

Love Supreme

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 April 2018

Preacher: Shawn Woo

[0 : 00] Let's pray together.

God, we want to be addressed by you from your word this morning. We want to get to know the God who is love better, and through that become more loving people, people who are more closely conformed to the image of your Son, who loved us with the perfect love.

So help us, speak to us, lead us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. A few years ago, Mohamed El-Aryan made the news when he resigned from his job as the CEO of PIMCO, which was one of the largest American investment management firms.

He was obviously doing quite well for himself career-wise, but he had a wake-up call when his 10-year-old daughter handed him a note that listed 22 milestones in her life that he had missed.

The list included her first day at school, her first soccer match of the season, a parent-teacher conference, and a Halloween parade, among other things. He got defensive because he had a good excuse for every single missed event.

[1 : 39] He said to travel, important meetings, an urgent phone call, etc. But he says, quote, He realized that his life was disordered, that his priorities were off.

And the work that was supposed to be a means of providing for his daughter ended up preventing him from caring for her as he should. In this passage, Apostle Paul warns the Corinthian believers of a similar mistake.

They were growing in and boasting in their spiritual gifts, and they thought that they had already arrived spiritually because, as Paul acknowledged in the opening of his letter in chapter 1-7, they were not lacking in any gift.

They had a lot of spiritual gifts. But they were so enamored with these gifts that they were losing sight of the most important Christian virtue, love. And in the context of corporate worship, they flaunted their gifts, and they used them in disruptive ways.

And as a result, they were not loving one another as they should. The gifts were given as expressions, intended to be used as expressions of love, but instead they became obstacles to love within the Corinthian church.

[3 : 02] So in this passage, Paul teaches us that we should pursue love above all things because while the spiritual gifts are temporary, love is eternal.

That's the main point of this sermon, and I'm going to outline that in the following ways. The priority of love in verses 1-3, the properties of love in verses 4-7, and the permanence of love in verses 8-13.

Paul concluded the previous chapter by saying, but earnestly desire the higher gifts, and I will show you a still more excellent way. So he will resume what he said about the higher gifts in chapter 14.

The higher gifts are gifts that have the most potential for edifying, building up the body of Christ. But then he digresses here in chapter 13 to talk about the still more excellent way, which is the way of love.

Because love is supposed to be the context in which all the spiritual gifts are to be exercised. And in order to demonstrate this priority of love, before we get into that, it's actually helpful to think about the portrait of the Corinthians that we have up to this point.

[4 : 12] Because the Corinthians believers, it seems, from their slogans, were fixated on maximizing their own freedoms, doing whatever is permissible for them to do.

But they weren't focused on building up others. So they were talking about what is permissible for them, but not what is helpful for others. And so at the heart of the Corinthians misunderstanding that we've seen up to this point of the letter is a misguided understanding of spirituality.

They were focused on self-love rather than selfless love. And they hid their selfishness under the guise of spirituality. And so this is really a corrective to that.

And Paul contrasts love here with several of the spiritual gifts that he had just mentioned in chapter 12. There he listed tongues, right, last in his list of spiritual gifts in order to de-emphasize it because it's the gift that was causing the most problems in the church.

But here he mentions it first in order to emphasize that even the gift of tongues should be subjected to the priority of love. So he says, read with me, if I speak in the tongues of men and of angels but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

[5 : 22] But Corinthians believed that they spoke in the tongues of men and of angels. And the word tongues is the same word in Greek that means languages. So here tongues of men refer to human languages while the tongues of angels is likely a reference to the spiritual gift of tongues that Paul's already mentioned in chapter 12.

And the Corinthians boasted that they can speak all forms of speech, right, not merely human speech but also angelic speech. And because of that, they became prideful. But Paul issues a stinging rebuke.

He says, it doesn't matter that you speak in the tongues of men and of angels. If you don't have love, you are a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. A noisy gong and clanging cymbal together represent these harsh, you know, grating, noises, discordant sounds.

