# 1 Corinthians 13 - The Most Excellent Way

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1 Corinthians chapter 13. At this point, somebody's probably going oh, oh, oh, I know that's the love chapter, right? I always want to say it like the announcer on the Love Boat, but only people who live during the 70s would get it, so, I'm going to just forego that one.

We're going to read through the chapter and then we'll get into this. Ready? Verse 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. [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. [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.*

*[4] Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant [5] or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; [6] it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. [7] Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*

*[8] Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. [9] For we know in part and we prophesy in part, [10] but when* (perfect or) *the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. [11] When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. [12] For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.*

*[13] So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love."* (ESV)

Pray with me, please:

Heavenly Father, we thank You for the opportunity to come together this morning and be in the Word. We pray that as we do, as we spend time going

through this passage and looking at the verses and looking at the wording, that You would speak to us, Lord, and give us insight and understanding as to what these things mean. And most of all, Lord, how we can apply these truths to our lives.

We pray that You would teach us today what we need to learn. We are Your students, O Lord, and may our hearts be open to Your voice through Jesus Christ, our savior, amen.

As I alluded when we just got started here: it's very common for people to take 1 Corinthians 13 and to pull it away from the context of what Paul is talking about, which is spiritual gifts. Chapter 12, spiritual gifts; chapter 14, spiritual gifts; chapter 13, it's like, wouldn't he want to just kind of take a vacation for a minute from talking about spiritual gifts? Oh, by the way, let's talk about love. And we tend to do that. We tend to take this chapter and we pull it out. And that's not to say that the chapter, at least as it relates to the definition of love, can't be viewed on its own, because it can.

But I think that we do ourselves a grave disservice when we cease to connect what Paul is saying to the subject of spiritual gifts and what he's trying to communicate here with us. Paul is still talking about spiritual gifts, and he wants you and I to know that love plays into the whole thing. That's a very important thing for us to know.

And the reason it's important is because unfortunately many churches that still operate in spiritual gifts do so apart from this chapter, and love is not brought into play. In fact, anything but, and we'll see that even more when we get into the next chapter, but it's very important as we look at these verses to look at the last verse of the previous chapter.

Just remember: Paul didn't write chapters when he wrote; you don't either. When you write letters, I hope you don't chapter 1; that would be weird, right? Paul didn't do that either. We put in chapters much, much, much, much later. But for the sake of helping us to understand, chapter 12 and the very last verse, which is verse 31, says this, *"But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way."* The reason that's an important statement is because that excellent way that Paul talks about there is what he now reveals in chapter 12.

What is Paul saying here? Paul is telling us that the motive and the heart behind spiritual gifts ought to be love. That is how that they should function. It's funny; the apostle Paul never condemned the Corinthian church. They were weird. I

mean, they were a little bit whacked out when it came to spiritual gifts, quite honestly. But he didn't ever condemn them. He didn't rebuke them. And he didn't say, don't do that. He said, you guys need some order, you need some direction. But he told them to, he encouraged them to desire spiritual gifts.

In fact, when he started this letter, he commended them for being a church that was functioning in spiritual gifts. But what he needs now to say to them is that there's a course correction that is required related to how you function in spiritual gifts. And it all has to do with love. And that's what he's going to say in this chapter. And that's what I hope we will be seeing here as well.

Look at verse 1 with me, and he says, *"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal."* All right. When Paul makes reference to speaking in tongues here, he's talking about the gift of tongues, it is referred to, and we've already dealt with it in 1 Corinthians chapter 12. And it is the supernatural ability, by God given to an individual, to speak in a language which they have no knowledge of.

In other words, they have no previous knowledge of that language, but they are given by the Spirit the ability to speak in that language. And some of you who are uninitiated and maybe haven't looked into these things in the past might be kind of rolling your eyes at this moment. It may be inside anyway, and thinking, yeah, right, this is weird. This is just flat out weirdness. What in the world would God do that for?

Well, that's not the purpose of our study today. We talked about it a bit last time. We're going to talk about it again in chapter 14. The point here is that Paul is saying, even if somebody has that, if I have that spiritual gift, and I'm able to speak in the languages of men or angels, but I have not love, and I'm not showing love, then it's like I'm standing up here just hitting a cymbal, or a gong. Can you imagine?

