

# Love - The Best Way and Our Highest Goal

Message 3 of 4 in the series: "Christmas in July: Unwrapping Spiritual Gifts"

## A. Paul wrote to the young church in Corinth because they needed to be corrected, instructed, and refocused concerning many problems.

*Note:* The Corinthians' problems were selfishness, pride, divisions, envy, lawsuits, sexual immorality, marital struggles, idolatry, impatience, disorderly worship, and the misuse of spiritual gifts.

1. Paul wrote to correct the source of their problems.

"Dear brothers and sisters, when I was with you I couldn't talk to you as I would to spiritual people. I had to talk as though you belonged to this world or as though you were infants in Christ. I had to feed you with milk, not with solid food, because you weren't ready for anything stronger. And you still aren't ready, **for you are still controlled by your sinful nature**. You are jealous of one another and quarrel with each other. Doesn't that prove you are controlled by your sinful nature? Aren't you living like people of the world?" 1 Corinthians 3:1-3 (NLT)

2. Paul instructed them by answering many of their questions.

"Now, dear brothers and sisters, regarding your question about the special abilities the Spirit gives us. I don't want you to misunderstand this... There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit is the source of them all. There are different kinds of service, but we serve the same Lord. God works in different ways, but it is the same God who does the work in all of us. A spiritual gift is given to each of us **so we can help each other**." 1 Corinthians 12:1 & 4-7 (NLT)

"He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love." Ephesians 4:16 (NLT)

3. Paul refocused them on what was most important.

"So you should earnestly desire the most helpful gifts. But now let me show you a way of life that is best of all... Let love be your highest goal! But you should also desire the special abilities the Spirit gives—especially the ability to prophesy." 1 Corinthians 12:31 & 14:1 (NLT)

*Note:* Agapé is the highest form of love. It is an unconditional commitment - not a feeling.

## B. Love is the best way and our highest goal because everyone and everything amounts to nothing without love.

"If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn't love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God's secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn't love others, **I would be nothing**. If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn't love others, **I would have gained nothing**." 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 (NLT)

"The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing..." John 6:63a (NIV)

"Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing." John 15:5 (NLT)

## C. Love is the best way and our highest goal because love is the character of God produced in our lives.

"Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance." 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (NLT)

"...God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them. And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect..." 1 John 4:16b-17a (NLT)

"May you always be filled with the fruit of your salvation—the righteous character produced in your life by Jesus Christ—for this will bring much glory and praise to God." Philippians 1:11 (NLT)

**D. Love is the best way and our highest goal because love lasts forever.**

“Prophecy and speaking in unknown languages and special knowledge will become useless. **But love will last forever!** Now our knowledge is partial and incomplete, and even the gift of prophecy reveals only part of the whole picture! But when the time of perfection comes, these partial things will become useless. When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child. But when I grew up, I put away childish things. Now we see things imperfectly, like puzzling reflections in a mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God now knows me completely. Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love.” 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 (NLT)

“Dear friends, we are already God’s children, but he has not yet shown us what we will be like when Christ appears. But **we do know that we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is.**” 1 John 3:2 (NLT)

**Application #1:** Examine and test your love.

“Examine yourselves to see if your faith is genuine. Test yourselves...” 2 Corinthians 13:5a (NLT)

**Application #2:** Put on love.

“Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him...Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony.”  
Colossians 3:10 &14 (NLT)

**Application #3:** Do everything with love.

“Be on guard. Stand firm in the faith. Be courageous. Be strong. And do everything with love.”  
1 Corinthians 16:13-14(NLT)

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Connect Group Questions:

1. Reflect on the problems that the Corinthians faced and read 1 Corinthians 3:1-3. Why do you think that we still have the same problems that the Corinthians struggled with almost 2000 years later? What does it mean to be controlled by our sinful nature?
2. Do you agree that without love everyone and everything amounts to nothing? Why or why not? Have you ever experienced that personally or witnessed it in someone else’s life?
3. “Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.” 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (NLT)  
  
Which characteristic of love stands out to you most? Why? Which of these characteristics do you find the most lacking in the world?
4. Why is the fruit of the Spirit (love) more important than the gifts of the Spirit? How can you ensure that you are using your gifts in love?
5. When and why do you think spiritual gifts will become useless?
6. Love is often referred to as a feeling, yet we are commanded to do everything in love. How do you trust God’s Spirit to produce love in your life in the most difficult things, even the things you don’t want to do?
7. Read 1 John 4:16b-17a. What do you think it means to live in God? How does that grow our love to be more perfect (complete)?