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1 Corinthians 13:1 - 14:19



1 Corinthians - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg delves into the importance of love in 1 Corinthians 13:1-14:19, discussing how love is the key purpose for spiritual gifts and not self-aggrandizement. He notes the Greek word for love, agape, and how this selfless, godlike love is central to Christian theology. The chapter emphasizes that spiritual gifts are meant to serve others and edify the body of Christ, rather than being used for personal gain, and that love is the paramount virtue in the Christian life.

Transcript

There have been a number of chapters in 1 Corinthians that we have taken a whole chapter in a single session. There have also been some chapters that have been divided into two sessions. It would seem that if any chapter deserves at least one whole session to itself, it's the famous love chapter.

Chapter 13. And I've been trying to decide whether I should try to give it a whole chapter to itself. The subject matter certainly warrants it.

However, the length of the chapter does not, it seems to me, because chapter 13 is only 13 verses long, which makes it equal in length to chapter 8, the two of them being the two shortest chapters in the book. Chapter 13 is less than half the length of chapter 12, and less than a third the length of chapter 14. It's just like a little parenthesis thrown in between chapters 12 and 14, which discuss the gifts of the Spirit and spirituality in general.

Certainly, chapter 13 is the heart of that discussion, because what Paul is saying is that there are wonderful gifts that the Holy Spirit gives, and we should not frown upon any of them. We should desire the best of them. But none of them is of any account at all, except through its exercise through love.

The purpose of the gifts is not self-aggrandizement or anything like that. The purpose of the gifts is to serve, to serve the interest of the body of Christ, and that is, of course, what love is. Therefore, to have the gifts, but not to be operating in love, is as good as not having the gifts at all, as far as God is concerned.

Maybe even worse than not having the gifts at all, because if the gifts of the Spirit are operated without love, they can bring a bad name on the gifts of the Spirit in themselves. We all know of people who shy away from Pentecostalism or charismatic stuff because they've seen some kind of wacky exhibition of the gifts that have nothing to do with serving and edifying other people. It's, if anything, sometimes driven people away from the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

So maybe it's even better to have no gifts than to have gifts without love. Well, chapter 13, as I say, is about love. Everybody, I think, knows that.

The word for love in the chapter, you probably also know, is the Greek word agape, or agape, really. The accent is on the second syllable. Agape.

And you may have heard all kinds of things about the word agape. I certainly have. Preachers are fond of making all kinds of statements about this word, most of which are not true.

For one thing, agape is sometimes contrasted with phileo, which is another Greek word for love. Phileo is the description of a love that exists, especially among brothers, family members. And many times people say, well, phileo is one level of love, but agape is a higher level of love.

That is possible. In some contexts, that may be intended. However, there are times in the New Testament where agape and phileo are used interchangeably.

They both mean love. It's possible that agape has a bit wider or different range of meaning than phileo, but they both are words for love. We have sometimes heard that agape means the most spiritual, the most godlike, the most unselfish kind of love.

Well, maybe it does, but if it does, it's not inherent in the Greek word. That is a meaning that the New Testament has given it. And that's fine.

Some people have said that agape was a word that had to be coined in order to speak of this unique kind of love, and that the Greek language didn't even have the word agape before the New Testament came along, and they needed a word in the Greek to explain this special divine kind of love, and so they coined the word agape. This, too, is not accurate. The word agape was in the Greek language before the time of the New Testament.

I don't know if you've heard any of those legends about agape before, but just to set the record straight, the word agape was in the Greek language before. It was a regular word for love, but it had more or less fallen out of regular use in the first century, and it seems that the New Testament did take up an old word and imbue it with new meaning and new significance. And all those things that are said about agape are perhaps somewhat true in a sense.

I mean, the way the New Testament uses the word, it clearly is a reference to God's love and to God's love in us. Phileo is a word that is sometimes used interchangeably with it, but often phileo does speak more of a human kind of brotherly kind of a love, whereas agape is the word that is regularly used for the kind of love that is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. So when you read the famous passages in the Bible about love, whether it's in 1 John or in Galatians 5 or here in 1 Corinthians 13, it's always going to be the word agape.

And I'm not going to act like a Greek scholar and try to tell you all the nuances of the word. We don't need to, because you don't learn the nuances of a word from its etymology or from the dictionary all the time. Sometimes you do it only by usage.

We can make mistakes about the meaning of a word if we're just going to go and see how the word originated and what its roots were and so forth. Sometimes that seems like a real responsible way to really get at what a word means. However, the word might in the time of the New Testament be used very differently than its roots would suggest.

And there are words that change in their meaning in usage. Now, to know what agape means in the New Testament, all we have to do is read 1 Corinthians 13, because we see how Paul uses it. Love is like this.

And so what he describes is the particular Christian understanding of the word agape, whether it bore all of this meaning in the Greek language prior to this, whether the lexicons would carry all these descriptive statements about the word. I do not know. I seriously doubt.

I think what Paul is doing is bringing some Christian theology into it and using the Greek word agape to mean all of those things. And he tells us here in this chapter what he means when he speaks of agape. Now, Paul has spoken of agape previously, the need to edify one another.

In Chapter 12, he's been talking about the gifts of the Spirit. He has had nothing negative to say about them, but he does say there is something more excellent. In verse 31 of Chapter 12, he said, but earnestly desire the best gifts.

Some gifts are all the gifts are good. Some are better and best and they are to be desired. But he says, and yet I show you a more excellent way.

Some people think that in saying I show you a more excellent way, which obviously goes into Chapter 13, talks about love. What he's saying is you can have the gifts if you want, but I'll show you something better than gifts. Go for love.

And people take that, especially people who aren't into gifts. And they say, well, you can have the gifts. I'll have love.

I'll have the fruit of the Spirit, which is love. It's a more excellent way anyway. But that

doesn't do justice to Paul's statement that we are to earnestly desire the best gifts.

And there is a more excellent way of using them than the way the Corinthians apparently were. And then the way that some modern folk perhaps do too. And that is to use them as to express loving service to one another, which is what the gifts are for.

Before we read 1 Corinthians 13, let me show you that Peter said essentially the same thing about the use of the gifts. In 1 Peter 4, verses 10 and 11, 1 Peter 4, verses 10 and 11. As each one has received a gift, and the word is charisma, minister it to one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

Now, what do you do with the gifts? You minister to one another with them, he says. You serve one another. The word minister means serve.

So, if you've received a gift, what are you to do with it? You're supposed to serve one another with it, and thus you become a good steward of it. You are a steward of it, whether a good one or otherwise. You are a steward of whatever gifts you've given.

If you don't serve one another with it, you're not a good steward. You're a bad steward. But if you serve other people with your gifts, that is being a good steward of the gift itself.

And he expands a little bit in verse 11. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. That's one kind of gifting.

If anyone ministers or serves, another kind of gifting. Let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. Now, Peter then says that if you have a gift, the purpose of that gift is to serve one another.

And thus be a good steward of it. Paul has the same thought, of course. Apparently the Corinthians liked the gifts, but they may have been attracted to them more for their sensational value than for their usefulness to others.

And to exercise them unselfconsciously, just because you know that the church will benefit from your exercise of the gift, is the proper use of it. And Paul, in chapter 13, by the way, I don't think we're going to take the entire session of chapter 13. I do intend to go into chapter 14 as well.

