

Ch. 10

The Greatest of These Is Love

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. (1 Corinthians 13:8–13 [ESV])

「Introduction」

The Corinthian church was richly gifted. In 1 Corinthians 1, Paul says that the Corinthian church was enriched in all speech and knowledge and did not lack any spiritual gift. A variety of gifts such as prophecy, tongues, and knowledge were at work, and the believers had spiritual experiences and knowledge. Sadly, however, the church was not as mature as it was gifted. The church was divided by loyalty to particular people (1 Cor. 1:12); some boasted of their knowledge and caused others to stumble (1 Cor. 8:11–13); and even in worship, the use of gifts caused confusion (1 Cor. 14). The gifts had instead become a cause of pride and division. What did this church need most?

And what do we need most today?

「Content」

1. Only “Love” Remains to the End.

1 Cor. 13:8 Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.

- Prophecy: speaking the truth, guiding people onto the right path, words of insight and discernment
- Tongues: spiritual experience, deep prayer
- Knowledge: knowledge of many kinds, both biblical and worldly

Serving through prophecy, tongues, and knowledge is precious, but all of them have an expiration date. Love, however, never ends.

Discussion Questions

- 1) The painting is “Science and Charity,” painted in 1897 by Pablo Picasso. Look at this painting and share what you notice.
- 2) Paul prayed that, above all, the church’s love would overflow (Phil. 1:9). Is your love for the Lord and for others in the church, at home, at work, and in your neighborhood drying up or growing more abundant?



2. From Spiritual Child to Mature Adult

1 Cor. 13:9–11 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.

- 1) Characteristic of a child: a partial life

To speak, understand, and think like a child means seeing only a fragment of what one has understood and felt, unable to see the whole, and treating it as everything. Have you ever met someone in daily life who “speaks and thinks like a child”? What were the characteristics of that person’s words and attitude?

- 2) The gap and limits until the perfect comes

- The perfect (τὸ τέλειον) refers to “that time” in verse 12, when the Lord returns.

1 Cor. 13:12 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.

Until the end times (the Second Coming), human knowledge and understanding can never be complete.

- The only way to fill the gap: “love”

Paul urges us to speak to, treat, and serve one another with love until the day we know fully. To put away childish ways is to speak with “love”.

Remembering the words about love we have learned this year, let us recite

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 together.

3. Of faith, hope, and love, the greatest is love.

- 1) Faith, hope, and love are the core values of a believer’s life.

- Faith (πίστις) - the foundation of belief: believing and confessing that through the merit of Jesus Christ’s cross all my sins are forgiven and I have become a child of God.

- Hope (ἐλπίς) - a holy expectation toward the promise that this earth is not all and that the Lord will surely come again, and toward the eternal kingdom of God.
- Love (ἀγάπη) - God's very nature, the reason and purpose of salvation, the highest commandment, and the guiding principle of believers' lives.

2) Why is love the greatest?

- Because God is love (1 John 4:8).
- Because it is the first commandment Jesus spoke of (Matt. 22:37–40).
- Because without love, we are nothing (1 Cor. 13:1–3).
- Because love lasts forever (1 Cor. 13:8).
- Because love is the fulfilling of the law (Rom. 13:10).
- Because love is the perfect bond that ties all virtues together (Col. 3:14).

「Application」

Julian Wolton, a leading American children's ministry leader, said, "You can teach programs for children, but you cannot teach love for children." Then where does love come from?

1) By abiding in Jesus' love (John 15:9).

We know a flawless and perfect love. When we abide deeply in God's love, shown to us through Christ, we come to love one another.

2) By praying for love (Phil. 1:9).

For the apostle Paul, love was always the first thing he asked for on behalf of the church. Love is not a trait we can acquire through our own effort alone; it is a grace that God must pour into us. Romans 5:5 says, "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." When the church prays, the Holy Spirit pours God's love more abundantly into our hearts, and in the end that love overcomes all things.

Discussion Questions

1. Over the year, we have learned many aspects of love.

Ch. 1: Love is patient.

Ch. 2: Love is kind.

Ch. 3: Love does not envy.

Ch. 4: Love is not arrogant.

Ch. 5: Love is not rude.

Ch. 6: Love does not seek its own benefit.

Ch. 7: Love is not irritable.

Ch. 8: Love rejoices with the truth.

Ch. 9: Love bears all things.

Ch. 10: The greatest of these is love.

Looking back on the themes of love we have studied, choose one theme that resonated with you most deeply and one that you still find hard to practice in your life, and share them.

2. Think about Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan. Reflect on whose neighbor you tried to be this past year. As the year draws to a close, if there are people around you who need your loving effort and care, share about them and put that love into practice.

3. The fifteen expressions of love in 1 Corinthians 13 are, in fact, the love and character of Jesus. With hearts longing to follow His life and to overflow with His love, let us read the prayer below together.

Make Us Like Jesus in Love

Loving God our Father, thank you for teaching us what true love is through the words of 1 Corinthians 13. We realize that love is not a mere feeling but the character of Jesus, and a fruit of the gospel that must be seen in our lives.

Lord, grant us a love that is patient and kind, that does not envy and is not proud. Help us to live with a love that does not seek its own interests, is not easily angered, rejoices with the truth, and bears, believes, hopes, and endures all things.

Holy Spirit, pour God's love more abundantly into our hearts. Make our words, thoughts, and actions resemble Jesus, and let us come to know more of God's deep, high, wide, and eternal love.

Let us walk in faith and hope within love, and give us a good heart and the courage to put into practice, even in one small way, the love we have learned this year.

Make our small group members one in love, and make us a community that looks after one another and encourages love and good works.

We pray in the name of Jesus, who loved us and loved us to the end. Amen.