

The Way of Love

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[0 : 00] Father, thank you that you are the speaking God. You're not an idol that can do nothing, but you speak to us with words of power, words of love. So please would you speak to each one of our hearts.

We hear what you want us to hear, no matter how close we are to you, how far we are to you. Thank you that you reach out to each one of us. So would we hear your voice today as Annabelle reads as I try to speak in Jesus' name.

Amen. Annabelle. Good morning, Watermark. The scripture for today comes from 1 Corinthians 13, verses 1 to 13.

Please follow along on the bulletin, the screen, or your own Bibles. If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

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.

[1 : 10] If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient and kind. Love does not envy or boast. It is not arrogant or rude.

It does not insist on its own way. It is not irritable or resentful. It does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.

Love bears all things. Love bears all things. Believes all things. Hopes all things. Endures all things. Love never ends.

As for prophecies, they will pass away. As for tongues, they will cease. As for knowledge, it will pass away.

[2 : 06] For we know in part, and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.

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.

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 known fully.

So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three. But the greatest of these is love. This is the word of God. Thank you, Annabelle.

Dearly beloved, we are gathered today on this wonderful occasion in the presence of God to witness the marriage of Richard and Susan.

[3 : 18] Thank you all for coming. I mean, that's kind of what you expect me to say now, right? Because you heard this passage. My guess is the previous time you heard it was at a wedding. This is the most popular wedding passage in the world.

It's about love. And even if you're here, maybe you're a visitor, your first time in church, you probably think, hey, I've heard that passage before at a wedding, maybe at a funeral.

Yeah, it's so famous, right? And we all know what it means. Love is the most important thing. And so many people, they say, oh, this is my favorite passage. So in a way, I don't want to preach on it, right?

Because I'm just going to ruin it. I'm going to get my dirty hands all over it. And you kind of, oh, you've ruined it for me. But I think it's a great passage because, of course, it's in the Bible.

It's also, you know, Hong Kong is at the city of love. Do we live in a great city? But it's not really known as the city of love, right? It's the city of hard work and making money.

[4 : 18] And so I'm not sure if we come from a culture where love is so valued. As a church, you know, we know in our heads, yeah, love is the most important thing.

But do we really believe it and practice it? Certainly the Corinthians had problems with that. So this actually is poem. It's not from a wedding. It's from the letter of one Corinthians.

And, yeah, Paul was addressing this church. They were into spiritual gifts, really miraculous abilities that God gives. And they were proud about it, envious, those kind of things.

And Paul wants to address them. And so in that, as he addresses this problem, he gives this beautiful poem about love. It is a poem, right? It's really beautiful.

It's really, you know, love believes all things, hopes all things. It's really beautiful. But it's not from a wedding. You know, you don't hear anything about marriage, nothing about husband or wife.

[5 : 19] On the other hand, you do hear, well, tongues and prophecy and knowledge, right? He's talking about spiritual gifts. He's talking about, yeah, speaking in tongues, about a word of knowledge, those kind of things.

So, yeah, that's what we're going to look at today. And, yeah, I pray that it will be really good for us. So, what is Paul saying? Well, the first point, I think it's pretty clear.

That gifts without love mean nothing. He's telling the Corinthians, gifts without love mean nothing. And so, first one, if I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

Speaking about speaking in tongues, you know, if I can speak by the Holy Spirit in the language of angels, right, it's so special. Well, actually, if I don't have any love, if I do that without love, then I'm just a clanging gong.

I'm just this really annoying noise that no one wants to hear. Like if we put this drum kit in the river class, I think that's the kind of noise that you would get, right?

[6 : 29] That's what it's like. So, gifts without love mean nothing. Some people last week thought that, you know, I have something against speaking in tongues. That's just the Apostle Paul, right?

He's talking to this church that is obsessed with speaking in tongues. And so, he, you know, really wants to address that. So, it's not me. It's Paul. But it's not the only gift, right?

So, prophecy, verse 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.

You know, I have prophetic powers. I can give everyone a word directly from God. And if I pray, you know, the mountains can move. If you were in prayer meeting in CGs this week, you heard that famous verse from Jesus, right?

If you have just faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, it will move. I've never done that. But even if you could do that, and Paul says, if you do that for selfish reasons, it's nothing.

[7 : 35] It is, yeah, it doesn't mean anything, right? It's really not what we expect, right? Or charity. Verse 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, right?

If you give millions and millions of dollars to charity. As we walk around here in Hong Kong, you see all these buildings named after people who paid for it. And that's really wonderful.

