

## The Motive Behind the Gifts

No study on spiritual gifts would be complete without considering the proper motivation for their use. The Corinthian church struggled mightily with a faulty understanding of the importance of the gifts and how they should be used in the church. To correct their misperceptions, Paul, moved by Holy Spirit, wrote three chapters on the subject of the gifts (1 Cor. 12–14).

The Corinthians tended to think of people in relationship to their spiritual gifts. For example, they over-valued people who had flashier gifts because they failed to grasp the ultimate purpose of ALL of the gifts. And Paul, at the end of chapter 12 wants to introduce them to what matter most of all:

### 1Cor 12:28-31 ESV

**28 And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. 29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? 30 Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? 31 But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.**

## The Futility of Loveless Gifts

The gifts of the Spirit are intended to build up the Church. So, could more excellent than the “higher gifts”? What could be more useful in building up the church than an Apostle of Christ, or a prophet, or being able to heal the illnesses of others? Paul answers this question most firmly: Love is far more important. Love is the *essential ingredient* for the effectiveness of any believer’s service to the Church. And Paul will show us why by revealing the emptiness of the gifts *apart from love* by picturing three examples where gifts are used in the most dramatic fashion possible. The first is this:

### 1 Corinthians 13:1 ESV

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

If someone were so gifted that he or she were able to speak in the exalted language of heaven’s angels, yet exercised this gift lovelessly, its result would be similar to replacing our worship leaders with a couple of hyperactive gong and

cymbal playing children. No one would be edified by their playing, and it's likely that everyone would be annoyed in the extreme. And that's Paul's point. Loveless gifts are a net negative when it comes to building up the church. He goes on to make another comparison:

**1 Corinthians 13:2 ESV**

**2 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.**

If someone is so gifted that he or she can grasp all the secret things of God, and know everything there is to know, and also has such faith that the Sandias jump at their command—yet does not exercise these gifts in love for others—their knowledge and abilities are meaningless, purposeless, and valueless. The Corinthians were impressed by flashy and attention-getting gifts. We must not assess gifts in that way. Just because someone's gift makes them up-front and easily noticed does not make them more valuable than someone whose gift is more subtle and behind the scenes. In both cases, we must value the love behind their expression. Unless we use our gifts to show love to our brothers and sisters in Christ, we're wasting our time and theirs. But, in case we haven't gotten his point by now, Paul makes one more comparison:

**1 Corinthians 13:3**

**3 If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.**

Here, Paul uses two extreme examples that most people would see as the epitome of selflessness. Someone giving away all their earthly goods to others or willingly choosing martyrdom are two of the highest forms of self-sacrifice we can imagine. Someone might say, "If that's not love, then I don't know what is." Yet, Paul indicates that, in reality, those sacrifices do no good if they are not rooted and grounded in love for others.

What's Paul point? Love is far more important than giftedness. In fact, since love is essential, the gifts are worse than useless without it. Any gifts God gives is intended to be used to love other people. Apart from love, gifts are a vain annoyance that build up no one.

Love must become the driving force behind our service in the church. Everything we do should be done in love (1 Cor. 16:14). Consequently, it's important that we grasp the nature of love and own it for ourselves. Paul describes what real love looks like by showing us the heart of love in *action*.

## **The Character of Love in Action and Attitude**

### **4 Love is patient and kind;**

Consider how impatience and harshness can damage our relationships with one another. An impatient person is self-centered—wanting to move-on to their own goals and desires as quickly as possible. A harsh man cares little for how his behavior negatively impacts others. Conversely, both patience and kindness are concerned with putting the needs of others before our own. Love is patient and kind.

### **love does not envy or boast;**

The Corinthians were full of pride in their giftedness—***commending themselves and measur[ing] themselves by one another and compar[ing] themselves with one another (2 Cor. 10:12)***. Many craved the more outwardly impressive gifts to satisfy their desire for public acclaim. Because boastful pride was their motivating desire, they used whatever gifts God for self-aggrandizement. There were careless of their duty to build up the church in love. On the other hand, believers who have a real love for one another are joyful when others are gifted with abilities beyond their own. Loving hearts rejoice when brother or sisters are blessed by God. True love makes us others oriented and keeps us from coveting what we don't have and from boasting in our gifts as if we created them ourselves.

