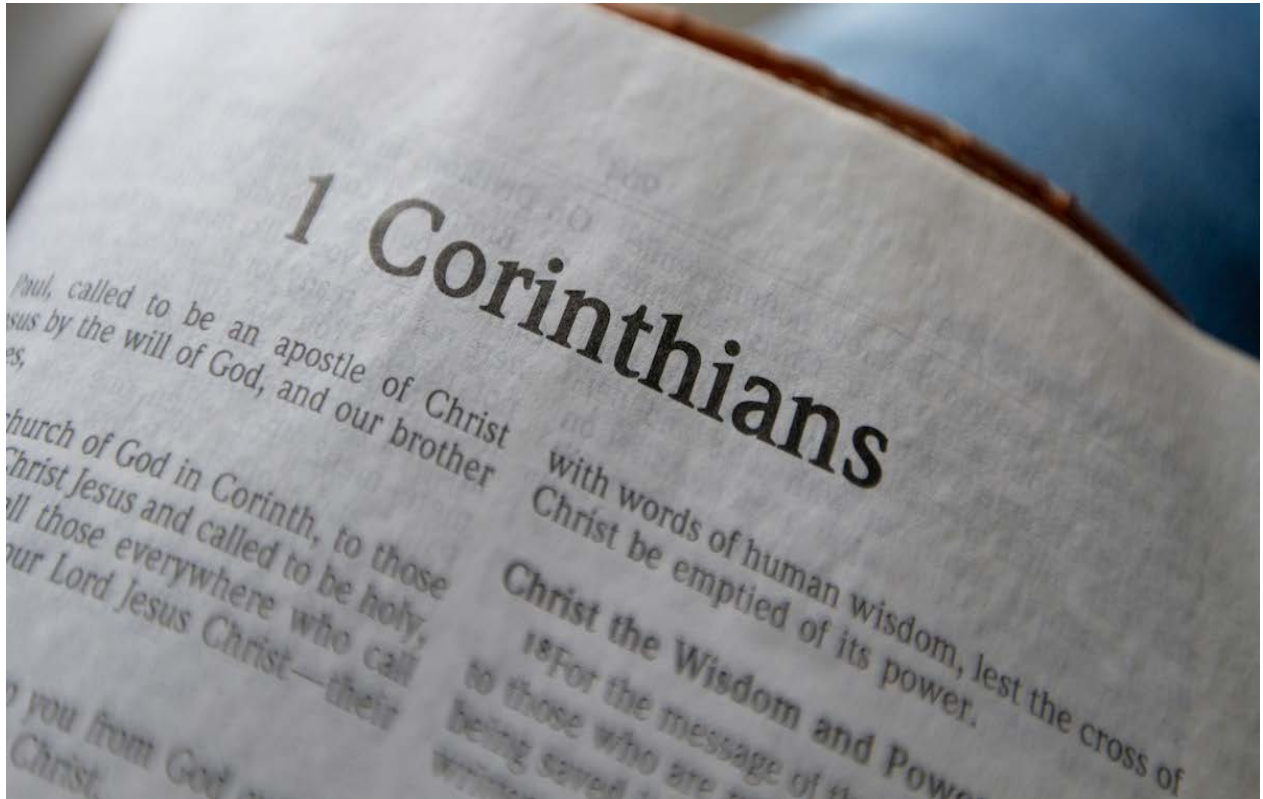


The More Excellent Way

1 Corinthians 12

1 and 2 Corinthians Part 14



T. M. AND SUSIE MOORE

A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

The More Excellent Way: 1 Corinthians 13
1 and 2 Corinthians Part 14
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Introduction to *1 Corinthians 13*

Everything in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians has been moving to this point. Their divisiveness, worldliness, and immaturity in the Lord showed that they had not learned the first lesson of all Christian instruction—love (1 Tim. 1.5). It was necessary for Paul to raise and address each issue that had come to his attention so that, when he reached this point in his letter, the Corinthians would have to agree that love is truly the “more excellent way.”

Not even spiritual gifts, apart from love, amount to anything in the church. No one who does not love, be they ever so gifted and visible in the church, has anything to offer without love.

Love is truly the more excellent way.

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We hope you find this study instructive and helpful to equip you for your walk with and work for the Lord. Thank you for joining us.

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1 **Zombie Faith**

Pray Psalm 25.4, 5.

Show me Your ways, O LORD;
Teach me Your paths.
Lead me in Your truth and teach me,
For You *are* the God of my salvation;
On You I wait all the day.

Sing Psalm 25.4, 5.

(Festal Song: *Rise Up, O Men of God*)

Make me to know Your ways, teach me Your paths, O LORD!
My Savior, all day long I wait and seek You in Your Word.

