

THE ONLY SOLUTION



Gary Wilkerson May 16, 2016

The way Paul writes to the Corinthian church, it's easy to assume that it was rife with gross sins. The truth is, however, they were greatly gifted by the Holy Spirit. Indeed, it's because of the Corinthians that we know about the gifts of the Spirit; Paul's letter to them shows how powerfully those gifts were operating in them. But even though the Corinthians had a great knowledge of the things of God, they lacked the love that Jesus commands of us. Paul hit them hard on this point:

"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

Note Paul's operative word here: *nothing*. That's what the love of the Corinthian church was worth. He was telling them they could never accomplish God's purposes. Christ's love—the lay-down-your-life-on-a-cross kind of love—is a tall order, one that's impossible except through the Spirit.

Now, this may sound to you like a surprising interpretation of 1 Corinthians 13. Most of us know this chapter as the Bible's "love chapter." Even non-Christians are familiar with it because it is read at so many weddings. In that context, 1 Corinthians 13 isn't much more than a greeting card sentiment. In truth, this chapter is a counterpoint to all the carnal sins Paul listed in 2 Corinthians 12. That list includes quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder. Note the contrast:

"Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Corinthians 13:4-7). When we compare this list with the other, we begin to see 1 Corinthians 13 as a spiritual solution to a problem of sin—indeed, the only solution.

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