

# A Study of First Corinthians

## Week Eleven

1 Corinthians 12:21-14:8

### Day One

21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" 22 On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, 24 while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, 25 so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. 26 If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

v. 21 – There are many analogies that represent the people of God in Scripture. The Church is referred to as a bride, an army, a body, a vine, a city and a temple. **Can you think of any others that I missed?** Each analogy teaches us something important about how the body of Christ functions or how it is seen by Jesus. We must be careful, however, not to emphasize one analogy over the others. I have seen some so enamored, for example, with the army analogy that they can't seem to make reference to anything else.

In this verse, Paul continued to compare the body of Christ to the human body, using that particular analogy to emphasize the fact that each part relies on the other. Each body part and member is critical to the effective working of the body—so it is with the body of Christ.

vs. 22-25 – There are some parts of the body that no one would want to look at on a regular basis, such as the lungs, heart and stomach. These parts are essential, however, so they are covered with skin and out of sight. No one would want to behold them, yet they are indispensable to life. Someone can lose an arm or leg and still live, someone could lose a lung and may live but no one could lose their heart and survive. That is how it is with the body of Christ. Not all ministries or gifts are made for public display, but that doesn't make them less important than the other parts. They are essential for the life of the Body.

**What would some of the unseemly or less honorable parts of the body today?** In my opinion, this could be children's workers, missions work, those who care for the sick and counseling ministries. **Can you think of any others?** Because these gifts operate "out of sight," it is all too easy for them to operate "out of mind" where the church is concerned. They tend to receive less honor and resources to do their work. **What can we do to change this?** We must stop "over-honoring" the public ministries of music and speaking and find ways to honor and support the less honorable but critical workers who

are carrying out their work among the poor and needy. **Do you agree? If so, what can you do to help honor and support the less honorable members and gifts?**

v. 26 – **Are you in touch with any suffering members of Jesus’ body? Are you aware of their burdens and the pressures that go with the work that God has given them to do?** When my foot hurts, my whole body is hurting. My entire body works to do something to help my foot, because it is a part of the whole. That is how we are to treat our fellow members of the Body who may be suffering.

## Day Two

27 Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. 28 And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. 29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? 30 Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? 31 But eagerly desire the greater gifts. And now I will show you the most excellent way.

v. 27 – I am only a part of the Body. I heard someone make a point one time that a heresy is when someone makes a part the whole. Let me explain. If someone has a gift of intercessory prayer, that is a good thing. But if they treat prayer like it is the only gift or the most important one, then they are making a mistake. That attitude or belief will affect their teaching and how they treat the other members who aren’t as effective at prayer as they are. I have seen this attitude surface with people who have a burden for missions, outreach to the poor and counseling as well. They are highly critical of other parts of the Body because the other members parts aren’t paying enough attention to their particular call or burden. In my mind, this is wrong and partly what Paul was addressing here.

v. 28 – I think these gifts or roles are still functioning in the church today. But I also think that this list wasn’t meant to be exhaustive. Proof of this can be seen in that this list differs in part from the list that found in Ephesians 4:11. I think these eight roles exist to help identify, equip and release all the gifts that the Spirit chooses to place in the body of Christ. I also don’t think that this list is meant to establish a hierarchy so that the apostle is the supreme gift over all. I do think the apostle has a critical role to play, sort of like the quarterback on an American football team. The quarterback is usually the star player, but where would he be without the rest of the team? He would be useless. That is how it is with the apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher. They are important members in the Body, but they are also part of the overall team, and need to conduct themselves accordingly.

vs. 29&30 – It may be of note that the only gift that isn’t mentioned in these verses that is first mentioned in verse 28 is the gift of administration. Does that mean that all have some measure of ability to organize and direct? I think so. The word for administration in verse 28 is the word for the helmsman on a ship. The administrator isn’t to determine the direction of the Church or organization, but is responsible to steer the course. And

the bigger any entity or organization becomes, the greater the need for everyone to exercise some measure of self-discipline and forethought to achieve the intended goal.

**Are you reaching your potential where self-discipline and administration are concerned?**

v. 31—Paul then urged his readers to earnestly desire the greater gifts. Which would be the greater gifts? Paul didn't indicate. Then he made a transition to his famous passage on love, which we know to be 1 Corinthians 13. Could the greater gifts be the ones that express the greatest love? We don't usually think of administration, for example, as motivated by love. Yet someone who would express a gift of healing or mercy would be moved by great love for others, I would think. Would that make mercy or healing a greater gift? I think we must read on to determine which gifts Paul considered to be greater.

