

## The Permanence of Love – Part 2

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*1 Corinthians*

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**Bible Text:** 1 Corinthians 13:8

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1 Corinthians 13 is where we are again this evening. 1 Corinthians 13. We read beginning with verse 1.

"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 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. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. 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. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. 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. So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love."

Let's pray together.

*Lord, thank You for this opportunity we have this evening to open Your precious book together, Your Word. We thank You, Lord, for giving it to us. We thank You that we've been entrusted with the oracles of God, and I pray that tonight, Lord, You would take Your Word in hand, Lord, and deal with our heart. Enlighten our minds. Bring things to bear upon our consciences and upon our hearts as we read and study, Lord. Do that work in us that produces change in us for the glory of Your name and for the good of our souls. I thank You for my brothers and sisters. And Lord, it's my desire tonight that this time in Your Word would be edifying for them. That Lord, that Your sheep would be fed. Nurtured, shepherded with the Word of God. And Lord, we also recognize, as has*

*already been voiced, that in all likelihood there is someone with us here tonight who does not have the life of God abiding in their souls, someone who has not experienced yet the new birth, someone who does not belong to Your Son, and we ask that in Your mercy and grace that even this night, Lord, they would see their emptiness apart from You, and Lord that they would desire to be reconciled to You through the death of Your Son, clothed before You in the righteousness of Your Son, and in that way, Lord, made right with You. We ask You for this tonight in Jesus' name and for His sake, Amen.*

This morning, we saw that the priority of love is seen in the permanence of love. The Bible says that love will not fail. The American Standard has it that way. Or "love never ends," the ESV says. The Greek word there, *pipto*, means to fall and we talked about the fact that it means to fall in the sense of ruin, or fall in the sense of destruction. The Word of God never fails. It is used in that sense. And so here, it tells us that love never fails. Love never falls into ruin. Love never ends. What he's talking about here is the permanence of love.

We didn't just see it stated, we also took time to explain it, and we said that this never ending quality of love is found in the Holy Spirit. In us, it's explained by the Holy Spirit's presence. He gives us love. When He came to live in us, the love of God was poured out in our hearts. Because He's been given to us forever, the love of God will abide in us and be expressed through us forever. And we talked about the fact that this love is the love of God Himself. This is an everlasting love. This is the love that has always existed in the Godhead. This is the love of fellowship and so the love that the Father, and the Son, and the Spirit all have to one another, this is the love that we've been introduced into through salvation, and it is from eternity to eternity and so in that way, this love never ends.

Now, I want us to go on explaining that tonight and thinking about that tonight, but, before we move on, I just want us first, this evening, to think about some of the practical implications of what we saw this morning. The idea that in salvation, the love of God was introduced into my life, the idea that in salvation, the person of God has come to take up residence in me, Christ in me in the person of the Holy Spirit, so that He, His presence in me, He is the explanation for my experience and my expression of God's love, and that this love is the love that exists in God Himself. What does this mean practically? I want you to think about a few things with me.

First of all, this means that God enjoyed perfect love and perfect fellowship before man was ever made. When you understand what we saw this morning, you are reminded that God did not create man because of any kind of deficiency in God. I don't know if you ever grew up hearing something like this, but the idea that God created man, because God needed fellowship. God created man, and no one says it quite like this, but the idea goes, God was lonely. God needed someone to have fellowship with, and so God created man to have fellowship with man. Nothing could be further from the truth. Before God ever created anything, God was completely satisfied in Himself. In the Godhead there was already fellowship. In the Godhead there was already love. There was relationship. So we were not created because God needed us. God created us, and in that way, He gave expression to certain things about Himself. It's right that God's glory would be expressed.

And so in creation, God has given expression to His glory, but it doesn't represent anything that God needed. God needs nothing. God is completely self-sufficient.

So we realize that this love we have been introduced into is love that existed in the Godhead before we were ever made. It reminds us of the self-sufficiency of God. It also gives us the true sense of what the fellowship of salvation is. It's a gracious invitation. The fact that God through His Son would introduce us into fellowship with Himself. That we in salvation have entered into a fellowship that has been going on for all eternity. That God brought us into this fellowship that He has already experienced in Himself. We've been brought into the fellowship that exists in God. The understanding that God was self-sufficient before He made us, but we've been introduced into this fellowship that already existed, what that says to us is this is nothing less than God's grace. That God would say to us, as it were, "Would you like to have fellowship with me? Would you like to have an experience of the fellowship that I've already known in myself from all eternity? I'm not introducing you into this because I need you. I'm introducing you into this fellowship because you need me."

