

**1 Cor 13:2 (NIV)**

If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

## 46-13-07-The Dead-Ends of Success

charisma, ingenuity, intelligence, vision, motivation, love, success

1 Cor 13:2

High levels of achievement are low assets without love.

**INTRODUCTION:**

–**Text: 1 Cor 13:2.** *If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.* This verse used to puzzle me in reading *the Love Chapter*. All these were *good things*, even evidences that God’s grace was at work in someone’s life. Yet, *without love*, their cumulative effect is a **dead-end**.

I may have these *gifts and virtues*, but if I “*have not love, I am nothing.*”

–This list looks like *spiritual successes*, but these are also areas of achievement in a secular or worldly sense. When ambitious parents led an inner child of the past to see these attainments as success in life—rather than reaching for God’s goal of having ***His love being expressed through them***—*emptiness* is the result. **HOM.idea.** *What happens...*

**I. When Visionary Charisma Is Without Love**—“*If I have the gift of prophecy... but have not love, I am nothing.*”

- A. There’s a debate about whether *charisma* is inborn or developed, but either way, if it gets *noticed* and *nurtured*, those who have it attract others to follow them. (Their *charismatic* attractiveness may be a *combination* of things: how they look, how they speak, what motivates their *cause* or *vision*: their *charisma* attracts.)
- B. Likewise, a *visionary* isn’t just a *dreamer*. (We all have dream, but some seem to have the gift of seeing their dreams *materialize*.)
  1. In the OT & NT, “*prophecy*” is always a “*gift*.” [**OT prophets** were often called “seers,” because they had visions of *what would come to pass*.]
  2. While *clairvoyance* may be inborn, the modern *visionary* is often groomed by ambition to see their dreams come into being.
- C. When these 2 characteristics combine—*vision* and *charisma*—the result usually has a widespread impact.
  1. *With love*, the impact can be *constructive*. (Think of the social *visions* of *charismatic leaders* like Gandhi & M.L.King, Jr.)
  2. *Without love*, visionaries led by ambition can be *destructive*. (On a small scale, think of the Jim Jones catastrophe, or on a large scale, think of Germany’s atrocities under Hitler.)

**TRANS:** There's nothing wrong with *achievement, ambition, success*. Paul commends "*the gift of prophecy*." Right before **Ch.13** he says in **12:31**, "eagerly desire the greater gifts," but then adds, "now I will show you the **most excellent way**," and he moves into the Love Chapter. *Human attainments* are only satisfying, to those made "in the image of God," if His glorious nature is guiding us, and that divine nature is love. **High levels of achievement are low assets without love**. *Next, what happens...*

## II. When *Clever Intelligence Is Without Love*— "*If I... can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge... but have not love, I am nothing.*"

- A. One evidence that God exists is the *elaborate design* of creation and of us. (A Divine Mind equipped us with *clever intelligence* so that we could *study* and *figure out the mysteries* of that *design*.)
1. But is intelligence only for solving puzzles?— **Gen 1:26a**, Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule..." (God's *intelligently* designed creation, and He wants it *governed intelligently* by those created in His intellectual "likeness.")
  2. God is **not Ultimate Mind**: "God is love." (We can logically reason because God does, but if our *clever intelligence* isn't guided by *love*, we will not fully *image* the God Whose "likeness" we bear.)
- B. Human knowledge is *dangerous* when it's disconnected from love.
1. Even *moral knowledge*, when *independent from God*, is deadly— **Gen 2:17**, "...but you must not eat from the tree of the **knowledge of good and evil**, for when you eat of it you will surely die." (Human nature was made not to gain knowledge but to use knowledge through love.)
  2. *Moral and theological "knowledge"* without "love" is not an asset but a liability— [**Controversy at Corinth**— **1 Cor 8:1-3**, Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. But the man who loves God is known by God.]
    - a. Childish claims of "*being right*" create *religious legalism* and *church division*, when so-called "knowledge" isn't tempered by this phrase: "[whoever] thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know." (It calls us all to humility in our "*knowledge*.")
    - b. God isn't impressed by our "*knowledge*" but by our "*love*." (When divine love guides us, that's when we are "known by God.")

**TRANS:** Creation's "*mysteries*" are being unraveled daily. A "*knowledge*"

of the universe is accumulating so rapidly that scientists can keep up with it. *Why did God give us minds so thirsty for discovery?* Paul told the Athenian philosophers in Acts 17:27, "God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us." He wants us to know Him, so that we'll love Him and love one another. *Success in thinking the Creator's thoughts after Him* is great, but it's not His real goal for us. **High levels of achievement in gaining knowledge are low assets without love**. *Finally, what happens...*

## III. When *Confident Accomplishments Are Without Love*— "*and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.*"

- A. Spiritually, "*faith*" is a godly asset in life— **Heb 11:6**, ...without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.
1. But belief in God's existence isn't enough: we must "seek him." (And seeking Him is seeking love, for "God is love.")
  2. To make his point, Paul uses words from *Christ's own teaching* on "*faith*" in **Mark 11:23**, "I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him." (Jesus was telling us here *faith's ability*, not *faith's ultimate purpose*.)
- B. When God's faith spoke creation into being, it was *Love creatively speaking*. (His purpose in creation was life, and *nature teems with living beauty*, because it came straight from God's loving heart!)
- C. We praise parents who teach children *self-confidence*—telling them they can take on the world, if they put their mind to it. (But do we praise the parents who gave that message to *Genghis Khan, Alexander the Great, Napoleon, Hitler*, and a score of others?)

## CONCLUSION:

—God created humans with *visionary charisma, clever intelligence* and *confidence for accomplishments*. But He designed these capacities to be motivated by love for loving purposes. An *inner child* who became an *under-achiever* may need *healing* from a wounded *self-esteem*. **But** one who became an *over-achiever* without *love's childlike receptivity*, must learn that **high levels of achievement are low assets without love**. This is why we must apply 1 Cor 13 by putting away childish ways and putting into practice the *mature, childlike ways of love*.