

“Love > Gifts” // 1 Corinthians 13 // Cutting Through the Noise # 14

(Announcement)

Men’s Conference was epic. This whole place will be filled. You can tell which men were there, they are the ones with a holy glow about them...

(Introduction)

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German pastor in the WW2 era--a faithful man of God and part of the German resistance. Ultimately, he would be executed for a failed assassination attempt on Hitler. In the 1930’s, as the Nazis rose to power, Pastor Bonhoeffer discovered a small community in Germany that he believed represented the antithesis of Nazi ideology. The community’s name was Bethel. Here’s how Eric Metaxas describes it in his book *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophetic, Spy*:

Bethel was founded in 1867 as a Christian community for people with epilepsy, but by 1900 expanded to include several facilities to care for 1,600 physically and mentally disabled persons. The founder’s son expanded his dad’s vision even further, turning Bethel into a community entirely for the disabled and deprived, and by the 1930s it was a whole town with schools, churches,

*farms, factories, shops, and housing for patients, nurses, and caregivers. At the center were numerous hospitals and care facilities, including orphanages. Bonhoeffer saw Bethel as the antithesis of the Nazi worldview that exalted power and honored only strength. It was the gospel made visible, **a fairy-tale landscape of grace**, where the physically and mentally disabled were cared for in a palpably Christian atmosphere.¹*

I love that: “a fairy tale landscape of grace.” This is the kind of community the gospel creates, and you are going to see a description of it today in 1 Cor 13. So, open your Bibles there if you have one.²

What we’re going to see today seems—at the same time—appealing and unrealistic. Sure, all of us would love to be the sort of person described in 1 Cor 13. We would love to live in a **“fairy-tale landscape of grace,”** but that’s kind of the problem. It feels like a fairy tale ... but we live in the real world. We have neighbors we’re fighting with; our kids won’t listen to us. If we want to succeed in our job, we can’t be soft; we’ve got to have an edge.

So if you read a chapter like this one and you think, “This sounds sentimental,” you aren’t alone. But if you *really* understand what Paul is saying, “sentimental” is the last word you’ll use to describe the love Paul lays out in this chapter. **Christian love is counter-cultural and often straight up confrontational.**

¹ Eric Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophetic, Spy*

² Works Consulted: Wilson, Andrew. *1 Corinthians For You: Thrilling You With How Grace Changes Lives*; Timothy Mackie, "The Language of the

Kingdom 'As We Gather,'" Aug 28, 2020; Timothy Keller, "Love's Way with Others," sermon posted by Gospelinlife.com on May 5, 1996; Eric Saunders, "The Story of Scriptures, part 31 - Arlington," this sermon is found on McLean Bible Church Audio Podcast October 6, 2019.

1 Corinthians 13 is one of the most famous chapters in the Bible!

The great love chapter. Some of you had this read at your wedding. It was etched in cross-stitch above our kitchen table. And that's fine, just remember that the immediate context of this chapter is 'love in the church'; particularly in how we use our spiritual gifts with each other. There is a problem Paul is trying to correct: the Corinthians are using their gifts for show instead of service; they should have been using them to bless, but they were using them to boast. They believed these gifts set them apart from others and make them spiritually superior.

Paul wants to show them that unless these gifts are driven by love, they are worthless to God. Love is everything in the Christian life.

You can apply the principles Paul gives here to any relationship—romance, family, friendship, neighbors. But never forget that the most immediate context is love in the church.

In fact, just to prove that, let's start at the end of chapter 12.

Remember, the chapter breaks weren't in the original. We need to read this together, just the way Paul wrote it. Here it is: **12:29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? 30 Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?** It's a rhetorical question, and the answer is 'no.'

31 But earnestly desire the higher gifts. (the ones that will enable you better to serve others).

And I will show you a still more excellent way.

Now, chapter **13: 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.**

1. It's possible to do super religious things with selfish motivations

What Paul lists out here is pretty impressive:

- **"If I speak with the tongues of men and angels..."** (That means you're at the pinnacle of spiritual gifts. We'll talk about this more next week, but, bottom line, when you speak with the tongues of men and angels, you're on the Varsity squad.)
- **"If I have great prophetic powers..."** IOW, I can perceive exactly what the Spirit wants to say in a situation, and God frequently uses me to speak directly to people. People often say to you, *How did you know exactly what I needed to hear? God is using you to speak directly to me, every time.*
- **"If I understand all mysteries and knowledge."** Whatever you want to talk about: Calvinism, the Trinity, when Jesus is coming back, how many angels can dance on the head of a pin, why cats are a personification of Satan--you name it, I can explain it.
- **"If I have all faith, so as to remove mountains..."** I have that gift of faith we talked about last week, where I can perceive what God wants to do and ask him for it. I don't just have a little bit of it, Paul says. I have ALL of it.
- **"If I deliver up my body to be burned..."** Talk about radical generosity. You can't get more radically sacrificial than that. The

offering plate comes by and while others are writing checks, you strike a match and set yourself on fire. Paul is talking about somebody who gives away everything--their 401K, their house, even their lives--for the gospel.

