Grace Baptist Church/Crossroads International Church/CIC again Dr. Rick Griffith

21 Mar 1999/ 28 Sept 2008/ 14 Apr 2013 Message #20 of 25

NIV 35 Minutes

**Why Love?**

Title

***1 Corinthians 13***

**Topic:** Spiritual Gifts

**Subject:** Why must we use our gifts with love?

**Complement:** Because love is superior to gifts, love benefits others, and love outlasts gifts

**Purpose:** The listeners will use their gifts in selfless love rather than for self-pleasure.

**Attribute:** We worship our God of love

# Introduction

### One day a mother entered her living room and saw her kids and their friends sitting in a circle playing. Wondering what they were doing, she walked over holding her grocery bags in her arms only to discover that each child was playing with a skunk. Terrified, she shouted, “Children! Run!” So, obediently, each child picked up a skunk and ran!

Black

### Sometimes a little information is more dangerous than no information at all. It was better that the children knew nothing at all about skunks than to terrify each skunk!

Biker

### The past two months I have addressed the topic of spiritual gifts from this pulpit.

Past

#### We studied gifts in a general sense in 1 Corinthians 12:1-6.

#### Then I invested one message on speaking gifts and one on serving gifts.

#### Then last time we saw how God has given us the gifts so that we will see our need for each other—how every one of us is important, based on 12:12-31.

### So we now know enough about spiritual gifts to be dangerous. You know how?

Bomb

#### We could get the wrong idea that gifts are better than fruit [explain 3 slides].

#### We could also get the wrong idea that gifts are given to benefit us as individuals.

### The Corinthians had this latter problem—their focus on gifts was self-edification.

Ch. 14

### This is why Paul ends chapter 12 speaking of “the most excellent way” (12:31b). Some consider this the real beginning of chapter 13.

• Ch. 13

### We’ll see today in chapter 13 that this best way to use spiritual gifts is *the loving way*.

### Main Idea: So here’s Paul’s point…*The most vital ingredient in using our gifts is love.*

MI

### Subject: But why do we need to use our gifts with love? The first reason is because…

• Why

# I. Love is superior to gifts (1-3).

MP

# You can be the world’s most gifted person, but if you use your gift selfishly then no one will benefit. For example…

## *Tongues* used to the maximum without love *produces nothing* (1).

Tongues

### Here Paul chose a sign gift—the amazing ability to speak in a language never learned.

### But the idea goes farther than that—to being able to speak *every* language on earth and even of angels—suppose you could do that? Some of you know that I serve as the Asia translation director of “The Bible… Basically” seminar––now in process in 33 tongues.

Babel

### I wish I could speak all those languages! Paul says that even if you could—which he doesn’t say anyone can—even if you could, this would be worthless without love.

### And what is love? Think of it as *selfless rather than selfish* living. Without love our gifts are not used for others but rather for ourselves.

### Now does Paul have a problem with resounding gongs and clanging cymbals?

Black

#### Nothing is particularly wrong with them as instruments, but they do not communicate as clearly as the spoken word.

#### I think of this verse every time I hear the lion dancer musicians whose cymbals clang! clang! clang! The sound has very little content and means nothing—except to get out of the way to have your conversation somewhere else!

(Now it’s not surprising that Paul would say this of tongues—because 1 Corinthians 12:28 says tongues is the least important gift. But what if you had a *real important gift* like prophecy? Surely having an up-front speaking gift has value in and of itself, right? No, in fact…)

## *Prophecy* without love is worthless to edify others (2a).

Proph<<<

### Like tongues, prophecy was the ability to declare an inspired message from God—except prophecy was given in the language of the hearers.

### We’ll talk more about this when we get to chapter 14.

## *Wisdom* that knows all previously hidden truths––but without love––can’t edify others (2b).

Wisdom

## *Knowledge* that knows all facts––but without love––is worthless to edify others (2c).

Know

### Sometimes people have been impressed with the number of books in my library and they ask, “Wow! Have you read all these?” Then I say, “Oh, I’ve read about 5% of them!” At that point they’re not so impressed!

### Once I looked around my study and thought, “What if I *had* read all these books and actually had this much knowledge at my fingertips?” Then the Lord impressed on my mind, “So what? Without love even all this knowledge would be useless!”

### Why does Paul pick tongues, prophecy, wisdom, and knowledge?

Black

#### Why didn’t he pick administration, teaching, or interpretation of tongues?

#### He notes tongues and prophecy first because these gifts were the problem gifts at Corinth—we typically seek more showy gifts! Even wisdom and knowledge can be showy gifts as well.

## *Faith* that can move mountains––but without love––is worthless to edify others (2d).

Faith

### This would make land reclamation a cinch here in Singapore!

Black

### But it would be useless without love!

## *Giving* to the ultimate degree without love *gains nothing* (3).

Giving

### Here Paul chooses a serving gift—giving. He says…

### Giving *all* my possessions to the poor without love gains nothing for me (3a).

### Giving my life itself in martyrdom by burning as the most horrible death possible yet without love gains nothing for me (3b).

Black

#### C. Peter Wagner says that verse 3 refers to the gift of martyrdom. He calls it the only spiritual gift that you can only use once! Actually, he’s joking—he says this gift is the ability to have an unusual attitude towards suffering.

India pics

#### In the 2008 violence in Orissa, India, one Catholic nun was locked inside her house and the house torched.

#### Being burned to death didn’t make her a hero. She already was! Not because of her death but because of her loving service for Christ. Yet if she didn’t do it out of love then she would have gained nothing.