We have taken, in the course of talking about chapter 12, we have taken a fair amount of chapter 14 into consideration. And there may leave but a few things to say about it. But let's work on chapter 13 first and deal with 14 when we come to it.

Paul says, Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become as a sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. 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 and have not love, I am nothing. 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.

This is the first of three sections of this chapter. And you can see that the first three verses are all making the same point. Anything you do, however commendable or impressive, if it's not in love, it's nothing.

Which means that love is everything. Because anything else without it is nothing. Now, the first things he mentions hypothetically that he might have without love is the gift of tongues.

In verse one, he talks about if I speak with the tongues of men and of angels. Now, this raises the question as to whether there are such a thing as tongues of angels. In a lot of the apocryphal literature, there were references to the tongues of angels.

This was not in the Bible, but in the Jewish writings of the time, which Paul and some of his readers may well have been aware of. But whether the angels actually speak languages of their own is nowhere made clear anywhere in Scripture. Anytime we see angels speaking in the Bible, they're speaking in the language of the people they're speaking to, which was an earthly language.

If they have another language that they use among themselves, we don't know. However, on the basis of this verse, and perhaps as well as that chapter 14, verse 2, which says, For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him. The suggestion is that there are times when you're speaking in tongues, you're not speaking in an earthly language.

You're speaking in a tongue that no one understands, only God understands, and it's a tongue of angels. It's a heavenly language. Now, there are those who believe in tongues, but they don't believe there's a heavenly language.

They say there's only human languages. Speaking in tongues is always in human languages, they say. Well, that cannot be proven.

However, this verse doesn't give conclusive proof that there are tongues of angels, either, because Paul seems to be given a hypothetical situation. I mean, he goes on to talk about having all faith and moving mountains and knowing all mysteries, which he certainly didn't claim to know, and giving his body to be burned and giving all his goods to the poor, which he didn't literally do. He's not speaking of something that is a reality, but something that could conceivably be a reality.

This is a hypothetical thing, and possibly using even a bit of hyperbole in there. I mean, to have all faith, to move mountains, to understand all mysteries and all knowledge, he's being a bit extreme, and he intends to. What he's trying to say is, if I have all these

things in their utmost manifestation, without love, they don't even begin to show up on the chart.

In their weightiest form, they are less than nothing, and like dust in the balances. Now, because of his hypothetical tone here, and even the possible use of hyperbole, some have suggested that he's saying, if I spoke with the tongues of men, and even of angels, which he is not suggesting is really a possibility, but he's just trying to make it really extreme. He might be a believer that only there are tongues of men and not of angels.

But his thought could be, even if I spoke in the tongues of men, or for that matter, even of angels, if there were such tongues, it wouldn't make up for the deficiency in the air of love. And some people believe that the reference to tongues of angels is hypothetical, and a hyperbole is not intended to be taken literally. I couldn't say, I have no objection to there being tongues of angels, we just don't have any witness to it in the rest of scripture, so we don't know.

But I do believe that speaking in tongues does not always take the form of an understood language, understood by those who are present. But whether it's some language unknown to those who are present, but known to someone on the face of the earth, I cannot say. We really cannot, from this verse, take any particular doctrine about tongues, although some would like to.

It's possible Paul's just using flights of fancy, even if I could speak in the tongues of angels, if there were such tongues. It would still, without love, just be so much noise, and not be of any value. Verse 2, And though I have the gift of prophecy, which he elsewhere in chapter 14, verse 1, indicates is a very exalted gift, a very important gift, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and have all faith, so that I could move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

Now, again, these are some of the gifts, in addition to tongues, that he listed in chapter 12. Prophecy was listed, the gift of faith was listed. Now, in verse 2, we're referring to understanding all mysteries and all knowledge.

It's not inconceivable that he's referring there back to what he called in chapter 12 the word of wisdom and the word of knowledge. Remember he said, to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom, to another the word of knowledge. I told you I don't know exactly what those refer to.

I know what they're commonly referred to in Pentecostal circles, but I don't know for sure what Paul meant by them. But wisdom and mysteries are connected in Paul's thinking in 1 Corinthians chapter 2. In 1 Corinthians 2, verse 6, he says, But we do speak wisdom among those who are mature, but not the wisdom of this world, but we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom, and so forth. So, since he was talking that way in chapter 2 of the same book, when he talks about a word of wisdom, he might

be talking about someone expounding on something, which is disclosing one of the spiritual mysteries.

And word of knowledge simply expounding on that which is knowledge of God's truth, or of God's person, or whatever. I guess what I'm saying is, he may be saying something equivalent to word of wisdom or word of knowledge. He says, if I understand all mysteries and have all knowledge, it may just be going back to the list he gave earlier in chapter 12, of gifts where those things were possibly equated with this, and have all faith so I could remove mountains.

Now remember when we talked about the gift of faith, I said I'm not really exactly sure what it means. It apparently means an exceptional expression of faith beyond that which all Christians have, and so this would seem to confirm that that's what it means. He's talking about a gift of faith that is capable of moving mountains.

We've never known of any such situation in history, including among the apostles, where any mountains were moved by faith. Jesus, of course, is the one who indicated in his teaching that if one had sufficient faith they could move mountains. In Matthew, I think, 21-21, Jesus said that.

Or, yeah, I believe it was there. That if you had sufficient faith you could say to this mountain, be plucked up and cast into the sea, and it would be. Once again, I've never heard of anyone ever doing that, and I suspect that Jesus himself was using hyperbole.

And so Paul, following Jesus on that point, is here too. I can see the need for faith to do things equivalent to moving mountains. I mean, things that are equally impossible as that.

I just don't know on what situation we'd ever be calling on God to actually move a literal mountain. It seems to me he may have put them where he wants them for me to redecorate the world, but it's not possibly what he has in mind for my use of faith. Now, verse 3, he's still giving the same kind of argument, but he's moved from talking about gifts of the Spirit.

He doesn't, in verse 3, mention gifts of the Spirit, but he talks about things which are, well, which would be regarded generally as extreme forms of sacrifice, extreme forms of self-dedication, which one would assume could only be done through love, and yet he suggests they can be done without love. Namely, though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and don't have love, it profits nothing. Why would anyone give all their goods to feed the poor or give their body to be burned if not for love? Well, certainly those things can be done out of love, and the Bible makes that clear throughout the rest of Scripture, that a loving person will care for the poor, a loving person will lay down his life, all those things clearly are things that can be done through love, but Paul is suggesting that even those things, those acts in themselves, if

they're not really motivated by love, if there's some selfish reason for doing it, even the acts themselves carry no merit, there's no profit in it.

Now, what selfish reason would there be? Well, I don't know. I suppose the one most obvious would be out of pride and a desire to be recognized as a sacrificial person, that people might admire you for the sacrifice you made. I don't know how many people there are who would give their body to be burned in order to be admired for it.

They wouldn't be around to enjoy the admiration that people were giving them, but the point is there may be people who could do such things without love, and if they did, the act itself is not meritorious, unless it's love. What he's saying all the way through here is there's nothing at all that makes any difference to God except love and what is done through love, and that would include exercising the best gifts or even making the ultimate sacrifice of your life and your property. Now he goes into the next section of the chapter where in verses 4 through the beginning of verse 8, he kind of tells what he means when he says love.