Vs. 3, Even if all those things are true of me, **...but (if I) have not love, I gain nothing.** Love is everything in the Christian life. Everything. Jesus said you could reduce everything else in Christian teaching down to 2 commands: *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind and love your neighbor as yourself.* If you do these, you'll do everything else naturally. The reverse of that is also true, btw: if you do everything else without these, you're nothing.

You say, "Well, why would anybody do those things if it wasn't driven by love for God?"

Great question. I'll tell you why *I* do them sometimes

Love of praise: What you are really after is the affirmation and admiration of others, and doing religious things is how you obtain that. You used to do this by being good at sports or succeeding at work or impressing others. Now you just use religion for the same thing.

This seems to be what's going on with the Corinthians. God is not so much beautiful to you as he is useful. **"What's the difference between something being useful and it being beautiful," you ask?**

- When something is "useful," it's a helpful tool to obtain something else. You may be fervently devoted to it, but only because it is a means to something else.

- Imagine a man who courts a woman because he learns that she's the heiress to a great fortune. He's not really interested in her--in fact, she bores him; she's just a means to what he really wants--her fortune. He might be very devoted to her--a model boyfriend in every way--but his devotion has nothing to do with her, only what she can give to him.
- There are a lot of people who serve God devotedly but only because he is useful as a means to other things: a good marriage; escaping hell and entering heaven; prosperity or some other blessing. And you might want those things bad enough that you discipline yourself to live like a great Christian. But your devotion has nothing to do with love for God; it's love for those other things that drives you. God is just a convenient means to an end.

So, it might be love of praise, or a desire to earn some other blessing, that motivates you. It might be that being good is how you think you'll earn heaven. My mother-in-law jokes about how a lot of older people, in their final years, get really sweet, even though they were mean as snakes when they were younger. They get sweet "because they're concerned about heaven."

But you realize that any good works done in order to earn something from God are, by definition, *inherently selfish*: **Charles Spurgeon tells a story I love to use to illustrate this: It was the story of a carrot farmer who showed up in the court of an ancient English King with a huge carrot, the biggest carrot the King had ever seen. The farmer said, "King, when I harvested this carrot, I knew it was deserving of a King. So I am bringing it to you to honor you, to express my appreciation for you as my King. You've led well, and justly, and protected our borders. I am your devoted servant."** Well, the King

was MOVED by this and said, “You know, I happen to own all the land next to your farm, I am going to give you 300 more acres.” Well, one of the King’s noblemen was standing there and thought, “Wow, if the King gives 300 acres in response to a carrot, imagine what he’d give in response to a real gift!” So that night he went out and bought the finest horse he could find, and he trots it in the next day and says, “O King, when I saw this horse, I knew it was deserving of a King. I want to give it to you, from your humble servant.” The King, who was very wise, and knew that the nobleman was giving the horse to him only in order to get something from him, said, “Yesterday, the carrot farmer was giving the carrot to me. Today you are giving the horse to yourself.”

Friend, every religion in the world, except for the gospel, teaches that whether God accepts you into heaven or not is based on your good works. And they produce some fervent adherents to their religion--some of the most religiously devoted people I’ve ever been around, who obeyed all the rules, were my Muslim friends--but if you asked them why they were so fervent, it was because they were scared of hell and the five pillars of Islam were the only way to escape judgment. When you do good works to earn anything from God, the good works are inherently selfish. You’re not serving God because he’s beautiful, but because he’s useful.

And that’s what was happening with these Corinthians. Their motivation in spiritual gifts was to set themselves above others, and Paul says that is inherently selfish and makes you “nothing” in God’s eyes, vs 3.

