

# **“What’s Love Got to Do with It?”**

## **1 Corinthians 13 in Its Ancient Context**

### **A PREP GUIDE**

by Allen Hilton

#### **PART ONE – ALL GIFTS ARE EQUALLY IMPORTANT (CHAPTER 12)**

As we seek to answer Queen Tina Turner’s famous question, our first answer comes from other pop music. Other song titles spring from memory to mind, as the Beatles croon, “All You Need is Love,” then England Dan and John Ford Coley blast from obscurity that, “Love is the Answer.” Then there are the thousands of sermons that have insisted, in one way or another, that all of Christianity can be boiled down to “LOVE”. And those sermons get their cue from scripture, as we know from sitting in Bible studies.

- God is love. (1 John 4.7-8)
- God loves us immensely. (John 3.16)
- Jesus says that our highest call is to love God and love neighbor. (Mark 12.38-44)
- God even produces that love in us through the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5.22-23)
- The shape of that love is given detail in 1 Corinthians 13.

The joint force of living in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, sitting in churches that have us looking at pulpits or platforms, opening our Bibles at all, and make our answer to Tina Turner simple and clear: Love very obviously has EVERYTHING to do with “it”.

Our question is, as the apostle Paul offers us the most famous love song in history – the beautiful poem of 1 Corinthians 13 – what would Paul say is the “it” with which love has everything to do for the Corinthians?

#### **The Famous Poem**

1 Corinthians 13 may be the most widely-heard bit of scripture in the world. People who don’t darken church doors on Sundays hear it at weddings and memorials. It was read at Lady Diana’s funeral..and William and Kate’s and Harry and Meghan’s Wedding...and maybe yours or ones you’ve attended? Engaged couples choose it

more than any other passage in the Bible for their weddings. Its picture of love has captured countless hearts and drawn myriads to a better part of themselves.

### ***The Poem Itself***

*If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup>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 do not have love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup>If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, <sup>4</sup>but do not have love, I gain nothing.*

*<sup>4</sup> Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant <sup>5</sup>or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; <sup>6</sup>it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. <sup>7</sup>It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*

*<sup>8</sup> Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. <sup>9</sup>For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; <sup>10</sup>but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. <sup>11</sup>When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. <sup>12</sup>For now we see in a mirror, dimly, <sup>13</sup>but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. <sup>13</sup>And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.*

### ***The Position***

When we read a passage, one of our first interpretive questions is, “What is the literary context?” Given our own social context, we would expect Paul to be talking about marriage when he writes in this beautiful celebration of true love, because that’s where we most often encounter the passage in our own lives. But...

The poem does not appear in the context of Paul’s conversation on Marriage. We remember chapter 7, where Paul said things like...

- “It is good for a man not to touch a woman.”
- “I wish that you were all (single) as I am...”
- “It is better to marry than to burn with lust.”

Instead, this beautiful poem lands in the more obscure context of Paul's theology on spiritual gifts in the community and worship – See Chapters 12 and 14. Many, many interpreters, including some of the best New Testament scholars in history, have maintained that Paul has clumsily dropped this gem – which some of them think was written by someone else and included here by Paul -- haphazardly into his letter.

Instead of beginning with “Paul's clumsy” as our starting point, let's give the apostle the same benefit of the doubt that we'd want readers to give us. Let's see if we can decipher a purpose to this jewel's place in the spiritual gifts and worship of a Christian community.

### *The Purpose*

Instead, Paul fits 1 Cor 13, which may have existed in some form before Paul wrote this letter, into a section in which Paul teaches the Corinthian Christians how they ought to look at their worship lives together. To get at this, let's figure out what Paul thinks the Corinthians are thinking and doing at present. Our best access will come from another shadow reading – a reconstruction of what's happening in Corinth using the specific emphases of Paul's prose.