You guys remember the Gong Show? Again, I'm referring, I don't know when that was. It should have never been, but it was. People would get up and entertain, and if the judges didn't like them, they'd gong them. But can you imagine me getting up here this morning and saying, we're going to, we have a spiritual gong up on the platform and I'm going to hit it a few times. And I just kind of, gong, gong. And then I said, okay, now we're going to close in prayer. And you guys would all kind of go, yeah, that's weird. Because there's really, because there's no edification, there's no, there's nothing that you could walk away with and say, I've been built up in the Lord today. I've been encouraged in Jesus. I've been, I've been given hope.

But yet Paul says, if you walk in the spiritual gift of being able to speak in languages for which you have never learned, but you are not operating out of a heart of love, it's just as if you got up and hit the gong a few times and then said, we're done, God bless you, see you later. Paul's making it very clear that it's just making noise, and it is ultimately meaningless.

Now here's the question we need to ask ourselves: Why? Do you ever, do you do that very often? Do you ever ask just why? Paul's making a statement—without love, this spiritual gift doesn't have meaning. Okay, why? What is it about love that makes a spiritual gift actually have meaning or value? Well, that's the thing that the Corinthians were missing. And it's sometimes what we miss as well.

The reason that God gave spiritual gifts to the church, you guys, is to empower us by the Spirit to communicate His love to a lost and dying world, right? That's our purpose. That's why we're here. We're here to communicate the love of God to a lost world. And sometimes the communication of that love requires a supernatural ability. And that's where spiritual gifts come into play—that they enable us to go beyond the natural, to speak into the supernatural or by the supernatural, and to accomplish this work that the Holy Spirit has called us to accomplish. And that's the part that we forget.

You see, for the Corinthians, spiritual gifts became a means of just displaying their spirituality. It was a way of me just; if I spoke in tongues in front of you, it was, I can speak in the tongues of men and angels. And you can't, sort of a thing; a one-up-man sort of, and I'm more mature than you are sort of an attitude. Paul says, guys, you've missed the whole point. God gives you spiritual gifts so that you can communicate to the world and to one another even in the body of Christ, God is love, and God loves you. His love is everlasting.

It's a powerful thing, but we can easily become so fixated on spiritual gifts or anything else for that matter. But in this context, we can become so fixated on spiritual gifts. We stopped caring about people. We're just talking about the gift. You got the gift. I got the gift. Did you get the gift? He's got the gift. Ooh, she got the gift yesterday. Okay. And we're all just focused on these things and we're forgetting why. Why God gave them, why he gifted them? That you might communicate His love. Even prophecy, which Paul held in very high regard.

Look what he says in verse 2 about prophecy. He says, "*And if I have prophetic powers, and* (by that means can) *understand all mysteries and all knowledge,* (and then he throws in something else just for good measure, he says) *and if I have all faith…"* Not just faith for something, but all faith; he's using kind of

some extremes here. He says, and notice he goes on verse 3: *"If I* (even)*give away all I have* (the idea there is giving it to the poor)*, and if I deliver up my body to be burned* (and that's the idea of being martyred for Christ. All right, I'm giving up my life in martyrdom)*, but have not love, I gain nothing."* Okay, so previously he made mention of the gift of tongues, and he said, if I have not love but I'm functioning in that gift, it's meaningless; it's just noise.

Now he goes on to say, and if I've been given prophetic powers, or the power of faith, to be able to move mountains, and I can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I give all that I have, everything that I own, and give it to the poor, and if I even surrender my very life in martyrdom for the cause of Jesus Christ, if I do it apart from love, he says, I gain nada, absolutely nothing. That's a strong statement, a very strong statement. And this is something—love is a powerful thing that we're going to see as we finish out this chapter.

It is what causes things to be valuable. It's what causes things to be meaningful, right? The message is clear: when love is why we do what we do, it has value. In fact, it makes churches valuable in what they do. And when I think about that, I have to stop and think. I have to stop and think about Calvary Chapel, Ontario. And I think, for 25 years that this church has now been in existence, I have to ask myself the question, have, is what we've done valuable?

