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R. C. SPROUL



LIGONIER MINISTRIES

*What Is Love?*

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## Chapter One

# The Priority of Love

First Corinthians 13 is a familiar chapter even to those who never read the Bible. It is often read at weddings. Its popularity says something about how deeply concerned we as people are about love. In fact, we as a culture seem to be preoccupied with love—not so much in the spiritual sense of the New Testament concept of love, but certainly with respect to romantic love. Love is said to make the world go 'round, and certainly romantic love makes the culture go 'round in terms of the

advertising industry, the music industry, the publishing industry, the film industry, and all the rest. We never tire of being gripped by stories about romance and love.

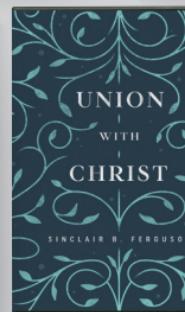
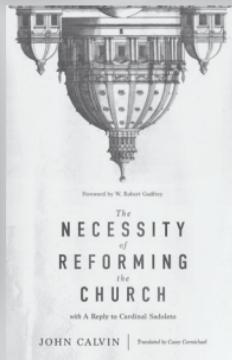
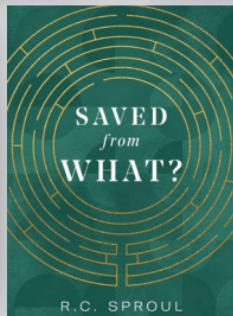
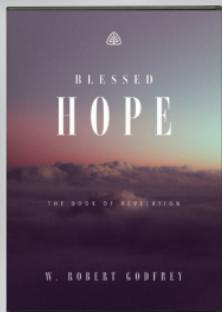
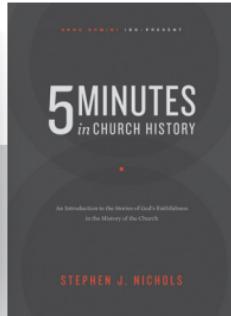
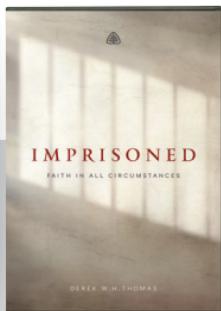
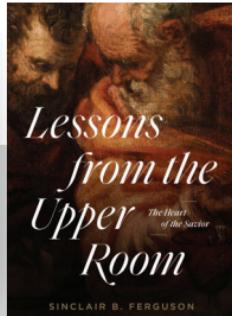
The first thing that we need to say about 1 Corinthians 13 is that it's not about romantic love. It's about a much deeper dimension of love. It is about the virtue of love that is seen as the paramount virtue that is to distinguish the Christian life. Love is so important to the biblical teaching about God that it is said of God that He is love.

The theologians of antiquity used a Latin phrase to capture the essence of the being and character of God: *ens perfectissimus*. It means “the most perfect being.” It means that God, in all His attributes, manifests total perfection. Not only is He totally perfect in His being, but each distinctive attribute has perfection within it. He is perfectly immutable (unchanging) and perfectly omnipotent (all powerful). There is no deficiency or imperfection in His power. His omniscience involves a perfect knowledge of all that there is. When we turn to the moral attributes of God, we also see there that His goodness and His holiness are manifested in absolute perfection, a perfection that does not admit to degrees. No defect mars the perfection of His character in all that He is and in all that He does.

It's important to keep this theological background in mind when we come to 1 Corinthians 13, because when this chapter describes human love, it describes a kind of love that the Christian is to possess and to demonstrate in imitation of God. God is love, which means that the love that comes from God is utterly perfect. We are called to reflect that love perfectly. Of course, none of us does this. That's why it is important for us to come back time and again to this chapter to find out what love really is supposed to look like. We are far too easily satisfied with a sentimental, maudlin, romantic, or superficial understanding of love.

This chapter plumbs the depths of what love really means. It is therefore a measuring rod by which we can check ourselves to see whether this love resides in our hearts and is manifested in our lives. So it seems that it would be the most despised chapter in all of Scripture instead of the most popular. No other chapter in Scripture more quickly reveals our shortcomings and our sins. It is popular, but it's one of the most misunderstood and least applied chapters in all of Scripture. One of the misunderstandings that attends this chapter is that we sometimes fail to see the context in which it was originally written.

We want to see men and women around the world connect the deep truths of the Christian faith to everyday life.



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