SMITH FOR CHRIST

TEACHING THE WORD · WATCHING THE TIMES



INDUCTIVE DEEP DIVE

1 Corinthians

Chapter Thirteen · Verses 1–13

The More Excellent Way

NASB 1995 | OBSERVE · INTERPRET · APPLY | TWO VOICES

One passage, read inductively and heard through two teachers — **John MacArthur** and **David Guzik** — with the key verses marked in the Berean standard.

THE PASSAGE

1 Corinthians 13:1–13

Thirteen verses · three movements

THE METHOD

Inductive

Observe · Interpret · Apply

WHAT'S INSIDE

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1 Corinthians 13:1–13 — the more excellent way

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"But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love." — 1 Corinthians 13:13

SECTION I · THE PASSAGE

1 Corinthians 13:1–13

The More Excellent Way

† How to Read This Study

The inductive method asks three questions of every paragraph. **Observe** — what does the text actually say? Who, what, when, where, which words repeat, where are the commands and the contrasts? **Interpret** — what did it mean to Paul and the Corinthians, and why? **Apply** — what does it ask of me now? Each movement below walks those three steps. The teachers are heard at the interpretation step, where they belong; the observations come first, from the text alone.

JOHN MACARTHUR · 1 Corinthians DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Key verses carry the six Berean marks. Mark what the text says — a phrase, never a sentence, and never an interpretation.

▲ GOD ▭ COMMAND ⇄ REPEATED WORD ⚠ SIN / WARNING ★ PROMISE ◷ TIME / PLACE / CONTRAST

KEY VERSE

But now ★ faith, hope, love, abide these three; but ▲ the greatest of these is love.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:13 · NASB 1995

† Before the Passage

Chapter 13 is read at weddings, but Paul wrote it for a church fight. Chapter 12 ended with a command — "earnestly desire the greater gifts" — and a promise: "I show you a still more excellent way." Chapter 14 will return to tongues and prophecy in the meeting. Chapter 13 stands between them, and it is the hinge on which the whole discussion of gifts turns. The Corinthians wanted to know which gift made a man most spiritual. Paul answers that no gift does, and then describes the one thing that does.

Three movements, and the structure is the message. Verses 1–3 take the gifts Corinth prized most (tongues, prophecy, knowledge, faith, even sacrifice) and set each beside love: without it, nothing. Verses 4–7 describe love in fifteen verbs — not feelings but behaviors, every one of them something the Corinthians had failed at somewhere in this letter. Verses 8–13 set the gifts in time: they are for now; love is forever. The word throughout is *agapē,* the love that gives itself whether or not it is repaid — the love of John 3:16, which the KJV renders "charity" to keep it clear of mere affection.

† The Text, Marked · KJV

The whole passage in the King James text with every Berean mark applied — the same marks the import file carries, so what you see here is what Berean will show.

▲ GOD ▭ COMMAND ⇄ REPEATED WORD ⚠ SIN / WARNING ★ PROMISE ◷ TIME / PLACE / CONTRAST

1 Though I speak with ◷ the tongues of men and of angels, and have not ⇄ charity, I am become as ⚠ sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand ◷ all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have ◷ all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not ⇄ charity, ⚠ I am nothing.

3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I ◷ give my body to be burned, and have not ⇄ charity, ⚠ it profiteth me nothing.

4 ⇄ Charity ▭ suffereth long, and ▭ is kind; ⇄ charity ⚠ envieth not; ⇄ charity ⚠ vaunteth not itself, ⚠ is not puffed up,

5 Doth not ⚠ behave itself unseemly, ▭ seeketh not her own, ⚠ is not easily provoked, ▭ thinketh no evil;

6 ⚠ Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but ▭ rejoiceth in the truth;

7 ▭ Beareth all things, ▭ believeth all things, ▭ hopeth all things, ▭ endureth all things.

8 ⇄ Charity ★ never faileth: but whether there be ◷ prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be ◷ tongues, they shall cease; whether there be ◷ knowledge, it shall vanish away.

9 For we know ⇄ in part, and we prophesy ⇄ in part.

10 But ◷ when that which is perfect is come, then ◷ that which is in part shall be done away.

11 When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but ◷ when I became a man, I put away childish things.

12 For now we see ◷ through a glass, darkly; but then ★ face to face: now I know ⇄ in part; but ★ then shall I know even as also I am known.

