

## 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

### "The More Excellent Way"

In the body of Christ, none are insignificant & none can be independent. We've all been gifted in some capacity by the Spirit of God & have been placed in the body specifically where God has purposed as it pertains to His plan for our lives. Each of you have a role, each of you have a responsibility if we're to function effectively as a body. *We're members individually, but collectively we make up the body. We need one another. No one has every gift, but everyone has some gift(s)... God has designed it this way so that we might have the same care for one another.*

You can't think, "Well, I'm not like anyone here so I guess I don't belong here." That's like a foot saying, "Well, I'm not like a hand so I guess I don't belong to the body." It's an absurd mentality if you just think it through even slightly. It's *because* the foot is different from the hand that it *does* serve a unique purpose & has a place in the body. It's the individual diversity that makes up the collective unity called the body of Christ. *& Each individual member has something to contribute to the collective... That's the concept that Paul seeks to communicate in Ch 12. & Because no one has every gifting, that's why it's so important that each of us exercise our gifts when we gather collectively. So that we can bless & build up one another spiritually.* As Paul told the Ephesians, *"And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, <sup>1</sup>"* (Christ being the head). He goes on, *"...from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love."<sup>2</sup>*

Here at the end of Ch 12, Paul emphasizes this same principle of mutual dependency in asking a series of rhetorical questions. Look at Vs 27 of Ch 12.

### Vs 27-28

*It's interesting that the gift they seemed so enamored with (tongues/languages) Paul puts at the end of the list (as far as any kind of priority is concerned) & these gifts/offices that they seemed to downplay he says are of the greatest importance! Why? Because tongues are primarily for personal edification (apart from an interpreter) but apostles, prophets & teachers equip, edify & supply the necessary "nutrients" (if you will) that feeds the whole of the body simultaneously as we gather corporately!*

<sup>1</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Eph 4:11-12). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>2</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Eph 4:16). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Now, I want to go on record saying that though we believe the gifts of the Spirit are still for today. These 1<sup>st</sup> 2 *offices* are no longer with us *in the same sense* that they were established originally. Why do I say that? Because Paul told the Ephesians (w/in this same context of body life, unity through diversity etc.) *"Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone,"*<sup>3</sup> Jesus Himself is the chief cornerstone of the church. The apostles & prophets established the foundation, we then become those building blocks (living stones as Peter put it) that collectively comprise the house of God (&/or the body of Christ).

I'm not saying that there aren't special representatives of God (as were apostles) or timely messengers sent by God (as were the prophets). However, that same apostolic authority (adding to the body of scripture so as to instruct the church globally) or that office of the prophet (meaning anytime the person speaks on God's behalf they speak w/100% accuracy & if they're ever wrong, death is the penalty) we don't see that today.

Those are the only offices (that I'm aware of) that have the explicit scriptural awareness tied to them that they were established for the foundational purposes of the church. Beyond that, we see teachers, gifts of healings (we've discussed these things). Helps... What is the gift of helps? It's exactly what it sounds like. It doesn't seek the limelight. Has no desire to be seen, it's simply content to assist or aid in any way possible.

Charles Spurgeon said this: "They are the sort of brethren who are useful anywhere, who can always stop a gap, and who are only too glad when they find that they can make themselves serviceable to the church of God in any capacity whatever." Invaluable to the body. But not only will a gift of helps evidence itself practically, it will serve you spiritually or emotionally as well. There you were in that pit of despondency & someone came along w/a warm heart, a word in due season, an outstretched hand & helped you regain your footing... That's helps... Everyone has something(s), no one has everything.

### Vs 29-30

Do we need to spend any time developing the anticipated answer to the questions that Paul is asking here? No. Because the point he's making is obvious. It becomes crystal clear by the 1<sup>st</sup> question he asks, "Are all apostles?" Yes? No! All are *not* apostles, or prophets or teachers or workers of miracles... not all will have gifts of healings.

<sup>3</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Eph 2:19-20). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Why then must all speak w/tongues? It's like, "No, no, no, no, no...yes!" No! Not any one gift is for every believer, that's his whole point! That's why we need one another.

### Vs 31

What are "the best gifts"? It looks like Paul may be saying, "Hey, better to have someone teach you. Impart to you something that will aid you permanently as opposed to relieving you (healing/miracles etc) temporarily." & That may be. But another way to look at it is that it depends on the need at hand. If you're ministering to a sick/downtrodden brother/sister, gifts of healing would be great, pray for it! If you're facing a sticky situation, a word of wisdom would be a blessing! Pray for it, seek it!

