

Dr. Dave Mathewson, New Testament Literature, Lecture 17, 1 Corinthians, Spiritual Gifts

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This is Dr. Dave Mathewson, in his New Testament History and Literature course, Lecture 17 on 1 Corinthians and Spiritual Gifts.

All right, let's go ahead and get started.

One item of announcement before we get going is your first quiz and exam have both been graded and maybe your second quiz. It's in the process of being put up on Blackboard now. So hopefully within the next day or two, your scores will be up.

So, keep checking Blackboard every once in a while. You'll also get the exams and quizzes back, so you can actually see them, but they'll be up in Blackboard before they get put back in your box. So just keep watching those, and hopefully, within the next two days, you'll be all caught up on your scores for quizzes and exams.

And you can expect that's where you can find the scores from now on. All right, let's open with prayer. Then we were last class period, talking about 1 Corinthians, looking at a number of texts within 1 Corinthians, and attempting to reconstruct a plausible background and scenario for what the issue was that the author was addressing, and how the author addresses that issue, etc.

And so, we'll look at another section of 1 Corinthians, actually two more sections, one of them in a little more detail, one a little more briefly today.

But let's open with prayer. Father, we thank you for your faithfulness to us, for sustaining us emotionally, spiritually, and intellectually, and I pray that we will concentrate all our abilities in thinking, and our abilities to analyze and to ask the right questions in studying your Word. And as we look at 1 Corinthians, I pray that not only would we be able to analyze it and understand it in light of its historical and cultural context, but we would also understand it in light of our context today, and how it continues to speak to us as your Word to your people today. In Jesus' name, we pray, amen.

All right, so to wrap up our discussion of 1 Corinthians chapter 11, we looked at some of the second half of 1 Corinthians 11, where Paul addresses the issue of the Lord's Supper, communion, or the Eucharist, depending on what you're used to calling it.

I suggested that the way to understand that section of text, especially when we come to the commands towards the end of it, when Paul tells them to examine themselves and not to partake of the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner, and we'll look at one

other command just briefly, is we need to understand the context that gave rise to that, and that is, we said that the same socio-economic distinctions and this whole issue of status, social status, between the elite, wealthy, and everyone else, had now trickled down into the church, and that what had Paul so upset is that they were perpetuating those social distinctions in the context of a meal that should have been celebrating their union and their unity as the one body of Christ and as God's people. In light of the gospel, in light of the cross, Jesus' death for them, in light of their union in Christ, the Lord's Supper should have been indicative of that, an expression of that. Instead, they were using the Lord's Supper as an expression of the ongoing socio-economic distinctions of status that exist in secular Corinth that now had, again, infiltrated the church, and so Paul tells them, we said that the command to examine themselves was not a command to think of all the sins you did and confess them.

Taking the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner was not to take it if you've forgotten some sins and didn't confess them all. Instead, those were directed at the specific situation. To participate in the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner was to do so in a way that promoted division.

To use a meal that promoted or expressed the unity of God's people, to use it in a way that promoted and perpetuated the division and socio-economic division in the Corinthian church was unthinkable to Paul. And so, he says, examine yourself, that is make sure that you understand the significance of the Lord's Supper and you're using it in a way not to create and promote division in the church. And I would suggest today that the same thing holds, that the primary sin that one needs to realize and examine is taking of the Lord's Supper when we have dispute and division with someone else in the body of Christ.

That seems to be the primary problem that had Paul so upset. So, verse, towards the very end of the chapter then, verse 33 then says, so then my brothers and sisters, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. That is, again the problem was, most likely the wealthy members arrived at church first, perhaps because they were less encumbered by the need to work, and the poor members who had to work longer hours would arrive at church later and would actually be in a separate room in the house church and would be served different and lesser food as well.

And so, Paul now says, instead wait for each other, that is make sure that you eat this meal together as an expression of your unity in Christ. No more using this meal as a means of perpetuating these social distinctions that are found in secular Corinth. So instead wait for each other and eat this meal together expressing your equality as members of the body of Christ, which Paul will talk about in this image of the body of Christ and unity.

Paul will continue to talk about that in chapters 12 and 14. All right, so chapters 12 through 14 then bring us to the next major text that I want to talk about briefly. Notice how it begins in verse 1 of chapter 12, now concerning spiritual gifts.

Actually, we've seen that Paul often introduces, when he starts to deal with the different problems that have been made known to him in the Corinthian church by word of mouth or by written form, he often signals that by this phrase, now concerning meat offered to idols, now concerning spiritual gifts, now concerning the matters about which you wrote, etc. etc. So that now concerning is kind of a signpost that Paul is introducing a new problem that he will now address.

