

In this section of his letter, Paul has been expounding on the priority of *agape* love and its necessity when any of the gifts of the Spirit are expressed. Without love the gifts mean nothing. This is a love that expects nothing in return. It even loves its enemies (Romans 5:10ⁱ). It is unmerited and given graciously to those who will receive it. It is unlike any love that man can muster for it is utterly unselfish. The previous four verses defined love, mostly by declaring what it is not. That helps us recognize how different our love is compared to the love of God. For example, love does not envy or boast, it is not rude or arrogant, nor is it irritable or resentful, which are attitudes we all experience. In the positive sense it is patient and kind. These descriptions are essentially a description of God's nature, for He is described as *agape* (1 John 4:19ⁱⁱ).

Paul continues by emphasizing the importance of love by contrasting the temporary nature of the gifts of the Spirit with the eternal nature of God's love. ⁸ *Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.* 1 Corinthians 13:8 "Ends" is a better choice than KJV word choice "fails," for the contrast is *agape's* eternal quality with that of things that are temporal such as gifts of the Spirit the Corinthians held so highly. The Greek word *pipto* literally means "falls or collapses." It is used of flower petals which have dried, fallen off, and decayed. We won't need the gifts of prophecy, tongues, or knowledge in heaven, but we will have love. **The very atmosphere of heaven will be love!**

"Never" in this Greek form is only used here in Paul's letters. It is more emphatic than simply saying "will not." You could say *agape* will absolutely not ever cease to be. Because God's eternal nature is *agape*, it cannot end. Some people use it like a formula. "If I use love I can't fail." *It is important to note that never fails does not refer to success. Love is not a magic key that Christians use to unlock every opportunity and guarantee every endeavor. Love is not a spiritual formula that, faithfully applied, automatically fulfills our desires and produces human success... Success will not always be a part of love, but love will always be a part of true spiritual success.*ⁱⁱⁱ

Verses 8-10 are used by some to say the gifts of the Spirit have ceased. We refer to those with that belief as cessationists. But as we have seen, the word "gifts" is also used for marriage and salvation as well as generosity and helping (1 Corinthians 7:6,7^{iv}; Romans 6:23^v; Romans 12:7,8^{vi}). Some expressions of the gifts will be experienced in heaven in their fullness, such as knowledge, but since we will be perfected, we will no longer need to build up one another (1 Corinthians 14:12^{vii}). All those gifts that are meant to help us all on to spiritual maturity will not be needed then. Paul is emphasizing the enduring fruit of the Spirit as opposed to the temporal spiritual gifts to try to help the Corinthians, and all who read the letter, to see the fruits of the Spirit, especially *agape* love, are essential to the believer's behavior and giftings.

While only three gifts are mentioned, probably those highly prized by the Corinthians, they are most likely representative of all the gifts. In heaven, we will all have knowledge. No one will need to speak a word from the Lord for the Lord Himself will be among us speaking to us. The prophecy will have come to pass that declares that no one will teach his neighbor to know the Lord, for all shall know Him (Jeremiah 31:34^{viii}).

The phrase “will cease” and “will pass away” are both translation of the Greek verb katargeo that is usually used in reference to the coming age when Christ will reign on the earth (1:28^{ix}; 2:6^x; 6:13^{xi}; 15:24-26^{xii}). The way Paul uses the word in this letter describes the things that will not continue into the coming age.^{xiii}

⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰ but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. 1 Corinthians 13:9,10 Gifts like prophecy and knowledge are limited and temporary until God's work in us is completed (1 John 3:2^{xiv}). Then we will have the child's version of gifts replaced with the adult version, the temporal replaced with the eternal. It is similar to what will take place with our bodies which are wonderfully functional now, but so limited compared to our eternal bodies (Philippians 3:21^{xv}). Our spirits will be perfected, completely Christlike. Imagine everyone you meet in heaven having the fulness of the fruits of the Spirit. Everyone will be loving like God loves, filled with joy, peaceful, kind, and gentle. All who are there will know God's Word and love the Father and Son with all their hearts. Each one will have a testimony of the grace that saved them. No one will be whining about the choice of music or the color of the carpet, or anything for that matter. All will be praise and glory to our gracious Savior.

