

## 1 Corinthians 13 Gonerby 2011 E100 Block 19.1 (1John 4:7-18)

### Introduction.

No review of the essential 100 passages of the Bible would be complete without this one. possibly the best-known passage because used so much at weddings.

One writer *"this chapter is frequently read at weddings or memorial services. It is often used on occasions which require lofty sentiments, literature of a high-quality, but no overt Christian statement."* (SUMS UP WEDDINGS !)

This is because it is taken out of context.

Today -- look at it in its proper context. Get to its fullest meaning that way.

### Corinthian Church.

The letters to the Corinthians, are some of the stormiest which Paul wrote.

The church was in many ways doing well -- expand.

But also there was much that was not good.

They had a habit of falling out among themselves and dividing into groups e.g. chapter 1 -- Paul's, Apollo's, Cephas'.

This problem comes up again in chapters 12 to 14 where they are making distinctions among themselves based upon "spiritual gifts".

Explain -- when a person becomes a Christian, God sends his Spirit to them.

The Holy Spirit starts to go to work on us.

The New Testament describes two major results.

First, as we grow as disciples of Christ, so we see more in our lives of those qualities which St Paul calls in his letter to the Galatians **"The Fruit of the Spirit"** Go through list -- improvements in character.

But the NT also speaks of something called the **"Gifts of the Spirit"**

These gifts are described in the letter to the Romans, and also in the chapters either side of this one we are studying

These **"Gifts of the Spirit"**-- some are natural gifts which are developed in us by the Spirit in e.g. teaching, preaching, hospitality, and administration.

Other gifts are more obviously supernatural in appearance

e.g. healing, miracles, prophecy, and speaking in tongues which is speaking in a foreign or a God-given language.

This second category of gifts tend to be more outwardly showy.

The Latin name for gift is "charisma" hence the term "charismatic" -- churches or Christians which emphasise, in particular these second set of gifts.

A major distinction between the Fruit of the Spirit and the Gifts of the Spirit is this. -- --

The fruit is given to all. Explain -- we improve in each of these character traits.

However the gifts are not all given to all Christians.

Explain -- in any church, an individual may be given gift of teaching, another the gift of healing, etc. so that in a Christian community, in that body of Christ all the gifts will be present amongst all the members.

(Which raises questions for our own church -- some are not being exercised -- maybe some people who have these gifts are not using them)

### The Problem Which Paul Addresses.

What was happening in Corinth was that the people with the more outwardly showy gifts were despising the people with the more ordinary ones. In particular speaking in tongues -- as happened in the 20th century charismatic revivals. Those people speaking in tongues were saying that the others were not Christians or were second-class Christians.

So, Paul writes to correct this attitude.

Chapter 12 -- Paul reminds them -- different spiritual gifts given to each. These gifts were not to be used competitively but to serve the whole body. (Is the body an eye etc.)

Chapter 14 -- tongues are not the ultimate gift or the ultimate test of spirituality. In fact, they can be most unhelpful -- Paul says, if an unbeliever comes into church he will not understand what is happening and think you are mad. So don't use in public at all unless with an interpreter present.

Between chapters 12 and 14 Paul drops in chapter 13 (obviously).  
He says that there is one thing more important than having any of the gifts.  
And that is love among the Christians.

And so Paul writes "I may speak... etc."

### **Verse 1**

Paul had in mind the gongs and cymbals used in the pagan temples in the city. They made a lot of noise but no melody. Possibly impressive but meaningless (compare a flute) sounds. Similarly tongues sound impressive but can be meaningless.

More basically, Paul is saying -- you think you are Christians -- you are no better than the pagans -- without love you have not made it to first base as a Christian.

### **Verse 2** (read).

The other gifts -- prophecy, understanding of mysteries, the word of knowledge (explain) -- even faith, sacrificial giving even to the extent of martyrdom. All these without love are nothing. Even stronger than that he says if I have not love, I am nothing.

Now, if we had someone in our church had a gift of healing, or someone who could prophesy, or someone who lived incredibly sacrificially for the sake of the Gospel, we would consider ourselves blessed that such a Saint lived amongst us. We would say "what a wonderful Christian". Yet Paul says that even someone with all these gifts without love, is a nothing, a nobody.

### **What is this love?**

But Paul is not content to tell the Corinthians just to love each other. He knows that that word "love" then, as now, has lots of different meanings.

I find nowadays, one of the most misleading of phrases is the term "God Is Love". First of all because God is much more than love -- and it's a distortion only to emphasise one aspect of his character. God is also, for example, justice.

But, secondly because that word "love" is so overused and misused in our society-- often meaning little more than soggy romantic feelings.

So that is our God is it!

Paul here defines love not in terms of romantic feelings or emotions, but in terms of practical ordinary everyday qualities -- Love is patient, does not remember others wrongs, isn't rude.

This practical, caring love is the love which, Paul reminds them, had to characterise the Christian community if it is in any sense to be recognised as Christian.

Whatever special spiritual gifts we receive from God, both individually and as the church, the one thing which we must keep at the centre of our community is this love..