

## ***Pursuing Spiritual Gifts (1 Corinthians 13)***

### **INTRODUCTION**

Roman numeral I. Please turn in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 12:31. “But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way” (1 Cor. 12:31). Paul tells us to earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, and then Paul describes what he calls “a more excellent way.” Often people focus on “the more excellent way,” yet they neglect to pursue and to be hungry for the spiritual gifts. It’s biblical and necessary for the prophetic church to be hungry for the spiritual gifts.

### **GOD CALLS US TO EARNESTLY DESIRE TO OPERATE IN THE POWER OF GOD**

You’ve heard the statement, “Seek His face and not His hand.” That’s not a biblical idea. The Lord doesn’t tell us to seek His face rather than His hand. We’re to seek His face first, but we’re also to see the manifestation of power, which is called “the hand of the Lord.” In Acts 4, the apostles prayed a powerful prayer. Acts 4:29-31: “Lord extend your hand to heal. Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus. And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:29-31).

So it’s the reaching forth of God’s hand that’s associated with signs, wonders, and miracles. The Holy Spirit is stirring up hunger in people’s hearts to function in the realm of the Holy Spirit. It takes hunger; it takes more than just an ideal that says, “Wow, it would be fun to operate in the Holy Spirit.” It takes more than that. It takes a conviction; it takes passion to sustain the process that’s necessary to operate in the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Now many people don’t understand that there’s a vigorous process in our inner man that’s necessary for us to operate in the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

### **“PURSUE LOVE, AND DESIRE SPIRITUAL GIFTS”**

Paul exhorts us in 1 Corinthians 12:31 to “desire them earnestly.” Be hungry for them. So, my question is this: are you hungry to operate in the gifts of the Spirit? Are you hungry enough to change some of the ways in which you live? Are you willing to change the way that I live and that you live? I’m saying that because, by the grace of God, I want to change some of the ways in which I carry my heart, so that I can line up with this thing called being hungry for the gifts of the Spirit.

Now look at 1 Corinthians 14:1: “Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy” (1 Cor. 14:1). Now you’ll notice that it says the same thing: pursue love but *desire* the spiritual gifts. It’s the same idea as desiring the spiritual gifts. Now it’s interesting that on both sides of the famous love chapter is an exhortation. Both the verse before and the verse after are an exhortation to pursue prophecy.

### **PURSUE PROPHECY: WE CAN’T DO GOD’S PART, AND GOD REFUSES TO DO OUR PART**

We’re to pursue the gifts of the Holy Spirit with all of our heart. Now 1 Corinthians 13 is a well-known love chapter. When you read Chapter 13, you must read it in its context by reading the verses before and after. It’s a chapter exhorting us to walk in love in the context of desiring the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Look at 1 Corinthians 12:31—the verse before 1 Corinthians 13—and look at the verse after this chapter on love. Both verses that sandwich this chapter on love are about pursuing prophecy. I wish that those two verses were included in the chapter of 1 Corinthians 13. It would be easier to understand 1 Corinthians 13 if we understood the surrounding

chapters. We would understand this chapter better if we had understood that we pursue love as one of the avenues to sustaining our hunger for the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

### **THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS A COOPERATION WITH GOD**

The Christian life is a cooperation with God. Most of us are clear about that. God won't do our part, and we can't do His part. God won't do our part. There's blessing that God withholds this gift until we pursue it, because He actually wants to give this to His Church. He won't give us this until we do our part. Now what does "our part" mean? Our part means pursuing the gifts of the Holy Spirit by being attentive in our inner man to the Holy Spirit. There are several things I could add. I don't want to develop those other points right now. I want to focus on this issue of being attentive to the Holy Spirit in our inner man.

We have to cultivate a spirit of listening. Now to do this is really inconvenient. In order to listen, in order to pay attention to the impressions of the Holy Spirit, we can't indulge ourselves in self-pity, anxiety, the feeling of fear or offense and a sense of how people aren't treating us rightly. We can't be indulging in those things and still paying attention to the Holy Spirit. To be attentive actually requires a certain amount of death to our self. One of the reasons the Church doesn't operate in the gifts of the Spirit is because we're so self-focused. We must be willing in our hearts; we must quiet our inner man and position ourselves to hear God. Actually being attentive to the Holy Spirit is a really rigorous and vigorous aspect of our life in God. It's not something that we do by just coming to a meeting. So now we're going to pay attention. We have to do our part.

Now there's more to our part than just this attentiveness. It's this issue of attentiveness that I want to address tonight. God's part is to give us the prophetic impressions. He will give us prophetic impressions, but here is the problem: when God gives us prophetic impressions, the vast majority of the time, it's a faint whisper in our spirit. He requires that we pay attention to that faint whisper. He actually requires that we step out, and we give expression to that impression. If we don't dial down on the inside, manage some of our emotions, and quiet the storm on the inside, we can't hear Him. Then we're not paying attention to that faint whisper. 1 Kings 19:11-12: when the storm came, Elijah knew the voice of God wasn't in the earthquake, the fire, or the thunder in the storm. God spoke in a small, still voice—in a whisper. That's how God is still speaking to His people today.

I'm resolved in my inner man to pay far more attention to this still, small voice. I'm resolved to cultivate a spirit of attentiveness more consistently in my life. The degree that we do this is the degree that we can hear more clearly. I was surprised how in my own life, these faint whispers were really just the beginnings of operating in the spirit of prophecy. In the early days, I was hoping that prophecy would always come by thunder. I imagined that prophecy would always come in lightning and earthquakes. I imagined that the angel of the Lord would stand in front of me and say, "Tell them this."

I imagined I would say to the angel, "OK, I can tell them that." It doesn't work that way. God won't do our part. He won't make us become attentive to the whispers of God. We can't create the impression, but we can listen for it. I don't mean listen in the natural sense. I'm talking about just paying attention. It takes a concerted effort to cultivate that listening attitude of the heart to the Holy Spirit.