Read and meditate on 1 Corinthians 13.1-3.

Preparation

1. What matters most in Christian faith?
2. Does anything else matter apart from this?

Meditation

I don't know much about zombies, but I do know that many folks today are fascinated by them. The *ODE* defines a zombie as "a person or reanimated corpse that has been turned into a creature capable of movement but not of rational thought, which feeds on human flesh." An alternate definition reads, "a person who appears lifeless, apathetic, or completely unresponsive to their surroundings."

In brief, zombies are dead people, walking around acting like live people, but without any real human essence.

We don't want to become that way as Christians. You know, active in everything, talkative about doctrines and Bible studies, faithful in worship, touting our ministries, but lacking the true measure of the Living Water of Jesus: love.

In the churches in Corinth, division was rife because people were so busy parading their religiosity and touting their gifts and knowledge that they left off loving one another and thus were devouring one another and their churches.

Yep. Zombies.

From what I can gather, zombies are a bit of a nuisance. They contribute nothing and ruin the neighborhood.

Christian zombies contribute nothing to their neighbors or churches, nothing that manifests the Presence and shows the effects of the Spirit of love. Paul has been holding a mirror up to the Corinthians, and now he sharpens the focus: *Zombies of Corinth, wake up and live!*

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162.

Though I can do everything—speak the Gospel in every known language, foretell the future with accuracy, understand all mysteries, comprehend all knowledge, have faith to literally move mountains—to impress the church folks and the watching world, if I do not have love for them, "I am nothing" (1 Cor. 13.2).

Though I can be everything—generous to a fault, martyred for my faith, outstandingly courageous, sacrificial, and bold—but do not love those I have done these things for, "it profits me nothing" (1 Cor. 13.3).

“By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? ...Let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth” (1 Jn. 3.16, 17).

“For love is as strong as death...its flames are flames of fire, a most vehement flame” (Song 8.6). And as the footnote states: the final *flame* could be written, “A flame of YAH” (a poetic form of YHWH, the LORD). And that indeed is a most vehement flame—love amazing and divine.

Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live” (Jn. 11.25 KJV). Jesus wants to bring us to life to love His people and His Church. We need only ask Him. “Do you believe this?” (Jn. 11.26) Yes, we do.

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Cor. 5.17). Our shabby, scraggly, apathetic selves now manifesting the Presence of Jesus by living out the effects of His Spirit of love into every nook and cranny of our Personal Mission Field.

*When I survey the wondrous cross,
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.*

*Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.
(Isaac Watts, 1707)*

For reflection

1. How would you be able to know if you were lapsing into some kind of “zombie Christianity”?
2. Love, Paul says, is the “more excellent way” (1 Cor. 12.31). Why is that?
3. What would you say are the keys to loving like Jesus loved?

In other words, says Paul, if I have no love I am not just useless but a positive nuisance. John Chrysostom (344-407), *Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians* 32.6

Pray Psalm 25.8-13.

Pray that the Lord will make you and your church more like Jesus—loving, growing, ministering to your neighbors, and walking the path of faithfulness and love in all things.

Sing Psalm 25.8-13.

(Festal Song: *Rise Up, O Men of God*)

Upright and good are You, You lead us in Your way.
The humble You instruct in truth and guide him day by day.

The paths of God are all of love and faithfulness.
All they who keep His covenant the LORD will surely bless.

For Your sake, LORD, forgive. All they who fear You, LORD,

shall know Your blessings day by day and follow in Your Word.

2 Love, Yes and No

Pray Psalm 103.1-6.

Bless the LORD, O my soul;
And all that is within me, *bless* His holy name!
Bless the LORD, O my soul,
And forget not all His benefits:
Who forgives all your iniquities,
Who heals all your diseases,
Who redeems your life from destruction,
Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies,
Who satisfies your mouth with good *things*,
So that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.
The LORD executes righteousness
And justice for all who are oppressed.

Sing Psalm 103.1-6.

(Old 100th: *All Creatures that on Earth Do Dwell*)

O my soul, bless the LORD's great Name! His many benefits proclaim:
He pardons sins and heals disease, and from the pit grants us release.

With mercy rich and steadfast love He satisfies us from above,
revives our youth, works righteousness, and justice serves for the oppressed.

Read 1 Corinthians 13.1-7; meditate on verses 4-7.

Preparation

1. How many attributes of love do you find?
2. Which are defined in negative terms?

Meditation

Paul's description of love is only a sketch. He's simply marking out the broad parameters of what was missing in the Corinthians' faith. Because God is love (1 Jn. 4.8), love is far vaster and more mysterious than can ever be subsumed in a few verses. And because He is love, the love we need—the love Paul commends here—can only be received from Him.