### **The Spiritual Gifts**

In chapter 12, Paul lists all the spiritual gifts in a way that seems keen on communicating two aspects of them:

1. They're various.
2. They have the same source.

Here's the passage:

*Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; <sup>5</sup> and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; <sup>6</sup> and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. <sup>7</sup> To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.*

- *<sup>8</sup> To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom,*
- *and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit,*
- *<sup>9</sup> to another faith by the same Spirit,*
- *to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit,*

- *<sup>10</sup> to another the working of miracles,*
- *to another prophecy,*
- *to another the discernment of spirits,*
- *to another various kinds of tongues,                      to another the interpretation of tongues.*

*<sup>11</sup>All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses. (1 Corinthians 12.4-11)*

Paul's list is not comprehensive or written in stone – a similar inventory in Romans 12 features different specifics. But he portrays the ones he does name here as equally valuable.

Paul also emphasizes that each gift is important. In fact, in the very next passage, he'll picture the Corinthian Christians as so many body parts in the whole "body of Christ". Their gifts aren't separate and independent. They all function within the movements of a unified body, and each is crucial to its well-being.

## The Body

Our next help comes from the way Paul presents the parts of the body. His use of the image of a body to demonstrate how the motley gathering in Corinth is nothing less than the body of Christ. Amusingly, in the course of his presentation, Paul drives home his points by having his body parts speak.

### *Chatty Feet and Ears*

In the passage, look especially at the bits within quotation marks, where Paul playfully pictures the individual body parts talking to one another. If we squint and look closely, these silly little quotations by talking body parts actually offer us a window to what's going on in Corinth. Let's beam into them.

*<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many.*

- *<sup>15</sup> If the foot would say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body.*
- *<sup>16</sup> And if the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body.*

*<sup>17</sup> If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?*

The foot and the ear seem to lack confidence, don't they? They sound like the pathetic football player who moans, "I'm not a real part of the team, 'cause I'm a bench-sitting offensive guard. I'm no quarterback, that's for sure!" Or the 3<sup>rd</sup>-chair flute player who can't see how she matters because "I'm not a first violinist." Coach/Conductor Paul says, "Not so fast! Every position, every instrument matters!"

### *Loquacious Eyes and Heads*

*But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. <sup>19</sup> If all were a single member, where would the body be? <sup>20</sup> As it is, there are many members, yet one body.*

- <sup>21</sup> *The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you,"*
- *nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."*

The eye and the head sound far too cool for school, aren't they? These two can't see why anyone else even needs to show up. They're like the middle manager who think salespeople are interchangeable and dispensable, or the principal who in her unguarded moments has no use for teachers. In comes Paul the CEO/Superintendent to cut them both down to size.

Who are the foot and hand and ears and eyes and hands and head and feet of Corinth? Who's feeling useless and who thinks she/he is God's only gift? Paul doesn't tell us yet. He'll get to that in chapter 14. So far, we only know that we've got at least two obvious cohorts in Corinth:

1. the saggy -shouldered wannabee and
2. the puffed up self -proclaimed superstars.

Paul answers both the same way: every gift matters to the working of the body. This proclamation bolsters the inferiority prone and takes the arrogant down a notch.

So....are all the gifts equal? In chapter twelve, we get two subtle hints at Paul's real evaluation.

1. *But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.* (12.31)
2. *To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.* (12.7)

From the first of these tiny clues (12.31), we gather that, however equal Paul seems to make them in most of this chapter, there is a sort of hierarchy of the gifts: some are “greater” than others.

And from the second (12.7), we’d guess that the “greater gifts” will be ones that better move the congregation toward the common good.

Let’s jump to chapter 14 and watch how this goes.

## **PART TWO – BUT SOME GIFTS ARE MORE EQUAL THAN OTHERS**

In his novel, *Animal Farm*, George Orwell takes on hypocrisy in several forms. In order to sound out this his warning, Orwell (like Paul) puts words into the mouths of animals – in this case, the pigs who rule the farm in the world he builds there. The pigs speak eloquently a famous line:

“All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others.”

These words describe governments that declare all people equal and then treat some quite differently than others. The subtlety keeps this from being a tirade, but we come away from the novel knowing who the pigs are and how much Orwell detests their ways.

