

Sermon Summary | Sunday 20th September 2026 | 1 Corinthians 13

1 Corinthians 13 is one of the best-known chapters in the Bible. We hear its words at weddings: “Love is patient and kind”; “Love bears all things”; “the greatest of these is love.”

But Paul did not first write these words to a bride and groom. He wrote them to a church — a church where people were comparing themselves, competing for importance and insisting on their own way. So this chapter is not a beautiful interruption in Paul’s teaching about spiritual gifts. It is right at the heart of what life together as God’s people should look like.

First, **without love, I am nothing**. Paul imagines extraordinary gifts: remarkable speech, deep knowledge, mountain-moving faith, even costly sacrifice. Yet without love, all of it amounts to nothing. That challenges us because Christian activity is not automatically Christian love. We can preach, organise, give, serve and volunteer for all sorts of reasons: because we like being needed, because we want to be noticed, or because we like being in control.

But Paul is not telling us to withdraw from action. Love acts. It moves towards another person and asks, “What can I do for their good?” Often that will look very ordinary: a conversation, a lift, a meal, making tea, helping with children, welcoming someone who is alone, praying for somebody and remembering to ask how they are.

Jesus loved us like that. He did not remain at a distance. He came, served and gave himself for us. Because we are already loved by him, we do not need our service to prove that we matter. We are free to serve simply for another person’s good.

Second, **love seeks another person’s good**. Love is patient and kind. It does not envy, boast or insist on its own way. Literally, Paul says that love “does not seek its own”. Love therefore asks something bigger than, “What do I want?” or “What suits me?” It asks, “What would serve them?”

That may mean beginning to serve. It may mean persevering in something unnoticed. It may mean noticing somebody who has gone quiet or whose life is difficult. It may mean having a truthful and difficult conversation. Sometimes love even means saying no, sharing a burden, or handing something on rather than trying to do everything ourselves.

There is no single action that love always requires. But love refuses to make my own preferences the centre. It looks outward and asks: “What would seek their good?”

Finally, **love never ends**. Gifts, ministries and roles matter now, but they belong to this present age. One day sermons, rotas, committees and church ministries will all have completed their purpose. Christians will see Christ face to face. But love remains.

That gives us perspective. Our Christian identity cannot finally rest in being the person who leads, organises, teaches or knows how everything works. Those roles will pass. Love will not.

And there is wonderfully good news here. God already knows us completely — our mixed motives, selfishness, resentment and reluctance — and yet Christ gave himself for people like us. We are fully known and loved by grace. So we can repent, change, begin again, and learn to love because we have first been loved. The great question, then, is not simply, “Do I feel loving?” It is: “Because Jesus has loved me, what would love have me do?”

Questions for personal reflection

1. Where am I most tempted to ask, “What suits me?” rather than, “What would seek somebody else’s good?”
2. Because Jesus has loved me, what is one concrete way love could take action through me this week?