I think if we probably are known, in the sense of a reputation for anything, here in this end of the treasure valley, it's probably we're probably known as being a church that focuses on the teaching of God's Word. For 25 years, we've been teaching through the Bible, chapter by chapter, verse by verse, to the point that we're on our third pass through the entire Bible. And I would assume that probably people know that, mostly, and they probably even appreciate it.

But then I have to ask myself the question: where does love come into play in who and what we are as a church? Because love is what makes it all valuable. I mean, are we just spitting out information, or are we doing something genuinely helpful, beneficial in the kingdom of God? Well, how do I know whether or not we have love? That's how I know. What would Paul say to us as a church?

Anyway, the point here is that love needs to be the focus. It needs to be the heart behind what we do, behind everything we do. And that's a challenging thought. Because it's so easy to just let it go and just do things because it needs to be done, and not even think about love. And then, when we talk about love, we have to ask the further question, what kind of love is even talking about here? Because, see, in America, we have a word for how I feel about pizza and how I feel about my wife. And it's the same word because I happen to love

pizza, although I haven't eaten very much of it in the last few years. But the point is it's the same; it's the same word. I can say in one sense, I love pizza. And then turn around and say to my wife, I love you. And it sounds exactly the same, but I sure hope it's different. And I think she does too. I trust that she does.

The point is the Greek language has actually several words that are translated love in the New Testament. And if you don't know what's behind the word, sometimes you might miss the meaning. Because again, English is pretty simple. I love is something we use to describe many things. In the Greek, there are three main, main uses for the word love, and they are:

**Greek words for LOVE**

- eros
- phileo
- agape

Eros, phileo, and agape.

**Greek words for LOVE**

- **eros - love between the sexes**
- phileo
- agape

And as we highlight each of them, you see that eros is the love between sexes.

The love that a husband has for his wife, or a wife for her husband, or something. In fact, this is where we get our word erotic. So, you can tell what kind of love we're talking about there.

**Greek words for LOVE**

- eros
- **phileo - brotherly love**
- agape

And then you come to phileo love, which is a kind of a more general, broader sort of a usage of love.

And it describes the love between friends. It's a kindly, friendly affection. It's one of the reasons why the city of Philadelphia was given its name. Philadelphia, as you know, means the city of brotherly love, and it comes

literally from the Greek word phileo, right? Which means that kind, loving friendship.

**Greek words for LOVE**

- eros
- phileo
- **agape - unconditional love**

And then you've got the last word, which is agape, and that is, as you see on the screen there: unconditional love, but it goes so much deeper than that.

It's the highest form of love that there is. It is the essence of goodwill and benevolence. And it means to delight in the object of your love. And do you understand, people, that much, much of what we love because of what we're going to get out of it?

That particularly describes my love for pizza. I love pizza. I don't just love to sit and look at it, right? I don't drive by the pizza shop and go, oh, love, love. I say that because I want to eat it. Frankly, that's the way we even respond; even erotic love, eros love, is self-directed. I love because I love being loved. I love because I like getting love back.

And frankly, erotic love, and even brotherly love, phileo love, those things can be thwarted or violated in such a way that I will remove that love. I no longer feel that love toward you because of, maybe you cheated on me. And so I no longer have that kind of love, or we were friends, but now you've decided you don't want to be friends anymore. Now that kind of phileo love has gone away. Do you understand that those kinds of loves can be thwarted?

Agape love can't be, can’t be thwarted because it has nothing to do with the giver. It has everything to do with the recipient. It's all about the recipient. And this is the way God loves you and me, and it's pretty cool love when you stop and think about it. Because what that means is you can't do anything to thwart His love. You can't sin your way out of His love. You can't, you can shout in His face and curse at Him all you want, and He's still going to love you. Now, that may not be true with the person, but it is very true of God.

God, and this is the other thing that's interesting and important to know about Agape love. It's a choice to love. It is a choosing of the will to love. Somebody asks you, if they ever ask you the question, so God loves you, right? Yes, God loves me. How do you— why does He love you? Are you so special? No, nothing special about me. Well, then why does God love you? What would you

say to somebody? The answer is because He's chosen to love me. He chooses. He's chosen to love me. In fact, no matter what, He's going to continue to love me, right? That's agape love. And His love is predicated upon His will and the determination of His will, and it is not predicated upon anything about me.