And, you start to sound like a “noisy gong or clanging cymbal” to others. (vs. 1) (Start CYMBAL bang**, every 6–8 secs)**

BTW, when Paul uses the example of cymbals, it’s likely that he was thinking here of the **temples of Cybele and Dionysius**³ right there in Corinth, because worship there involved banging on gongs and cymbals to try and get the god’s attention. Paul is saying to the Corinthians, “At the end of the day, our religious devotion is just paganism dressed up in Christian clothes!”

Beyond that, it’s just annoying. AMIRITE? But you’re gonna have to listen to that for the rest of this message. (Just kidding.) Everybody give Daniel Riggs a hand. *clap clap* ****END CYMBAL BANG****

Cymbals can be a beautiful part of an orchestra, but what makes a symphony a “symphony” is that every instrument is pursuing one united sound. They’ve all surrendered their individual sounds to blend into one beautiful, single sound. “Symphony” literally means “same sound.” (sym/phone). You don’t want some guy over in the corner with his cow bell, trying to draw attention to himself.

- (It’s the same way in acting, btw: all the actors surrender their individual parts to the whole. This story won’t surprise some of you, but I was part of a drama group in college and we were doing a comedy and I played a really dumb guy, and I really mastered the character (it wasn’t hard; it came quite naturally) and could make everybody laugh. I thought I was doing a great job. But the Director pulled me aside and said, “Stop making everybody laugh

³ The gods of wild animals and nature, respectively

when the scene is not about you.” You see, we’d be on stage and the action would be over here but I’m over on this side doing things to divert people’s attention to me. I was getting the laughs but the overall quality of the play was going *down*.

It doesn’t help unless it’s surrendered to the good of the whole.

Apart from love, every other religious act is empty, hollow, and displeasing to God and annoying to others. And so just because you are religiously fervent and gifted on the outside doesn’t mean you are spiritually healthy on the inside.

You tracking with this? Because this is what the Corinthians were: impressive religiously on the outside, full of selfish immaturity on the inside.

- There’s a medical term I’ve heard, “**TOTOFOTI**”: It means thin on the outside, fat on the inside. Maybe it’s not an official medical term, but it should be. It refers to that cursed group of people who can eat cheesecake all day long and still like great. Don’t you just hate them? But their weight can be deceptive, because people assume that thin means healthy; sometimes **doctors** even miss heart issues and other things because they look healthy on the outside. But in truth, though they look great on the outside, their insides are all clogged up with the effects of unhealthy eating.

Corinth’s worship services looked fit: They had intense worship. Miraculous signs. =Gifted leaders and speakers. But only on the

outside. Inside, if you looked past their service and their giftedness and into their hearts, you found hearts clogged with selfishness.⁴

So, what does real love look like? In vv 4–7, Paul gives us a 15-part description of love (If you ever think / have too many points in my sermon, just look at Paul’s 15-point sermon!) Again, you can apply them to any relationship, but specifically Paul is thinking about relationships in the church. So, as I walk through these, think of some friend in the church and how you are doing in these:

4 Love is patient and kind;

- **Patience means you expect others not to be perfect.** And you’re ok with that. One of the things the Holy Spirit has recently been dealing with me about is how little patience I have for others’ dysfunction and how much patience I expect God, and others, to have for my own. I’ll think about someone else’s weakness or dysfunction and just despise them for it. But I’ve got way more problems in God’s eyes than they do in mine--what if God accepted me like I am accepting them? **Love is patient;**
- **Love is kind.** Kind here really means “considerate.” It means that love considers others’ needs instinctively; it’s not just happy when it’s ok; it’s concerned about you being ok, too. Naturally we consider ourselves; love considers others, also.

...love does not envy or boast;

- To not even means that you rejoice in someone else’s blessings even when you aren’t experiencing that blessing and want to. **What happens when that person gets the house** that you wanted? Or that promotion? Or that boyfriend? When their ministry or business grows and yours doesn’t?

⁴ Eric Saunders

- Parents, what's your attitude when someone else's kids are doing well and yours aren't? It's fine to be sad about yours, but are you envious of them? Do you despise their blessing--secretly wishing their kids would struggle, too? **Love is not like that. Love rejoices in others' blessings even when you aren't experiencing them.**
- How about when someone gets honor or recognition while you are being overlooked? Love delights in the happiness of others even when you are unhappy.

...(love) **it is not arrogant**

- Arrogant means always thinking of itself preeminently. Always focused on its rights and entitlements. Believing you deserve blessings and irritated that you are not delivering them.

5 or rude.