Black

MPI

(So we should use our gifts with because love is superior to gifts. As we move to the middle part of the chapter we find 15 different descriptions of love. How can we sum up all 15 of these descriptions of love? Here we find another reason love is indispensable for beneficial use of gifts. That’s because while gifts can be misused to benefit self…)

Vision

# II. Love benefits others (4-7).

MP

# [Here is the most beautiful description of love ever penned—but the element common to all these traits is concern *for others.*]

## As we go through these traits, there are veiled references to how the Corinthians had been acting—noted in other places in the letter. First…

## Love benefits others passively and actively (4a-b).

Others

### Love is passively patient by not retaliating towards others (4a).

•passive

#### In the Corinthian letter we have already seen how love doesn’t take conflicts with other Christians before unbelievers (6:1).

#### Love also patiently waits for others at the Lord’s Table (11:21-22).

### Love is actively kind by serving those who do harm (4b)—love seeks “the good of many” (10:33).

•active

Heart Size

## Love doesn’t hurt others in seven negative ways (4c-5).

Negs

### Love doesn’t inwardly envy (4c) another’s giftedness:

• Envy

#### “Wow! Apollos is such a gifted speaker! O to be eloquent like him!” (3:3-4).

Horses

#### And “because I am not a hand, I am not part of the body” (12:14-17).

### Love doesn’t outwardly boast (4d) of its own giftedness (“the eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you,’” 12:21).

• Boast

### Love isn’t inwardly prideful (4e) of its own group (4:6, 18), of its tolerance like they tolerated incest among them (5:2), or pride over their knowledge: “love puffs up” (8:1).

People

• Pride

### Love doesn’t behave improperly (5a) such as in sex roles (11:2-16) and in worship (11:26-33).

• Improp

### Love isn’t selfish (5b) in financial matters (6:7) and in debatable matters (10:24).

• Selfish

### Love isn’t irritable (5c) to the extent of initiating lawsuits (6:1).

• Irritable

### Love isn’t unforgiving (5d)––it keeps no record of wrongs.

• Unforgiving

#### This means not forgiving offenses (6:8) and insisting on rights (8:11).

#### This word *logizomai* gives us our word “logarithm.” It’s an accounting term—love doesn’t add up how many offenses another has committed against me.

## Love knows the right things to get happy about (6).

Happy

### Love doesn’t rejoice in wickedness (6a) as in delight over incest (5:2).

• Evil

### Rather, love rejoices with the truth (6b).

• Truth

## Love doesn’t give up on others (7).

Give up

### Love endures others’ shortcomings (7a)—endures those misusing their gifts (12:14-26).

•endures

### Love believes all things? It’s gullible? Now, it thinks the best of others (7b).

•believes

### Love hopes in God (7c) that church problems will be resolved.

•hopes

### Love perseveres when personally wronged by courageously waiting (7d) for marriage (7:9), food (11:21), or a chance to speak (14:27).

•persevere

### One commentary on this verse says, “When Love has no evidence, it believes the best. When the evidence is adverse, it hopes for the best. And when hopes are repeatedly disappointed, it courageously waits” (Robertson-Plummer).

(So why is love so necessary when using our gifts? Love is superior to gifts [1-3] and love benefits others [4-7]. A final reason we need to use our gifts with love is because…)

# III. Love outlasts gifts (8-13).

#  [Gifts are great but temporary—love is greater as it is eternal!]

MP

## [Love is eternal and complete (8a).]

### What does it mean that “love never fails” (8a)? Does this mean that love never makes mistakes? If so, do we have to be perfect to love? No, this means that…

• Love never fails

### Love is eternal and complete.

## Gifts are temporary and partial (8b-12).

Temp

### Prophecy, tongues and knowledge are *temporary* (8b-d).

### Prophecy and knowledge are *partial* (9-12).

#### Prophecy and knowledge will cease because they give only part of the whole truth of God before the church is complete (9-10).

##### How do we know in part now? There are millions of things to be discovered!

##### How do we prophesy in part now? God has never given a prophecy of the date of Christ’s return—or given us prophecies to settle issues like the role of women in the church, church government, and other controversial issues.

• teleion

##### What is mean by “perfection” (*to teleion* in10a)? This is a mega issue:

mega

###### The death of the Christian has been taught by some; but Paul uses the plural here—“we.”

Black

###### The establishment of the church has been proposed as well but Paul is looking to the future, not the past.

##### There are three main views on *to teleion*. Each has strengths and weak points.

3 views chart

###### The completion of Scripture has been popular among those who believe some gifts have ceased until recent days. Now the feeling is that Paul probably never envisioned a completed NT or canon.

Canon

###### The return of Christ is the most common view and may be correct. It seems supported by verse 12’s reference to seeing “face to face.” However, it also has its problems:

Rapture

It doesn’t explain the gradual maturing of verse 11.

Paul never uses *to teleion* as "the perfect" in the absolute sense.

"Perfect" is a qualitative term—so it poorly contrasts "partial," a quantitative term in verse 10.

###### Although I can’t be dogmatic, it seems that “perfection” refers to the maturity of the church as the body of Christ.

Body Graphic

Robert L. Thomas presents the view this way: "It pictures the Christian church collectively, growing up as one body, beginning with its birth, progressing through different stages of development during the present [relative maturity in v. 11] and reaching maturity at the return of Christ [ultimate maturity in v. 12]."

Thomas

By using the ambiguous term for “mature” or “perfect” Paul left open two possibilities, the church being: (1) relatively complete at the completion of the New Testament or (2) ultimately complete at Christ's return.