### **GOD RELEASES PROPHECY BY RELEASING FAINT IMPRESSIONS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

Paragraph D. God's way of releasing prophecy through us is most often by giving us simple faint impressions. Now the fact that God most often just speaks in faint impressions is a stumbling block for many in the kingdom. This is a really important point that I'm telling you here; it's a stumbling block to many, and it keeps them

from entering into the fullness of the prophetic spirit. Again, occasionally, a person will hear the audible voice of the Lord and angels visit them from heaven. Those kinds of things happen occasionally, but most of the time, there's just a faint impression. That's a stumbling block to many, because a lot of believers insist, "Well, if that's how it's going to operate, I don't want to engage in that kind of attentiveness. I don't mind doing it occasionally, but I don't want to do that often. I don't want to cultivate that kind of spirit."

If we speak in a way that quenches the Holy Spirit, our spirit gets quenched. If we fill our mind with things that are quenching the Holy Spirit, our spirit gets quenched. If we use our money and our time in ways that are contrary to the will of God, our spirit gets quenched. We get so accustomed to a quenched spirit that we get used to it, and we think that's normal.

The way that the Lord speaks to us prophetically is very gradual; this is the way all the gifts of the Holy Spirit operate. They start off with a whisper in the inner man; that's how they begin. Occasionally, there's the big, overt audible voice of the Lord and those kinds of things. Mostly, He speaks in the still small voice; His voice comes in the whisper.

I've seen Christians over the years say, "I don't really want to do this; I don't want to bother with that. That seems like a hassle." That's why Paul put this exhortation here to be zealous for the spiritual gifts. This exhortation is actually the introduction and the conclusion of the love chapter. We must realize that to become attentive is about love. The gifts of the Spirit aren't just about dynamic things happening. It's about a lifestyle where all that we do, we'll do for the sake of love.

#### **NUMBER ONE: "HOLY SPIRIT, WHAT ARE YOU SAYING AND DOING?"**

Now, what do we have to do to operate in the prophetic spirit?

Number one: we have to regularly ask the simple question: "Holy Spirit, what are You saying and what are You doing?" As simple as that is, we must ask, "Holy Spirit, what are You saying?"

You don't have to say that question out loud. You can simply ask God in your spirit when you wake up in the morning. When you drive to work, when you get to work, when you're with your family, in your everyday comings and goings, you can ask this question. If you ask that question five or ten times in a day, it will increase your ability to hear God. I'm not saying asking it every minute for eighteen hours. That's not what I'm saying. I'm saying to ask God every few hours. If you would pause, if you would get quiet on the inside, just ask Him that simple question. I tell you that it takes love to do that—it takes effort to do that. Someone is treating you badly, or something exciting is about to happen; then ask Him. If there's some opportunity, and your inner man is moving 100 miles an hour, slow down to dial in.

By nature, we're self-absorbed with the things of our life. We have to slow down that storm on the inside in order to ask this question. I find it annoying to do that. I'm just fleshing out, fretting, worrying, bragging, boasting, gossiping, and I have to slow my inner man down to ask the Lord that question. I don't like that process. That's why the exhortation to desire the spiritual gifts introduces the love chapter, and it concludes this chapter. Prophecy is about love.

We've been talking about the gifts of the Spirit and its dynamic impact. That's a very important part of the gifts of the Spirit. I'm just giving one facet of the diamond. We decide that for the sake of love, we will actually cultivate and carry our heart sin a different way on the inside. We must ask the Holy Spirit questions.

Now, I'm going to ask you the question. When is the last time you've asked the Holy Spirit? When is the last time you spoke to Holy Spirit five times in one twenty-four hour period? When was the last time you asked, "What are You saying and what are You doing that you want me to be involved in?" When is the last time you've asked that question five times in one twenty-four hour period?

### **CULTIVATING A LISTENING HEART AS A LIFESTYLE**

I'm sure some people would say, "Today. I've done it today!" Others would say, "I've never asked the Holy Spirit five times in one day." That's my point. We need to cultivate a lifestyle that asks the question. It's so simple. As the preacher said, "It's profoundly simple and simply profound." It's simply profound, and that's the power of this question.

So I ask our worship teams. Before we get to a worship set, I tell them to ask the Holy Spirit this question. At IHOP-KC, we have eighty-four two-hour worship sets a week. We have fifteen worship teams. Each team usually does five to seven sets a week in the prayer room. We have different worship sets outside the prayer room as well. I tell the worshipers, "Before you go to that prayer room, I want you to ask, for an hour or two before your set, 'Holy Spirit, what are You doing?'"

Just start asking, on your way to getting prepared: "Holy Spirit, what are You saying?" Then, when you get into the briefing time, pause as a team and ask the question. Then, when you're doing the worship set at IHOP-KC, I want you to ask the question again. Then afterwards, I want you to ask it again.

### **PROPHECY AS ONE-ON-ONE OPPORTUNITIES**

Now, prophecy isn't meant to function mostly in corporate meetings. A lot of people think of prophecy simply at Sunday morning meetings. Beloved, 99 percent of prophecy doesn't function in a corporate meeting. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 14 to have two or at most three prophecies in a corporate meeting. Well, if you have 1,000 people in your congregation, if only three propesy according to the order of God's Word, that's not many people prophesying.

Most prophecy is done in small groups. For example, we prophesy in the car with our friends driving somewhere. We prophesy at the family settings—at the dinner table. We prophesy in the marketplace. We prophesy at the children's soccer game. Now we don't have to tell the people that we're prophesying. We don't have to wave our hands, blink our eyes, go into "over-drive mode," and say, "OK, it's coming; it's coming," as if you're revving up your engine.

Beloved, we don't have to do that. Some people, when they prophesy, they have to get completely into another mode. They act as if they're going to launch into outer space any moment now. The engines are moving, everything is shaking, and they're about to go.

Now, I'm not against moving and shaking. That's not my point. My point is that all prophecy isn't limited to that kind of over-dramatic revving up. Some of that revving up is OK here and there. You don't want to limit your prophetic ministry to that. Everyone is called to a prophetic ministry. Literally, everyone in the Body of

Christ is supposed to prophecy. A brand-new believer can prophesy the day he or she is born again. It's not about maturity level; rather, prophecy is the gift of God. It's about the heart desiring it.