It's a gracious invitation that we've been brought into the fellowship of God, or we could say it this way: that it's a gracious thing that we've been brought into the experience of God's love. That God would bring us into this love relationship that He knows Himself. That's God's grace. This means something else. This means that this is how we are to understand our fellowship with each other. I'm absolutely convinced that in the church of our time, there is a very deficient view of koinonia. There's a very deficient view of what it means to have fellowship with each other. You see, the fellowship that we share with each other is the very same fellowship that we share with God. Here you have this fellowship that exists in God from all eternity. God in His grace redeems us, saves us, brings us into this fellowship, this love relationship that God knows in Himself, so that now we become God lovers but also lovers of those who are the offspring of God. So we have love for one another. The fellowship that we experience is this union that we know in God. That is our fellowship. Now, we can enjoy varying degrees of the outworking of that fellowship. We can have a very deficient approach to the enjoyment of that fellowship, but what I want you to get is this: the moment you are saved, that fellowship already exists with every other genuine believer. It's not something you go about establishing. It's something that is established in Christ. The prayer of the Son of God has been answered. We are one in Him. As the Father is in Christ, and Christ is in the Father, so we are in Christ. And in that way, we are in union, each one of us with one another. That is our fellowship. Which means that if I claim to be in fellowship with God, but I don't have any appreciation for my union with you, if I claim to be in fellowship with God, but I can't love you, I don't find any commonness with you, I may in fact be demonstrating that I'm not in fellowship with God at all. It is impossible to be someone who has fellowship with God and not enjoy that union with other believers. It is impossible because this fellowship is the very same fellowship. The fellowship I have with you is the fellowship that I have in the Lord Jesus Christ and in my relationship to the Father.

So the first practical thing I want you to bring away from what we've seen so far is this love is a fellowship love. It has already existed in God. We've been graciously brought into that fellowship and into that love, and it's that fellowship that we share with each other. Now, another practical thing that you can consider is what does this look like when the love of God breaks into a person's life? When the Holy Spirit has come to take up residence, when salvation has truly been experienced, and you're a new creation, and you're in the Lord Jesus Christ, you've entered into this fellowship, what does it look like from a practical experiential point of view? Well, not to give an exhaustive list, but just a few things to think about. Here's what it looks like. First of all, it means we see God now the way that God sees Himself. We see God the way that God sees Himself. If I have come to experience the love of God, if God's love has been poured out in my heart, this means that my love for the Father will be the very same kind of love that the Son has for the Father. My love for the Son will be the same kind of love that the Father has for the Son. Do you see? I've been brought into the love of God, so that the way that God relates to Himself, the way that God loves Himself in terms of each person of the Trinity, the way that God sees Himself, the love of God has been poured out in my heart so that now I love the Father, and love the Son, and love the Spirit with that love that exists in God.

What does it look like when the love of God has come to a life? There is an awakening. There is an awakening as to who God is, but it is more than just a knowledge of who God is. There is an attraction to who God is. There is an appreciation for who God is. There is a passion for the true and living God. I asked you this morning at the close of the service, "Do you know anything about this love?" We could ask that practically is to say, "Do you have a view of God that is consistent with God's view of Himself? Do you see the Son the way the Father sees the Son. Do you love the Spirit the way the Father and the Son relate to the Holy Spirit? Is your view of God consistent with God's revelation of Himself so that you have a passion, a desire, an appreciation for the true and living God as He has revealed Himself in Scripture?" This is the dawning of the love of God in a person's life. And we have all met people who say that they know the Lord and love the Lord, but then you present them with the God of the Bible, and they revolt at the God of the Scriptures. You see, where the love of God is really present, then as God makes Himself known on the pages of Scripture, there is not a rejection of that God, there is a desire for that God.

What does it mean for the love of God to break into a person's life? It means that our view of people is the same as God sees people. After all, this is not our love. This is God's love that has been poured out into our hearts. And so now, I see people the way God sees people. That is, I see lost people the way God sees lost people. Does God have a love for lost people? Does God have a general love for all people? What do you think the answer is? Yes. When John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world," is that a general kind of love that God has for all humanity? Were they salvific desire? Yes. Do we know that? I mean, do we have a passion and desire to see people converted? Do we look at our community where God has planted us, can we say that we have a real passion to see people come to Christ?