Body chart

This view ultimately concludes the same as the Canon View.

It better fits the 1 Corinthian passages which contrast *to teleion* (meaning "mature") with "babes, child" (2:6 & 3:1).

It also best fits the "body and gifts context" of 1 Cor. 12-14 and the striking similarity to Eph. 4:1-16.

#### Two illustrations then show the partial nature of prophecy and knowledge (11-12).

11-12

##### Gradual maturity of people parallels how these revelatory gifts existed only until the maturity of the body of Christ at the completion of the canon (11).

##### Poor reflections in a mirror show how prophecy and knowledge helped Paul know in part in contrast to our complete knowledge at Christ’s return (12).

## Love will outlast even faith and hope (13).

13

### Why is hope brought into the picture since there is no “gift of hope”? Hope is even better than gifts—but love is even better than hope.

### How is love greater than faith and hope? It lasts! When we get to heaven we won’t have to exercise faith or hope any more. But love? This will last into eternity!

# Conclusion

### Why must we use our gifts with love? Because love is superior to gifts, love benefits others, and love outlasts gifts (MI).

MI

### Yes, love is the “glue” that holds together all that has been said about gifts so far.

= Life

### How are you doing at loving others? Is your focus others or yourself?

How…

#### As we have studied gifts lately, have you needed God’s admonition here to show greater concern for love?

#### Why do you use your gift? ‘Cuz it makes you feel good or out of love for others?

Black

##### Some believers sometimes withhold their gift of giving because they disagree with a decision of their church. This shows that their motive was not one of love for God in the first place.

##### Why do you teach that class or care group? Love!

##### Why do you serve in your capacity? Make it from love for God, who is the One you ultimately serve anyway.

##### A wise writer of the 20th century named A. W. Tozer hit it right on the head. He said: “Ask not *what* a man does to determine whether his work is sacred or secular. Ask *why* he does it. The motive is everything. Let a man sanctify the Lord God in his heart and he can thereafter do no secular act.”

Tozer

#### What will it to take to stop you from using your gift to the maximum for Christ?

Black

##### Will one discouraging word from someone keep you from being effective?

##### Are you fearful of further education to develop your gift?

##### Will lack of support from your parents or even this church stop you from genuinely serving Christ to the degree possible? Not if love is your motive!

### May it be said, “Crossroads excels in the most important quality of all—love.”

#### You probably heard about the Australian missionary Graham Staines who died in the flames on January 22 in India with his sons Timothy and Philip. He went to India in 1965 to visit a friend for a month but stayed 35 years ministering to lepers and preaching the gospel.

Bethesda Serangoon Church Youth Training Camp Dr. Rick Griffith

Wednesday, 18 December 1991 Message 3 of 4

NIV 45 Minutes

**How to Make Your Spiritual Gift Really Count**

1 Corinthians 13:1-7

**Topic:** Love

**Subject:** The way to make your spiritual gift really count

**Complement:** is to use it in selfless love for others.

**Purpose:** The listeners will see that the gift which showed up on the SGI is not for personal satisfaction, but should be used to build up the body.

**Introduction**

1. SPIRITUAL GIFTS interdependence (tools conference)

2. I noted yesterday that *what* gift you have will affect God’s plan for your life of ministry. Here’s some ministry possibilities related to the various gifts (explain transparency of definitions and ministries).

3. God wants us to know and use our gifts.

a. SPIRITUAL GIFTS discern them

b. SPIRITUAL GIFTS how to discern

c. SPIRITUAL GIFTS preaching (needs listeners)

4. However, there is one extreme caution. The real issue relating to gifts is not *what* gift you exercise but *how* you exercise it!

a. Any of God’s good gifts can be used in the wrong way—this applies also to money, health, and education.

b. Spiritual gifts can also be used or *mis*used!

5. What I want to address today is how to make your spiritual gift really count. What is the key to the effective use of your spiritual gifts (restatement)?

6. The Corinthian believers were very gifted but really messing up in how they used their gifts. Turn with me to 1 Corinthians 12 and you’ll see what I mean.

a. Some used their gifts with a spirit of *inferiority* (12:14-20).

b. Some used their gifts with a spirit of *superiority* (12:21).

c. Paul points out that both attitudes were wrong since we all need one another (12:22, 27).

7. Rather than exercising gifts with inferiority or superiority Paul says in verse 31a that he will show them an even better way to use their gifts. And it is here that Paul answers this question of how to make your spiritual gift really count.

**I. Any gift used to its maximum helps no one if not exercised in love (13:1-3).**

 **[You can be the church’s most gifted person, but if you use your gifts selfishly then no one will be benefited.]**

 **[[If gifts aren’t exercised in love then their use is futile.]]**

These three verses all have the same pattern: an extreme or impossible situation accomplished without love and the meaningless result.

Paul deal with three different categories of gifts also: the first verse is a sign gift, the second speaking gifts, and the third serving gifts.

A. Speaking every earthly and heavenly language without love helps no one (12:1).

1. The tongues here refers to the spiritual gift of being able to speak other human languages without ever knowing them.

a. Of course, somehow angels also communicate to one another as well.

b. Paul doesn’t say anyone *can* speak in all the earthly or heavenly tongues, but even *if* he could it would be worthless without love.

2. Love here is the unconditional commitment of man to his fellow man in response to God’s love—selfless serving of others.