13 And now abideth faith, hope, ⇄ charity, these three; but the greatest of these is ⇄ charity.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:2-34 · KING JAMES VERSION · 37 MARKS

I
MOVEMENT

1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-3

Without Love, Nothing

Corinth's greatest gifts, each set beside love and found empty

> 1 *If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.* 2 *If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains,* ⇄ *but do not have love*, ⚠ *I am nothing*. 3 *And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.*
>
> 1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-3 · NASB 1995

O OBSERVE · what the text says

- Three **"if I"** sentences, each with the same refrain: **but do not have love** (×3).
- The gifts named are exactly the ones Corinth prized: **tongues** (even of angels), **prophecy**, **mysteries**, **knowledge**, **faith** — then the highest sacrifices, **all my possessions**, **my body**.
- Three verdicts, escalating: a **noisy gong** (v.1), **I am nothing** (v.2), **it profits me nothing** (v.3).
- Paul says **I**, not *you* — he puts himself under the test first.
- Every "if" is hypothetical maximum: *all* mysteries, *all* knowledge, *all* faith, *all* possessions.

I INTERPRET · what it means

Paul takes everything the Corinthians thought made a man spiritual and imagines having all of it, perfectly. Tongues beyond human speech. Prophecy that understands every mystery. Faith that moves mountains — Jesus' own phrase. Generosity that gives away everything; courage that gives away the body. Then he subtracts one thing, love, and the total is zero. Not reduced — zero. The gong and cymbal were the instruments of the pagan temples down the street; tongues without love sound like Corinth's old religion. And the point sharpens with each verse: without love I *sound* empty, I *am* nothing, and even my sacrifice *gains* nothing. Gifts are not evil; they are containers. Love is the content. An empty container, however ornate, is just noise.

Why tongues first? Because tongues was the gift Corinth prized most, and the reason was pride of a particular kind. Their religious instincts were formed in the pagan cults, where being "carried away" (12:2) was the sign a god was present — the more dramatic and less controlled the gift, the more spiritual it looked. In a rank-conscious city, a gift that was audible, public and unverifiable made the perfect badge; and because it felt directly supernatural, the one who had it could feel touched by the Spirit in a way those without it were not. Paul had already answered that in 12:28–30, listing tongues last and asking, "All do not speak with tongues, do they?" A gift the Spirit does not give to everyone cannot be the badge of the Spirit. Corinth was not wrong to want gifts; it was wrong about what they were *for*.

JOHN MACARTHUR · 1 Corinthians

MacArthur reads vv.1–3 as Paul dismantling the Corinthian scale of spirituality from the top down: the gift they prized most (tongues) first, then the ones they ranked beneath it, then even the ultimate acts of devotion. His stress falls on "I am nothing" — not "my gift is diminished" but the person himself is a nullity before God without love. He takes the tongues "of angels" as hyperbole (there is no record of an angelic language given to men), the mountain-moving faith as Jesus' own idiom for the impossible, and the body given to be burned as martyrdom — so that even dying for Christ, without love, earns nothing.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik notes that the Corinthians had kept the gifts and lost their motive and purpose, treating them as ends in themselves; the chapter is not love *versus* gifts but a correction of focus. On v.1, he observes that Jews of Paul's day believed angels had their own language, and that tongues may be a supernatural prayer language — but even that, loveless, is noise. On v.3 he mentions that some early Christians sought martyrdom as a kind of cleansing, and rejects it: even that supreme sacrifice profits nothing without love. He defines *agapē* against *erōs*, *storgē* and *philia* — self-giving, sacrificial, largely unrelated to emotion.

A APPLY · what it asks of me

- *I will run my own inventory through Paul's subtraction: my teaching, my serving, my giving — minus love — equals what?*
- *Where am I loudest and least loving? That is my gong.*

II MOVEMENT

1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-7

Love Described

Fifteen verbs — what love does, and what it refuses to do

4 ▭ *Love is patient*, ▭ *love is kind* *and* ⚠ *is not jealous*; *love* ⚠ *does not brag* *and* ⚠ *is not arrogant*, 5 *does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered,* 6 *does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth;* 7 ▭ *bears all things*, ▭ *believes all things*, ▭ *hopes all things*, ▭ *endures all things*.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-7 · NASB 1995

O OBSERVE · what the text says

- Fifteen descriptions, and all fifteen are **verbs** — love is what it does, not what it feels.
- Two positives first (**patient**, **kind**), then eight negatives (**not jealous… does not take into account a wrong**), then a contrast pair (**not in unrighteousness / with the truth**), then four **all things**.
- **"All things"** four times in v.7 — bears, believes, hopes, endures.
- Every negative names a sin already in this letter: jealousy (3:3), arrogance (4:18; 5:2), seeking its own (10:24), wrongs suffered (6:7).
- The subject throughout is **love** — not *the loving person*. Paul personifies it.

