

# *Iglesia de Carne*

## Studies in First Corinthians

### Text

First Corinthians 13:1-13

### Topic

Paul tells the believers in Corinth that they “have not love” in their exercise of the Holy Spirit’s gifts

### Title

**“Gifts Without Heart and You’re to Blame,  
You Give Love a Bad Name”**

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You’ve probably heard a Bible teacher say that the Greek language has these four different words for love:

1. *Eros* is a word for love that describes, as we might guess from the word itself, sexual love.
2. *Storge* is a second word for love. It refers to family love, the kind of love there is between a parent and child, or between family members in general.
3. *Philia* is a third word for love. It speaks of a brotherly friendship and affection. It is the love of deep friendship and partnership. It might be described as the highest love of which man, without God’s enabling, is capable of.
4. *Agape* is a fourth word for love. It is a self-giving, self-sacrificing, selfless love that gives without demanding or expecting anything in return. Although the apostle John uses *agape* to describe a love humans have for sin and the world, we mostly associate it with the supernatural love of God, Who “so **loved** the world that He gave His only begotten Son” to be our Savior (John 3:19 & First John 2:15; John 3:16).



There are two additional 'loves' in Greek that you rarely hear about:

1. *Pragma*, a longstanding love is a mature, realistic love that is commonly found amongst long-established couples.
2. *Philautia*, or love of self.

I'd like to suggest a seventh love. Not in a scholarly sense; I know next to nothing about the Greek language of the New Testament. Think of it as a devotional thought. It is suggested in our text as *agape* we **do not** want to characterize our lives. You see it in each of the opening three verses.

If you are reading from the NKJV, see the word "love" in verses one, two, and three? It is in each occurrence preceded by what two words?

The additional love I'm suggesting is "have-not love." We will see that it is a state that a believer can be in even though he or she is exercising gifts of the Holy Spirit or doing powerful works for God.

I'll organize my comments around two points: **#1 If You Have Not Love You Will Injure Other Members Of Jesus' Body**, and **#2 If You Have Love You Will Encourage Other Members Of Jesus' Body**.

### **#1 - If You Have Not Love You Will Injure Other Members Of Jesus' Body (v1-3)**

"Have-not love" can be seen in at least one other place in the New Testament. It isn't called by that name; but the condition being described is similar. It is the description Jesus gives in His letter to the church in Ephesus. He praises them for their various works, but then says rather dramatically, "Nevertheless I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love" (Revelation 2:4).

- The church in Ephesus lacked love.
- The church in Corinth lacked love.
- We must conclude that any church can lack love; that any of us individually may "have-not love."

What is more, like the believers in those two first century churches, we may not even recognize it.



We are in the middle of the apostle Paul issuing correction to the Corinthians for their misuse of the gifts they had been given by God the Holy Spirit. The correction began in chapter twelve and continues all the way through chapter fourteen. The crux of it was that, “the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues...” (14:23).

The real problem, though, was that by doing so they were calling attention to themselves and away from Jesus. Their gifts were not benefitting others in the body - only themselves. They were chasing visitors away - visitors who needed to hear the Gospel. That’s not *agape*, is it? No; it is have-not *agape*.

1Co 13:1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.

First thing to note is that each of the opening three verses indicate the person with have-not love can nevertheless perform mighty deeds. Thus it can initially be hard to recognize.

The believers who were speaking in tongues seem to have concluded that they were on a par with angels. Since they were speaking in tongues all at once, they thought it a beautiful chorus of worship. But instead of sounding like a choir of angels, they were each one more like a clanging cymbal played out of order, amplified by a device called a sounding brass.

We might consider the exercise of spiritual gifts in public like the playing of a symphony orchestra being conducted by a great master conductor. We each have our necessary and proper place in the symphony. But we can exercise our gift or gifts in such a way as to call attention to ourselves and away from the conductor. We can be like a gong or a cymbal being played loudly out of place.

1Co 13:2 And though I have *the gift of* prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

Spectacular displays of supernatural power. But as one commentator mused, “You can lift the mountain, but you then drop it on others.”



1Co 13:3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.

Paul said of such displays, “I am nothing,” and, “It profits me nothing.” It doesn’t help others... And it’s not good for you.

