

First Corinthians

July 13, 2025
Chapter 13

The Matters of the Spiritual Part 6

“Manifest Grace of the Holy Spirit”
Chapter 12:31

Paul’s point in verses 29-30 is that the Holy Spirit and the LORD designate saints in the Church to fulfill various roles and functions essential to each local body of believers. Not everyone can do everything; responsibilities are distributed among the different saints in the Church.

c) Paul’s Concern Concerning the Appointed Functions in the Church (12:31a)

In this section, we address Paul’s concern regarding the appointed functions of the Church. Verse 31a.

^{31a}*But earnestly desire the greater gifts.*

Paul urges to “earnestly desire the greater gifts.” The phrase “earnestly desire” denotes a deep, passionate yearning. Paul isn’t encouraging each saint to seek the “greater gifts” for themselves, as it is the Holy Spirit who determines that. Instead, Paul urges the saints to wish for the Holy Spirit to manifest through someone in the Church, fulfilling each role for the health and well-being of the congregation and, by extension, all the saints.

d) Paul’s Intent Concerning the Appointed Functions in the Church (12:31b)

Paul has reasons for everything he says. We analyze Paul’s intent regarding the roles assigned within the Church.

^{31b}*And I show you a still more excellent way.*

Paul has something to say about a “more excellent way.” Once the spiritual divisions are understood and corrected, which represent manifestations of the Holy Spirit, Paul must address the responsibilities of each saint in the Church for the benefit of both the lost and the saved, both inside and outside the Church.

Chapter 13

The Matters of Love

A More Excellent Way in the Church
Chapter 13:1 - 13

e) Manifestations vs Love

(1) Love More Excellent than Languages (13:1)

Paul transitions to a better way within the Church by comparing manifestation to love. He asserts that love is superior to languages. Using himself as an example in each of his defense scenarios, Paul states in Chapter 13:1:

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

We must remember that this letter addresses the troubling issues within the Church. The congregation in Corinth was not the only church in the world. Certainly, the Corinthians were aware of what was occurring in other churches and desired to experience the same manifestations in Corinth. However, Corinth faced challenges regarding spiritual matters. Paul has urged the Corinthian Church to comprehend the workings of the Holy Spirit's manifestations. Now, Paul uses the word "if" to present the argument that suggests the Holy Spirit may not manifest in the saints of the Church "if" the saints do not display love. Paul begins this series of "if" scenarios by referencing the ability to speak in multiple languages, which the Corinthians greatly esteemed. The large city of Corinth was a blend of nationalities from across the Roman Empire, all speaking various languages. Furthermore, Paul highlights the absurdity of saints speaking in the language of "angels." However, if this gift is not paired with love, it amounts to nothing more than meaningless noise, akin to a "*noisy gong*" or "*clanging cymbal*." This illustrates Paul's point that without love, the ability to speak multiple languages is insignificant.

(2) Love More Excellent than Prophecy, Mysteries, and Faith (13:2)

Continuing with the "if" scenarios about himself, Paul asserts that love is superior to prophecy, mysteries, and faith. Verse 2.

²If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

In God's eyes, love is what truly matters, not the outward display of knowledge or power. We must not overlook the immense significance of the Holy Spirit's manifestations in the saints of the Church as a guide for the Church's functions. Yet, in these situations, Paul addresses the troubling issue of the lack of love in the Corinthian Church, which was brought to his attention by Chloe. When considering the various troubling matters within the Church, it becomes evident that Corinth was a "loveless" Church.

(3) Love More Excellent than Giving and Sacrifice (13:3)

Once again, in the hypothetical scenarios of Paul's defense regarding the issues in Corinth, he asserts that love surpasses both giving and sacrifice, as giving and sacrifice profit Paul nothing (Verse 3).

³And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.

Paul discusses extreme acts of generosity and sacrifice—such as giving away all possessions to help the poor and even offering one's life in martyrdom. While these actions may seem like the ultimate expressions of devotion, Paul states that without love, they "*profit me nothing*." Even the most selfless and sacrificial acts are worthless if done without love. Love is the essential motivation that gives value to any good deed or act of service. Paul emphasizes that love must be included in the lives of saints for the Holy Spirit to manifest within them. Love is a fundamental necessity of a saint's life.

f) Characteristics of Love (13:4-7)

Paul advises the Corinthian Church against expecting the manifestations of the Holy Spirit if the saints lack love. Beginning in verse 4, Paul outlines the characteristics of love to emphasize its importance.

