

Gifted: You Have Extraordinary Gifts!

A sermon based on 1 Corinthians 12:27-13:13, ***“Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.²⁸ And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of 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 Now eagerly desire the greater gifts.***

And yet I will show you the most excellent way.

13 If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have 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 do not have love, I am nothing.³ If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.⁵ It does not dishonor others, 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.⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part,¹⁰ but when completeness comes, what is in part 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 the ways of childhood behind me.¹² For now we see only a 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.”

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

“All you need is love.” I don’t even need to sing it; most, if not all of you, already are familiar with the tune. July 7, 1967 the Beatles released the single to their already popular hit, “All You Need Is Love.” You see, written for a live television show which was broadcast in 25 countries and viewed by 400 million people, John Lennon wanted to send a message to the world...simply, “Love is all you need.”

What do you think? Were they right? Well, it depends on what you mean by love. “I love pizza.” “I love my wife and daughter.” “I love the color blue.” “I love God.” But hopefully I mean something entirely different in each of the four ways I just used the word “love.”

If John Lennon meant “a fuzzy feeling you get around someone else,” that love just won’t cut it. If he meant a self-sacrificing love we have for each other and that we demonstrate in our actions, he would be closer to right, but still, as imperfect as that love of ours is, it won’t cut it either. But, if John Lennon meant the love of Christ he has for us sinners—a love so great it took him to the cross to pay for our loveless actions—then he was right on. All any of us need is that love...the greatest gift of all.

What does your gift of love look like? This is a tough one...not just having the gift of love (I hope you would all say you have it), but also properly using the gift of love.

I mean, have you been following Paul's train of thought over these past few weeks? Let's see, you've been gifted. Your gifts make up part of the body of Christ. We might all have different gifts, but the same God gives them to us for his purpose...the same purpose...to build up his family here, to dispense his love in doing so, and to ultimately bring glory to God. And those gifts...we need to, we want to use them to work together towards that goal.

And, now today, the gift above all else we all should be striving for as we do all that...love. But again, what do we mean by love? The Corinthian believers had love. They loved to boast about their gifts, right? To them, "different" meant "not as good as" when they were comparing the gifts of others with their own. Their heads got a little big, an attitude reflected by how they were seeking to use their gifts for *their own* glory, rather than for God's glory.

So, Paul's point here? If the Corinthians wanted to be great, they should have been using their gifts to love others. Boasting about their gifts to gain honor or glory for themselves, or using their gifts to serve themselves alone, was about as fitting to the church as a clanging symbol out of rhythm is to a symphony. If they knew everything there was to know, but in selfishness kept it to themselves, if they gave all they had away to the poor, but did it only so they would look or feel good, it was worthless. Every act done for selfish reasons – and not in love - is a sin.

Friends, we're not really all that different from those Corinthians, are we? Look at all the blessings God has showered on us. Look at all the gifts he's given you. This room is not without its share of talents and abilities. Even in just the small handful of Time & Talent surveys I've gotten back so far, it's clear: you are all incredibly gifted by God—each in your own unique way!

But, how are we using those gifts? If we're going to be honest, too often, it's selfishly, isn't it? Now, along the lines of another famous tune – a Tina Turner classic – you might be asking, "What's love got to do with it?" Well, everything, right?

What does the Bible say? ***"This is love for God, to obey his commands"*** (1 John 5:3). Over the last few Sundays, you've heard his commands concerning your gift usage. And I know you would join me in saying, "I love God. I love Jesus for what he's done for me."

But, friends, love—real love—is not just a luke-warm "I'm sort of glad he did what he did for me." No. It's an action. Listen again to the way Paul defines love with action words, ***"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails."***

Is that you? A pastor once suggested to me that these verses served as a great mirror. Hold them up to see how loving you've been. Take the word "love" and replace it with your name. "Jason is patient." No, not really. "Jason is kind." Sometimes, but not always to everyone. "Jason does not envy. He's happy with the gifts God's given." Well... no. "Jason does not boast, is not proud." Well, he's being humbled here pretty quickly. "Jason is not rude. Jason is not self-seeking." Failed, again and again. I think you get the picture, right? No need to go on. And I know that since each of you are a sinner too, you would all have the same trouble comparing how your life really is to what God wants your life to look like—perfectly loving toward everyone in every way.

Or, even when you hold up your spiritual gifts to that mirror, how do they look? If I have the gift of being an extrovert, am real friendly and can strike up a conversation with just about anyone, but I leave every conversations filled with gossip or cursing or coarse joking or inappropriate sexual talk and devoid of love and even the loving message of Christ crucified for them, it's that instrument in the symphony that's terribly out of pitch and disrupts the entire performance.