We go to work every day. Do you have a burden for those people you work with? Young people, you go to school when it's not summertime. You go to school. Maybe some of

you are going to school in the summertime, I don't know. But you go to school. Do you have a desire, a passion, to see those people you go to school with come to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior? We have family members who don't know the Lord yet. Do you have a passion to see them come to Christ? We just had some of our people come back from Guatemala. Do you look at the world, and do you see, and do you realize that it's God's desire and in fact, in terms of the elect of God, it's His plan and purpose to bring to Himself worshippers from every people group on the face of the planet? All races, languages, cultures. Is that your heartbeat?

If the love of God has been poured out in my heart, I would think that my view of the lost would mirror His view of the lost. But not only my view of lost people will be changed by the love of God, my view of God's people will be changed by the love of God. Now the church becomes precious to me. Now I see men in terms of their relationship to Jesus. And if you know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, you are seen by me, if the love of God has been poured out in my heart, I see you as my brother. I see you as my sister. I see you as a joint heir of all of that that's been given to believers in Christ Jesus, so that my relationship to you is not merely a human one, but it is one that is fueled and formed by God's view of His church.

Do we come to the church and just view it as some human organization? Or do we come to the church, and do we see the family of God, which means my family, my brothers, my sisters? And not just gathered in this one local expression of the family of God, but then when you meet believers all over the world, do you see the family of God as your family, your brethren?

What does it look like when the love of God has come to a soul? It's first a God-ward change. The way I see God has changed. But then it is also a people change. The way I see people has changed. And when the love of God has come into a soul, it also means that our view of the truth changes. The Word of God becomes precious to us. We know this in things that are just absolutely merely human and natural. When you love someone, communication from that person becomes important to you.

I can remember when I was love sick before I got married. Some of you can remember when you were love sick before you got married. And I'm really amazed my wife loved me, because I wanted her to write me letters when I was away from her. And I would count how many pages. That's stupid, isn't it? Yes, it is. You can say it is. It is. But I would. "Now you wrote me a ten page letter last time, this is a two pager. What happened? What's wrong in our relationship? We need to talk." But I'm telling you, there I was hours from her, and I would take these letters, and I would read them. I would read the letters, and I would put them away, and then a day or two later I would take it back out, and I would read it again. Why? Because I was love dumb. I was love struck. I loved her. Still do.

When you love someone, communication becomes important. Listen, when you love the living God in a way far more profound than any love for a human being, when you love Holy God, His communication to you is precious. The psalmist said, "Oh how I love

Your law!" Do you love the Word of God? One of the evidences that God's love has broken in upon your soul is that you now have a newfound love for the communication that God has given to us in Scripture. It changes my view of God. It changes my view of people. It changes my view of the truth. It also means that my view of God's commandments has changed. "This is the love of God that we keep His commandments, and His commandments are not burdensome," the book of 1 John says. His commandments are not burdensome. Why are they not burdensome? Because now they are the matters of my desire. The love of God has been poured out in my soul, so that now I have a desire to please the one who gave Himself for me. To walk in the commandments of God doesn't run contrary to my desires. Now those commandments run in the direction of my desires.

I asked you this morning, "Do you know anything about this love? Do you know what it is to have your view of God transformed? Do you know what it is to have your view of people, lost people and saved people, transformed? Do you know what it is to have your view of the Word of God transformed? Do you know what it is to have your view of walking in the commandments of God transformed? And one final thing I would mention is when the love of God is present in the soul, it means our view of redemption changes. Jesus dying on a cross becomes a very personal thing, doesn't it? He didn't just die for sinners, though He died for sinners. Now as a sinner who's been saved by Christ, saved by the grace of God, I'm able to say, along with the Apostle Paul, of Jesus, "Who loved me," Paul writes, "And gave Himself for," what does he say? "Me. He gave Himself for me." He loved me, Christ did, and He gave Himself for me. So that redemption is not something theoretical, and out there, and sort of belonging to some general category. No, I am a redeemed one who has been forgiven of all my sins, and set free from my slavery to sin, and will stand before God forever and forever cleansed, purified, perfected because of what His Son did for me. Is that your view of redemption? Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 9:15, "Thanks be to God for His inexpressible gift!" Another version has "indescribable." I mean a gift I can't describe. When the love of God has broken in upon a human soul that is the view of the cross. Amazing grace. An indescribable gift.

