

## Introduction

Recently I was reading about the ten greatest salesmen in America. The only one that I know is Zig Ziglar, who led a Bible study on the PGA Tour at the Byron Nelson tournament in Dallas, Texas. He was a great motivator, and positive thinker. I have his book, *See You at the Top*, in my library. Zig encouraged people to make a lifelong commitment to learning and training.

Another one of the list of the greatest salesmen is David Ogilvy, who is considered the father of modern sales training. He was so successful in selling that his company asked him to create an instruction manual, which he did, and it was distributed to the other members of the sales force. One of the things that David said was, “The worst fault a salesman can make is to be a bore. Foster any attempt to talk about other things; the longer you stay the better you get to know the prospect, and the more you will be trusted.”<sup>1</sup>

Another great salesman was Joe Girard. He was a Detroit native that is considered the greatest car salesman. He learned sales as a paper boy for the Detroit Free Press. He learned that the more doorbells he rang, the more money he made. During a fifteen-year period that began in 1963, he sold more than 13,000 Chevrolets at a local dealership. Joe’s success is attributed to his constant contact with his customers. He sent out personalized cards to all his customers. When it came time for them to buy a new car, they automatically went back to Joe.

Our passage is about love, not becoming great salesmen. The apostle Paul stayed in touch with the churches. Paul encouraged them and prayed for them. Paul was committed to helping churches learn and he trained leaders everywhere he went. He is not on the list of the greatest salesmen, but he was a model for these great salesmen. In the passage today, Paul makes his closing argument about why love is more excellent than spiritual gifts. He told the Corinthians to earnestly desire the greater gifts, and he opened by saying that he was going to show them a more excellent way, something that was even better than spiritual gifts. He began his pitch by saying that if he spoke with tongues, or had the gift of prophecy, or knew all mysteries, and had all faith, but did not have love, he was nothing, and it would profit him nothing. That opening argument showed the surpassing value of love, and the absolute necessity of having love.

(1 Cor 12:31-13:3) “But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way. {13:1} If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. {2} If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. {3} And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.”

In order for the Corinthians to fully understand what Paul was talking about, he carefully defined love for them. He gave them the characteristics of love, that it is patient, kind, is not jealous, is not jealous, and is not provoked. He gave them examples of what love does, and what it does not do. Love does not brag and does not act unbecomingly. Love does not seek its own. Love does not take into account a wrong suffered, and does not rejoice in unrighteousness. Love rejoices with truth, bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. The Corinthians now understand what love is, what it does, and why it has a surpassing value over the gifts.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.businessinsider.com/the-10-greatest-sales-people-of-all-time-2011-3#john-h-patterson-1>

(1 Co 13:4–7) “Love is patient, love is kind *and* is not jealous; love does not brag *and* is not arrogant, {5} does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong *suffered*, {6} does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; {7} bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

In verses eight through thirteen, he talks about the duration of love. What we have and know today is only a part, but when the perfect comes, we will know all things fully. At that time, there will be no need for the gifts, and they will be done away. The gifts are temporary, to help us in this present life. Love, however, will never fail. In context, love will never be done away with; it will last forever. Like a good salesman, Paul makes a final pitch and closing statement that would hopefully get a buy-in of why love is a more excellent way. He said, “But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest is love.”

### **Love Never Fails (Why is love a more excellent way than gifts)**

1. Gifts are temporal and love is eternal (1 Cor 13:8)
2. Gifts are partial, and will one day not be needed (1 Cor 13:9-11)
3. Gifts give a dim picture, and one day we will see clearly (1 Cor 13:12)

(1 Cor 13:8-13) “Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. {9} For we know in part, and we prophesy in part; {10} but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. {11} When I was a child, I used to speak as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. {12} For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known. {13} But now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”

#### **1. Gifts are temporal and love is eternal (1 Cor 13:8)**

Love never fails. The word for fail is not what we might think at first glance. The Greek word is *pipto* (Strong’s G4098), which means to fall, to fall down, or to fall off. Love will never fall off and die; it will continue forever. Of the ninety times that it is used in the New Testament, this is the only time that it is translated as fail. Eighty-eight times it is translated as fall or fall down.

(1 Cor 13:8) “Love never fails (*pipto*); but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away.”