**By the way, how is your understanding of your own gifts coming along? I had mentioned in a previous study that it would be good to do some research into this issue. There are several gifts profiles available on the market that can be helpful, along with some books on the same topic. I urge you to get to know yourself where your gifts are concerned so you can know where and when to serve when the need arises.**

### Day Three

13:1 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. 4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

v. 1 – Paul had mentioned tongues earlier as a spiritual gift. Once again, I would ask: **How could anyone deny at least the possibility that this is a gift in the church today based on how often Paul mentioned this gift in his epistle?** At any rate, as important as gifts are, they are less than complete unless they are founded and expressed in love. The speaking in tongues, as majestic and as heavenly as it may be, makes one sound like a party noisemaker that is good for nothing unless the motivation for speaking is love.

I said that administration is usually not a gift that is thought of in the context of love. I have an administrative gift, however, and God has worked in my life so that it isn't just a business or organizational expression. A few years ago, I felt impressed in a time of prayer that I wasn't using my administrative gift to help the poor very often. I made some changes and adjustments, particularly in Africa, to express my gift as a practical means to help people. I love to see people clarify their purpose and I am glad to organize seminars and workshops to help people accomplish that. In other words, I am organizing because I love of people and not just because I love organization.

v. 2 – Paul addressed prophecy and faith next, declaring that those two gifts without love amount to nothing. More specifically, Paul wrote that the person is nothing who expresses these gifts without love. This could be a mathematical equation: prophecy plus faith minus love equals zero!  $P + F - L = 0$ .

I have found much of the Pentecostal world enamored with prophecy; much of the evangelical world disdains or ignores its existence. We will discuss this more when we reach the next chapter.

**Is love your motive for expressing your gifts? If not, what changes do you need to make? What should you be asking God to do in your life and heart to make it possible for love to have the upper hand, so to speak?**

v. 3 – This is a startling statement. If I give all my money away and even yield my body to a martyr's death, yet have not love, I gain nothing at all. I am seeing a trend here in what Paul wrote: Unless my focus is the good of other people and that good stems from a heart that expresses God's love, then I am being selfish and my gifts amount to nothing. What's more, a selfish expression of my gifts brings me no benefit, even if those gifts happen to benefit other people.

God is more interested in the heart than He is in the appearance. Based on what this says, I could be an anointed evangelist or working tremendous miracles. The people who were touched by my work would be blessed, but I on the other hand would not benefit if my motive for doing my work wasn't love. It occurs to me that my love here isn't just for the people who benefit, but for God as well. **Is the motivation for my gifts my love for God?** If not and my motivation is only other people, then I think I could be consumed by the needs of people. I could then lose focus on who gave me the gift and how He wants me to use it.

I tell people whom I take to Africa not to give to the needs they will see. There are tremendous needs there and they could give all their money and clothes away on the day they arrive. The impact would be minimal. Instead I urge those who go with me to meet people and establish relationships so that when they do give, it will make an impact in the lives of people they have come to know and love. I think that is the point that Paul was trying to get across here. **Do you agree or disagree?**

v. 4 – Paul then moved into an explanation of what love is. This is really a list of how love is expressed in our relationships with others. It is a bit easier to be patient, for example, with those we hardly know. We just have to be patient with them for a few minutes or hours. **But what about someone with whom we live, work or minister? Isn't that where our love is tested? Isn't that where we need to express love the most?**

Someone once said the church would be a great place if it wasn't for all the people in it! Why would he say that? Obviously because the more we get to know people and the more they know us, the harder it is to relate to them. We see their faults and their

shortcomings often hurt or inconvenience us. **So how is your love for those closest to you? Are you impatient, boastful, envious or proud? If you answer yes to any of those, then your love is faulty and in need of repair or replenishment.**

#### Day Four

5 It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. 8 Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.

v. 5 – I wish Paul hadn't been so specific. When I put my love to the test against what he wrote, I am found sorely lacking! I am often rude at airports when I receive bad service. I find it almost irresistible to talk about myself, what I have accomplished and where I have traveled when the topics come up. I am easily angered by the shortcomings of others, but easily excuse my own. And I have to work to “kill the bookkeeper” – that tendency in my heart to keep an account of the wrongs that were perpetrated against me.

v. 6 – I tend to be a pessimistic administrator. Seeing the negative comes all too easily for me. I don't think this is what the verse is saying, but I can relate it to my ability to see the negative and not the positive. And I seem to relish seeing all that could go wrong—the evil or downside in any situation.

