

## A More Excellent Way Outline

### *1 Corinthians 13*

#### I. Context.

- A. There is disunity in the Corinthian church, partially from a misuse of spiritual gifts.
  - 1. An overemphasis on gifts.
  - 2. A overemphasis on select gifts: Speaking in tongues and prophesy.
- B. Chapter 13 is a part of Paul's admonition.
  - 1. The element missing in the church: Love.

#### II. New Testament love.

- A. **Eros**—Physical “love”.
- B. **Storge**—Familial love or family love.
- C. **Phileo**—Friendship.
- D. **Agape**—sacrificial love; God's love.
  - 1. Agape love was missing in the Corinthian church.
  - 2. They were exercising spiritual gifts outside of agape.

#### III. Structure.

- A. Prologue (1-3)
- B. Acts (4-7)
- C. Comparison (8-12)
- D. Epilogue (13-14:1)

#### IV. Prologue

- A. PRINCIPLE: Spiritual gifts without agape love are useless.
  - 1. A noisy gong—Most likely a “sunder”- a bronze “vase” used to amplify sound in the amphitheater.
  - 2. Clanging cymbals—more like chiming cymbals.
  - 3. Point—if you don't have love, when you speak in tongues you are just a cacophony.

- B. Love is not a spiritual gift, it is a fruit of the Spirit—all Christians are to have this fruit.
- C. PRINCIPLE: The most extreme personal sacrifice, the ultimate sacrifice is meaningless if done without love.

V. Acts (4-7)

- A. PRINCIPLE: Agape is love demonstrated...
- B. Agape is a verb: an action word.
  - 1. Love is patient.
  - 2. Love is kind.
  - 3. Love is not jealous.
  - 4. Love does not boast.
  - 5. Love is not puffed up.
  - 6. Love does not act unbecoming.
  - 7. Love does not seek its own.
  - 8. Love is not a provoker.
  - 9. Love does not take into account wrongs suffered.
  - 10. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things

VI. Comparisons ( 8-12)

- A. PRINCIPLE: The spiritual gifts will all fall away but love is eternal.
  - 1. Imperfect state of man—There will be spiritual gifts
  - 2. The “perfect comes”—Spiritual gifts no longer needed—love continues.
- B. Two illustrations.
  - 1. The stages of life—a child, an adult—coincides with the necessities of life.
  - 2. A mirror—we see a reflection of reality in a mirror, there is a time coming when we will see Jesus face to face.

VII. Epilogue ( 13-14:1)

- A. Love is supreme, Love is the greatest, Love is perfect, God is love (1 John 4:16).
- B. The indispensable virtues of the Christian life:
  - 1. Faith
  - 2. Hope
  - 3. Love

## A More Excellent Way Pastoral Notes

### *1 Corinthians 13*

The great group of philosophers known as the Beatles got one thing right... when they sang “*All you need is love*”...I’m pretty sure they did not have in mind the definition of love we get in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians chapter 13.... What has become known as *The Great Love Chapter of the Bible*.

Some call this great chapter “*The Hymn of Love*”... “*The Sermon on the Mount Set to Music*” it is surely one of the most familiar passages in all of the Bible... Even people who have never read the Bible have heard this passage as many times as the weddings they’ve attended... for it is one of the most quoted passage of all literature... secular and religious recited at weddings.

It’s beautiful... it’s musical... it is poetic... from a literary viewpoint it is the greatest passage the apostle Paul has ever penned... one commentator said *It is Paul’s finest moments*... the same commentator warned preachers to be careful when preaching on 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 13... *too much analysis will detract from its beauty and power*.

Like taking apart a beautiful flower, some of the beauty is lost as you remove the components...

It has been called *a breath of fresh air, an oasis in a desert of problems*...and it is... the words themselves are refreshing... many have found them inspirational... that is why the thirteen verses have been printed on countless greeting cards... we like 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 13.

