

# 1 Corinthians 13.1-13

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## *Love is...*

Amington

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### **Love is... (1-8)**

Love is... I wonder how you would end that sentence?

I don't know if they still do, but food and drink companies used to run competitions where you had to complete the sentence to win a crate of whatever it was: 'I love Shreddies because...' or 'Galaxy chocolate is the best because...' well, it just is. Although I'm probably not supposed to say that now I live a mile from Cadbury World. At first they sound easy, but then you start to think, and realise it's not so simple. Love is...

### *Pause*

These verses from 1 Corinthians are Paul's way of completing that sentence. He is describing the love between friends, family, within a church family – and yes, between husband and wife. If you want to know what it means to love another person, this is it.

Which is why this beautiful passage is also terrifying. If this is what love is, then I'm not sure I love my wife Jess. Am I always patient? Absolutely not. Am I always kind? Most of the time I hope, but sometimes I can be mean. Do I get easily angered? Yes, though not usually by her – she normally bears the brunt of it when I get angry at other people. Do I get jealous of the time she spends at work? Yes. Am I selfish? Often.

Oh dear.

My score sheet isn't looking so great! I wonder what *your* score sheet looks like? What about those who are supposed to love you – what does *their* score sheet look like?

Given I regularly fail on at least half of these, does that mean I don't love Jess? What's going on here?

## **Now we see only a reflection (9-13)**

Thank God for verses 9 and 12:

For we know in part...

For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror...

*1 Corinthians 13.9 & 12 (NIV)*

It's important here to realise that for Paul, mirrors were different. For us, mirrors are effectively perfect, hence the phrase 'mirror image'. In computing, a 'mirror' is an exact copy of the original. But for Paul, mirrors were different. They were usually polished metal. They were not perfectly flat, and they did not give a perfect image. In fact in Paul's day people didn't *really* know what they looked like. Imagine telling that to a 21<sup>st</sup> century teenager. If you hold a mirror to your own love, or the love of others for you, don't expect to see an exact reflection of what Paul describes here. Expect to see something *like* 1 Corinthians 13, recognisable *as* what Paul describes, but falling short.

Our brokenness and hurt and sin are like the imperfections of a bronze mirror; we still reflect God and his love, but not perfectly like this. I'm a perfectionist so I find that hard – but it is also encouraging because it means perhaps I *do* love Jess after all (!).

And it is also encouraging because there *is* one who *does* reflect God and his love perfectly. Paul was not writing an abstract essay here; he was describing a person. And because we are in church you all know the answer: Jesus! You can swap the word 'love' for 'Jesus' and you'll see.

Jesus alone is perfect love, because Jesus alone gave everything – even his very life – for love. God loved the world *in this way*: he sent his Son to die in our place, to bring forgiveness and new life to all those who – like our dear brother Frank – repent and put their trust in him. In Jesus God shows us the depths to which his love will go to find us, and to bring us home.

So to win the ‘competition’, the prize for which is everlasting life, we simply need to complete the phrase, ‘Love is... *Jesus.*’

May those words be on our lips and in our hearts, all our days.

Amen.