

# Light Reading/Deep Reading of the Bible

## 1 Corinthians chapter 13

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What is faith, what is hope, and what is love

In the context of 1 Corinthians 13, Paul's mention of "faith, hope, and love" is the core virtue of the Christian faith.

1. Faith refers to trust and loyalty to God, especially in God's promises, Christ's redemptive work, and the truth of the Bible. It is not only an intellectual identification, but also a life commitment to God's action. Hebrews 11:1: "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the assurance of things not seen." Faith is the assurance of things that are not fully revealed by God, such as eternal life, the kingdom of God. Faith is the starting point for a relationship with God (Romans 5:1). It includes acceptance of Christ's salvation (Ephesians 2:8-9) and steadfastness in the midst of trials (James 1:3).

2 Hope is the anticipation and assurance of God's promised future, especially Christ's return, resurrection, and eternal life. It is not a worldly "hope" (uncertainty), but is based on God's faithful assurance. Romans 5:5: "Hope is not shameful, for the love of God is poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given to us." In 1 Corinthians 13, hope points to the hope of eternity, a future of complete communion with God (13:12). Hope is the driving force for Christians to persevere in the midst of suffering (Romans 8:24-25). It is closely linked to God's promises and the resurrection of Christ (1 Peter 1:3). It is hoped that believers will be inspired to remain joyful in the midst of temporal difficulties and focus on God's ultimate plan of salvation.

3 Love is selfless, sacrificial, God-centered love that transcends emotions or conditions and embodies God's love for humanity. It is an active action of choosing to pay for the good of

others. 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 describes in detail the qualities of love, such as "long-suffering, kindness," and "not seeking for one's own good," reflecting Christ's love on the cross. 1 John 4:8: "God is love" shows that love is at the heart of God's nature and that Christian love should imitate God. Love is the foundation of all spiritual gifts and works (13:1-3), and without love, nothing else is meaningful. Love is eternal and transcends temporary gifts (13:8-13). Love drives believers to live selflessness and sacrifice in relationships, church life, and service to the world. The relationship between the three is that the greatest faith is the foundation for people to know God and receive salvation. Hope is an extension of faith, pointing to God's promised future, giving believers patience and motivation. Love is the fruit of faith and hope, which is reflected in actions towards God and man, and is the highest expression of the Christian life.

1 Corinthians 13 is known as the "chapter of love," Paul's teaching letter on issues within the Corinthian church (e.g., factionalism, moral depravity, misuse of spiritual gifts, etc.). Paul emphasizes that no matter what spiritual gifts (e.g., speaking in tongues, prophecy, knowledge) or acting (e.g., almsgiving, sacrifice), without love, nothing is worthless. Paul describes 15 characteristics of love, such as "love is endurance and kindness", "not jealousy, no boasting", "tolerance in all things, belief in all things", etc. These qualities showcase the selflessness, humility, and enduring nature of love, in contrast to the selfishness and contention of the Corinthian church. Love never fails, and other gifts (such as prophecy, tongues, knowledge) will eventually pass because they are temporary. Paul uses a mirror blur as a metaphor for the limitation of knowledge today, pointing out that when we see God face to face, everything will be fully revealed. Finally, he emphasized that "faith, hope, and love" always exist, and love is the greatest of them.

We pray

Dear Heavenly Father,

Thank You for giving us faith, hope, and love in Christ. Your Word teaches us, "There is faith, hope, and love that abides now; The greatest of these three is love." Lord, we admit that sometimes we are weak in faith, lost about the future, and even lack of love for people. We plead with You to fill us with the Holy Spirit so that we can truly live out these three precious graces in our daily lives.

Teach us how to hold on to our faith in You and rely on You in good times and bad. Give us heavenly hope so that we will not be swallowed up by the darkness of the world, and always look to the eternal kingdom; It also teaches us to walk in love, to love You, to love others, even those who are not lovely, and to live out the likeness of Christ.

Lord, may our lives be witnesses of faith, hope, and love, so that people can see Your glory and grace through us.

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

1 Corinthians 13

## The Excellence of Love

**13** If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not <sup>[a]</sup>love [for others growing out of God's love for me], then I have become only a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal [just an annoying distraction]. <sup>2</sup> And if I have *the gift of prophecy* [and speak a new message from God to the people], and understand all mysteries, and [possess] all knowledge; and if I have all [sufficient] faith so that I can remove mountains, but do not have love [reaching out to others], I am nothing. <sup>3</sup> If I give all my possessions to feed *the poor*, and if I surrender my body <sup>[b]</sup>to be burned, but do not have love, it does me no good at all.