What does it mean to be saved? It means you've been invited by the God who needs nothing, who doesn't need you, into fellowship with Himself and this fellowship we enjoy with God is a fellowship of love, everlasting love. It's a work of God that has transformed your soul so that you see Him, you see the world, you see the church, you see His Word, you see His commandments, and you see the cross in a radically different way. Do you know about that love?

Now, we come to our text, and notice that he explains the permanence of love, not only by stating it, but by contrasting it. Remember the priority of love is seen in that it is everlasting. He states that it's everlasting. "Love never ends." But now he shows us how it is superior to other graces and other gifts that have been imparted through the Holy Spirit to God's people. It is distinguished from these other graces and gifts by its everlasting nature. He says in verse 8, "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 prophecy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away." We're going to dig more

into these verses more next week and begin to look specifically at the issue of tongues, and we'll see how these verses relate to that subject. But all I want you to note tonight is that these gifts that the Corinthians, no doubt, valued so highly, these gifts that had their proper place, had their proper function, are important, are significant, nonetheless, they are not permanent. Prophecies will pass away. The gift of prophecy will pass away. Tongues will cease. The gift of knowledge, he's not just talking about knowing things, because we're going to know in heaven perfectly as God means for us to know. But the gift of knowledge, it will pass away. Why? Because there is something perfect that is coming. And when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.

Now let's think about this together. First of all, before we deal with the specific gifts mentioned here, and we could call them the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit, I want you to think about the general gifts from God's Spirit. Jonathan Edwards said this, "There are the common and ordinary gifts of the Spirit of God. These in all ages have more or less been bestowed on many natural unconverted men in common convictions of sin, and common illuminations, and common religious affections, which, though they have nothing in them of the nature of divine love, or of true and saving grace, are yet fruits of the Spirit in the sense that they are the effect of His influence on the hearts of men. And as to faith and hope, if there be nothing of divine love with them, there can be no more of the Spirit of God in them than is common to natural unregenerate men." What is Edwards saying? He is saying that the Spirit of God gives certain gifts, not gifts as in spiritual gifts, divinely given abilities for ministry in the body of Christ. He's not talking about that. He's just talking about gracious things that God does, even for lost men, by the influence of His Spirit, so that in that sense they could be called gifts from God through the Spirit to men. And he mentions specifically, for example, natural men can know the common convictions of sin. There are men in this world who do not know the Lord who would tell you that they know what they are doing is wrong. There are people in this world who do not know the Lord who have pangs of conscience, whose consciences bother them. They put their head down on the pillow at night, and they cannot get rest, because they know that what they are doing is wrong. Well, who makes them to know that? You say, "Well, some of that is just found in man's very nature, created in the image of God." That's true, but it's also true to say that the Spirit of God strives in some way that falls short of salvation, there is still a striving that goes on with men who are not converted. So the common convictions of sin.

He also makes mention, Edwards does, of the common illuminations of divine truth. The Spirit of God allows men, even lost men, to know of certain things that have to do with the truth. A lost man can look around at all that has been made and know that there is a God. A lost man can look around at what has been made and come to the conclusion that this is all not a matter of evolution. This is not all a matter of chance. Even lost men can be brought by God's gracious influence, not only by nature, but by God's gracious influence to recognize certain things that have to do with the truth.

And Edwards mentions also common desires for religion. Listen folks, there are people who are not yet converted and may never be converted who will say to one another, "I know this, because I grew up in a home where this happened for a time." Where a lost

husband and a lost wife talked about, "You know what? We need to get our family into," what? "Church. We need to get them into a church. We need to get our family into a place where we talk about God, and we pray, and we pursue that sort of moral life that sort of goes along with religion." What would move a person to say, "We need religion. We need some kind of worship of God"? Where does that come from? You say, "By nature." It's true, but it's also by virtue of the gracious general influence of the Holy Spirit.

All of those kinds of gifts are temporary. I mean, when the day comes that that lost man dies, those temporary gifts, those temporary insights, convictions, desires, will stand as a testimony against his stubborn sinful heart. Although those things should have led to love for God and belief in the Gospel, a seeking out after the true God, even though those things are enough to make the man responsible before God, he did not respond to those things in a saving way. When he dies those things will be passed. Temporary. You say, "Will a man still have a conviction concerning his sins? Will he be aware of his sinfulness in hell?" I think the Bible is clear about that. Yes. "Will he have a knowledge that Jesus is Lord?" Yes. There will be illumination concerning the truth. But what he knows in hell will be different from what he has known temporarily in this earth.