These expressions should remind us how humble we should be about our present knowledge or prophecy. If we know the expression of these gifts is only partial, we must recognize that there is so much more that we do not yet understand. Man has always been searching for more, and in many cases that is to exalt himself above others or to gain fame and respect. But this is telling us that no matter how much we know, our knowledge is still only partial knowledge. When the Lord returns to call us home, the partial will be replaced with fullness. Do you want to know what that is like? Sorry, our knowledge is only partial. Einstein said, “The more I learn the more I realize how much I don’t know.” Aristotle said, “The more you know, the more you know you don’t know.” That is our humble condition now.

Man is so arrogant. Every generation thinks they have finally arrived at the pinnacle of knowledge only to be far surpassed by the next. By the middle of the twentieth century, knowledge was doubling every 25 years. As of 2013, human knowledge was doubling every 13 months on average – faster in some industries like nanotechnology research. Now, human knowledge is almost doubling every day!^{xvi} I have spent my life studying the Scripture, but I am only scratching the surface. I listen to others who are much more intelligent than I and who took a more studious path, and yet they have only scratched a tiny layer deeper. Paul is trying to tell us how humble we should be about our gifts, and how limited those gifts are. But *agape* love, on the other hand, is a quality that is eternal.

“When the perfect comes” is clarified by the following verses that declare it is a time when we see Jesus face to face and know fully even as we are fully known, which is the consummation of all things. It is not as some suggest, when the Bible is completed as a book around A.D. 400. Those descriptions did not occur then. That is an illustration of that “reasoning in part,” or isogesis, which is reading into Scripture what we want to find rather than what the passage says. Keep in mind that everyone’s reasoning is only in part. However, we must carefully examine what we can understand of Scripture to learn more. Interpret Scripture with Scripture.

In the letter, “perfect” or “mature” is set in contrast to “infant.” By using the term “perfect/mature,” Paul is probably picking up on the Corinthians’ language and self-understanding in order to add rhetorical force to his argument. In 2:6-3:4, for example, the message of wisdom spoken to the mature (2:6^{xvii}) is set in contrast to Paul’s claim that he could only speak to them as mere infants in Christ (3:1^{xviii}). The Corinthians considered themselves to be mature, wise, and spiritual. Paul pointed out that their behavior indicated otherwise. The mature/infant contrast appears again in 14:20^{xix}, “Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults.” - The true indicator of maturity/spirituality is love, not the exercise of the temporal gifts.^{xx} Paul is pounding away at their ego to humble them and bring them into unity. Humility in Christ is the only path to unity.

¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. 1 Corinthians 13:11 Paul used an illustration comparing a child becoming an adult to our present state with spiritual gifts and our future state in heaven. We are playing with toys now, as wonderful as they are. But then we will no longer be playing with partial abilities but will have the full purpose and function for which all gifts are given.

The Corinthians thought some of them had mastered rhetoric. They believed themselves to be excellent speakers, but Paul is saying it sounds like little children compared to what is to come. We won’t truly know how to speak until we are matured in heaven. If we can look back on what we thought was excellent speech, thinking, and reasoning, we will realize it was so immature. What must fellowship in heaven be like then? Sorry, we only know in part. But that doesn’t mean we cannot look forward to it.

We rely on our reasoning. I hear some people’s explanations about their theology and I think how immature their reasoning is, but this verse is telling me, so is mine. We only reason like little children compared to what God has for us then. **A mature Christian is one whose main attribute is *agape* love.** I think when most of us consider that, we know we have a long way to go to truly be spiritually mature.

¹² For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. 1 Corinthians 13:12 Mirrors in that age were polished bronze and gave an imperfect reflection. That is an analogy of us looking into the Word even with the help of the Spirit. The image is there but not clear. Then it will be like sitting down with Jesus face to face- UHD/3D+ What we know now is like a that of a 5 year old but then it will be like the professor with quadruple PhD. Better yet, it will be like Jesus knows us. And that is the goal. Not just knowledge but knowing Jesus. And to know Him is to love Him (Deuteronomy 7:9^{xxi}; Hosea 2:19,20^{xxii}; John 17:3^{xxiii}). To know Him is to be transformed (Ephesians 1:17^{xxiv}).

When Moses saw just a portion of the glory of the Lord, his face radiated that glory (Exodus 34:29^{xxv}). Our heavenly bodies will then be able to behold His unveiled glory. (2 Corinthians 3:18^{xxvi}). What will that do to us? How can we fully know as we are known, except by the miracle working power of God? I don’t think any earthly comparison comes closer, than to say I will fully know even as I am fully known. How well does Jesus know you? He knows your thoughts before you speak them (Psalm 139:4^{xxvii}), the desires of your heart, your struggles and pain, your joys and fears. We will know Jesus as intimately. Of course, He has no struggles or fears, but you get the idea.