<sup>4</sup> Love endures with patience *and* serenity, love is kind *and* thoughtful, and is not jealous *or* envious; love does not brag and is not proud *or* arrogant. <sup>5</sup> It is not rude; it is not self-seeking, it is not provoked [nor overly sensitive and easily angered]; it does not take into account a wrong *endured*. <sup>6</sup> It does not rejoice at injustice, but rejoices with the truth [when right and truth prevail]. <sup>7</sup> Love bears all things [regardless of what comes], believes all things [looking for the best in each one], hopes all things [remaining steadfast during difficult times], endures all things [without weakening].

<sup>8</sup> Love never fails [it never fades nor ends]. But as for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for the gift of special knowledge, it will pass away. <sup>9</sup> For we know in part, and we prophesy in part [for our knowledge is fragmentary and incomplete]. <sup>10</sup> But when that which is complete *and* perfect comes, that which is incomplete *and* partial will pass away. <sup>11</sup> When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. <sup>12</sup> For now [in this time of imperfection] we see in a mirror dimly [a blurred reflection, a riddle, an enigma], but then [when the time of perfection comes we will see reality] face to face. Now I know in part [just in fragments], but then I will know fully, just as I have been fully known [by God]. <sup>13</sup> And now there remain: faith [abiding trust in God and His promises], hope [confident expectation of eternal salvation], love [unselfish love for others growing out of God's love for me], these three [the choicest graces]; but the greatest of these is love.

1 Corinthians 13 is one of the most beloved and quoted passages in the New Testament. Often referred to as the "Love Chapter," it is part of Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth. Positioned between his teachings on spiritual gifts (chapters 12 and 14), this chapter emphasizes that **love (Greek: *agape*) is superior to all spiritual gifts and is essential to Christian life.**

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### Detailed Explanation (Verse-by-Verse)

#### Verses 1–3: Without Love, All Is Useless

*"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love..."* (v.1)

- Paul begins by highlighting that **even the most impressive spiritual gifts are worthless without love.**

- Speaking in tongues, prophecy, wisdom, and sacrificial actions — all these mean nothing if love is absent.
- This reflects the danger of **pride and performance without heart transformation**.

**Key Point:** Love is not just an add-on to spiritual gifts; it is the **foundation**.

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### Verses 4–7: The Nature of Love

*“Love is patient, love is kind...”* (v.4)

- Paul uses 15 action-oriented descriptions to define what *agape* love looks like.
- These include:
  - **Positive traits:** patience, kindness, truth-rejoicing, enduring
  - **Negative traits avoided:** envy, boasting, pride, rudeness, anger, selfishness

**Key Point:** Love is **active**, not just emotional. It's expressed in how we treat others consistently.

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### Verses 8–13: Love Is Eternal

*“Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease...”* (v.8)

- Spiritual gifts are temporary and will pass away when we are perfected (in heaven).
- Paul contrasts the **eternal nature of love** with the **partial nature of knowledge and prophecy**.
- The famous line in v.13: *“And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.”*

**Key Point:** Love is the **highest virtue** and will continue even after faith and hope are fulfilled in eternity.

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## Theological Influence

### 1. Redefining Christian Maturity

- Many Corinthians prided themselves on spiritual gifts. Paul shifts the focus to **Christ-like love as the true sign of spiritual maturity**.
- This remains a vital message for churches today: gifts without character are incomplete.

### 2. Agape as the Essence of God

- This chapter supports **1 John 4:8**: *“God is love.”*
- Love is not just an attribute of God — it defines His **essence**.
- The chapter offers a glimpse into **God’s nature** and the **love believers are called to reflect**.

### 3. Ethical and Relational Theology

- Paul's description of love informs **Christian ethics**.
- It's a template for:
  - Marriage relationships
  - Church unity
  - Social justice
  - Forgiveness and reconciliation

#### 4. Eschatological Vision

- Verses 8–12 point to a future when we will **see God face to face**.
  - Until then, **love bridges the gap** between our limited understanding now and full knowledge later.
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#### ♥ Practical Implication for Believers

- Evaluate if your actions, service, and speech are done **in love**.
  - Use 1 Corinthians 13 as a **spiritual mirror** to assess your relationships.
  - Understand that **God values the motive (love)** more than the performance.
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#### ✚ Summary

**1 Corinthians 13** teaches us that no matter how gifted or knowledgeable we are, **without love, we are nothing**. Love is the **eternal, divine standard** by which Christian life is measured. Paul elevates *agape* love above all, revealing that the heart of the gospel is not power, but love — self-giving, patient, enduring, and unconditional.