

Spiritual Gifts, Part 4 (1 Corinthians 13:4–13)

The Superiority of Love

By Pastor Jeff Alexander (12/4/2018)

Introduction

1. The Corinthian church was wrongly focused on certain sensational gifts because they created personal excitement and prideful distinguishing. This caused abuse and disunity in the body.
2. Paul seeks to correct this error in four steps: (1) establishing the corporate nature of the church for properly using spiritual gifts; (2) pointing to a superior way to “pursue higher gifts” through a regulating principle; (3) arguing for the superiority of prophecy over tongues; (4) maintaining proper order of worship to curb the misuse of gifts.
3. Paul transitioned from establishing the essential unity of the body by encouraging the saints (1 Corinthians 12:31).
 - a. In seeking grace-gifts, the one necessary motivating factor in the Corinthians’ zeal, *agape* love, was absent.
 - b. *Agape* must regulate the surpassingly excellent way to seek the higher gifts for three reasons: (1) without *agape*, any pursuit or sacrifice is worthless; (2) the qualities of *agape* make it indispensable; (3) *agape* alone is permanent.
 - c. Today and next week, we want to consider the qualities of *agape*. The section before us today (verses 4, 5a) contains three characteristics of *agape*, showing the passive and active side of each.

I. Patience and Kindness

1. Love is *patient* with present difficulty and wrong, waiting upon God to change things. This word means to suffer or bear long—longsuffering.
 - a. Patience is the *passive* aspect of self-control in response to personal setbacks and opposition over which one has no control.
 - b. Patience is the essence of *perseverance*, enduring with toleration (forbearance) and not losing heart. It is enduring evil, injury, and provocation from others without resentment, indignation, or revenge.
 - c. Patience is evidence of the grace of God that gives the mind power over selfish anger, enabling the saint to wait for God in trials of personal hurt.
 - d. Patience is to be God-like (Romans 2:4) and is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22).
2. Love is *kind* (“to show oneself mild”), being the *active* counterpart of patience.
 - a. Kindness is the positive action of response to all persons that we encounter. It treats all persons the same, doing good to them.
 - b. Kindness is necessary because one’s apparent patience may be merely self-restraint motivated by fear or self-protection.
 - c. Not only is God patient with sinners but also is He kind in His response to them as He calls them to repentance (Romans 2:4).
3. Matthew Henry notes that “under these two generals [patience and kindness] all the particulars of the character may be reduced.” Patience and kindness are marks and essentials of Christian faith.

II. Not Jealous or Boastful

1. Love does not *envy*, trusting that God is fully in charge of what and where the believer is in life. Envy is the passive aspect of the sin of discontent. As we will note at the conclusion of this message, envy often subtly masks itself as spiritual concern.
 - a. The term translated *envy* (as to things) and *jealousy* (as to persons) means “to burn with zeal.” It is literally to be grieved at the good of others, their gifts, qualities, honors, possessions, or status. This is a very common but seldom recognized sin.
 - 1) Envy is not a small sin: Abel was murdered due to Cain’s envy (Genesis 4:3–8); Jesus was crucified because of the envy of the Pharisees (Matthew 27:18). Envy not only destroys others, it is a festering sore that will eat the jealous person alive.
 - 2) No one is equal (save in the eyes of the law). Envy cannot tolerate this truth. Love understands and rejoices in others.
 - b. In loving one’s neighbor, we not only help them in their need but rejoice and celebrate their success, prosperity, happiness, and sanctification (Romans 12:10).
2. Love does not *boast*, seeking to promote self before others.
 - a. The term used here means to exalt oneself.
 - 1) Love says, “It is not important that my horn gets tooted, but if it does, I must not be doing it.”
 - 2) Parading oneself, in this sense, is (often falsely) an attempt to elevate oneself to gain attention.
 - b. Love works anonymously, avoiding attention and praise. Love gives because love loves giving (Philippians 2:3).

III. Not Arrogant or Rude

1. Love is not *arrogant* or puffed up.
 - a. The Greek here means “to inflate or swell up,” expecting others to treat one differently because of preferable circumstances (Luke 11:43).
 - b. When one is truly elevated, love refuses to draw attention to self or to claim credit. Love recognizes that whatever we have, it came as a gift of grace (John 3:27).
2. Love is not *rude*—does not lack courtesy.
 - a. The Greek, translated *rude*, literally means “to behave in an unseemly way.” In other words, love is marked by courtesy, tact, consideration, propriety, and politeness.
 - b. Where love is, there will be good manners, showing kindness to all.

What Can We Take Away?

1. Love understands that God is sovereign and is ruling in all the circumstances of our lives. We are exactly where He wants us.
2. We must also understand that many of the difficulties we face are a consequence of our own foolishness—selfishness and lack of love.
3. Envy and jealousy are the root of gossip. With Christians, envy can be masked as spiritual concern or righteous indignation.