We have been in the Christmas season, and in Matthew 2:11, when the three magi came into the house to see child that had been born, they fell (*pipto*) to the ground and worshiped Him. They fell down before someone greater in their presence, the Son of God.

(Mt 2:11) “After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.”

We see the same thing in Revelation 4:10. The twenty-four elders fall down (*pipto*) before Jesus, who sits on the throne, and they worship Him who lives forever and ever. They fell down before someone greater. Love never falls down or fails because there is nothing greater than love. The gifts will eventually be done away, but love will never fail.

(Re 4:10) “the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying,”

In the parable of the house, Matthew records that the house that was built on the rock did not fall (pipto), but the house built on the sand fell (pipto) when the rains and floods came. It fell or failed because it wasn't built on the Word of God. When our lives are not built on God's word and principles, we can fail or fall down. Love is a strong foundation, and when our lives are built on the love of God, they will not fail.

(Mt 7:25–27) “And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. {26} “Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. {27} “The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall.”

One of the commentaries gave the example of a flower that falls. At the end of its life, it falls down. Love does not wear out like a flower, and there is no end to the life of love, so it will never fall down. Gifts are temporal and when the perfect comes, their purpose and usefulness will be over and they will end. Love is permanent and will never fail.

Paul contrasts love with the gifts of prophecy and tongues. They will be done away and cease. They are not permanent; they are temporal. On the other hand, love is not temporal; it is eternal and will never fall or fail.

The gift of prophecy, which is considered one of the greatest gifts because it edifies the church, will be done away with. Like a flower, it has a life span. Because we are not in our glorified body and with the Lord in heaven, we have finite knowledge and understanding. We need prophecy right now. But once the perfect comes, we will no longer need prophecy. It is given to help us in this earthly life. In heaven, there will be no need for prophecy any longer, and it will be done away. Love is not like prophecy. We need love in this present life, and we will be operating in love for eternity. Love will never fall down, fail, or stop being needed.

The same is true with tongues. Tongues are needed right now in this present life. Tongues build up the individual believer. The tongues of men were given to communicate with people from other countries at Pentecost. The gift of tongues continued, and was something that believers used to pray in the Spirit, and to sing in the Spirit. It was not something that edified others, unless there was an interpretation. Tongues will cease, but love will never fall down or cease. There are some people and pastors that say that tongues have already ceased. They say that the perfect has already come, and this is the Scripture they used to say that tongues have ceased. Some believe that the perfect refers to when the gospel had been preached. Others believe that the perfect refers to when the Scriptures were canonized. However, this cannot be the case. We do not know all things and have all knowledge. The rest of the passage will bear this out. Perfect refers to heaven and our glorified state.

In Albert Barnes' commentary he said, “The sense here is, that in heaven – a state of absolute perfection – that which is in part,” or which is imperfect, shall be lost in superior brightness. All imperfection will vanish.”

Prophecy and tongues will cease when we are in heaven. We will not need those gifts of revelation and knowledge, so they will cease. Love, on the other hand, will not come to an end and fall down. Love is eternal and will last forever. Therefore, love is a more excellent way.

## 2. **Gifts are partial, and will one day not be needed** (1 Cor 13:9-11)

Gifts are temporal and will cease, but love will never fail. Second, gifts are partial. We know in part and we prophesy in part. We do not know everything, although I have met some people who think they know everything. When God reveals something to us in a word of knowledge or a prophecy, we just get a piece of the puzzle. We get part of the picture. When the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. Why will it be done away? It will be done away because we will have the whole picture at that time. We will have full knowledge. We won't need the gifts that give us a partial understanding because we will already know it. There will not be a need for the gifts. The gifts are here to help us right now. When the perfect comes, we won't need those gifts.

(1 Cor 13:9-10) “For we know in part, and we prophesy in part; {10} but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.”

The question for those that believe that the perfect refers to the canonization of Scripture is, “Do you have full revelation, knowledge, and understanding?” The obvious answer is that they do not have full knowledge and understanding. They still need the gifts of the Spirit.

Paul brings this contrast up to let us know that there will never be a time that love is not needed. Love is needed in this present life, and it will still be the way things operate when the perfect comes. When the partial is taken away, and full knowledge and revelation are given, love will still be needed and operational. The character and essence of God is love, and His kingdom operates out of love. When the perfect comes, I believe I will have a more perfect love, but love will not be done away.