I INTERPRET · what it means

Here is the portrait, and it is a portrait of behavior. Patience comes first — the long temper that does not retaliate — and kindness second, the active goodness that does what patience only refrains from. Then the refusals: love does not want what another has, does not advertise itself, is not inflated, is not rude, does not insist on its rights, is not touchy, and keeps no ledger of wrongs. It takes no pleasure when someone falls and every pleasure when truth wins. Then the four "all things": love covers rather than exposes, believes the best rather than the worst, keeps hoping when evidence is thin, and stays. Read the list against Corinth and every line is a rebuke; read it against Christ and every line is a description. That is the double edge of vv.4–7: it is what we fail at and what He is.

And there is a third way to read the list. Everything in it was first done *to* us. God was patient with us (2 Peter 3:9), kind to us when we were ungrateful (Luke 6:35), did not keep account of our wrongs (2 Corinthians 5:19), bore with us, believed, hoped and endured. The fifteen verbs are not only the standard; they are the history of how we were saved (Romans 5:8). The man who knows he was loved like this has somewhere to start.

JOHN MACARTHUR · 1 Corinthians

MacArthur insists the fifteen are deeds, not emotions, because *agapē* is a love of the will that can be commanded. He works through them as a mirror of Corinth: their jealousy over gifts, their boasting over teachers, their arrogance about knowledge, their lawsuits (seeking their own), their grudges. "Does not take into account a wrong" is the accountant's word: love refuses to keep the books. "Believes all things" is not gullibility but the readiness to think the best until proven otherwise. The passage, he says, is finally a portrait of Jesus — substitute His name for "love" and nothing changes; substitute your own and everything does.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik walks each descriptor as practical behavior: longsuffering as the refusal to retaliate when one could (he cites Chrysostom), kindness that even children can detect, envy that produces nothing (Cain, Joseph's brothers, the leaders who envied Jesus), spiritual pride as the worst pride, rudeness as a failure of ordinary courtesy, irritability as sin (Moses at the rock), and "thinks no evil" as refusing to keep souvenirs of grievances. "Bears all things" is *covers* — like the oyster around the grit — echoing 1 Peter 4:8. "Believes all things" chooses the charitable reading, bounded by facts. His test: put *Jesus* in place of *love*, then your own name.

A APPLY · what it asks of me

- *I will read vv.4–7 with my own name in place of "love" and stop at the first line I cannot say. That is this week's assignment.*
- *Whose wrong am I still carrying on the books? Love does not take it into account — I will close that account.*

III
MOVEMENT

1 CORINTHIANS 13:8-13

Love Never Fails

Gifts for now, love forever — and the day the partial ends

> 8 *Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are*
> *tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away.* 9 *For we know in part*
> *and we prophesy in part;* 10 *but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.*
> 11 *When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child;*
> *when I became a man, I did away with childish things.* 12 *For now we see in a mirror*
> *dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also*
> *have been fully known.* 13 *But now ★ faith, hope, love, abide these three; but ▲ the greatest*
> *of these is love.*
>
> 1 CORINTHIANS 13:8-13 · NASB 1995

O OBSERVE · what the text says

- A flat statement opens: **Love never fails.** Then three gifts with three endings: prophecy **done away**, tongues **cease**, knowledge **done away**.
- **"In part"** ×3 (vv.9, 10, 12) against **"the perfect"** (v.10) — partial now, complete then.
- Two pictures: a **child** who becomes a **man** (v.11); a **mirror dimly** that becomes **face to face** (v.12).
- Time words carry the passage: **now… then… now… then** (v.12); **but now** (v.13).
- Three things **abide**; one is **greatest**.