We’ve seen Paul imply to the Corinthians in chapter twelve that every gift is important. Now, in chapter fourteen, though, we get more access to what’s going on in Corinth, what gifts they themselves seem to have value most, and how Paul’s value system clashes directly with theirs. As you read this part of the letter, ask yourselves two two -part questions:

1. What is the Corinthians’ favorite spiritual gift? And why?
2. What is Paul’s favorite gift? And why?

Remember that we’ve hopped right over the famous love chapter (Don’t worry; we’ll come back to it.), so Paul begins with a reference to love. (More on that below.) For now, on to tongues and prophecy. Here’s 1 Corinthians 14.1 -5:

*Pursue love and strive for the spiritual gifts, and especially that you may prophesy.*

- <sup>2</sup> *For those who speak in a tongue do not speak to other people but to God; for nobody understands them, since they are speaking mysteries in the Spirit.*

o <sup>3</sup> *On the other hand, those who prophesy speak to other people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation.*

• <sup>4</sup> *Those who speak in a tongue build up themselves, o but those who prophesy build up the church.*

<sup>5</sup> *Now I would like all of you to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. One who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up.*

### ***A Collision between Cultures***

Now it's time to take up our two two -part questions with these as our data. The second question – what is Paul's favorite? – is easy to answer, because Paul's the writer and he tips his hand decidedly. To paraphrase 1 Corinthians 14.1;

*Love one another, do that spiritual gift thing I talked about before...  
“BUT ESPECIALLY THAT YOU MAY PROPHESEY!”*

He gets even more blunt in stating his preference:

*One who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues*

(His next line -- *unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up* – will need our time in a moment.)

So, Paul prefers prophecy. We've nailed part one. But part two is at least as important as that, namely, what purpose gives prophecy the edge for him. And Paul's side-by-side comparison between tongues and prophecy lets us in on his answer. Paul prefers prophecy because it builds up the other people in the living room in which these Corinthian Christians are worshipping. The gifts are given “for the common good”, after all. (12.7) Paul recommends prophecy as the more common-good-serving gift of these two.

Paul's side of the value system is clear, then. But how about the Corinthians? Which gift do they prefer...and why?

A little socio-religious history will help us imagine the culture collision that 1 Corinthians 14 captures. In the first century Graeco-Roman world that all of our players occupied, ecstasy won the day. Even at the prophecy center in Delphi, the prophetess gained her or his authority by entering a trance-like state that wowed the people who came to hear the oracle. In fact, ecstasy established their authority. It

was like a divine highlighter pen to tell people where the spiritual action was. Here's how one ancient historian describes the moment...

...when the Pythoness ascended into the tripod, and, filled with the divine afflatus (i.e., inspiration) which at least the latter ages believed to ascend in vapour from a fissure in the ground, burst forth into wild utterance, which was probably some kind of articulate speech, and which the *hosioi*, 'the holy ones', who, with the prophet, sat around the tripod, knew well how to interpret. ... What was essential to Delphic divination, then, was the frenzy of the Pythoness and the sounds which she uttered in this state which were interpreted by the Ὀσίοι [Osioi] and the 'prophet' according to some conventional code of their own. (Lewis Farnell, [\*The Cults of the Greek States\*](#), 1907, vol. IV, p.189

This “frenzy of the Pythoness” identified what she was saying as unmistakable authored by the gods.

Now let's go back to the Corinthian living room where this fledgling group tries to figure out what in the world Paul wants. He has talked to them about “spiritual gifts” before, it's clear; and they've made two reasonable leaps based on their culture:

1. look for ecstasy, and you're on the track to hearing a god/God speak;
2. exhibit ecstasy, and you can draw a crowd that listens intently to you.

What's not to like, if you're a Corinthian Christian who is “eager for spiritual gifts”? (14.12) But picture the result, both in the Corinthian living room meeting and in this exchange with Paul.

