

**Before Reading**

The Church in Corinth needed Paul's teaching on love in ch 13 because they were prone to division, pride and jealousy. So first we read part of the chapter before it, 1 Cor 12 p 1153. In Corinth, some people were praying in a non-human language, and some were treating it as a mark of extreme holiness. Paul had to tell them about all the other gifts of the Holy Spirit, and their relative importance; 'tongues' came last on the list, not first.

A strange language is no guarantee of holiness: Suppose, v 3 someone said, in a 'tongue', 'A curse on Jesus' - well that was not from the Spirit of God. "And no-one can say, 'Jesus is Lord' and mean it, except by the Holy Spirit."

God's Spirit gives different gifts to different Christians.

v 7. To each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given *for the common good* Paul goes on to use the analogy of the different parts of the human body: Read first: 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, 27-30a

**Message starts here.**

Whatever gift the Holy Spirit has given you (and it is OK to eagerly desire the gifts that come higher up the list, gifts that build up the church, like proclaiming God's word and teaching) there is one feature of the Christian life that the Spirit gives to *all* Christians, Love.

The Spirit inspired Paul the Apostle to write this famous hymn

v 1-3	show the necessity of love	it is essential
vv 4-7	describes the nitty-gritty of love,	its elements
v8-end,	the nature of love.	it is eternal

Up until the New Testament, the highest form of love in Greek thought was to love that which was lovely.

To love a person *because of their beauty*, or a virtue *because it was virtuous*, was the limit of their language.

How natural that a groom should love his radiant bride.

But the Christian church discovered a new kind of love, They adopted the Greek word Agape to describe it. It is love for the unlovely.

Romans 5: vv 6, 8 and 10 When we were ungodly rebels, God loved us. When we were sinners, Christ died for us. When we were enemies of God, God came looking for us and made reconciliation possible. Agape - love that takes the initiative.

1 John 4:10 This is love, not that we loved God (who is worthy of all love and obedience) but that He loved us (sinners though we are) and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sin to be the means by which our sins are forgiven. ( Today's English Version)

So as we read chapter 13, let's try to visualise Paul's words by thinking of Jesus.

1 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

3 If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

5 It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

8 Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.

9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part,

10 but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears.

11 When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.

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.

13 And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

### 13:v 1

Jesus could speak in the tongues of men and angels,  
but it was never without love

e.g.

*His preaching* touched chords in hearts. The common people heard him gladly.

Children came when he called, recognising a love they could trust. Mothers brought their babes in arms for him to bless.

### v2

He spoke of the strength that faith wields. 'If you have faith as little as a grain of mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, move, and it will.'

I guess some Christians in Corinth had found such faith; could they have become a little proud of it, or themselves?.

Paul had to add the warning: if you have faith that can move mountains - but don't have love, you are nothing.

Jesus had the faith to heal the sick, but it was because of his love for them that he did so.

He had the faith to feed the 5,000, but it was compassion that moved him to do so; they were like sheep without a shepherd.

### v3a and c

The hated tax collector, Zacchaeus, was so moved by the simple friendship of Jesus that he sold up his tax business, paid back four-fold any ill-gotten gains, and gave away half his total assets, which I guess was all of the rest. (Luke 19:1-10)

Jesus so touched Zacchaeus by love that he gave up his lucrative career to follow him. He saw in Jesus someone who had himself given up a joinery business, and gave himself to preaching and helping the poor.

### v3b

We recognise that death by fire is horrendous; Jesus went one worse, in crucifixion.

But even as the soldiers nailed him to the crossbar, he was praying for them, Father forgive them they don't know what they are doing. What Love!

To see the *necessity* of love as *essential*, we look at Jesus

Secondly, v4-7 shows the nitty-gritty of love, its elements

Paul begins and ends this list with positives:

**patient** (reaction, when ill treated, or to difficulty, annoyance, pain, delay. )

**kind** (takes initiative, sees needs, sees opportunities.)

In between, 8 negatives to illustrate patience and kindness. These next words all fall under one or other of the first two. Patient... and kind.

does not envy cf John the Baptist That man is baptising more than you He must increase, I must decrease

does not boast, Mt of Transfiguration - Jesus declined Peter's rash offer of permanent markers to rank Jesus with Moses & Elijah

is not proud

Not rude, abrasive

not self-seeking Jesus declined to feed himself by turning stones into bread

not easily angered but some anger is good - at exploitation, Cleansing of temple  
Gentile court  
How often *our* anger bubbles to the surface when it is only hurt pride.