This problem though is similar to chapter 11 in that they both occur within the context of the church as it gathers for worship. In fact most of the issues Paul deals with in 1 Corinthians do. He's not so much addressing what they do at home, although he's concerned about that, he's not so much addressing their lives at home or out in the workplace, but he's addressing what the church does when it comes together.

And all of chapter 11 of 1 Corinthians deals with problems that emerge when the Corinthian church comes together for its worship. The same is true of chapters 12 through 14. 12 through 14 addresses a problem that emerges when the Corinthians meet together for worship.

I would suggest to you that the problem is similar to chapter 11 in that it's a problem that would have reflected some of the ideals or values in the secular Corinthian society and now that has infiltrated the church and caused a number of problems that Paul is now going to address. So, in chapters 12 through 14, let me just read the first portion of this. Chapters 12 through 14 has kind of a common overarching theme is the church and its use of spiritual gifts.

We'll talk a little bit about that and what the problem was. But starting with chapter 12, now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were pagans you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak.

Therefore, I want you to understand that no one speaking by the spirit of God ever says let Jesus be cursed and no one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit. Now there are varieties of gifts but the same spirit and there are varieties of services but the same Lord and there are varieties of activities but it is the same God who activates all of them and everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the spirit for the common good.

To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same spirit, to someone else faith, the gift of faith by

the same Spirit, to another gift of healing by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another person prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues and to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are worked or activated by one and the same spirit who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses. Now what is Paul doing? First of all we need to ask well what is the problem that Paul seems to be addressing? Why did he have to sit down and talk about spiritual gifts? First of all, just very quickly I would define a spiritual gift according to this context as any ability supernatural or natural that is energized by the Holy Spirit and used for the building up of the entire church.

And so, Paul is concerned that the Corinthians have apparently exercised and received and are aware of these gifts that the Holy Spirit has poured out on them in order for the church to grow and to be built up yet Paul is also aware that they are being abused. Now here I think is the problem when you read chapters 12 through 14. It appears that once again the Corinthians were using spiritual gifts to further promote this distinction in status.

So, the social economic status that we've seen in a number of issues, the patron-client relationship, the clamoring for a following among the leaders and boasting in their social status, etc. etc. The division between the wealthy elite and the poor.

Now that had infiltrated the church and it was also affecting their view of spiritual gifts that went something like this. Some of the Corinthians most likely the elite, the socially elite and wealthy in society were associating their elite wealthy social status with certain gifts that they thought went along with that status. Mainly their ability to speak in tongues.

The ability to speak in tongues in the first century was a supernatural gift that under the Holy Spirit one could speak in a language, either a different language or some would even say a heavenly exalted language that's not identifiable with any human language. But the ability to do that having never studied or learned that language before. Now some of the Corinthians were promoting this gift of tongues, the ability to supernaturally speak in a different tongue.

They were promoting that as a sign of their spiritually elite status. And everyone else was obviously at a lesser status demonstrated by the fact that they did not have possessed that gift. Now one of the reasons for this is to understand that the Corinthians and Christianity were not the only religions in that day to have a phenomenon like tongues.

Speaking in some other language or some ecstatic type of speech. Interestingly other religions also had the ecstatic type of speech where one would speak again in a different tongue or language. And interestingly a lot of other religions associated that with a socially elite status.

So, you think about the Corinthians perhaps coming out of a situation, many of them belonging to these different pagan religions, who had belonged to religions where tongues, speaking in a tongue, or ecstatic speech was associated with a certain social status. Now that was being transferred into their newfound Christian faith. And so in the church, again probably the more elite, socially elite, and wealthy members of the church were boasting in their ability to speak in tongues as a sign of their elite spiritual and social status.

Just as they perhaps had learned in other pagan religions. Now that had been carried over into Christianity. And so that's what has Paul up so upset.

And that is the attitude and the problem that he is going to try to combat. So, the way he does that is Paul demonstrates in chapters 12 through 14, Paul is basically going to demonstrate that no one gift manifests and notice the English translation called these gifts manifestations of the Spirit. In other words, no single gift is a sign that someone has the Holy Spirit more than any other.

That's why Paul mentions this, did you catch that list of gifts? Paul says, to one is given through the Spirit the utterance or speech of wisdom, to another knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another the gift of faith, to another gift of healings, etc. etc. What's Paul doing? He's simply trying to show that tongues is only one possible gift and it has no pride of place over any other.