- **Corinthians Prized the Ecstasy of the Speaker.**  
The group has gathered, the meal has been eaten, the worship begins, and suddenly two or three or four people just start shouting or singing out the sort of frenzied speech they've seen at the oracles. Everyone else stops in awe and flocks to them. Frenzy and excitement is everywhere. Many in the crowd are undoubtedly exhilarated by the obvious and spectacular display of divine presence.
- **Paul Prized the Content of the Communication.**  
Paul's view of prophecy has been formed by the tradition of the Hebrew prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Elijah, Elisha, et al.), which features some oddball behavior (wacky symbolic actions, strange names for their kids, etc.) but not, for the most part, ecstasy. For him, the community's purpose is mutual



“edification” – actions that build one another up. When he pictures the scene at which the Corinthians have marveled, he wonders if anything at all has been accomplished in that room.

So goes the culture collision.

Paul wants nothing less from these Corinthians than a theological transformation. He wants them to understand God as an agent of their growth and community flourish rather than the author of shiny spectacles. This means each member should seek both to be built up and to build up others. His picture of prophecy only wins the room and the community if this transformation takes hold.

### **PART THREE– PAUL’S VISION OF WORSHIP**

Most Christian worship services in the U.S. are led by a few people at the front of a room. The rest of the people face forward – or at least toward that focus point – and sing or pray on command and, most often, in unison. Very rarely does someone from “the congregation” play a role (announcements, occasionally) and almost never is that role spontaneous. For all but those of us from Pentecostal traditions, this makes Paul’s ideal worship service a bit exotic to us.

#### *The Design*

Paul’s picture of worship is quite another thing. It is much more improvisational and spontaneous. You may have thought that he blew the whistle on the Corinthians’ ecstasy obsession in order to seat them in rows and hand out bulletins that kept them in line. Indeed, the theological claim with which he ends his description – “God is a God, not of disorder, but of peace.” – would seem to trend that way. But sit long enough with this passage, and we can begin to picture what Paul imagines will be best in that Corinthian living room.

*What should be done then, my friends? When you come together,*

*each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation* .

*Let all things be done for building up.*

*<sup>27</sup> If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn; and let one interpret. <sup>28</sup> But if there is no one to interpret, let them be silent in church and speak to themselves and to God.*

*<sup>29</sup> Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. <sup>30</sup> If a revelation is made to someone else sitting nearby, let the first person be silent. <sup>31</sup> For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged. <sup>32</sup> And the spirits of prophets are subject to the prophets,*

*<sup>33</sup> for God is a God not of disorder but of peace. (14.26-33)*

This vision has order. It's an orchestra with a conductor; but for Paul, there's no pre-crafted script, and the conductor of this spontaneous, ordered masterpiece is not any person in the room, but rather the Holy Spirit. You can almost picture the Spirit cueing the violin section (prophet), then the flutes (tongues speaker who has an interpreter) then back to the viola (the second prophet), and so on through the whole. The Corinthians' job is to listen for and sense that Spirit's directions and respond. Every member of this orchestra – which Paul pictures as the whole company of believers in that ancient living room – will have a role, but none should play on and on, just to hear her or himself. The conductor's driving theme is not the glory of any section or player, but always the “building up” of the body.

### *Women in Paul's Churches*

[Note: The YDS Con Ed study of 1 Corinthians covered this issue in our Session 6, but it's important now to see it in its literary context.]

There is a very important “By the way...” to be spoken here. Perhaps the most controversial of Paul's words in this letter come near the end of this chapter, when Paul commands, “let women be silent in the church.” That one moment of putting pen to papyrus has disqualified Paul from the affection and even the audience of many contemporary Christians. The full quotation goes like this:

*As in all the churches of the saints, women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. (1 Corinthians 14.33-35)*

Taken by itself, and particularly through the eyes of 21<sup>st</sup>-century westerners, this passage feels Neanderthal. If the Wayzata Community Church congregation followed Paul's lead, wouldn't three of our six pastors would need to sit silently?! Reading it this way, some Bible readers simply stop here and stamp Paul: “REJECTED” “OUT OF TOUCH” “IRRELEVANT”

So, did Paul want women to shut up in church? Let's dig deeper, because this issue provides a powerful lesson in the necessity of always reading Bible verses in context.