¹³ So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

1 Corinthians 13:13 What lasts? What does not pass away? Faith, hope, and love endure. Paul often writes about the relationship of these three qualities. To the Galatians he writes that by faith we eagerly await the hope of righteousness and the only thing that counts is faith working by love (Galatians 5:5,6^{xxviii}). He told the Thessalonians that when he remembers their work of faith, labor of love, and steadfast hope in Jesus he prays for them (1 Thessalonians 1:3^{xxix}). And since we are children of the day we have put on the breastplate of faith and love and the helmet of the hope of salvation (1 Thessalonians 5:8^{xxx}). But of these three, *agape* is the crowning attribute of the soul hidden in Christ. God's love has free flow through the lives of these who have died with Jesus on the cross and been raised with Him to newness of life (2 Corinthians 4:10,11^{xxxi}).

Love—true love (agape love)—does not originate in the nature of man, but in the nature of God. God is love; love is the basic trait of His nature. The very existence of man is due to the fact that God is love, not to the fact that God believed or held hope for man. Therefore love, which is the basic trait of God's nature, is far superior to faith and hope.^{xxxii}

To the Corinthians and the church ever since, Paul has laid out the supreme goal. While we are to desire the best gifts (12:31^{xxxiii}), the most excellent way is love, without which the gifts are worthless, even an irritant (see verse 1-3). Yet, we cannot work this love up. It just is not in us. When someone pushes our buttons, we react. When our spouse seems distant and unconcerned about what we are going through, we begin to feel the same toward him or her. We say we are falling out of love. What we are falling out of is *eros* or *phileo*, but it is not *agape*, for *agape* never ends.

The world is desperately searching for this type of love. We try to make ourselves attractive in hopes it will draw this type of love, but we are only attracting *eros* love. *Eros* love is not guaranteed to endure. You may find *phileo* love, but commitment can come with limitations. I remember an accident in the Verde Valley when a young girl's face was destroyed. She lived, but you would not recognize her. In our day there is actually such a thing as a face transplant, but she would never appear the same. If she had a boyfriend, would he still love her? Perhaps, but most teenage boys would move on because their love has limits. I would venture to say that most people never find the love they crave, because we are looking in the wrong place. *Agape* love, true love, has its source in God.

While we often fall far short of this goal of letting the love of Christ flow through us to others, there is One who never fails. His love never ends. That love took Him to a horribly agonizing death on a cross. And He did so while we were yelling, "Crucify Him!" It happened while we were questioning His love for us, and while we doubted His goodness. But in that death and resurrection a victory was won. Love prevailed over all our sins and death and the grave. **Love defeated death!** And because His love did, we know our souls are valued beyond what we can imagine. It does not matter what we look like or what we accomplish. We are loved because God chose to love us. That love heals all our scars and make us beautiful on the inside. It is at work even now in every child of God. The day of completion is on God's calendar already. And we will be in the presence of this Love that never ends. It is the only real happily ever after!

We need to go about our lives each day with the reality of these truths in mind. We need to face the loveless world around us with all its impatience and frustrations and insults knowing we are loved. We need to know nothing in this world can change that fact. We are loved with a love that is patient and kind. It is a love that never envies or boasts, never irritable or resentful, and never insists on His own way. We are loved by the greatest love, the love that laid down His life for us (John 15:13^{xxxiv}). Then in total trust in that love, we can let that love flow through us to the ungrateful, the annoying, and the mean spirited, knowing that we don't need their love, but that they desperately need the love we have found. **We have all the love anyone could ever desire in Jesus.** Paul tells us in Romans 5:5^{xxxv} that God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. That is why we can let His love flow through us to others. We do not need them to react like we want them to. Love will do its work whether rejected or embraced.

The world rejected Jesus but look what His love accomplished. The little band of persecuted followers looked hopeless, but they had His love. They were not perfect, but they had His love. And it is by that love that the world has heard, and billions of souls have experienced that same love. Jesus said, "Love one another *as* I have loved you." John 15:12^{xxxvi} We are not perfect, but now and then as we walk in the Spirit with the realization that we are embraced by a love that never ends, that love flows through us to someone who has given up on ever finding love that loves the unlovely. In those moments we feel we are touching the One who loves us with that love that never ends.

