

# THE MOST EXCELLENT WAY

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The Gathering, Pt. 4, 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

November 12, 2023

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

## **Fruit or gifts?**

And now I will show you the most excellent way . . . .

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. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

<sup>4</sup> Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. <sup>5</sup> It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. <sup>6</sup> Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. <sup>7</sup> It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

<sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> For we know in part and we prophesy in part, <sup>10</sup> but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> 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.

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

1 Corinthians 12:31-13:1

1. There is a better way . . . than competing over the gifts of the Spirit
2. The gifts of the Spirit require the fruit of the Spirit to accomplish their purpose
3. Paul balances both what love is and what love does not do
4. The gifts are necessary only as long as we live in the “imperfection”
5. Note that the faith and hope (along with protecting and persevering) are, as Spurgeon says, love’s labors (13:7)

The main point: The fruit of the Spirit (singular) empower the gifts of the Spirit (plural), and love leads the fruit

## What we learn about love

Next to this, love has four sweet companions. There are with her tenderness that "beareth all things," faith that "believeth all things," hope that "hopeth all things," and patience which "endureth all things," and he that hath tenderness, and faith, and hope, and patience hath a brave quaternion of graces to guard him, and he need not be afraid. Best of all, love sucks her life from the wounds of Christ. Love can bear, believe, hope, and endure because Christ has borne, believed, and hoped, and endured for her.

Spurgeon, "Love's Labors"

### 1. Religion without love is useless -- exercising gifts without the Spirit

*<sup>26</sup> If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. <sup>27</sup> Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.*

James 1

### 2. Love allows us to share the life of God

*<sup>7</sup> Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup> Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. <sup>9</sup> This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. <sup>10</sup> This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. <sup>11</sup> Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. <sup>12</sup> No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.*

I John 4

### 3. Love is always consistent with truth and order

*<sup>14</sup> Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. <sup>15</sup> Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. <sup>16</sup> From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*

Ephesians 4

*<sup>33</sup> For God is not a God of disorder but of peace.*

1 Corinthians 14

### 4. Gifts are for the church age and so are necessarily incomplete, but love is forever

*<sup>8</sup> Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. <sup>9</sup> The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." <sup>10</sup> Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.*

Romans 13

## Putting love in action

<sup>7</sup> Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup> Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. <sup>9</sup> This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. <sup>10</sup> This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. <sup>11</sup> Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. <sup>12</sup> No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

1 John 4

1. In showing us the “DNA” of the body, Paul is revealing what God is like

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. <sup>17</sup> In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. <sup>18</sup> There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

1 John 4

2. Love gives us a lens through which we see Jesus’ work

*Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.*

John 13:1

<sup>8</sup> *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

<sup>9</sup> *Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him!*

Romans 5

3. We now have a way of discerning which gift may be the greater (see 12:31a) – that which allows me to most effectively love the other

