others, needs to be celebrated and heard over others
- c. Arrogance: self-obsessed, disdain, lack of respect for others
- d. Rude: ignoring others' rights, "puffed up", sarcasm
- e. Own way: stubborn, inflexible, everyone adjust, smartest one in the room
- f. Irritable: easily annoyed, contentious, impatient
- g. Resentful: suspicious, retaining vivid memory of wrongs done
- h. Rejoice in wrong: celebrating sin and its consequence in the lives of others
 - "They got what they deserve," very different from justice

*God is ready to love through us if we are ready to reject our insecurity, the negative expression that we enjoy experiencing. Each of these hurdles bring attention to us and seek our own glory at the expense of others.

3. Love's choice (verse 7)

- a. Bears all: endures wrongs and evils and covers in a respectful way, doesn't share to injure
- b. Believes all: not gullible but believes what is possibly believable, willing to start over, grants another chance
- c. Hopes all: there is always a place to start again, doesn't give in to darkness
- d. Endures all: it never quits

D. The preeminence of love (verses 8-13)

1. 8a: never ends

- a. Meaning "falls away" like the petals of a flower
- b. It is never used up, love keeps coming. The more you use it, the more there is.

*As followers of Christ we are called to love liberally and generously because there is no limit to its abundance.

2. Love vs spiritual gifts

- a. Church at Corinth, as we know, struggled with unity, purity, and their use of freedom. Summarized, they struggled with loving one another.
- b. People were making a big deal about their gifts. Three favorites:
 - 1) Prophecy: making clear God's word for the Gospel community
 - 2) Tongues: spontaneous utterance of a language never learned
 - 3) Knowledge: grasping biblical truth and systematizing in a way to better know it

*Even the most sought-after gifts in the church at Corinth expire. Love doesn't.

3. Love is the mark of one who has matured in Christ - when we love we must accurately reflect the character of God (verses 9-12)

- a. Child: immature, limited viewpoint and experience
- b. Adult: mature, larger viewpoint, and greater experience

- c. Mirror = silver or polished metal giving a distorted and dimmed reflected image

*In this life we are limited in our experience of love and our expression of love. One day, we will comprehend fully how loved we have always been by God.

4. Final word (verse 13)

a. "So now"; "abide"

- 1) Logical conclusion to all Paul has said, not now as in temporal
- 2) Fundamental and permanent, not transient like the gifts

b. These three ...

- 1) Faith: human response to divine provision; we are eternally responding to what God has given and keeps giving us
- 2) Hope: both as an expectation of what is get to come and an anchor for all eternity
- 3) Love: God is love, God is not faith or hope. To achieve love is to become like God.

III. Challenge

A. Evaluate

- 1. How have I experienced love? How do I define love from my experience?
- 2. What is the experience of love others have through me?

B. Take action

- 1. How do I grow in patience, kindness, and honesty? Process one way that will move you forward for each characteristic.
- 2. Choose one hurdle that you will work on to overcome that decreases the quality of your love for others.



GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER (USE JUST ONE OR ALL OF THESE QUESTIONS TO CONNECT AS YOU START YOUR CONVERSATION)

- 1** Name three ways you have heard the word “love” used in the past week. What do those uses of the word reveal about the way people typically view love?
- 2** How might our culture define love differently than God?

We are a world in love with being in love. We use the word about food, sports, entertainment, and people. But where our culture sees mere affection, God sees something different. Love is the defining mark of the Christian. In the context of 1 Corinthians 13, Paul helps us see the nature of true love and shows us that no matter how gifted people are, their impact is minimal without love.

QUICK REVIEW (OPPORTUNITY FOR PEOPLE TO SHARE WHAT MOST STOOD OUT FROM SUNDAY’S MESSAGE)

Looking back at your notes from this week’s teaching, was there anything you heard for the first time or that caught your attention, encouraged, challenged, or confused you?

DIG DEEPER (OBSERVATIONS FROM THE SCRIPTURE OR COMPLEMENTARY SCRIPTURES FROM SUNDAY’S MESSAGE)

- 1** Someone read **1 Corinthians 13:1-3**

¹ 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.

What metaphors did Paul give for using spiritual gifts without love? Which stands out to you the most? Why?

How would the exercise of spiritual gifts differ with or without God’s love flowing through us?

No matter how impressive a spiritual gift may appear, no matter how dedicated a religious act may be, the absence of genuine love renders these actions meaningless. The Corinthians may have felt like Paul was going too far. Paul, however, wanted the church to know that everything they did should come out of love. Greatness without love is at best annoying like a clanging cymbal and at worst completely meaningless.

- 2** Someone read **1 Corinthians 13:4-7**

⁴ Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵ 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.

Which of these qualities of love is the easiest for you to apply in relationships with others at church? Which is the most difficult?

Read Ephesians 5:2. How did Paul define and understand love in this passage? Why must a person know the work of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection to love?