All these gifts, whether it's miracles of healing or faith or the ability to speak knowledge or whatever, they all equally manifest or show the Spirit. So how dare the Corinthians isolate or elevate one gift as a sign that somehow they have arrived spiritually or they possess a spiritually and socially elite status? All these gifts equally show and manifest the Spirit. Did you notice the other thing about that list is Paul lists the very last gift on that list as tongues? That's because, again, that was the one that the Corinthians were blowing out of proportion and drawing attention to, and so Paul puts it on the end of the list, because, again, he's kind of leveling the playing field.

Paul is trying to demonstrate that, again, the same God and the same Holy Spirit are behind every gift equally. So, the person who has the gift of faith doesn't have any less of the Holy Spirit than the person who speaks in tongues. The person who speaks in tongues does not have any more of the Holy Spirit than someone who exercises the gift of hospitality or other possible gifts.

So, Paul's trying to—the Corinthians had a, presumably, kind of a hierarchy of gifts where, again, the tongues were at the top. Now Paul takes that and levels the playing field so that all gifts are at an equal level. So, again, Paul's instruction is no more promoting certain gifts as a sign of your spiritual status.

Everyone equally possesses the Spirit because every gift equally shows the Spirit, no matter how insignificant or menial that it might appear. And that's why Paul also evokes the body imagery. He compared the church to a body, which was not unusual.

This is not new for Paul. Other writers in the Greek world compared different institutions and associations to a physical body to express its unity, but the fact that it also exists in diversity. So, notice what Paul says.

Again, he starts in verse 12. For just as the body, the physical body, is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit, we have all been baptized into one body.

Jews and Greeks, slaves and free, and we were all made to drink the one Spirit. Now listen to this. Paul then will elaborate on this body imagery.

And notice what he's doing. He's trying to level the playing field to show that all the gifts are of equal importance. He says, Indeed, the body does not consist of one member, but many.

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. 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. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? Do you see what Paul is doing? He's saying, imagine how grotesque it would be if you consisted of one gigantic eyeball or one gigantic ear.

That's ridiculous. And Paul's whole reasoning then is that that's no more true in the physical realm than it is in the spiritual realm. So, to promote, for the Corinthians to promote one gift as somehow being more indicative of possessing the Spirit is equivalent to saying that the body, to having a body that consists of just a gigantic eyeball or an ear or a foot or something like that.

For the body to function properly, it requires all the parts to work in tandem. Although they're diverse, they contribute to unity. And so, the physical body then provides a perfect illustration of what Paul wants to get at.

There's no one gift that is any more important than the other. How dare the Corinthians exalt or promote the gift of tongues as a sign that some of them are of spiritually elite or socially elite status? In fact, notice how he begins.

Before he ever talks about spiritual gifts, he says in verse 3, that no one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit. Why did he say that? Because he's saying that the

true evidence that one possesses the Spirit is not speaking in tongues or miracles or any other gift. The true evidence is the ability to confess Jesus Christ as Lord.

It's almost as if Paul is saying, if you have done that, that is proof that you have received God's Holy Spirit. Because no one can confess that apart from the Spirit, the Holy Spirit. So again, Corinthians, no more boasting about certain spiritual gifts.

No elevating tongues or any other gift as a sign that you have the Spirit or as a sign that someone else doesn't. Instead, all the gifts equally manifest the Spirit. All the gifts contribute to the working of the one body in the same way as all the body parts contribute to the operation of a physical body on the physical plane.

Now Paul ends, in chapter 12, Paul ends by saying, but strive for the greater gifts, and I will show you a more excellent way. First of all, what does Paul mean when he tells them to strive for the greater gifts? I thought he just said that the playing field is level. There are no gifts greater than any other.

All gifts equally show the Spirit. Why now would Paul all of a sudden tell the church to strive for the greater gifts? And the other thing is when you read chapters 12 through 14, chapter 13 seems to be an intrusion at first glance. That famous love chapter that we read at weddings and things like that, and my wife and I had it read at our wedding, chapter 13, love is kind, love is patient, etc., etc., we often take that out of its contextual environment in 1 Corinthians and read it on various occasions.

And 1 Corinthians 13 does have enough, it kind of has a poetic quality that allows us to do that with it. But I want to return to ask, what is chapter 13 doing there? Because you can make, if you took out chapter 13, chapter 12 would lead very naturally into chapter 14. So, we'll come back and ask, what is chapter 13 doing there? But before we do that, I want to ask the question, what are the greater gifts that Paul has in mind in chapter 13? Because chapter 14 begins, pursue love and strive for the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.