I INTERPRET · what it means

The last argument is about time. Prophecy, tongues, knowledge — the gifts Corinth fought over — all have an end, because they belong to a partial age. Love belongs to the age to come, so it never falls. Paul draws it twice: the child's speech and reasoning are right for a child and set aside by the man; the bronze mirror shows a true but blurred face until you meet the person. One day the partial will be done away and we will know as we are known. Teachers divide over what "the perfect" is — the completed Scripture, or the return of Christ and the eternal state — and the division matters for whether the sign gifts continue; the passage's own point does not depend on it. Whatever ends, love does not. And so v.13: faith and hope abide too, but faith will become sight and hope will be fulfilled; love simply goes on, because God is love.

Notice the comfort folded into v.12. "Then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known." God's knowledge of me is already complete; mine of Him is catching up. The Corinthians were fighting over everything in the "in part" column and neglecting the one thing in the "abides" column. The question for any church is which column its energy goes into.

JOHN MACARTHUR · 1 Corinthians

MacArthur reads “the perfect” as the eternal state — face to face with Christ — not the completed canon, so he does not rest cessationism on v.10. He grounds it instead on the verbs of v.8: prophecy and knowledge are “done away” (passive — something ends them, at the perfect), while tongues “will cease” (middle voice — they stop of themselves), and he holds that history bears this out: tongues passed with the apostolic era. The child/man and mirror pictures contrast the partial revelation of this age with the full knowledge of the next. Faith and hope, he notes, are fulfilled in heaven; love alone continues unchanged, and so is greatest.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik rejects the view that “the perfect” is the New Testament canon, taking it as the eternal state or the return of Christ (he notes Calvin placed it at death). He disputes MacArthur’s argument from the middle voice, calling the verb change stylistic, and says the passage gives no timeline for tongues ending — so he holds the gifts continue until the perfect comes. He draws on Corinth’s bronze mirrors for v.12 and on Exodus 33 and Numbers 12 for “face to face,” reading v.12b as knowing God as fully as a creature can. Love is greatest because it continues into eternity, faith and hope having finished their work, and because love is what God is (1 John 4:8).

A APPLY · what it asks of me

- *Everything I am proud of in ministry is “in part” and will be done away. What am I building that will still be standing face to face?*
- *I see dimly now — so I will hold my opinions of others loosely and my love for them tightly.*

† Word Studies

Twenty words carry the weight of the chapter — every one of the fifteen verbs of vv.4–7, and the words that frame them. Each card gives the Greek, the NASB rendering, and why it matters here.

ἀγάπη **agapē**

LOVE · 1 COR 13:1-13

Nine times in thirteen verses. Not *erōs* (desire), *storgē* (family affection) or *philia* (friendship) — *agapē* is the love of the will, that gives itself for another's good whether or not it is returned. KJV "charity" (Latin *caritas*) tried to keep it apart from feeling.

μακροθυμεῖ **makrothymei**

IS PATIENT · 1 COR 13:4

Long-tempered — slow to anger with people, not merely with circumstances. The same word describes God toward sinners (2 Peter 3:9: "patient toward you").

χρηστεύεται **chrēsteuetai**

IS KIND · 1 COR 13:4

Found only here in the New Testament. Active goodness — patience is what love does not do when wronged; kindness is what it does. God is *chrēstos*, kind, to the ungrateful (Luke 6:35).

ζηλοῖ **zēloi**

IS NOT JEALOUS · 1 COR 13:4

The same verb as "earnestly desire" in 12:31 and 14:1 — zeal can be holy or envious. Love wants nothing that belongs to another.

περπερεύεται **perpereuetai**

DOES NOT BRAG · 1 COR 13:4

A windbag's word, found only here — to show off, to parade oneself. Love does not advertise.

φυσιοῦται **physioutai**

IS NOT ARROGANT · 1 COR 13:4

Puffed up like a bellows. Paul uses it six times in this letter (4:6, 18, 19; 5:2; 8:1) — the Corinthian disease, named here as love's opposite.

ἀσχημονεῖ **aschēmonei**

DOES NOT ACT UNBECOMINGLY · 1 COR 13:5

Without *schēma*, without proper form — rude, graceless. Love keeps the courtesies; it does not behave as though others were not there.

ζητεῖ τὰ ἑαυτῆς **zētei ta heautēs**

DOES NOT SEEK ITS OWN · 1 COR 13:5

Paul's own rule in 10:24 ("let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor") and Philippians 2:4. Love does not insist on its rights.

