

The Greatest of These is Love 2025
1 Corinthians 1:1, 10:16, 12:27,31- 13:3, 8-10, 12-13

1 Corinthians 1:10, 10:16, 12:27, 31-13:1-3, 8-10, 12-13 (New Revised Standard Version)

Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you should be in agreement and that there should be no divisions among you, but that you should be united in the same mind and the same purpose. The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ?

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way. If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 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 do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

My mother could do truly amazing and tasty things in the kitchen.

So, when I grew up and moved out to live on my own,
I asked for copies of her recipes of my favorite foods,
which included my mother's chocolate frosting recipe.

The 1st time I made it, I carefully melted and stirred in the butter,
then I mixed in the bakers' chocolate, milk and other ingredients.
I was so pleased that it looked right, exactly as I remembered it.

Then I tasted my cooking, and it was just awful and horribly bitter.
seems I had mistakenly forgotten to add in the sugar,
that critically important ingredient was missing.

In the book of Acts we can read about Saul on his way to Damascus
to arrest and persecute any Christians he could find there.
But along the way, he had an encounter with the risen Christ
which for him **changed everything**, including his name to Paul.

So, Paul spent the rest of his life traveling and proclaiming
the Good News about Jesus Christ throughout the Roman empire,
as an apostle, a preacher and evangelist to the gentile world.

Acts 18 describes his ministry in the Roman colony of Corinth,
noted by ancient historians for its vice and pagan immorality,
seemingly, a most unlikely place to start a new church.

Paul stayed in Corinth preaching & teaching for almost two years,
and began and established an early Christian community there.
Then, when he moved on to evangelize elsewhere,
**that church of mostly new and inexperienced Christians
got seriously off track and needed more instruction.**

1st Corinthians is Paul's letter to that struggling congregation
as he pushes pretty hard instructing to get them back on track.
For Paul, the message about God's grace given through Jesus Christ,
was a most incredible and powerful truth **that changes everything.**

In all his writings, the Apostle's focus is always on God's grace
along with the blessings of God that express that gracious love,
yet somehow the Christians in Corinth had missed the point.

Ancient Corinth was a colony set up for retired Roman soldiers,
and was a major crossroads along an important trade route,
so, it was a busy and bustling city with rich diversity
that welcomed people from all over the ancient world,
and that diversity was also a part of the church in Corinth.

Paul specifically mentions that there were
Jews and former pagans, slaves and the wealthy and powerful,
a variety of converts trying to be Christians together.

As a group, the Christians in Corinth were abundantly blessed
with a vast array of spiritual gifts, skills and abilities,
and as a faith community, they had it all going for them,
but their **self-focused** misunderstanding about God's gifts
was leading to conflict and misuse of those spiritual gifts.

The main issue that the Apostle Paul addresses in his letter,
is that, their diversity and differences were leading to
petty jealousies, friction, resentment and conflict,
and those petty battles that were tearing up the church family.

They might have sung with great gusto and in unison,
"And they will now we are Christians by our love",
but that wasn't a truth they were living.

Paul wants them to know that everybody is necessary and needed,
that they are all connected-members of the one body of Christ,
and that each one is **equally** important and significant
in the life, the ministry and mission of the church.

Paul wrote urging those groups that were jostling for position
to shift away from selfishness and pride, from ego and arrogance,
toward mutual respect, acceptance & to appreciate each other.

The Apostle Paul was very direct in his letter and explained that

they were **missing the point of walking together in faith,** vs. 1:10,

Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose.

They were fighting over the critical truth that every person,
is equally important for the life and mission of the Church,
and each unique & ideal according to God purpose, design and love.

Everyone has a part in building-up the church and its mission,
because God has freely provided all the gifts that are needed
for the mutual benefit & blessing of the whole church body.

The church was abundantly blessed and well-equipped to faithfully
make a difference by living and serving together in common-unity,
as believers and disciples, as the beloved children of God.

Paul realized that their jealousies, bitterness and conflicts
was disrupting and damaging their fellowship and witness,
and they were destroying their life together in community.

They probably worked very hard and were committed to their faith,
but for all their efforts, divisiveness pointed to a problem,
so, Paul makes the **connection between our love and our good works.**

**They were missing the point of God's call and blessings,
because they were missing the essential ingredient —**

- and so, Paul writes, vs. 12:31b, 13:1-3,

I will show you a still more excellent way.

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 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 do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love never ends.

When I bought my first car, I remember my dad explaining to me,
that my car would not keep running or last very long,
unless all the engine parts were kept well-lubricated.

Otherwise,
the **friction of part against part** would surely destroy the engine.

**Gracious love, that places the interests of others ahead of our own
is the necessary lubricant against the friction
of one member rubbing against another member.**

If I preach the finest sermon ever heard by anyone in pews,
but if it's not done with love --- **then my preaching matters not.**

If I contribute enough money to build and accomplish great things,
but if not given with love, then as far as God is concerned,

I have given nothing at all and **my gift is a waste & a loss.**
If I put in hour after hour of endless Christian service and ministry,
but do not love, then **there is no point to anything I have done.**

Now it's not a case of love **instead** of gifts and Christian service,
but that if my gifts and good deeds **are done without love,**
they do not serve to build up the body of Christ,
and do not honor or glorify the Lord our God.

Love is the necessary motivation and indispensable ingredient,
the lubricant against friction so the body parts can function,
and what makes our offerings and service pleasing to the Lord.

The Corinthian Christians were very talented and gifted.
They probably worked very hard & were committed to their faith,
but they were not living out sacrificial Christian love,
and love was the missing essential ingredient,

specifically, our love for one another within the body of Christ,
and the necessity for God's gracious love to be flowing through us.

Paul's point is, that the Holy Spirit calls and equips us,
to build up other people and not to attack or put anyone down,
for God's love is to flow through us in service to others.

As Paul tried to make clear to the Christians in Corinth, that it's
not about **our** rights or gifts, **our** sacrifice or accomplishments,
for all that is meaningless, pointless and nothing,
if it is not accomplished within the context of love.

It's about a blending that's greater than the sum of the parts
as we are brought into harmony to the glory of God,
by all serving to accomplish our shared mission,
as a community trying to live out the love we've received.

And what does this God-love look like? Paul describes it, vs. 4-8

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.

Paul's not describing some idealistic, theoretical dream-world,
but rather, love that is very practical, specific, and concrete.
It is a self-sacrificing, active and practical love
that places the wants and welfare of others above self,
which sometimes means taking the hit without complaint,
other times it's the courage to take a stand, even alone.

As Paul tried to make clear to the Christians in Corinth,
the focus is not on ourselves, or our accomplishments,
but on serving within the context of sacrificial love.

When you use a sponge to wipe off a kitchen counter,
you've got get the sponge wet
before it can soak-up anything and clean a spill.

Our heart needs to be moist with God's gracious love first,
before we **can love** and can serve the needs of other people.

We've got to receive & trust God's love before we can share that love.

Only then, as we are moistened by grace and as our heart changes,
that God can use us well to love and to serve other people.

Because God is faithful, infinitely gracious, wise and perfect,
so, let us be united in our purpose & vision, trusting the truth
that each one has been chosen, called and equipped in Christ.

All of us have been gathered into the Church to be the body of Christ
individually called & equipped to live out God grace & blessings,
so that God's grace overflows – spilling out onto others,
and so that we become blessings and hope to our world in need.

Today, as we respond to Christ' invitation to the Table of Grace,
the critical question we need to ask ourselves is this,
How is the love I have received blessing and serving others?"