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## 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 *Have not love?!*

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Into Thy Word Ministries Bible Study [www.intothyword.org](http://www.intothyword.org)

**General Idea:** We are to do nothing and say nothing without love! If you can speak any kind of language, do any kind of thing beyond what you think you can do, but do not have love, then what do you have? If you were the richest person, the healthiest or strongest person, the one with the power and prestige—can it mean anything or be worthwhile if you do not feel love or could not love others? If you could have it all and then get it all and you had no love in your life, what would you really have? What if you had great amounts of money or power; could you be content? Life would be meaningless, noisy, stressful, disconnected, and even miserable if there is no practice of real love. You would be just like a pagan, clanging his instruments of noise and war, if your words were without love and deeds were without joy. Your efforts and ministry would still be an annoyance and detriment to others, even those who are close to you or those to whom you want to be close. There would be no effectual relationships, no contentment or joy. In fact, without love, life would be drudgery and meaningless—utter misery even if you have all the rest! Even if you were the greatest statesman or Christian preacher or writer or famous personality the world over, would this be meaningful if you did not have real, effectual love taking place in and out of you? What about having a great amount of faith and able to do the impossible? What if you were the great philanthropist, giving away vast amounts of money and resources to others? Would you feel content or gratitude if you did not feel or show love? What if you would sacrifice yourself for someone else; would it matter without love? Does life matter without love? The fact is, nothing of either greatness or simplicity matters unless there is love! But the question is *what is love?*

### **Contexts and Background:**

This passage is about the importance of Love, that nothing is comparable to it. It is part of Paul's Epistle but was also used as a hymn and sung in the early church. It was and is an essential instruction on how we are to be and behave. This is the quintessential template and archetype that sets us up for what love is. There is perhaps no vocabulary or prose in the history of humanity that can correspond to that which God is clearly communicating to us. The point is that in order to be real, *love must move us beyond our culture and ourselves.*

### **Commentary—Word and Phrase Meanings:**

- *If I speak.* The Corinthians were obsessed with eloquent philosophies and prominent speakers; here, we are given a distinction between what we think is eloquent and important and what really is (2 Cor. 10:10).
- *Tongues of men/languages.* This phrase here primarily refers to the ability to speak many languages like in Acts 2, which was a great trait of value to have in the cosmopolitan Roman landscape like we have in Europe today. This, in context, (chapters 12 and 14) can also refer to the spiritual gift of “tongues.” This is the supernatural ability to speak a language one has never learned so that the Gospel message can be known to the hearers in that language. Its purpose is as an evangelistic tool for spreading the Gospel—and never for self-grandstanding. The word *tongues*, in the Greek language—a very clear, real, and stable language—is not ecstatic speech (a dead language, understood by no one except God, and that comes with extra emotionalism and hysteria to make it more real) as many teach today. Paul explains it is too often abused, counterfeited, misused, and used, creating a church in disarray, all for pride's sake or seeking something new outside of the Bible. Even if one would use this as a communication link to God, the emphasis must be God's Truth in its orderly use, meant to glorify God. Paul, in the next chapter, takes the time to state that tongues are not important or essential for worship; rather,

order is essential for worship—as is love (Mark 16:17; Acts 2:1-13; Acts 10:44-46; 19:1-7; 1 Corinthians, 13-14).

- *Tongues of angels.* Not necessarily meaning one can talk to angels willingly, and when we do, we usually do not know it and when they are revealed to us, we are floored by them. This means if we can and when we do, what good would it be without love?
- *Resounding gong or a clanging/tinkling cymbal.* This means being an annoyance, uttering nonsense, and/or a bad and inappropriate war cry! Today, it would be like crying out “fire” in a crowded theater when there was no fire. Various pagan cults would have riots, fighting one another using gongs and cymbals. Thus, Paul is comparing that to our words and deeds that lack love, which will leave us destitute and a problem to others. In context, this is also about disorganized worship services that are like ecstatic pagan noise! A Christian must edify others—not distract them from what is good and who Christ is. A *cymbal* was the same then as it is today—two rounded bronze plates that are slammed together as a percussion instrument. A gong was a flat or rounded bronze disc that was hit with a mallet or stick. Both were used in pagan worship and were very annoying. Also, Corinth was famous for its bronze works as well as pagan practices.
- *Gift of prophecy.* This means one who brings God’s Truth to others. This is not new revelation, rather teaching of the Scriptures in the Old Testament for the people then and expounding the Bible for us now. If we are great teachers and disciplers but do it without love, we do it by ourselves, outside of God’s will, and with conceit and selfish motivations, detached from God’s command and call (1 Cor. 12:10; 14:1-5; Eph. 4:15; 1 Thess. 5:20).
- *Fathom all mysteries.* The great quest of the Greek philosophers was seeking the “what” and “why” of the universe. If it were possible that we could comprehend it, that too would be meaningless without love (Phil 1:9).
- *Knowledge.* Knowing what the Word speaks of and its application are paramount. Knowledge of any subject is essential to practicing it, like to know how a car works before one can fix it. But, knowledge and faith cannot give rise to, supersede, or replace love.
- *Have a faith.* Refers to the gift of extra faith, a spiritual gift that helps us to motivate others to have a more absolute trust and confidence in Christ. This kind of faith, that we all can have, helps us realize that things may look impossible to us, but with God, anything is possible. This also helps us be submissive to God and examples to others that faith is more than any deed or obstacle (Matt. 17:23; Mark 9:29).
- *Faith that can move mountains.* Referring to hyperbole, a figure of speech for something that is impossible. Meaning if we could do the impossible, what good would it be without love (Zech. 4:7; Matt. 13:24-42; Mark 11:23)?
- *Have not love/charity.* No great achievements can be accomplished that would glorify God and echo into eternity if there is no love to them. We also have to be careful, because we can be so busy serving and trying to please Christ that we do not bother to be a loving person ourselves or work on our own spiritual development toward knowing Him more or praying more.
- *I am nothing.* This is not just exaggerating language; rather, it shows the contrast of the paramount need for love.