παροξύνεται **paroxynetai**

IS NOT PROVOKED · 1 COR 13:5

Our word *paroxysm* — to be sharpened to a point, to flare. Love is not touchy; it does not keep a short fuse.

λογίζεται τὸ κακόν **logizetai to kakon**

DOES NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT A WRONG · 1 COR 13:5

Logizomai is a bookkeeper's word — to enter in the ledger. Love keeps no account of wrongs; the same verb says God does not count our sins against us (2 Corinthians 5:19).

συγχαίρει τῇ ἀληθείᾳ **synchairei tē alētheia**

REJOICES WITH THE TRUTH · 1 COR 13:6

Syn-chairō, to rejoice together with. Love and truth are allies; love takes no secret pleasure when someone falls, and open pleasure when truth wins.

στέγει **stegei**

BEARS ALL THINGS · 1 COR 13:7

To cover as a roof covers, to hold up under. Love covers faults rather than publishing them (1 Peter 4:8; Proverbs 10:12) and bears what it cannot change.

πιστεύει **pisteuei**

BELIEVES ALL THINGS · 1 COR 13:7

Not gullibility — love extends trust, takes the charitable reading, assumes the best until the facts forbid it.

ἐλπίζει **elpizei**

HOPES ALL THINGS · 1 COR 13:7

Love refuses to write anyone off. Where faith believes the best now, hope expects the best still to come — because God is not finished.

ὑπομένει **hypomenei**

ENDURES ALL THINGS · 1 COR 13:7

To remain under — the soldier's word for holding a position. Love stays when it would be easier to leave.

πίπτει **piptei**

FAILS · 1 COR 13:8

To fall, collapse. Love never falls to the ground; it is the one thing in the chapter without an expiry.

καταργηθήσεται **katargēthēsetai**

WILL BE DONE AWAY · 1 COR 13:8, 10

Rendered inoperative, set aside — the fate of prophecy and knowledge "when the perfect comes." Tongues get a different verb (*pausontai*, will cease).

τὸ τέλειον **to teleion**

THE PERFECT · 1 COR 13:10

The complete, the goal reached. What it refers to divides the teachers (see Movement III); what it does is agreed — it ends the partial.

ἔσοπτρον **esoptron**

MIRROR · 1 COR 13:12

Corinth was famous for polished bronze mirrors — bright enough to use, dim enough that you never quite saw yourself. Now we see God that way; then, face to face.

μένει **menei**

ABIDE · 1 COR 13:13

To remain, to stay. Faith, hope and love outlast the gifts; love outlasts even faith and hope, because it is what God is (1 John 4:8).

† Why Love Is Essential

Paul does not argue in chapter 13 that love is important; he assumes it and shows what happens without it. The argument itself is spread across the whole Bible. Eight reasons, each anchored in the text.

1 **Love is what God is.**

Every other virtue is something God *does*; love is something God *is* (1 John 4:8, 16). Scripture never says God is faith or God is hope. Before there was a world to be patient with, the Father loved the Son (John 17:24) — love is older than creation. That is why Paul can end with "the greatest of these is love" (v.13): faith and hope are the creature's posture toward a God not yet seen; love is the life of God Himself, shared with us. To lack it is not to lack a virtue; it is to lack the family likeness.

2 **Love is the command all others hang on.**

Asked for the greatest commandment, Jesus gave two, both love (Matthew 22:37–40; Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18), and said the whole Law and the Prophets *depend* on them. Paul says the same in Romans 13:8–10 and Galatians 5:14: love is the fulfillment of the law, not an addition to it. So a loveless gift is not merely unimpressive; it is lawless. That is why vv.1–3 can say *nothing* — a spiritual act that breaks the first commandment has no standing before God.

3 **Love is how we were saved — and so it is how we know we are.**

"In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son" (1 John 4:10). Agapē came to us first, undeserved, while we were enemies (Romans 5:8). Everything in vv.4–7 was first done to us: God was patient (2 Peter 3:9), kind (Luke 6:35), did not keep account of our wrongs (2 Corinthians 5:19), bore, believed, hoped, endured. The believer loves because he has been loved (1 John 4:19), and John makes it the test of the new birth: "everyone who loves is born of God" (1 John 4:7), and the one who does not, whatever he claims, is a liar (1 John 4:20).