Nevertheless, what Paul wrote about love here is true and was measured to the Corinthians so that they could see clearly in the mirror of God's Word where they needed to improve.

Paul defines love both positively and negatively. Doing so would give the Corinthians many angles on this most excellent of all gifts of the Spirit. Paul treats love here as in the gift category, but we also know that he explains it as the fruit of the Spirit which breaks out into several more specific attributes (Gal. 2.22, 23). Positively, love is patient, kind, joyful in truth, long-suffering, trusting, hopeful, and durable. Negatively, love does not envy, parade itself, become puffed up, seek its own, become provoked, think evil, or rejoice over iniquity.

There's enough here for a lifetime of improvement for every one of us.

Everything in 1 Corinthians has been unfolding toward this point. All the Corinthians' problems, concerns, issues, and needs can be resolved as the Spirit works in them for love. Love never fails (v. 8), and only when

we love like this can we realize the presence, promise, and power of the Kingdom of God.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162.

Paul's description of what love does and does not do is a succinct reflection of God's Law—what it commands us to do and not do.

Love for God requires that we serve only Him, love only Him, and worship only Him. It also requires that we bear His Name, as Christian, in an unhypocritical way—not in vain. It requires that we keep the Sabbath Day holy—being its own special day—resting in Him. It also requires that our first foray into dealing with others—our parents—is honoring them (Ex. 20.1-12).

Then love for God and for others prohibits some behaviors:

This love does not murder.

It does not commit adultery.

It does not steal.

It does not lie.

It does not covet (Ex. 20.13-17).

The Law and Love are God's message to His people, spelled out carefully in His Word.

With only a few changes, we can take the contemplative song written by the sons of Korah, and recast it as a message from God to us:

“[My] heart is overflowing with a good theme;
I recite [My] composition concerning [My people];
[My] tongue is the pen of a ready writer” (Ps. 45.1).

“Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You” (Ps. 119.11).

“Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law” (Ps. 119.18).

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Ps. 119.105).

“Finally, all of you be of one mind,
Having compassion for one another;
Love as brothers,
Be tenderhearted,
Be courteous;
Not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling
But on the contrary blessing,
Knowing that you were called to this,
So that you may inherit a blessing” (1 Pet. 3.8, 9).

Truly, godly love is “far vaster and more mysterious” than we can comprehend; so, the whole of Scripture sets out to teach us, through the Holy Spirit, the ins and outs, the ups and downs, the do's and don'ts, and the yeses and no's of Love.

“That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Eph. 3.18, 19).

It'll take a lifetime, but happily, that is the sanctifying work our lifetime is meant for.

For reflection

1. What are the absolute, rock bottom essentials for loving like this?

2. In which aspect of love would you like to make more progress? Why?
3. Whom will you encourage today in the wondrous and wonderful love of God?

Some of the effects of charity are stated, that we may know whether we have this grace; and that if we have not, we may not rest till we have it. This love is a clear proof of regeneration, and is a touchstone of our professed faith in Christ. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on the 1 Corinthians 13.4-7

Pray Psalm 103.17-22.

See how many ways God shows His love to you! Give Him thanks and praise for them all, and call on Him to help you grow in His love for others.

Sing Psalm 103.17-22.

(Old 100th: *All Creatures that on Earth Do Dwell*)

But evermore to those who fear the LORD brings lovingkindness near;
His righteousness to them extends and to their children without end.

He rules upon His throne in heav'n; His sovereign rule o'er all is giv'n.
You angels, bless the LORD, rejoice, who live in strength to heed His voice.

All you who serve Him, bless the LORD, all you who heed His righteous Word!
Let all throughout the cosmos whole unite to praise Him, with my soul!

3 Never Failing

Pray Psalm 68.19, 20.

Blessed be the Lord,
Who daily loads us *with benefits*,
The God of our salvation!

Selah

Our God *is* the God of salvation;
And to GOD the Lord *belong* escapes from death.

Sing Psalm 68.19, 20, 32, 33.

(O Store Gud: *How Great Thou Art*)

Blessed be the LORD, our burden daily bearing,
O God, our God, our Savior and our King!
With us salvation and deliv'rance sharing,
He life from death His people daily brings.

Refrain vv. 32, 33

Sing to the LORD, O kingdoms of the earth!
Ancient of Days—praise Him on high!
Behold He speaks; His Word is going forth;
Ancient of Days—praise Him on high!

Read 1 Corinthians 13.1-8; meditate on verse 8.