What do you mean by love? I mean if I can give my body to be burned and have not love, if I can give all my goods to feed the poor and have not love, well then maybe I don't know what love is. What is it? Well, love is this. Love suffers long and is kind.

Now, the expression suffers long is just a reference to the old-fashioned English word long-suffering. Long-suffering is the King James word, which for some reason the new King James retained, although they modernized much of the language of the King James, they kept the old-fashioned King James word for long-suffering. In the King James Bible, you'll find the word long-suffering in some passages and the word patience in other passages.

Unfortunately, those words don't convey the same things to us in modern times that they did in the old times. What we think of as patience is what they called long-suffering in 1611 when the King James was translated. The English word long-suffering meant what we mean when we say patience.

And what patience means, of course, is that we're unruffled when we are forced to wait. We can bear with the inconvenience someone causes us of not being prompt or whatever. We think of that as being patient.

And that's what long-suffering means, being unprovoked, really, unprovoked in the face of being taken advantage of or whatever. I mean, it's got a fairly wide range of concepts in it. But when you use the word patient, you're speaking of the same concept that the word long-suffering means both in the King James and the New King James.

When the King James and the New King James use the word patient, they mean a different concept because in the old English, patient referred to being enduring. Patience

was perseverance or endurance, a different concept than our modern one. So the words long-suffering and patience in the King James and also in the New King James, unfortunately, can lead us astray if we don't know what it's meant by.

When he says love suffers long, it means love is long-suffering. And long-suffering used to mean what we now mean by patient. So some modern translations simply say love is patient, love is kind.

Now, when Paul talks about the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians, of course, love is the first of the fruit, but patience is on the list also, or long-suffering. And sometimes I think the New King James is inconsistent in its translation of it. Let me see here.

Galatians 5, 22 and 23, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering. Okay, there it is. That's patience.

Patience, patience, patience, patience, patience, kindness, long-suffering and kindness are fruits of the Spirit along with love. Paul says love is long-suffering, love is kind. And what that means is if you are a loving person and you are inconvenienced by somebody's slothfulness or somebody's doing something that they didn't... you were expecting them to do something else, or you wanted to meet them in a certain place and they ended up forgetting and keeping you waiting or whatever.

Being patient is a function of loving them. Of giving them the benefit of the doubt that they probably forgot. I mean, you could do the same, if not for the grace of God, there go you and so forth.

To be patient with people who are inconvenient is simply what love calls us to be. Again, if we are impatient with such people, it is a defect not in patience itself, but in love. We just don't love them as we love ourselves.

And we're supposed to do that. Likewise, kindness, it's obvious that if you love your neighbors, you love yourself. You'll be kind because you want to be treated kindly.

It hurts your feelings when people treat you unkindly, even when you deserve to be treated unkindly. You'd still rather have people deal gently with you than roughly. And obviously, if you're loving then your neighbors yourself, you'll be kind as well as patient.

Love does not envy. Why? Because love wants for the other person what it wants for itself. In other words, love is not self-centered.

It wishes the happiness and the benefit of the other party. Therefore, envy is the opposite of that. Envy is wanting for yourself what the other party has.

So envy is a mark that a person is not loving. It's the absence of love. Love does not parade itself and is not puffed up.

I guess we think of both of these things as parts of pride. Puffed up is an expression that has been used earlier in 1 Corinthians several times. It's a Greek word that means to be inflated.

It doesn't have an inflated self-opinion. And parading itself would have to do with, of course, I guess, not only having an inflated self-opinion, but acting like it. Acting proud, vaunting oneself is the King James word.

Putting yourself on display, being ostentatious, trying to get attention. Those things aren't loving. Those things are self-love, but they're not the love that God is looking for because it's the fruit of the spirit of his spirit in our life.

Verse 5, love does not behave rudely or unseemly, the King James says. Bad manners are unloving. You know, you ever wonder where some manners got started? Like why the fork has to be in that position and the spoon in another position at the table setting? Why is it that when you spill soup on your tie, it's not good manners to stick your tie in a water glass and clean it off? I mean, what's the deal? If it's practical, why should anyone care? Who made up these rules anyway? Who defined what's rude and what's not rude? Well, if you think about it, if you study manners, for the most part you'll find that most manners have their root in just trying to avoid making the other person feel uncomfortable.

Doing things that make people feel awkward or uncomfortable are often the very things that are considered to be impolite. Politeness, good manners. You might think it's just social custom, and to a certain extent it is.

But because it is social custom, people think in those categories. It used to be if a man didn't open the door for a woman, that was rude. Now, we might say, but she can open the door for herself and his hands are full, there's no reason he should have to do that, and that might be a perfectly good and reasonable thing to say, but in a society where men are expected to do that, it would offend.

A woman not having the door open for her. Now, we don't live in a society like that anymore, but it would have been considered rude, and rudeness is what offends people. It makes them uncomfortable, it makes them awkward, it makes them offended.

Therefore, love doesn't do that. Love doesn't do things that are offensive and impolite. It does not seek its own.

Love doesn't seek for its own interests. This is something Paul said also in, I guess in almost very similar words, in Philippians chapter 2. Philippians 2, verse 4, he said, Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Paul put it another way, in Romans 15, verses 2 and 3, where he said, Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification, for even Christ did not please

himself.

We're to be like Jesus, he didn't please himself, he didn't come to do that. That's the basic difference between being born again and not being born again, is who you're living to please. Really, it's that simple.

Whose pleasure is most important to me, mine or God's? If mine, then I'm not converted. If God's, then I am. If by God I'm referring to the Father Jesus Christ, I'm thinking of Jesus Christ as the expression of what God's pleasure is, because I'm a Christian in that case.

A person seeking his own things is not behaving like a Christian. And if you want to please God instead of yourself, you'll be seeking those things that obviously please God, and that would be things that help other people, and that make other people happy. God is pleased with that kind of an attitude.

So love doesn't seek its own, it seeks to bless others. It's not provoked, it thinks no evil. So these things, it seems almost redundant to comment on.

They're self-explanatory for the most part, and to me they seem obvious. Maybe they're not so obvious to everybody. Maybe it's just I've read this so many times, it just becomes part of the way you think about things without having to say so.

But it seems obvious that love is this way. Love is not provoked, verse 5 says, and that's a very interesting thing, because it would suggest that it's not possible for you to get angry at least in a selfish sense angry, angry at somebody who wrongs you, or offended if you are loving them. That to be offended is to be provoked.

Somebody has done something that has provoked a bad attitude toward them in you. Being provoked means that somebody can arouse in you something that wouldn't be there otherwise, and that they are in control of the climate of your inner person. Their actions can stimulate and arouse in you things that don't belong there.

That's what provoking generally means. And so if a person is loving, they are not capable of being provoked. Or to put it another way, if you are offended, or made angry by somebody's behavior toward you, then there's a deficiency there in the area of love, because love is not provoked.

And thinks no evil. The last line in verse 5. Love thinks no evil. Another way of understanding that is it does not keep account of evil.

It doesn't keep track of evil. And evil would be understood as things that people do against you. Evil conduct that wrongs you and injures you.

There are people who certainly will never allow themselves to forget all the injuries they've sustained. And they dwell on them. Whenever they're lonely or bored, they just

bring them up again in their mind and think about how many people have hurt them, and how many times it's been done, and what a victim they've been.