⁴ Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, ⁵ does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, ⁶ does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; ⁷ bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

“Love is patient.” True love endures wrongs and hardships without frustration or anger. It demonstrates forbearance and long-suffering, especially when others are challenging or slow to change, allowing space for growth and healing.

“Love is kind.” Love is compassionate, caring, and attentive to the needs and feelings of others.

“Love is not jealous.” Love doesn’t hold onto envy or resentment towards the success or blessings of others. Instead, it rejoices with others instead of feeling threatened or diminished by their achievements.

Jealousy undermines relationships by promoting division and comparison. True love is content and celebrates the happiness of others.

“Love does not brag and isn’t arrogant.” Love is humble. It does not boast about its accomplishments or seek attention. It shuns pride and self-importance.

Humility is a vital aspect of love, as it emphasizes the needs of others over self-promotion or displays of superiority.

“Love does not behave inappropriately.” Love acts honorably and respectfully. It refrains from rude, offensive, or unacceptable behavior.

Love requires courtesy, good manners, and respect for everyone in every interaction, aiming to uphold the dignity of all individuals.

“It does not seek its own.” Love is selfless and does not demand to have its way. It is neither selfish nor self-serving but is ready to make sacrifices for the sake of others.

True love emphasizes the needs and well-being of others, even when it requires personal sacrifice or inconvenience.

“Isn’t easily provoked.” Love is not easily angered or irritated; it remains calm and maintains self-control even in challenging or frustrating situations.

Love is patient and slow to anger, preferring understanding over frustration or bitterness.

“Does not take into account a wrong suffered.” Love doesn’t keep a record of wrongs or hold grudges. It forgives and lets go of past hurts instead of dwelling on them.

Forgiveness is an essential aspect of love. It enables relationships to heal and flourish instead of being tainted by bitterness or resentment.

“Love does not delight in wrongdoing,” whether experienced personally or observed in others. Rather, it rejoices in truth, righteousness, and integrity.

“Love aligns with goodness and righteousness,” opposing evil and celebrating what honors God while reflecting His truth.

“Bears all things.” Love is protective, shielding others from their weaknesses and faults. It avoids exposing or shaming them and instead offers patient support during their struggles.

Love entails enduring hardships and shouldering the burdens of others, demonstrating steadfastness in relationships.

Love trusts and has faith in the best for others, offering the benefit of the doubt. It is neither suspicious nor cynical; rather, it aims to trust in others’ good intentions.

When Paul says that love “*hopes all things*,” he means that love consistently looks forward with expectation and confidence. Love does not give up on fellow saints or God.

When Paul states that love “*endures all things*,” he indicates that love will withstand life's trials, hardships, and difficulties, ultimately overcoming them.

g) Endurance of Love (13:8)

Building on his statement that love “*endures all things*,” Paul further elaborates on the endurance of love in verse 8.

⁸ *Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away.*

“*Love never fails.*” This phrase signifies that love is eternal and will never cease. Unlike spiritual manifestations that have a specific purpose, love endures endlessly. It never “*fails*” or becomes irrelevant. Paul demonstrates this point next.

“*If there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away.*” All manifestations of the Holy Spirit will one day come to an end when the Church is gathered with the LORD. Paul is aware of this because he has written to the Thessalonians in an earlier letter (1 Thessalonians 4). These manifestations will be “done away with” or “cease.” However, love will never cease, even in the future, in the Holy City of God. Love is the foundation of God’s relationship with all people and remains central to saintly living for eternity.

(1) The Limit of Knowledge and Prophecy (13:9-10)

As we delve into verses 9-10, Paul recognizes the limitations of his knowledge and prophecy while composing this letter. Nevertheless, he is aware that this limitation will eventually be lifted.

⁹ *For we know in part and we prophecy in part; ¹⁰ but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.*

The boundaries of Paul’s guidance on the troubling issues in the Corinthian Church are defined by what he knows and what has been revealed to him by the LORD. He does not possess all the knowledge about everything at this stage of his life. He doesn’t have answers to every question, but he understands that he will one day. When? “... *when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.*” When will the “*perfect*” arrive?

(2) The Development of Knowledge and Prophecy (13:11)

To explain when the “*perfect*” will arrive, Paul will discuss the evolution of knowledge and prophecy in human life. Verse 11.

¹¹ *When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things.*

Using the transition from childhood to adulthood to illustrate the difference between immature and mature understanding, Paul conveys that maturity in the LORD is a gradual process. In this process of growth, mature individuals fundamentally change their thinking to avoid repeating the mistakes of their childhood and facing the consequences.