Preparation

1. What does love not do?
2. What other things do this?

Meditation

Love never fails. Fails at what? At being love, to begin with. Because God is love and God is eternal, love is eternal and unfailing. It will never end. We need never think that love will cease to be an affection and experience we can know every day. Love is a gift we can use and fruit we can bear continually (Ps. 1). Love is how we show the face of God to the world.

Love does not fall down. It's always strong in the face of every challenge, threat, or disappointment. When the love of God is operating in us, nothing can overcome or prevail against us; that is, nothing can keep us from loving even those who hate and would destroy us.

Or even those unlovable people we sit behind in church.

Prophecy, tongues, knowledge—all these are good and useful gifts. But they are empty without love (vv. 1-3). And a time is coming when these will no longer exist. When Christ returns and takes us to Himself, prophecies fail. Tongues will cease. Knowledge will vanish, that is, as a gift possessed by only a few. But love never fails. We won't always need the gifts of the Spirit for the simple reason that the indomitable, inescapable, unavoidable, all-sufficient, and unfailing love of God will pervade all we are and do.

And it can begin to do so even now. Seek therefore this more excellent way above all else. It will never fail you.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Years ago, on a Dr. Dobson radio program, he encouraged parents to make sure their children could do one thing very well, so that when they failed at something else, they could fall back on their success. “I might have lost that soccer game, but boy howdy, I did well on that last math quiz!”

God is giving us that same encouragement: “Children, you might not do many things well, but boy howdy, if can you love the unlovable, you can do anything!” Indeed, my prophecies may fail, my tongue cease, and I may be dumber than a bag of hammers, but if I can love, my life will never be a failure. Nope. Never.

Our friend Pat Hunter taught, “We do not love because of the target; but because of the love Jesus generates in our hearts for them.” So, we don’t love because others are lovable, we love because God gives us the desire, capability, and strength to do it.

“Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all sins” (Prov. 10.12).

“But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you?” (Matt. 5.44-46).

“Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law” (Rom. 13.8).

“Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart...” (1 Tim. 1.5).

“And above all things have fervent love for one another, for ‘love will cover a multitude of sins’” (1 Pet. 4.8).

“And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also” (1 Jn. 4.21).

In Victor Hugo’s book, *Les Misérables*, it was the forgiving and generous love from Bishop Myriel that changed the heart and life of Jean Valjean. As the online study notes for the book state, “Jean Valjean... becomes a trial figure for Hugo’s grand theories about the redemptive power of compassion and love.” And Hugo’s “grand theories” come straight from the heart of God.

In *Les Mis* the bishop sang to the thief Valjean, explaining the higher purpose of his love:

But remember this, my brother.

See in this some higher plan.

You must use this precious silver

To become an honest man.

By the witness of the martyrs,

By the passion and the blood,

God has raised you out of darkness:

I have saved your soul for God.

When we love like that, with a higher plan, remembering Jesus’ death, to serve others with His love, we will never fail. This majestic work of sharing God’s love, if it is the only thing we ever do—and do it well—we will have lived and loved successfully.

Never failing.

For reflection

1. Is there anyone in your Personal Mission Field you find hard to love? Why?

2. What should you do to seek the love of Jesus for all the people in your Personal Mission Field?

3. Whom will you encourage today with the love of Jesus?

Love always remains firm and stable, unchanged and unchanging. Theodoret of Cyr (393-466), *Pauline Commentary from the Greek Church*

Pray Psalm 68.26-35.

God is love, and love never fails because God never fails. Give thanks to God for the many ways He has shown Himself faithful to you. Call on Him to fill you with His love for the day ahead.

Sing Psalm 68.26-35.

(O Store Gud: How Great Thou Art)

Bless God in all His holy congregations,
even the LORD, the Fountainhead of grace;
He calls His people forth from all the nations
and gathers them before His glorious face.

Refrain vv. 32, 33

Sing to the LORD, O kingdoms of the earth!
Ancient of Days—praise Him on high!
Behold He speaks; His Word is going forth;
Ancient of Days—praise Him on high!

To You, O God, are strength and exaltation;
You fill the skies and dwell in holy awe!
To us You give strength, pow'r, and full salvation.
Blessed be Your Name, our strong, majestic God!
Refrain

4 Part and Whole

Pray Psalm 142.1-3.

I cry out to the LORD with my voice;
With my voice to the LORD I make my supplication.
I pour out my complaint before Him;
I declare before Him my trouble.
When my spirit was overwhelmed within me,
Then You knew my path.
In the way in which I walk
They have secretly set a snare for me.

Sing Psalm 142.1-3 (5, 6).

(Dix: For the Beauty of the Earth)

With my voice, O LORD LORD, I cry—hear my plea for mercy, LORD!
My complaint mounts up on high, bringing You my troubled word:

Refrain vv. 5, 6

LORD, You are my Refuge strong! O receive my plaintive song!