3. The result of such tremendous speaking ability is uselessness. It communicates nothing just like my ringing this bell means nothing to you.

a. (Ring) What did that mean? Anyone know? That means that you had a good breakfast today. (Ring) Can you interpret that? That means Dennis has a nice haircut.

b. You can’t guess the meaning of a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. Likewise, even a spectacular gift like tongues is worthless without love.

c. By the way, some feel that one of the purposes of tongues is personal edification based upon 1 Corinthians 14:4, but this is but the accompanying circumstance. No gift is given for personal edification! This teaching is contrary to 1 Corinthians 12.

(What is said of tongues can also be said of any other sign gift such as interpretation of tongues, miracles, and healings. But tongues is the least important gift according to 12:28—how about a real important gift like prophecy? Surely having one of the up-front kinds of gifts has value in and of itself, doesn’t it? In the next verse Paul gives a resounding “No!”)

B. Using very important gifts without love helps no one (12:2).

1. Like tongues, the gift of prophecy was an ability to declare an inspired message from God, but it differs from tongues in that prophecy was given in the language of the hearers.

2. “Fathom all mysteries” and all knowledge also refer to gifts—the word of wisdom and the word of knowledge, respectively. These gifts enabled the person to have unusual insight into spiritual truth prior to the completion of the New Testament.

3. The gift of faith was mentioned in 12:9 and refers to the ability to trust God to do incredible things like toss around mountains. (Illustrate with trying to “throw” Dennis.)

4. The point, though, is not to accurately define all these gifts! The point is that *any spiritual gift exercised without selfless concern for others is worthless.*

(So far we’ve seen that the *least* of the sign gifts like tongues has no value without love. Then we saw that even the *most important* speaking gifts like prophecy also helps no one without love. The third verse picks out a third type of gift—a serving gift—and draws the same conclusion.)

C. Using a serving gift such as giving without love helps no one (12:3).

1. One writer, C. Peter Wagner, feels that this is not a reference to the gift of giving. Rather, he sees here another unique gift—the gift of martyrdom! He tongue-in-cheek says that this is the only spiritual gift that you can use only once! Actually, he says that such a person possesses an unusual ability to handle suffering.

2. Of course Paul’s issue is not what you call it but whether it is done in love—even if it costs you your life.

3. Also, how much a person *gives* is not as important as how mucha person *loves!* Remember what Jesus said about the widow’s two little mites? “This poor widow has put more into the treasury that all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on” (Mark 12:43-44).

D. I wonder how each of you felt when you finished your Spiritual Gifts Inventory and saw what this test said may be your gift.

1. Some of you said, “Oh, no, that’s not what I wanted!” because you had hoped that you’d have what you thought would be a more significant gift. Well, remember that the important point is not *which* gift is yours but rather *the attitude* in which you use it!

2. Others of you may have said to yourself when you say the results, “Oh, nice, I was hoping I’d score strong in that gift. After all, having that gift gets a lot of acclaim!” You, too, need to be reminded that selflessness is the main requirement in really using it well.

(I told you at the beginning that this message would answer the question of how to make your spiritual gifts really count. Do you know the answer now? Yes! Use your gifts in love! But how do you do that? What does a loving use of gifts look like practically? I’m glad you asked because Paul gives the answer in verses 4-7…)

**II. Loving use of the gifts is seen when they are used to benefit others (13:4-7).**

 **[If you use your gifts in love then people will be helped.]**

You see, the first section in verses 1-3 told us *how not to* use our gifts—don’t be super-gifted without being super-loving. Now in verses 4-7 we’ll see *how to* use them—so they help others. I think this is what love is all about—benefiting others from our actions. Edifying others is at the heart of what Paul wanted to communicate to the Corinthians—especially in chapters 12—14.

Paul’s style of long, drawn out sentences changes abruptly here into short statements showing the moral characteristics of love. Actually, there’s 14 descriptions of love: 7 positive and 7 negative.

A. Using gifts in love means serving others with characteristics which unite the body (13:4a).

 [Two unifying, loving traits are listed to show the way you *should* use your gifts.]

1. Serving others in love means doing it with patience.

a. This means having your gift “put on the shelf” for a while if God wills (ILL: use my *ZPBE* rarely but helpful and there vs. rarely use musical abilities in a new place).

b. It also means exercising your gift and being patient for God to take care of other concerns. For example, fear of lifelong singleness keeps some of us from considering missions (Susan and I vs. Bob and Brenda?).

2. Serving others in love means doing it with kindness.

a. The church had a real problem here as those wronged by others in the church retaliated by taking them to court rather than show kindness (6:8).

b. Also, there was a big problem at the love feasts when gluttony reigned (11:21-22).

(After naming these two ways believers *should* use their gifts Paul shows how we *shouldn’t* use our gifts in the rest of verse 4 and in verse 5…)

B. Using gifts in love means avoiding seven characteristics which divide the body (13:4b-5).

 [Seven divisive, unloving traits are listed to show the way *not* to use your gifts.]

1. We don’t have time to investigate each of these traits in detail, but it’s interesting to note that the Corinthian church was messing up in each of these areas too—especially when it came to gifts.

a. Some were envying those with more showy gifts (12:15-16).

b. Some boasted about having these more showy gifts (12:21-26).

c. Some behaved rudely in the services (11:2-16; 14:26-33) and at the breaking of bread (11:17-22).

d. Some were self-seeking by insisting upon their liberty instead of being concerned for others in the church (8:9; 10:23-24).