It's a cacophony of noise. So you think that you're self-important because you're speaking in tongues. If you don't have love, it's all a bunch of meaningless noise. That's what Paul's trying to tell them.

And add to the metaphor the fact that clanging cymbal is the instrument that is used. It's particularly associated with the pagan cults at the time. They used the clanging cymbals in pagan worship.

[6 : 33] So he's saying that by using tongues without any interpretation as the Corinthians were doing it, as we see in chapter 14, they were not only making fool of themselves by speaking unintelligible words that nobody understood, but they were also imitating the practice of the pagans who expressed themselves in disorderly, ecstatic utterances.

And then he continues in verse 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.

Here Paul mentions the gift of prophecy, word of knowledge and faith, which are all spiritual gifts that he mentioned earlier in chapter 12. Prophecy is a gift that Paul regularly considers to be one of the most important gifts for building up the church.

Yet even having the gift of prophecy would be futile without love. Likewise, the gift of knowledge, however deep and vast, the gift of faith, even if it's strong enough to remove mountains, they are nothing apart from love.

Notice how emphatic Paul is. He says, if I understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

[7 : 55] The math is pretty clear, right? It doesn't matter how large the number is. If you multiply it by zero, the result is zero, right?

Ten times zero is zero. A million times zero is zero. Similarly, it doesn't matter what degree of theological knowledge you have or what level of faith that can move mountains you have.

If you have no love, it amounts to zero. Even if you've had all of the spiritual gifts that's listed in chapter 12, and even if you had each of them to their fullest measure without love, you would amount to nothing in the sight of God.

In verse 3, Paul goes even beyond the spiritual gifts and to expound the absolute necessity and priority of love. He says, If I give away all I have and if I deliver up my body to be burned but have not love, I gain nothing.

These two phrases describe what we might consider the two most total examples of self-sacrifice. So first, giving away all I have refers to giving away all of our possessions to the poor.

[9 : 10] Voluntarily impoverishing ourselves in order to enrich others. And this is something that Jesus commends, right? It's something that he said in Matthew 19, 21. He told a rich young man, If you would be perfect, go and sell what you possess and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven and come follow me.

So Paul's not saying here that giving away one's possessions to the poor is not good. In fact, Paul's not saying that any of these things are not good. He knows that the gifts are necessary and he commends them for our use in chapter 13.

The spiritual gifts are good. Giving to the poor is good and giving away your life for God is good but if we do any of these things without love, it is pointless is what he's trying to say.

So Paul's not saying that telling us to pursue love instead of the spiritual gifts. He's telling us to eagerly desire the spiritual gifts in the context of love as we pursue love above all things.

Similarly, the second expression refers to a form of self-sacrifice. The ESV translates it as if I deliver up my body to be burned but if you have an NIV that you're using, if you're using a different translation, it might say this way.

[10 : 20] It says, if I give over my body to hardship that I may boast. This translational discrepancy actually is due to a real textual variant in the manuscripts that we have available upon which this English translation is based.

So in the Greek, the words burned and the word boast are spelled almost identically and so at some point there was a scribal error and so it could mean if I deliver up my body that I may boast or it could mean if I deliver up my body that I may be burned.

The translators of the NIV took it as boast and in order to help us make sense of what that means, they added the word hardship. So it reads, if I give over my body to hardship that I may boast.

This is really one of the few places in the Bible where it is not clear what the original text said but I think the NIV gets it right for two main reasons. First, the oldest and best manuscripts we have available to us all preserve the word boast.

It doesn't say burned. Second, generally, when deciding between textual variants like this, the more difficult reading is generally to be preferred meaning because a scribe is more likely to take something that he thinks is difficult to understand and smooth it out and make it easier to understand rather than going the other way around.

[11 : 41] So it's probably, he probably read something like if I deliver up my body that I may boast and then thought, whoa, what in the world does that mean? And then he thought, okay, the boast must be a typo. It must mean burned and he slightly changed, changed one letter to make it something, so that's probably likely what happened.