### **it is not arrogant 5 or rude.**

Arrogant people have opinions of themselves are inflated beyond reason. They do not see the painful sickness of their own pride. Rudeness refers to thoughtless behavior that dishonors others by disgraceful and indecent behavior. Rude and arrogant believers display a shocking lack of Christian maturity. Christlike love, however, prizes humility and seeks to behave in ways that show true concern for

the feeling of others. Love is not arrogant or rude, but behaves in humble and fitting ways.

**It does not insist on its own way;**

Literally this means a loving person does not “seek the things of himself.” Therefore, a believer motivated by love won’t act out of “**selfish ambition or conceit**” but, instead, “**count[s] others more significant**” than himself (**Phil. 2:3**) and seeks “**the good of his neighbor**” (**1 Cor. 10:24**).

**it is not irritable or resentful;**

Irritability is simply anger waiting for a reason to boil over. Resentfulness, literally referring to one who “counts up wrongdoing,” causes us to keep a lengthy record of wrongs done to us. Irritable and resentful hearts do not love, are prone to bitterness, and do not build up others. Conversely, Christlike love is forgiving, doesn’t hold on to anger, and refuses to dwell on the hurts of the past.

**6 it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.**

Christlike love takes joy in what is good and righteous in God’s eyes. True love hates injustice and unrighteousness, and that moves us to preserve the unity of the body of Christ and avoid anything that might damage it.

**7 Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.**

A love-motivated believer is glad to quietly move past the faults and shortcomings of others for the sake of their continued growth in Christ. Love helps us to remain devoted to one another when we rub each other the wrong way, and It makes us gentle when others behave in irritating ways. Loving people believe and hope “all things.”— not because they are innocently willing to accept anything as truth. Love does not mean we are to be naïve. But, instead, as Tom Schreiner writes, “love does not give way to cynicism and despair, but believes and hopes for the best... [loving people] are anchored to the God of the promise.” Therefore, they endure by staying true to their course, and even when things get challenging, they continue to strive to build up the body of Christ.

Up until now Paul has shown us the uselessness of spiritual gifts if they are not motivated by love. He has also described the nature of true Christian love in action toward others. And finally, in the beginning of vs. 8, Paul shows the lasting value of love in comparison to the temporary value of gifts.

### **Love Lasts Even When Gifts Do Not**

**8 Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.**

Notice the contrast. Gifts are temporary. But love is not. The gifts of prophecy, tongues, and knowledge all have a shelf life. They are impermanent, while love is lasting. Love never becomes invalid, nor does it fail. Because love is lasting. The temporary nature of the gifts must be supported by the permanence of love in order to be useful in building up the body of Christ.

Often, when we discover how God has gifted us, we can be tempted to turn our attention toward that gift. To maximize its efficacy and to grow it in usefulness. But God has given us spiritual gifts with one ultimate goal in mind, and Paul expresses that goal most clearly below:

#### **Eph 4:10-16 ESV**

**10 He who descended [that is Christ] is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things. 11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, 14 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. 15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.**

Notice that Paul lists four of the gifts for context —apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor-teacher—and then describes the purpose of all of the saints, who are themselves each individually gifted, as “building up the body of Christ.” Then, dropping down to verse 16 we see that **each part** of the body **when...working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.** Paul points to love as the motive force for the growth of the Church. And building up the body in love is the ultimate purpose for the gifts. The growth of our Christian family, our church, our local body is a work to build one another up in love. We each have a role to play. We each are given at least one spiritual gift which we should use to do so. But no matter what gift you have, it is given to you to love your church family toward maturity in Christ. And maturity looks like greater love for Christ and for one another.

So, in closing, I would urge each of you who is confident that you know how God has gifted you, think in terms of how you can love someone with it. Our gifts make lasting impact only through the love they contain.

Now, If you don't yet know how God has gifted you, simply seek to love others by serving them in different capacities within the church. Over time you will discover how God has designed you to function in the church. You will begin to see the areas in which God brings special blessing to others. But, in the meantime, don't fear that you are not successfully serving the church until you're sure you understand and have developed your gift. Remember, it is love that makes the difference. If you are seeking to love your brothers and sisters in Christ through your service... what you do *will* last. Even if, at a later time, you discover your gift is in another area.