4 **Love is the mark Christ gave His church.**

Jesus did not say the world would know His disciples by their gifts, their doctrine, or their power, but by their love for one another (John 13:35). Corinth had every gift (1:7) and was known for its divisions (1:11; 11:18). Ephesus had sound doctrine and tireless work and heard "you have left your first love" (Revelation 2:4). A church can be orthodox, gifted, busy, and dying. Love is the evidence that the thing is alive.

5 **Love is the only thing that builds.**

"Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies" (8:1). The same letter has already said it: the gift that puffs up the one who has it does not build up the ones who watch. Chapter 14 will measure every gift by one standard — does it edify the church? — and that standard is simply love applied. Gifts are power; love is direction. Power without direction does damage. That is the Corinthian story.

6 **Love is the goal of all teaching.**

"The goal of our instruction is love" (1 Timothy 1:5). Doctrine that does not arrive at love has not been understood. Paul prays for the Ephesians to *know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge* (Ephesians 3:19) — a knowledge beyond knowledge, the fullness of God. The man who has studied his way to all mysteries and all knowledge (v.2) and not to love has stopped before the destination.

7 **Love is the Spirit's fruit, not our achievement.**

The same Spirit who distributes the gifts (12:11) pours out the love of God in our hearts (Romans 5:5), and love heads the list of His fruit (Galatians 5:22) — followed immediately by patience and kindness, the first two words of v.4. The fifteen verbs of vv.4–7 are not a self-improvement program. They are what the Spirit produces in a man who stays near the cross, and a man who tries to manufacture them without Him produces the Corinthian imitation: performance.

8 **Love is the one thing we will still be doing.**

Prophecy ends when there is nothing left to foretell; tongues fall silent; knowledge in part gives way to knowing as we are known (vv.8–12). Faith becomes sight and hope becomes possession. Love is the only thing in the chapter that walks through the door of eternity unchanged, because the One we will see face to face is love. To practice it now is to begin the life of heaven early. That is why it is *essential*: not useful, not admirable — essential, the thing without which the rest is nothing and the thing that remains when the rest is gone.

† Reading the Chapter Whole

The three movements, the word studies and the cross-references pulled into one reading — what the chapter is doing, and the threads that tie it to the rest of the letter and to the gospel.

1 **One argument, three movements.**

Read whole, the chapter is a single sentence: *gifts without love are nothing (1–3), because love is this (4–7), and love is the only thing that lasts (8–13)*. Corinth asked which gift made a man most spiritual. Paul answers that no gift does, describes the thing that does, and then shows that the gifts they were fighting over all have an expiry date.

2 **Corinth's question and Paul's three answers.**

Which gift is highest? None — subtract love and every gift equals zero. **What does spirituality look like, then?** Fifteen verbs, every one of them something you do to another person. **What about the gifts we have?** Use them, desire them (12:31; 14:1) — and remember they are for now, not forever.

3 **The disease had a name: *physioutai*.**

"Puffed up" appears six times in this letter before 13:4 names it as love's opposite. Corinth's tongues-pride, its teacher-factions, its knowledge about idols, its tolerance of sin — all one disease. Chapter 13 is the cure, and the cure is not a better gift.

4 **The same verb, two directions: *zēloō*.**

"Earnestly desire" (12:31; 14:1) and "is not jealous" (13:4) are the same Greek verb. Zeal aimed at what is yours to pursue is holy; aimed at what your brother has, it is envy. Paul does not tell Corinth to stop wanting; he tells them what to want.

5 **The ledger closes in both directions.**

Logizomai — to enter in the account — is used of love in 13:5 and of God in 2 Corinthians 5:19, "not counting their trespasses against them." The reason I can stop keeping books on my brother is that God stopped keeping them on me. That is the gospel inside the portrait.

6 **Two columns.**

Prophecy, tongues, knowledge — *in part*, done away. Faith, hope, love — *abide*. Corinth put all its energy in the first column. The one thing in the second column that outlasts even faith and hope is love, because God is love and we will see Him face to face.

7 **The two-name test.**

Put *Jesus* in place of "love" in vv.4–7 and every line is true: a portrait of Christ. Put your own name in and stop at the first line you cannot say: a portrait of the work. Then remember the third reading — every line was first done *to* you.