On a deeper level, rejoicing with evil is a hard concept to understand. How could anyone in their right mind delight in what is perverse? Yet it happens all the time. I just read about some armed gunmen in the Middle East who kidnapped some civilians and tortured them brutally until they died. **How could anyone do such a thing? Is it too simplistic to say that they did not have the love of God?**

v. 7 – Up to this point, Paul has said what love is not. Now he says what it is or what love does. Love trusts, hopes, protects and perseveres. I have been honest about my love (or lack of it). Now it's your turn. **Based on what Paul has written in this chapter, how does your love measure up to what Paul described? It's hard to do, I know. So let me give you some more help. Let's consider Jesus' life and see if we can use Jesus as a model of love and then see how we do as we examine Him.**

For example, Jesus trusted men whom He knew would desert Him. He even trusted Judas with the finances of the group and Judas was a thief! That's trust. **Did Jesus hope?** He did, entrusting Himself to the Father on the cross while promising salvation to the thief at His side. **Did He protect?** Yes He did. He protected His disciples through teaching and prayer and He worked to protect women and children from the harshness of men and the Law. **And did He persevere?** He endured to the end, dying a horrible death as directed by His love for the Father and His creation.

You see that Paul was not instructing us to do anything that Jesus did not do. And you further understand that Paul was not giving us some ideal of love that cannot be attained. Jesus achieved this level of love and left us a legacy to follow and the help of the Spirit to see us through to the end. **Reflecting on Jesus' life and love, how can you improve where love is concerned, relying on the Spirit's help to do so?**

This is why love is a more excellent way than gifts. Prophecies, tongues and knowledge will pass away in the next age when they are no longer needed. Then we will see Him face to face and understand all things. But love will continue because God is love, so love is more lasting than gifts, therefore it is a more excellent way. While Paul urged us to pursue and express gifts, I think he was suggesting that these gifts be based on and expressed through love. **Does this make sense? Do you agree or disagree?**

### Day Five

9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. 11 When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. 12 Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. 13 And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

v. 9 – I wish more with prophetic gifts would pay attention to this verse. I believe in prophets and prophecy, but I don't believe that they are infallible. Nor do I think that they see it all or know it all. Paul wrote more about prophecy later, so I will hold any more remarks until later in this study. I also wish more teachers and those who pursue and have knowledge would have the same attitude because they know that they know in part—they don't have all the truth about any topic. That would save us a lot of church splits and arguments.

v. 10 – When perfect love comes, then there is no need for the imperfection of gifts. It is hard for me not to think of these verses in terms of the next age when we will be like Him and behold Him as He is. Until then, we will need all the help from the Spirit that we can get. After His return, we will behold love in all its glory and majesty.

v. 11 – This is a simple analogy of the comparison between the present age where love is imperfect and the next age when the love of God will be obvious to all.

v. 12 – This again seems to me to be a reference to the age to come. Now we know in part, but then I will know in full. I have known the Lord for 33 years as I write, and I have changed many things that I thought I knew at one time. As I have gotten older in years and experience, I see that some of my past understanding was either incomplete or simply wrong. I saw in part and must remember that, even though I know more now, I still know in part. So why do I argue and bicker over things that I think I know when I may not know as much as I think I do? **What about you? Do you exhibit as much**

**charity and love as possible when you disagree with someone or when that person disagrees with you?**

v. 13 – Paul wrote that faith, hope and love remain consistent through our lives. We may or may not have certain gifts, and we may have seasons when those gifts operate more effectively than at other times. But without faith it is impossible to please God. Someone once said that hope is the oxygen for the soul. And love is the motivation upon which we base all that we are and do where God is concerned. So it is easy to see why Paul would say that faith, hope and love remain while other spiritual things come and go—we cannot do without them and serve God! And among those three the greatest is love.

Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (Matthew 22:37-40).

It occurs to me that Jesus never taught on gifts, but He taught a great deal on love. So which do you think is greater—gifts or love? I think Paul chose wisely when he made love the main thing. You and I would do well to make the same choice.

