

“A More Excellent Way”

1 Corinthians 12:31 Earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.

- In the church / admire = ability / eloquence / insight / talent
 - influence / supernatural gifting
- **1 Corinthians 13** = Paul lifts our eyes above all of those things
 - shows us more excellent way = **love**
 - Love = not just one virtue / among many
 - Not merely one spiritual gift = alongside / others
- Love = atmosphere in which every gift = must operate
- Spirit/love gives every gift its beauty / usefulness / Christlike purpose
- W/O love = most impressive spiritual activity / becomes empty noise

1 Corinthians 13:1 Paul begins w/startling language: **“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal”**

- I.E. Even if = person speaks w/ extraordinary eloquence / heavenly sounding words = W/O love = amounts / spiritual racket
- Noise may attract attention = but does not transform hearts
- Love = what turns speech into ministry

1 Corinthians 13:2 : Though I have / gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing”

- Quite humbling verse = may possess knowledge / insight / remarkable faith / ability—yet W/O love = Paul says
 - not merely of **little value** = says WE'RE **NOTHING**
- Sobering warning for church = possible to be
 - doctrinally informed /still spiritually unkind
 - gifted / but without grace
 - defend truth / fail to reflect character / God of truth
- Heaven = not impressed by gifts / operating apart from love

1 Corinthians 13:3 Paul goes further: **“And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing”**

- Even sacrifice / if disconnected from love = loses / spiritual value
- Means = love / not optional = it's essential / central / indispensable
- Why? Because love = very nature of God **1 John 4:8 “God is love”**
- Everything God does flows from His nature of love
 - His truth / loving truth = His justice / loving justice
 - His correction / loving correction
 - His salvation / love in action = the cross itself
 - greatest revelation of divine love universe has ever seen:

Romans 5:8 “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us”

- When Paul describes love = not merely listing moral ideals
 - Describing = life of Christ
- Showing us what = Spirit wants to reproduce in every believer

1 Corinthians 13:4 Listen to beauty / depth of these words:

“Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy....

- Patience / kindness = not weak qualities = rather
 - powerful evidence of = heart ruled by Christ
- Patience restrains irritation / kindness chooses tenderness
- In this harsh world = patient kindness = witness to gospel of love
- Paul says love **does not envy** = Love not threatened by another person's gift / success / recognition / usefulness
- **Envy** “Why them?” = **Love** “Thank You, Lord, for blessing them.”
 - Envy **competes** = love **celebrates**

Vs 4 continues **“love does not parade itself, is not puffed up”**

- Love does not need to be = seen / praised / admired
 - Pride draws attention = to self
 - Love directs attention = to Christ / seeks good of others
- Gifted person W/O love = becomes = **self-important**
- Gifted person w/ love = becomes = **servant**

1 Corinthians 13:5 Paul continues: love **“does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil”**

- Love = not rude / it is considerate
- Does not insist on its own rights / not easily irritated
- Does not keep / record of wrongs
- How many homes / churches /relationships would be healed if this one verse were prayerfully lived out?
- Love does not = keep replaying injuries
 - Love does not = build its identity around offense
- Love doesn't retaliate = because it has been forgiven

1 Corinthians 13:6 love **“does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth”**

- Biblical love / not sentimental softness
 - Does not excuse sin / celebrate compromise
- Love rejoices in truth = because truth sets people free
- Love will not help someone remain in darkness
 - speaks truth /in spirit of Christ
 - **Ephesians 4:15** we are to speak **“the truth in love”**

1 Corinthians 13:7 Paul gives four sweeping statements: love **“bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things”**

- Love bears/believes/hopes/endures = steadfast / persevering love
- Does not quit/ when relationships get difficult = collapse under strain
 - Keeps trusting God = keeps hoping in grace
 - Keeps enduring w/ holy perseverance
- No wonder Paul places this chapter between 1 Corinthians 12 / 14 where spiritual gifts are being discussed
- Teaching us = gifts W/O love = can damage the church
- But gifts = governed by love = build up / body of Christ
- Love = key to right use of every gift
 - Teaching / Preaching / Music = needs love
 - Giving / Serving needs love
 - Leadership needs love = Truth itself / must be carried in love

1 Peter 4:8 Peter similarly says: **“And above all things have fervent love for one another, for ‘love will cover a multitude of sins’ ”**

- Then = immediately speaks about spiritual gifts

1 Peter 4:10: “As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God”

- Connection / clear = love / not separate from ministry
- Love is what makes ministry = truly Christian

1 Corinthians 13:13 “And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love”

- Why is **love** / greatest?
 - Because **faith** will one day = become sight
 - **Hope** will one day = be fulfilled
 - But love = will remain forever
- Love belongs not only to time = but to eternity
- Best way to understand God’s love = is not only / to **study** it
 - but to **pray** for it / **receive** it / **reflect** it = **Romans 5:5**

- So question for us is not merely, “What are my gifts?” but “Are my gifts governed by love?”
- Not merely, “Am I serving?” but “Am I serving in the spirit of Jesus?”

- **2 Corinthians 3:18** As we behold Christ = Spirit reshapes us
- When His love fills our heart = ordinary acts become = holy ministry
- May Lord teach us this more excellent way
- Way of patience / kindness / humility / truth / endurance / grace.
- When love rules our hearts = Christ is revealed thru our lives