

1 CORINTHIANS 13 DEVOTIONAL

HIS LOVE NEVER FAILS

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love
never fails



Overview

Jesus said to his disciples, “I love you...and because I love you I want you to love one another as I’ve loved you.” John 13:34 And what exactly would that look like? Let’s read and meditate on 1 Corinthians 13 together and, by the Spirit, find out.

1 Corinthians 13

The Way of Love

[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.

[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.

[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.

[13] So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love. (ESV)



DAY ONE

1 CORINTHIANS 13:1

1 Corinthians 13:1 “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging symbol.”

In the beginning of the church, Christians took up the Greek word Agape to describe the love of God in and through Christ. Love was more than a feeling. It was not just an emotion. And it wasn't just a warm interest in another. Love was Jesus on the cross...love was Jesus sacrificially giving his life away for sinners...for the utterly unworthy. Agape came to mean a love lavished upon others without a thought of whether they deserved it or not. And that was exactly what Jesus did when He gave His life for you and me at the cross 2000 years ago...a sacrifice...a gift of immeasurable value...without expecting anything in return...Agape love / Eternal life!

The apostle Paul was saved and transformed by that love of Christ. And thus he began to see people differently. He began to see people as the object of God's love. And therefore people became the object of his love too. Paul's thinking process became “If Jesus loved me sacrificially, then I must love others in that same way...beginning with my brothers and sisters in Christ.

Paul believed that speaking in the different languages of men from around the world was a valuable gift from God. He apparently knew and communicated in more languages than just Greek and Hebrew. But Paul was Holy Spirit convinced that all of his verbal skills for spreading the gospel were only valuable to God's purposes if they were motivated and generated by Agape Love...Christ's selfless life of love for his own.

Notice with me the words noisy gong and clanging cymbal. These words described a processional of worship that took place through the streets of Corinth often. The church members that Paul was writing to would immediately see and hear a connection to the false worship of Dionisius. Paul was comparing Christian worship without the life of love to pagan worship.

Oh how serious it was to “have not love”. Spiritual gifts could not operate in the church community as God designed where there was not love. And spiritual worship could not take place in the church as God desired where there was not love.

PRAYER

“Father, work your perfect work of love in our lives and in our church family. We surrender ourselves to the Agape Love of Jesus...no more prideful attitudes about our gifts and ministries...only humility and gratefulness...and no more pretending to worship our Lord on Sundays while we still harbor an unforgiving / bitter spirit toward a fellow believer in Christ...only forgiveness and giving ourselves away to serve others. Thanks, Father...Love you too.”



DAY TWO

1 CORINTHIANS 13:2

“And if I have prophetic powers...and if I understand all mysteries...and if I have all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing.”

In the beginning of chapter 14 of this letter, Paul speaks of the gift of prophesy. He elevates prophesy above every gift. Why? Perhaps because the Spirit used prophets to speak the messages of God to people so that they could understand God's words. But here, Paul puts the gift of prophesy and himself as a prophet in their proper place. The apostle, one more time, raised the priority of loving people above every gift operating in the church. He was saying that without love the prophet was nothing. Wow.

And then Paul continues to make his case. He writes with hyperbolic imagination again...he describes ultimate human mental faculties...

“having understanding of all mysteries and having all the knowledge accumulated on earth.” And Paul said of such brilliance, “if I have not love, I am nothing.”

And finally, Paul writes of faith. In this verse, Paul was never intending to depreciate prophesy or knowledge. And now Paul is not devaluing faith.

He always preached saving faith...and that there was no spiritual salvation apart from trusting in Christ alone for eternal life. But the faith he is pin pointing here is not saving faith for unbelievers but the gift of faith for Christians who are expecting confidently in prayer that the Lord is going to work a miracle on behalf of his children...making possible the impossible.

Most of us have yearned for that gift of faith for miracles...not just for us and our family but for others. And that's good. But let us remember that God designed for gifts to operate in and through love.

PRAYER

“Father, may Your love for Your church be in us. We desire to be empowered by the Spirit to love one another abundantly within our community of faith. And people would see it Lord and know that we are your disciples. Praise Your Name!”



DAY THREE

1 CORINTHIANS 13:3

“If I give away all that I have and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.”

“Giving away all that I have”...not all at once, but a measure at a time...inorder to meet the needs of others. Commendable to be sure...

Remember the record at the end of Acts 4? The church was brand new...and the new believers in Christ in Jerusalem began to sell their stuff and bring the money from the sales to the apostles to be distributed to those in need across the city and the region. And the biblical text says that the grace of God was upon them all...that is, God’s presence and power was upon these believers to do the will of the Lord. Pretty awesome!

So what motivated Barnabas and so many others to give so sacrificially? Love...God’s love poured out in their hearts for others...for Christ’s sake!

How do I suspect that? The rest of the story...Acts 5. A couple from church, named Ananias and Sapphira, sold some land and brought some money to the apostles. The husband led the apostles to believe that they were giving all the proceeds from the sale to the church. But in reality they had kept some of the money for themselves. And God judged them for it. Why? Because their gift was not given in the love of God for the needy, but rather it was given in the prideful love of themselves. Without true love, generous gifts may be gain to the recipient, but for the loveless giver, it gains him nothing with God.