And yet Paul says, if that is without love, if you give money just to, you know, to feel good about yourself, if you just do it to show off, it's nothing, right? That is what Paul says.

I don't know what it is for you. Certainly for the Corinthians, it's a challenge. Their obsession with gifts, well, without love, it's nothing. Maybe you can do miracles. Maybe you can heal people.

You can raise people from the dead. Or maybe you've planted a church, and within two years, it's grown to 6,000. Wow. Maybe you understand every single book of the Bible, even the Song of Songs.

[8 : 43] And yet, if you do that without love, Paul says, it is nothing. And if you lack love, you can go to North Korea as a missionary. If it's not out of love, Paul says, well, it doesn't mean anything.

It's really interesting, right? We often, you know, we're a pretty results-oriented society, and we think, you know, what you do is what matters, right? It doesn't really matter why you give.

As long as you give money to the poor, the poor are happy. It's a good challenge. What makes for a good action? Maybe if you're here, you're not a Christian. What makes something good?

What makes something right? If you give for selfish, if you do something good for selfish reasons, is it actually still good? And of course, if it's not actually that good, if you do it for yourself, I think one question is, how good are we really, right?

If motivation matters and not just what we do. But that's the challenge. Paul says, well, without love, all your gifts and all your prophecies and tongues and everything, it's nothing.

[9 : 47] Again, as Christians, it challenges us. We usually think that, you know, if someone can do something really spiritual, it must be, that must be a man of God, right? They must be really close to God. I mean, how can you heal people and hear from God and you're not close to him?

Well, sometimes, of course, the Bible says, yeah, that's true. Jesus can say, yeah, look at my miracles. Clearly, I'm the Messiah. Yeah? Sometimes it does work. But not always.

The fact that you can do these things doesn't always have to mean anything. In the Old Testament, you probably know the story of Samson. I mean, he was really gifted by God. He was so strong and powerful to save people.

And yet he was immoral and proud and bad-tempered. And he was not at all a good role model, right? We know that. Or even worse, there's this scary passage in Matthew.

The Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

[10 : 54] On that day, many will say to me, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and cast out demons in your name and do mighty, mighty works in your name? And then will I declare to them, I never knew you.

Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness. There are people who can do miracles and yet they don't know Jesus. That's the scary thing that this passage says.

So yeah, someone, you know, some televangelist and they do miracles, but they have shady finances. It's all for themselves. Yeah.

We shouldn't treat a person as if, you know, this must be a real man of God just because of the miracles. That's the challenge here. It's ultimately about love. It's a challenge for me, right?

The fact that God can do amazing things even if that means nothing for my spiritual state, right? So I preach and a couple of people say, oh, that was such a great sermon. And then I probably think, oh, wow, I must be, well, I must be really good, right?

[11 : 54] God must be happy with me. No. God just loves you guys. He wants to speak to you, even if it is through me, right? That's what I should think. It means nothing. Paul says, look at your heart, right?

It's not about how gifted you are. It's not about how great you are and how much you do. What is your heart like? Is there love? And the fruit of the spirit is far more important than the gifts of the spirit.

And yeah, gifts without love. Is that the Corinthians? Well, let's look at verses four to seven because these are these really famous verses, right? Love is patient and kind.

Love does not envy or boast. And that's what we read at the weddings, right? Love does not envy or boast. Ah, love is patient. Ah, and it's so, right? You know the feeling.

That's what a wedding is like. Oh, and we always just, I've heard so many sermons where they say, Paul was just dreaming about Jesus, right? He's writing this letter and he's thinking about Jesus and writing down, oh, Jesus is, but then, of course, changing Jesus to love because Jesus is love incarnate, right?

[13 : 04] Someone says, Jesus is love covered with flesh, so, ah, love is patient and kind. And the Corinthians hear it and they are so inspired to be loving. Well, Paul is definitely thinking of someone, but I'm not sure it's Jesus.

The thing is, this is chapter 13, right? And what kind of things has Paul been saying to them in chapters 1 to 12? Well, let me read a few verses. In chapter 11, each one goes ahead with his own meal and so wait for one another.

Chapter 3, while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh? Chapter 4, if then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

Chapter 5, and you are arrogant. Chapter 10, let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor. But you yourselves wrong and defraud even your own brothers, right?

The whole letter has been one big rebuke. And now, Paul talks about love and so what does he say? Well, love is patient. Love does not envy or boast.

