

## The Wreckage and the Fire Pt 21

### THE MORE EXCELLENT WAY

*What Outlasts Everything the Church Can Do*

**1 Corinthians 12:31** - ...*And yet I show you a **MORE EXCELLENT WAY.***

**1 Corinthians 13:2** - *Though I have the gift of prophecy... but have not love, **I AM NOTHING.***

**1 Corinthians 13:8** - *Love never fails.*

INTRODUCTION - The Church has always been fascinated with power. We celebrate great preaching. We admire gifted worship leaders. We chase prophetic voices. We fill conferences because someone is known for miracles. We applaud charisma. We are drawn to gifting.

There is nothing wrong with that. God is the One who gives the gifts.

**The problem begins when we become more impressed with what God does THROUGH PEOPLE than what God is doing IN PEOPLE.**

That was Corinth. This was perhaps the most spiritually gifted church in the New Testament.

- They spoke in tongues.
- They prophesied.
- They operated in words of knowledge.
- They experienced miracles.
- They flowed in the supernatural.

**Yet they were also divided... immoral... competitive... jealous... offended and spiritually immature.**

**A church overflowing with the gifts of the Spirit while simultaneously starving for the fruit of the Spirit.**

Paul does something shocking. Right in the middle of his teaching on spiritual gifts, he slams on the brakes. Before he tells them **how** to operate in the gifts... he tells them **why**. Before he teaches them manifestation... he confronts their motivation.

God has never been looking for gifted people. God has always been looking for loving people.

The Holy Spirit never intended His gifts to become spiritual trophies. He intended them to become expressions of the Father's heart.

**The gifts are not the destination. Love is.**

The gifts are simply the road that carries heaven into broken lives.

**The greatest evidence of spiritual maturity is not how powerfully God moves through you. It is how faithfully God's love flows from you.**

## **1. LOVE IS THE MOTIVE**

**Without the right motive, the gift loses its meaning.**

**1 Corinthians 13:1-3** - Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.<sup>2</sup> And though I have *the gift of* prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.<sup>3</sup> And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.

Paul begins with the spectacular. He does not mention ordinary Christianity. He imagines the impossible.

- "I speak with the tongues of men and angels."
- "I understand every mystery."
- "I possess all knowledge."

- "I have faith that moves mountains."
- "I give away everything."
- "I die as a martyr."

**Yet Paul ends every example exactly the same way.  
Without love...**

- I am nothing.
- I gain nothing.
- It profits nothing.

**Notice the progression.**

- The gift becomes noise.
- The sacrifice becomes worthless.
- The minister becomes nothing.

**God never evaluates a gift apart from the heart  
carrying it.**

**Our generation often celebrates what is impressive.  
Heaven celebrates what is loving.**

**The Holy Spirit never anoints ego. He anoints humility.**

**He never empowers self-promotion. He empowers  
self-sacrifice.**

**A gift motivated by pride may impress people...but it  
never pleases God.**

Jesus never said the world would know we are His disciples by our gifts. He said they would know us by our love.

**The Holy Spirit is attracted to surrendered hearts long before He entrusts supernatural hands.**

## **2. LOVE IS THE MANIFESTATION**

**Every gift should reveal the character of Christ.**

**1 Corinthians 13:4-8** - Love suffers long *and* is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; <sup>5</sup>does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; <sup>6</sup>does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; <sup>7</sup>bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. <sup>8</sup>Love never fails. But whether *there are* prophecies, they will fail; whether *there are* tongues, they will cease; whether *there is* knowledge, it will vanish away.

Most people read this as a description of love. The early church saw something much greater. They saw Jesus. Every phrase points to Him.

- Love is patient. - Jesus was patient.
- Love is kind. - Jesus was kind.

- Love is not arrogant. - The King of Glory wrapped a towel around His waist and washed dirty feet.
- Love bears all things. - Jesus bore a cross.

**Paul is saying something profound. The greatest manifestation of the Holy Spirit is not power. It is Christlikeness.**

**We have spent decades arguing over manifestations while neglecting transformation.**

The Holy Spirit did not come merely to give us gifts. He came to make us look like Jesus.

**The gifts reveal His power. Love reveals His nature.**

**Power may astonish people...but love heals them. Miracles can change someone's circumstances. Only love changes someone's heart.**

**People may admire your gifting, but they will remember your love.**

### **3. LOVE IS THE MEASURE**

**Everything that is eternal is measured by love.**

**Then Paul lifts their eyes beyond this present age.**

**1 Corinthians 13:8-13** - Love never fails. But whether *there are* prophecies, they will fail; whether *there are* tongues, they will cease; whether *there is* knowledge, it will vanish away. <sup>9</sup> For we know in part and we prophesy in part. <sup>10</sup> But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away. <sup>11</sup> When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. <sup>12</sup> For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. <sup>13</sup> And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these *is* love.

**Everything that we are fighting over...everything we are comparing ourselves to...everything we are competing with...everything we are building identity around...is temporary.**

**We are spending our entire life chasing something heaven says is passing away.**

**The gifts belong to this age. Love belongs to eternity.**

- Faith will become sight.
- Hope will become fulfillment.

**God does not merely possess love - God is love.**

- One day we will no longer need prophecy because we will stand face to face with the Word.
- We will no longer need words of knowledge because we will know fully.
- We will no longer need healing because there will be no sickness.

**But we will still love.**

**The gifts introduce people to Jesus. Love makes them want to stay with Him.**

## **CONCLUSION**

**The extremes:** Some churches have rejected the gifts because they have seen them abused. Others have exalted the gifts while forgetting the character required to carry them.

**Paul rejects both extremes.**

**The gifts are not the destination - Love is.**

- Every prophecy should travel on the road of love.
- Every miracle should flow through the heart of love.
- Every sermon should be carried by love.
- Every song should be saturated with love.

- Every act of service should be motivated by love.

**When love becomes the motive...Jesus becomes visible. When Jesus becomes visible...people are transformed. When people are transformed...the Kingdom advances.**

- One day every gift will complete its assignment.
- Every sermon will be preached.
- Every prophecy will be fulfilled.
- Every miracle will have served its purpose.
- Every tongue will become silent.

But when the dust settles...when history closes...when eternity begins...one thing will still be standing.

**LOVE.** Because love is not merely the greatest gift.

**Love is the atmosphere of Heaven, the nature of God, and the more excellent way.**