If we desire it, we can do it, but you do have to be attentive. In order to be attentive, in order to do this well, you have to slow down the traffic on the inside. Of course, filling our heart with the Word of God, godly fellowship, and godly choices increase our ability to prophecy. Those things help slow us down on the inside. There are other things besides being attentive, but that's not the focus tonight. I encourage people to be supernaturally natural when they prophesy. In other words, just say what's coming to them. They don't have to say, "Thus says the Lord," on the front end or the back end. They don't have to do that.

For example, if when you're talking to your neighbor and the Lord gives you an impression, give expression to the impression by prophesying over your neighbor. All you do is simply ask them a question. Ask them if something is going on, or you can ask to pray for them about a certain issue. You can simply say, "Is it OK if I pray for your family?" It's something that simple. Or you might say something like, "You know, I know that the Lord wants to bless your family right now."

The guy might look at you, and his eyes might get really big and ask, "How did you know?"

#### **START SMALL AND VERBALIZE WHAT YOU SEE**

Just the simplest little impression, when the Holy Spirit is breathing on it a little bit, can apprehend the human heart. These small impressions strike the heart of the believer or the unbeliever who is listening. They say things like, "That's the Lord!" It's amazing how easily and quickly another person recognizes that the word is from the Lord. If we didn't feel so insecure about our prophesying, we wouldn't have to sell it so strongly on the front end. It's only if we don't believe it's a prophecy; that's why we have to rev it up so much. We have to psych up and launch. Maybe everyone will say, "Wow, at least he thinks it's a prophecy." Or, "He's convinced, so it must be." We don't have to go through all of the antics to rev up for it.

We can be supernaturally natural. We've all prophesied probably more times than we know. I've spoken to people, just in the course of conversation, and I'm aware that there's a life on it. There's the life of God on it, and it's a prophecy. I don't ever say it's a prophecy, and I don't say it's from the Lord. I've had many times—I'm sure you have as well—where the man says, "Wow, that was the Lord."

I didn't respond, "Well, I know." I didn't say that. I didn't say, "That really was the Lord!" I just shook my head and tried not make a big deal about it. We make up so much stuff, saying, "Well, I was praying for you, and it came to me, and I said Lord, 'Lord, I'm Your servant...'" We don't have to go on and on in showmanship. The poor guy says, "You know what? Next time, I'm not going to even tell you. I'm not going to even bother to tell you that it was the Lord."

Then, we get so wounded by rejection in the process that we say, "I'm not going to prophesy because the Church doesn't like prophecy." What the Church doesn't like are strange people! That's what the Church doesn't like—strange showmanship. I'm being serious. I have more prophetic friends who are living in a martyrdom complex because they think that the Church doesn't like prophecy. They're just so weird and socially obtrusive when they do all their stuff. I say, "No. They actually love prophecy." It's the antics that they can't bear.

## **DON'T DESPISE THE DAY OF SMALL BEGINNINGS**

The reason I'm saying that's to give you courage; honestly, I'm not trying to put anyone down. What I'm really trying to do is to give you courage that the Body of Christ actually does like real prophecy. People love even the smallest impressions. It doesn't have to be a dramatic word given by an internationally known prophet. The Body of Christ really does like prophecy, but it's the package that we wrap the prophetic in that throws everyone off.

It's the human dynamics that offend people, and they're really not necessary. We often learn them from the prophet we saw before, as that's how they did them. We want to grow up and be like them; so we end up imitating them, including their strange overdramatic exaggerations. The cement dries in a funny way, and we act just like they acted. We end up in the same martyrdom complex that they have. I'm convinced that the whole Body of Christ can do this with a whole lot less collision if they would just be supernaturally natural in the process. If they weren't so interested in waving the flag every time they had something to say from God, we would flow more smoothly. Say it and just let it land where it lands. But it starts with simply asking questions to the Holy Spirit.

Beloved, I want to challenge you as a brother in the Lord. I want to challenge you to ask that question two or three times tonight before you go to bed. Then ask the question five or ten times tomorrow. You don't have to make a big deal about it. While driving in the car, just ask Him, "Oh, Holy Spirit, what are You saying?" You don't have to dominate the conversation when you do this; just do it quietly. You're not trying to get credit with anyone for doing this. Rather, you're trying to engage with the Holy Spirit.

Sounds like I've hung around a lot of prophetic people for years, doesn't it? I have, and I speak from the perspective of having made all these mistakes. That's why I'm such an expert on this—from making mistakes. I know them all. Not just because I've seen them, but because I've personally made them.

I'll give you some simple examples. I imagine that some of you are going to be in the car driving. You might accidentally prophesy in the car on the way to IHOP-KC in the three-minute drive. You're going to say something, and the person is going to say, "Wow, that was important in my heart." They may not say it back to you, but in their heart, they will register it. Beloved, prophecy happens all the time. Another example is when we're praying for each other in a gathering like this. Practice prophesying. You can be in your home right now listening to this message and have a friend there. Even now, after the meeting, or after this show is over, you can just speak and prophecy will begin to flow. I don't mean everyone will do this every time, but throughout the course of our relationships, if we'll ask the question, the Holy Spirit will give us impressions.

## **NUMBER TWO: VERBALIZE THE IMPRESSIONS**

Number two: we have to verbalize the impressions. I wonder how many impressions that I've received from the Holy Spirit I didn't take the energy to verbalize it? In order to receive the revelation, it requires a certain amount of spiritual vigor. You have to pay attention. I don't mean that you have to be a deeply spiritual person. You don't have to be the most mature prophet—more than Elijah. I don't mean that. It just takes denying ourselves; it requires quieting ourselves to ask the question. We're so naturally self-indulgent with our self-pity and our worry. That really is self-indulgence. It's a work of the flesh; it really is. That's the biggest hindrance that I have.

We have to take every thought captive and not indulge in that thinking. What happens in our mind is crucial. No one knows what you're thinking or feeling, as you're not bothering anyone. We don't realize the weight of our words and the impact of our thoughts. The Holy Spirit says, "OK, go for it for a while. When you're done, let Me know; I've got things I would like to talk to you about." I'm really getting right to the real point of why many people don't prophesy. It comes as simple as that.

So, I've asked the question; now I have to express it. Now expressing it requires a whole new dimension. It takes energy. I don't mean express it; just say it. That only takes a minute. Then the guy wants prayer, and he wants to talk about the prayer. Then he wants a meeting, and it goes on and on. It takes energy. There's a spiritual vigor involved in this. I got the impression; I know that I'll email it, and that's it. I know a lot of people who are so hungry to prophesy. I'll slip the impression to them and let them do the actual expression of saying the prophetic word.