Paul is not talking about an emotional love. The kind of love he described here is above emotion; it's self-sacrificing for the sake of another. These 15 qualities describe loving others, even when doing so is difficult. Of course, that is when love is most needed. If we love only those who measure up to our standards or who never pose any challenge, then is that really love? This is the kind of love that you can only truly see in Christ. It's only through experiencing the self-sacrificial love of Jesus that we can truly love others. In the final set of verses in this chapter (vs. 8-13), Paul contrasted love's permanence and eternal presence with the temporary things of this world.

3 Someone read **1 Corinthians 13:8-13**

⁸Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. ¹¹When 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. ¹²For 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. ¹³So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

In vs. 8-13, Paul summarizes how important love truly is. Compared with love, why do spiritual gifts have limited value?

Why is love greater than faith and hope? What will happen to our faith and hope when Christ returns? What will happen to love?

Love will never end as we love God and love others. This type of love can play out practically in our relationships. Loving God and others is far more than head knowledge. No real transformation in our church occurs without love being at the center of it. Paul's words are clear that anything we do apart from love will pass away. When we embrace the truth that love is permanent, then we will show it consistently to others, and it will be a defining aspect of our character.

LIVE IT OUT (DISCUSS HOW YOU CAN LIVE OUT THE TRUTHS YOU JUST OBSERVED IN SCRIPTURE)

1 In what ways have you seen people interrupt their normal routine to take action on behalf of another person? Which people or groups do you find difficult to love? Why?

2 How can you grow in patience, kindness, and honesty? Process one way that will move you forward for each characteristic.

3 What is one barrier that you will begin working to overcome that decreases the quality of your love for others?

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

4 Examine yourself this week with these questions. Ask God to help you make a change where change is needed.

- How have I experienced love? How do I define love from my experience?
- What is the experience of love others have through me?

CLOSING PRAYER

Thank God for showing us the nature of true love in Jesus. Ask Him to help your group remember the central place of love in your lives and our church, and to never allow a focus on spiritual giftedness to take the place of genuine love.

NEXT WEEK'S MESSAGE SCRIPTURE

COMMUNITY WEEK

With next Sunday being Baptism Sunday, next week would be a great opportunity to connect on more of a relational level. Check out the attached Community Week instructions, but feel free to eat a meal together, go do something as a group or just take more time to check in and pray for each other. It's totally up to you! **Call or email your coach or the church office (homegroups@cpmodesto.org | 209-521-0181) if you have any questions!**

PRAISE/PRAYER REQUESTS (TRY TO HAVE ONE OR A FEW PEOPLE PRAY FOR ONE TOPIC AT A TIME)

Use this space or the back of this paper to record the requests and find a way to share those with the group so you can be praying for each other during the week.

How to Use this Discussion Guide

The guide is meant to serve you and your group as you intentionally create a healthy environment for Gospel community, growing in friendship, and living like Jesus together. Use the guide as a tool to help your unique group.

With that in mind, please review the guide before your group meets to see if some content or questions might resonate more or less with your group. Don't feel pressure to read all the content during your group discussion or to hit on all the questions. The guide is not meant to be something you power through for the sake of completing. Pick the content from the guide you feel will help your grow in Gospel community.

In addition, spend some time praying for your group each week, preparing your heart, and asking God for wisdom and guidance as you lead. We are praying for you too!

Visit cpmodesto.org/groupleaders to download the sermon discussion guide every week. Not in a Home Group, but want to be in one? Visit cpmodesto.org/homegroups and use the Home Group Finder!

COMMENTARY FOR 1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-13

13:1. In this section, Paul focused on some of the spiritual gifts the Corinthians especially valued. In each case he demonstrated that without love these spiritual gifts were meaningless. His first example was human or angelic languages or tongues. Steeped as they were in Greco-Roman culture, the Corinthian church members valued highly the art of rhetoric. Apparently, they judged their preachers at least in part on how well they could speak publicly (see 2 Cor. 10:10). However, Paul pointed out that excellent speech without love was nothing more than empty noise.

13:2. Four other spiritual gifts come under scrutiny in this verse. We know from 14:1-5 that Paul highly valued the gift of prophecy and urged the Corinthian Christians to desire this gift above all others. This gift consisted of the clear proclamation of the Gospel and may also have included at times the element of foretelling God's ways. Without being motivated by and directed by Christlike love, exercising spiritual gifts comes up empty!

13:3. Extravagant sacrificial acts are Paul's next two examples. Jesus' command to the rich young ruler (see Luke 18:22) was at the heart of Paul's reference to give all he possessed to the poor. To give one's body to hardship may point to a believer's martyrdom for the faith. In any case, Paul was emphasizing out that even extreme acts of self-sacrifice gain nothing if those doing the acts are not driven by agape-love.

13:4. The Greek word for "patient" literally means "to be long [that is, slow] to anger." Generally speaking, the term refers to the patience we need to have with people as opposed to endurance in difficult circumstances. The word for "kind" refers to an active quality in which we look for opportunities to act with helpful intentions toward others. This is the quality of love in which we seek to do good to others. We derive the English word "zealous" from the Greek term for envy. This word is sometimes used in a positive sense, for we can be appropriately passionate about many good causes. In this case, however, the term refers to a negative desire for gain or jealousy that another person received gain. To be boastful refers to a tendency to call attention to one's accomplishments or abilities for selfish reasons. Paul saw this tendency as a particular problem among the Corinthian church members. He included the synonymous term "conceited." This word literally means "to be puffed up" and serves as an apt illustration of the inflated egos of some of the Corinthians. Paul insisted that Christlike love displays neither of these tendencies.

