1 Corinthians 13:8-13 "Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. [9] For we know in part and we prophesy in part, [10] but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. [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. [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. [13] So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love. (ESV)

As I was studying this week it struck me that here in the second half of chapter 13, in establishing that the love Paul is describing never ends, there is a sense that this love is not only categorized as never failing but something that is past, present, and future. And as I usually do I asked the Lord for help in the formation of the sermon and then confirmation that I was headed in the right direction.

Then Friday morning I pull out of my daughter's backpack this booklet; "My Past, Present and Future!" So that is how we will progress this morning, thinking of this love in the past, present and future.

This is really how we define ourselves anyway, by truths from of these tenses of life. It shows in what we ask of each other. To little children we ask what they want to be when they grow up, in the future. To the middle aged and those that grew tired of being asked what they wanted to do when they grow up and actually start doing something, we ask what it is in the present they do, and to us this often defines them. Then when we approach someone older, more seasoned, we ask them what they once did, their past. It is fascinating that we do this...

For the Christian though, those that claim Jesus as their savior, what is truest about them, what defines us and acts as a compass for our lives and our value in community is all three of these, and specifically the love we receive and share in our past, present, and future.

The past, present, and future experience of love is the fuel for the believer (for the church) to love others.

Context: Paul has been highlighting the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church. Miraculous ability and signs that are meant for the good of the church and the glory of Christ. The church in Corinth is a church confused at times and misappropriating the gifts, ranking them and even abusing each other in pursuit of some over others. And Paul calls them to unity in their variety of gifts all functioning as a healthy body. This is for us today too, that we would seek the Spirit for gifts to do the ministry or mission of the church in our day.

Then we come to chapter 13 and Paul is waxing poetically in the middle of his correction on the importance, the essential reality of love. Gifts don't matter if you don't have love. Actions don't

matter if you don't have love. All the smarts in the world and a visionary soul ain't squat without love. As Paul describes Love in relation to the gifts of the Spirit, it is like he is saying "Don't breathe without oxygen."

And this love is different... it isn't erotic love like the fleeting passions of the day. It isn't temporary and flighty. It isn't demanding. It isn't arrogant. It is a devotedness, like a covenantal bond that stands up against the most severe conditions. And in our text he goes on to show how this love lasts and by doing so he shows that this love is not only what is needed in the church but it is also the motivation of the church.

"this chapter calls for a response of love. Those who have received the *gifts* of the Spirit must exercise them alongside the *fruit* of the Spirit, including love, patience, and kindness (Gal. 5:22). Wherever the gospel goes, it bears the fruit of faith, hope, and love (1 Cor. 13:13; Col. 1:4–5; 1 Thess. 1:3). Of these, love is the greatest, because unlike hope (which will be fulfilled at Christ's return) and faith (which will then become "sight"; 2 Cor. 5:7), love will never pass away. For all of eternity, love will be the appropriate response to the mercy we receive in the gospel."

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V. 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) Past

Paul is using personal language - talking about himself, but this is for all believers, for the church in Corinth and for us. It is our shared history - and the past of the believer is summed up in being "Fully known."

There is something about us that desires love in this way. To be seen, understood, and accepted. The problem is that we feel like we have to put our best self forward, only reveal that which we think is lovely. Always pretending and never knowing what it feels like to be fully known; every secret thing we keep hidden, every thought, every emotion, every inclination, everything about us; and fully loved.

"To be loved but not known is comforting but superficial. To be known and not loved is our greatest fear. But to be fully known and truly loved is, well, a lot like being loved by God. It is what we need more than anything. It liberates us from pretense, humbles us out of our self-righteousness, and fortifies us for any difficulty life can throw at us." - Tim Keller

And this is exactly what Christianity is about. That we can be bare before Jesus, and that fully knowing us, he loves us, calls us his own not because of what he knows of us but because he loves. His love changes our trajectory.