Talking about being a desert of problems... that may be one way to look at it... but in reality it is far more nuanced than that... I think the apostle Paul... if he were to see what we have done with this chapter would be surprised or even shocked... Greeting cards?... weddings?...posters... memes...

Chapter 13 is sandwiched between two chapters that make up Paul’s dissertation to the Corinthian church on spiritual gifts... remember Paul has been answering questions via this letter that a few in the Corinthian church had been asking him.

All have been in the context of the overarching problem in the church which was disunity... because of their disunity... many problems were surfacing... chapters 12,13 and 14 answer many questions regarding spiritual gifts...

The situation in the Corinthian church included an imbalance in emphasis on the spiritual gifts... the spiritual gifts were being over emphasized in the church... not only that... but certain gifts were being overly emphasized over other spiritual gifts.... Specifically the gifts of tongues and prophesy.

For some the spiritual gifts had become a status symbol.

If you had the gift of prophesy...you were somebody!... If you had the gift of tongues... you were really somebody!...these two gifts were emphasized most likely because prior to Christianity arriving in Corinth... the pagan temples practiced a form of speaking in tongues... and they “prophesied”...

We saw last week how all the gifts... and all the individual parts of the body... the body of Christ... All Christians make up the parts, all with their distinct gift... all are important and even vital for the building up of the church...

...so that the church, functioning in unity can glorify God and accomplish the mission God has for it.... well... the Corinthian church is broken... they’ve become “competitive with their gifts”... they were elevating their spiritual gifts for their own benefit... prestige... recognition...

So Paul writes these three chapters to admonish them... exhort them and educate them so that they will become unified.... Chapter 12 was no cakewalk... he confronted their problem head on...not angry words... not a scolding, lovingly but direct, pointed words.... Chapter 14 will continue on with even more detailed instruction... uncomfortable to a church that has been doing the opposite.

But in the middle of these two confronting chapters.... Paul inserts this wonderful chapter 13. This is not a change in tone from Paul. It is not as if Paul thinks to himself *“I’ve been pretty rough on this church. I need to give them something happy... something that makes them feel good... something they can put on greeting cards, post on their refrigerators to give them a happy thought before going to work...something charming.... Or something to say at their weddings....*

No... even though this passage...to us... is charming, wonderful and happy... it is still a part of a confrontation... perhaps not actually a rebuke but close!.... the bottom line is that there is a factionalism going on in the church... they are not united... they are in disunity...part of it centers around the misuse of spiritual gifts.... **And the thing missing... the essential ingredient of a spiritual life... is love.**

One said that *“love is the mortar between the bricks of the Christian building... the body of Christ... This actually is an indictment of the Corinthian church for their lack of love... and the elevation of the self...*

These words are for us as well.. for we all... like all the Christians in the Corinthian church are all a part of the body of Christ...all given at least one spiritual gift... and we like the Corinthians must deal with Our human tendency... to become “prideful” of our spiritual gift...

*that it makes “me” important... it makes me stand out... it gives me a sense of value... people will acknowledge my worth when they see how gifted I am...*

Love... this love puts all that in check...love lifts my eyes off of myself and places it on the body of Christ...Now... the problem we have in our English language is that we only have one word for love...so love is a big pot we can throw all sorts of stuff...

Listen to the music of the your day.... I remember the song in the seventies “*Love the One You’re With*”....meaning don’t get lonely, grab whoever your with and “love them”... we had the *Love Boat*... which had NOTHING to do with the love of chapter 13....

The New Testament has four words for love...all with different meanings and usages... only one is the love referred to in chapter 13....

**Eros**—Physical “love”... *Love the one you’re with*...sexual love... in the positive use it is “intimacy” in the negative it would be “selfish love”.

**Storge**—Familial love or family love... there’s a bond, but you didn’t choose each other...a natural love family members have for each other... family love gives you the sense of belonging.

**Phileo**—Friendship...Philadelphia, city of brotherly love.

Those three different “loves” are what most people are thinking of as being “love”... those are the greeting card loves... the forth one is actually pretty foreign to most people...even absurd to them....