“If I deliver up my body to be burned”...some commentators relate burned to the brand burned into the flesh of slaves. I wonder if Joseph was branded by the Midianite traders when his older brothers sold him into slavery? That picture comes to mind, but realizing that Joseph didnt voluntarily give himself to slavery for the sake of another.

Yes, slavery could be what Paul was alluding to by burning, but I lean toward a form of martyrdom of that day. Christians would be given the choice to deny that Jesus was Lord or be burned alive at the stake as a heretic or as an enemy of the Roman emperor. Many followers gave their bodies to be burned at the stake for the sake of the gospel of Christ. That would appear to men as the highest tribute to Christ that anyone could give. But the Spirit told Paul that even martyrdom, without love for the disciples around him, meant nothing to God and absolutely no spiritual gain for the Christian martyr. Wow...“have not love” is huge...

PRAYER

“Oh Father, may our benevolence toward the needy around us come from a sincere love for them. Holy Spirit love through us the love of Jesus.

And should we face martyrdom for our faith, may we surrender to Christ’s love for us in that hour and overflow with love for our family and our friends in the faith. Help us Lord...In Jesus’ Name...Amen.



DAY FOUR

1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-5

1 Corinthians 13:4,5

“Love is patient; love is kind; love does not envy or boast; love is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful.”

Some people call these verses a list of the “qualities of love”. I can see that. But I’ve recently learned that in the Greek text, these properties of love are verbs...such as...

“Love is patient” means enduring the offenses that people direct toward us...

...”and love is not resentful” goes along with patiently enduring offenses...by not focusing attention on the wrongs that others have done to us...

...but rather focusing on how “love is kind”...focusing on the offender with deeds of kindness that would demonstrate the kind of forgiveness that Jesus gives to us every day upon our every offensive sin toward him. That’s kindness! That’s God’s grace of love.

And if we are about love with kind deeds toward those in our church who have been a source of irritation to us...how can we stay irritated?...

Oh Ok...”Love is not irritable”...Following deeds of kindness...I see that grace clearer now.

And loving as God’s Spirit empowers us, that “love does not envy” what another has and that I do not...

what an opportunity that we have today to love the brethren by rejoicing with them in their good fortune...their gifts from God’s hand in this season.

And if we are going to boast, let us boast in God’s good gifts to us...let us credit him...and be grateful and not rude or arrogant.

PRAYER

“Lord, the Spirit reminds me that Your love never insisted on Your own way. You submitted to the Father’s. Not my will but yours be done...the selfless grace of love that you have poured out into our hearts is amazing to our sight. May we not be so quick to insist upon our own way, but give you time to illumine yours for us. Thanks Father.”



DAY FIVE

1 CORINTHIANS 13:6-7

“Love does not rejoice at wrong doing; but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things; believes all things; hopes all things; endures all things.” 1 Cor. 13:6-7

To rejoice in wrong doing is not love...it's the same as rejoicing in unrighteousness...and to rejoice in unrighteousness is to rejoice in sin. God can never rejoice in sin...and neither can the love of God. No wonder the Spirit says to Paul, “The Love that I have poured into you does not rejoice at wrong doing.” It grieves at wrong doing.

I agree with John MacArthur when he writes, “To rejoice in unrighteousness is to justify it. It is making wrong to appear right.”

In Isaiah 5, the prophet warns the people of God, “Woe to those who call evil good...and who substitute darkness for light.” How can we rejoice when the truth is turned upside down?

Instead let us “rejoice with the truth”. God's love stays devoted to the truth in everything. And let us listen to the Spirit through Paul's prayer for the brothers and sisters in Christ in the church at Thessalonica...”may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and the steadfastness of Christ.”

Yes...Jesus in and through us being steadfast for the truth no matter what. That's the love of God. And that's why we rejoice in the truth. Jesus!

What else does the love of God do? It bears all things...said another way...it carries. The love of God carries our sins far away...just like the scape goat carried the sins of Israel outside the gates and into the wilderness. Love carries.

It also covers. In the cross, God threw His great mantle of love over sin, forever covering it for those who believed His Son.

And God's love also believes...It trusts...it places confidence in others...it believes in others...all the way to forgiveness if these others are found out in their sins.

God's love also hopes...It knows that human failure in the church is not the final chapter as long as God's grace is still at work ... and it's always operating. Love refuses to take ones failure and write him or her off. Love is always hopeful for return and restoration.

And finally the love of God in and through us always endures. In other words, love holds fast to those they love. Remember Stephen in Acts 7? “Father, do not hold this sin against them.” Stephen held fast to those he loved...even when they turned on him and stoned him to death.

PRAYER

“O Father, Your love is so much higher...so much nobler...so much grander...so much beyond what humans call love. It's powerful. It changes us. It preserves our relationships inside and outside the church. Thank You for loving us so much...help us love just like You do...heaven and earth waits. In Jesus Name!”



DAY SIX

1 CORINTHIANS 13:8-9

"Love never fails. As for prophecies, they shall 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..."

What gift from God will never end? His love will never end.