Keeps no record of wrongs of we are really bad at this: in families we complain, 'you *always* burn the toast', or 'you *never* do the dishes' Words that show we are keeping a score of the other persons' wrongs. You may challenge me: Jesus at the Lakeshore asked peter three times 'do you love me', which matched the triple denial. Does that not sound like Jesus keeping a score? I put it to you, that was not because *Jesus* had been keeping count, but *Peter*. Jesus did it only so that Peter could be cleansed of the memory of each failure, and re-commissioned for service.



Such was the efficacy of the cross, he really was forgiven. **Mic 7:19** You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea. (And Corrie ten Boom added: "and God puts up a sign, 'No Fishing'" It is because God does not count our sins, but sees the death of Christ as sufficient to pay for them, that we must beware counting the sins others do against us.

Love does not delight in evil but (back to positives) rejoices with the truth  
Jesus said, I am the truth.  
(unlike much newspaper reporting nowadays) When we see people come to Christ, to know him as the way to the Father, believe him as the truth, and serve him as the life, there is rejoicing in heaven over each sinner who repents. is that where we find our joy today? Or do we look for pleasures in entertainment, in pastimes?

love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres  
So, necessity of Love - essential, nitty gritty of love, elements:

**v8 Love never fails. Distinguish** from v7 'perseveres'  
i.e. para 3, v8-end, the nature of love. it is eternal

Love is a relationship word. We're made to be friends with God not primarily for *service*, though we will be given tasks to do, and the strength and gifts of the spirit to do them.  
It is not the gifts that count, but what God accomplishes by them, building up the church.

You may deliver a masterly speech, but it's not a cracking sermon unless God uses it to bring one person to repentance , another to faith in Christ as Saviour and Lord, another to clarity of guidance, another to peace amid stress and so on.

Love is different from all the gifts because, one way or another, they will all come to an end, .

That's what the next phrases illustrate - things that *don't* last for ever.

## Vv 8-12

Explain mirrors made of metal, beaten flat and polished, but never completely flat, so image always a little distorted. This mirror not for seeing our own reflection, but seeing round a corner as it were to the invisible God who can only be partly seen in what he has made - creation - and done - in Jesus. In love that takes the initiative and loves the unlovely: us!

And here is another temporary picture: Communion bread and wine. This is my body  
When we trust and obey Jesus as Saviour and lord, 1 Corinthians 12:12 then we become in another sense, the body of Christ. Not alone, but as a church.

When we are all as filled with love as we are meant to be - as we can be, because the Spirit of Christ can fill us - we are another bit of evidence - another sign of the God of love, even if people, looking at us, only get a distorted picture of God as if in an uneven mirror. We together are the body of Christ!

Love is for people, not things - for God and for God's people. We will one day see our loving heavenly Father, face to face !

Other spiritual gifts will one day have served their purpose and no longer be needed.  
They are obsolescent and will one day be obsolete.

Even characteristics that are better classed, not as *gifts* of the Spirit, but as the *fruit* of the Spirit: **faith + hope**, will come to an end when we get to heaven

Once we are in heaven, we will not merely have faith in God; we will see him, know him,  
Once we are in heaven, at home with Jesus, what better place is there to hope for?

So even Faith and Hope will one day be obsolete.

But love? The greatest of these is love because

**Love never fails, it is eternal**

In heaven, everything else will have changed, but love comes into its own.

Today, we are all invited to feast with the King.

We do not yet see him

But he has given us these symbols of his body, his death, his resurrection, his love, his life-changing power.

Let me be part of you, he says,

Let me so fill your mind and behaviour that you spread my love wherever you go. Make this fellowship a bit of heaven!

Be the body of Christ as a congregation, an evidence that God's love really has come to earth in Jesus.

Be a genuine congregation because of my love

Find a genuine minister who is full of the *gifts* of the Spirit *and* the *fruit* of the Spirit, especially **love**.

Come and eat these symbols of the body of Christ

Come in love and be filled with love,

Come and be the body of Christ,

Joined to our only king and head, Jesus, King of Love.

**1 Corinthians 12: 27** Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.  
28 And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.  
29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles?  
30 Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?  
31 But eagerly desire the greater gifts.

And now I will show you the most excellent way. **1 Corinthians 13: 1** If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. 4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. 8 Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. 11 When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. 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. 13 And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love