**Agape**—I like defining it as “God’s Love”... Jesus Christ love... sacrificial love... agape love is a rare love found mainly in the Bible... agape was basically an unknown word until the New Testament... agape is found 118 times in the New Testament.

This is not some human virtue... but about a love that **is rooted in God’s love for Christ!**... it is agape love that is the love in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 13.

Agape love does not come naturally to us. Because of our fallen nature, we are incapable of producing such a love. If we are to love as God loves, that love—that agape—can only come from its Source.

This is the love that “has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us” when we became His children. “**This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters**” (1 John 3:16). Because of God’s love toward us, we are able to love one another.

You cannot comprehend the meaning of love in this passage outside of the cross of Jesus Christ as the manifestation of God’s love for the world...**for God so loved the world... that He gave His only begotten Son... that whosoever believes in Him shall have everlasting life... therefore only a Christian can understand and practice agape love....**

It is agape love missing in the Corinthian church.

So in the context of the Corinthian church and their problem with the over emphasis of spiritual gifts... Paul presents to them what is truly important...when it comes to spiritual gifts... you can either be 1. Pragmatic or 2. Spiritual....

Pragmatic says *let's all find our gifts and see which ones will be most beneficial of us... which ones will stimulate us the most... which ones will bring in the most people?.... or....*

The truly spiritual asks... *Is agape love radiating out from each one of us as we are using our spiritual gifts?*

So... let's go through this wonderful passage and see what God wants us to see....

**Structure**—This is truly a great form of literature...it is suggested that Paul has used a communication device called an “encomium”... and encomium is a speech or a writing (as it is here) that praises...usually a person or people... but also a virtue or other highly valued subject... here Paul is highly praising the virtue and value of agape/love....The structure is:

1. Prologue (13:1-3) This will connect us to what has been said
2. Acts (13:4-7) What agape does
3. Comparisons (13:8-12) The superiority of agape over spiritual gifts
4. Epilogue (13:13-14:1) The bottom line.

All to admonish a self-centered people...remember how Paul ended chapter 12?... he promised them that he would **show them a more excellent way....**spiritual gifts are vital to the church... for the edification,, the building up of the church... but there is something way more excellent than the spiritual gifts...that more excellent way is chapter 13

**1. Prologue (13:1-3)** Remember the gift of tongues is king in the Corinthian church:

### **Read verse 1**

As it was in the first century in Corinth...in many churches today... the gift of tongues is over emphasized... some say that tongues are evidence you are a spiritual church...they do the same with the gift of prophesy...and some with healing.... TBN

When we get to chapter 14 we will have much to say regarding tongues... what I want us to see today is the superiority of love over all the spiritual gifts... not only is love superior... but it is to be given priority over everything else.... All of the gifts.

**PRINCIPLE: Spiritual gifts without love are useless.** ... here Paul refers to 1. The tongues of men and 2. The tongues of angels... a lot of theories as to what the tongues of angels is referring to .... But what I think we can be sure of is that Paul is using hyperbole to get across his point.

I love hyperbole!... I'm accused of it all the time!...*exaggeration not meant to be taken literally*...Paul uses hyperbole all the time... what he is saying here is that even if the believer

speaks in the most exalted languages imaginable... if they do not have agape... they are like a clanging cymbal and a noisy gong...

Something little but I think interesting... noisy gong and clanging cymbal.... What do you imagine there?... a cacophony... the horrible annoying sounds of noisy and clanging gongs and cymbals....that's our culture and time...

In the 1<sup>st</sup> century mid-east... a noisy gong would be a "acoustic sounding bronze vase"... In the outdoor amphitheaters that seated thousands but had no modern sound systems.... They had these tall vase like bronze vessels around the stage that would magnify the sounds coming from the stage so that the people in the back could hear what's going on.

These were actually referred to as "sounders"... endless reverberation of sound...what we translate as a "noisy gong" was in contrast to... a clanging cymbal...clanging may not be accurate...it could be the delicate, chiming of two brass cymbals... so one loudly clanks while the other chimes...a horrendous sound mixing with a pleasant sound makes a horrible sound... here's the point.