Galatians 2:20 "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (ESV)

Romans 5:8 "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (ESV)

"The proof of God's love is that He knows everything about us - including our sin, brokenness, shame - AND still pursues us. This is GRACE." - Eugene Cho

For the believer, this is your past. This is the thing about you that matters more than anything else. And this is the thing that gives you entry into the community of believers who are all reflecting this love to one another.

When we say as a church that we don't have much but what we have we freely give you - this is it. The love of Christ for you, his acceptance and embrace, his welcome, that you would be fully known and loved by Jesus.

Receive this love, don't wait for the end of the sermon, believe in Jesus, that he loves you and gave himself up for you, that you would be made new. Fully known and totally loved.

Then live this truth, that because of his love, it is Christ who lives in you, now, in the present.

2) Present

In Christ, we now live in the empowered present. He gave his Spirit to comfort and help believers and the church live something amazing... and experience his ongoing love.

"By faith, Christ's finished work in the past is applied to our lives in the present by the Holy Spirit, who gives us the eyes of faith to see who Jesus is and what he has done for us (Acts 26: 18). The Holy Spirit is the bond who connects us to Christ today. And once Christ's life is connected to yours, nothing, not even death, can separate you from him (Rom. 8: 38–39). He is yours and you are his forever." Wilbourne

And we are given all we need. **1 Corinthians 1:4-8** "I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, [5] that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge—[6] even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you—[7] so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, [8] who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." (ESV)

This is what we have been hearing most clearly in the last couple of chapters of 1 Corinthians. The the church is gifted by the Spirit for the present mission of the church. And because this is true, we can serve and love one another.

But this present reality is only for the present. Love never ends, but prophecy, tongues, knowledge - the gifts the Spirit gives the church to glorify Christ - they are temporary, they will end.

These are things that are "partial," the text says that we know in part and prophesy in part - gifted but still not finalized and when things are finalized there will be no need for these partial things.

Now it is important to see here that when Paul says that gifts will pass away, that tongues will cease, he is looking to a future reality, when the perfect comes. This "perfect" is Jesus. When he returns to reign and finish making all things new, these gifts will no longer be needed, and then they will be put away.

For now, in our present we "know in part." It is not that we haven't been given the full story, it is that we don't yet know it fully. We have all we need now, but that is not all there is, it is not the totality of the depths of love that are coming. We look into a mirror dimly... (bronze mirrors in their day, foggy mirror in ours. If I enter the bathroom to shave, something when you do it, it is helpful to see clearly. In the fog I seen my shape, I know I am there... but the detail is blurred...)

Knowing in part is sufficient for salvation, for hope, faith and mission, right response to the good news of Jesus... and we are given ongoing power to know and do what is needed, but we are headed somewhere better.

For now, even our most engaging high-mindedness is but Baby-talk.

"Our language is insufficient to carry the greatness of all that God is." "God has chosen to send his Son into our nursery and speak baby talk with us. Jesus Christ became a child with us. There was a time when Jesus himself would have said, "When I was a child, I spoke like a child and thought like a child and reasoned like a child." That is what the incarnation means. He accommodated himself to our baby talk. He stammered with us in the nursery of human life in this age.

"Jesus spoke baby talk. The Sermon on the Mount is our baby talk. His high priestly prayer in John 17 is baby talk. "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" is baby talk. Infinitely precious, true, glorious baby talk.

"More than that, God inspired an entire Bible of baby talk. True baby talk. Baby talk with absolute authority and power...

"Baby talk that is sweeter than honey and more to be desired than gold. John Calvin said that "God, in so speaking, lisps with us as nurses are wont to do with little children" (*Institutes*, 1.13.1). O how precious is the baby talk of God." Piper

This doesn't for a second lessen the awesomeness of what we have been given and receive each day as we walk out life in union with Christ. But the horizon holds even more wonder... maturity, understanding, face-to-face relationship...

3) Future

"When the perfect comes..." **V. 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."