There are general gifts given by the Spirit that are temporary in nature, but what Paul is writing about here is not that, not those general gifts. He's talking about extraordinary gifts. He's talking about gifts given to believers. As we've talked about, the spiritual gifts fall into two categories. You have temporary sign gifts, and then you have permanent edifying gifts. But realize that when we talk about permanent edifying gifts, we're still talking about permanent throughout this age, not permanent forever. When you talk about the gift of service, that's needful for this age. When you talk about the gift of proclamation or prophecy, that's needful for this age. The gift of knowledge, needful for this age. But one day the need for those gifts will have passed away. When the perfect comes, there will be no need of preaching. When the perfect comes, there will be no need of the gift of knowledge drawing out the truth from God's Word. There will be no need for that. When the perfect comes, there will be no need for a sign gift, such as the gift of languages. The time for those things will have ceased and all that will be left is love. And that makes love the priority. The permanence of love makes it, not my priority, not Paul's priority, God's priority. This is what God wants us to make the priority in our life, because this is a gift from Him by His Spirit that will last forever.

We need to think about that. I think about that often. I really do. I'm going to give you an example about how I think about it. You know I am so thankful and so blessed when I think about the fact that I get to preach the Bible. What a blessing that is. But something is wrong. Something is defective in my thinking if I think about myself primarily in terms of being a preacher. I am thankful that I am a married man. I am thankful for my wonderful precious wife, but something is defective in my thinking if I think about myself primarily in terms of marriage. I'm thankful to be a father of four children. But something is defective in my thinking if I think about myself primarily as a father. Because listen: the day I die, the day that my own individual story on this earth ends, I won't be preaching anymore, and my primary relationship to my wife, if I precede her in



death when we're both before the Lord in heaven, my relationship will no longer be one of marriage. No, brother and sister, before our living God and before our Savior in heaven there is no marriage nor giving in marriage, as Jesus said. Same thing could be said of my relationship as a father.

So the first way, the primary way that I should think of myself has to do with the love of God. Not a preacher, but a redeemed person. Not a husband, but a child of God. Not a father, but a member of God's family, a member of God's church, because every other way, though these things are important, and great blessings, and great privileges, and I rejoice in them all, and they all have their time and their purpose, they are all temporary. But my relationship to God's love is forever. Forever.

Think about all the things you're doing right now in your life that are important. They're appropriate. They're needful. But how many of the things that you are doing right now will not go on forever? You're a teacher. You love teaching the Bible. You love teaching in your class. It's a wonderful thing. Thank God for you and for the ability that God has given you, but you won't be teaching forever. Maybe you work in a service way in the church. That's wonderful! Thank God for that! But it's not forever. Maybe you have a great gift of organization, and you're very good at organizing things and managing things, and you give yourself to that. That's wonderful but it won't go on forever. Now when you think about your own life, what you realize is the one thing that goes on forever is your relationship to God's love in Jesus Christ.

I spoke with someone not too long ago who was a little bit grieved, not terribly grieved, not upset, but a little bit grieved to recognize that when you look at the qualifications for an elder or for a deacon, they don't qualify to serve there. And so they said, "You know, I just realized I will never serve as an elder or a deacon." And I was able to encourage them with this thought, "Listen, those offices are temporary anyway. They're important. They're needful. They're useful. But do you know what? They're not forever." The Corinthian problem was jealousy over where they plugged into the body of Christ, or in some cases a feeling, perhaps, of being deficient or less than because of where they plugged into the body of Christ. But realize something: none of those things is the most important thing. The most important thing, the thing that goes on forever, is our relationship to God's love in Jesus Christ. Our relationship to each other in God's love in Jesus Christ. This is the priority.

Not only is that true in the individual life. This is also true in the church. Did you know that we are a people, and I heard this described this way this week, and I really rejoiced in this thought, we are a people who are living between ages in a sense. The inauguration of the end of the age came with the coming of Christ. In terms of the church, we experienced the inauguration on the day of Pentecost. The end is coming when we are all going to stand before the Lord finished and perfected, glorified. And right now, we are living between the inauguration and the end. This is the age we are living in and in the church there are certain gifts that are still operating. I believe, as I have already taught you, I believe there are certain gifts that ceased. Here's what interesting to me about how some people think about that. They say, "No, we don't want to believe that some of the

gifts have ceased, because that would make the church of today somehow deficient when compared with the church in the past. If in the first century you had all these gifts operating, but right now you don't have all these gifts operating, wouldn't that mean that somehow the church right now is deficient when compared to the church back then?"