Agape love is not something that you merit. It's not something you become worthy of receiving. It is something that God simply gives because He decides to love you.

Our love is so easily predicated upon externalities, isn't it? We love people because they love us back. We love people because they are talented, or they smell nice, or they're pretty, or we love the— I just love your voice. Or I love this about you, or I love that. And it's all very external. And we were just really drawn by those things. I'm drawn. Oh, I'm just drawn to this individual. That's all very selfish. It's not a determination of the will. It's an attraction of some kind of a physical, emotional thing that feeds me somehow to love you. I'm loving you because it feeds me to love you. Well, that's not God's love.

God's love does, in fact, if you decide today, I don't love God. In fact, I hate God. He's still going to love you. He's going to keep loving you. That's not going to thwart His love. It's not going to foil His love. Because it's agape love. You get it? You get the picture? Let me show you a passage. Ephesians chapter 2. I've highlighted the word, love because, well, you'll see:

**Ephesians 2:4-5 (ESV)**

*God, being rich in mercy, because of the great **love** with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ —by grace you have been saved.*

*"God* (Paul writes)*, being rich in mercy, because of the great **love*** (That's not Eros, that's not phileo. That's agape because of the great, unconditional, unmerited, and focused love that is a purpose of His, of the setting of His will.) *with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses…"* What does that mean? That means even when you guys didn't care a hoot about God, and you were living in the just the fullness of your sinful life, that's when He loved you the most. And he goes on to say, "*....by grace you have been saved* (so on and so on)*."*

Important thing to know here is that this is the way God loves you. But it is not only the way that God loves you; it is the way that we are called to love one another. And if you just feel like I just flattened all four of your tires, that's

okay, because it really is impossible apart from God. Let me put this passage up, though.

**John 13:34 (ESV)**

*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.*

*"A new commandment I give to you, that you love* (agape) *one another: just as I have* (agape) *you, you also are to* (agape) *one another."*

This is the commandment of Jesus to you and I, the believers in Him, and He says, I want you to agape.

Now, the first thing we recognize when we really begin to understand the fullness of agape love is this: I can't do that. I can't do that. I am so selfish. I am so self-centered, and I am so focused on myself and what things —what I get out of things. Agape love is just, it's beyond me.

And that's when God comes along and says, that's exactly right. Agape love is beyond you. Guess what though? When you came to me, I gave you my spirit. My spirit came to indwell you, to live literally within you. You are a temple of the Holy Spirit. Now I am there to empower you and to enable you. And now guess what? You can show agape love because I am showing you how to love that way. Ahh, sounds really, I don't know, it sounds easy; it's like, hey, agape love is from God, God is in me, now I can love with agape love.

There's only one problem; there's one thing we haven't talked about yet. We'll get into it later; it's not for today. But it is a critical issue, and that is that for you and I to show agape love, that means we have to die to self. That means the sinful, selfish part of me that wants to do things for me and for my benefit has to step aside in death that the work of God and His true agape love might be shown through me because it's not going to benefit me. Agape love benefits the other person.

Now as Paul gets into this description of agape love, it's really amazing. Look at verse 4 in your Bible. He begins to say, that *"love is patient and kind…"* Patience. Are you very patient? I, yeah. Patience is the quality that speaks of being slow to repay offenses. That's patience, being patient.

He says, love is also kind. Kindness takes many forms, but at its basic element it refers to a gentle approach to people, rather than a harsh, don't do that, or you're doing that wrong, or just that flash point of anger that gets frustrated and

irritated so easily, which don't we all at times? I mean, good grief. But he said, that's not love, love is to express kindness through a gentle response. Even when people mess up, remember that God's love was expressed to you and I, while we were still in our trespasses, while we were still completely opposed to Him, right? That's when God's love was expressed. So, how is He want us to show that kind of kindness even to people who don't care?

He goes on to say, *"...love does not envy or* (it doesn't) *boast; it is not arrogant…"* Those things aren't love. What is envy? Same thing as basically jealousy. Envy takes over when our admiration for someone and what they have becomes resentful because we don't also have it, whether it's a gift or a possession or a relationship or a home or whatever the thing might be. And we begin to envy. And Paul says that's not love.