"But beyond all of that," Paul says, "I want to explain to you an even greater means by which you should *conduct* yourself, & through which you should *express* yourself to one another." There's something that's going to bless & benefit everyone around you even more than the gifts in & of themselves. (& Of course, he's going to enlighten us as to the role/responsibility & expression of love in our midst).

Here's what I want you to take from this section of scripture. The gifts of the Spirit are *engaging*, but when *love infuses* them, they become *enriching*. It's not enough to *engage* one another. We are called (& responsible before God) to *enrich* one another.

### Vs 1-2

Let me keep this as simple/straightforward as I know how. The point that Paul is developing here is that it really doesn't matter how gifted I may be spiritually, apart from *love* there's no profit eternally.

& To emphasize this, he gravitates toward these gifts that one might consider to be really incredible. The ability to speak in other languages supernaturally, speaking on God's behalf through prophecy, insight into otherwise unknowable mysteries, faith that removes any equation of impossibility... I mean, "Wow how amazing to see & be a part of such things." But what Paul is drawing to our attention is the fact that apart from love being the energy that *fuels* the gifts, the motive *behind* the gifts... though these things may provide an electrifying impact (momentarily), they won't have any lasting value (eternally).

Listen, *love* is everything. Apart from love, you can be the most spiritually gifted person on the planet. It doesn't mean anything. Remember this: when it comes to the exercise of the gifts, it's not about the "what" (tongues, teaching, miracles, prophecy). It's about the "why". Why am I doing this? Why do I want to use my gifts? – To fulfill my desire to feel necessary or needed? To be seen as important? To be recognized as a "somebody"?

You've got to be honest w/yourself. What's your motive? Is it for your own benefit in some way? Or is it, "God, You've loved *me*, You've given Yourself *for me*, You've paid the ultimate price that You might *save me*, I want to offer my life to You that You might *use me* & be glorified *in me*, have Your way *completely*?" Do you see how polar opposite those motives are? We want to be a dispenser, a conduit through whom the love of God can flow... so as to impact, enrich, build up & bless those around us.

Tongues (even if you speak the language of *angels*) apart from love is an empty noise. & He goes down the list demonstrating the irrelevance of *any* gift apart from love, regardless of how amazing it may seem. & He's not seeking to devalue the gifts, he's showing us that the gifts *find their value in love*.

Think about it. How often does the subject of spiritual gifts come up in scripture? Not very. There's a couple of mentions in a few places. By way of comparison, how often do you find an emphasis upon love? It's everywhere. 1 Thess 3:12, "*And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all,*"<sup>4</sup> 1 Pet 1:22, "*...love one another fervently with a pure heart,*"<sup>5</sup> Again, 1 Pet 4, "*And above all things have fervent love for one another,*"<sup>6</sup> 1 Jn 4:7, "*Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.*"<sup>7</sup> Jesus said, "*This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.*"<sup>8</sup> Time would fail us to review & think through even a portion of the scriptures that emphasize, exhort & command us to *love* one another... That should tell us something of the preeminence, the priority of *love*.

& For the sake of pointing it out, it's a reference to Agape. Most of you are familiar w/the fact that the Greeks had 4 words that translates into the single word "love" in English. "Eros", or erotic/sexual kind of love/interaction. "Storgē", which would be a familial love (parent to child, sibling etc). There was "Philēo" which would be a deep friendship kind of love... Paul didn't choose any of those words here. He chose, "Agapē" which could be described as an unchanging, giving, self-sacrificing love that does nothing w/thought for repayment but gives w/out thought for self. – No desire to receive in return, it only gives to give. It really has nothing to do w/emotion, it's more about self-denial for the sake of *something* or *someone* else. – For God so *loved* the world, that *He gave* (denied Himself for the sake of others) His only begotten Son...

<sup>4</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (1 Th 3:12). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>5</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (1 Pe 1:22). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>6</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (1 Pe 4:8). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>7</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (1 Jn 4:7). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>8</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Jn 15:12). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

But strictly speaking (though we at times describe this as “God’s love”) we can’t really confine it to that. Because John used this word when he quoted Jesus as saying, *“And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.”*<sup>9</sup> He used it again in 1 Jn 2:15 (I’ll let you look that up). But think about that. People will agape their sin. They sin w/no thought for themselves or what the ramifications may be. They love their sin to the extent that they’ll perish, sacrificing/giving themselves for their sin...