And such people are not healthy in their mind. A healthy mind is no doubt a loving mind. And one of the marks of spiritual health, and mental health I would say, if we could use that term, is that you tend to remember the positive things, and just kind of tend to forget the things that aren't positive.

I've heard that from even secular psychologists. I don't have much sympathy with psychology, but it's an observation that they've made, and an assessment they've made, that healthy minds tend to remember positives and forget negative things. Whereas minds that are a little bit sick tend to remember all the injuries they've sustained and tend to forget all the blessings.

Well, whether that's true in the psychological sense or not, it certainly is the case spiritually. The Bible indicates that we should always be thankful in everything. In order to do that, we've got to be thinking about the things that make us thankful, not the things that are grievous to us.

The Bible says, Bless the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits. Don't forget the good things. But there is virtue in forgetting the bad things, in forgiving and forgetting.

Love inclines you to want to forget what people did wrong to you, because you want to love them, and remembering what they did wrong to you makes it more difficult to love them. You just as soon put it behind you. Now, that doesn't mean irresponsibly, because if somebody has wronged you and has not repented, there's a good chance that they'll just keep doing the same kind of thing, if you give them the chance.

There's a place, as Jesus said, to go and confront them, elicit their repentance, and when they repent, forgive them. But the point is that there are people who, even after they say they've forgiven you, they haven't forgotten it, and they bring it up from time to time, especially if you do it more than once. And they keep a list, they keep an account of evil.

You may notice a marginal reading on that part of verse 5, where it says, Thinks no evil, the marginal reading says, Keeps no account of evil. It has to do with storing up a memory of all the wrongs done by someone to you. Love doesn't do that.

Love does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth. Now, it's not entirely clear in what sense rejoicing in iniquity is meant. On the one hand, a person who wants to feel like he's more righteous than other people may, in a sense, rejoice, maybe secretly, when he hears of some other person falling, some other person that he measures himself against.

When someone else falls into sin, if that person is someone that you're measuring

yourself against, you almost see them as a spiritual rival, you almost exult in it, because that makes you look better in your own eyes than others, because somebody else has now got a blot on their record that you don't have. There is such a place that people can be in, where they actually rejoice in iniquity, in the sense that they rejoice in somebody else's sin, for that reason. But I don't know that that's what Paul has in mind here.

I'm not sure what he does have in mind when he says he does not rejoice in iniquity. It's possible that he just means that a loving person does not find it entertaining. Sinful things are not entertaining.

Dirty jokes, movies that have corrupt characters and plots and so forth, they are not amused. To them, that's not their idea of having a good time, is watching that kind of junk, that kind of corruption. They don't enjoy reading news stories that are just muckraking.

They don't rejoice in that kind of stuff. There are people who clearly do witness the success of gossip publications, whether it's the tabloid types, we all know their names, we see them all the time at the checkout stands, or even the more fancy tabloid types, like People Magazine and Us Magazine, which are just glorified gossip magazines anyway. I mean, they're very successful.

Someone rejoices to read about all the dirt. Somebody is rejoicing in iniquity, but love doesn't do that. Love rejoices in truth.

Love is attracted to purity and truth and good things. It doesn't rejoice or find pleasure or entertainment in these other kinds of things. Now, verse 7 says, Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things.

One problem with this verse is that bears all things sounds like the same thing as endures all things, which is at the end, the first and the last statement in verse 7. Bearing all things sounds like putting up with everything, but so does the word endures all things. It has been suggested the word bears in the Greek should be translated covers, and that Paul may here be alluding to or even partially quoting Proverbs 10, 12. Peter does actually quote Proverbs 10, 12, and Paul might be quoting it or alluding to it here, which says, Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all sins.

Love covers all sins. Peter quotes it as saying love covers a multitude of sins. James says that a person who converts a sinner from the Arab is way shall cover a multitude of sins.

And Paul might have this verse in mind where he says, Love covers all things. Actually, bears all things doesn't convey that notion, but the Greek word can mean covers. And so that would make it a separate thought from the later thought in the same verse endures all things.

Let's assume that that is Paul's meaning. So love covers all things. That means that

when you learn something about somebody that you love, something unflattering, something which would be a juicy thing to tell, maybe even something they did wrong to you, which makes you all the more eager to complain about it to someone else than if they did it to someone else.

You don't tell about it. You cover it. The Proverbs say that a number of times on the same subject.

Not only in the proverb I mentioned, which is Proverbs 10, 12, which is love covers all things, but Proverbs 11, 13 says, A tailbearer reveals secrets, but he who is of a faithful spirit conceals a matter. And then Proverbs 17, 9 also, Proverbs 17, 9 says, He who covers a transgression seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates best of friends. Notice that in all these Proverbs, covering the matter is in contrast to repeating it or being a tailbearer.

You know something. You've got something on them. You could ruin their reputation, or you could at least do damage to it.

But you'll cover it. I think of Noah and his sons. When Noah was drunk, because he was so drunk he wasn't aware, he was laying naked, uncovered on his bed, and Ham discovered it.

Now, the other two brothers, when they learned of it, of course, didn't look. They covered him up. They came in backward with a cloak over their backs, and they dropped it where they figured he was, and they covered him up.

Now, the difference between Ham and the other two brothers is that he repeated it. He went out and gossiped. He went out and bore a tale.

He went out and made a matter of mockery of his father and hurt his father's image and his reputation and so forth by doing so. The other brothers were not inclined to do that. They wanted to cover his embarrassment.

They wanted to conceal it. And that's what love does. Love covers all things.

Love believes all things. Now, again, this expression, believes all things, has occasioned some curiosity. We certainly don't believe all things.

We're not encouraged to believe lies. We're not supposed to be gullible and just believe anything we're told. The proper meaning of this phrase probably is that love trusts, as much as is reasonable to trust, of course, and is not skeptical and cynical.

I prefer to believe the best about people that I love. I'm not saying I would never, ever allow an evil report to be accepted if it proved to have tons of evidence on its side. If I found out that a good friend of mine or somebody I love had in fact turned out to be

doing criminal things or terrible things and the evidence was overwhelming, I certainly wouldn't be an ostrich about it and pretend like it wasn't so.

At the same time, if I love somebody and I hear some vague rumblings about them, some negative thing, I still believe the best about them. In fact, even when I have heard of friends who've done things wrong, while I might even believe that they did the things, I still tend to try to put their action in the most positive construction until I know otherwise. I mean, well, maybe they were extenuating circumstances.

Who knows? I don't know. Until I know more, I'm going to believe the best. I'm going to put that other person's actions, I'm going to put the best construction on them I can.

And that's what I think love believes all things means. I'm going to trust that that person did not mean to do evil, if they did. And if I've just heard that they did evil, I'm not even going to believe they did it until I have better evidence of that.

Paul said don't receive an accusation against an elder, but by two or more witnesses. Frankly, it's not a bad idea regardless to receive accusations against anyone, but by two or three witnesses. Love hopes all things.

I'm not sure what the precise difference is between believing all things and hoping all things, but I guess we could say it's always hopeful. If you love somebody who's not yet saved, if you love somebody who is saved, but they've got constant backslidings or problems or whatever, you don't give up hope for them. You keep hoping the best for them.

You keep hoping for their salvation even if all hope seems to be lost. Your love for them prevents you from giving up hope. Hope's all things.

And endures all things. Now, endures all things is a pretty sweeping statement. Endures all kinds of abuse.

