

Sermon Summary | Sunday 20th September 2026 | 1 Corinthians 13

What should we expect when Christians gather together?

It is easy to think mainly in terms of what we will receive: Will the sermon help me? Will I enjoy the music? Will I know people? Will the service suit me? But 1 Corinthians 14 asks a different question: **Will somebody else be stronger because I was there?**

That is the heart of Paul's teaching: "Let all things be done for building up." God gives gifts. Love acts. And what God gives us is to be used for the good of other people.

First, build others up.

Paul contrasts prophecy with speaking in tongues. Christians differ over the precise nature of these gifts, but Paul's main point is clear. A gift which strengthens, encourages, or comforts another person is more useful in the gathered church than something nobody else can understand.

So Paul's question is not, "Which gift looks most impressive?" or, "Which experience feels most spiritual?" It is: **Who is being strengthened?**

That presses on us too. Corinth may have had too many people keen to make their contribution heard. Our danger may sometimes be the opposite. Church can slowly become something a few people provide while everybody else receives. Somebody else welcomes. Somebody else teaches the children. Somebody else notices the newcomer. Somebody else sets up, visits, prays, stays behind.

But God has given something to each of us for the good of others. That does not mean everybody needs a title or a microphone. Usually it looks much more ordinary: encouraging somebody, praying with them, helping a child understand the Bible, giving a lift, preparing carefully, noticing a need, or remembering someone who has disappeared from view.

Second, help others understand.

Paul insists that words must be intelligible. Five words that help another person understand are better than ten thousand words which leave them outside. The Holy Spirit is not opposed to understanding. Spiritual worship is not measured by how mysterious it feels.

That applies far beyond tongues. It applies to preaching, prayers, music, notices, conversations, and welcome. Churches develop a language of their own. We know what a PCC is. We know why we confess our sins, where the children go, when to stand, and what Christians mean by words such as grace, salvation, communion, and gospel.

But somebody else may not.

Love does not say, "Well, I understand it." Love asks, **"How can I help them understand?"** That means explaining without embarrassing, avoiding unnecessary jargon, helping someone find the Bible passage, showing a newcomer where to go, or taking time to answer a question.

This is not about watering down Christian truth. Quite the opposite. If the gospel is true, we should work hard to make it clear. Paul imagines an outsider entering the church and, through understandable truth, coming to recognise that God is really among his people.

Third, let everything be done in order.

Paul's answer to disorder is not to shut everything down. He does not say, "Nothing should be done." He says, "Let all things be done for building up." There should be participation, service, prayer, truth, and encouragement — but all of it shaped by love and governed by God's Word.

Good order is not the enemy of the Spirit. It makes room for other people. It prevents one person dominating. It allows truth to be heard. And spiritual maturity means submitting ourselves to Scripture rather than placing our preferences, traditions, experiences, or claimed gifts above it.

That brings the whole series together: **Given by God. Shared for good.**

What has God given me? Time, experience, opportunities, resources, relationships, the ability to notice, welcome, teach, help, pray, give, or encourage?

Who could be stronger if I used it? And what will I actually do? Because love does not merely agree that serving others is a good idea. **Love acts.**

That is what Jesus has done for us. He did not remain at a distance. He came. He spoke so ordinary people could hear. He welcomed outsiders. He served. And at the cross he gave himself for us, bearing our sin and dying in our place. He rose to give us life.

We do not need to serve in order to prove that we matter. Christ has already made us his own by grace.

But because we already matter to him, we are free to serve.

Not spectators. Not consumers. Members of one body. Given something by God. For the good of somebody else.

Questions for personal reflection

1. When I come to church, do I mainly ask, “What will I get from being here?” or “Who might be stronger because I was here?”
2. What has God already given me that I could use more deliberately for the good of someone else?