He says, love doesn't boast. What's interesting about this word for boast here? This is the only time this word is used in the entire New Testament. The only time, and it refers to bragging without foundation, right? To brag without foundation. And then he says, love is not arrogant. Your Bible may say puffed up or proud. And that means to be overly self-confident to the point where nobody can tell you anything.

As far as I'm concerned, he should have just said, love is not like a teenager. Because that described me when I was 14, 15 years old. Nobody could tell me anything because I knew everything. I wasn't teachable. You want to show me how to do that? I already know. Don't bar me. That's the way I was when I was 15 years old. God bless my parents. Surprisingly they lasted into their 80s with having me as the last child. Because boy, bringing up the rear was not easy. Because I did not show any kind of love. This kind of arrogance refers to that prideful, puffed up attitude that cannot be taught. That's not love.

He says in verse 5, love is not rude. And rudeness, of course, is just a disregard for the way people feel and a concern for them. It's a complete disregard of concern. He says, *"...It does not insist on its own way…"* Or your Bible may say, *"...It is not self-seeking…"*And that's just another way of saying it's not selfish. To love is rather to put the benefit or the blessing of others above you.

But that's hard, isn't it? Come on, you guys, that's hard, isn't it? You guys sit there and look like I'm just doing all the confessing here. It's hard. It's hard putting people's feelings above your own, putting—especially when, don't you hate it, guys, when your wife says, let's go out to eat? And then you start talking about where you want to go, and she inevitably wants to go somewhere that you hate. And it's so hard because it's like, let's do Chinese, but you want to go,

okay. It's so hard because I'm hungry and I don't want to go eat Chinese. I hate Chinese, not the people, the food. And I told—I said to somebody, if God ever called me to live in China, I would die of starvation, slow starvation. Because I just can't do it. But the whole idea of this kind of love is the idea that it doesn't insist on its own way. And it says, let's go do that.

It says, *"...It's not irritable or resentful."* The NIV says. *"...It's not easily angered."* In other words, it doesn't quickly come to that place of frustration. Oh, why do you always do that sort of a thing. That's not love. And then notice the word resentful. The idea of love not being resentful refers to love not keeping track of wrongs that have been committed. And this is something we do.. In fact, the NIV renders this word: *"Love keeps no record of wrongs..."* Which is a dynamic translation of that word. But it's accurate, and we do that, don't we? But love doesn't do that.

Love doesn't, six months down the road, say, yeah, but remember what you did? or remember how you said? and you always do sort of a thing. Love doesn't do that. Love keeps no record. It's not resentful that way, doesn't bring up the past. Are you feeling more and more uncomfortable?

Verse 6: *"*(Love) *does not rejoice* (in wrongdoing or) *at wrongdoing* (which is to say evil)*, but rejoices with the truth..."* This is a way of Paul saying love doesn't, isn't happy when evil wins out; love prefers when people walk in the truth of God and His word. And that's what wins out. He says, *"[7] Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."* Wow. In other words, it doesn't go away. It doesn't give up. It endures.

And again, that's that reminder. You can't love yourself out of, or excuse me, you can't sin yourself out of God's love. Because that's one of the, one of Satan's favorite pet ideas. Is to communicate to you somehow, and maybe the enemy's done this to you. You're sitting in church and people are worshipping or whatever, and Satan just kind of whispers in your ear and says, well, all this good stuff might be great for other people, but you've kind of just messed up a little too much. And so you see, all this joy, all this peace, this hope, it's not something that you're ever going to be able to lay hold of, you see, because you've just, you've sinned too much. It's not for you.

Well, Paul has another thing to tell you about God's love. And that is, it bears all things, it believes all things, it hopes all things, and it endures all things. And you cannot sin your way out of God's love. His heart of love is always there and will not go away.

Now here's, if I could take a little deviation here just for a moment: this is an amazing description of agape love here. But, and it's something that Paul is referring or speaking to the church about related to spiritual gifts. But if I can deviate for just a moment, it's also what He has called men to do in their marriages toward their wives. I know you're going to regret coming today. Check out this passage from Ephesians.

**Ephesians 5:25 (ESV)**

*Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her…*

*"Husbands, love your wives…"* I'd be delighted if the word there was eros, but it's not; it's agape. That's why he says, *" ….love you wives, as Christ loved the church* (As He agape) *and gave himself up for her…"*

Even we men, as we're thinking about our calling to love the women that we've taken into our lives, and we begin to wonder what exactly does that mean? Well, wonder no more. The description is given in 1 Corinthians chapter 13. Here's the next question.