Earlier, Paul told the Corinthians that were taking their neighbors to court, he said, why don't you just let yourself be defrauded? Why don't you just bear the wrong? Why don't you just endure it? Well, most people don't want to. But if you love someone, you will. That's what love does.

It endures. And so all these things are what Paul means by love. It's self-sacrificial.

It's tough. It's tough not in the sense that Dobson talks about love must be tough and we come to talk about tough love. Well, it may be tough in that way too.

I'm not trying to put that down. But when I say it, I mean it's survivable. It's not destroyed by somebody injuring or insulting or doing something that would be offensive or rude to it.

Although love itself doesn't initiate such things, doesn't act rudely, and doesn't do things wrong to other people. It does no wrong and doesn't rejoice in wrong. So, this love that he's talking about is a very, you know, it involves, it's involved in all relations.

And now in verse 8, Paul says, love never fails. Now, in a sense, that sounds like maybe it's the last line of what he's been saying. Love is this, love is that.

Love does this, love does that. Love never fails. And possibly it is, but really, if it is, it gives Paul occasion to springboard into the final section of the chapter, which is a contrast between that which is permanent and that which is not permanent.

Now, in the first part of chapter 13, in verses 1 through 3, he talks about that which is really important and that which is not so important. Love is. Some of these other things aren't as much.

Certainly, without love, they're not important at all. But now he's talking in terms of what endures and probably in order to illustrate why they are important. Things are important because they're durable.

Things are valuable because of their durability. A thing that disappears, you know, with usage in a few days or weeks is not going to, you're not going to pay much for it. It's not of much value.

A car that will drive reliably for a year or two and then begin to fall apart is going to be a cheap car. If you pay more and get a real expensive car, the likelihood is that you're hoping it'll run 10 or 15 or 20 years without serious problems because if something is durable, if something endures, if something is long-standing, that is, in a sense, linked with its valuableness. And Paul has said that love is the only thing of real value in the opening verses.

Now he's going to say why. Because love is the only thing that's going to really last. These other things that he said were not as valuable are not permanent.

At least not in their present form. He said in verse 8, Love never fails, but whether there are prophecies, they will fail. Whether there are tongues, they will cease.

Where there is knowledge, it will vanish away. Now knowledge probably refers to the special knowledge that's relevant to the gift that he referred to earlier as knowledge or the word of knowledge. But these things, the gifts, he's referring to gifts of the Spirit, they will someday have an end.

The time will come when we don't need to prophesy anymore. The time will come when we don't have to speak in tongues anymore. When knowledge as we have it will be displaced by something far greater, of a different species entirely.

So much different in fact that he says it's like we're seen through a glass dimly now but then face to face. It's a totally different kind of knowledge. The knowledge we have is of a temporal, limited sort.

Love, however, is going to be the thing that endures even in the next age. We won't need prophecies and tongues and the kind of knowledge that we have now which is very incomplete. But we will still need to love because that's the thing that God is.

God is love and in all eternity love is the thing that will never fail. By the way, fail means come to an end. I realize that we could understand love never fails to mean something like it never... it always succeeds or something like that.

But fails in this connection refers to coming to an end. Failing to endure, really. And he says the prophecies, they're going to fail.

Now when he says prophecies are going to fail he's not saying that some of them are going to be bad prophecies. That some prophecies are going to fail to come true. He's talking about the prophetic gift as a whole it's going to have an end.

That's the meaning of the expression. Love will not have an end. It's always going to be relevant.

Prophecies, not so. Nor tongues, nor knowledge as we know it today. Why? Because we know in part and we prophesy in part.

But when that which is perfect has come then that which is in part will be done away. 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. For now we see in a mirror dimly but then face to face.

Now I know in part. As he said also in verse 9. But then I will know just as also I am known. Presumably by God.

As much as God knows me now I will know then. And now abide faith, hope, love. These three, the greatest of these is love.

Now this section is a little bit like 2 Thessalonians 2 in that Paul says some things that people have guessed a lot of what he was referring to. It's not exactly clear. In 2 Thessalonians 2 he said you know what hinders that the man of sin will rise in his time when that which hinders is taken away and so forth.

Well we don't know what it was and there's all kinds of guesses as to what Paul is referring to. There are likewise lots of guesses as to what Paul is referring to when he talks about that which is perfect. When that which is perfect has come then that which is in part will be done away.

I'd like to tell you at least three different possibilities. I'll save the one that I favor for the last. One possibility that is widely held and this among non-charismatic, non-Pentecostal types especially is that that which is perfect in verse 10 is a reference to the completion of the New Testament.

That when Paul was writing this of course not all the books in the New Testament were written or gathered and therefore God was still speaking new things but with the completion of the New Testament we have the full record of everything God ever wanted to say. He doesn't have anything else to say. We have the perfect revelation of God in the New Testament canon.

And therefore we have that which is perfect. Now that which is in part is a reference they say to the gifts because it says we know in part and we prophesy in part in verse 9. So knowledge and prophecy are among the gifts that he's mentioned earlier. So we do that in part.

But when that which is perfect has come that which is in part will be done away. Which they understand to be another way of saying when the New Testament is complete the gifts will be done away with. And that is almost the principal and only biblical basis for suggesting that the gifts have been done away with.

They say well the New Testament is complete now and Paul said when that which is perfect has come that which is in part that means the gifts will be done away with. Very common interpretation of this passage. However an amazingly naive interpretation it seems to me.

I mean if people take that to be true interpretation one has to wonder upon what basis they interpret anything in scripture since there is not a clue in this passage that Paul even knew that such a thing as a complete New Testament canon ever would exist. He certainly doesn't give any hints of it. He doesn't say that.

There's not anything in the context to let us know that the canon of the New Testament would be in his mind in this discussion. I mean really to import that into the passage into Paul's thought it would seem to require in order to justify doing so it would require us to have something Paul said somewhere nearby or in some other similar place where he made reference to a New Testament canon a group of completed writings of the New Testament that he knew was going to someday exist. But we don't have any evidence whatsoever in Paul's writings that he knew someday his letters and others like them would be gathered to be what we call the New Testament.

And even if he did know he doesn't give us any reason to believe that that's what he had in mind when he was talking about that which is perfect. Now another opinion much more common probably among charismatics is that that which is perfect refers to Christ himself when Jesus comes back. Now earlier in 1 Corinthians chapter 1 verse 7 Paul had

said that the church would come behind in no gift or lack no gift awaiting the revelation of Jesus Christ which is usually a reference to his second coming.

So taking that together with this some would say well that which is perfect is a reference to Christ himself. We have the gifts now but we will not have them after he comes back. We won't need them anymore when he comes back.

He is perfect and he will replace that which is partial. My partial knowledge of him will be replaced by perfect knowledge of him. My partial revelation which is exhibited in our present prophetic ministries will give place to a complete revelation of Christ when he comes.

And therefore that which is perfect is thought to be Christ. Now I've heard this view criticized on the basis that Paul says that not he. That which is perfect not he who is perfect.

And in the Greek he does use the neuter not the masculine pronoun. When that it which is perfect. When if he is referring to Christ it would seem more natural for him to say when he who is perfect is come.

I have to admit the objection does carry some weight. Although against that is the fact that for instance the word spirit in the Greek is a neuter word and yet Jesus always referred to the Holy Spirit as he. The Greek word for spirit is a neuter word in the Greek language.