 Nowadays we can be self-seeking in the use of our gifts by pursuing avenues of service which provide the most glory. How much more honoring to the Lord it is to serve in a place where we are more needed (ILL: me at SBC rather than USA, them outside Singapore because of greater needs elsewhere).

e. Some were angry enough to take other believers to court for their money (6:1-11).

f. Some kept a mental record of wrongs by initiating lawsuits (6:8) rather than have a “forgive and forget” attitude.

2. The challenge for us is to evaluate our motives for using our gifts. The Chinese character for “false” literally means “two skins”—one on the outside that people can see and the real skin underneath (*Straits Times Collections*, 121). Do you have true or false motives?

(What else does “using our gifts in love” mean?)

C. Using gifts in love means we get excited about the right things (13:6).

1. Very often people insist upon exercising certain spiritual gifts even to the point of dividing churches—then they rejoice at what they call the “privilege of planting a new church”! This is misusing gifts and rejoicing in evil.

2. Do you “rejoice with the truth” about the certain gift you have? Or do you wish that you had another gift?

(The final verse provides a final bit of advice how to use our gifts in love…)

D. Using gifts in love means not becoming easily discouraged from helping others (13:7).

1. One commentary on this verse says, “When Love has no evidence, it believes the best. When the evidence is adverse, it hopes for the best. And when hopes are repeatedly disappointed, it courageously waits” (Robertson-Plummer).

2. In applying this again to gifts let me ask this: What’s it going to take to stop you from using your gift to the maximum for Christ?

a. Will a simple discouraging word from someone keep you from being effective?

b. Are you fearful of further education to develop your gift? (John Stuart “could never learn Hebrew or Greek”)

c. Will lack of support from your parents or church stop you from genuinely serving Christ to the degree possible?

3. Remember that opposition can often be God’s means to help you *develop* your gift!

a. I had to “bear the shame” of becoming the only full-timer in my family—and out of the country to boot!

b. Mom: “My son…the honors student…begging for money” and “Don’t you realize all those people in Asia have had religions for hundreds of years? What makes you think you can convince them that yours is better?”

**Conclusion**

1. How will this youth group be known by people who come in from the outside?

a. Many groups are known as a group of little clichés, each cliché their own rules, dress, academic standards, etc.

b. How much better that newcomers see you each using your unique gift to *help* one another!

2. What I’ve been talking about today is how to make your spiritual gift really count.

a. The way to do it is through love, which in real practical terms means to use your abilities for the sake of others—not for your own sake (M.I.).

b. Actually, your character is more important than your gifts anyway (SPIRITUAL GIFTS related to fruit of the Spirit)

3. The real issue each of us needs to address is how we can use our abilities to accomplish the greatest good for the kingdom of God.

a. Once again it gets down to motivation.

b. A wise writer earlier this century by the name of A. W. Tozer hit it right on the head: “Ask not *what* a man does to determine whether his work is sacred or secular. Ask *why* he does it. The motive is everything. Let a man sanctify the Lord God in his heart and he can thereafter do no secular act.”

4. But even if you commit yourself to lovingly use your gift for others, how do you know the will of God regarding a specific ministry?

a. The great man of faith, George Mueller, trusted God for years while he was a German missionary to orphaned children in England. He had an incredibly keen sense of knowing God’s will and recorded over 50,000 answers to his prayers in his lifetime.

 Are you interested in knowing the steps he went through to discern the will of God? I won’t tell you! At least not all of them! But he considered the first one to be the most important: “I get my heart into such a state that it has no will of its own.”

 How? *Before* asking God for His will Mueller had already said, “O.K., Lord, I’ll do it.”

b. It’s like God giving us piece of paper and saying, “This is my will for your life.”

 “Thanks, Lord!” we say, “This is what I’ve been wanting to know for a time!”

 Then we look at the paper. It’s blank—not a word, but there is a dotted line at the bottom.

 “Please sign on the dotted line,” the Lord says.

 We look again at the paper. “But Lord, it’s blank! I don’t know what I’m signing for! I don’t know what I’m agreeing to do!”

 “You mean you don’t trust Me?” He says in response.

5. Please take a few moments and commit to the Lord that you’ll do whatever He wants you to do with your gift. Mentally sign that paper—even though it’s blank.

6. The best way to make your spiritual gift really count is to use it in \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, which means to use your abilities for the sake of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

7. Fill in the blank: The best way I can make my spiritual gift count for eternity is by…

# Preliminary Questions

**Verses Questions**

# Context What did the author record just prior to this passage?

### Paul has been discussing spiritual gifts for one chapter now.

### In chapter 12 he said that God gave these abilities to the church for it to function properly. In fact, he compared the church to a human body which functions when each part does its part.

# Purpose Why is this passage in the Bible?

### The Corinthian tendency (as well as ours) was to see spiritual gifts in individualistic terms—God gave a gift to you so you will be fulfilled.

### While they are individual gifts, the danger here is to neglect seeing the corporate aspect of gifts.

### In light of this danger, Paul addresses in chapter 13 how to make your spiritual gift count.

# Background What historical context helps us understand this passage?

### Urban areas tend to be more individualistic and less relational than rural areas.

### Corinth was a classic case of an urban centre in it self-seeking use of the spiritual gifts.

# Questions

### What’s so bad about a resounding gong and a clanging cymbal (1)? Nothing is particularly wrong with them as instruments, but they do not communicate as clearly as the spoken word.

### What is love (1)? It is selfless rather than selfish living.

### Why is love so necessary when using our gifts? Without love our gifts are not used for others but rather for ourselves.