Now, the greater gift, when Paul says to pursue the greater gifts, I am convinced by that, he means prophecy in 1 Corinthians chapter 14. So, chapter 12, which ends with the command to strive for the greater gifts, then leads naturally into chapter 14, where Paul is going to talk about the gift of prophecy and kind of what it is, and how the Corinthians should use it. But the question becomes, again, why does Paul call this a greater gift, and why does he tell them to strive for prophecy? I mean, I thought he was trying to do away with this certain gifts are better than others and level the playing field.

Why does he tell them to strive for the gift of prophecy? Prophecy, to me, seems to simply be the ability to communicate a message, an intelligible message, to God's people. Again, remember, we're in the context of the church. Paul's addressing, in

chapters 12-14, Paul is not addressing what the Corinthians do when they're at home or in the workplace.

He's addressing what they do when they come together to worship in their, what we would say, their church service. Why do you think Paul tells them to pursue the greatest gift, which is prophecy? Why would he do that? Especially when he's trying to tell them, no, there's no gift greater than the other. How dare you elevate tongues or any other gift as a sign that you have more of the Spirit? Now he says, oh, by the way, I want you to pursue the greater gift, which I take it in chapter 14, is prophecy.

All of chapter 14 is devoted to this gift of prophecy, the ability to speak an intelligible message to the people of God for their building up within the context of the church. Because it's the most useful gift for the entire church. Again, notice what he says.

Back in chapter 12, he said that the purpose of gifts, let's see, numerous times he said the purpose of gifts was for the building up of the entire church, or to use this metaphor, the body of Christ. And now notice what he says in chapter 14. He says, pursue love and strive for the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.

For those who speak in tongues do not speak to other people but to God. For nobody understands them since they are speaking mysteries in the Spirit. Now Paul doesn't say that's wrong.

He just says that's a reality. Tongues is primarily for the benefit of the person speaking in tongues. On the other hand, in verse 3, he says, on the other hand, those who prophesy speak to other people for their up-building and encouragement and consolation.

Those who speak in a tongue build up themselves, which is not wrong. Paul is just saying that's just the way it is. Tongues is primarily of benefit for the person speaking in tongues.

But those who prophesy build up the church. So again, why Paul emphasizes tongues is not because he contradicts what he said earlier, that all gifts are equal, but he's counteracting what the Corinthians are doing. The Corinthians are boasting.

Not only are they guilty of boasting about their social status and causing more division, but they're also emphasizing a gift that is primarily beneficial to one person, the person speaking in tongues. Where Paul would rather, when the church, remember the context here is the church when they gather for worship. When the church gathers for worship, Paul would rather that they pursue prophecy.

Why? Because it is intelligible and of immediate benefit to everyone. As he said, the one who prophesies speaks to everyone. The one who prophesies speaks an intelligible message that everyone can hear and benefit from.

The one that speaks in tongues basically speaks to God and speaks mysteries that not everyone may benefit from. So what Paul is saying is, Corinthians, when you gather for worship, pursue those gifts that are intelligible and have an immediate effect of building up the entire body of Christ. Not tongues, which again, Paul is fine with and wants them to speak in tongues, but they said not when you gather for worship, you should primarily pursue prophecy because it's prophecy, this intelligible message that one communicates, receives from the Lord and communicates to the church as a whole, that, since it's understandable and intelligible, has the best chance of building up the whole body of Christ.

Whereas one who speaks in tongues may be uttering mysteries that not everyone understands. Tongues can sometimes be noticed. What do you think about when Paul says, I would like every one of you to speak in tongues? Yeah.

Again, probably when Paul says, I'd like every one of you to speak in tongues, he's, I mean, this is, I think that's kind of his rhetoric and his argument that, again, he's saying, yeah, tongues is fine, but again, when it comes to worship, sometimes Paul argues like that throughout Corinthians. He'll agree with something, he'll say, yes, you're right. However, you've missed the point.

So yes, it'd be great if everyone would speak in tongues, my paraphrase. Yes, it'd be great if you all spoke in tongues, but when you gather together as a church, it's a time for building up the entire body of Christ. Prophecy is the gift that has the best chance of doing that.

So, therefore, pursue the best gifts. Very, very good question. I should have talked to you before I taught this class.

I could anticipate all your questions. Yeah. That's right.

Paul does, again, Paul does say if it is going to be used, it requires an interpreter because that's the only way that it could be intelligible to the entire church. Right. Yeah.