- Some scholars translate "rude" as "dishonoring," and I think that is more of what Paul had in mind. Love doesn't dishonor a person by treating them like a commodity for the fulfillment of your needs. Evaluating someone by how well they fit into your scheme of what you need in life: emotionally, sexually, or whatever, like cogs in the machine of your happiness.
- **Paul puts these two together--arrogant and rude--**because he is saying that a person of love doesn't approach life as if life is all about them and it is everybody else's purpose in life to provide happiness for them!

He continues that thought, vs 5: ...(Love) **It does not insist on its own way;** (When you live with self-focus, you see other people as coming into your life to fulfill your needs, so you want to make sure they play their part. And if not, you get angry.

BTW, one of the big instruments God uses to break this mentality is marriage, because theoretically you now have someone you focus on more than yourself. But here's the irony: most of us commandeer

marriage to get someone else focused on our needs: "Well, up until I've had only one person who get up every day thinkin' about my needs; now I have TWO."

So God sends along his second instrument, his Master Class in breaking the back of our selfishness: kids. Because those kids are not going to think about any of your needs for a long, long time. Amen? My kids, especially when they are young, never looked at me and said, "*Dad, you look like you've had a hard day. What can I do to be a blessing to you this evening?*" With kids, quite often what I want out of a day--or a vacation--doesn't happen. In fact, I stopped calling our vacations "vacations" because there was no 'vacating' happening, at least by me. They were not VACATIONS, they were **ESCALATIONS**, if anything. I'd come back angry and disappointed that my vacation was so exhausting. So I changed the name from vacations to "family trips" and that helped. I'm happier because I've changed my expectations. I know that if I don't come back from a vacation more tired than when I left, I wasn't a very good dad.

Love takes this attitude toward others in your life, too. How many times have you been upset at a friend for not understanding what you needed in the moment and giving that to you? They were needy when you needed them to be strong. They were down when you wanted them to be up. They were blind to some things you really needed. Selfishness says, "I better re-evaluate this friendship; I'm not getting much out of it." Love says, "I'm not here to insist on getting my way." Ultimately, I'm here to serve, not to be served.

Vs. 5: ...(love) **it is not irritable...**

- Irritable means “easily triggered.” **Because self-centeredness** sees the world primarily through the lens of what it needs and wants, it’s quick to get angry when you don’t fulfill its desires. But love doesn’t think through that filter, so it is more patient when you frustrate or disappoint them.

...or resentful;

- **That means you “keep no record of wrongs.”** In fact, the NIV literally says that, “Love keeps no records of wrongs.” When someone hurts or disappoints you, do you drag up all the previous ways they’ve let you down? Some people, when they get angered, get hysterical; others get historical. “You did this and that connects to that previous time where you did this and then there was that time in 2009 that you said this, and your mom told me that when you were in high school you did this...” I know spouses who actually keep journals of the ways their spouses have disappointed them. Yeah, that’s setting up for a good marriage. Some of us don’t do that because we keep it all up here. Do you see how out of step you are with 1 Cor 13?
- **Love keeps no record of wrongs.** Past wrongs are like spent ammunition; bullets that can’t be fired again.

6 (Love) ~~...it~~ does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.

Love never delights when someone else struggles, and it cares enough to speak up when a friend is doing something that will hurt them.

Some personalities have more problem with vs. 5; others have more problem with vs. 6. That’s me and my wife. I feel like I need to confront everything, and I have trouble letting stuff go by. Veronica has more difficulty confronting someone even when she knows what they are doing is harmful to themselves. The question vs 6 presents is this: *“Do you love someone enough to speak into their life, even though you know that’s going to be uncomfortable, and that they are probably going to be upset at you and maybe even cut you off for a while?”* Do you care enough about that person to be uncomfortable? Fake friendship doesn’t ever care enough to confront, because it loves its own comfort more than it loves the wellbeing of the other person.

7 Love bears all things,

When you love someone, you patiently endure the wounds of their selfishness and immaturity. You know that real change takes time—none of the big changes of my life came because someone had *one* conversation with me, or I heard one sermon—the big changes were the result of someone faithfully sowing seeds of truth in the soil of unconditional love, and you are here for it. The people I listen to most in life are those whom I know have “locked the back door” so to speak, in our relationship. They’ve made clear that they’re not leaving and that our relationship is not conditioned on me getting everything right. They know I’m going to disappoint them, and frustrate them, but they’re mine for life, and that means they are going to have to **bear with** a lot of my dumbness, because it may take me a while to change.