When my spirit faints away, You my falt'ring pathway know;
where I take my journey they traps have hidden to my woe.

Refrain

Read 1 Corinthians 13.1-10; meditate on verses 9, 10.

Preparation

1. How many of us “know in part”?
2. When will all our gifts be made perfect?

Meditation.

Paul implies caution and of encouragement in these words. We're all a work in progress. None of us is perfect in any of the gifts the Lord supplies. We can always improve, and we must not become discouraged because we keep stumbling over the same old obstacles and impasses. Press on!

And don't look down at others who don't have your gifts or who seem to be not as exercised in their gifts as they might be. They're in progress just as we are.

For now, we in the believing community must bear in mind that we'll probably never have all the gifts and that even the ones we have will never be complete in this life. We should therefore encourage one another, seek growth in the Lord and opportunities to serve Him, and guard against become puffed up or resenting one another. A time of perfection is coming, when Jesus returns. Then we will see Him as He is and we'll all be like Him. Then we won't need gifts from Him; He will be our gift to enjoy and share with others.

For now, though, we need all the gifts in strong and unified expression. So let love be our guide and let us strive together as one Body to see the rule of King Jesus coming on earth as it is in heaven.

Imperfection with contentment and striving now, perfection in glory then.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

“Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 Jn. 3.2).

“For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth;
And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God,
Whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another.
How my heart yearns within me!” (Job 19.25-27).

Everything else we know in part—knowledge and prophecy—now, but one day all our partial knowledge will be full and complete. We will “see Him as He is”. What a glorious day that will be!

Our life now consists of what we know from His Word, and how we apply it to our life.

God is very gentle as He teaches us the ins and outs of living for Him.

The Law requires loving God first, then the authority figures in our growing up years, next our own families, and finally, the church, and the community-at-large.

This is the training ground for “Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the uttermost end of the earth” (Acts 1.8). If we cannot love within the basic framework of life, how can we expect to love properly the uttermost ends?

How often have we not shown love at home, but then charged out into the world to be Jesus to others? That way is not the good way, and someone always suffers: parents, siblings, spouses, and children. Home is where our heart should be first and foremost. When we have successfully accomplished that love field, we are safe to go out into other fields to share the love of Christ. But have no doubt, it will not work successfully elsewhere when it is a sham at home. Everywhere becomes a minefield of hypocrisy and failure.

But doing it God’s way, even in part, is the best and only way—the loving way that never fails. Because one day, most assuredly, our eyes will behold Him, the whole of Him and love divine. How our hearts yearn within us for that Day! “Imperfection with contentment and striving now, perfection in glory then.”

For reflection

1. In what sense is our life but a preparation for seeing Jesus and being with Him forever?
2. What can keep you from increasing in the love that never fails?
3. How should you prepare right now to show the unfailing love of God to the people you will see today?

The unity of the body consists in the fact that its many members supply the things which the other parts lack. Ambrosiaster (fl. 366-384), *Commentary on Paul’s Epistles*

Pray Psalm 142.4-7.

Call on the Lord to give you greater freedom from fear, sin, and self so that you can know, love, and serve Him better every day.

Sing Psalm 142.4-7.

(Dix: *For the Beauty of the Earth*)

LORD, look to my right and see: None takes notice of my plight.

Is there refuge left for me? Is my soul out of Your sight?

Refrain vv. 5, 6

LORD, You are my Refuge strong! O receive my plaintive song!

Hear my cry, LORD, I am low! They are strong who seek my soul.

Jesus frees from every foe; He will keep and make me whole!

Refrain

The More Excellent Way: 1 Corinthians 13

Out of prison lead me, LORD; thanks and praise to You shall be.
Righteous men armed with Your Word will Your grace bestow on me.

Refrain

5 Now and Then

Pray Psalm 23.6.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
All the days of my life;
And I will dwell in the house of the LORD
Forever.

Sing Psalm 23,6.

(The Gift of Love: *Though I May Speak with Bravest Fire*)

Goodness and mercy, full and free, shall ever after follow me,
and in the house of God, my LORD, shall I abide forevermore!

Read 1 Corinthians 13.1-12; meditate on verses 11, 12.

Preparation

1. How do we “see” in the present?
2. How will we know in the time to come?

Meditation

We all love our children. We all even mostly love all children. But children are children—immature, self-centered, impatient, demanding. Grownups should no longer act like children. Paul points to himself again, as he has done at several points in this letter. All the Corinthians would agree that Paul was a grownup Christian and not a babe in Christ. What about them?

