

Now We See in a Mirror Dimly, But Love Leads the Way
I Corinthians 13
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Introduction: Today we begin our farewell journey, a journey that must be filled with love. It seemed to me that I Corinthians 13 would serve as a good foundation for our coming weeks. It is one of my favorite scriptures, but I know I say that a lot. It reminds me of something that happened when Johnny was about 15 years old. We were in the car, listening to the radio. A song came on and Johnny said, "That's on my list of top 100 songs." Then another song came on and Johnny said, "That's on my list of top 100 songs." It happened again and again. Every song that came on the radio, Johnny identified as one of his top 100 songs. Finally, I turned to Johnny and asked, "How many songs are on your list of top 100 songs?" Without missing a beat, Johnny said, "214."

So I can say this passage is on my list of top 100 scriptures!

I Corinthians 13:1-31

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ²And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

⁴Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant ⁵or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. ⁷It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

⁸Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. ⁹For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; ¹⁰but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. ¹¹When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. ¹²For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. ¹³And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

Prayer: Lord God, we turn to You in times of change. We pray that You would guide us with Your loving kindness in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen

This is a hard day for us. We are all trying to get used to the idea that I'm retiring. There are plans for lots of activities for the summer, which along with one-on-one time will give us plenty of opportunities to see each other.

When you work as closely together as we have, there are bound to be differences. As we say farewell, it's time for resolution to my leaving and to any differences we may have lingering about, and resolution needs a strong foundation of love. So let us turn to perhaps the best description of love, Paul's letter to the Corinthians.

First, the passage explains that nothing can be resolved without a foundation of love. Without love, conflict resolution is just a game. The game might be very challenging like chess, but it's still a game. Some of us are very good at arguing our case, but winning an argument seldom involves resolution and love. If we look over our lives, each of us can remember arguments won and lost without resolution.

Here is a moving interpretation of the first section of the passage that gives us a more contemporary understanding of Paul's words. The piece that reads like poetry was written by an anonymous Indian medical student and was published in *The Prairie Overcomer* in January 1955.

If I have language ever so perfect and speak like a pundit,
but have not the knack of love that grips the heart,
I am nothing.

If I have decorations and diplomas,
and am proficient in up-to-date methods,
but have not the touch of understanding love,
I am nothing.

If I am able to best my opponents in arguments so as to make fools of them,
but have not the wooing note,
I am nothing.

If I have all faith and great ideals and magnificent plans and wonderful visions,
but have not the love that sweats and bleeds and weeps and
prays and pleads,
I am nothing. ...

If I can heal all manner of sickness and disease,
but wound hearts and hurt feelings for want of love that is kind,
I am nothing.

If I can write books and publish articles that set the world agog,
but fail to transcribe the word of the Cross in the language of love,
I am nothing.

We, too, are nothing without love.

The second part of this passage is the famous quote: the description of love. As a minister, I have performed over 50 weddings. In almost every one of those weddings we

have used the passage on love. I always tell the couple they can use another passage, but while they sometimes add other readings, they seldom take the love passage out.

There was one couple who did remove it. When we started to go over the service, they said, "Everything looks fine, except the scripture passage. We just don't want to use it at all. Can we pick something else?" Of course, I assured them that they should pick a scripture that was meaningful to them.

After the service, I did ask them why they were uncomfortable with the love passage. They answered that the love described by Paul was just too idealistic. They believed it wasn't realistic. They said, "That kind of love just doesn't exist!"

That kind of love does exist and it is our business to bring it to life. Our love must be patient and kind. It isn't envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. In Christ, we are called to share His amazing love, a different, transforming love – a love that changes those we love and ourselves.

Finally, we come to the promise of love. "Now we see in a mirror dimly..." We can't really see the future. We see hints of what might happen, but when things change we are thrown off balance. It is only when we rely on the love of God that we will find our way.

I visited my mother yesterday and then had lunch with my sister, Jean. She reminded of something that happened when we were children. My mother had taken my sisters and me somewhere. As we were going home, a deep fog settled on the road. Since my mother couldn't see well enough to drive, she pulled over. There we sat, on a deserted road. Finally a large truck came down the road. My mother put the car in gear and we followed the truck. Sometimes we need help to see the way. That help is what Geneva is all about.

Geneva isn't a pastor. Geneva is all the people who have been drawn together by the voice of Jesus Christ. We will be fine because our confidence is in the body of Christ, the church, Geneva. We will be fine in God's care. Amen.