It takes energy; it really does. How many of you know that when you're tired, it's just easier not to bother with it? You're in a meeting. There are five people in a home group. There are three people driving in a car. There are four or five friends in a coffee shop or at a kid's soccer game. Ask the Lord, "What are You saying?" You have to turn the switch on and say, "OK, I'm going to engage. When I'm tired and I'm fleshly, I just don't want to bother. I set my heart to engage." That's why the exhortation for prophecy introduces the love chapter, and the exhortation for the spiritual gifts concludes the love chapter. This thing is about love—it really is.

### **NUMBER THREE: WE HAVE TO VALUE SMALL DEMONSTRATIONS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

Number one: we have to ask the question. Number two: we have to verbalize the impression. Number three: we have to value the small demonstration of the Spirit. Imagine when a person gets healed of half their headache. You pray for them and half the headache goes away.

You think, "Well, that's no big deal."

Well, the devil didn't heal them of half the headache. If it's really a healing, it really went away, and it's really a healing. It's really the Holy Spirit. We tell ourselves, "Well, I don't want to bother with the little stuff. Lord, when You want to use me, I'm your man! Here I'm. When You need the courageous man or woman to lead the stadiums, I'll stand boldly."

The Lord says, "No, that's not what I'm looking for right now. I'm looking for the man or the woman who will be faithful in the small impressions and the small demonstrations."

They'll look at those opportunities and say, "I don't want to bother with it. But for the sake of love, I choose to bother with it. For the sake of God's kingdom, I choose to prophesy—for love." It really is a labor of love. This is the way of God's kingdom. When we don't want to bother with it, it's not just that we don't love the person; it's actually a statement that we don't like Jesus' leadership of His kingdom. If I were God, I would only have big impressions and demonstrations of the Spirit.

We ask God, "What are these billions of little demonstrations about anyway, Jesus? If I was the head of the Church, I would only have big stuff."

The Lord says, “You’re not the head of the Church—most of the time, I’m only going to give little stuff. Big ones will break in and surprise you. You don’t know when the big prophetic words will break in. So just be faithful with the little ones when I give you little ones. Keep reaching for big ones, but say ‘thank You’ for the little ones.”

For example, you pray for the person who suffers from depression. The depression lifts for three hours, but it comes back by evening. They ask, “Well, what was that?”

I say, “Well, at least it lifted for three hours. That was the spirit of grace touching them.”

We grumble to ourselves, “Well, I don’t want to bother with a three-hour depression reprieve. I want to fully deliver them, or I don’t want to bother with it.”

The Lord says, “That’s not how I run My kingdom. I do give three-hour reprieves of depression through My servants, if you will bother with it.” Actually, what we’re really saying in our hearts is that we’re offended at Jesus’ leadership of His kingdom.

### **GOD RELATES TO US ON HIS TERMS—NOT ON OUR TERMS**

When this began to hit me, I began to understand that my heart was offended, and I didn’t like it. I wanted the big stuff and only the big stuff. I told God, “When You’re ready for the big stuff, I’m Your man.”

God said, “No, I’m not going to relate to you on your terms; I’m going to use you in power on My terms.” Why do many believers neglect to prophecy? It takes love. It takes spiritual vigor to be attentive; it really does. It takes energy to act out the impression. It takes a certain amount of risk of being misunderstood.

So, here you are. You say, “OK, I’ve been attentive. I’m going to take time to pray for the guy. I’m not going to be in a hurry like I always am. I’m going to choose to stop.”

Prophecy is intrusive, but I think part of it is intended by God to be intrusive. It’s about humility and love operating in the gifts of the spirit. It’s not that often that I’m perfectly rested or in the perfect mood with nothing on my mind. That’s not the precondition required for the gifts of the Spirit to operate. It hardly ever is that way. Usually, it’s late, and I’m tired. I’m weighed down, and I feel like I’m running out.

God says, “Now. You’re under My leadership. Do it.”

We’ve given the word to the person, and we prayed for them. Now, we run the risk of the person thinking, “That’s it for now. But I thought that you did the Holy Spirit stuff?”

Often they feel disappointed by how small our prophetic ministry was. Sometimes they just really disagree with what happened; sometimes, they’re mad at you. We grumble to ourselves, “Well, all this effort expended, and now they’re mad at me. Forget it! I’m not in this thing.”

The Lord says, “Why are you in this anyways? You said you’re not in it for your own glory. You say you’re in it for My glory and the good of the people. This is part of My process.”

## **THE GIFTS HUMBLE US AS THEY REQUIRES ATTENTIVENESS, ENERGY, AND RISK**

The way that God releases the gifts of the Spirit is by first making us humble. He humbles us and causes us to grow in love. It's the very nature of the gifts to humble us. We think automatically that the gifts will exalt us. We think that if we move in the power gifts, we'll be exalted. The truth is that we do move in the power gifts, but only in the beginning stages. It's a lot of work, and people don't really appreciate it. It humbles us, and we grow in love.

The Lord would say, "It's working."

We tell God, "What do You mean, 'It's working'? It's not working! I signed up for exciting stuff. I do this to draw some attention and relieve myself of boredom. I wanted some excitement in my life."

The Lord answers, "I called you to walk in the gifts of the Spirit, so that you would grow in humility and love. I called you so that other people would be touched in the love of God."

So I've had a paradigm shift in both the mechanics and theology of how we administer the gifts of the Spirit. Why are we doing this? Why is it that we bother with prayer times? Many times, we're just too tired to do the prayer times. I have to turn the switch on and engage. It's an act of love to do this. It's true of all of you. Every now and then, you're in that perfect mood. It's that perfect day, and you're ready to pray and prophesy over everyone.

## **THE SUPREMACY OF LOVE OVER POWER (1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-3)**

Roman numeral II. Let's go to 1 Corinthians 13:1-3: "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing" (1 Cor. 13:1-3).