So when you read this Ch, don’t think that Paul is telling us to be nice, or to be friendly. Agape isn’t really friendliness (though that may be *incorporated*). Agape is self-denial for the sake of another.

& Paul is taking the time to explain to us that apart from agape, there is no benefit or profit behind anything we do, even the most magnanimous of deeds apart from the proper motive add nothing to you eternally! Notice.

### Vs 3

Paul is climbing about as high as humanly possible. The greatest sacrifice a person could make. Selling everything you have so that you have that you might feed the poor. You’re the greatest humanitarian individual to ever live... Even if you lay your life down in some dramatic form of martyrdom... surely that guy/gal is super spiritual! I mean, wow! Family, I’ll say it again. It’s not about *what* we do. It’s *why* we do it...

Sacrifice & service can still be self-centered. That’s why Jesus said, *“when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.”*<sup>10</sup> You’re going to make your mark, leave your legacy, achieve admiration & notoriety. People will remember you! ... It profits you nothing before God. It’s love that gives the gifts meaning & depth, apart from love they’re shallow, self-serving & meaningless. Let love lead you to serve, to sacrifice, to give... now you’re not just engaging others, you’re enriching them & laying up rewards for yourself in heaven.

One commentator said, Write down a string of zeros. Teaching alone is a zero, prophecy alone is zero, knowledge/zero, faith/zero, service/zero, martyrdom/zero. Six zeros still add up to nothing. But you put the number 1 to the left of that string of zeros, & suddenly every zero amounts to something.

<sup>9</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Jn 3:19]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>10</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Mt 6:2]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Love is that element that needs to be added to every gift of the Spirit. Love will give them their value.

### Vs 4-7

Of course, this is where you'd write down Galatians 5:22-23 so you can read it later & compare the two. You might also look at Col 1:11, 3:12-13

But we have a list of 14 characteristics that help us get a grip on what this love *is/does*, & what it *is not/does not* do. Some of these things are passive, some are active, some (7) are positive, some (7) are negative.

Passively it will endure, actively it will do good. It will endure wrong (& the burden that brings) & confer blessing. So let's remember. Love may be accompanied by feelings (though not always), but it's demonstrated in action (being passive/active).

I'm not going to do a deep dive into all 14 things Paul puts in place here, I'll just highlight them & trust that if you should so desire, you can research further from there.

2 Things it *will* do. Suffer long & be kind. To suffer long speaks of an enduring patience when being wronged. – One day Peter asked Jesus, *“Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?”* Jesus said to him, *‘I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.’*<sup>11</sup> The idea being that we're to be patient w/people. Forgive them, if necessary, again & again. They come to you, tell you they've repented, seek your forgiveness. Give it to them. Love suffers long. Love never says, *“That's it! I've had it! I'm through w/you!”* Aren't you glad that God never said that about you? After you sinned against Him, over & over again (even in the same way).

As Peter said, *“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.”*<sup>12</sup> If the love of God is in me, I'll be patient w/those who have a tendency to sin against or hurt me. I won't be looking for the opportunity to “even the score.”

Love is kind. This doesn't mean that love is nice. *“Oh what a sweet, kind person, they're always so nice.”* Of course it *includes* that. But this is talking about *acts* of kindness. Doing good to others. *“Let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed & in truth.”* (1 Jn 3)

Those things are to the positive. To the negative, love *does not, will not* envy. It doesn't resent when someone else gets the promotion or the acknowledgment. Listen, it was envy that murdered Abel (Gen 4). That sold Joseph into slavery (Gen 37:11)...

<sup>11</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Mt 18:21–22]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>12</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). [2 Pe 3:9]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

& Placed Jesus on the cross (Matt 27:18). Love does not envy. Which means that love is content w/its lot. Is life fair? No. Some are rich, some are poor, some live in health, others fall ill... Love isn't blind to inequality, but it's content resting in the fact that God has our eternal good & His eternal glory at heart.

When Jesus was growing in fame, J.B. didn't envy. He said, "He must increase, I must decrease." There was no inner boiling or burning because His ministry was exceling. It wasn't about John, & it's not about me, & it's not about you. It's all about Jesus...

Love doesn't parade itself. Doesn't draw attention to itself, needs no recognition, doesn't have to have a pat on the back, a "good job" accolade. Why? Because love gives, it's not seeking to get something back...