And that would have made a lot of sense to the scribes as well because in Paul's day when Paul was writing, Christians were not really burned for their faith. But later in time, there was a frequent punishment people for Christians.

They were burned for their faith. So a scribe that's looking at reading that verse later would have made a lot more sense for that person to think that this probably means burned. So sorry for that digression, just to explain so that you don't read two different versions and go, oh no, the Bible's not reliable.

But don't worry because the meaning of the clause is not substantially changed even if we opt for the word boast because verse 3 then reads this way, If I give away all I have and if I deliver up my body that I may boast but have not love, I gain nothing.

So Paul's concluding this section with climactic demonstrations of self-sacrifice. So first one is giving up all our belongings and then second is giving up even our own body for the sake of others.

[12 : 54] And giving up our own body certainly includes martyrdom but it's not limited to that. So the early Christian writings show that Christians sometimes surrendered their bodies themselves as slaves so that they can use the profit that they make from that to help the poor in their midst.

So that would be an example of something like that. Paul uses this similar construction in chapter 9, 15. He says, I have made no use of any of these rights to be compensated for I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of my ground for boasting.

Right? So that's kind of I think that's what Paul has in mind here. He gave up his right to be compensated for ministry. He gave over his body to manual labor in order to not so that he can preach the gospel free of charge so that he would not be a burden to others.

So he gave up his body in that way so that he might boast. That was his ground for boasting that he was not preaching Christ for money but that he was preaching Christ for his own sake. And so that's the kind of thing that's envisioned here to give over our body to deliver love of my body that I may boast.

So this what Paul has in mind is anything that follows the pattern of Christ's self-sacrifice because Christ said this is my body which is delivered which is for you. And so then Paul is saying even the greatest possible thing even the greatest example of self-sacrifice that a Christian can do for God and his church even the delivering up of one's own body would be of no account without love.

[14 : 30] Throughout this letter he mentions many times how Corinthians were looking for gain. They were seeking to benefit themselves and here he tells them the only way you gain something is by giving up everything for the sake of love for your people for your brothers and sisters in Christ.

So are you seeking to help yourself or to help others with your life? What are some good things in your life that you are tempted to pursue without love?

If you start and run a Fortune 500 company and give away billions to charity but you don't have love you would be nothing. if you become the next big social media star a YouTube celebrity who covers Christian songs and holds concerts all over the world or the next celebrity pastor who speaks at conferences and writes bestsellers but you have not love you would be nothing.

If you heal dozens of people of their diseases or if you prophesy with such striking accuracy so that you are sought after globally but you have not love you would be nothing.

Do you get the point? This is God's radical economy. Spiritual currency not made up of love is worthless in his valuation.

[16 : 03] And all that we must all that we do must flow from and be filled with love. That's the priority of love. Okay, so we get the priority of love but what does love look like?

That brings us to the second point the properties of love. In verses 4 to 7 Paul tells us what love is then what it isn't and then concludes by reiterating what love is.

So he begins in verse 4 by telling us two positive expressions of love. He says love is patient and kind. These two properties of love describe love in its passive and active forms.

So the first word patient is literally a combination of two words that mean anger and a long time. So it means that you don't get angry for a long time. It means that you are long suffering.

This is the passive expression of love. How it responds to the offenses and provocations of others. And the second word kind refers to doing good. In the Old Testament it is commonly used to describe God's goodness.

[17 : 09] It says that he instructs sinners in the way because he is good. Scripture describes God's rules as good and that God is good and does good. That's the same word here for kind.

So along the same lines in the New Testament Jesus commands in Luke 6.35 love your enemies and do good to them. So it's the disposition to do good even to our enemies as God does.

That's what kindness means. So if patient describes the passive posture of love kind describes the active posture of love. What we're seeking to do to love is to suffer long and to do good.

Love is patient and kind. Are you patient with others? Are you long suffering with others when they offend you or hurt you? Or do you flare up quickly to seek vengeance?