In this passage, Paul will show that love is even more important than power. His point isn't that power is unimportant. I've seen people emphasize 1 Corinthians 13 in a way that ends up demeaning 1 Corinthians 12, which is about the gifts of the Spirit. We don't put down the gifts of the Holy Spirit to exalt love. The gifts of the Spirit are very important. The gifts of the Spirit are about love, but love is even more important than the gifts of the Spirit.

It's the ultimate gift; but actually, it takes love to operate in the gifts of the Spirit. He says, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I become sounding brass and a clanging cymbal." Now, what's happening here is that Paul is going to set the teaching on the gifts of the Spirit and moving in power in the context of the judgment seat of Christ.

## **THE CONTEXT OF THE GREAT LOVE CHAPTER: THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST**

If you don't understand the context of 1 Corinthians 13, you're not going to understand the content of 1 Corinthians 13:1-3. It's not just poetry for the Christian, or for greeting cards. This is really to be taken literally. Earlier in the book of 1 Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 3:10-15, Paul the apostle spoke of the judgment seat of Christ:

“According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire” (1 Cor. 3:10-15).

So earlier in the book of 1 Corinthians, Paul is writing to the very same people in the church in Corinth; Paul emphasized how every single one of us will appear before the Lord. The Lord will evaluate everyone’s ministry. So he’s already said that very strongly to the Corinthians. Now he’s going to put operating in the gifts of the spirit in chapter 12 in the context of eternity—the judgment seat of Christ. So we fully understand the gifts of the Spirit from God’s point of view—a heavenly point of view.

He says, “Though I speak in the tongues of men and of angel, if I have not love, I am a sounding brass and a clanging cymbal.” Now, to whom are you a sounding brass or a clanging cymbal? Certainly not to the crowd. You’re a clanging cymbal in God’s presence. If you spoke in the tongues of another language or in an angelic language, you would fill up a stadium. If you could do it regularly, nations would flock to hear you. It’s important to realize that you wouldn’t be a clanging cymbal to men. Men would just stand in line. In fact, they would pay huge amounts of money just to watch you do it. You could fill up every conference in the stadium. Imagine \$100 registration—they would pack it out. You could speak in angelic languages or in the tongues of men regularly.

### **LIVING BEFORE AN AUDIENCE OF ONE**

Men might not think that you’re a sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. However, God will at the judgment seat. He’s not writing off your whole life; what He’s doing is writing off that part of your ministry. It’s not beautiful to God. It’s as if it doesn’t sound right to God. So a lot of people have put a lot of energy to move in the great dimensions of power. Paul is basically saying, “I want you to do that. If you put all of your energy on how big the power is and you don’t put your focus on why there is power, you’re going to end up getting no reward for the power.”

### **IT’S ALL FOR LOVE’S SAKE**

Many people wrongly use this verse when they discuss this theme of pursuing the gifts of the Holy Spirit. That’s the verse right before this: “But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way” (1 Cor. 12:31). They put all their attention on power, and they don’t understand that the reason God wants to give them power is to develop love in them and to develop love in the person who will be blessed. If we’re not after love, we’ll get offended in the process of seeking power, and we’ll quit seeking it. If we’re in it for a show, we’ll quit seeking it. We’ll draw back from the necessary attentiveness required to move in the prophetic. We’ll draw back on the necessary energy expenditure. We’ll draw back on the necessary risk to operate in the gifts of the Spirit. If we’re not doing it for love, we’ll draw back and stop. Of course, that’s describing a significant part of the Body of Christ: it’s just too much of a hassle to bother with it. We don’t get enough attention for it; we don’t get enough excitement for it.

It’s as if the Lord says, “I want you to do it for love’s sake.” Many times, there will only be a small manifestation, and sometimes, there will be huge ones. You don’t know which words will release small

manifestations or big ones. So we end up going for the big stuff. The Lord says, “Even if you do get the big stuff, if you’re not doing it in the spirit of love, it won’t gain you anything. Your ministry won’t bear fruit at My judgment seat.”

In 1 Corinthians 13:2, Paul continues to talk about having the gift of prophecy. Again, he’s talking about the chapter before this, 1 Corinthians 12. In verse 2, he describes prophetic mysteries and words of knowledge. Imagine if you could call up every person in the auditorium and give him or her all the information on their life. If you had all the words of knowledge, you would be the greatest prophet in history. If I had the faith literally to move mountains, my faith would expand.

But if you had no love at the judgment seat of Christ, you would have nothing for your ministry that would bear fruit before God. It doesn’t mean I’m nothing in the sense that I’m still a child of God; I’m still dear to God. However, my life work will be blown away. Walking in love isn’t something that we’re doing in a social setting so that we can get the reputation before people that we’re loving. Sometimes, we get tempted to develop a reputation of being loving more than actually being loving. It’s growing in love and being loving that will cause our fruit to grow.

### **MAN LOOKS AT THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE, BUT GOD LOOKS AT THE HEART**

Our ministry is to bear fruit at the judgment seat of Christ. It’s not the reputation of loving where people say, “That gal, that guy is so loving!” We can learn enough social protocols and act right in the right settings—to get the right reputations. I’m not interested in reputation. I do like a good reputation. I’m as proud as the next guy. That’s not what I meant; I don’t really care about my reputation. I’m saying one thing: God cares. God cares about the reality of this working in us. He ties it together with this thing called “functioning in the gifts of the Spirit.” Often we don’t tie it together; we separate it. We’re going after power, and we get offended in the process with God.

We quit going after it, or we lose the vigor and the rigor necessary to press in and to keep attentive. We’re not getting enough return, it’s not that big of a bang, the crowds aren’t talking, or no one is talking about it. We grumble, “Forget it anyway.”

### **GROWING IN LOVE AND GROWING IN POWER**

The Lord says, “If you did it for love, it would last forever with My Son.” That’s real. What I’m contending is that we tie the two subjects together as one reality. We don’t need a reputation that we’re loving; we need the eyes of the Lord to see the truth that our spirit is growing in love. Here’s how you tell. My point is not to make us all feel bad; my real point is to try to get us to truly focus on growing in love and power, as two parallel tracks in our life. Parallel tracks that stay together all the way to the end until we meet the Lord. That’s what I’m after.