[14 : 11] Love is not arrogant. Love does not exist on its own way, right? What is Paul saying? Well, love is not you, right? Look at yourselves. You are not loving, right?

Guys, look at yourselves. Love is, it does not envy. Love does not eat all the foods at the Lord's Supper before the poor arrive. Love does not boast in, you know, in your pastor.

Love, you know, it doesn't envy the person who speaks in tongues, right? That's what he's saying. This is actually a pretty stinging passage if you think about it, right? He's just throwing tomatoes at the Corinthians, basically.

I don't know, there's a lot of young people here. Maybe you're dating, getting engaged. Maybe don't give, if you ask me to preach at your wedding, don't give me this passage, right?

Because you may not like what I'm going to say. Okay, well, love is not what Richard did like last week, right? But that is basically what he's saying.

[15:10] But yeah, we think it's funny, but at the same time, you know, that's the Corinthians. What would Paul say to us? Right? We were at confession just now. You know, love remembers to pray for people when you said you would pray for them.

Love does not bail out of serving at the last moment. Love does not have difficult conversations by text message. Love considers what others may be going through before making a joke.

Love does not change CG just over a misunderstanding. And so on, and so on, right? I don't know what it is for you. The Holy Spirit needs to speak to you, but that is basically what Paul is saying.

Look, guys, love is not you. Gifts without love, that very much describes what you are like, right? You lack love.

Of course, that raises the question, then why is love so important, right? Why, hey, we have all these spiritual gifts. Why are they less important than love? And so we get the last section.

[16:13] Verses 8 to 13. And he is saying, well, the thing is, love lasts and gifts don't. Right? Compared to love, spiritual gifts, they just don't last.

They are temporary. And Paul, you know, Christian life is quite easy. Just think about what matters in a thousand years. And then you know what really matters. And that's what Paul thinks.

Well, think of the future. Think, take the long-term view. And then, yeah, it says, verse 8, love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will pass away.

As for tongues, they will cease. As for knowledge, it will pass away. So prophecy, words of knowledge, all that stuff will pass away. But when and why?

Well, verse 9, for we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. And he's saying, well, gifts are partial, but the perfect will come.

[17:14] Now, what is the perfect? I think, you know, Christians have wrestled with that. There are some people who would say, well, look, that is the New Testament. Back then, Christians did not have the New Testament yet, so we needed things like prophecy and those kind of things just because, yeah, because we needed to know God's will.

But now we have the New Testament, so we don't need those gifts anymore and they've stopped. I'm not sure if that's right, right? Because if you 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, the New Testament is wonderful. It is not face to face with Jesus, right?

It isn't. It's not fully knowing Jesus, as we will know him that one day when he comes. So I think that is what it's talking about. It's talking about the return of Jesus. And now, those people are partly right.

If you were here last week, I talked about, you know, apostles and prophets as kind of the foundation of the church. Those 12 guys that Jesus commissioned as his authorized witnesses, you know, yeah, they were the foundation of the church and we don't have them anymore.

[18:31] That's true. Some gifts, yeah, they have now been replaced by the New Testament. But the things mentioned here, tongues, prophecy, words of knowledge, they should continue, right?

Because that's what the passage says. We should expect them today in church. Of course, the thing is, Paul isn't trying to say, look, those gifts are lasting and they should continue now.

Paul is saying, well, actually, ultimately, they do not last, right? They are only until Jesus comes. And why? Well, because they are partial, right?

It's like reflecting, you know, it's like dimly in a mirror. These days, mirrors are really good. Back then, mirrors were not very good. You couldn't really see. This morning, I was practicing my sermon in the living room and there's this piano and it's nice and shiny and I can kind of see myself, but it's not, it's not clear, right?

And that is like our view of Jesus now. But, it's not face to face, but gifts, yeah, he says that they're limited, that they're like that piano.

[19 : 39] It's a temporary measure while we wait for Jesus. Or, yeah, verse 11, when I was a child, I spoke like a child, I fought like a child, I reasoned like a child.

When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. It's, a child here is a, like a toddler, a really young child. Now, young children, they can really communicate, right?

They see a car and they say, vroom, vroom, vroom, vroom, right? They really talk. And yet, that's not how adults talk, right? Children grow up and Paul says, well, that is basically gifts.

Gifts are, they're limited. And so, you know, getting a word from God, maybe once a week, God gives you a message or at least you get some message and you need to work out, it's this from God.