Are you kind to others? Are you favorably disposed toward others? Do you seek their good? And after the two positive descriptions of love which really summarizes love Paul continues by telling us the negative descriptions of what love isn't what love is not.

[18 : 21] And it's not accidental that these negative descriptions are strikingly accurate descriptions of the Corinthian believers themselves. So Paul is not writing an abstract essay here on what love is.

He's writing a letter to the Corinthian church and he's applying Christian love to their particular situation. And so you'll see that as we go. He says love does not envy. So the adjectival form of the same word envy was used earlier in chapter 3 verse 3 to describe the rivalries that divided the Corinthian believers.

So Paul said that they were behaving in a fleshly way because there was jealousy and strife among them. The jealousy that's the same word that's translated here as envy.

So envy is a covetous desire for something that belongs to another and therefore it produces rivalry. It means to begrudge the status or blessing of another person.

And because of that it's contrary to love. If we love someone right? Think about if we love someone truly we delight in their blessing don't we? we enjoy it. We delight in it when something good happens to them.

[19 : 28] So it's when we don't love someone that we begrudge their good. It's the opposite of being kind. Those who are kind seek the good of others. Those who are envious begrudge the good of others.

Are you envious of others' prosperity? Their blessings? Their giftedness? Their status or position? Envy is a failure of love and we are rightly alarmed when we feel envy rising up in our hearts.

And love also does not boast. The word translated boast refers to heaping praise on oneself. It's to be a bragger really. A pretentious windbag.

That's another way to translate that word. It refers to any form of self-exalting self-aggrandizing speech. Once again the Corinthians were guilty of this. They are described as boasting in their misguided spirituality in chapter 4, 7 and chapter 5, verse 6.

So do you like to then make yourself to be larger than you really are? Do you exaggerate your stories in order to impress others? Do you like to boast about your past accomplishments, present projects, and your grand plans for the future?

[20 : 43] Do all your conversations somehow find their way back to you? Are you seeking attention for yourself? Is your speech aimed at lifting yourself and not building up others?

That's boasting. Boasting is contrary to love because in order to love others we must in humility count them more significant than ourselves and look not only to our own interests but also to the interests of others.

And boasting because it's by nature self-focused it precludes others and orientation that is centered around others that love requires. Similarly love is not arrogant.

The word arrogant literally means puffed up and it means to be full of hot air. So Paul again used this word five times, all five times and he used it to describe the Corinthian believers.

He says that they were puffed up in favor of one against another in chapter 4 verse 6. They were arrogant toward Paul as well chapter 4 verse 18 to 19. And they were arrogant even in the midst of their sins.

[21 : 47] They were boasting that oh we're so free, so spiritual, we can indulge in these sins. They were puffed up. And they were destroying their brothers and sisters, Christian brothers who had weaker consciences by indulging in their freedom in this way.

They're puffed up. And this arrogance is antithetical to love because love requires high regard for others but those who are puffed up have the highest regard for themselves. Their opinions, their strengths, their righteousness and they are self-confident and self-sufficient which leads necessarily to disregard of others.

For this reason they seldom ask questions that reflect their concern for others. They really only ask questions that serve their interests. They won't condescend to associate with the lowly but they presume to bring down those above them to their own level.

They are marked by selfish ambition and greedy for honor beyond that of their peers. That's what it means to be arrogant. Love is also not rude which refers to behaving in a disgraceful, dishonorable or an inappropriate way, in an unseemly way.

The word was used in chapter 7 verse 36 to describe the Corinthians once again who were not behaving properly toward their betrothed. And then in verse chapter 11 2 to 16 Paul wrote that men and women who blur their differentiated complementary genders in the context of corporate worship are dishonoring their heads and bringing disgrace to themselves.

[23 : 18] So once again that's rude behavior, inappropriate behavior, dishonorable behavior. And similarly in chapter 11 verse 22 Paul scolded the wealthier members of the church who were humiliating and dishonoring the poorer members of the church at the Lord's Supper.