### Why does Paul pick the particular gifts that he does—tongues, prophecy, wisdom, knowledge, faith, and giving?

#### Why didn’t he pick administration, teaching, or interpretation of tongues?

#### He notes tongues and prophecy first because these gifts were the problem gifts at Corinth—the more showy gifts are the ones we typically seek!

### How can all 15 of these descriptions of love be summed up (4-7)?

### What does it mean that “love never fails” (8)? Does this mean that love never makes mistakes? If so, do we have to be perfect to love?

### Is Paul purposely signaling out tongues as passing away in a different way than prophecy and knowledge (8)?

### How do we know in part now?

### How do we prophecy in part now?

### What is mean by “perfection” (10a)? Verse 9 indicates that the idea here is the “partial” versus the “complete.” There are many views here:

#### The death of the Christian has been taught by some; but Paul uses the plural here—“we.”

#### The completion of Scripture has been a popular view among cessationists until recent days. Now e feeling is that Paul probably never envisioned a completed NT.

#### The establishment of the church has been proposed as well but Paul is looking to the future, not the past.

#### The return of Christ is the most common view and may be correct. It seems supported by verse 12’s reference to seeing “face to face.” However, it also has its problems:

##### It doesn’t explain the gradual maturing of verse 11.

##### Paul never uses *to teleion* as "the perfect" in the absolute sense.

##### "Perfect" is a qualitative term—so it poorly contrasts "partial," a quantitative term in verse 10.

#### Although I can’t be dogmatic, it seems that “perfection” refers to the maturity of the church as the body of Christ.

##### One writer presents the view this way: "It pictures the Christian church collectively, growing up as one body, beginning with its birth, progressing through different stages of development during the present [relative maturity, v. 11] and reaching maturity at the *parousia* [ultimate maturity, v. 12; Thomas, 86]."

##### By using the ambiguous term *to teleion* Paul left open two possibilities, the church being: (1) relatively complete at the completion of the New Testament or (2) ultimately complete at Christ's return.

##### This view ultimately comes to the same conclusion as the Canon View.

##### It better fits the 1 Corinthian passages which contrast *to teleion* (meaning "mature") with "babes, child" (nhvpioς; 2:6 & 3:1; 14:20; cf. Heb. 5:13-14).

##### It also best fits the "body and gifts context" of 1 Cor. 12-14 and the striking similarity to Eph. 4:1-16.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Strengths** |  | **Weaknesses** |
| a. | Parallel 1 Cor. passages contrast *to teleion* (meaning "mature") with "babes, child" (nhvpioς; 2:6 & 3:1; 14:20; cf. Heb. 5:13-14). | a. | "Mature" (a qualitative term) poorly contrasts "partial" (a quantitative term, v. 10). |
| b.  | Consistent with both the relative maturity of v. 11 and the absolute maturity of v. 12. | b. | Assigns a double sense for *to teleion* which may be unlikely. |
| c. | Best fits the "body and gifts context" of 1 Cor. 12-14 and the striking similarity to Eph. 4:1-16. |  |  |
| d. | Has the same strengths of a., b., & c. in the Canon View. |  |  |

**Implications of the Body View:** While this is a difficult issue, it seems that that the Body View has the most to commend it. There is no New Testament evidence that Paul knew which would come first: Christ's coming or the completion of the canon (as the Old Testament was complete). His use of the somewhat ambiguous term *to teleion* therefore would allow room for either possibility: the completion of the canon or the Rapture.

However, Paul *did* recognize that the church would be progressing in maturity during the period of direct revelation and miraculous authentication (represented by childhood in v. 11a) until the time of the completion of the canon (represented by the body's maturity in v. 11b). Thus, the church would continue to grow until the time of the *parousia* when maturity will be complete, with the body of Christ collectively mature and conformed to His image. Since the canon was completed *before* Christ's return this means that while some gifts would continue, prophecy, tongues and knowledge ceased when the canon was finished in the first century.

### What is the “imperfect” (10b)? In the context it means that these gifts will no longer be necessary when the “complete” comes.

### Has does this illustration of human maturity relate to gifts and love (11)?

### Has does this illustration of sight relate to gifts and love (12)?

### When will we see “face to face” and be “fully known” (12a)? The phrase “face to face” appears only four times in the NT:

#### 1 Cor. 13:12 Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

#### 2 Cor. 10:1 By the meekness and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you —I, Paul, who am “timid” when face to face with you, but “bold” when away!

#### 2 John 12 I have much to write to you, but I do not want to use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to visit you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete.

#### 3 John 14 I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face. Peace to you. The friends here send their greetings. Greet the friends there by name.

### Why is hope brought into the picture since there is no “gift of hope” (13a)?

### How is love greater than faith and hope (13b)?

# Tentative Subject/Complement Statements

The “glue” that holds together the Bible’s teaching on making spiritual gifts count is love

Love is indispensable for beneficial use of gifts.

Anything accomplished apart from love is nothing accomplished at all.

Love supersedes, benefits, and endures.

# Possible Illustrations

### Sometimes people have been impressed with the number of books in my library and they ask, “Wow! Have you read all these?”

#### Then when I answer they’re not so impressed! “Oh, I’ve read about 5% of them!”

#### Once I was looking around my study and I thought, “What if I not only had read all these books but actually had this much knowledge at my fingertips?”

#### Then the Lord impressed on my mind, “So what? Without love all this knowledge would be useless!”

### The Australian missionary Graham Staines died in the flames last month in India with his sons Timothy and Philip (13:3).

### C. Peter Wagner says that verse 3 refers to the gift of martyrdom. He calls it the only spiritual gift that you can only use once! Actually, he’s joking—he says this gift is the ability to have an usual attitude towards suffering.

