

First Corinthians

July 20, 2025
Chapter 13

The Matters of Love – Part 2

A More Excellent Way in the Church
Chapter 13:9 - 13

(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.

"For we know in part and we prophesy 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.

"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

(3) The Coming of Full Knowledge and Prophecy (13:12)

Now, Paul will explain when the fulfillment of complete knowledge and prophecy occurs in the life of each saint. Verse 12.

"For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.

In the ancient world, mirrors were often crafted from polished metal, producing a dull or imperfect reflection. Paul employs this metaphor to illustrate the current, incomplete understanding of spiritual matters. Believers perceive and grasp God's truth only partially now, but in eternity, when they see Him "face to face," they will comprehend all spiritual truths. In eternity, the saints will possess a mature knowledge of God, and "... childish things" will no longer be necessary.

h) Greatest is Love (13:13)

Returning to the discussion about the perfect spiritual knowledge we will attain when transitioning from this life into eternity with the LORD, Paul addresses life on earth as a saint. He states that of all the things in the Church, the greatest is love (Verse 13).

"But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Paul concludes by emphasizing the lasting importance of faith, hope, and love. Love is the greatest because it is eternal, while faith and hope, although essential on earth, will also be realized when the saints are with God in eternity.

“Faith” refers to trust in God and His promises, which is essential for this life but becomes unnecessary when believers are in God’s presence.

“Hope” refers to the expectation of future good, particularly the hope of eternal life and being with God, which will be fulfilled in eternity. With that said, following Paul’s declaration that love is the greatest, he will now integrate this understanding into the spiritual realm of the saints and Christ’s body.

Chapter 14

The Matters of Worship Services

“Guidance for Worship in the Church”

Chapter 14:1 - 4

After moving past Chapter 13, where Paul illustrates that love is the greatest, he turns to Chapter 14 to provide guidance on love and the spiritual realm of the saints and Christ’s body.

a) Love First Then the Spiritual (14:1)

“Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.”

This verse follows Paul’s renowned chapter on love, 1 Corinthians 13, where he emphasizes the superiority of love over all spiritual expressions. Let’s explore the key ideas in this verse.

“Pursue love.” By urging believers to make love their primary pursuit, Paul revisits the theme from the previous chapter, demonstrating that love is the greatest virtue and essential for any spiritual manifestation to have value. Love should be the foundation of everything a saint does.

“Genuinely desire spiritual gifts.” Once again, the term “*gifts*” is absent from the Greek. The Greek word simply refers to *spiritual*. By intertwining “*love*” with the “*spiritual*,” Paul instructs believers to aspire to the spiritual, which encompasses the Holy Spirit’s manifestations within the saints. The Holy Spirit provides these manifestations, such as prophecy, languages, and healing, through the saints to strengthen the Church and serve others. Paul does not undermine spiritual manifestations by prioritizing “*love*” above them; rather, he cautions the saints to consistently love so that the Holy Spirit can work through them as He wishes, utilizing the various manifestations.

“Especially that you may prophesy.” Now, Paul emphasizes one of the manifestations of the Holy Spirit that should be earnestly desired. The saints have no control over these manifestations; that responsibility rests with the Holy Spirit. However, Paul acknowledges the importance of the manifestation of prophecy. In this context, “*prophecy*” refers to preaching the testimony of Jesus. It does not entail predicting the future but rather focuses on the Gospel message that leads to salvation and sainthood. Being able to witness to the lost sinner is the primary purpose of the LORD’s Great Commission.

(1) The Problem with Languages (14:2)

In verse 2, Paul addresses the issue of languages in preaching the Gospel message. Why does Paul tackle this issue? The answer can be found in verse 39 of this chapter: *“Therefore, my brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak in tongues.”* Paul discusses the concerns raised by Chloe, indicating that the Jewish saints in the Corinthian Church face challenges regarding the

allowance for testimonies and preaching by those who do not speak the predominant language of the Church. In the next verse, Paul will outline how to properly manage these matters, including who can speak and who cannot. We begin with verse 2.

² *For one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God; for no one understands, but in his spirit he speaks mysteries.*

Paul is clear in this verse. If someone speaks in a language that is unfamiliar to the others, God hears and understands their words, but they have no significance for the listener.

"In his spirit he speaks mysteries." A better translation of the Greek for this sentence is, *"However, in the spirit, he utters mysteries."* What does this mean? The clue lies in the word "mysteries." There is no direct Hebrew equivalent for the Greek word "mysteries." However, the concept can be found in the Hebrew word *"musterion."* This term refers to the divine secrets or mysteries regarding the counsel of God, which were once hidden but are now revealed in the Gospel message of Jesus Christ. God understands those mysteries regardless of the language a speaker uses. Nevertheless, the purpose of prophecy (preaching, teaching) is to provide the necessary information about the Gospel of Jesus Christ so that a person can accept Him as LORD and Savior. Verse 2 presents the issue of the wrong language being used. Now, Paul clarifies the purpose of preaching the Gospel.