Once again that's being rude, inappropriate, dishonorable, disgracing. And so it refers to the word rude to all those who indulge their immediate selfish desires without concern for how they are violating the conventions and courtesy of their relationships.

Once again it's opposed to love because love propels us outward toward others but rudeness drains everything inward toward ourselves. Are we behaving in a seemly way, honorable, appropriate way in our relationships?

Love also does not insist on its own way. In chapter 10 Paul corrected the Corinthians because they were disregarding the consciences of others and insisting on their own way. So he commanded them at that point, let no one seek his own good but the good of his neighbor.

And he urged them to follow his own example. He said, I'm trying to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage but that of many that they may be saved. All of these negative descriptions up to this point are related.

[24 : 40] And people who insist on their own way are unloving and they're arrogant. It's because they think so highly of their own ideas, they are willful and stubborn and don't take counsel or criticism well.

When they are proven wrong, they are reluctant to admit fault and slow to reform their ways. Even with relation to God, those who are arrogant insist on their own way.

When things are going as they think they should, they pat God on the back and say, wow, you're great, you're doing great. When things don't go their way, they become disgruntled and bitter toward God because they think they know better than God how their life should be.

They insist on their own way. Now, this doesn't mean that loving people, that in order to be loving people, we need to necessarily be pushovers. because that's not what that means.

It doesn't mean to never insist on our own way at all. So, Jonathan Edwards, who was a 17th century American pastor and theologian who preached on this passage, he put it this way. He says, a truly humble person is inflexible in nothing but in the cause of his Lord and Master, which is the cause of truth and virtue.

[25 : 56] In this, he is inflexible because God and conscience require it. But in things of lesser moment, in which do not involve his principles as a follower of Christ, and in things that only concern his own private interests, he is apt to yield to others.

Right? It's always a treasure to meet humble people like that, isn't it? Right? People who are unflinching and unyielding lions when it comes to God and his will revealed in Scripture.

Yet, people who are soft and tender like lambs when it comes to anything else. Whenever possible, a loving person puts the interests of others ahead of his own.

And in contrast, an unloving person insists on his own way. Love is not irritable. A loving person is not easily provoked to anger. This, too, is connected to pride and arrogance.

Those who think highly of themselves make much of little offenses committed against themselves, and so they are easily aroused to anger. Being irritable is the opposite of being patient and forbearing.

[27 : 01] A loving person exercises self-control for the sake of others, while an unloving person gives full vent to his anger to gratify himself for his own sake. The word resentful is a translation of a phrase that says literally, it does not count or reckon evil.

It does not count evil. The NIV puts it this way. Love keeps no record of wrongs. We find a parallel phrase in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, chapter 5, verse 19.

It says, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

So love does not count evil in the same way that God does not count our trespasses against us. It's similar to Proverbs 10, 12, which says that hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses.

A loving person is a forgiving person. An unloving person is a resentful person. And unloving people have a tendency to count not only real evil, but also just perceived evil.

[28 : 13] They are quick to presume guilt and suspect others instead of giving them the benefit of the doubt. Counting the evil of others and being resentful is contrary to love because we always give the benefit of the doubt to people we love.

When it comes to our spouses, our children, our best friends, we think well of them. We give them a break. We don't hold grudges against them. We naturally make light of their shortcomings and put the best possible construction on whatever they do.

And that's because we love them. But when it comes to people whom we are prejudiced against, people we antagonize, then we are quick to point out and make a big deal of their shortcomings and put the worst possible construction on their wrongdoings.

We count all their evil and we resent them. Resentfulness is also rooted in arrogance because we fancy ourselves to be above the sins and failures that we observe in other people that we find their sins and failures to be so inexcusable.

We are lenient with ourselves but harsh with others. We are forgiving with ourselves but resentful of others. This is contrary to Christian love. But the fact that love does not count evil, that it's not resentful, does not mean that we must condone evil and never right the wrong committed by other people.