But, anyway, that's amazing, right? That God speaks to you and gives you this message to give to someone else. But one day, you're going to be with God forever, right? And you can hear from him all the time, constantly, right?

[20 : 43] Directly, without any discernment needed. That's going to be so much more amazing, right? Than a word of knowledge now. Healing.

It's amazing if God heals someone, right? It's a miracle. They're going to die again, though. Getting a whole new resurrection body, that will be later and that will be so much more amazing, right?

I preached on that a few weeks ago. Speaking in tongues. That's another thing. In a way, it's quite limited. Now, some people don't know this, but I can actually speak in tongues.

I used to go to a Pentecostal church in the past, but Paul says it's limited and, you know, I agree. The Holy Spirit makes you speak all these things, but I don't know what I'm saying.

One day, I'll be with Jesus and I can just speak to him, my heart, everything I want to say directly, isn't that just so much better than anything we have here? And so Paul says, actually, these gifts, you know, they're good, they're useful, but long-term, actually, they're not that special and they won't last.

[21 : 50] Later, you won't need them anymore. Maybe this is a good illustration. Many of us, we have family abroad and we want to communicate with them. And how do you do that?

Well, in the past, you had to write a letter and, you know, then you could make a phone call and that was amazing. You could hear that voice and now, you can make a video call and you can see them and that's so cool, right?

And maybe one day, you can put on your Apple Vision Pro and it's like you're in the living room with them, right? And that's so cool. Well, it is cool. And yet, a few months later, you actually see your family.

You don't need your Apple Vision Pro, right? You are face-to-face and actually, this thing doesn't really matter. And so, the fact that you don't have one, well, shouldn't be, right now, shouldn't be a cause of envy if you know you're going to see your family soon, right?

You don't need to be proud about it. I mean, what's the thing that matters? It's your relationship, right? If you have a wonderful relationship with your family, it doesn't matter if you can only call them.

[22 : 55] And even if you have an Apple Vision Pro, but actually, you know, there's a lot of conflict and tension, that's not the real thing, right? The real thing that matters is love.

Love is what lasts. The relationship is what lasts, not the gifts. Heaven is a world of love. The love that you have, the love that the Holy Spirit has created in your heart, that is the love you will have for all eternity.

And your gifts will cease. So yeah, love matters. Verse 13, right? These things remain, faith, hope, and love, but the greatest of these is love.

Love is what matters. And gifts, they're good, but they're partial, they're temporary, not as good as love. And so Paul says, well, 14 verse 1, pursue love, right?

If love is what matters the most, pursue love in everything, in your spiritual gifts, but also, well, in everything. So yeah. So here's a few good questions.

[24 : 00] Who is the most spiritual, mature Christian you know? Is it the person who planted the church, that grew to 6,000? Is it the person here on the stage, who is so bold, and charismatic, and amazing, right?

Charismatic in the personal sense. Or is it maybe the person behind the scenes, the person who no one knows, who is caring for a spouse, with a terminal illness, really selflessly.

Maybe that person is far more spiritual, far more loving, than anyone here on stage. That's a good question. Who is, yeah, who do you want to be?

What do we want for our church? Maybe we want, you know, more evangelism, and more serving, and more spiritual gifts. Do we pray that we'd be a more loving church?

That actually, our love is the big thing. And that we would be watermarked, wow, that church is really a place of love, where people really love Jesus, and love each other.

[25 : 00] And that's why people come here. Wouldn't that be amazing? But of course, let's talk more about spiritual gifts. Because that is what Paul wants, right? Doesn't mean gifts are nothing.

He says, you know, earnestly, verse 14, verse 1, he continues, right? Pursue love, and earnestly desire spiritual gifts. And he doesn't mean helping, administrating, he means miraculous gifts.

You know, we should pursue them. But as we'll hear next week, well, which gift? That is what love determines. But let's go back to last week. You know, last week I told us, hey, let's think about who we are, and what gifts we have, and let's use them, let's serve.

But do we do that out of love? So why do we want to use our gifts? Do we want to do that out of love? If you want to be here on stage playing music, is it because you want to really serve people, really help them worship through our music?

Or is it maybe because you feel so great being on the stage? Yeah, sometimes our motivations are wrong. I know this guy, he wanted to be a pastor, and that's great.

[26 : 09] But basically, well, my dad was a pastor, and he had a low self-esteem because he felt, you know, I'm a disappointment to my parents. That's when I become a, why I want to be a pastor. It had nothing to do with people. It's not really a good motivation, right?

It should be love. And so, why do we want to use our gifts? Have you considered the needs in the church? Right?