Do we operate in love? Are we really serious about love? The soil in which love is to grow best and most is in the context of our homes and our families. It’s much easier to love socially—at the church, the office, the elder’s meeting, the ministry team meeting, or at the outreach or at the ball game. We’ve got enough social protocol to behave and politeness to kind of hang in there. Every now and then, we might get stirred up a little. At home, everything is so familiar. It’s so familiar. Beloved, we need to be desperate in the natural familiarity, in the hustle and bustle of the irritations of living together with sinful broken people, and in everyday life. If we can exercise love towards our children, our spouse, our parents, and our siblings, we win. If we can press in at

that heart level, it will have an impact on our ability to operate in love in the Holy Spirit. It really is a corresponding impact. We're going to grow in attentiveness to move in the Holy Spirit. I tell you that it's in the routine and mundane, where we say offensive things all the time. It drives me nuts. Everyday life is the soil in which love is grown—for real. That's where the gifts of the Spirit are going to be cultivated—in that garden right there. I don't mean that's where you will always have the greatest demonstration. That's where the foundation of your life is being set to operate in the gifts of the Spirit in a way that's according to the Word of God.

### **UNDERSTANDING THE THREEFOLD LOVE OF GOD**

Paragraph C. Understanding the threefold love of God. We have to understand this thing called love. The love of God has three dimensions to it. It's very common, but it's good to get it clear. If you don't have it clear, it's important to clarify this.

Number one: there's love from God, which is the foundation of our intimacy with God. We spend a lot of time on learning about the fact that God loves us. We'll be focused on the love of God for billions and billions of years. Love from God: He's our Father—the first person of the Trinity. He's our Bridegroom—the second person of the trinity. We must feed our spirits on the Father's heart and the heart of the passionate Bridegroom. We need to feed our spirit upon this revelation of love. That's only the first dimension of the love of God—God's love for us.

Number two: the second dimension of the love of God is our love for God and our response. Jesus said the first commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart. And the second commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself. He said, "This is the first and great commandment" (Mt. 22:37). Our response back in love is the second dimension of love.

Number three: the third dimension of love is our overflow of loving people. Jesus said that the second commandment is like the first one; the two go hand in hand. Sometimes I'll hear people say, "Well I'm really into the first commandment; I just want to love Him." Other people say, "Well, I'm not really into that. I'm really into the second commandment." It's impossible to separate those two commandments. If you love God in truth, you will have love for believers and unbelievers. If you really have love for believers and unbelievers, you will really love God. That's the only place it comes from. I've had people actually debate this. They say, "Well, I'm into the first commandment; that's more powerful than the second commandment."

Then people say, "We're into the second commandment. We're into hanging out with people."

I stop them and say, "Guys, hold on. This is all theoretical. You run into that burning flame called God, you'll love Him and you will love everyone that God loves. When that flame touches you, it will melt you on the inside. There's no distinction."

### **YOU CAN'T SEPARATE THE FIRST COMMANDMENT FROM THE SECOND**

If you love God, you must love people. It's a completely worthless, theoretical argument; it's really worthless. You touch that flame and you'll say, "I love You, God. I love the lost, the broken, and weak people in the Body of Christ." That flame will tenderize you.

Well, there are three dimensions of love. Some parts of the Body of Christ are really into dimension one. They're really into receiving God's love, and there's nothing more powerful than that, but it can't just stop there. We have to return it back, and it has to overflow to others. When Paul says, "If I don't have love," he's talking about all three dimensions of love. We're talking about all three dimensions.

Let's look at 1 Corinthians 13: "Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Cor. 13:4-7). Paul is now going to talk about the character of love—the nature of it. The character of love is the nature of eternity itself. This is the key to the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It's tapping into this dimension of God's nature, understanding it, and receiving it directly from God—this kind of love from God; then, purposing to return this kind of love back to others.

Now go to paragraph B on the notes. Again, those of you who are watching this by TV, you can get these notes on the Internet. If you want them right now, they're available to you. If you read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, it starts out by emphasizing that love suffers long and love is kind. Now, there are fifteen different descriptions of love in these four verses—fifteen different but important descriptions. It's important to follow this.

#### **“LOVE SUFFERS LONG AND IS KIND; LOVE DOES NOT ENVY . . . IS NOT PUFFED UP”**

Paragraph B. The essence of love is described in two phrases. 1 Corinthians 13:4: "Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up." Paul uses two key phrases in 1 Corinthians 13: love suffers long, and love is kind. That's the essence. I'm going to break that down for you in just a moment. That's the essence of what love is. Then Paul takes the next eight descriptions, and he gives eight negatives of what love is not. Then Paul gives five positives of what love is. Basically, what he's doing in these next thirteen descriptions is elaborating on the first two.

Why am I telling you this? If you see the fifteen, the list is so big that we just stare at this long list like a mountain. We say, "Well, wow! I'll just buy the poster. I'll just put the poster on my wall. That's what I need. I'll buy the greeting card." I want to say it again. This four-verse description of love is the most precise description of love that God gives anywhere on the earth. This is the clearest definition that God has ever given of love in the Word of God in terms of describing it phrase by phrase. It's very strategic, and significant, and these are the two significant descriptions. Then the eight negatives tell you what love is not. Five positives tell you what love is. OK, let's look at the essence of love.

#### **SUFFER LONG AND SHOW KINDNESS TO YOUR ENEMIES AND FRIENDS ALIKE**

Paragraph C. The essence of love is that love suffers long. Love suffers long—that's passive. It doesn't give the judgment that's deserved; it suffers long. The second essence of love is THAT love is kind. It gives the kindness that's not deserved. We're going to look at that again. The first part of this definition is that love suffers long. First, God suffers long with us. He really does. The Scripture talks about the unbeliever who has resisted him, and it says God feels that resistance (Eph. 4:30). It's not like God is bigger than the resistance, but He feels it because it's real to Him. Even as believers, though He loves us and He delights in us, when we resist Him, quench Him, and grieve Him, it hurts Him. Those are the verbs that Paul uses. The Word of God uses these phrases: we resist the Spirit, grieve the Spirit, and quench the Spirit.