Again, I would want to, can you cut the camera, Ted? No, I would, again, I would want to ask why that's the case. I would, again, follow Paul's advice, what I resist is not so much how many people speak in tongues or whether the whole church, it's why that's the case, is I still, I think following Paul's instructions, now there's kind of two ends of the spectrum. Some have suggested, well, tongues is no longer a valid gift for today.

It's with the completion of the New Testament, now that we have the full revelation of God, we don't need tongues. So, it was for the first century and it's no longer valid today. The opposite end of the stream, the end of the spectrum, the extreme end, is in some of the more charismatic, again, I'm not labeling all charismatic movements the same, but some of them where tongues is still a criteria for having received the Spirit.

In other words, it's not just enough to become a Christian, and express your faith in Christ, at some point you must speak in tongues and receive the Holy Spirit. But that seems to be the very thing Paul's speaking out against, that the Holy Spirit, that tongues is a necessary sign that one has a spirit. So, in principle, I'm not against the entire church speaking in tongues.

What I think I'm against, not because I'm against it because I think I'm, if I read 1 Corinthians correctly, is suggesting that everyone has to speak in tongues as a sign that one is spiritual, and has received the Spirit. That seems to be the very thing Paul is acting against. So, my question would not so much be whether tongues, no, I think tongues is still valid.

I don't see anything in 1 Corinthians that says it was only for the first century and is no longer valid. I think it is, and I've known persons who have spoken in tongues. But what I do think is incorrect is when it's made a criteria that one has a spirit and it's forced upon everyone, that everyone has to speak in tongues as a sign that you've received the Spirit.

That's exactly what Paul is saying is not true. Yeah, I mean tongues does seem to be a fairly diverse phenomena in a sense. You go back to Acts 2. Remember we talked about Acts 2? Of course you remember that.

When the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the people in fulfillment of the Old Testament, they spoke in tongues. And there's some evidence in the text that a lot of that was a recognizable language. It says some of them recognized their language.

But 1 Corinthians talks about it in terms of, when it says speaks mysteries to God, it seems that it could be also something else. So I'm not sure what I think about that, but certainly, I don't think we can pin it down and say this is what tongues is and what it always looks like. But again, I think the main thing is for churches to ask what they're doing or what's their emphasis and what is the function of tongues.

Again, it's interesting that when the church comes together, the very thing that some people emphasize is the very thing that Paul says should be de-emphasized. That is, what should be emphasized when the church gathers together is the building up of

the entire body of Christ, not what benefits me or shows that I have the Spirit or something like that. Good questions.

A couple of the things about this text, too, that I would suggest is, interestingly, because of this background, it does not appear that Paul gives us anything close to a complete list of the gifts, of all the gifts. I think he's just giving a representative list just to show the Corinthians that there are a variety of ways that the Spirit shows himself within the church. In fact, when you add, the New Testament talks about spiritual gifts in just a handful of places.

There's another section in Ephesians chapter 4. There's another section in Romans chapter 12. We looked at Romans already but didn't spend time in chapter 12, where there are other gifts mentioned. Some of them overlap with this list here in 1 Corinthians 12.

Other gifts mentioned in those passages are in addition. But even when you add them all up, I don't think it's a New Testament author's intention ever to say this is a complete list of all the gifts. In fact, I'm convinced that Paul would have thought that the way the Holy Spirit can work is simply too diverse to ever pin it down to a simple list of gifts.

So, Paul is simply saying, here's an example of the kinds of ways the Spirit manifests himself, as opposed to giving you an exhaustive list. For me, that's important because when I was growing up, maybe some of you have done this. Again, I'm kind of getting pastoral now, but I took one of those spiritual gift inventory tests, where you answer all these questions and you honor two of them with their spiritually elite status.

Instead, he wants to show them that the Holy Spirit cannot be limited to any one gift. All the gifts equally show the Spirit, and he gives them just a sample list. So there's probably a lot of variety in the way that we approach spiritual gifts, how we figure them out, whether we have more than one gift, whether some gifts can develop, and whether we can change gifts, etc.

Paul doesn't answer those questions, and there's an area for some differences in opinion in those areas. But the primary thing, though, from 1 Corinthians is to make sure we use them in a way that immediately builds up the body of Christ, the church when it gathers for worship. There's no room for promoting our own spiritual experience or emphasizing our own spiritual or social status by virtue of what gift or position we occupy in the church.

Paul rules that out of bounds immediately. Having said that, what about chapter 13 that's kind of thrown in the middle, this famous love chapter? Again, I won't read the whole thing, but it begins, if I speak, I mean, it's clear that Paul does tie it in with his

discussion of gifts because he talks about gifts. He doesn't just talk about love in chapter 13.