You are not merely living for the moment or just 80 years of experience on this earth. Your hope is not in this temporary dwelling however great it is... Our Savior has promised to return, to restore his creation and to bring us back to the garden, to proximity to him, forever.

When Jesus comes faith and hope become fact. They are to be face-to-face reality. We will know fully... how many times a day do I say "I wonder?" There is lots of mystery now, but then, there will be none. Paul in 2 Corinthians recounts being in heaven and having "heard things that cannot be told, that man cannot utter" that we don't even have words to describe.

We can't contemplate fully (because we know in part) how wonderful this will be. Every questions answered and they won't matter all that much because of the love, the constant unfolding, increasing, ongoing love.

"Where is your life headed? Now you have an answer. Jesus is your horizon. And because he deigns to make us one with himself, this horizon is not only beautiful but also accessible. Jesus already went the distance, and now he takes hold of you to bring you there. One day, you will see him face to face, and that face will have a form you recognize. But you will not only see him. On that day, "when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3: 2). This glorious destiny is where you are headed." Wilbourne

On their own, our past and present are enough to motivate love in us for others - our redemption, being known and still loved and saved; being empowered, given gifts, miracles for our good and Christ's glory, the ability to love... these should activate in us love - the fruit of the Spirit in our lives.

Add to these the final destination. This glorious moment and eternity when the perfect comes. When we see that it is not really about us, but we are graciously made an important member of the party; we are fueled for worship, for a life of sharing this wonderful Jesus and running our race with our eyes set on the finish line, to our treasure.

This is what the Spirit is at work for, that we would view our past, present, and future and be forever changed, forever fueled and forever satisfied. That we would own the words of the hymn "I'd rather have Jesus..."

"I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold; I'd rather be His than have riches untold; I'd rather have Jesus than houses or lands. I'd rather be led by His nail pierced hand.

"Than to be the king of a vast domain Or be held in sin's dread sway. I'd rather have Jesus than anything This world affords today.

"2 I'd rather have Jesus than men's applause; I'd rather be faithful to His dear cause; I'd rather have Jesus than worldwide fame. I'd rather be true to His holy name.

"3 He's fairer than lilies of rarest bloom; He's sweeter than honey from out the comb; He's all that my hungering spirit needs. I'd rather have Jesus and let Him lead"

The past, present, and future experience of love is the fuel for the believer (for the church) to love others.

Friends, let this truth of your redemption, your empowerment and your coming glory activate and motivate your love for others, that you would use your gifts in love; the tongues, prophecy, the knowledge... the service, the helps... all of it in love.

In Christ, "Your win is to become a human being, to become more like Jesus: dependent and obedient, humble and compassionate. Above all, your win is becoming someone who loves. For this is what characterizes Jesus above all, what he prized above all things (Matt. 22: 37–38). Because love was central in the life of Christ, love is at the heart of the image of God. Your win is learning how to love." Wilbourne

As we seek to grow in love, we must always keep Christ's saving work in clear view, since Scripture consistently treats this as the ultimate demonstration of love (John 3:16; 15:12–13; Rom. 5:8; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 2:4–7; 5:2, 25; 1 John 3:16; 4:9–10; Rev. 1:5).

This chapter calls for a response of love and it motivates and enables such a response by deepening our appreciation for the love of God, given to us in Christ.

Let this love move you.

Exist in love - know it.

Live the gifts out of love - use it.

Serve in love - because of it.

Share the gospel - as the greatest love. (Revision 2017, heart for the lost)

Close: We can now tell our own story of our past, present, and future and we tell it by loving.

"We don't yet see things clearly. We're squinting in a fog, peering through a mist. But it won't be long before the weather clears and the sun shines bright! We'll see it all then, see it all as clearly as God sees us, knowing him directly just as he knows us! But for right now, until that completeness, we have three things to do to lead us toward that consummation: Trust steadily in God, hope unswervingly, love extravagantly. And the best of the three is love." MSG

Let us know his love... let us love.