(2) The Purpose of Preaching (14:3)

What is the purpose of preaching? Paul says in verse 3,

³ *But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation.*

Paul's words, *"But one who prophesies,"* do not refer to predicting the future. Rather, they denote sharing the Gospel message. What impact does the Gospel message have on people? It edifies, exhorts, and consoles. The individual delivering the Gospel message does not edify, exhort, or console God; instead, he edifies, exhorts, and consoles non-believers and saints.

What is *"edification?"* To edify means to strengthen, encourage, and understand God's will and truth. For non-believers, it involves guiding them to the Lord Jesus so they can accept Him as their Savior. For saints, it includes discipling them to grow in maturity in the Lord Jesus, their Savior, and equipping them to carry out the Great Commission.

What is *"Exhortation?"* The Greek word means *to encourage*. Its root signifies *calling someone to one's side to provide comfort*. *"Exhortation"* can occur in times of distress as well as in times of great joy; it spans the distance from the worst moments to the best and everything in between. Everyone needs biblical exhortation at all times—the message of the Gospel. The entire narrative from Genesis to Revelation conveys a message from the LORD meant to encourage those in deep despair or great joy.

What is *"Consolation?"* The Greek word signifies *to console or comfort*. *"Exhortation"* encompasses aspects of comfort and consolation, but this term introduces an additional dimension. It addresses how the Gospel message is conveyed, meaning that the message should be delivered with *a gentle and empathetic approach to provide solace*. In the New Testament, it describes the interactions between saints and both non-believers and fellow saints. In the context of this passage, it is fundamentally tied to the critical element of *"love."*

(3) The Problem of Self vs the Church (14:4)

Love is essential when engaging with the spiritual aspects of the Church. The language we use to present the Gospel messages closely follows its intended purpose. Now, in verse 4, Paul hones in on the issue of self versus the Church.

⁴ One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the Church.

When Paul states, “*One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself*,” he is clearly directing his Apostle finger at those pursuing self-edification instead of the edification of the Church. Paul has not overlooked the message that came from Chloe regarding the troubling issues within the Church. Here, we find Paul’s introduction, which he will further elaborate on throughout this chapter. Based on what Paul has indicated so far, he addresses languages that the local people, whether lost or saved, cannot comprehend. God can understand, but the people cannot.

In 1976, I witnessed a perfect example of what Paul talks about in my church outside Kilgore. Back then, the oil money was still flowing, and Kilgore had the best of everything. Additionally, it offered scholarships to foreign students, some of whom were from Vietnam that year. One of those students connected with me because I was also the music and youth minister at Laird Hill Baptist Church. He wanted to be part of my church, but he didn’t speak English well. He was a saved saint and loved the Lord dearly, yet our communication was limited. No one in the church spoke his native language, Vietnamese.

Nevertheless, he wanted to speak at every meeting with the college-aged group. He was quite a talker! Once he started, it was nearly impossible to stop him. No one understood what he said; even his English words were slurred by his accent. He felt like he was on cloud nine when I took him home after church, proud of his testimony. He edified himself, but he did not edify the group, who could only catch a word here and there from his testimony. I spoke to my pastor about the issue. His name was Nelson Parish, truly one of the kindest pastors I have ever met. He has long since joined Jesus in heaven, but I still love him dearly to this day. Bro. Parish opened the chapter and read the entire passage to me. He looked at me and asked, “Do you have your answer on how to handle it now?” I told him yes! However, dealing with my Vietnam friend was easier said than done. How could I do this with love? My options were to find another Vietnamese person to join our group or connect him with a Vietnamese group. After some searching, I found a suitable group for him at another church in Longview. Next, the challenge was arranging a ride for him to that church. Simple problems aren’t always easy to solve. Nevertheless, the Longview church welcomed him and encouraged him to join their fellowship. It was a great fit. Corinth also faced the same issue, with enthusiastic foreigners wanting to share their testimonies.

Paul says, “*But one who prophesies edifies the Church.*” He is referring to preaching the Gospel message to edify, exhort, and console both saints and non-saints. The preacher must communicate in a way that is understandable to everyone in the congregation. How can we determine if the Corinthian preacher speaks the people’s language? This isn’t stated. We don’t know what language the preacher used. It’s also unclear whether Paul is addressing the current pastor of the Corinth Church or all Church preachers. Regardless, from this point onward, through the end of Chapter 14, Paul provides guidance on the appropriate structure and rules for using different languages during worship services in the Corinth Church. By extension, Paul’s guidance pertains to all churches.