### Some believers have withheld their gift of giving because they disagreed with a decision of their church. This shows that their motive in the first place was not one of love for God.

**Why Love?**

***1 Corinthians 13***

**Exegetical Outline**

# Exegetical Idea: The reason love is indispensable for beneficial use of gifts is because love is superior to gifts, love benefits others, and love outlasts gifts.

# I. The best way to use spiritual gifts is the loving way (12:31b).

# II. One reason love is indispensable for beneficial use of gifts is because love is superior to gifts (1-3).

## A sign gift such as *tongues* used to the maximum by speaking every human and angelic language without love speaks empty and worthless words and so *produces nothing* (1).

## One who uses any gift to its ultimate degree without love *is nothing* (2).

### A speaking gift such as *prophecy* without love is worthless to edify others (2a).

### *Wisdom* that knows all previously hidden doctrines but without love is worthless to edify others (2b).

### *Knowledge* that knows all facts but without love is worthless to edify others (2c).

### *Faith* that can move mountains but without love is worthless to edify others (2d).

## A serving gift such as *giving* to the ultimate degree without love *gains nothing* (3).

### Giving all my possessions to the poor without love gains nothing for me (3a).

### Giving my life itself in martyrdom by burning as the most horrible death possible burning without love gains nothing for me (3b).

# III. Another reason love is indispensable for beneficial use of gifts is because [while gifts can be misused to benefit self] love benefits others (4-7).

## Love benefits others passively and actively (4a-b).

### Love is passively patient by not retaliating towards others (4a; cf. 6:8; 11:21-22).

### Love is actively kind by serving those who do harm (4b; cf. 10:33).

## Love doesn’t hurt others in seven negative ways (4c-5).

### Love isn’t inwardly jealous (4c) of others’ giftedness (3:3-4; 12:14-17).

### Love doesn’t outwardly boast (4d) of its own giftedness (12:21).

### Love isn’t inwardly prideful (4e) of its clique (4:6, 18), tolerance (5:2), and knowledge (8:1).

### Love doesn’t behave improperly (5a) in engagement (7:36), sex roles (11:17-22), and worship (11:26-33).

### Love isn’t selfish (5b) in financial (6:7) and debatable matters (10:24).

### Love isn’t irritable (5c) as in initiating lawsuits (6:1).

### Love isn’t unforgiving (5d) in offenses (6:8), in withholding marital sex (7:5), and by insisting on rights (8:11).

## Love knows the right things to get happy about (6).

### Love doesn’t rejoice in wickedness (6a) as in delight over incest (5:2).

### Love does rejoice with the truth (6b).

## Love doesn’t give up on others (7).

### Love endures the shortcomings of others (7a) as in those who misuse their gifts (12:14-26).

### Love believes the best of others (7b).

### Love hopes in God (7c) that church problems will be resolved.

### Love perseveres when personally wronged by courageously waiting (7d) for marriage (7:9), food (11:21), or a chance to speak (14:27).

# IV. Another reason love is indispensable for beneficial use of gifts is because love outlasts gifts (8-13).

## Love is eternal and complete (8a).

## Gifts are temporary and partial (8b-12).

### Prophecy, tongues and knowledge are *temporary* (8b-d).

### Prophecy and knowledge are *partial* (9-12).

#### The reason prophecy and knowledge will cease is because they are designed to give only part of the whole truth of God before the church is complete (9-10).

#### Two illustrations show the partial nature of prophecy and knowledge (11-12).

##### Gradual maturity of humans parallels how these revelatory gifts were given only until the maturity of the body of Christ at the completion of the canon (11).

##### Poor reflections in a mirror represent how prophecy and knowledge helped Paul know in part in contrast to our complete knowledge at Christ’s return (12).

## The result of the superiority, benefits, and permanence of love is that love will not only outlast gifts but even faith and hope (13).

**Homiletical Outline** (Cyclical inductive form)

# Introduction

### We now know enough about spiritual gifts to be dangerous.

#### We could get the idea that gifts are more important than fruit.

#### We could get the idea that gifts are given primarily to benefit us as individuals.

### This is why Paul talks of “the most excellent way” (12:31b).

### We’ll see today in chapter 13 that this best way to use spiritual gifts is the loving way.

### Main Idea: The most vital ingredient in using our gifts is love.

### Subject: But why do we need to use our gifts with love?

# I. Love is superior to gifts (1-3).

## *Tongues* used to the maximum without love *produces nothing* (1).

## *Prophecy* without love is worthless to edify others (2a).

## *Wisdom* that knows all previously hidden doctrines without love is worthless to edify others (2b).

## *Knowledge* that knows all facts without love is worthless to edify others (2c).

## *Faith* that can move mountains without love is worthless to edify others (2d).

## *Giving* (a serving gift) to the ultimate degree without love *gains nothing* (3).

 (Another reason love is indispensable for beneficial use of gifts is because while gifts can be misused to benefit self…)