It's not puffed up (or arrogant). Knowledge puffs up, love builds up. Encourages & edifies others. In short, it's not prideful but well pleased to walk in humility.

"Doesn't behave rudely." Well mannered, courteous. "Does not seek its own." Give preference to one another, look out for the interest/well-being of others.

"Is not provoked." If your bible says, "not *easily* provoked" just take a pen and scratch the word "easily" right out. It's not there in the Greek manuscript. Why was Moses kept from the Promised Land? Ultimately we know that he ruined the "type" when he struck the rock. But what caused him to strike the rock? He was *provoked* by the people.

"Thinks no evil." Literally, "Tallies no evil." Meaning it doesn't keep a record of wrongs. I'll never forget (yrs ago) the time a woman came into my office w/a notebook in which she had recorded every way in which she felt like I had wronged her over however much time she'd been there. Love doesn't accumulate, calculate, or keep track of wrongs. Write it down, read it later, Eph 4:31-32

"Does not rejoice in iniquity". There's something in us that just loves to hear the dirt on people. Bad news, news of failings or short coming or sin should grieve us. Too often we feed on such things. Maybe it makes us feel better about ourselves... but it ought not be.

Love... "rejoices in the truth." Even if it hurts. Because truth helps us grow. We're to speak *the truth*, in *love*. Love... "bears all things." Or "Covers/concels them." Love covers a multitude of sin. It doesn't drag out into the daylight the failures/faults of others. That doesn't mean we turn a blind eye to sin, we confront what needs confronted, but we don't advertise the sin of others. "Believes all things." Gives the benefit of the doubt. Doesn't assume the worst, presumes the best... "Hopes all things". Love is optimistic, not pessimistic.

“Endures all things...” Listen, I wish I could do a deep dive into a Greek word study & find us all a loophole here, but it doesn’t exist. “All things” means “all things.” Listen, I can bear some things, believe some things, endure some things... but God calls us deeper into love... for Him, for one another & for a perishing world.

Love doesn’t run away. How easy it is just to scoot out when you’re in a difficult situation. Love endures... all things.

Now; if you want to measure your “love maturity level” just put your name in the place of love & see how it fits 😊. The name Jesus fits perfectly... My name not so much. But By God’s grace we’re growing more & more in His love.

### Vs 8-10

Paul has spoken of the *preeminence* of love, the *perfection* of love, he moves toward his conclusion in emphasizing the *permanence* of love. It will never fail (or fade away, come to an end). The gifts of the Spirit are temporary (for the present time). Love is eternal.

When will the gifts cease (as he says here)? He tells us in Vs 10. “When that which is perfect has come.” Those who believe that the gifts were for the apostolic era tell you this refers to the completion of the N.T. Context doesn’t support that at all.

When Christ is ruling & reigning upon the earth. When Jesus comes for us, or we go to Him, you will have entered that which is perfect (the kingdom of God). He tells us, that right now we know in part, we prophecy in part. We don’t have perfect knowledge. We don’t understand all mysteries perfectly, we don’t know the heart of God flawlessly. But when we see Jesus (1 Jn 3:2) we’ll know completely, fully. We won’t have need for the gifts any longer.

### Vs 11-12

In the ancient world, mirrors weren’t perfect glass. They were polished brass. The image was always a bit skewed... Paul is saying, “That’s the way our understanding is now. But when we’re w/the Lord we’ll see clearly, we’ll understand perfectly, that’s when the gifts will no longer be necessary.” When the sunrises you don’t need your flashlight...

### Vs 13

The 3 pursuits of the Christ life aren’t “power, gifts & miracles”. They’re faith, hope & love. What are you focused on? What do you desire more of? It should come back to these 3 things. Faith, hope & love. The greatest of which is love...

Why? Because love is eternal. Because *God* is love. – Don’t just engage people, enrich them. Love God, love others, change the world...



**Prayer Points:**

God, we would ask that You would fill us *with*, & help us to grow exceedingly *in* Your love. We pray for a fresh pouring out of Your Spirit upon this body of believers. That we would be busy about Your will, infused w/Your love, edifying one another, glorifying You.

God has loved you w/an everlasting love. & He demonstrated that love in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. We can never repay Him, but we can surrender our lives to Him. Turn from your sin, trust in J.C. today who went to the cross, poured out His life, that you might find life in Him.