



## The Way of Love - 1 Corinthians 13

### Sermon Outline

This is a very famous passage yet not very well understood. Paul did not write it for a wedding, but for the Corinthians, addressing their problems with spiritual gifts. Basically, love is what matters, and in their pursuit of gifts while lacking love the Corinthians got it all backwards.

1. Gifts without love mean nothing
2. Love is not you
3. Love lasts, gifts don't

### Questions

1. Have you ever heard this passage at a wedding? How do you feel about it after Sunday's sermon?

*Just an ice breaker. It's a famous passage but often misunderstood. After the sermon, hopefully no one will want to have it read at their wedding.*

2. What are ways we could use spiritual gifts "without love"? What do you think of Paul's claim that we are nothing in that case?

*Dwelling on the passage. E.g. we could do it with pride, or envy, or to make others feel bad etc... Paul's claim is quite strong - without love it's nothing. Don't know if we believe it.*

3. Most people would say they are pretty good. How does this passage challenge how good we really are? E.g. someone who never murdered anyone.

*Paul says that without love, we're nothing. So our motivation matters. Many of us do good without love. E.g. we don't murder anyone, but not out of love, but because we don't want to go to prison. Then ultimately it's just a selfish action. We're not as good as we think we are.*

4. Why does love matter more than spiritual gifts?

*See if people remember vs. 8-13. Love lasts forever, while gifts are only until Jesus' returns. They are a limited measure until we can see Jesus face-to-face, likened to a child vs an adult, or a mirror vs face to face. So even though we can be very excited about gifts, they are limited and temporary and not that important ultimately.*



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*NB Paul claims that spiritual gifts are “partial” and will disappear when the “perfect” comes. Given v12 where the perfect is called “face to face” and “fully knowing”, this suggests the perfect that we are waiting for is the return of Jesus. Then we will have such a close and direct relationship with Jesus, we won’t need spiritual gifts anymore. It implies that we should see spiritual gifts from this passage in the world today (tongues, prophecy, knowledge), which is our position as a church. (Exception is e.g. the 12 apostles. Their authoritative witness to the gospel has now been captured in the New Testament.)*

*Still, Paul’s point is not that spiritual gifts last all the time until Jesus’ return, but rather that they only last until Jesus’ return, unlike love which lasts forever.*

5. What kind of person would be the most spiritual person you know? How much would love factor into that?

*We think of the bold and charismatic person up front, but maybe someone behind the scenes who is showing incredible sacrificial love is actually much more spiritual.*

6. How do you think about serving and using your gifts in Watermark? How would today’s passage on love change that?

*Applying it to the topic of spiritual gifts. Hopefully most of us are serving and using our gifts, but this chapter should be challenging. Perhaps it’s our motives - where we serve mainly for ourselves or for what we get out of it, rather than out of love. Or it can be about the way we serve, where there may be tasks we don’t like and so don’t do, but they really need doing. Many different applications.*

7. How does the cross both challenge and comfort us as we consider how loving we really are?

*Good to finish with the gospel. It’s a challenge because as we see the cross we see the true standard of love, and our own love falls woefully short. But the cross comforts us as we see how Jesus died for our lack of love and we are not justified by our love, our gifts or anything else, only by what Jesus did on the cross.*



## Speaking with Clarity - 1 Corinthians 14:1-25

### Sermon Outline

The fourth sermon in this series looks more closely at prophecy and speaking in tongues. Paul applies last week's passage on love and notes that prophecy builds others up and convicts non-believers, as it can be understood, while no one understands speaking in tongues (unless there is a gift of interpretation) and might put outsiders off. So if you love people and want to build them up and see them saved, you should want to grow in prophecy and limit the use of tongues.

1. Spiritual Gifts and the Christian Church
2. Spiritual Gifts and Christian Witness

### Questions

0. *(Optional) The passage talks about spiritual gifts that some people are not used to. Any questions people have that we can write down for now and maybe discuss later?*

*We want to hear the main thing God says and not let the discussion go off track. So maybe it's good in advance to let people voice their concerns and questions. Write them down and if you have time talk about them later, so we can focus on the main purpose of the passage, that we would build up our brothers and sisters and be concerned for outsiders in what we do at church.*

*You will not have every answer. Neither do we! The Bible tells us almost nothing about spiritual gifts, beyond "let love guide how you use them", so freely admit your ignorance. Best to refer people to the workshop on Wednesday 9 October, 8pm at the CC, about how to use and grow in spiritual gifts. See the bulletin/MM announcements for more details.*

1. What should be our aim in Christian gatherings according to this passage? How is it different from why many people go to a church service?

*The passage has a big horizontal focus. When we get together we should want to build others up and encourage them. So we gather for the benefit of others, including visiting non-believers. There is little focus on the vertical and our individual experience of God in the service. Different from many people who go to church mainly for their personal experience rather than to serve others.*



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2. What is the big difference between prophecy and speaking in tongues in this passage? How does love lead to a preference for prophecy over tongues?

*Prophecy can be understood, speaking in tongues can't. So prophecy builds people up, encourages them, while speaking in tongues may encourage the speaker but has no effect on the listener. So if you love someone and want to build them up, you want to say something they understand and will be useful, and hence should desire to grow in prophecy (unlike the Corinthians who favoured tongues for selfish reasons).*

3. What are practical things we can do to be contributors in church, not consumers?

*Applying the point. It's quite general as not everyone will prophesy or speak in tongues, but the principle of doing what benefits others rather than myself is the essence of love and very much still valid. Kevin mentioned a few things - come early to church, pray on the way... Generally be other-centred, aiming to bless and encourage others rather than focus on your own spiritual experience.*

4. Consider the effects on outsiders of prophecy and tongues in 20-25. Imagine bringing a non-believing friend to church and v23 happens. How would you feel?

*According to 20-25, intelligibility is really important for non-believers. If they have no clue what is going on and think you're crazy, it won't help them come to Jesus, rather it puts them off of Christianity. Just trying to reach our heart about the importance of love in trying to see people saved.*

5. Are there things we do in church that are hard to understand for outsiders? How can we maybe change them?

*Again practical and general. If things in church should be intelligible for the sake of outsiders, there may be things we do that are less helpful (while not being on the level of the whole church speaking in tongues). E.g. we use a lot of Christian jargon that people don't understand. Some songs are weird or off-putting if you're not a Christian. Again, what does love for outsiders look like?*

*By the way, I don't think non-Christians need to take part for it to be intelligible. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are only for Christians, but if it is explained well the non-believer knows what it means and why it is for believers only. So you can still*



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*celebrate the Lord's Supper with non-believers, though if you are focussed on seekers you may want to be wise how often you have it.*

6. Take time to reflect. Have we been more contributors or consumers at church? Perhaps confess any ways, that you have been a consumer and failed to love people.

*Time of reflection and confession, making sure the discussion is not just academic but we actually feel convicted of ways we have failed to love.*

7. In light of your failings, how do you feel about Jesus' love for you on the cross? How does it motivate you to change and instead contribute in church?

*Being encouraged by the gospel. When we feel convicted and then reflect on how Jesus willingly died for those failings out of his great love, it comforts us, and then motivates us to follow him in sacrificially loving and contributing in church. Not particularly new but important to let the gospel change us, rather than just "do better".*