† The Passage in the Whole Bible

Scripture interprets Scripture. These passages stand behind Paul's argument or carry it forward — the two great commandments, the cross, the Spirit, and the church.

1 Corinthians 12:31

"But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way."

The door into the chapter: gifts are to be desired, but there is a way above them all.

1 Corinthians 14:1

"Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy."

The sentence on the far side of chapter 13: love first, gifts second — both commanded.

1 Corinthians 8:1

"Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies."

Paul's earlier verdict on Corinth's knowledge: it puffs up (the same verb as 13:4); love builds.

1 Corinthians 16:14

"Let all that you do be done in love."

The letter's closing instruction — chapter 13 compressed to seven words.

Matthew 22:37

"And He said to him, " 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.'"

The first and greatest commandment — love is not one virtue among many; it is the command the others hang on.

Matthew 22:39

"The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

The second commandment, inseparable from the first; vv.4–7 describe what "as yourself" looks like.

John 13:34

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another."

The measure is no longer "as yourself" but "as I have loved you" — Christ is the standard of vv.4–7.

John 15:13

"Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends."

Love defined by what it gives — the opposite of v.3's sacrifice without love.

Romans 5:8

"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

Agapē demonstrated: given before it was deserved, to those who had not earned it.

Romans 13:10

"Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law."

Why love is essential — it is not an addition to obedience; it is obedience.

Galatians 5:6

"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love."

Faith's working form is love — faith and love of v.13 bound together.

Galatians 5:22

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,"

Love, patience, kindness — vv.4–7 are the Spirit's fruit, not human effort.

Romans 5:5

"and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us."

Where agapē comes from: poured out by the same Spirit who gives the gifts.

Ephesians 3:19

“and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.”

Love outranks knowledge (v.2) — it is the fullness of God Himself.

Ephesians 5:2

“and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.”

Love as a walk, modeled on a sacrifice.

Colossians 3:14

“Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.”

Love as the bond — the answer to Corinth’s divisions.

1 Timothy 1:5

“But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.”

The aim of all teaching is love — knowledge that does not arrive there has missed.

1 Peter 4:8

“Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.”

“Bears all things” — love covers rather than exposes.

Proverbs 10:12

“Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all transgressions.”

The Old Testament root of “bears all things.”

2 Peter 3:9

“The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.”

“Love is patient” — the same word used of God toward us.

2 Corinthians 5:19

“namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.”

“Does not take into account a wrong” — the same ledger word; God closed the books first.

Luke 6:35

“But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men.”

“Is kind” — the Father’s kindness to the ungrateful is the pattern.

1 John 4:8

“The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.”

Why love is greatest (v.13) — it is what God is; faith and hope are what creatures do.

1 John 4:10

“In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”

The definition of love is not our love for God but His for us — the cross.

1 John 4:11

“Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”

The logic of chapter 13 in one sentence: loved, therefore loving.

1 John 4:20

“If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.”

Loveless spirituality is a lie — the sharp edge of vv.1–3.

1 John 3:2

“Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.”

“Then face to face” — the perfect comes when He appears.

Revelation 2:4

“But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.”

A church with sound doctrine and hard work, and the one thing Christ held against it — love lost.

SECTION II · STUDY HELPS

At a Glance

Three movements, three questions

The inductive walk in one table: what the text says, what it means, what it asks.

THE MOVEMENT	OBSERVE	INTERPRET	APPLY
Without love (13:1–3)	Three “if I”; refrain ×3; verdicts escalate to “nothing”	Gifts are containers; love is the content; empty = noise	Audit my gifts minus love
Love described (13:4–7)	Fifteen verbs; eight refusals; “all things” ×4	A portrait of behavior — Corinth’s failures, Christ’s character	Put my name in; stop where I can’t
Love never fails (13:8–13)	Gifts end; “in part” ×3; now / then; three abide	Gifts belong to this age; love to the next; God is love	Build what lasts face to face

1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-13 · AN INDUCTIVE READING

† Teaching Outline for the Table

Forty-five minutes, five parts. Built so the men do the reading and the chapter does the work.