***Question 1: Did women participate in Paul's ministry?***

Given Paul's reputation in some corners of the contemporary church and the way he has been read, it's worth asking the basic question whether women could receive the gifts we've been discussing and speak up in Paul's idea worship service.

So...did women participate in Paul's ministry?

***Answer 1: Yes!***

In Romans 16, where Paul greets a laundry list of friends and fellow workers, he mentions: "our sister Phoebe, a deacon in the church at Cenchrea (just outside Corinth)...Prisca, who works with me in Christ Jesus, and who risked [her] neck for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles....Greet Mary, who has worked hard among you...Greet...Junia, who was in prison with me and is prominent among the apostles..." And the list goes on. The list of Paul's female "co-workers" in ministry is remarkable, and he sets them right next to (in fact in front of) the male co-workers. In this letter, in fact, Paul mentions his conversation with a group of people associated with a Christian leader named "Chloe."

***Question 2: Did Paul want women to participate in worship leadership in Corinth?***

***Answer 2: Yes!***

Prophets were Paul's favorite truth-tellers in his churches: people who brought God's word to play in the context of their worship time together. In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul urges the Corinthians to prize prophecy over all the spiritual gifts. And in 1 Corinthians 11, he treats the question how prophets should wear their hair or hats while prophesying. That has been an opportune time for Paul to say, "Only men can prophesy!" Instead, he goes to great (and somewhat strained) lengths to make way for female prophets. In other words, the ministry Paul recommended above all others was being carried out by Corinthian women prophets.

These two facts help us when we return to the "Let women be silent in the church."

Our options:

1. Paul is blatantly self-contradictory, urging women to speak in church in chapter 11 and then forbidding them to speak in church in chapter 14.

2. Paul didn't write 1 Cor 14.33 - 35, which was added by a later editor along the way. (Some scholars have proposed this, though there is no manuscript evidence for it.)
3. Paul does not mean his "Silence!" absolutely, but rather in a situational sense that he and the Corinthians both understand, but we may not.

Most likely, the right answer is #3. The setting is a worship gathering. Paul is explaining how God conducts worship through the people God has gifted to lead. Three times in that context, Paul uses the Greek verb "*sigatosan*", which means "let them be silent."

- In 1 Cor 14.27-28, Paul says, "any who begin to speak in a tongue, but have no one present to interpret, *sigatosan* (let them be silent).
- In 1 Cor 14.29-30, Paul says, "any who are prophesying when another member of the group gets a fresh prophetic word from God, *sigatosan* (let them be silent)."
- In 1 Cor 14.33-35, Paul says, "if women have questions during worship, let them be silent (*sigatosan*) and ask their questions later."

We saw above that the picture Paul paints is of an orchestrated worship service that is not to be interrupted by personal interest. The same logic that has guided the letter since chapter 6 pertains here: "Defer to the good of the community. Don't interrupt with your question."

This picture makes especial sense when we realize how rare it was for women to receive education in the Roman world. A new member of the group sees someone reading from a scroll and interpreting what the "book" says and has questions. For Paul, worship is the chief concern here. Chasing a curiosity can wait.

Unfortunately, literalist readings of this passage out of context have been used to restrict the role of women throughout Christian history. Up to the present, even some people who are trying to be faithful to God deny women the opportunity to minister and deny congregations the valuable gifts of women – all because of 1 Corinthians 14.33-35.

I believe this fact would grieve Paul. Some of his most effective colleagues and partners were women. I imagine he would have felt very limited if they had not been free to minister alongside him. Paul was not an "enlightened" twenty-first century male. But in the context of Male female relations in first-century Rome, he was veritably liberationist. Women played a key role in his ministry. Women occupied

the most valuable station in Corinthian worship at his urging. He put women on an equal footing with men in marital relations (7.1 -7).