Do we fail? Oh, let me count the ways! I fail on this regard quite often, and I've had now 38 years to fail with my wife. Thankfully, she's a very forgiving woman, but this is what we're called to regardless. And it is not possible apart from the Spirit. Guys, it is not possible apart from the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Now, Paul's goal here was not to talk about marriage; it's to talk to the church, to ask the church, how are you measuring up to the standard of God's love that I've just described? Because you see, the believers in Corinth were kind of plowing ahead as it relates to spiritual gifts, and they were ignoring the fact that love needed to be the crucial element of the exercise of those gifts. And they were doing it especially in the area of spiritual gifts. So, Paul had to remind them what real love is and what real love ought to be motivating.

And too often, this still goes on when you wander into a church. I hate to say this, but you wander into a church where the gifts of the Spirit are active. Too often, there is a complete and total disregard of love for people. They just want to exercise their gifts. They just want to walk in their gifts. And that's what the Corinthians were doing. What's the answer? Well, part of the church decided the answer was just to ignore spiritual gifts. We talked about that. Or the other answer is to try to explain it away.

Well, you notice that Paul doesn't do any of these things. In fact, in chapter 14, he's going to continue to encourage them in the function of their spiritual gifts. But he's going to give them some direction, and that's what we're going to be looking at. But before we get to chapter 14 next time (we won't do it today, of course), we need to cover just these last few verses of the chapter. Because in these last few verses, there are— these have been used as a proof text by people to explain why the gifts of the Spirit are no longer functioning today. And I'm going to show you these.

Let's begin in verse 8. Paul says, *"Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues* (he's talking about the gift of tongues)*, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away."*

What is Paul saying about spiritual gifts here? Well, contextually, what he's saying is these things will pass away; love never will. That's why it's the most excellent way.

But for our understanding, what he's saying about spiritual gifts is: there will come a time when they pass away. Isn't that what your Bible says? These things will pass away. Now, that's not in question here. That's not in dispute. Paul is truly saying the gifts will pass away.

Question, we got to figure out is when? Let's keep reading verse 9: *"For we know in part and we prophesy in part, [10] but* (when, and there's that key word the when question, when) *when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away."* So, there's your answer: spiritual gifts will pass away, when? When the perfect comes. All right, let's close in prayer.

No, I'm just kidding. I'm not going to leave you hanging because the critical issue here, right, is what's the perfect? What does that mean? Well, now, see, here's where people have injected their opinions, their ideas. The word, *"the perfect"* can also be translated when completeness or the completeness appears or comes.

And so they have deduced from that, oh, well, that means when the Bible is completed, in other words, when it's no longer being written by the apostles and those who trafficked with them to write the scriptures, when the completion of the canon is done, then spiritual gifts are no longer necessary in the body of Christ.

Now, they'll say, because the Bible is completed, done, spiritual gifts are no longer necessary. Now, this is a very popular teaching in the body of Christ.

And this is used as a proof text to say, first of all, A: Paul says gifts of the Spirit will pass away. And B: he says when the Bible is completed, they will pass away.

I agree with the first deduction. Paul does say spiritual gifts will pass away. But as we're going to see in the next statements that Paul makes, he's not talking about when the Bible is completed. In fact, it couldn't be the completion of the biblical canon. As you're going to see in what he goes on to say, continue reading with me.

Verse 11: *" When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways."* Paul is simply saying when we outgrow things, even spiritually, even in physical terms. I outgrew my childish ways. In spiritual terms, we will outgrow certain things, like spiritual gifts. He still hasn't told us when.

Look at verse 12: *"For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known."* Now, what Paul is doing is he's giving a description of the now and the then.

The now is in Paul's present day. The then is when the 'perfect comes, okay? He's saying now we see only partial, dimly. Then we're going to see everything, right? Now, I know only partially, then I will know fully (and then this is the critical qualifying statement); even (he says) as I have been fully known.