PART	WHAT TO DO
Open (5 min)	Read 12:31 and 14:1 aloud first, then 13:1–13. Ask: who was this written to, and what were they fighting about? Establish that this is a chapter for a church fight, not a wedding.
Movement I (10 min)	Walk the three “if I” sentences. Ask the men to name the gifts Corinth prized and why (pagan ecstasy, status, feeling of proof). Land on “I am nothing” — the person, not the gift.
Movement II (15 min)	Read vv.4–7 three times: once as written; once with “Jesus” for “love”; once with each man’s own name. Stop at the first line he cannot say. Then the ledger word — 2 Corinthians 5:19.
Movement III (10 min)	Draw the two columns on a whiteboard: IN PART / ABIDES. Ask which column the church’s energy goes into. Read v.12 slowly — “fully known” is already true.
Close (5 min)	1 John 4:19. Everything in vv.4–7 was first done to us. Each man names one verb he will practice this week, and on whom.

† Key Insights to Carry

- **This is a chapter for a church fight, not a wedding.** It sits between 12:31 and 14:1 — Paul’s answer to a congregation ranking itself by gifts.

- **Love is subtracted, not compared.** Paul does not say gifts are less than love; he says gifts without love equal nothing (vv.1–3).
- **Agapē is a verb.** Fifteen descriptions in vv.4–7 and not one is a feeling. Love of the will can be commanded — and obeyed.
- **Every refusal names a Corinthian sin.** Jealousy, boasting, arrogance, seeking its own, keeping account of wrongs — all appear earlier in the letter.
- **"Does not take into account a wrong" is a ledger word.** Love closes the books, as God in Christ does not count our trespasses (2 Corinthians 5:19).
- **Gifts are for now; love is forever.** Prophecy, tongues and knowledge are "in part" and end; love never falls (v.8).
- **The teachers disagree on "the perfect" — and agree on the point.** MacArthur and Guzik both read it as the eternal state, and differ on whether tongues have already ceased; neither lets the gifts outrank love.
- **Love is greatest because God is love.** Faith becomes sight and hope is fulfilled; love goes on unchanged (v.13; 1 John 4:8).
- **Everything in vv.4–7 was first done to us.** God was patient, kind, kept no account — the portrait of love is the portrait of how we were saved (Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:19).
- **The Law hangs on love.** Both great commandments are love (Matthew 22:37–40); a loveless gift is not unimpressive but lawless.

† Questions for the Table

1. **Why does Paul put chapter 13 between two chapters about spiritual gifts?**
   Because the gifts were dividing Corinth, and love is the way that makes them worth having.
   1 COR 12:31; 14:1

2. **What is the difference between "my gift is diminished without love" and "I am nothing"?**
   Paul says the second: without love the person, not just the gift, is empty before God.
   1 COR 13:2

3 **Why are all fifteen descriptions of love verbs?**

Because agapē is a love of the will — behavior, not feeling — and so it can be commanded.

1 COR 13:4-7

4 **Which of the eight refusals in vv.4–6 had Corinth already failed at in this letter?**

All of them — jealousy, boasting, arrogance, rudeness, self-seeking, grudges — each appears earlier.

1 COR 3:3; 4:18; 6:7

5 **What does it mean that love "does not take into account a wrong suffered"?**

It keeps no ledger — the same word says God does not count our sins against us.

1 COR 13:5; 2 COR 5:19

6 **What does "love never fails" mean next to gifts that will be done away?**

Gifts belong to this partial age; love belongs to eternity and never falls.

1 COR 13:8

7 **What do the child and the mirror teach about how we know God now?**

Truly but partially — and one day fully, face to face.

1 COR 13:11-12

8 **Why is love greater than faith and hope, if all three abide?**

Faith will become sight and hope will be fulfilled; love goes on because God is love.

1 COR 13:13; 1 JOHN 4:8

9 **If Jesus said the world would know His disciples by their love, what is our church known for?**

The gifts and the doctrine are not the mark Christ named; love is.

JOHN 13:35

10 **Which of the fifteen verbs has God most clearly done for you — and which do you find hardest to do for others?**

He did all fifteen first; the hardest one for me is where I least believe I was loved that way.

1 COR 13:4-7; 1 JOHN 4:19

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Paul promised a more excellent way, and it turns out to be a person. Read vv.4–7 with Christ's name in place of "love" and every line is true; read them with your own and you find the work. The gifts will end. The mirror will become a face. And the love that was patient with you in Corinth, and is patient with you now, will still be there when everything partial is done away.

Teaching the Word. Watching the Times. — Smith For Christ

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