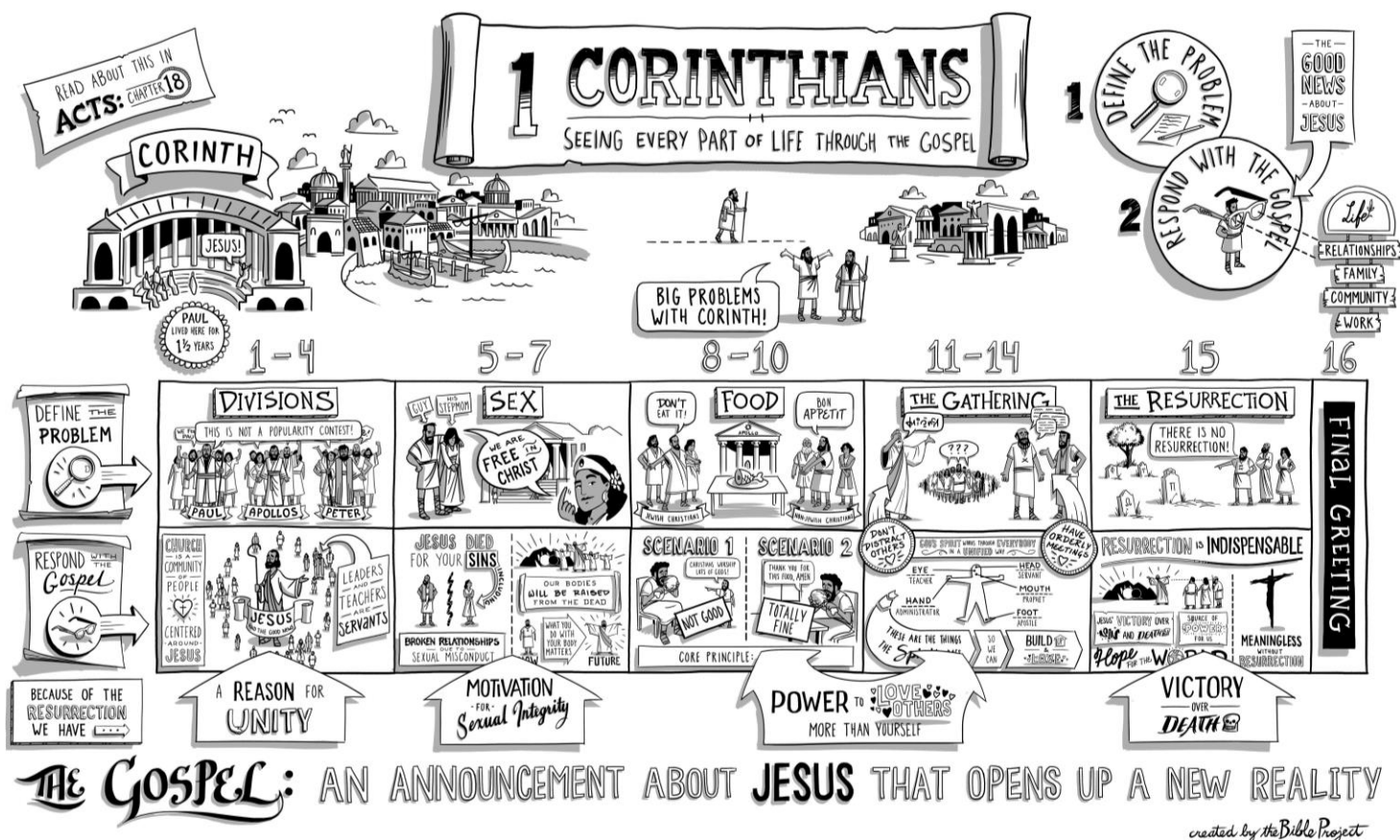
*But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, <sup>25</sup> so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. <sup>26</sup> If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.*

1 Corinthians 12

4. We now can begin the hard work of deciding what happens when the gifts are in conflict – love wins

<sup>6</sup> *The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.*

Galatians 5:6



## Resources for further study

The Bible Project team does a great job of introducing 1 Corinthians at <https://bibleproject.com/guides/book-of-1-corinthians/>

Spurgeon, Edwards and Ryle have 1 Corinthians 13 studies at <https://www.biblebb.com/brefindex/1co.htm>

Ryle's study 1 Corinthians 10:14 is a good summary of the book at <https://www.monergism.com/flee-idolatry>

John Piper has a very good 1 Corinthians series at <https://www.desiringgod.org/scripture/1-corinthians/messages>

Keller has a wonderful piece on spiritual gifts at [www.trinitypca.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/0e1508579\\_discerning-and-exercising-spiritual-gifts.pdf](http://www.trinitypca.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/0e1508579_discerning-and-exercising-spiritual-gifts.pdf)

Doug has referenced these commentaries:

Simon Kistemaker's *New Testament Commentary* (Baker, 1993)

Anthony Thiselton's *NIGTC* volume (Eerdmans, 2000)

Harold Mare's commentary in the *EBC* series (Zondervan, 1976)

Derek Prime has a shorter study "Opening Up 1 Corinthians" (Day One, 2005)

Alexander Maclaren's commentary on this text is at

[https://www.preceptaustin.org/1\\_corinthians\\_maclaren\\_3#wl73](https://www.preceptaustin.org/1_corinthians_maclaren_3#wl73)