"A Christian should always remember that the value of his good works is not based on their number and excellence, but on the love of God which prompts him to do these things. Where there is no love, pour love in, and you will draw love out. In the twilight of life, God will not judge us on our earthly possessions and human successes, but on how well we have loved." John of the Cross

Are you still searching for this love that never ends? If you have never opened your heart to Jesus and invited Him to grant you His forgiveness, thanked Him for taking your sin debt upon Himself, and accepted His love that He longs to give you, what are you waiting for? You will never find it searching in all the wrong places. In Revelation 3:20^{xxxvii}, Jesus is standing at the door of hearts, knocking, hoping we will open our heart to Him and receive Him as our Lord and lover of our souls. Only then can He pour His love through us to others who so desperately need His love. It will cost you everything, but the question is, do you really want to live (Mark 16:25^{xxxviii})?

Questions:

- 1 Why is *agape* eternal?
- 2 Why are we sure gifts have not ceased?
- 3 When will gifts as we know them cease?
- 4 Why is there no reason to take pride in our gifts?
- 5 What is the child adult analogy?
- 6 How can we love God more?
- 7 What lasts?
- 8 Why is love greater than faith or hope?
- 9 How can we agape others?
- 10 Where are you looking for love?

ⁱ **Romans 5:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.

ⁱⁱ **1 John 4:7-8 (ESV)**

⁷ Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.

⁸ Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

ⁱⁱⁱ John F. MacArthur Jr., [1 Corinthians](#), MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), 358.

^{iv} **1 Corinthians 7:6-7 (ESV)**

⁶ Now as a concession, not a command, I say this.

⁷ I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another.

^v **Romans 6:23 (ESV)**

²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

^{vi} **Romans 12:7-8 (ESV)**

⁷ if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching;

⁸ the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

^{vii} **1 Corinthians 14:12 (NIV)**

¹² So it is with you. Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church.

^{viii} **Jeremiah 31:34 (ESV)**

³⁴ And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

^{ix} **1 Corinthians 1:28 (ESV)**

²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are,

^x **1 Corinthians 2:6 (ESV)**

⁶ Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away.

^{xi} **1 Corinthians 6:13 (ESV)**

¹³ "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food"—and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.

^{xii} **1 Corinthians 15:24-26 (ESV)**

²⁴ Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. ²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

^{xiii} Ciampa and Rosner *1 Corinthians*, p 653-54

^{xiv} **1 John 3:2 (ESV)**

² Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

^{xv} **Philippians 3:21 (ESV)**

²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

^{xvi} The all knowing Google

^{xvii} **1 Corinthians 2:6 (ESV)**

⁶ Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away.

^{xviii} **1 Corinthians 3:1 (ESV)**

¹ But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ.

^{xix} **1 Corinthians 14:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature.

^{xx} Mark Taylor, [1 Corinthians](#), ed. E. Ray Clendenen, vol. 28, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 317.

^{xxi} **Deuteronomy 7:9 (ESV)**

⁹ Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations,

^{xxii} **Hosea 2:19-20 (ESV)**

¹⁹ And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy.

²⁰ I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the LORD.

^{xxiii} **John 17:3 (ESV)**

³ And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

^{xxiv} **Ephesians 1:17 (NIV)**

¹⁷ I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.

^{xxv} **Exodus 34:29 (NIV)**

²⁹ When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the LORD.

^{xxvi} **2 Corinthians 3:18 (NIV)**

¹⁸ And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

^{xxvii} **Psalms 139:4 (ESV)**

⁴ Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.

^{xxviii} **Galatians 5:5-6 (ESV)**

⁵ For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. ⁶ For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.

^{xxix} **1 Thessalonians 1:3 (ESV)**

³ remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

^{xxx} **1 Thessalonians 5:8 (ESV)**

⁸ But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.

^{xxxi} **2 Corinthians 4:10-11 (ESV)**

¹⁰ always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

¹¹ For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

^{xxxii} Leadership Ministries Worldwide, [*The First & Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*](#), The Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible (Chattanooga, TN: Leadership Ministries Worldwide, 1996), 167.

^{xxxiii} **1 Corinthians 12:31 (ESV)**

³¹ But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

^{xxxiv} **John 15:13 (ESV)**

¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

^{xxxv} **Romans 5:5** and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

^{xxxvi} **John 15:12 (ESV)**

¹² "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

^{xxxvii} **Revelation 3:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.

^{xxxviii} **Matthew 16:25 (ESV)**

²⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.