I believe Paul would have cheered the great women leaders of Christianity, from his friends Priscilla and Phoebe and Euodia and Syntyche, to the 2<sup>nd</sup>-century martyrs, Perpetua and Felicitas, through the 12<sup>th</sup> century saint, Hildegard of Bingen, to St. Francis' female counterpart, St. Claire, and on to St. Teresa of Avila and Mother Teresa of Calcutta. I believe he would have wanted to hear Barbara Brown Taylor and Joanna Adams and Lillian Daniel and Nadia Bolz-Weber preach. He would have listened, and then debated with them.

Whatever your interpretation of Paul's teaching on women, my advice to followers of Jesus is this: keep reading him. Paul can hardly be blamed for the misinterpretation of his letter. And, as we have seen and will see, this well runs deep!

### **PART THREE: WHAT'S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT?**

We're now (finally!) ready to return to that not -originally -for -weddings passage with which we began and ask, "What's love got to do with worship in Corinth?" It's worth reading again as we now know it. Situated smack between the variety of gifts given for the common good (ch. 12) and the vision of spontaneous and yet ordered, Spirit - conducted worship (ch. 14) is to be governed by this vision of other -oriented love:

*If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup> 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 do not have love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup> If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, <sup>[a]</sup> but do not have love, I gain nothing.*

*<sup>4</sup> Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant <sup>5</sup> or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; <sup>6</sup> it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. <sup>7</sup> It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*

*<sup>8</sup> Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. <sup>9</sup> For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; <sup>10</sup> but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. <sup>11</sup> When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. <sup>12</sup> For now we see in a mirror, dimly, <sup>[b]</sup> but then we*

*will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. <sup>13</sup> And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.*

How do you think 1 Corinthians 13 fits here? How does a splendid poem on other-oriented love ( *agape*) add anything to what we've just read?

At each turn in this letter, Paul has tried to woo, cajole, or scream his Corinthian Christians out of their self-centered view of the world and into a community-minded one that puts others first.

- When a man is sleeping with his father's wife, he is to be put out of the church for a time, because the community comes first. (ch. 5)
- When one Corinthian Christian has a grievance against another, she or he does NOT take the offender to court, because it is better to be wronged than to wrong another – the other comes first. (ch. 6)
- When deciding whether or not to marry, it's not primarily about what's fun, because God's purposes come first. (ch. 7)
- When deliberating about whether to eat meat that's been sacrificed to idols, the first consideration is not what I have a right to do, because my weaker, more vulnerable brother or sister comes first. (ch. 8—10)
- When the community gathers for food, my appetite must take second place because my brothers and sisters who arrive later come first. (ch. 11)
- And now, when I discern what are my spiritual gifts and how I ought to use them, it's not about me, because the building up of the whole community comes first. (ch. 14)

## A Final Word

This steady thrum, thrum, thrum of other- and group-focus over self finds its beautiful summary in 1 Corinthians 13. It gathers the exhortations of chapters 6 through 11, and, as we've seen tonight, it becomes the prerequisite of the good, gifted, spirit-led worship Paul describes in chapters 12 and 14.

Put another way, talents are talents; things that we're good at are things that we're good at; strengths are strengths. This is all fine and good, but these lovely hey do not truly become the spiritual gifts they were intended to be until they move out from us toward "the common good". (12.7) Love is the water in "just add water." It is the outward-moving engine that makes talents into gifts. Love has everything to do with

good worship, because it makes us pass up the spotlight (tongues speakers in Corinth) out of dedicated interest in one another and in what God is up to among us.

1 Corinthians 13 is a GREAT wedding passage. Paul would shout “Amen!” to every couple who choose to make it the launching pad for their marriage. Its powerful words can become the foundation for a brilliant life together

But Paul would never let it stop there. The love passage moves through our whole lives, and he sees it as the very heart of Christian worship. We give because we love.