Somebody gets up to speak in church... the speaker makes a noise... that's going to happen... that is what speakers do...so... if this speaker gets up and speaks in tongues... BUT this person does not have love...this person has become a wretched noise!

He could be like a boisterous reverberation of sound a gong....a loud echo...an empty sound coming out of a hollow lifeless vessel!..... mixed with a pleasant chime of cymbals... but they are just noise... the person is in effect.... NOTHING... a gifted nothingness.

He says the same thing about one with the gift of prophesy... prophecy here refers to as one able to expound on the words of God... insight given to them from God and then able to share it with others... If I have that gift... but don't have love... I AM A NOTHING!

All this is saying something more than the spiritual gift is trumped by love... understand this... vital... Love is not another spiritual gift... **love is the fruit that is to be evident in all Christians!** ... love is a fruit that naturally comes from the tree of Jesus Christ... Galatians 5 right?... love is a fruit of the Holy Spirit who resides in you.

So... if gifts are being exercised without this fruit...where the self is king... you are number one... you are exercising your gifts to make you feel good about yourself... if the order is YOU first... God and neighbor second, or third, or somewhere... status is sought over humility demonstrated.... Makes you spiritually irrelevant.

*But what about all my "self-sacrificing for others!?" ... I do so much good!... I give so much time and money to others... I'm good right?*

**Read verse 3**

All your goodness is a waste of time!... interesting... this adds another dimension to the story Jesus tells in Mark 10... the Rich Young Ruler...who asks Jesus **what must I do to inherit eternal life?** Jesus gives him the bottom line... **go and sell all you possess and give to the poor....and you will have treasure in heaven.**

We know what happened... **at these words he was saddened, he went away grieving ... he had a lot of property.**

Well... what if the rich young ruler did what Jesus said to do and sold all he had and gave it to the poor?..... Paul tells us!!!!**if you don't have love... don't bother!... it will all be for nothing!**...then...Paul goes so far as the ultimate sacrifice... being worthless without love.

(3) **If I surrender my body to be burned...** most likely offering your body as a sacrifice for Christ... Tortured for Christ...persecuted... that's the ultimate act of good right?... not if it is done without love!... that's why Jesus said **greater love hath no man but this... to lay down his life for his friends...** surrendering your body for the ultimate sacrifice only makes sense in the context of love.

**PRINCIPLE: The most extreme personal sacrifice, the ultimate sacrifice is meaningless if done without love.**

**2. Acts (13:4-7)** What agape does

What does agape look like?... maybe you've done this before... I think it is helpful... **in these verses exchange the name of Jesus Christ for the word love**.... Because what this really is, is a description of the one who loved perfectly... Jesus Christ.

**Jesus is patient... Jesus is kind... Jesus is not jealous... Jesus doesn't boast... Jesus is never puffed up...Jesus is never unbecoming...Jesus never seeks His own... Jesus is not provoked...Jesus does not take into account a wrong suffered... Jesus does not rejoice in unrighteousness... Jesus rejoices in truth... Jesus bears all things...Jesus hopes all things.... Jesus endures all things...**

Amazing?!... now... for your homework... do this later... exchange your name with Love and Jesus's name... does that describe you?... do you feel the admonishing the Corinthians must have felt as Paul one by one listed these truths?...the Corinthians lived the exact opposite of this list! not so much a greeting card is it?

Also...

Something important to notice... these are not adjectives.... These are verbs!...action words... 15 of them in four verses... love is not conveyed by words.... adjectives... it has to be shown... there has to be movement... action...

This isn't *love is like*,.... *This is love is*.



**PRINCIPLE: Agape is love demonstrated...**

Love is not some theoretical theological construct... it only has any meaning when it is **seen in action** in the life of the person!... The spiritual gifts are important to the church... the spiritual gifts become visible in a congregation **BUT the lack of love is even more visible!**

All these verbs on the list describe the love of God for us through His Son Jesus Christ... and what Christ did on the cross on our behalf... It is this life we are to emulate in our own lives and in the church.

