

Wind-Powered Love

Lesson 5

1 Corinthians 13



Big Idea

It's not uncommon to attend a wedding and hear the words of **1 Corinthians 13:4–7**. It's an extremely well-known passage of Scripture and can even be found referenced in popular culture.¹ While it is a beautiful description of what love is and is not, the context of these verses isn't a wedding or marriage; the context is spiritual gifts in the Church.

In the Greek language there are many different words for love, including one describing a deep friendship,² one describing familial love,³ one for loving yourself⁴ and one describing romantic love.⁵ However, the Greek word used in 1 Corinthians 13 is *Agape* which is described as the “active love of God for His Son and His people, and the active love His people are to have for God, each other and even enemies.”⁶ First Corinthians 13 isn't about romantic love, love for self or familial love; it is about loving others as God loves. We can't love like this on our own; we need Holy Spirit's help. We need to be Wind-powered.

¹ For example: *A Walk to Remember* (book and movie), *Wedding Crashers* (movie) and *How I Met Your Mother* (TV show)

² *Philia* concerned the deep comradely friendship that developed between brothers in arms who had fought side by side on the battlefield. It was about showing loyalty to your friends, sacrificing for them, as well as sharing your emotions with them. Krznaric, Roman. “The Ancient Greeks’ 6 Words for Love (And Why Knowing Them Can Change Your Life).” *Yes! Magazine*, 28 Dec. 2013, www.yesmagazine.org/health-happiness/2013/12/28/the-ancient-greeks-6-words-for-love-and-why-knowing-them-can-change-your-life/.

³ Another kind of *philia*, sometimes called *storge*, embodied the love between parents and their children.

⁴ *Philautia* meant self-love, and clever Greeks such as Aristotle realized there were two types. One was an unhealthy variety associated with narcissism, where you became self-obsessed and focused on personal fame and fortune. A healthier version enhanced your wider capacity to love. Krznaric, Roman. “The Ancient Greeks’ 6 Words for Love (And Why Knowing Them Can Change Your Life).” *Yes! Magazine*, 28 Dec. 2013, www.yesmagazine.org/health-happiness/2013/12/28/the-ancient-greeks-6-words-for-love-and-why-knowing-them-can-change-your-life/.

⁵ *Eros*, named after the Greek god of fertility, represented the idea of sexual passion and desire. Krznaric, Roman. “The Ancient Greeks’ 6 Words for Love (And Why Knowing Them Can Change Your Life).” *Yes! Magazine*, 28 Dec. 2013, www.yesmagazine.org/health-happiness/2013/12/28/the-ancient-greeks-6-words-for-love-and-why-knowing-them-can-change-your-life/.

⁶ Goodrick, Edward W., and John R. Kohlenberger. *The Strongest NIV Exhaustive Concordance*. Zondervan, 2004. 1523



BACKGROUND

In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 12 reiterated that the gifts were from Holy Spirit and given according to Holy Spirit's will. The gifts were intended to be used for building each other up and maintaining unity. Paul didn't downplay the significance or magnitude of the gifts, but he took time in chapter 13 to make an essential point. Chapter 13 reads as an extremely important "pay attention" declaration: "Everything I have told you, and will tell you about spiritual gifts, is useless without love!"



Read 1 Corinthians 13

^{13:1} 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.

² 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. ³ 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.

⁴ Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud ⁵ or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. ⁶ It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. ⁷ Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

⁸ Prophecy and speaking in unknown languages and special knowledge will become useless. But love will last forever! ⁹ Now our knowledge is partial and incomplete, and even the gift of prophecy reveals only part of the whole picture! ¹⁰ But when the time of perfection comes, these partial things will become useless.

¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child. But when I grew up, I put away childish things. ¹² 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.

¹³ Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love.



DIG IN

1. Chapter 12 ended with a teaser for what Paul would talk about in chapter 13 when he said, “But now let me show you a way of life that is best of all.”¹ He then went right into his message on love. From **1 Corinthians 13:1–3**, what do you notice about the importance of love? What happens when love is absent?
 - a. Can you think of any time(s) when you have seen spiritual gifts used without love? How did those experiences impact you or others?
 - b. How could those experiences have looked different if *agape*² love had been the driving force?
 - c. What motives other than *agape* love tend to infiltrate your use of spiritual gifts?