He begins by saying if I speak in tongues of mortals and of angels, but I do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries, and I have all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to move mountains, but I do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions and hand over my body, that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient, love is kind, love is not envious or boastful or arrogant. It is not rude, it does not insist on its own way. It is not irritable or resentful, it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth.

It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends, but now notice Paul's going to turn back to spiritual gifts. 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. For we know in part, we prophesy in part, when the perfect comes, the partial will end.

But, then he ends by saying, and now faith, hope, and love abide, these three, and the greatest of these is love. Now, a couple of questions to answer. First of all, why does Paul single out, we'll ask in a moment why this chapter on love right here where it is, but why does Paul single out love as the greatest of these gifts? I mean, what, he says hope, now exists hope, faith, and love, the greatest is love.

Well, I mean, isn't faith in Jesus Christ important? Or hope, expressing my expectation of the fulfillment of all God's promises for salvation that we will one day enter into the future? Certainly, that's important. Why do you think he isolates love at this point? Okay, so love then, love could be the visible manifestation expression. If one really has faith and hope, it will demonstrate itself in love.

I would say ideally, if you do have this love that he's talking about, it doesn't necessarily mean you don't need to be a tongue talker, this all out of wisdom and all this, you don't need, because you know that that love, you know, Jesus and all that is true enough, you don't need to, you know, express it in any other language that people wouldn't understand. Right, OK. All right, so love will be, again, if they act out of love, then that will be evident and visible.

You'll see it in their works. Right, apart from these gifts. OK, good.

Good, I wonder, and I'm not fishing for one particular answer. I think those are all right. I wonder, too, if when you look at those three things, and this has always

puzzled me why Paul would emphasize, when you look at those three, it's love that is the character that we can most, out of those three, it's by loving that we must reflect God's character.

Never does it say God believes or that God hopes and expects, but he does love and God is love. So, I wonder if part of it is in love, out of those three, it's love that God himself reflects and does. And it's by loving, not so much by believing and hoping, but loving that we reflect God's character and his loving attributes and his loving activity as well.

OK, yeah, right. Yeah, that could be as well. Right, yeah, certainly we'll no longer have to hope for heaven because we'll be participating in that, but love will still remain.

Yeah, there's nothing that says we're going to stop loving once we get to heaven. Good, yeah. Could it be an echoing of Jesus saying the greatest commandment? Sure, it might also reflect Jesus' command that the greatest commandment is you shall love the Lord your God and your neighbors yourselves.

That might be a way of exactly right. Why is chapter 13 here? Again, especially since chapter 12, if chapter 13 were missing, you could glide very naturally from the transition from chapter 12 right into 14. Why is chapter 13 here? I mean, we all know that it's about love.

As I said, it does have that poetic quality that allows it to be removed from its contextual environment and moorings and utilized in different contexts, such as weddings, et cetera. But in its literary context, what is chapter 13 doing here in the middle of this discussion? Again, in chapter 13, Paul does mention tongues and prophecy, so there is obviously some connection. But what is it? Why at this point does he launch into this kind of exalted prose or almost poetic type of text, exalting the virtues of love? Why here? Here, let's break it down.

In the end, do you need all this stuff? Remember, love is the greatest commandment. So, he's sort of bringing that back, that if you have this true love, I think, you don't need all of this. And again, trying to bring it back down to reality, if you will.

OK. And back down to reality, then, would be not using these gifts, as the Corinthians were, to boast about their status. So, in other words, again, think of his description of love in chapter 13.

When he says, love is patient, love is kind, it's not boastful or arrogant or rude, it does not insist in its own way, et cetera, et cetera. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. I think what Paul is saying is, that if you

exemplify this kind of love, then you will not be using your gifts as a way of boasting in your spiritual status.

Instead, if you have the kind of love described in chapter 13, that will manifest in using your gifts for the building up of the entire body of Christ, not just yourself. So, I think this chapter is completely pertinent to what Paul is doing. And again, if they're exemplifying the kind of love in chapter 13, then they will not boast about their spiritual status and gifts or social status.

Instead, they will only pursue the gifts. If they really have love, the true love is spelled out in chapter 13, then they will pursue those gifts that are relevant for the entire body of Christ. They will be concerned for the building up of the entire church and not just what benefits them.

So, chapter 13, I think we missed something. Again, as I said, it's not wrong to take chapter 13 out and use it in other contexts about love. But ultimately, we have to remember why Paul put it here.