Next, Paul uses the illustration of a baby, and he points to his own life. He said, “When I was a child, I used to speak as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things.” The Greek word for child that is used is *nepios* (Strong's G3516), which means “not speaking.” *Ne* is a negative prefix and *epos* means to speak. Together it means one who cannot speak, such as an infant. An infant who cannot speak will still communicate to you by crying, but the words will not be intelligible. Paul said that when he was a baby, he spoke like a baby. He also thought like a baby and reasoned like a baby. When he became a man, he did away with childish things. He no longer babbled like a baby and had childish thoughts. Paul then switches to “we” and said, “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.” The church is not in that mature state; it is like the baby that speaks and thinks like a child. The church is not at the place of doing away with childish things, i.e., spiritual gifts. When the perfect comes, the church will do away with the gifts, which will seem like childish things at that time.

(1 Cor 13:11) “When I was a child, I used to speak as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things.”

A couple of months ago we were taking a walk around the neighborhood, and there was a young girl learning to ride her bicycle. She had training wheels on the bike. There is nothing wrong with training wheels. While a young person is learning to ride a bike, it helps them learn in a safe manner. The training wheels eventually come off after the child is stable on it. The training

wheels served a purpose, but once they were not needed, the training wheels are taken off. In the same way, while we know partially, we need these spiritual gifts. When we are in heaven, we will not need these things, and the partial will be done away.

### 3. Gifts give a dim picture, and one day we will see clearly (1 Cor 13:12)

The gifts are temporal, and they are only partial. Third, the gifts give only a dim picture. Paul said, “for now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known.” In the ancient times, the mirrors were made out of shiny metal, and they gave a dim reflection. The word for mirror is *esoptron* (Strong’s G2072), and the root word is *optanomahee* (Strong’s G3700), which means to see or appear. There is some indication that glass may have been used in these mirrors, but we cannot be sure about their composition. No matter what they were made of, they were not the high-quality mirrors that we have today that produce a crystal-clear image. Paul said that, “for now we see in a mirror dimly.” The gift of prophecy helps us to see, but to see dimly. Words of knowledge, revelation, or wisdom help us see, but only dimly. When the perfect comes, we will be face to face with the Lord, and we will not need the dim mirror. We will no longer know in part, but we will know fully, just as we have been fully known.

(1 Cor 13:12) “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known.”

The point of this is that the gifts are temporal. We see dimly and we need these gifts, but at some point, they will be done away because they are no longer needed. Love on the other hand, will always be needed and exercised. It will never fall away or fail us.

### Conclusion and Applications (1 Cor 13:13)

Paul wraps up by saying, “But now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.” We need faith. We are saved by faith, not works. We walk by faith. Without faith it is impossible to please God, and so we please God by faith. We operate in the gifts by faith. Faith is incredibly important. Like the disciples, I ask God to help increase my faith. Yet, love is greater than our faith.

(1 Cor 13:13) “But now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”

(Heb 11:6) “And without faith it is impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and *that* He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.”

(Eph 2:8–9) “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; {9} not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

I love what Paul wrote in Romans 4 about Abraham’s faith. He said that Abraham did not waiver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform. We can grow in our faith like Abraham did. We need to take the promises of God, and apply them in our lives. We grow strong by exercising our faith. Faith is important and God was glorified by Abraham’s faith. God wants us to grow strong in our faith, but faith is not the greatest of these three. The greatest is love.

(Ro 4:20–21) “yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, {21} and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform.”

We need hope. We would be discouraged and without any encouragement that things will be better for us in the future if we did not have hope. I love what David said in Psalm 27. He would have despaired unless he believed he would see the goodness of God in the land of the living. David had hope and it kept him from despairing. There are many times in our lives where we can get depressed, discouraged, or despaired, and we need to have hope in the goodness of God. Hope is extremely important, but it is not the greatest. The greatest is love.

(Ps 27:13) “I would have despaired unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the LORD In the land of the living.”