[29 : 40] Verse 6 tells us that love does not rejoice at wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. The word wrongdoing is elsewhere translated as unrighteousness or injustice and the word truth is the word that refers to God's faithfulness.

That God is always true to his character, to who he is. He's faithful to himself. This means that Christian love opposes injustice and unrighteousness and rejoices with the truth that God has revealed to us.

So true Christian love is always rooted in truth. And once again this was something that the Corinthians were missing. They said they rejoiced and boasted in their wrongdoings. Chapter 5 verse 6.

They condoned an incestuous brother who was living in their midst. And they indulged in sexual immorality with prostitutes. But Paul tells them in chapter 5 verse 13, purge the evil person from among you.

Personal forgiveness does not mean that we tolerate evil. sin must still be addressed and wrongdoing must be made right. And sometimes people will gloss over clear scripture teachings to condone sin and in the name of tolerance.

[30 : 51] But such tolerance is antithetical to love. Because we tolerate sin which is eternally detrimental to someone. So that we could avoid conflict.

That's not loving. That's hating them. We're putting our desire to avoid conflict above the desire for the good of the other person.

That kind of tolerance is not love. That's selfish and unloving. True love is rooted in truth. And after describing at length what love is not, in verse 7, Paul finally returns once again to describe what love is.

He says, love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. This verse is structured like chiastically.

So that means the two items at the beginning and the end, they match. And the two middle items, they match with each other. So love bears all things, parallels love, endures all things. And they both deal with the present circumstances.

[31 : 59] And love believes all things, and love hopes all things. They both look toward the future. Love bears all things, endures all things, meaning there is nothing that love cannot face.

Love can bear all things, endure all things. Love perseveres to the end. That's what it's meant. And I think here, it's likely that believing all things and hoping all things, they refer to relationship between people, just like all the other descriptions so far has done.

So what does that mean, to believe all things and hope all things? And I don't think that all things, that all things are repeated here for rhetorical emphasis. And it conveys the resilience of love.

But the fact that love believes all things, I don't think means that we should be gullible or credulous people who believe everything and everyone. We need to be discerning about what we believe.

But rather, I think what it does mean is that we should be disposed to trust people, to give them the benefit of the doubt, to believe the best about them as an expression of our love for them.

[33 : 05] Instead of suspecting people and distrusting them, love believes all things. Do we love one another in this way? Or are we suspicious of one another?

Skeptical toward one another? Or are we inclined to believe and trust one another? Similarly, love hopes all things. Not in the sense of naive optimism, but in the sense that love never despairs of people.

We never give up on them. We never lose hope for the people we love in all things. Do you love people in this way, even when they seem to take a turn for the worse?

Do you continue to pray for them? Do you continue to hope for them? Or are you quick to give up on them and dismiss them as a hopeless case?

And it's because love believes all things and hopes all things that love bears all things and endures all things. Without faith in what God can do within our relationships, through our church, through Christ in our church, without hope for one another, our love will not bear all things or endure all things.

[34 : 21] And having spoken of the priority of love and the properties of love, Paul turns to the permanence of love. He says in verse 8, love never ends. And that sets up the contrast between the gifts of the Spirit that will seize and pass away and love which never ends.

Right? So read with me. As for prophecies, they will pass away. As for tongues, they will cease. As for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.

These are all references to spiritual gifts that were mentioned early in chapter 12. So prophecy, tongues, utterance of knowledge. And of course, knowledge of God itself doesn't pass away as verse 12 makes clear.

But the gifts of the word of knowledge, the utterance of knowledge does pass away. It will pass away because it will no longer be necessary. Our partial knowledge will be subsumed by the full knowledge we will have when our union with God is consummated.

Similarly, if the tongues really is the tongues of angels, as I think the context seems to indicate, mentioned in verse 1, then it doesn't make sense that tongues would fade, that it would pass away in the age to come.