A neuter noun. Yet we know the spirit to be a personal being. And a he as Jesus referred to him.

So maybe the neuter here doesn't really eliminate the possibility that it's referring to a he. But there's a third option which I suspect is what is really in mind here. That which is perfect.

Remember the word perfect can mean mature or complete. The Greek word can be translated any of those ways. Mature is a very common way to translate it also.

And complete another. When that which is mature is come. That which is immature or in part incomplete will be done away.

That which is mature would be simply a reference to maturity in general. That is to say the Corinthians were immature. Paul said there were babes in Christ in chapter 3. And their function in the gifts was very immature.

It was very lacking in love. The mark of maturity. And if they had love it was an immature love.

It was not all that it should be. Prophecy, gifts and so forth existed among them. But

they were exercised in a very immature fashion.

But when that which is mature is come then the immature expression of these gifts will be done away. But probably replaced with more mature expressions of it. Now in support of this particular interpretation is the thing Paul says immediately afterwards in verse 11.

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. He starts that with... That's an illustration of what he meant when he said when that which is mature or perfect is come that which is in part will be done away. What do you mean? Well, it's like when I was a child.

I had certain things, but when I grew up I put away those things. When maturity came, those things that were immature were put aside. Now is he speaking of the end of the gifts of the Spirit? Of the taking away of the gifts of the Spirit? Now I do believe the time will come when the gifts of the Spirit are gone.

And that is, I think, when Jesus comes back. But I don't think that's necessarily the point he's making here. I think he does make that point in verse 8. When he says prophecies, they're someday not going to be around.

Tongues, knowledge as we know it, they'll be replaced. But I don't think he's necessarily saying here... Well, let me just say what I think he's saying. I think he's saying that when you're immature, you exercise the gifts in part, immaturely.

When maturity comes, it does away with that immature stuff. But it replaces it with mature stuff. And when Paul said, as a child I thought and I acted and I spoke as a child, he doesn't say, but when I became a man I stopped thinking and stopped doing and stopped speaking.

I just stopped doing it as a child. I now do it as a man. I still think, I still act, I still speak, but I don't do it like a child anymore.

I do it like a man because I put away those childish ways of doing it. I still do the same things, but in a more mature way. And I suspect that that might be what Paul has in mind here.

Now, whether he's speaking about individual maturity, for example, like when you immature people who are speaking in tongues in the way you are, when you grow up, you'll speak in tongues and you'll govern it more maturely through love and so forth, whether that's what he means, or whether he's speaking about corporate maturity of the whole church. I'm not sure. The reason I raise that question is because in Ephesians 4, he seems to talk similarly, and there he's talking about the corporate maturity of the entire body of Christ.

Because he says in Ephesians 4, verse 11 through 13, he himself gave some to the apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, that's what the gifts are for, but notice it's until we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God to a perfect or mature man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Now, it's not until we all individually become mature people, but until we, plural, become a singular mature man. You see, two chapters earlier, he talked about the body of Christ as a new man.

God created in himself one new man, meaning the body of Christ. Now he says this man, this body of Christ, this church, has to become mature, has to grow up. And the apostles and prophets, evangelists and pastors and teachers are there to build up the church until that time, until that corporate maturity has been reached.

But what then? Once the church is mature, what then? Well, maybe that's the second coming of Christ, who knows? Or maybe there's an ongoing career of the church in that condition, where the gifts of the Spirit are now exercised in a purer form. Someone was telling me yesterday that they didn't agree with my teaching the other day about the gifts of healing being a reference to actual healings, but tended to go with more the view that the gifts of healings are the ability to perform healings. Which is, of course, a more common view.

And I said, well, who's got a gift of healing then? Have you ever heard of anyone with a gift of healing? If someone has a gift of healing, I presume that means that they have the ability to heal people. And yet, I've read studies on this. From what I've read, the person that has the highest success rate in healing of all people around doing it today is John Wimber.

And someone did a study of all of his healings, and they said he's successful about 30% of the time. Almost everyone else who has healing ministries is successful at the most about 10%. About 1 out of 10 people they pray for get healed.

John Wimber is more like 3 out of 10. But still, how many people that Paul prayed for, or Peter prayed for to be well, how many of them got well? Or Jesus prayed for? How many people did Jesus try to heal, and they actually got healed? As far as I know, 100%. If somebody has the gift of healing, like Jesus had it, and like the apostles had it, I mean, if that means the ability to heal, then one would expect to see better than 10% success, or 30%.

Actually, I wouldn't be surprised if 10% of people got healed on their own praying for healing at home, alone. I mean, I really wouldn't be surprised. I've never heard studies about that.

But I wouldn't be surprised if of all the people who never go to a healing evangelist and

just pray for God to heal their sickness, I wouldn't be surprised if 1 out of 10 of them got better. And that's, you know, it's sort of like the studies that have been done on psychotherapy, you know. They say, well, they did a study, they found that 50% of the people who got psychotherapy got better.

They did a double-blind study where they had a group of mental patients who got psychotherapy and a group who got no therapy, and half of the ones who got no therapy got better, too. About the same, you know. It seems like the therapy, some people would say it helps them, but some people got equally benefit without the therapy.

And I'm not so sure that we could point to anyone in our modern times that has a healing ministry, if by healing we mean they perform healings like Paul and Peter and Jesus did, with that kind of success rate. Now, it could be argued against my position, well, we're still living in that imperfect time. We're still living in the childish, divided church.

Immature babes, still talking about I'm of Paul, I'm of Apollos, and so forth. But when we grow up, when the church grows up, then we'll see some perfect stuff. We now heal in part, and we now prophesy in part, and so forth, would be a way of arguing it.

And I couldn't argue against that. I mean, I don't know. We'll see, I guess.

It's a possibility that this is true. Paul might be talking about some eschatological event that has not yet happened, where the whole church actually comes to a mature state. Then the gifts are no longer partial at all.

They're fully mature. And what we know as knowledge is done away because it's replaced by more perfect knowledge. What we know today as prophecy or tongues is done away because it's replaced by something entirely superior.

I cannot say. I don't know how much eschatology Paul has in this passage and how much he's just talking about individual maturity. It is true on an individual level that if I speak in tongues as a baby Christian, I'm going to speak immaturely.

If I speak in tongues as a mature Christian, I'm going to use that gift in a more mature fashion. It'll be a very different kind of a thing. Just like the thinking and acting and speaking of a child are different than those same activities when done by an adult.

All the gifts of the Spirit are God doing it. I mean, it's the Spirit. The Spirit of God is God.

And so if a person prophesies or works a miracle or speaks in tongues or interprets a tongue or teaches, if it's really the gift of teaching happening, it's the Lord. It's the Lord doing it through the Spirit. The body of Christ is still acting through the members of His body.

And the same would be true of healing. If I pray for the sick and they get healed, it's

Jesus who healed them. In that case, He healed them through my prayers.

But He could have healed them without my prayers as well and might heal them through their own prayers or might heal them through a healing evangelist laying hands on them or something. But I guess when I hear, when I think like I used to, I mean, I used to think this way without even questioning it, that some people just have a gift of healing, which means they've got the anointing to heal people. And you think of people like Katherine Kuhlman and some people like that.

But, I don't know, maybe that is it. Maybe it's just an immature stage. Maybe these things are not in their complete form.