## **THE HOLY SPIRIT IS PATIENT WITH INCOMPREHENSIBLE PATIENCE**

Ephesians 4:30: “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” (Eph. 4:30). 1 Thessalonians 5:19: “Do not quench the Spirit” (1 Thess 5:19). The Spirit gets grieved. The Spirit doesn’t give up when the Spirit gets grieved; the Spirit doesn’t say, “That’s it! I’ve had it—that’s it.” The Spirit suffers long with us. He says, “No! I’m not giving up; I’m sticking with you. I’m not changing My mind. I’m committed to you.”

So the first dimension of love is passive. It’s what love *doesn’t* do. He doesn’t cut us off like we deserve. The second dimension is active—it’s what He does do. He’s committed to extravagant kindness. One is passive, and one is active. Now this is really significant related to the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In my weakness and carnality, I say, “Lord, I want to be used by You. But oh man, I’ve had such a rough time.”

The Lord says, “No. I suffer long with you; I haven’t given up on you. I haven’t written you off. You’re still a delight to Me. I still want to work with you. I’m still with you. I’m not writing you off at all.”

So knowing God suffers long gives me confidence to operate in the gifts of the Spirit even when things are unsettled in my life. In the issues where I want victory and I don’t yet have it, I rest in the fact that love suffers long.

It’s as if the Lord says, “I’m with you.” Then the issue of God’s kindness hits us. He says, “I’m actively kind. I give you the kindness that you don’t deserve. I withhold the judgment that you do deserve; I’m longsuffering. I give you the kindness that you don’t deserve. You can flow in the gifts of the Spirit even in your weakness.”

## **THE SUPERIORITY OF LOVE: ITS PERMANENCE AND SUCCESS (1 CORINTHIANS 13:8-12)**

Now let’s go the next dimension. As we move in the gifts of the Spirit, we run into someone. We don’t really appreciate them, and then it becomes longsuffering to relate to them rightly. We like that God suffers long with us, but we don’t want to suffer long with people. You know what? Some translations use the word *patience*. I don’t like the word *patience*. *Patience* is an accurate word, but we empty the word of its meaning. I’m really impatient when I’m driving, or when I’m talking really fast on the phone, or getting frustrated with the computer. That usage reduces the concept of what Paul is saying. Paul is talking about something far bigger. He’s talking about love suffering; the word means “suffer long.” It doesn’t mean a little bit of impatience in a conversational style, just kind of a little annoyed that your computer isn’t working right, or you’re impatient waiting for someone to do something. It’s talking about something far bigger than that. It’s talking about the ability to suffer long because God suffers long.

## **LONGSUFFERING WITH PEOPLE: MOVING IN THE GIFT ON GOD’S TERMS**

Beloved, I tell you: this is so absolutely critical to the gifts of the Spirit. What we end up doing is saying, “Lord, I’ll move in the Spirit on my terms.” I’ve seen different people whom the Lord has honored in their ministry. When someone gets honored in their ministry, whether it’s in the church, in the marketplace, their assignment in a political arena, or anywhere, what ends up happening is this: they lose their ability to suffer long with people who annoy them. They write them off because they’re in a place of power and of influence. They don’t need that person. The Lord says, “No, I want to give you power and the gifts of the Spirit so you can suffer long with people and bless them with power. Bless them with the power I put in your hands.”

Whether it's wealth or Holy Spirit power in the direct sense, God wants us to suffer long with people. Wealth is Holy Spirit power in the indirect sense. The Lord doesn't want us to use our position of blessing in God to avoid longsuffering with people who annoy us; He actually wants us to bless them.

### **GOD IS KIND TO ALL, SO WE MUST ALSO BLESS OUR ENEMIES**

It says in Luke 6:35: "But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil" (Lk. 6:35). God even blesses the unthankful and the evil man. He's kind to them.

So often we get the idea, "I want to move in power. I don't want the little stuff; I only want the big stuff. I'm Your man for power. When I get the big stuff, I'm going to go for it." What we would end up doing with that spirit is only blessing the people we like. Even though it's God's power and not our power, we don't have the right to choose whom we use it for. If we grow in the spirit of selfishness as we grow in the gifts of the Spirit, we'll use the gifts in selfishness, and God knows it. I've told the Lord many times, "Lord, I'm not like those other guys. You can trust me; You give me all the heavy-duty stuff, and I'll be unbelievably humble. I'm not like those other guys. Just trust me, I'll be different."

The Lord probably would say this: "I really like you, Mike, but I've heard this story a billion times already. Just do what I tell you."

Beloved, if we won't suffer long with people in our family without power, I guarantee you that we won't suffer long with people when we operate in the power of God. You know the accountability that we would have in the presence of God, to be stewards of His power, and we used His power like it was our power. Then we stand before God at the judgment seat of Christ. It's as if He says, "You really don't understand it. You don't want that; trust Me when I tell you that you don't want that. You really don't want that. You don't want to use My power with a spirit of selfishness."

We tell Him, "Lord, I don't want to be selfish."

He might answer, "Good, then let's measure how you act at home. I tell you, that's the litmus test."

We argue, "I want to move in a spirit of power."

The Lord says, "I don't want to give you more power than what you'll want to answer for at the judgment seat of Christ. You really don't want to use My power with that spirit; you really don't. I'll remember it, and we'll talk about it."

### **LIVING BEFORE THE JUDGMENT SEAT: MOVING IN POWER IN THE RIGHT SPIRIT**

Again, the chapter is set in the context of the judgment seat of Christ. Love is kind. Now God releases the gifts of the spirit through us when we don't deserve it. He still uses us in partnership with Him. He wants us to be kind to people who don't deserve kindness.

"Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away. When I was a

child, I spoke as a child; I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor. 13:8-13)

### **LOVE NEVER FAILS**

Love never fails. Love never fails. “For we know in part and we prophesy in part.” Let’s go to verse 12: “For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then see face to face . . . Now I know in part.” 1 Corinthians 13:13: “And now abide faith, hope, love, these three, but the greatest of these is love.”

Now, faith, hope, and love are three distinct priorities in the Spirit. The greatest is love, but all three of these are distinct priorities if we’re going to walk in the Spirit. Some people focus on faith; some focus on one part of love. Some focus on the fact that God loves them. Others focus on the fact that they love God. Others don’t do a lot of focus on that; they try to love other people. They pick one of the three dimensions of love and say, “That’s what my life is about.” Walking in the Spirit requires that we embrace faith, hope, and love. We must embrace the three distinct dimensions of life in the Spirit. I have some of that on the notes. Let’s look at this issue that love never fails. Love never fails.