[35 : 34] But the gift of tongues, wherein the speaker utters mysteries that cannot be understood, apart from interpretation, that will cease. And the gift of tongues, which is partial and incomplete, will no longer be necessary because all will be able to speak and understand one another fully in heaven.

The Corinthian believers were much enamored with the spiritual gifts and they were misusing these gifts in the context of corporate worship. And they believed that the possession of these spiritual gifts indicated their spiritual arrival.

I'm already experiencing heavenly life here on earth. I'm already like the angels in heaven. That's how they believed themselves to be because they possessed these spiritual gifts. But Paul is sharply contradicting them when he says this.

He's saying that the spiritual gift, contrary to what you think, they don't belong to the future age to come. Rather, they belong to the present age. The spiritual gifts are not a sign of our arrival.

It's a sign of our waiting that the perfect has not yet come. We know only in part. We prophesy only in part and this partial knowledge of God and partial prophetic revelation are characteristic of the present age that will pass away.

[36 : 49] And eventually, we will know God fully and we will see his revelation fully so that the gift of knowledge, the gift of prophecy, they will be made obsolete. That's what he means when he says when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.

And Paul's not merely saying that just these three gifts, tongues, prophecy, and the word knowledge are going to pass away. He's using them representatively to say that all the gifts that he is mentioning, all the spiritual gifts will pass away.

And it's an influential Christian theologian named Karl Barth, he puts it this way. Because the sun rises, all lights are extinguished.

We turn on the lamps at night because there is no sunlight. But when the sun rises, we turn them off because there's no need for those inferior lights. In the same way, when spiritual gifts exist in the present, only until we are fully united with the giver of all good gifts.

And they will be no longer necessary when we are united with him. Paul also uses the knowledge to explain this in verse 11. He says, When I was a child, I spoke like a child. I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child.

[37 : 59] When I became a man, I gave up my childish ways. And the Corinthians boasted that their spiritual gifts were a sign of their spiritual maturity, that they've already been made perfect. But he tells them that that's actually, those gifts are a sign of immaturity, of incompleteness.

Not immaturity in the sense that people who don't have the gifts are more mature than people who have them, but in the sense that all the gifts are an indication of immaturity because they point to the fact that our union with Christ has not been perfected.

Just as we expect grown men and women to put away their childish ways, in the age to come, the spiritual gifts will be put away. Paul continues in verse 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. And the word dimly here can be more literally translated as indirectly, or by a riddle.

That's what it literally means. And this verse is actually an allusion to numbers 12, 6 to 8, where God says, When there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, reveal myself to them in visions.

[39 : 12] I speak to them in dreams. But this is not true of my servant Moses. He is faithful in all my house. With him I speak face to face, clearly, and not in riddles.

He sees the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses? This is why Moses is considered the greatest of all Old Testament prophets. God spoke to him face to face, whatever that means, in the context, not in riddles.

And God addressed him directly, rather than indirectly, through dreams and visions. So the contrast here of seeing in a mirror dimly, and seeing face to face, is not merely a contrast between a low resolution image, and a high resolution image, but it's a contrast between a mediated view of God, and a face to face view of God.

Between an indirect view of God, and a direct view of God. And NIV gets this right as well. He says, for now we see only a reflection as in a mirror. Then we shall see face to face.

We see and experience God through the gifts of the Spirit like a reflection in a mirror. We see a true reflection. It is true, but it's only a reflection. We see indirectly, but not directly.

[40 : 27] We see partly, but not fully. Right? And we should long for this day. I long for that day when we'll see him face to face. I mean, sometimes when I'm coming home from working outside, I call my wife on my way home so I can talk to her.

And then my conversation with her, of course, is indirect, right? It's mediated through a phone. But when I arrive at home, I put away the phone because now I can talk to her in person.

I see her face to face. The medium is no longer necessary because now I'm face to face with the person. In the same way, the gifts are but a reflection.

They're a medium through which we know and experience God. But a day is coming when we will see God face to face and the gifts will no longer be necessary. Now I know in part, then I shall know fully even as I have been fully known.