# II. Love benefits others (4-7).

## Love benefits others passively and actively (4a-b).

### Love is passively patient by not retaliating towards others (4a; cf. 6:8; 11:21-22).

### Love is actively kind by serving those who do harm (4b; cf. 10:33).

## Love doesn’t hurt others in seven negative ways (4c-5).

### Love isn’t inwardly jealous (4c) of others’ giftedness (3:3-4; 12:14-17).

### Love doesn’t outwardly boast (4d) of its own giftedness (12:21).

### Love isn’t inwardly prideful (4e) of its clique (4:6, 18), tolerance (5:2), and knowledge (8:1).

### Love doesn’t behave improperly (5a) in engagement (7:36), sex roles (11:17-22), and worship (11:26-33).

### Love isn’t selfish (5b) in financial (6:7) and debatable matters (10:24).

### Love isn’t irritable (5c) as in initiating lawsuits (6:1).

### Love isn’t unforgiving (5d) in offenses (6:8), in withholding marital sex (7:5), and by insisting on rights (8:11).

## Love knows the right things to get happy about (6).

### Love doesn’t rejoice in wickedness (6a) as in delight over incest (5:2).

### Love does rejoice with the truth (6b).

## Love doesn’t give up on others (7).

### Love endures the shortcomings of others (7a) as in those who misuse their gifts (12:14-26).

### Love believes the best of others (7b).

### Love hopes in God (7c) that church problems will be resolved.

### Love perseveres when personally wronged by courageously waiting (7d) for marriage (7:9), food (11:21), or a chance to speak (14:27).

(A final reason love is indispensable for beneficial use of gifts is because…)

# III. Love outlasts gifts (8-13).

## Love is eternal and complete (8a).

## Gifts are temporary and partial (8b-12).

### Prophecy, tongues and knowledge are *temporary* (8b-d).

### Prophecy and knowledge are *partial* (9-12).

#### The reason prophecy and knowledge will cease is because they are designed to give only part of the whole truth of God before the church is complete (9-10).

#### Two illustrations show the partial nature of prophecy and knowledge (11-12).

##### Gradual maturity of humans parallels how these revelatory gifts were given only until the maturity of the body of Christ at the completion of the canon (11).

##### Poor reflections in a mirror represent how prophecy and knowledge helped Paul know in part in contrast to our complete knowledge at Christ’s return (12).

## Love will outlast even faith and hope (13).

# Conclusion

### Why do we need to use our gifts with love? Because love is superior to gifts, love benefits others, and love outlasts gifts (MI).

### How are you doing at loving others? Is your focus gifts or glue?

# Introduction

### Main Idea: The most vital ingredient in using our gifts is love.

### Subject: But why do we need to use our gifts with love?

# I. Love is superior to gifts (1-3).

## *Tongues* used to the maximum without love *produces nothing* (1).

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## *Faith* that can move mountains without love is worthless to edify others (2d).

## *Giving* to the ultimate degree without love *gains nothing* (3).

# II. Love benefits others (4-7).

## Love benefits others passively and actively (4a-b).

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### Why do we need to use our gifts with love? Because love is superior to gifts, love benefits others, and love outlasts gifts (MI).

### How are you doing at loving others? Is your focus others or yourself?

NLT from Illumna

1 If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn’t love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God’s secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn’t love others, I would be nothing. 3 If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it;\* but if I didn’t love others, I would have gained nothing.

4 Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud 5 or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. 6 It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. 7 Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

8 Prophecy and speaking in unknown languages\* and special knowledge will become useless. But love will last forever! 9 Now our knowledge is partial and incomplete, and even the gift of prophecy reveals only part of the whole picture! 10 But when full understanding comes, these partial things will become useless.

11 When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child. But when I grew up, I put away childish things. 12 Now we see things imperfectly as in a cloudy mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity.\* All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God now knows me completely.

13 Three things will last forever–faith, hope, and love–and the greatest of these is love.

### Ask Yourself: How can I better show my need for others here at Crossroads?

**Rick Griffith**

14 April 2013

*Message 20 of 24 in “Becoming Who We Are” 1 Corinthians Series*

**Why Love?**

**1 Corinthians 13**

# Introduction

### Main Idea: The most vital ingredient in using our gifts is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

### Subject: But \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ do we need to use our gifts with love?

# I. Love is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ to gifts (1-3).

## *Tongues* used to the maximum without love *produces nothing* (1).

## *Prophecy* without love is worthless to edify others (2a).

## *Wisdom* that knows all previously hidden doctrines without love is worthless to edify others (2b).

## *Knowledge* that knows all facts without love is worthless to edify others (2c).

## *Faith* that can move mountains without love is worthless to edify others (2d).

## *Giving* to the ultimate degree without love *gains nothing* (3).

# II. Love \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ others (4-7).

## Love benefits others passively and actively (4a-b).

## Love doesn’t hurt others in seven negative ways (4c-5).

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# III. Love \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ gifts (8-13).

## Love is eternal and complete (8a).

## Gifts are temporary and partial (8b-12).

## Love will outlast even faith and hope (13).

# Conclusion

### Why do we need to use our gifts with love? Because love is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ to gifts, love \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ others, and love \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ gifts (Main Idea).

### How are you doing at loving others? Is your focus on others or yourself?

**Thought Questions**

1. Read 1 Corinthians 13 aloud. This chapter has often been called the “love chapter” but what title would you give for it?

Love is the greatest power in the world

Love is the best motive and method in the world

The way that’s far better than spiritual gifts is love

“You can give without love but you cannot love without giving” (John Wesley)

1. Which of the 15 descriptions of love in verses 4-8a is most surprising to you?

“Love believes all things” (7b) does not indicate gullibility but it means “love never loses faith” (NLT).

“Love endures all things” (7d) but do all have the same capacity to love?

“Love never fails” (8a), but our love sometimes fails. The following contrast tells us that love will last forever in contrast to gifts.

1. How do these descriptions of love different from the world’s view of love?

Genuine love is selfless whereas the world’s “love” is selfish.

1. How can you better love others?

I commit to pray for my parents and sons until the day I die