13:5. The phrase "not dishonor others" can be literally translated as "not behave against the scheme." The phrase refers to God giving His people a certain pattern of behavior to follow. Those who are guided by agape-love strive to avoid acting in ways that are inconsistent with that God-given pattern. The phrase "is not self-seeking" literally means "does not seek its own." Again, Paul's emphasis was on avoiding any behavior that constantly puts one's own desires and preferences above the needs of others. Selfish behavior was at the root of many problems in the Corinthian church. Selfless love was the solution.

13:6-7. The Corinthians would have recognized these faults as taking place among them. Contrary to common perception, love is not marked by tolerance for error. Love endures in this age with a sure expectation of better things to come in the next.

13:8. Paul contrasted love's permanence and eternal impact with the temporal nature of spiritual gifts. This verse serves as a kind of thematic parenthesis with the beginning section in which Paul also used the examples of prophecies, tongues, and knowledge. By emphasizing that love never fails, Paul highlighted that loving God and loving one another are two things Christians do that extend even into eternity. Active expressions of love are the substance of the "treasures in Heaven" that Jesus taught His followers to store up (see Matt. 6:20).

13:9. The Corinthians, who put great stock in their knowledge and worldly wisdom, may have been particularly stung by Paul's assertion that they only know in part. It can sting us today as well if we put too high a value on our human abilities. Whether it be preaching in a worship service or teaching the Scriptures in a Bible study group, we are to

humbly acknowledge that we have limited knowledge and thus we prophesy in part. One day the spiritual gifts of preaching and teaching will no longer be necessary. However, this cannot be said for love. Love will always be needed, and love will endure eternally as the bond of believers' relationship with God and with one another.

13:10. Where we are going in the future should shape the way we live in the present. In the future completeness comes; Christ will return and set things right. The prayer "Your will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven" (Matt. 6:10) will be a reality. At that time, God's people will know without doubt that love is the enduring quality. That certainty—when all believers will be fully cloaked in God's love—should lead us to express love today to people in our churches.

13:11. Paul included another gentle but firm rebuke of the Corinthians' immaturity by using an illustration that showed their fascination with spiritual gifts was childish. Continuing to act like a child acts once a person becomes an adult is one of the saddest and most embarrassing forms of immaturity. Refusing to express love in a church is equally childish.

13:12. The making of mirrors was a significant industry in first-century Corinth. People worldwide prized owning a Corinthian mirror. However, these ancient mirrors were not made of the materials used today. Rather, they were made of polished metal. At best, the reflections seen in these mirrors would be somewhat distorted or incomplete. Paul used the analogy of a mirror to explain that presently we cannot know everything there is to know about God and His purposes. We can understand many things; in Christ, we can know God in a saving relationship and can understand His expectations for us. Nevertheless, we yet see God as only a reflection. One day, however, Christ will return and His saving work will be complete. That we are fully known by God and yet fully loved by Him should drive us to our knees in gratitude. When we know fully, we will be able to express love as we always should have demonstrated it.

13:13. Some Bible interpreters have puzzled over Paul's selection of these three that remain without reaching a conclusion as to why he chose only three and why these three. Faith, hope, and love certainly can be viewed as three of the greatest words in the Bible. My own conclusion is that Paul was emphasizing the value of faith as the means of relating to God and hope as the confidence we have in God. These two qualities are great and abiding, and yet love is the greatest.

COMMUNITY WEEK – Week of 3/17

Community is so much more than regular meetings. We describe Gospel community as the natural result that occurs when a group of people live with Jesus first before everything else. People who live in Gospel community put Jesus first, seek to be transformed to live more like Jesus and meet one another's needs. Home groups, who enjoy Gospel community, can honestly say that they have shared laughter and tears.

This kind of community seldom happens if the only time a group gets together is for group meetings. Changing the focus of the gathering from time to time or doing something away from their regular group meeting are essential if the group is going to grow in relationship together.

The following are a list of options that may be helpful to you and your group as you brainstorm ideas of things you can do together.

- ⊙ Have a Jesus & Bible-centered discussion around a topic that is relevant to everyone in your group.
- ⊙ Have everyone bring something they can share with the group that night: Scripture they have read that has challenged or encouraged them, a song, food, a gift, etc.
- ⊙ Host a potluck, and maybe include the kids too!
- ⊙ Have group members open their homes for a progressive dinner.
- ⊙ Host a game night, playing party or board games together.
- ⊙ Gather around a bonfire for smores or snacks, and conversation.
- ⊙ Go out to eat together at a local restaurant.
- ⊙ Go bowling together at a local bowling alley.

This list could keep going, but you know your group better than anyone else. Before your group wraps up this week, talk about what you want to do together.

We would love to hear your experiences. What are some things your group has done that aren't listed? Email us – homegroups@cpmodesto.org.