It has to do with if they have that kind of love, then they'll use gifts appropriately in the church for the building up of the body of Christ, not for boasting about their spiritually elite statuses and things like that. All right. Any other questions on 12 through 14? Again, Paul doesn't tell us everything there is to know about spiritual gifts, how many there are, how to find them, or how to discover your gift.

He's not interested in those questions. He's addressing a very specific problem and only communicates the information necessary to address that problem. And that's probably why you don't find the issue mentioned in other letters of Paul because it wasn't really a problem.

It seemed to have been in the Corinthian church, but probably in most other churches, it wasn't a big issue. So, he never really says much about it. It would seem odd that if this was a practice from, I mean, I can understand something like singing that happened in another religion and then it came into Christianity and it's still appropriate to worship, but this is something that they're claiming is coming externally from God.

It seems to have kind of migrated from another religion. Yeah. I don't know if I want to say that Christianity borrowed it from other religions.

It's simply what other religions emphasize. Just like other religions emphasize singing and praising, that doesn't mean necessarily that Christianity borrowed it from them. It just means that that was an area of similarity.

And so, all I'm saying is that other Christianity may not have borrowed tongues from any other religion. It's just that was an area of similarity that may have caused the problem. If some of the Corinthians did belong to religions where there was the ecstatic type of speech associated with their elite status, they may have carried that over into Christianity which had a similar phenomenon.

And so, that's a very good point. Yeah, I don't want to say that Christianity borrowed tongue speaking from other religions. They just may have had a similar phenomenon.

Some of the Corinthians were perhaps then carrying over what they may have learned in certain religious contexts into their use of tongues in the Christian context. That's a good point. Could it be that more of the things that were come up by other religions were the pride and arrogance that they brought to the spiritual gifts rather than the actual spiritual gifts? More of the emphasis is that other religions had the same type of issue where you wanted to exalt yourself by saying, I had all these things in this religion.

And that's what he's condemning from other religions where it's a spiritual gift might have been. Sure, yeah, you're right. Most of the stuff that Paul condemns in Corinthians is what seems to have come from secular Corinthian culture, from either just their political culture, historical cultural background, or religious background, is that had now infiltrated the church.

One well-known New Testament scholar wrote a book called *After Paul Left Corinth*. And that was kind of his thesis, that after Paul established his church that we read about in Acts 18 after he left Corinth, then all these problems that came from secular Corinth, their religions, their political background, et cetera, they now started creeping into the church and causing all these problems, especially problems related to status and class and social distinctions within religions and within other sectors of Corinthian life. Good.

Chapter 15. Chapter 15 is probably the longest and most sustained treatment by Paul or any New Testament author on the topic of resurrection, where Paul begins by discussing Jesus' resurrection, the fact that Jesus has arisen, and he ties that with part... This is part of the early apostles' teaching that has been passed on in the early church. So, Paul says, I passed on to you what was passed on to me, which that's kind of often technical language of passing on a tradition.

And part of that was that Jesus died, he was buried, and he rose again as well. And then after that, though, in the rest of chapter 15, Paul launches into a more detailed discussion of resurrection in general, the validity of understanding a physical resurrection in general. So, what is interesting is chapter 15 seems to be a defense of Paul for a physical bodily resurrection, not primarily of Jesus Christ, although that's important, that's kind of at the center of it.

But he argues for our resurrection as well, the fact that there must be a physical resurrection at the end of history. And we'll see why that's important, but let's think again for a moment. But why would Paul need to address that? I mean, did Paul just stop, well, I haven't said anything about the resurrection of Christ.

We've kind of gotten off-topic into gifts and things. I better get back to Christ so I'll talk about his resurrection. Why do you think Paul had to address that issue? Because from what we've seen so far, every chapter appears to be addressing a specific problem in the Corinthian church.

Why now do you think that Paul needed to address the issue of a physical resurrection? Any guesses? What could point to a strain of maybe even like the Platonic influence of restorative and spiritual fleshly ideas and kind of restored it as a fleshly battle? All right. So maybe this kind of Platonic thinking of the distinction between the physical and the spiritual had at some level infiltrated the Corinthian church. And maybe in a combination with other features, that now led to the denial, not so much of a resurrection, but a physical resurrection, that the appropriate resurrection is going to be a spiritual one and not a physical one because of this kind of Platonic type thinking that the physical is not important.

The true reality is what is spiritual. I think you're right. Notice, too, that with chapter 15, you don't really have a break with chapter 14.

Interestingly, in other words, you don't have chapter 15 now concerning the resurrection. So, you've had now concerning those things you wrote me about, now concerning this, now concerning meat offered to idols, now concerning spiritual gifts. And now that's absent.