What Paul is saying here is, when the perfect comes, I will see and know as I am known by God. That's the finishing of that thing. These are the two things; here they are:

**When "the Perfect" comes…**

1. "Then" [we shall see] face to face
2. "Then" I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

When the perfect comes, we will see face to face, and he says we will know fully. Again, the qualifier: even as I have been fully known.

With that description, we need to ask ourselves a few questions. And that is, do I see face to face? Do we see face to face? Do we know as we are fully known? Do you know to that degree? Do you and I know today as we are fully known? How well, how much does God know you? That's the question you have to ask, because he's saying, and then I'm going to know as God knows me, I'm going to know.

How does God know you? How much does God know you? David talked about it 700 years before Christ was born.

**Psalm 139:1-4 (NIV)**

*O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD.*

*"O LORD, you have searched me and you know me.* (He says) *you know when I sit and* (you know) *when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down* (in other words, my coming and going)*; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely…"* God, before I talk, what I'm going to say, before I think what I'm going to think.

We know elsewhere in the scripture that God knows you to the very number of hairs on your head (Matthew 10:30); which isn't to say He sits and counts the follicles, and every time you drop one, He makes a correction. I mean, He could. But that's a way of God saying that He's intimately acquainted with every aspect of your being.

All right, that's how God knows you. Now, when the perfect comes, you're going to know as God knows you. In other words, you're going to have perfect intimate knowledge of all those things.

Ask yourself the question: do you now have perfect intimate knowledge of all things? No, we don't. And if we don't have perfect knowledge of all things, then that means the perfect has not yet come; and if the perfect has not yet come, that means spiritual gifts are still available to the church today.

By the way, the perfect can only refer to the coming of Jesus Christ for His church to set all things in order, to bring the perfect knowledge and understanding of these things which today we cannot see. And the other thing that's interesting about Paul's statement is he says, today, says, now we see dimly as in a mirror, but only in a through a dim mirror, then we shall see face to face.

What if we're going to believe that the perfect has already come, then what you have to say is, you know more than Paul; that's what you have to say. You have to say, Paul saw dimly. I see perfectly. Problem with that is that we're still

trying to figure out some of the things he wrote about. We got things in some of his epistles that still cause us to scratch our head and go, okay, I don't get that.

Where's this perfect understanding that he talks about? Well, it hasn't come yet, because Christ hasn't come yet and set all things in order. Paul ends this letter by saying, *"So now faith, hope, and love abide* (verse 13) *, these three; but the greatest of these is love."*

People, we're going to end with this: Faith, hope, love. He says the greatest is love. Why? Why? Because love is the only one of those three that's going to go on into eternity.

Do you guys understand that faith and hope are going to also go away, right? Let me show you, let me show you a couple of quick passages: Hebrews 11.

**Hebrews 11:1 (ESV)**
*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of THINGS NOT SEEN.*

*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of THINGS NOT SEEN.*

We put our faith in that in which is unseen, believing that someday we will see it. But what happens when we see it? Are you still going to have faith? That you're going to see it? No; you're going to have it right in front of you. You don't have to exercise faith anymore because it's right there.

It's kind of like when you pray for something—God, you pray and you ask for something specific from the Lord, and then He answers and gives it to you. Do you still have to put your faith in God that He's going to give it to you someday? No; you've got it. It's right there. You no longer have to exercise faith. You see, faith passes away when we receive what God has promised. And then what about hope? Let's look at that one.

**Romans 8:24 (ESV)**
*For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees?*

*"For in this hope* (he says) *we were saved.*(Now what is hope? He says), *now hope that is seen* (in other words, possessed) *is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees?"* Or he could say it this way: Who hopes in what he already has.

Can you imagine a little child saying, I hope, I hope, I hope, I get a bike for Christmas. I want to, I hope, I hope, I get a bike for Christmas. And he wakes up on Christmas morning and there's this bike next to the tree with a bow on it. Does he still keep saying, I hope, I hope, I hope, I get a bike? No, he goes, yeah, I got a bike. He's no longer hoping because he has it.

What are we saying? Faith is going to pass away. Hope is going to pass away because why? They will be realized. They will be fulfilled when every promise of God is made real, is manifest. Maybe that's a better way to say it. Love, that one just keeps going into all eternity. We are going to love God and be loved by God. And that's why people say love is the most excellent way.