It's easy to think, okay, this is what I'm good at. This is what I'm like to do. You know, in a church, lots of stuff needs to happen. Maybe actually, if you're loving, you, rather than thinking, what do I want to do?

What needs to be done? Right? Well, how can I serve others? So, here at the coffee, we have disposable cups. That's easy. I was at another church, and basically, what people, we do, use real cups, and they had to be washed.

And there was just no one with the spiritual gift of washing dishes. No one came forward, hey, I feel really cold to washing dishes, right? It was just so hard to get anyone to do that.

[27 : 10] Why? Right? It needs to be done. Why not love and do these things? Right? Crash, looking after babies, so that the parents can have a moment, or actually to listen to God.

In other churches, yeah? No one wants to do that. Right? Have we considered the needs of the church? Or maybe, why would you not use your gifts? Maybe some people, you have gifts, but I don't want to use them, right?

I can play music, but that means coming in on Saturday to rehearse, and Sunday, I need to be here at 9 a.m.? No, thank you. Right? Some of us, of course, we don't have the capacity, but for others, you know, are we driven by love, or by our own comfort?

I think it's a really good question. I hope you get the point, right? Love, it's seeking the good of others, not our own good. So, you know, let's pray about our gifts, let's pray how we can serve, let's pray how we can do, but ask the Holy Spirit to, show us our hearts, right?

Why do we want to do this? Is this motivated by love? Do I want to do this for others, or for myself? Yeah, that's the big challenge we hear, and that's something, yeah, we should reflect on, we should pray about.

[28 : 29] But as we do that, as we close, I hope you hear, this is not an inspiring passage, it's a rebuke, and some of us will feel very convicted, right?

I can see this, I can see all the ways that I'm not loving. But if you feel convicted of a lack of love, do remember the gospel, right?

We were not in church last week because of our gifts, and also we're not here in church, we're not accepted because we are so loving, not because we have sorted out love.

I know that's kind of our, you know, our instincts, right? We hear this and we think, oh, I need to be more loving. Maybe you're here as a visitor, you're not, you wouldn't call yourself a Christian, and

you hear this and you think, okay, I need to be more loving, and then God will accept me. No, we can't do that. I can't do that. None of us here can do that. I mean, what is the standard of love? It's Jesus on the cross, right? Jesus coming down from heaven to die for his enemies. [29 : 33] I mean, if that is love, real love, then none of us have met the standard. None of us. But the thing is, Jesus didn't die for no purpose. He knew that we, we don't, we're not loving enough. We don't love God with all our heart. We don't love our neighbor as ourselves. That's why he came down and died for us. Died to pay the penalty for our lack of love. So, yeah, we're not here because we got it all together. We are here because we're just a bunch of helpless sinners who need God's grace to receive his grace, his forgiveness. And if you don't know that, if you're here as a visitor, please come, come and talk to me. I'd love to help you know how you can come to Jesus and receive his love when you don't have the love that you need to come to God yourself. Come to talk to me later. But when we have done that, when we have received love, then of course, let that love change you. We do want to be people of love. And that will come as we, well, as we know Jesus' love. [30 : 35] A famous verse in the Bible, we love because he first loved us. If you realize what Jesus did for you, it will change you. It will, yeah, make you loving. So let's pray that God would do that, that we would, you know, trust his love, that we would want to be as loving as he is, that we would rest in it. Right? I don't need to get my approval from spiritual gifts. I don't need to, I have Jesus already. I have his love. I don't need your love. I can just serve. And love. That's the idea. So I'm going to leave us for 30 seconds just to reflect. And then I'll pray. And then Jeremy is going to lead us in a time of singing. Amen. Our Father, we, we haven't loved you with all our hearts. and we haven't loved our neighbors, each other as ourselves. We see the standard of love and we know it's not us. Thank you that Jesus paid for that. [32 : 13] Thank you that we are accepted, well, because of your love. Because of your love and not because of ours. Please, would we know that? If we don't know that yet, would we help us receive that and to come to you and receive your love? But then to be changed by it. Father, we do want this church to be a place of love. We want this church to be known in the whole city as a place where we love you and where we love each other. That is a miracle. It's something that you need to do. It's something that, yeah, this will be the new creation. It's a world of love. And we want Watermark to be a little world of love right now. So do that work in us by your spirit. Change us. Transform us by your grace. And, yeah, and then it will bring you so much glory. And everyone will see it. That's our dream. In Jesus' name. Amen.