And as he enjoins love on the Corinthian believers, Paul's mind comes to two other central, kind of cardinal Christian virtues. And he concludes this passage by mentioning them in verse 13.

[41 : 40] So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three. But the greatest of these is love. Paul frequently mentions faith, hope, and love together as a triad in his writings.

And those three virtues really encompass the entirety of the Christian life. so they are really the defining qualities of the Christian. Because Christians are those who live by faith and not by sight.

We have entrusted ourselves to the Lord Jesus Christ and his salvation. We are, Christians are those who live with hope in their future inheritance. Like we, knowing that the Holy Spirit is our deposit, our down payment, guaranteeing the future consummation of those spiritual blessings.

And the Christians live with love for God and neighbor, having received and having been transformed by the love of the Father. So faith, hope, and love. Faith in Christ, hope in the Spirit, the love of the Father.

These are the defining traits of the Christian. But so, if that's the case, why does Paul say that the greatest of these is love? Both faith and love are Christian virtues for the present.

[42 : 51] But they are not for eternity. Hebrews 11, 1 says, Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

We have faith. We need faith now because we don't see. Faith is characteristic of this present age. And when we see God face to face, our faith will turn to sight.

Similarly, Romans 8, 24 says, For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees?

Again, we hope because we do not yet see. But when we see God face to face, our hope will materialize and will become reality.

This is why love is the greatest. Faith, hope, are temporal, but love is eternal. So now, in the present, faith, hope, and love abide, these three.

[43 : 53] But the greatest of these is love because love is eternal, as Paul said in verse 8. All three abide in the present, but only love will abide for eternity.

For this reason, we should pursue love above all things because while the spiritual gifts are temporary, love is eternal. This passage is in one sense probably the easiest passage for the pastor to preach because after all, who doesn't like to talk about love, right?

Everybody wants more love in the world. But in another sense, this passage is perhaps the most challenging and controversial among the passages in 1 Corinthians. And this is because it teaches us that most people in the world are severely mistaken in their understanding of what love is.

people don't love this way. Indeed, they can't love this way because they do not know the love of God.

1 John 4, 7-10 teaches us that God is love and that only those who have been born of God and know God can therefore love. If you are not yet a Christian, then you have not been born of God.

[45 : 09] But here's how you can know the love of God. In verse 4, Paul said that love is patient and kind. Remember, that's the description of love. Summary of what love is like, properties of love. In Romans 2-4, he uses those very two words to describe God's love toward us.

And he says this, Do you presume on the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?

You have spurned and offended God, your creator, by living for yourself and not for Him. You have sinned against Him by presuming to know that you know better than He does and breaking His laws.

He has cared for you and He has provided for you and yet you have snubbed Him and ignored Him in your life and yet God has not poured out His wrath against you. He has been forbearing with you, patient, enduring all things.

so that you might have a chance to turn back to Him. And God has also been kind to you.

[46 : 19] Scripture uses the word kindness to describe Christ. In Ephesians 4, 32 it says, Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you.

The kindness that we are to show one another is exemplified, embodied in the kindness that Christ showed us in forgiving us. And how did Christ do that? God shows His love for us in this that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

God loved us not when we were starting to turn around and follow Him but while we were still going headlong in the wrong direction. God loved us while we were still unlovable.

God loved us while we still hated Him. We rebelled against Him. We were His enemies. That's the kindness. of God. If you want to know what love is, look into the face of Jesus Christ.

That's where you see love. That's where you meet love. And it's only when you meet love of Christ, experience the love of Christ, that you can be transformed to love in this way.

[47 : 28] all your longing for love in your life, all your pursuit of love, you're longing for God. You're pursuing God.

So run after Him today. Let's pray together. Actually, let's take some time to reflect on that in silence, to respond to it.

Reflect on your love, love of God for you, and how that calls us to love one another. Reflect on that and we'll respond by praying together, corporately.

Thank you.