Love bears all things. It's used to feeling under-appreciated. C.S. Lewis asked, "How do you know if your friendship is selfish?" (He answered) "If you get upset when the gratitude does not come and you give up."

He went on to say, "If you do good things for your friends in the hopes they will see what you do and appreciate it, you'll be disappointed." Love bears all things.

7... (love) believes all things, hopes all things.

Let me put these 2 together: Love never gives up hope for this person; never stops believing in who this person could be; who God created them to be.

Paul is not talking about a silly, naive optimism, where you refuse to see faults. You just never give up what God could do in them; what he created them to be. You perceive what God has created them to be and what God could *re-create* them to be. Think of a good dad with a child. A good dad may see clearly the child's faults, but they never stop believing in this amazing person and what they could be..

Just as an aside: many of us dads make the mistake of spending so much time focused on telling our kids what is wrong with them and not enough time believing in the person God made them to be. A mentor of mine, when I had kids, warned me that this might be the biggest mistake I would make as a parent. He said, "You're going to try to pastor your kids instead of being their dad. And you'll probably be spot on in your correction. But a dad is someone who is primarily just excited about who they are. The pastor is the one leading devotions around the table at night; the dad is the one cheering his heart out at the ball game. Make sure what they remember is a dad

that was excited about who they are and amazed at how God made them.

Obviously, as a dad, you're giving them instruction. But love says, "What I most want you to say about me is that I believed in you; I never gave up hope for you." Even when everybody else felt like this about you (thumbs down), I felt like this.

So, by saying love "believes all things and hopes all things," Paul doesn't mean a naive optimism but a confidence in how God made them and what he intends for them. Paul also does not mean "an overly-credulous assumption that they never do wrong." Love believes all things: "You say you are not doing this, or that you don't have a problem with this, and love believes all things--so I'll just accept what you say." Sometimes love asks the hard questions, and presses down to expose what you are hiding.

What do we do, for example, when a woman says her husband is abusing her but he denies it? Do we say, "Love believes all things so we're going to automatically give him the benefit of the doubt?" Well, what about her? Aren't we going to give her the benefit of the doubt that it was hard for her to bring this forward? Love does not naively close its eyes when difficult questions are in order.

"Love believes all things, hopes all things" means that **love never stops recognizing the incredible creation God made this person to be, or giving up hope of what God can do in their lives.** We serve a Savior who prayed for forgiveness of the ones nailing him to a cross and then raised from the dead. There is nothing he can't fix, redeem,

or heal. There is still hope for this person. And love *believes* those things for them.

Last quality of love, vs. 7 ... (love) **endures all things**. Again, it never gives up. It can't. It's bound its heart to yours and can't be happy until you've been completed.

So, there it is, your 15-part description of love. And that leads us to this million dollar question: **How can we produce that love in our hearts?**

I mean, if you're like me, when you read that, you don't say, "Yeah, that sounds like me." Nope. You probably say, "Well, that doesn't sound like me AT ALL... in fact, it describes the opposite of me! So what do I do? Do I just memorize this list... work on one per week for 15 weeks... or try to work up this emotion of love in my heart? "I feel like I hate you, but...**LOVE.**"

That won't help. In fact, that will be exhausting. I've tried it. You can't produce love in your heart no matter how hard you try. **Martin Luther talked about the dilemma of the Great Commandment.** The GC: Jesus commands us to love God with all our heart, soul and mind and our neighbor as ourselves-- Jesus is commanding us to do something that, by definition, cannot be commanded! If you love something, you don't need to be commanded to do it! You never have to command me to eat a steak, take a nap or kiss my wife. I do those things from desire. On the other hand, if you don't love something, no command can change that. You can compel obedience, but not desire. I hate, hate, hate (with a dark, revolting passion) mayonnaise and tomato sandwiches. Pretty much anything

mayonnaise-y. If you are big enough, you might be able to force me to eat one, but no command of yours can make me love it. Luther said the dilemma of the Great Commandment was that Jesus was commanding something that couldn't be produced by command.

Love of this kind is received before it is shown. And that's where we discover the secret of this chapter. **Let me ask you a question:** when we went through that list, didn't it seem like Paul was describing someone? Like he is thinking of someone he knew and describing them?

I think he was. Substitute the name of Jesus everywhere you see the word "love."