How does this have-not love happen? After all, we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, Who is God and therefore IS love. He works to produce the fruit of the Spirit in and through our lives; and the fruit of the Spirit IS love.

At least one way we have-not love is revealed when Paul said to the believers in Galatia, “Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?” (3:3). In context, Paul was warning them to not return to Judaism and its rites and rituals.

It applies more broadly to the fact that believers have a tendency to yield themselves to the flesh.

- In some cases, that can mean a return to rules, rites, and rituals as the means to get saved and stay saved.
- In other cases, it can mean seeking to merge worldly wisdom with the wisdom of God.
- It can be a distortion and over-emphasis on something, e.g., a doctrine, or the gift of tongues.

“Flesh” describes our unredeemed humanness. When a person is saved, the Holy Spirit takes residence in a body that has the propensity to sin. This will dog us until we receive our new bodies.

In a minute, in verses five and six, we will see some of the ways we can yield to the flesh rather than to the Spirit. Two ways of living will be on display.

But first we’ve been made aware that we can have-not love and not even realize it. Instead of benefitting others, we risk injuring them - spiritually and maybe even physically.

It is gracious of God to reveal this to us. No believer wants to lack love, or to injure another.



## #2 - If You Have Love You Will Encourage Other Members Of Jesus' Body (v4-13)

I'm not sure why, but as a kid I played *Mystery Date* a few times. It is marketed to girls ages 6-14. I don't think it was gender confusion. More like I wanted to know what to wear on a bowling date.

In all, there were five possible dates - four were desirable, and the Dud, who we affectionately referred to as "the bum from *Mystery Date*." At the end, you'd open a plastic door to reveal your date.

These next few verses feature the desirable and the undesirable believer. You don't want to be the Dud - the bum from Calvary Hanford - when God opens a door for ministry.

I have a really hard time as a teacher in this chapter. Mostly because commentary cannot improve it. Instead it threatens to dismantle it. It's a little like dissecting a rose. It ruins its beauty, and you can't really put it back together.

1Co 13:4 Love suffers long *and* is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up;

1Co 13:5 does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil;

1Co 13:6 does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth;

1Co 13:7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

We easily recognize each of these responses when we are the recipient. You've been treated kindly in your life; you've been treated rudely. Do, or do not do, unto others accordingly.

**We are not talking about self-improvement.** It isn't a matter of trying to be kind, or trying to be less rude. Anyone can try to improve. You don't need to be a believer for that.

Remember when everyday you heard the expression, "Pay it forward?" It encouraged the beneficiary of a good deed repaying the kindness to others instead of to the original benefactor. Nothing wrong with it, I suppose. But it is

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a **program** designed to help people be kind. You have a **Person** to encourage and then empower you to always be kind.

If you are a believer, you can be kind, and not be rude, **right now**, by yielding to the indwelling Holy Spirit. You can respond, or not respond, accordingly.

I don't always believe that is true; and therein lies my problem. In perhaps the most popular devotional ever written, *My Utmost for His Highest*, Oswald Chambers writes,

The first thing I must be willing to admit when I begin to examine what controls and dominates me is that I am the one responsible for having yielded myself to whatever it may be. If I am a slave to myself, I am to blame because... I yielded to myself. Likewise, if I obey God I do so because... I yielded myself to Him.

Another commentator said, "We must stay yielded to the Spirit. We must say "Yes" to the Spirit when He prompts us to take a certain action or say a certain word. We must give mental assent to the Spirit's direction, and then we must actually obey His prompting and follow through by doing or saying what He has called us to do or say."

This isn't meant as a rebuke; far from it.

It is meant to set us free from re-enslavement by the flesh in order to manifest the Holy Spirit and thereby genuinely benefit others.

When we looked at the gifts listed in chapter twelve, we said the best way to understand them was to see them in the life of Jesus, or in the lives of His disciples. That works just as well for the traits of *agape* in these verses.

Jesus was always long suffering and kind. He never envied, or paraded Himself, or was puffed up, or behaved rudely, or sought His own, or was provoked, or thought evil, or rejoiced in iniquity.

"Of course," you say, "because He was God." He was fully God and fully man. While on earth, in His incarnation, He set aside the prerogatives of His deity to live as a Spirit-filled man. He yielded Himself to the Spirit as an example to us of what that looked like:

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- He once said, “I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things. And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him” (John 8:28-29).
- He said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner” (John 5:19).
- He said, “For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me commandment, what to say, and what to speak” (John 12:49).