**Day Six**

14:1 Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. 2 For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God. Indeed, no one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit. 3 But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort. 4 He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. 5 I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. He who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may be edified.

v. 1—Paul finished his discourse on love and then returned to a discussion of gifts. We must follow the way of love, which would seem to be our service to and for others. And then he began a discussion of prophecy that lasted the entire chapter (keep in mind that the chapters and verses were added to Paul’s letters many centuries later).

v. 2 – Paul mixed his discussion of prophecy with a mention of tongues. He juxtaposed tongues with prophecy to show the different effects between the two. Speaking in a tongue isn’t for a discussion between believers but between a believer and God. When one speaks in tongues, one is using his or her spirit to utter things known only to God unless someone can interpret that tongue.

v. 3 – A prophecy, on the other hand, is spoken not for the benefit of the believer but for the benefit of the one listening. I have often felt that some have prophesied for their own benefit and not always for the benefit of the listener. What should the result be from a

prophecy? It should strengthen, encourage or comfort the hearer. Notice that it doesn't say a prophecy should flatter the listener, especially the leader of the church. I will say again that I don't think Paul would have written as much as he did about tongues and prophecy if they were not relevant for the church today.

v. 4 – This is straightforward and simple. The one who speaks in a tongue is benefiting himself and the one speaking a prophecy is benefiting someone else.

v. 5 – Paul knew that tongues would benefit the user, but that could lead to selfishness. Selfishness isn't an expression of love, for love seeks to benefit others. So he urged them to pursue prophecy rather than tongues. I don't think Paul was saying that prophecy was the best gift, but it is better than tongues since it helped others.

**How are you using your gifts to benefit others? Do you know what your gifts are by now? Could you have any gifts of which you are aren't aware or which you don't consider gifts? And how do you feel about prophecy? Do you recognize its worth? Exercise its gift? Honor the gift in others?**

### Day Seven

6 Now, brothers, if I come to you and speak in tongues, what good will I be to you, unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or word of instruction? 7 Even in the case of lifeless things that make sounds, such as the flute or harp, how will anyone know what tune is being played unless there is a distinction in the notes? 8 Again, if the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle?

v. 6 – It seems to me that the Corinthians must have raised a question about prophecy and tongues in their letter to Paul. They could have had some who wanted to speak in tongues in the public meeting, substituting that for a message using intelligible language. In fact, I read that some believed the local temple prostitutes would go into trances and use another language to speak in their temple rituals. It was quite possible that some of those women became Christians and continued their ritual, speaking in tongues in the local church. Maybe they saw that as being spiritual. Perhaps the leadership was asking how they should handle that situation.

If that was true, and there no way to know for sure, then Paul was urging the church to use the public meeting not to carry out some secret rite of speaking in tongues, but rather to edify those who were present. Paul was so practical and often counseled out of just plain common sense.

vs. 7&8 – I have often taken these verses out of context, using it as a basis for individuals and organizations to be clear about their purpose and what they exist to do. Of course, Paul was using it to reinforce his philosophy that tongues not making any sense will not move people to action or knowledge in a church setting.

Bear with my application for a moment. Clarity is essential for effectiveness. If you can't clearly describe who you are and what your purpose is, then no one will rally to your cause. I have heard people describe their purpose as "Well, it's sort of like, you know, helping people, but it's not me but Jesus who is sort of working with people to bring them some sort of assistance." What does that mean? How could someone respond to that and say, "Oh I see. Could you please help me?" It won't happen.

**So are you clear about what you are supposed to do? Is your organization clear? Can you state it simply and in just a few words? Or are you blowing a trumpet, producing an unclear sound, and wondering why things aren't happening for you? Is your company or ministry trying to be everything to everyone? When that happens, you lose any chance to be profitable or effective.**

**Now let's return to Paul's meaning. If you are involved in a church, are your public meetings effective? Do people leave confused or clear? Are they edified or bored? Do they feel like they've heard from the Lord or are they just fulfilling their duty of going to church?**

**People often say to me, "I enjoyed your message." I sometimes say, "Thank you" and then ask, "What did I say?" I want to see if I have been clear and whether or not I connected with the listener. It isn't enough that people enjoyed my style, humor or delivery. I want to know if they heard and understood me. Otherwise I may be making an unclear sound that isn't capable of moving people in the direction that the Lord has chosen. Does this make sense? Are you clear? If not, then your ability to help people using your gifts and your love for them are both hindered.**