Briefly... what about these verbs?

**Love is patient**—or forbearing...the positive act of waiting.... This is not so much about being patient in your circumstances rather than it is about being patient with others... I would rather be patient in my circumstances!

Patient with another's weaknesses... idiosyncrasies... weirdness's...habits... this really requires putting yourself in second place... I don't see this often!... I have always said relationship problems are the result of self elevation of one or both in the relationship!...patience requires humility.

**Love is kind**—Responding to others (all those mentioned above) with a tender heart... having the forgiveness that Christ had for you!

**Is not jealous/does not envy**—**intense negative feelings over another's achievements or successes**...this is the person who constantly compares themselves with someone else or others to make sure their status is not superior to their own.... If it is higher... the envy glands are activated!.... a huge Corinthian problem!

**It does not boast**—doesn't brag... is not *vainglorious*...literal translation... "*a pompous windbag*"...

**Love is not "puffed up"**—directed to the Corinthians... they were "puffed up" with their knowledge... **knowledge "puffs up", love "builds up"** (8:1) another way to put it... love is constructive, it builds up buildings... the puffed up spirit blows up the building!

**Does not act unbecomingly**—or better, rudely...arrogant

**Love does not seek its own**—self-seeking...back in Chapter 10:24 Paul wrote **Let no one seek his own good, but that of the other person....** Do you see why you have to be a Christian to do all these?... because you must have supernatural power to live like this! To love like this!.... and that can only be from the Holy Spirit who resides in you.

**Love is not a provoker**—specifically being provoked to anger...I think a good word here would be cantankerous...someone who picks fights for no reason... for fun maybe...

**Love does not take into account a wrong suffered**—“I’m keeping a list!”... *“I’ve got this accounting book with the records of all the things you’ve done to irritate me!”*... aren’t you glad God doesn’t keep an account of all our wrongs we’ve done to Him?

Romans 4:8

**Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account.”**

Love does not rejoice at evil but rejoices at the truth—One thing that love does is the more love you have the more you will turn away from evil... God is found in truth and love... Satan is the father of lies and is found in evil.... the further you are from evil... the closer you are to God... the more you will rejoice!

**(7) Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things**—the key word in these is “All”... it is the idea that through love we will put up with the consequences of putting Christ and the gospel before everything else... face it... putting Christ first in this life will most likely make this life more difficult than easier... but love bears anything the world throws at us because of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

“**Believes all things**” doesn’t mean we believe everything the world is throwing at us... that would be naïve and indiscriminating... the act of believing and hoping in all things implies that love will never stop having faith and will never lose hope.

It is the idea of having a total commitment to the TRUE TRUTH!... and we will have complete hope in the promises of the gospel... there is an eternal future blessing for the Christian... it is only with complete faith and hope that we then can endure all things...

We come to the third part of this “encomium”... this elevation and praise of love.

**3. Comparisons (13:8-12)** The superiority of agape over spiritual gifts.

We need to see that Paul makes a distinction between that which is eternal—love and that which is temporal—spiritual gifts (and all activity on this earth)... another distinction is the partial and the perfect or complete... the spiritual gifts are imperfect... or partial... where love is perfect... complete.

**Read verse 8**

A literal translation would be **love never falls...** love never collapses... it always will stand... Love will go on through eternity... on the other hand... eventually... the spiritual gifts... though important now... they will eventually fall away.... They will not go on through eternity.

Paul says... *Love will never cease to exist... but the gifts of tongues will pass away... the gift of healing will fall away... the gift of prophecy will cease...* and the argument in the church today is... when?... have they already? Are some gone?... some fallen away?... and some are still here

waiting for their final day?...some use this verse to support their belief that all the gifts have ceased....

[we could argue this!... next week we will a bit]...