And when that which is perfect is come, then we'll see a lot of different results. I don't know. In any case, what I'm saying is, just like Paul's reference to that which hinders the man of sin, this reference to that which is perfect is nebulous, it's unclear.

It's not certain what he means. I think the least likely understanding is that he's referring to the New Testament being complete. I can't imagine any exegesis that would yield that interpretation responsibly.

I could see the suggestion he's referring to the second coming of Jesus or individual or general corporate maturity and bringing about a change in the present status of the gifts as we know them today. Now, he says in verse 12, 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.

Now here's the important thing. Twice he says now, but then. Now I know in part, then I will know more.

Now I see through a mirror dimly, but then. Face to face. Well, what is the then? What has he referred to previously that is the then here? Well, the only sensible answer is what he said in verse 10.

When that which is perfect is come. When that happens, then I will see face to face. Then I will know as also I am known.

And this particular consideration particularly is death to the interpretation that says the coming of the New Testament was the coming of that which is perfect. And therefore the gifts are all now done away. How could this be? The New Testament has been with us for centuries now, and yet we still know in part.

We still see through a glass dimly. And so, but Paul said when that happens, it won't be that way anymore. We're going to see him face to face, which argues for either the second coming of Christ being the thing in question or or else, as I say, some eschatological last days condition of the church that has not yet come about some mature state, which will be tantamount to seeing the Lord face to face.

But I mean, different interpretations are out there. I don't know which is the right one. Just I just lay out to you what the problems are with each verse 13.

Now, abide, faith, hope and love these three. But the greatest of these is love. Now, there seems no reason for him to have had to mention faith and hope.

Since his whole topic of this chapter is love and nothing else, he's not talking about faith and hope. He's not love. Because of that, some people feel some scholars feel that this statement now abide, faith, hope and love these three.

That might have been a creedal statement that that was a common confession of early Christians. We do find Paul in a number of places combining faith, hope and love in a single discussion. As if they are virtues or qualities that were commonly known to belong together or be found together.

For example, in First Thessalonians, chapter one, first Thessalonians, one, three, Paul says, remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love and patience of hope. Faith, hope and love. Those three are found there.

First Thessalonians, one, three, your work of faith, your labor of love and your patience of hope. Also in Romans, chapter five, we find faith, hope and love all joined together in a single short discussion. Where he says in the opening of Romans five, therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we also have access by faith into this grace in which we stand and rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance, perseverance character, character of hope. Now, hope does not disappoint because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has given to us. We've got faith, hope and love in that passage, too.

And there are others. These three qualities are linked in the mind of Paul and very possibly in the mind of the early church. There was some, like I say, a creedal statement that mentioned faith, hope and love as the three paramount virtues of a Christian life.

It would not seem necessary for him to mention all three of them here in this discussion if he were not quoting some kind of a statement like that. Although if there was a general understanding that these are the three great abiding virtues that the Christian should be concerned about, he might mention all three simply to make the point that the greatest of them is love. I mean, they're all important faith.

I mean, how how could anyone diminish the value of faith when we're saved by faith? We're justified by faith. Our prayers are answered on the basis of faith. All that we live and receive from God we live by faith.

But even that's not as great as love. Love is even greater. Not that any of them are indispensable.

Hope is that which gives us the ability to persevere in hardship and so forth. The hope of seeing Jesus. The Christian has something ahead of him.

Faith and hope are not the same thing. Faith is trusting in God, the God who is now here. The God who has made promises that we now expect him to fulfill and so forth.

We trust him. We trust in his present faithfulness. But hope is the anticipation of promises that have not been fulfilled yet, which are not even expected to be fulfilled immediately, but which we know are the ultimate destiny that he has laid before us.

And it's that destiny that gives direction and meaning to our present struggles and so forth and our perseverance in them. And without that, it would change the entire character of the Christian life. If we didn't hope for heaven, if we didn't hope for vindication someday, it would change everything about the character of our lives.

These three things are cardinal points of the Christian life. But Paul says of the three, the greatest is love. It's not clear why the greatest is love.

Very possibly simply because God is love. God is not faith. God doesn't have to believe anyone.

God is faithful, but he doesn't need faith. He doesn't have to trust anyone. He's independent.

We're not. That's why we need faith. We have to trust in him.

I don't know that hope is an emotion that God has, like we do, but love is a characteristic of God himself. Maybe that's why Paul says love is, even though all three of these things are abiding, important things, the greatest of them is love. Now in chapter 14, we've talked about a lot of these verses because when we were talking about tongues and prophecy in chapter 12, we cross referenced over to 14 because most of the teaching on those two gifts is found in that chapter.

And let me just get into it. I mean, the more of it we can take, the less we'll have left over to take. We're running low on time.

He says, Pursue love, which is what he's been talking about, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy. Now notice how the transition into chapter 13 and then out of chapter 13 again is made. At the end of chapter 12, he says, Earnestly desire the best gifts, yet I show you a more excellent way, which is, of course, love.

And he goes on to discuss that. Having discussed love, he gets back around to the subject of spiritual gifts. Pursue love, which we've been talking about, and desire

spiritual gifts, which is the last thing he said at the end of chapter 12.

So he gets back into that. It's quite clear that 13 was kind of a parenthesis, now back to the previous subject. Just because I've said that being able to prophesy and move mountains with faith is nothing if you don't have love, doesn't mean that they're nothing if you do have love.

If you have love, these gifts have value too. It's not either or. Love is the most important thing, but given the assumption that as a Christian you are walking in love, then you can add to that spiritual gifts.

And especially, he says, that you may prophesy. Now, the reason that he gives that we should desire prophecy above other gifts is because of its edification value to the church. He says, for he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him.

However, in the Spirit he speaks mysteries. But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men. He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church.

I wish that you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied. For he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets that the church may receive edification. Now, this entire section, the five verses, is making the point.

Prophecy is more desirable than tongues by itself, because prophecy can be understood by people. And because they understand it, they can receive benefit from it. They can be edified by it, built up spiritually.

You speak in tongues, people will see what a good time you're having. But unless there's an interpretation, they'll never get anything out of it. And therefore, it's not that great to speak in tongues, unless there's also an interpretation.

Later on, he actually tells them not to speak in a church, unless there's an interpreter there. And he also says in verse 13 that a person who speaks in tongues should pray that he himself could interpret, just to make sure that there would be an interpretation available. Now, there is some question as to what it means in verse 2 to say he speaks in the Spirit mysteries.

No one understands him. He's not speaking to men but to God. If he's not speaking to men, why would he do it in the church? There are three senses in which tongues is used, and I think understood by Paul.

One is this way, where a person is speaking only to God. Because he's speaking only to God, he doesn't need to interpret. But also, he doesn't need to do it in the church.

He doesn't need to talk to God in the church in tongues if he's not speaking to men. Paul specifically says he's not speaking to men. This is prayer.

This is private. This is devotional. And tongues apparently has a use in devotional praying.

Later on, however, he says that in verse 22, Therefore tongues are for a sign not to those who believe but to unbelievers. Now, a sign to unbelievers, that's another use. That's not speaking to God, that's speaking to men.

Unbelievers, or at least speaking in a way that is a sign to them. The case that we can think of an example of that would be on the day of Pentecost. When unbelievers heard the disciples in the upper room speaking in tongues.