He just launches in, now I would remind you of the good news I proclaimed, which you in turn received, in which also you stand. And then he goes on and launches into a discussion of not so much a defense or apologetic, but a reminder of Jesus' resurrection and its importance. I wonder, too, if this dualistic type of thinking would have also been reflected in following hard on the heels of chapters 12 and 14, the fact that some of them thought that they had arrived spiritually were of a spiritually elite status meant that there was no need of anything else, any physical resurrection.

So that, again, the idea that certain gifts demonstrated that they're spiritually elite status, the implication was, therefore, there's no need for a physical resurrection, that I've arrived spiritually. All I need is a spiritual resurrection, now or in the future, perhaps. And so now Paul, in addressing that thinking, again, along with this Platonic type dualism, now has to remind them and argue for the necessity of not just a resurrection, but a physical resurrection in bodily form, not just a spiritual resurrection.

And what Paul will do, basically, in chapter 15, he's going to, there's more than this, but just two key things he argues. Number one is he tells the Corinthians, if you deny a physical resurrection, then you deny that Christ physically rose from the dead. And that has serious implications.

Paul will say, if that's true, then your faith is in vain. And I like to tell people, that if someone could prove to me beyond the shadow of a doubt that Jesus Christ did not rise from the dead, I'd be one of the first to scrap my Christianity. And that's basically what Paul's saying.

If Jesus didn't raise you from the dead, you're still in your sins. You're still dead in your sins. You have no hope whatsoever.

Christianity is a fake without the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ. So that's the first thing he says. By denying the physical resurrection, the Corinthians have to also deny Christ's resurrection.

And that has serious implications for their faith. But the second thing he argues is, in order for the last enemy to be defeated, the physical resurrection must take place. And that last enemy is death.

So Paul makes it clear, that the last enemy to be defeated is death. And if death is going to be defeated, that requires not just a spiritual resurrection, but a physical one as well. And I think reflection on this passage may help us to, at times, rethink and challenge some of our conceptions of what we think being a Christian means and our future hope.

Interestingly, Paul is clear that our salvation and our future hope contain a physical, earthly element to it. At the risk of being understood, I tell people, I don't know about you, but I'm not going to heaven. And hopefully, you aren't either.

When I read 1 Corinthians 15, my ultimate destiny is not some heavenly existence floating around in clouds playing harps. I mean, how boring. What a boring existence, if that's what heaven is like.

But Paul is convinced from Genesis chapter 1, the creation of humanity, God created us to live and exist as physical beings on physical earth. And so, Paul, again, naturally envisions that our ultimate existence is not the immaterial part escaping the physical body. That was a Gnostic, Platonic-type idea.

But our salvation consists of not only saving our souls, some of the jargon we often use in Christianity is to save our souls. It's not just saving my spirit or soul, but my

body as well. Therefore, Paul argues for the physical resurrection as a necessary part of our salvation.

And as we'll see when we get to Revelation, it's interesting. The last two chapters of Revelation have us ending up not in heaven, but on a new earth. So, I think chapter 15 challenges us to rethink our understanding of Christian existence and what that means for now and in the future.

God's intention for us has always been a physical bodily existence. Yes, it will be a very different one, stripped of all the effects of sin and death, but it will be a physical bodily existence nonetheless. And Paul is convinced that that's the case and argues for it in 1 Corinthians chapter 15.

All right, what is the theme of 1 Corinthians? And that's always dangerous. I don't know. I shouldn't say dangerous.

At times, it may not be necessary to boil a book down to one theme. There's no reason why a book cannot have more than one theme or the author is trying to accomplish more than one thing at the same time. But if I could, I used to think that the main theme was the unity of the church because a number of the problems in Corinthians stem from disunity, this idea of social classes, and this elitism causing division in the church.

But now I think I'm more convinced that the main theme is probably the church's purity in the midst of a secular culture. All of the problems in Corinthians seem to stem from allowing the values, attitudes, and morality of the secular Corinthian culture to infiltrate the church. And that's what caused many of these problems to emerge.

Paul's consistent response, where he often compares the church to a temple and to the Old Testament people of God in Corinth, his consistent response is for the church to pursue purity. And to remain pure in the midst of the secular culture in which they live. So, I think if I were to choose a theme for Corinthians, it would be the purity of the church in the midst of the pagan culture in which it finds itself.

And again, all the problems seem to stem from allowing that to infiltrate the church. All right, I will see you on Wednesday for an exam. No, that's another class.

This is Dr. Dave Mathewson, in his New Testament History and Literature course, Lecture 17 on 1 Corinthians and Spiritual Gifts.