### **PRINCIPLE: The spiritual gifts will all fall away but love is eternal**

The spiritual gifts exist only in what we might call the “imperfect state of man”... the moment Christ ascended to heaven and the Holy Spirit arrived to all believers at Pentecost in Acts 2... all the way to the *consummation of all things new* described in Revelation 21.... Where the world is perfected by God.

As long as we are in the imperfect state... spiritual gifts... at least some of the spiritual gifts will be used to edify the church... but they will completely give way to the perfection of love when we are all made perfect!... we will have perfect knowledge.

Until then

### **Read verses 9 & 10**

As God ushers in all that is perfect and complete...the intended goal of creation... **When the perfect has come...**

Who? What? When?...the “perfect”

Possibilities:

- The completion of scripture.
- The rapture of the church
- The completion of the church
- The second coming
- The eternal state

**I believe the latter... the future eternal state....**God brings in full complete and perfect knowledge...right now we only know in part... but we will one day have full knowledge...so simultaneously He will abolish...or do away with that which is not perfect... that which is not complete..... there will be no need for spiritual gifts when the world has been made perfect.

Spiritual gifts are amazing in the imperfect world of NOW... but they would be Ho-Hum in a perfect world!... why do they have to cease?...great illustration:

### **Read verse 11**

There is an age... appropriate to certain to certain human activities... a six week old baby is expected to need just about everything done for her... a one year old is a completely different

story... they have become mobile... they may be walking or running... but they don't yet drive automobiles.

And when one becomes an adult... they should by then be feeding themselves and changing their own diapers!... Paul is showing us through the maturing of a person that in each stage of life, activities that were common and even necessary before have become unnecessary now.

Tongues... prophesying... healing... even knowledge...preaching and teaching were/are suited for a time... that time will pass and a new set of circumstances and purpose are presented... tongues have done their job and are no longer needed.....same with all the other spiritual gifts...they are and will be “done away” with.

### **Read verse 12**

God knows everything about us... we know only partially

A lot of possibilities here... thinking about mirrors... 1. Mirrors produce a clear reflection of the original subject. 2. Mirrors don't show everything. 3. Mirrors can distort reality... I like the ones that make me look thin!

A person looking in a mirror does not see the object directly... the mirror is a intermediary...  
**WHAT ONE GETS IN A MIRROR IS ONLY A REFLECTION OF REALITY...NOT THE REALITY ITSELF.**

When you look at a mirror...you don't see yourself... you see a mirror image of yourself... with the aid of spiritual gifts... you really do see...but what you see is only partial...your sight is incomplete.

But there is a time coming when there will no longer be a mirror.... Or the need for one... for our eyes will be opened completely and we will be seeing “face to face”!... we will see Jesus Christ face to face.... Perfectly!.... when that happens... we will know Him fully!...

Our knowledge is incomplete now... but it will be made complete.

### **4. Epilogue (13:13-14:1)** The bottom line.

### **Read verse 13**

Love is supreme... Love is the greatest... Love is perfect... God is love (1 John 4:16)

**16 We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who remains in love remains in God, and God remains in him.**

Love has been juxtaposed to the amazing Spiritual gifts and has been seen to be far superior... how superior is love?... the three greatest virtues in life are faith, hope and love.... When faith and hope are added next to love... and love is declared the greatest of the three.... The immense heights of faith and hope elevate love even higher!

The Christian can be a Christian apart from spiritual gifts... all the gifts described in chapter 12... but what is absolutely indispensable is faith, hope and love.

- Faith has to do with the basis—the ground on which we stand.... The ground on which we stand is the gospel of Jesus Christ... that He died for our sins... and through Him we live eternally if we have placed our faith in Him.... He is the ground on which we stand. Who gives us...
- Hope is the reaching out for something to come... this is not all there is!... we have been given a hope through the gospel of Jesus Christ... to spend eternity with Him.... and all this is because of His perfect love for us.... without His love there would be no faith or hope.
- Love is being there and acting

**14:1** so... **Pursue love!**