Everything that Jesus did and said was exactly what His Father wanted Him to do and say, led by the Holy Spirit. It is our example. *We have the same Holy Spirit.*

1Co 13:8 Love never fails. But whether *there are* prophecies, they will fail; whether *there are* tongues, they will cease; whether *there is* knowledge, it will vanish away.

Paul is addressing the over-emphasis the Corinthian Christians had on the gifts of the Holy Spirit. They should emphasize love, because love is permanent, carrying over into eternity, whereas the gifts are temporary.

1Co 13:9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part.

1Co 13:10 But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.

There is almost no argument anymore among serious scholars about what Paul meant when he said, “when that which is perfect has come.” He was talking about eternity.

- You won’t need the gift of prophecy because the Lord will be speaking to you directly.
- There will be no unknown languages that need interpreting.
- The word of knowledge, by which the Lord supernaturally reveals to you something you could not have known, will vanish away because you will know everything.



By now you understand we discuss the gifts of the Holy Spirit listed in the New Testament - all of them - in the present tense. They *continued* beyond the Book of Acts; they *continue* right up to today.

Why do some Bible teachers say that several of them have ceased? One popular reason they give, that at first sounds credible, is that (they say) the verb **will cease** is not in the passive, but in the middle voice, and it could be translated, *tongues will stop by themselves*.

David Guzik writes, “Their analysis sounds scholarly, but is disregarded by virtually all Greek scholars. Even if this translation is correct, it does *nothing* to suggest *when* tongues will cease. This passage *doesn’t* tell us tongues will stop by themselves; and it tells us tongues **will cease** only when **that which is perfect has come.**”

**There is no biblical reason to argue that any of the gifts have ceased.** I think the real reason many believers argue against the continuation of certain gifts - notably tongues - is this: Most of the believers who manifest these gifts do so just as the believers in Corinth did. They are out of order and in error about their proper use. They rarely are open to biblical correction.

Two illustrations help you get a grasp of the change from earth to eternity.

1Co 13:11 When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

Paul compared our change from earth to eternity to the change from childhood to adulthood.

I don’t think, however, he was describing the gradual changes as we grow. The way he worded this sounds more immediate. Paul was perhaps thinking of his bar mitzvah. One moment Paul was still a boy; the next he was considered a man.

It will be a spiritual bar mitzvah, in a sense, when we go to be with the Lord. Whether through death and resurrection or the rapture, we will be immediately matured. Then the gifts, as precious and important as they are on earth, will be left behind.





1Co 13:12 For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.

The mirrors in those days were made of beaten and polished bronze. No matter how well crafted a polished bronze mirror might be, it was really crude in giving a proper representation.

That's how we see currently spiritual things - only partially. Yes, we have everything we need for life and godliness in God's Word. But it is still not the same as being with Jesus. In Heaven we will see Him face to face. And we will know Him perfectly, even as He knows us perfectly today.

1Co 13:13 And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these *is* love.

- In eternity faith will become sight when we see Jesus.
- Our blessed hope is the coming of the Lord. Thus "hope" is only necessary for our time on earth.
- "Love" does not have the same temporary quality. It will go on for eternity as the very atmosphere in which we exist.

The Holy Spirit produces this love. Since He indwells us **these characteristics are not only possible, they are normal. Love is normal Christian behavior.** In the movie *Pay It Forward*, the lead line was, "When someone does you a good deed, don't pay it back, pay it forward." It spawned a "Pay It Forward" foundation... A "Pay It Forward" novel... And a "Pay It Forward" day, April 30th.

None of that was specifically Christian, although there are tons of sermons that capitalized on it. It's a good example of what we always tend to do: Make our walk with Jesus a self-improvement program.

If you were to review the most popular Christian books over the last twenty years, they are really self-improvement programs masquerading as something spiritual.

***You can't improve the flesh. Not ever. It isn't a matter of my trying harder but of believing I can yield to the indwelling Holy Spirit.***



We're going to fail all the time, on account of the flesh and our two mortal enemies - Satan and the world system he oversees as its ruler.

The answer isn't a program; it's to listen and obey. You don't need any program because you have the Person.

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*"You Give Love a Bad Name"*