Paul continued here urging his readers on to maturity, to the stature of a self-denying servant of the Body of Christ. The Corinthians knew what Paul expected of them: grow up, set aside all your childish and divisive ways, and learn the more excellent way of love.

But our progress will be in fits and starts, so let’s be patient with one another, helping one another along the way rather than looking for some advantage over our neighbor. We only see dimly now, like looking at our two-dimensional self in a mirror. But that’s as good as it gets for now, so let’s work to see as clearly as we can and to bear one another’s burdens as we progress.

For a time is coming—then—when we’ll all have perfect knowledge and perfect love because we will be face-to-face with Him Who is perfect knowledge and love. And then, when we see Jesus face-to-face, we will be like Him; we will be perfect love and perfect knowledge.

That’s then. For now, we must strive toward that mark, being patient and persistent, ministering to one another; and growing continually into adulthood as a believer.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Celtic Christians had the ability to live in the “there and then”, “here and now”. That is what sustained their time of revival for almost 400 years (430-800 AD). They were able to keep their eyes on Jesus—the Author and Finisher of their faith—to help them lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares, and run with endurance the race that was set before them. (Heb. 12.1, 2).

We must look unto Jesus, and consider Him Who endured hostility and cruelty, so that we too will not become weary and discouraged in our souls (Heb. 12.2, 3). When we see Him, even dimly, His light is so bright that it will carry us to completion on that final Day (Phil. 1.6).

In this life, it may take two or more doses of spit to help us see Jesus more clearly: “Then [Jesus] came to Bethsaida; and they brought a blind man to Him and begged Him to touch him. So He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the town. And when He had spit on his eyes and put His hands on him, He asked him if he saw anything. And he looked up and said, ‘I see men like trees, walking.’ Then He put His hands on his eyes again and made him look up. And he was restored and saw everyone clearly” (Mk. 8.22-25).

Jesus was sent by God, to do these mighty works of physical, emotional, and spiritual healing. “I, the LORD, have called You in righteousness...to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the prison, those who sit in darkness from the prison house” (Is. 42.6, 7).

When our eyes are opened, we see God as He must be seen; but ourselves, we must see as clearly. It is a foretaste of glory divine. Job summed it up, “I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know...I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42.3, 5). And after we have seen Him and seen ourselves, we hear Jesus’ words of hope: “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly” (Jn. 10.10).

There and then, here and now...growing to be more like Jesus, so that when we take that final step into glory it will not be a stupefying change, but a peaceful, seamless move from partial knowledge to full on face-to-face knowing. How our hearts yearn within us! (Job 19.27).

*Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine! O, what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God, Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.*

*Perfect submission, perfect delight, Visions of rapture now burst on my sight;
Angels descending, bring from above, Echoes of mercy, whispers of love.*

*Perfect submission, all is at rest, I in my Savior am happy and blest;
Watching and waiting, looking above, Filled with His goodness, lost in His love.*

*This is my story, this is my song, praising my Savior all the day long;
This is my story, this is my song, Praising my Savior all the day long.
(Fanny J. Crosby, 1873)*

For reflection

1. When you think of Jesus, what do you see? Where did you get that idea about Jesus?
2. If we “saw” Jesus more clearly, how would that affect our life of following Him here and now?
3. Why is it so important that we have a clear and compelling vision of “then and there”—when we see Jesus face-to-face and are like Him?

Where God is to be seen as he is, and face to face, there charity is in its greatest height; there only will it be perfected. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Commentary on 1 Corinthians 13.11, 12*

Pray Psalm 23.1-5.

Thank the Lord for His shepherding care. Pray that He will use you to care for and shepherd others.

Sing Psalm 23.1-5.

(The Gift of Love: [Though I May Speak with Bravest Fire](#))

Because the LORD my Shepherd is I shall not want, for I am His!
He makes me lie in pastures full; I rest in Him by waters still.

The More Excellent Way: 1 Corinthians 13

My soul He quickens and will bless; He leads in paths of righteousness.
Though I may walk in death's dark vale, I shall not fear—He will not fail!

The LORD is ever by my side; His rod and staff with me abide.
A table rich for me He spreads; with oil my LORD anoints my head.

6 Faith, Hope, and Love

Pray Psalm 84.1-4.

How lovely is Your tabernacle,
O LORD of hosts!
My soul longs, yes, even faints
For the courts of the LORD;
My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.
Even the sparrow has found a home,
And the swallow a nest for herself,
Where she may lay her young—
Even Your altars, O LORD of hosts,
My King and my God.
Blessed are those who dwell in Your house;
They will still be praising You.
Selah

Sing Psalm 84.1-4.