- *Give all I possess to the poor/feed the poor.* Wealth and the emptying of our wallets for others is an admirable trait, and giving to the Lord's Kingdom is essential for the kingdom's ministry to exist, but without the love, there is no joy or real purpose behind it. Giving becomes selfish or reluctant and regretful leading to bitterness for the receiver, and the opposite of joy and contentment—what we are supposed to gain—that must have love to make it work (Rom. 12:20).
- *Surrender my body to the flames.* Meaning allowing yourself to be martyred, knowing that God can rescue you but also knowing He may just take you home. This also means to boast in Christ as Paul did in Romans 1:16-18. Paul's boast was not selfish ambition; rather, it was sacrificial and pointed to Christ. When we sacrifice without love, we can only do it with pride and that only honors us and accomplishes nothing. This alludes to the Book of Daniel where Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were tossed in to a raging furnace to be burned, but God saved them. Some pious Jews would burn themselves alive before they could be forced to renounce their faith by pagan invaders or wicked kings (Dan. 3:17-18; Matt. 6:2).
- *I gain nothing.* Life, ministry, our spiritual gifts, and exercising the time, treasures, and talents God has given us for His kingdom are useless if we do not do them in and with love. We have to be on guard that we do not overlook how God is working in others.

### **Devotional Thoughts and Applications:**

The principle of love, which is the essence of the Gospel, must impact us so we are influenced by His love, that we ponder upon it, become energized by it, and it flows even when we are not thinking of it or are stressed. The point of this passage is the point of the Gospel. If we live out our Christian lives with great commitment and diligence and we do all we can in ministry and service to our Lord, it will be meaningless and of no value unless we are fueled by love. Nothing we are capable of doing can amount to what it could be if we do it without love. What we think is extraordinary or important is not—unless it is tied to faith. All we do must be in the wagon that is pulled by our faith, hope, and most of all our love, because of Christ's love. Keep in mind that most people, including us Christians, have a skewed idea of love. We get our ideas from media and movies, we consider things based on our feelings and how people treat us; therefore, we do not see the unmerited love we already have.

**The Essential Inductive Questions** (for more Inductive questions see Inductive Bible Study):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

**Additional Questions:**

1. How do you feel when someone is annoying you? Have you considered that if you are a follower of Christ and do not love, you are annoying?
2. How do you display the wonder of His love and grace in your daily life? How is love connected to contentment or joy?
3. Finish this statement: Without love I feel\_\_\_\_\_? Does life matter without love?
4. What is love? What does it mean to you? How do you feel when others express it genuinely? What about with insincerity? Why is love important?
5. Why is it that as Christians, we should do nothing and say nothing without love? What if you had great amounts of money or power; could you be content without being loved or loving?
6. How does love affect your witness and relationships? How can your life be meaningless, stressful, and even miserable if there is no practice of real love?
7. How does the love Christ gives you help you realize that although things may look impossible to us, with God, they are possible?
8. What happens when people have power and prestige but have no one in their lives whom they can trust or feel genuinely likes them?
9. How do you hope in Christ, worship Him, and allow Him to be your lead?
10. What you say, how you say it, what you do, and how you do it will be prime witnesses for our Lord. How is this so? How is this so with love? How is this so without love?
11. In order to be real, love must move us beyond our culture, past, fears, problems, and also ourselves. So, how do you do this now? What gets in your way? How can you exercise this real, effectual love more?
12. What do you need to do with your efforts in life and ministry so you are not an annoyance and detriment to others? How can you better express the love of our Lord to those who are close to you or to whom you want to be close?