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.

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.)
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.”)

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.