(Holy Manna: *Brethren, We Have Met to Worship*)

LORD of hosts, how sweet Your dwelling; how my soul longs for Your courts!
Let my soul with joy keep telling of Your grace forevermore.
Like a bird upon the altar, let my life to You belong.
Blessed are they who never falter as they praise Your grace with song!

Read 1 Corinthians 13.1-13; meditate on verse 13.

Prepare

1. Which virtues “abide”?
2. Which is the greatest?

Meditation

In the “now”—the time in which we are journeying toward the “then”—faith, hope, and love “abide” as the primary virtues to acquire and use. Faith enables us to believe in Jesus, to know that we have a part to play in building His Church, and to identify and use the gifts His Spirit has given us. By faith we look to the Word of God to guide us in all our ways.

Hope is the anticipation of eternal peace, joy, and rest, which we realize in the “now” by looking to Jesus and trusting in Him. Hope is fueled by faith and, in turn, reinforces faith for a more consistent and fruitful walk with the Lord.

But love is the greatest, because God intends His love to pervade us, soul and body, and to flow from us like rivers of living water to the world. Without love, faith and hope are merely forms of self-indulgence.

For “now”, we nurture and exercise these virtues as members of Christ’s Body, witnesses to His resurrection and reign, and ambassadors of His Kingdom. But “then”, faith will give way to fullness. We will see Jesus as He is, and we will be like Him. We will have no need for faith because we will have reached the end for which God created and redeemed us. Similarly, “then” hope gives way to having; all that we have hoped for of peace, joy, and rest we will have in unceasing abundance in the Presence of our Lord. Love will remain and will last through all the ages.

Love is the greatest virtue for now, and it will be greatest virtue forever. It is truly the “more excellent way”

(12.31).

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162.

We can think of these gifts as a three-ring circus: faith, hope, and love. But underneath our canopy, instead of clowns, elephants, and flying trapezes, are attributes that please God.

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen”.

“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Heb. 11.1, 6).

“My hope is in You” (Ps. 39.7).

“For you are my hope, O LORD God...” (Ps. 71.5).

“Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Rom. 5.5).

“Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but when the desire comes, it is a tree of life” (Prov. 13.12).

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (Jn. 3.16).

“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5.8).

Paul’s time in the Thessalonian church conjured up happy memories for him. “Their faith, hope, love, and perseverance in the face of persecution are exemplary.” (NKJV notes to 1 Thessalonians) “We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father, knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God” (1 Thess. 1.2-4).

They were living out these gifts in the here and now, so that their joy would be full in Jesus there and then—sans the clowns (which are never good), the elephants (which are very large), and the flying trapeze (which is at its core, dangerous business).

Truly, *The Greatest Show on Earth*, is love.

Here and Now, There and Then, and Forever.

For reflection

1. How would you describe the state of faith, hope, and love in your walk with the Lord?
2. Why is love the greatest of these three abiding virtues?
3. What can you do to grow in love for God and your neighbors?

Faith and hope will cease when the things believed in and hoped for appear. But love then becomes even greater and more ardent.
John Chrysostom (344-407), *Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians* 34.5

Pray Psalm 84.5-12.

Pray for a clearer and more constant vision of the “there and then”, and that God will fill you with faith, hope, and love in the “here and now.”

Sing Psalm 84.5-12.

(Holy Manna: *Brethren, We Have Met to Worship*)

Blessed are they whose strength is founded in Your strength, O LORD above.

All whose hearts in You are grounded journey in Your strength and love.

The More Excellent Way: 1 Corinthians 13

Though they weep with tears of sadness, grace shall all their way sustain.
In Your Presence, filled with gladness, they shall conquer all their pain.

LORD of hosts, my prayer receiving, hear me, help me by Your grace!
In Your courts I stand believing; turn to me Your glorious face!
LORD, our sun, our shield, our glory, no good thing will You deny
to those who proclaim Your story, and who on Your grace rely.

7 **Summum Bonum**

Pray Psalm 69.13-15.

But as for me, my prayer *is* to You,
O LORD, *in* the acceptable time;
O God, in the multitude of Your mercy,
Hear me in the truth of Your salvation.
Deliver me out of the mire,
And let me not sink;
Let me be delivered from those who hate me,
And out of the deep waters.
Let not the floodwater overflow me,
Nor let the deep swallow me up;
And let not the pit shut its mouth on me.

Sing Psalm 69.13-15.

(Greensleeves: *What Child s This?*)

O LORD, I make my prayer to You; receive my words, O Savior!
Let lovingkindness see me through, and answer me with favor!
Lord, lift me above the mire; deliv'rance is my one desire!
Let not the floods conspire tlo swallow me forever!