Well, think about it beloved, if that's true, then what it means is this: for these gifts to cease puts us in a deficient position when in fact, what this passage teaches is this: when we will have arrived, when we will be most glorious, when we will have been perfected, is when these gifts are no longer functioning. Now you have the church standing before Christ and the need for these gifts is no more. And we stand before Him perfected. Notice the illustration that he uses. It's a powerful illustration. He says, verse 9, "We know in part; we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away." And then he says this, "When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways." With maturity certain things go away. Verse 12, "For now," in this age, "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." When the church is in her perfect maturity, finished, standing before her Savior glorified, what will remain is not prophecy, not tongues, not knowledge. What will remain is love.

Let's look real quickly. We're going to wrap it up. Go over to the book of Ephesians 4 and you get a picture of this from another place in the New Testament. Ephesians 4. And look at what the apostle writes in verse 11. He's talking now about the gifts, the ascension gifts of Jesus to His church, but now he's not talking about individual giftedness, gifts given to individual believers, now he's talking about gifted men. That God has given to His church gifts in the form of the men themselves. These men are gifts to the church.

Verse 11. "And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastor teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." How long are gifted men needed in the life of the church? Until there is this unity found in belief. Until there is this unity found in the knowledge of the Son of God. Until there is mature manhood. Until there is the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

And in their ministries in this age, notice what we are aiming at. Verse 14. "So that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in," what? "Love." You see, this is the aim. The church learning, knowing, growing, contributing, serving, imparting to one another, so that there is this stature of Jesus that is formed in the church and all of this exists in the realm of the love of God.

Now when is this going to be perfected? When is the church going to be fully mature? When is there going to be an absolute unity of faith, an absolute unity found in the knowledge of the Son of God? Now, I am talking experiential unity. When is this going to come to pass? When we stand before our Savior one day, where? Before His presence, right? In heaven. So that these gifts operate in the church until the perfect comes. The perfect represents the time when these things are no longer needed.

Look back, if you would please, at 1 Corinthians 13. So to think of the passing away of some gifts as making the church deficient when compared to its previous condition doesn't hold water because I'm saying to you tonight, when we reach our fully mature state, none of these temporary gifts will be in operation any more and we will have been perfected and fully matured in the presence of the living God.

What have we learned here? We've seen that God's love is the source of all the gifts. We've seen that God's love is the course for all the gifts. That is, we function in God's gifts to us in love, if we're functioning properly. If I don't have love, I'm just making noise. If I don't have love, I am nothing. If I don't have love, I gain nothing. So, the source of the proper operation of the gifts? God's love. The course? God's love. The power behind it or the force behind it? God's love. The goal of all of it? God's love. So that what has priority in the church is God's love. It doesn't have priority because Paul gave it priority. It doesn't have priority because I give it priority. It has priority because God gives it priority.

I ask you, is that your priority? When you think about your own walk with God this evening, what is your mind and heart most captured by? Preaching? Teaching? Organizing? Serving? Marriage? Fatherhood? Motherhood? What most captures your heart? What is the umbrella under which everything else should operate? Are you saying to yourself, "Lord, let me experience and walk in the fullness of this love that You have brought me into through salvation in Your Son, that You introduced me into by the presence of Your Spirit. Lord, the love that opened my eyes to a new view of You, and a new view of the world, and a new view of Your church, and a new view of Your Word, and a fresh view, a desiring view, of Your commandments. Lord, let me make my priority what is Your priority that I would express and experience Your love, the love that has existed in God from all eternity and that You brought me into when You brought me into fellowship with Yourself. Lord, let me focus on that." And all God's people would say, "Amen."

Let's pray together.

*Lord, that is our heart's desire, and that is our prayer. We confess to You tonight, Lord, that oftentimes we get distracted. We get sidetracked. As the Corinthians were divided over things that are temporary, they treated those things as though they were the ultimate priority, when they are secondary in nature. So, Lord, we oftentimes get distracted by things that are secondary in terms of their importance. Help us, Lord, to make the main thing in our life what is the main thing according to You. Thank You, Lord, for loving us. Thank You for bringing us into fellowship with Yourself. Thank You, Lord, for pouring*

*Your love out in our hearts. Thank You for giving us a love for You, and a love for each other, and a love for Your Word, and a desire to walk in Your commandments. And Lord, let us examine ourselves in light of that standard when we think about the reality of our salvation. Lord, we give You praise and thanks for making us lovers of God, and we pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.*