And it was a sign that something supernatural was going on. Got their attention. But in that case, they were speaking languages that were known.

There was no need for the gift of interpretation then either. Because they were speaking languages known to the unbelievers themselves. Now think about this.

There are two uses of tongues that do not require interpretation. One is when you're alone talking to God. Why would you need an interpretation? He already understands.

You don't, but that's not what's important. You're speaking to God, not to men. No interpretation needed.

Or when it's a known language, it's a sign to an unbeliever. Again, you don't need an interpretation. They already understand it.

That's what's a sign to them, is that you know their language. But then there's this third thing that does require an interpretation. And that's where it's to edify the church.

As he says at the end of verse 5. He who speaks with tongues is not as great as he that prophesies, unless indeed he interprets that the church may receive edification. So tongues can be added to God alone, not to man. Or as a sign to unbelievers.

Or as a ministry to edify Christians, the church. Only in the last case is an interpretation necessary. And it is a given that it's not understood by anyone.

No one understands him, he says in verse 2. And therefore, it's not speaking a known language to anyone present. It may be speaking a heavenly language or just some other language not known by anyone present. But an interpretation is needed.

But the gift of interpretation and tongues linked together have to do with the ministry of tongues to the church. Other uses of tongues were known and practiced. But Paul's discussion in chapters 12 and 13 where he's linking tongues and interpretation together.

He's speaking in terms of ministry in the church in utterance and tongues followed by interpretation. Verse 6. But now brethren, if I come to you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you unless I speak to you either by revelation or knowledge or prophesying or teaching? Those things are better than tongues. He says revelation, knowledge, probably word of knowledge, prophesying or teaching.

Even things without life, whether flute or harp, when they make a sound, unless they make a distinction in the sounds, how will it be known what is piped or played? A cacophony of miscellaneous notes that are not distinct from each other. You just hear that drone is not going to be music. You won't be able to recognize the song.

Each note has to be recognizably different than the others. It has to be organized. It has to be sensible.

Or if a trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare himself to battle? If the bugler doesn't know how to play reveille correctly and he plays something that sounds more like another kind of signal. Bugles are used for a lot of different signals. People who are supposed to just wake up may be grabbing their guns because he may be giving a signal that they mistake for a call to arms.

But what he's saying is that speaking in tongues, or to put it another way, God speaking in the church is like music and it's like a bugle call. It's supposed to be intelligible and appreciable. But tongues without interpretation fails to measure up to those qualifications.

So likewise you, unless you utter by the tongue words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air. There are, it may be, and you're not speaking to people, you're just speaking into the air, it doesn't do anyone any good. There are, it may be, so many kinds of languages in the world and none of them is without significance.

Therefore, if I do not know the meaning of the language, I shall be a foreigner to him who speaks and he who speaks will be a foreigner to me. Actually, the King James says a barbarian. I don't know where Benjamin picked this up, but when he was five years old, we were talking among our family about where the kids were born.

He was the only one born in California, the others were born abandoned. And we were talking about how they were born abandoned. Stephanie says, well, I was born in California, I was a barbarian to those who were born abandoned.

And he was five years old and it was echoing the language of this verse, though I don't know when he heard it or what, because this is not a verse we read at home out loud very often, but Paul actually said, I am a barbarian to him who speaks and he who speaks will be a barbarian to me. A barbarian was somebody who didn't speak Greek. I

mean, the Greeks, everyone who spoke Greek, no matter what their nationality, was called a Greek.

Everyone who didn't speak Greek was a barbarian. And so, if I'm speaking in the church, a language no one understands, I'm like a barbarian to them. Verse 12, even so, you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel.

Don't just be zealous to have sensational gifts, but be zealous to have gifts that will help the church grow. Therefore, let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret. That way he can be sure there's an interpreter present when he wants to speak, if he's it.

For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful. What is the result then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray also with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing also with the understanding.

Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how will he who occupies the place of the uninformed say, amen, that you're giving him thanks, since he does not understand what you say? For you indeed give thanks well, but the other is not edified. Now, verse 16 makes it clear that blessing with the spirit is synonymous with blessing in tongues. Because he says if you bless with the spirit, they won't understand you.

So, with the spirit seems to mean in tongues. Earlier he says, in verse 14, or not there, but verse 15. If I pray, well, I'll pray with the spirit, and I'll pray with the understanding also.

I'll sing with the spirit, and I'll sing with the understanding also. Singing and praying in the spirit is usually understood to mean praying and singing in tongues. Because blessing with the spirit, in verse 16, is in tongues.

But that's not the only way to understand it. See, where he says, I will pray with the spirit, and I'll pray with the understanding also. I'll sing with the spirit, and I'll sing with the understanding also.

There's two ways of understanding that. It could mean he'll have a balanced worship life. Sometimes he'll pray in his native tongue.

Sometimes he'll pray in unknown tongues. Sometimes he'll sing in his own language. Other times he'll sing in tongues.

I'll pray with the spirit, meaning in tongues. And I'll pray with the understanding, would be on other occasions. Another way of understanding it is, I will pray with the spirit and with the understanding, meaning I will pray at once in my known language, but also in the spirit.

That is to say, I won't pray in tongues in the church. I'll pray in my own language, but I'll do it in the spirit anyway. I mean, it can be spiritual.

The Holy Spirit can be guiding my prayer, whether I'm praying in my own language or not. He might be saying that my prayer life will be balanced by tongues and intelligible prayers. Or he might be saying, I'll just see to it that when I'm praying intelligible prayers, I'm praying in the spirit.

That I'm praying guided by the spirit. I don't know which is the right meaning. I suspect his readers must have had enough information to know.

He says in verse 14, if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, which might equate praying in the spirit with tongues. He says, my understanding is unfruitful. Usually this verse is taken to mean, if I speak in tongues, my understanding is not active.

I don't understand what I'm saying. And that could be true, because I suspect that is. When people speak in tongues, they probably don't know what they're saying.

I don't, when I speak in tongues. And I usually use that verse to say that's normative. When you speak in tongues, you don't know what you're saying.

Now, on the day of Pentecost, when the disciples spoke in languages that were known to others, did they know what they were saying? I don't know. But there's another possible meaning of verse 14, and that is that when I speak with tongues, my spirit is praying. That's good, that's fine.

God hears the prayer, and that's wonderful. But, my understanding is not fruitful, as it's not bearing fruit. He might say, I do understand what I'm saying in tongues, but what I understand isn't bearing fruit in the church.

It's not fruitful. Therefore, I'm going to pray in the spirit with my understanding, so that it can bless the church. I really don't know.

There's enough ambiguities in this passage that no one can be dogmatic. There are standard ways that Pentecostals understand it. There are other possible ways to understand it.

All we know is that Paul was favoring exercise of speech in the church that was intelligible, and therefore capable of edifying language that was not intelligible. His point is no one can even say amen to it, they don't understand what you're saying. Verse 18, I thank God that I speak with tongues more than you all.

So, Paul believed in tongues and spoke in it. Yet, in the church, I would rather speak five words with my understanding that I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue. So, clearly, Paul didn't think tongues was a real important gift to have

exercised in the meeting.

Now, with an interpretation, it had merit, but without interpretation, it didn't even have any merit. One gets the impression from him here. Okay, let's look at a... Well, we're going to stop there and pick it up here next time.

Unfortunately, we have fallen behind schedule a bit.