4 Jesus is patient and Jesus is kind (Jesus considered our needs higher than his own and bore in his own body our sins on the cross); **Jesus does not envy or boast** (he did not consider equality with God something to be clung to, but emptied himself of glory and made himself a servant to serve and save us); **Jesus was not arrogant or rude. Jesus did not insist on his own way** (In fact, he prayed, 'not my will but yours be done!'); **Jesus was not irritable or resentful** (he was the friend of sinners, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief); **6 Jesus did not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoiced with the truth.** (Of all those the Father gave me, he said, I haven't lost a single one!) **7 Jesus bore all things, believed all things, hoped all things, endured all things.** His love would not let go until he could declare boldly from the cross, "It is finished!"

Love like what is described in 1 Cor 13 has to be received before it is shown. What Paul is thinking of, I believe, is the person of Jesus. It's

why John, the Apostle said, We love him because... **because why?** Because it's the right thing to do? Because we memorized a list? Because we had accountability partners? Because he'll put us in hell if we don't? No. We love *because he first loved us*. Knowing the love of God for you produces the love of God *in you*.

See, look: Only Jesus' love can give you the freedom to love others like this:

- For example, it's only by **confidence in the loving plan of Jesus** in your life--that is, that he is responsible to meet your needs and he will cause all things to work together for good in your life--only if you believe that will you be free from feeling so dependent on everyone else to do it. When you are dependent on others to meet your needs, you will feel driven to control them so they don't let you down. I mean, they are your hope for happiness, fulfillment, and security, so of course you have to control them! Of course your friend has to appreciate you more. Of course your wife or husband has to *be* this and *say* this. But when you are confident in Jesus' love, you are not captive to them anymore and you can release them and actually start to love them, not use 'em.
- **Only Jesus' love can keep us from boasting and enviousness.** Think about it: Why do we boast? We boast because we're insecure. I need you to think I'm great because inside I'm not sure I'm great and I need you to tell me I'm great so I brag on me so you'll tell me I'm great. I envy because I think I need what you have to be happy. Envy shows that deep down you are an unhappy and dissatisfied person. **Only Jesus' love cures that.**

- **Only Jesus' love fills the emptiness in your heart** so that you have the capacity to love!
- **Tim Keller uses this great analogy in his little book, *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness*:** He says, "the only time we usually think about a part of our body is when it's hurting. I'm not thinking about my knee right now because it's not hurting. It's just there. But when it's hurting, I think about it all the time. Walking. Standing up. Getting out of bed. Keller says, When you're always thinking about yourself all the time, do you know what that tells you about you? You've got a problem, your soul is hurting. Because if you were working well, if your soul wasn't hurting--you wouldn't be thinking about you all day. You'd be healthy enough to think about others.⁵

Only Jesus can heal the hurt part of you. The love of Jesus gives you the acceptance you crave; the significance you crave; his promises gives you the security that you crave. And then it teaches you how to love.

How could you hold somebody accountable for a \$2 offense against you if you've been forgiven a billion-dollar debt against him? How could you keep a record of wrongs if he doesn't?

MUSIC

Again, I say: **Only by soaking yourself in the love of God for you will love for God, and others, grow in you. 1 John 4:19, "We love,**

⁵ Notation from Eric Saunders, McLean Bible Church

because he first loved us.” So press into God’s unconditional love for you in Christ, and ask God’s Spirit to produce this 1 Cor 13 kind of love in you.

Let’s close by reading these last few verses in ch. 13, because they set us up for next week: **8 Love never ends.** It’s never going away, not for all eternity. God himself is love. **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,** That’s just because we’re not in the presence of Jesus. **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.** So I needed things like prophecy and miracles and tongues. **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.**

All these other spiritual gifts, Paul says, will fade away. We’ll all have jobs in heaven. You might even have a glorified version of *your* version in heaven. There’s only 3 jobs I know that won’t be there: police, doctors and preachers. In heaven we’ll have no need of prophecy: we’ll all know God’s mind perfectly. We’ll have no need of the gifts of exhortation and teaching, because the knowledge of the Lord will cover each of us like the waters cover the sea. We won’t need miracles because nobody will be sick. Amen? But guess what will remain? **13 So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.**

Faith, hope and love last forever, and the greatest of those is love. It is the currency of heaven. So if you are going to focus on growing in

anything in the Christian life, focus on growing in love, because that’s eternal, and once that gets produced in you, ***everything else in the Christian life comes as naturally as roses on a rose bush.***

The good news of the gospel is: You can’t produce it in you. Soak yourself in the love of God for you. The irony of the Christian life is that the only ones that get better are the ones who know their acceptance isn’t based on getting better!

Pray (Open hands—receive the love of God for you)