In those times of difficulty and despair, I remind myself that I will see the goodness of the Lord. I also remind myself that God works all things together for good in my life because I love Him. I remind myself that God delights in the prosperity of His servants, which does not necessarily mean financially. These promises fill my heart with hope, which is so important.

(Ro 8:28) “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”

(Ps 35:27) “Let them shout for joy and rejoice, who favor my vindication; and let them say continually, “The LORD be magnified, who delights in the prosperity of His servant.”

Our hope is in Christ, the hope of glory. Paul prayed for the saints in Ephesus that the eyes of their hearts would be enlightened so that they would know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance. He wrote to the Colossians and told them that Christ, who was in them, was the hope of glory. Our hope is in Christ. We need hope, but Paul tells us that love is greater than hope.

(Eph 1:18) “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,”

(Col 1:27) “to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

Paul has made his final point, and his goal was that the Corinthians would prioritize love over everything else. In the use of their liberties, he wanted them to consider love, not just knowledge. In their quarrels and lawsuits, he wanted them to walk in love. In their use of spiritual gifts, he wanted them to prioritize love. Without love the gifts were nothing. Without love, the gifts would not profit them anything. Love is the greatest thing that we can pursue. The gifts are temporal, but love is permanent. The gifts are partial and one day when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away with. Not love, love will not fall down or fail. Love will always be needed. Whether we have partial knowledge or full knowledge, we need love.

We see dimly right now, and if there was ever a need for love, it is now. We need to give grace to one another and walk in love. Love is patient, and while we see dimly, we need to be patient. Love bears all things, and while we see dimly, we need to bear all things. Love is gentle, and while we see dimly, we need to be gentle with people. Love is not arrogant and does not brag,

and while we see dimly, we should not boast as if we see clearly and know all things. We have only partial knowledge and see dimly, so we need to operate in love. Love is not provoked, and while we see dimly, we need to walk in love so that we are not provoked. Love does not take into account a wrong suffered, so while we all see dimly and know in part, we need to forgive one another and walk in love. While we are still childish in our thinking, reasoning, and words, we need to walk in love.

Love will never fail or fall down. We can depend on it. We can put our confidence in love, because it never fails. Love is also eternal. While gifts are temporal, love is eternal, so we should love.

The Lord wants His people to be successful and to prosper. He has given us the key to never failing. That key is LOVE. 1 Corinthians 13:8 says that love never fails. Love will give you the confidence that you need to succeed instead of failing.

Paul is not finished talking about spiritual gifts. He just paused in 1 Corinthians 13 to put the gifts in perspective. At the end of 1 Corinthians 12, he said, "But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way." Then, to begin 1 Corinthians 14, he wrote, "Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy." God does not want us to be ignorant about spiritual gifts. He wants the gifts to be used, and to unite the body. He wants us to pursue gifts, especially the greater gifts, but without love, the gifts are noisy gongs. Without love, we are nothing. Without love, the gifts profit us nothing. We need to pursue love above all things, and we should earnestly desire spiritual gifts.

### **Closing Prayer**

Father, we thank You for Your love. Thank You for loving us while we were yet sinners. Thank You for demonstrating Your love to us. Thank You for pouring out Your love and lavishing Your love on us. Thank You, Jesus, for the greatest example of love that we could ever have. Help us to walk in love. Help us to patiently love others. Help us to forgive others and not take into account a wrong suffered. Help us to bear all things. Lord, help us to kindly love others. Help us to be love others by being gentle with them. Help us to love by bearing all things and enduring all things. Help us to love by rejoicing in truth. Help us to be rooted and grounded in love. Help us to know the love of Christ, which surpasses knowledge. May people know that we are Your disciples by our love. May love be our earmark, that which identifies who we belong to. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.



**Love Never Fails** (1 Cor 13:8-13)

**Introduction** (1 Cor 12:31-13:3, 8-13)

1. **Gifts are temporal and love is eternal** (1 Cor 13:8, Matt 2:11, 7:25-27, Rev 4:10)
2. **Gifts are partial, and will one day not be needed** (1 Cor 13:9-11)
3. **Gifts give a dim picture, and one day we will see clearly** (1 Cor 13:12)

**Conclusion and Applications** (1 Cor 13:13, Rom 4:20-21, Ps 27:13, Rom 8:28, Ps 35:27, Eph 1:18, Col 1:27)