Review 1 Corinthians 13.1-13; meditate on verses 1-3

Preparation

1. How does love relate to the other spiritual gifts?
2. Without love, where are we?

Meditation

Everything in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians has been moving to this point. Their divisiveness, worldliness, and immaturity in the Lord showed that they had not learned the first lesson of all Christian instruction—love (1 Tim. 1.5). It was necessary for Paul to raise and address each issue that had come to his attention so that, when he reached this point in his letter, the Corinthians would have to agree that love is truly the “more excellent way.”

Not even spiritual gifts, apart from love, amount to anything in the church. No one who does not love, be they ever so gifted and visible in the church, has anything to offer without love. For the loveless, spiritual gifts are just a means to boost the egos. Protestations of great faith or knowledge might just as well remain silent if love is not their fruit and evidence. Apart from love, the exercise of spiritual gifts is a nuisance.

That's just how important it is that we learn this lesson.

Love is like God because God is love. And Jesus is the supreme statement and example of God's love for us. We are to be like Jesus. Not like Paul or Apollos or Cephas or (your favorite preacher here). It's Jesus and the incredible self-denying, sacrificial love He showed the world that must be our pattern and template.

Love is the summum bonum of Christian life. We who know this are blessed if we do it.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

If we wanted to lose weight, let's say, eating less and exercising more, would be a good start.

If we wanted to do well on an exam, reading the text, memorizing the essentials, and internalizing the ideas, would be a definite plan.

If we wanted to build something, from a cake to a log cabin, getting quality materials, nailing down expert help, and laying out the recipe or blueprint to follow, would be the road to success.

And if we wanted to be sounding brass, clanging cymbals, and an absolutely, resolutely, unsuccessful nothing? Just don't love. It's as easy as that.

But what if we wanted to love? Then we must get our minds and our hearts wrapped firmly around the idea that we:

1. will suffer long in this endeavor (maybe even unjustly)
 2. will be kind (even to the difficult)
 3. will not be envious (of anyone or anything)
 4. will not be narcissistic egoists (all about me, me, and more me)
 5. will not think highly of ourselves (see Job's description 12.2)
 6. will never be rude, not ever (talking over someone, being perpetually late, speaking before thinking, etc.)
 7. will not be selfish (mine, mine, and more mine)
 8. will not be quickly angered (even if everything, every time is not your fault—what are the chances?)
 9. will not think evil thoughts (not fantasizing about anything sinful)
 10. will not be happy about sin of any kind (never: well, maybe just this once won't be so bad)
 11. will rejoice whenever we hear the truth (tell me the story of Jesus, write on my heart every word—Crosby, 1880)
 12. will bear up, with God's help, under the direst of circumstances (bad health, bad friends, bad anything)
 13. will believe all truth about our Triune God (He is the only way, truth, and life, Jn. 14.6, and I believe it)
 14. will hope in His sovereign mercy (which is our hope of salvation to freely share)
 15. will be overcomers to the end (solidly His for the duration, Ps. 119.112; Rev. 21.7)
- (1 Cor. 13.4-7).

“If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them” (Jn. 13.17). And if we do them, blessed are those who are loved—through us and by us—with God's supreme love.

“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God...we love because He first loved us” (1 Jn. 4.7, 19). “I am with you, says the LORD” (Hag. 1.13). This work of love will not be easy, “but with God all things are possible” (Matt. 19.26). Especially the greatest, supreme good, love—Summum Bonum.

For reflection

1. Why is it so hard to love some people? How can we overcome our reluctance to love?
2. In which of the 15 facets of love, listed above, do you need to improve?
3. Whom will you encourage today to walk the path of love?

The excellent way had in view in the close of the former chapter, is not what is meant by charity in our common use of the word, alms giving, but love in its fullest meaning; true love to God and man. Without this, the most glorious gifts are of no account to us, of no esteem in the sight of God. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on 1 Corinthians 13.1-3

Pray Psalm 69.34-36.

Praise God for His salvation, for the love He has shown us in Jesus Christ. Pray that all who love His Name will love as He does.

Sing Psalm 69.34-36.

(Greensleeves: What Child Is This?)

Let heav'n and earth now praise You, LORD, the seas and all their creatures,
for God will save us by His Word and build His City's features.

There we and our seed will dwell and know His blessings full and well.

His glorious Name we'll tell to every man and creature!

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. Why is love a more excellent way than all other gifts of the Spirit?
2. What are the primary characteristics of love? In which of these do you need to improve?
3. Nothing substitutes for love, and nothing is of any value without it. Why?
4. How would you describe the state of faith, hope, and love in your life?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this part of our study of 1 and 2 Corinthians?

For prayer

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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