Holy Spirit has gifted each believer in the church on purpose: to equip the saints for the work of the ministry...to build up one another in the faith...to serve and strengthen fellow Christians. (Eph. 4 among others Rom. 12 and 1 Cor. 12)

Some in the church will be given the gift of prophecy...empowered to preach the message of God and call the church to righteous living in Christ.

Some believers will be given the gift of tongues or the gift of praise. God will use them to stir up praise and worship in the church.

Also, the Acts 2 passage reveals how the message of Jesus was spread to Jews of different nations by the gift of languages not previously learned by the witnesses. God uses this gift to inspire missionaries at home and abroad to take the gospel to places just recently uncovered...to places and people without a written language to translate the gospel text from...

And some of the faith family will be given the gift of knowledge...the knowledge of God and His Word and His Will. Their understanding of the will and ways of God may not be perfect yet...But their gift inspires fellow members to desire God more intimately than ever before.

This church knew Paul. God used him to get this church started...just 5 years before this letter was written. But this church forgot about Paul. And even worse, many of these members forgot about what makes doing church meaningful to Christ and his kingdom purposes...His love...better than all the spiritual gifts put together...His love...the only gift that has no end.

PRAYER

"Father, we only know and prophesy in part today...we need You, the Son and the Spirit most urgently in our day...we get occupied with good things and not so good things in this life. We occupy ourselves with the temporary...the here today and the gone tomorrow stuff of life. Help us to focus on You and Your love...the only thing that matters and lasts forever. In Jesus Name Amen!



DAY SEVEN

1 CORINTHIANS 13:10-11

“But when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. When I was a child, I used to speak as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things.”

What does Paul mean when he writes “when the perfect comes...?”

Some say Christ is that perfect one...when he comes...and must then refer to his second coming.

Others say that the perfect refers to the perfect kingdom of God...that could mean a place...a reign of a king...heaven?...a redeemed person’s heart?...a resurrected person’s body?...heaven and a new earth?...or all of the above at the end of this age...

...perfection/completeness...God reigns and everyone on earth are his beloved people who have surrendered to his love...and He is their God...the people have brand new resurrected bodies...with perfect fellowship with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit...and with one another...forever.

...”when the perfect comes...”

These God breathed words stir up a strong desire within me...for a perfect time and place with Jesus and those I love...a forever time and place that you and I have never known but long for secretly.

Fact is, we live in imperfect times...in a partial world, an incomplete world...better recognized as a broken world of selfishness and wars; of suffering and death; of hopelessness and loss; of disappointment and shattered dreams; of discouragement and despair.

Sounds like Jesus addressed this in Matthew 7:14: “for the gate is narrow and the road is “hard” that leads to life...”

Life’s road can be very hard. But for the believers in Jesus, we here Him say, “Come unto me you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” That perfect time is coming and it brings amazing rest to our bodies and souls.

For those who are mourning over the loss of a loved one...they shall be comforted for the perfect is coming when the last enemy to be destroyed is death. O When the perfect comes...

For those who are tired in the fight against unrighteousness and wonder if there will ever be a time when all is made right...well, “blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied...for the perfect kingdom is coming.

PRAYER

“Father, if my “knowing in part” is any where close to your prophecies, then when the perfect comes, the partial, the imperfect days and ways will be done away...and as spiritually mature believers we will breathe the air of the new heaven and new earth and we will participate with delight in perfect life with God’s Love and God’s family. Love you Lord...in Jesus Name Amen.”



DAY EIGHT

1 CORINTHIANS 13:12-13

“For now we see as in a glass darkly, but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as I am also known.”

Now the Amplified Version of this text....

“Now, in this time of imperfection, we, who follow Jesus, see a blurred reflection of Christ at best, like looking through a dark glass...so much of His Word and ways are as mysteries to us. But then...when the time of perfection comes...we will see Him face to face...and we will understand Him and His kingdom’s glory clearly. Now I know in part, just in pieces, but then, when the perfect comes, I will know fully, just as I have been fully known by God.

And now there remain: Faith that trusts in God and His promise of eternal life...Hope that is confident about the future because our God holds it in His hands for us...and Love that meets the needs of others without expecting anything in return, all for the glory of God...and the greatest of these is LOVE!

In Paul’s letter to the Galatians, the Spirit put love at the beginning of a list of spiritual fruit that would mark the life of a Christian. Joy and peace and patience and kindness follow in that list. But Love is first. And in this Corinthian letter, the Spirit calls Love the greatest; even greater than faith and hope. And I agree with RC Sproul when he edited the Reformation Study Bible.....

“Love is the greatest because

Christ’s Love in and through us most accurately mirrors and reflects the character of God’s selfless love for us.”

God was using Paul to teach the young Christian community in Corinth how to do church...starting with how to love one another as Jesus loved them.

PRAYER

“Father, we know that the Spirit gives us gifts to serve and strengthen the church for ministry and mission. But sometimes we let our gifts drive our service instead of Your Love poured out in us. Help us to be good stewards of our spiritual gifts. And remind us often that without Love for our fellow church members our worship and our ministries amount to nothing. Thanks again Father, love You...”