If I have the gift of knowledge, but I only care to be up-to-date on current events, so that I'm always all too-eager to talk about politics, waving my Make America Great Again hat...and I have absolutely no passion for growing in my faith in Jesus through studying his Word...and no passion for saving the lost, inviting someone I know very well to church...or if I think I know everything in God's Word and don't care to follow it, that gift is worthless.

If I give all my time to helping charitable organizations around town (which is a great thing to do), but my concern only for aiding in people's temporal needs leaves me with no time to lovingly serve God's family, something of eternal value, I gain nothing.

You see, we, like the Corinthians, too often use the gifts God's given us to bring glory to ourselves, rather than to God. We use our gifts to love "me first," not others. We aren't always patient or kind. We do envy and boast. We are rude and certainly self-seeking. We get angry when we shouldn't and we keep track of who's hurt us and how much. We don't rejoice in the truth and love to hear God's Word. We do fail.

Oh, you could say we love...We love to think we know better than God. We love to think we know what's best for our relationship with God.

Is that love? You know it's not. You know for such selfish use of the gifts that God has given *us*, for such lovelessness, we deserve to have our gifts stripped away. *We* deserve hell.

But, we don't get what we deserve. You know why? Well, again, love's got everything to do with it. It's because we receive God's love. We receive it in Christ. That same pastor who suggested I use these verses as a mirror, then suggested I also use them to see Christ. Read verses 4 to 8 again, this time replacing "love" with "Jesus." You'll see how much Jesus loves you.

Jesus is patient with us even when we reject him like those in Nazareth as we heard about last Sunday (cf. Luke 4:28-29). He is always kind, giving us way more than we deserve. He was not self-seeking as we have been, but selfless, giving his life on a cross and suffering hell in our place. He keeps no record of our wrongs, but takes them away, assuring us of his forgiveness by giving us his very body and blood to eat and drink! And Jesus will continue to care for us and protect us because his love, unlike ours, has never, will never fail. No matter what we do, no matter how bad we've been, he will *always* love us.

That gift love is extraordinary. Is that how you would describe it? I mean, that's the way the song goes, doesn't it? L is for the way you look at me...O is for the only one I see...V is very, very extraordinary.

Do you know what that means...extraordinary? It has two definitions: 1) unusual; 2) remarkable/exceptional.

What makes God's love unusual, yet remarkable/exceptional? It's unusual in the sense of it being grace. We don't deserve God's love. There's no rational reason why God should care about us, let alone be willing to save us. But he does, and he has.

His love is exceptional and remarkable because of the lengths he went to show that love to you...again, see Jesus on the cross, bearing your sins. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God's Son, sent from heaven, all for you and for your forgiveness. That's exceptional. That's unusual. That's extraordinary.

By his love, we, who once delighted in evil, rejoice in the truth of Jesus, the embodiment of perfect love for us. Because of him, now our love can be the same. Our love gets to be the same...extraordinary.

We, who once used our gifts only for selfish gain, now we use our gifts to express our gratitude and love for God by loving others. Having had Jesus reveal himself as perfect love to us unloving sinners, we can't help but be his instruments of sharing that love as he reveals himself as perfect love to others through us forgiven believers. Whatever gifts you've been given they can be used to serve God out of love for him. You can use your gifts, no longer for personal gain, but out of thanks to Jesus for the perfect love he's shown to you, you can use your gifts to love each other. As the apostle John put it, "***This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. ...let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth***" (1 John 3:16,18).

Again, that's extraordinary. Because you know what? Love, it's not your spiritual gift. Galatians 5 calls it a "fruit of the Spirit." You know what that means? It's something we all have. Love is something worked in us by the Holy Spirit. It's part of our very fabric in being dearly loved children of God...so that now, recognizing how great is the love the Father has lavished on us! (1 John 3:1) and how perfect the love that Jesus has shown to us, laying down his very life for us, we will reflect that love toward others.

We will love others, not with some shallow emotion, but with loving actions and in truth. We will be patient, kind, content, humble, and polite. We will be selfless, calm, forgiving and honest. We will be trusting and hopeful. We will persevere unflinching to the end. "***We love because he first loved us***" (1 John 4:19). And through us, forgiven believers, Jesus will be revealed as perfect love to others.

Maybe John Lennon was on to something. All we need is love—Jesus' love shown to us unloving sinners, which leads to Jesus love being shown through us forgiven believers. "***This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ...if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete***" (1 John 4:10-12). All you need is love. You have it. And it's extraordinary! Amen.