¹ **1 Corinthians 12:31**

² *Agape* or selfless love is love that you extend to all people, whether family members or distant strangers. Krznaric, Roman. “The Ancient Greeks’ 6 Words for Love (And Why Knowing Them Can Change Your Life).” *Yes! Magazine*, 28 Dec. 2013, www.yesmagazine.org/health-happiness/2013/12/28/the-ancient-greeks-6-words-for-love-and-why-knowing-them-can-change-your-life/.

2. “In morally corrupt Corinth, love had become a mixed-up term with little meaning. Today people are still confused about love.”¹ How do you see this confusion about love in your own experiences or in today’s culture?

3. List the ways Paul described love in **1 Corinthians 13:4–7**.

(a.) What stands out to you about the way love is described and why?

(b.) What seems most difficult to you personally? What seems easiest? Why?

¹ *Life Application Study Bible: New Living Translation*. Tyndale House Publishers, 2004. 1950

4. “Before we rush to trivialize these words about love by assuming they can easily fit us, let’s stop to consider they actually describe God’s character. These are not sugary claims. They are hard-edged descriptions of God’s perfection-in-relationship. Holy Spirit inspired the apostle to write a breathtakingly beautiful description of the nature of God.”¹

a. Re-read **1 Corinthians 13:4–7** and substitute “God” for “love” in each phrase.² What do you personally learn about God through Paul’s description of love?

b. What does it take for you to love this way? See **Galatians 5:22** and **Colossians 1:8** as you answer.

c. In lesson 3 you identified the spiritual gifts Holy Spirit chose to give you.

i. Describe what it could look like to use them without a loving attitude/heart.

ii. In contrast, what would it look like to use them with a loving attitude/heart?

¹ Wilson, Neil quoted in Barton, Bruce B., and Grant R. Osborne. *1 & 2 Corinthians*. Tyndale House, 1999. 185

² **1 John 4:8**: *But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love.*

5. When the time of perfection comes—when Jesus returns and things are made perfect—spiritual gifts will no longer be needed (**13:8–10**).¹ What do Paul’s metaphors and illustrations teach you about the time of perfection:
- a. **1 Corinthians 13:11**
When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child. But when I grew up, I put away childish things.

 - b. **1 Corinthians 13:12**
Now we see things imperfectly, like puzzling reflections in a mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity.
6. The time of perfection has not yet come, but God knows us completely even now (**1 Corinthians 13:12**). What does it mean to you that God knows you completely and still loves you perfectly?
7. Paul makes it clear that love is permanent, complete and supreme. Christ is coming back and love will be fully known and experienced (**1 Corinthians 13:8–13**).² How does this give you hope?³

¹ The purpose of spiritual gifts is to share the Gospel and build up, serve and strengthen Christians and the Church on earth. The time of perfection refers to eternal life and/or the Second Coming when Jesus will reign on earth. *NIV Study Bible: New International Version*. Zondervan, 1985. 1950

² Barclay, William. *The Letters to the Corinthians*. Revised ed., The Westminster Press, 1975. 125-126

³ **Philippians 3:20–21**

- (a.) Of the three things that Paul said will last forever—faith, hope and love—love is declared the greatest. Why do you think that is so?
- (b.) What implications does that have for your life?

Wind-Powered Love

“Although people have different gifts, expressing God’s love should be the ultimate purpose of every gift. When you ask God for more love, realize that part of the answer comes in the form of spiritual gifts. When you ask God to show you your spiritual gifts, His answer will include a new awareness of the people around you who need His love.”¹

1. Take time this week to ask God to give you greater awareness of the people around you who need love and how to use your spiritual gifts, in love, to care for them.
2. Meditate on **1 John 4:7–12**. Consider printing or writing it out and putting it in a place you see often to help remind you to love others as God loves you.

⁷ Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. ⁸ But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love. ⁹ God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. ¹⁰ This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins. ¹¹ Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other. ¹² No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us.

¹ Barton, Bruce B., and Grant R. Osborne. *1 & 2 Corinthians*. Tyndale House, 1999.