### **LOVE NEVER FAILS; LOVE DEFINES OUR SUCCESS BEFORE GOD**

Paragraph B. 1 Corinthians 13:8: “Love never fails.” Now, it’s not saying that love never fails in the sense that everyone you love responds to you. That’s not what it’s saying. You’ve loved many people, and they wrote you off. God has loved many people, and the people didn’t respond, so they ended up in hell.

Love never failing isn’t a human dimension. It’s us before God. What Paul is saying is this: if you invest in love, as verse 1 Corinthians 13:5-7 describes so dynamically, it’s so invasive, but it’s so awesome; it’s clearly true. It’s the kind of description of love that will bear up at the judgment seat of Christ.

### **GOD REMEMBERS AND REWARDS EVEN THE SMALLEST MOVEMENT OF OUR HEART**

It’s as if Paul says, “If you will give yourself to that kind of living, and every activity of your heart to love, it will be remembered and rewarded at the judgment seat of Christ. Not one seed you sow in love will fail to go before God. It doesn’t mean that its impact on people won’t fail. Many people you love, they won’t receive it. God will never, ever forget it—never.”

Not one movement of your heart to show kindness and to suffer long with someone who doesn’t deserve will go unnoticed. God remembers every single one of them. Paul is listing fifteen descriptions of love. He consoles them with this: every thing you’ve ever sowed in love will be remembered and rewarded and honored before God forever. Even if people don’t appreciate it, God appreciates it. Our efforts to operate in the gifts of the Spirit go unnoticed or unappreciated. Even if we just operate in the faint impressions and the small manifestations, this is still true. Remember the headache that was only half healed? Or the depression that only lifted for three hours? God notices; God rewards. He’s a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Heb. 11:6). So we’re sticking with it in love.

### **GOD REMEMBERS EVERY MOVEMENT OF OUR HEART IN LOVE**

The Lord says, “I will never fail to remember it. Never will love fail in My sight, because I am love.” My point is this: it’s worth the journey. Hebrews 6:10: “For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which

you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister” (Heb. 6:10). God is not unjust to forget one act of love that you’ve done in His name by ministering to people. Beloved, you will show love to God by ministering to people. You must love the people as well. Minister to people, even if they don’t receive it—believer and unbeliever alike. They don’t receive it; that doesn’t determine whether God remembers it or not. God says, “I’ll not forget it, even if they don’t like it. I’ll remember. If I forget one act of love, you can charge Me with injustice on the last day.”

I tell you, it puts an anchor in my soul to want to go after this thing with all my heart. Why do people draw back in the gifts of the Spirit? One of the reasons is that for the people who love the Spirit, the spiritual vigor of attentiveness, reaching out, expressing, risking, yet not getting an immediate payback of honor from men, or dazzling the crowds.

We think, “No one noticed, yet it didn’t seem to be a big deal. They criticize me anyway. Why am I doing it?”

### **YOU’RE DOING IT FOR LOVE, AND IT’S REMEMBERED BEFORE GOD**

Paul answers, “You’re doing it for love, and it’s remembered before God.” It will never fail. Your labors will never fail to be remembered by God. Never, ever will they fail to be remembered. Many other things will fail. Grand achievements will fail. Some of the great trophies in life will fail, but love will never, ever fail to be honored before God if you sow it in your life.

Now look at what he’s talking about: the very next line after “love never fails” is 1 Corinthians 13:9-10: “For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.” Beloved, Paul is emphasizing that “you know in part and you prophesy in part.” Paul is making several points here. I’m only going to make one of the several. There are several points to be made, but I’m going to wind this up in the next minute or two. What Paul is saying here is that we know in part and we prophesy in part. Even the way that God has orchestrated prophecy, we only get a fragment of information. We only get a piece of information. That’s what God gives us.

If we use it, we’re operating in love. That’s not the primary point that Paul is making here, but it’s a point that he’s making. The very way that prophecy operates is in fragments of information. They’re given to you, they’re small impressions, and you express them. The people either like it or don’t like it. It doesn’t matter one way or the other. You still get honored before God for it; He still remembers it. He’s saying that “love never fails.” Even the way prophecy operates will prove this out on the last day. Now again, Paul is making other points in this passage besides that, but we can’t fail to miss that.

### **THE HIGHEST GOAL OF OUR FAITH IS TO WALK IN LOVE: SUCCESS IN GOD’S SIGHT**

He goes on in 1 Corinthians 13:13, and he says this—the greatest of all these is love. Of faith, hope, and love, the greatest is love. I’ll conclude with this. A lot of streams in the Body of Christ put a lot of emphasis on growing in faith, and that’s important. That’s what this conference is about. This conference is about growing in the power dimension of the kingdom. That’s the faith. We want to exercise the faith muscle. Some whole streams are locked into faith. Other streams are locked into hope, but not very many. Hope in the Bible is almost entirely about the age to come. Hope is the subject of eternity in the end times. Most people ignore hope. Some people focus on hope. You can turn on the television; some folks are focused on the end times and eternity. There’s a dimension of hope. Hope is a vast subject; hope is as big in the Bible as faith is.

Other people focus on love, but normally maybe on different dimensions of love. One group is into “God loves us.” They’re into the father heart of God. The other group is just focused on loving God. They say, “We’re just going to be wholly devoted to the Lord.”

Other people say, “Well, we just love people. We don’t spend a lot of time with God.” They even divide the love of God up.

The Lord doesn’t want three camps for love, another camp for hope, and another camp for faith. He says the three must operate together for all of them to grow into fullness together. You don’t have to pick which one you want. You get to have your heart, your liver, and your kidney all functioning at once; you don’t have to pick one of them. It’s not like God is asking, “Which one do you want, and you only get one?”

You ask, “Why can’t I have all three?” I’m committed to be in the midst of a people that grow vibrant in their faith and who understand eternity. Our understanding is formed intentionally on eternal things; about the age to come and the end times. We’re growing in all three dimensions of the love of God. I believe that the context of these three things together is the context in which the spirit of prophecy abounds in the Body of Christ. Amen. Let’s stand.