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Sermon 30 January 2022

Title: Unwrapped 3: Sine Qua Non

- Good morning church family! We are certainly glad you are with us this beautiful Sunday morning—whether you’re watching at the LargsNaz Sunday brunch or from your virtual sanctuary online—whenever and wherever you are gathered with us, we are glad you’re here for this third and final Sunday of our Unwrapped sermon series.
- Now during this short 3-Sunday series we’ve been looking at the 12th chapter of Paul’s first epistle to the church at Corinth, and considering what he had to say to them—and to us—about the gifts of the Spirit—*pneumatikon*—that spiritual stuff that he didn’t want them to be uninformed about. And thus far in the series we’ve considered six points—six ideas that Paul shares with us—3 each Sunday
- That first Sunday we learned that 1) the MANY gifts of the Spirit are given by the ONE GOD—in contrast to the many temples in Corinth to all the various Greek and Roman Gods that people might go to hoping to receive something, Paul reminds the church that while there are many spiritual gifts, there’s only the one God who gives them
- Our second point that we learned that first week—number 2 The gifts of the Spirit come with the batteries included—they are not only given, but also

activated by the one who gives them—so it is not our power or abilities that provides the energy that makes a spiritual gift work, but the power of the Spirit—and third, we learned that first week that

- 3 Gifts of the Spirit are given to each one—and every one—there are no ungifted disciples—the Spirit allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses
- Now last week we continued to consider the first 11 verses of Chapter 12 of 1st Corinthians, and we saw that 1) God, through the gifts of the Spirit, speaks—and this was in contrast to the silent Corinthian gods—Paul reminds us that the true God speaks through the gifts that he has given to his followers—not only the gifts that lead to utterances—words we might say—but also those gifts that communicate through our attitudes and our actions
- Now the second thing we learned last week was: 2) The GIFTS of the Spirit lead to ministries that have effects—and that led us to ask the question, “How many ministers does our church have?” And the answer was of course as many as there are followers of Jesus, because just as each follower is given gifts of the spirit, so each follower of Jesus is called to a ministry that makes things happen
- And finally last week we learned WHY each follower of Jesus is given gifts that lead to ministries that have effects, and through which God speaks—and that reason was this—for the common good—not for our own edification or to bolster our self-esteem or to prove our worth to others, but for the common good.

- Now we also shared a spiritual gifts survey with you last week—and I know some of you have worked through it and we certainly appreciate that—but I also know that some of you thought it was pretty complicated and difficult and I appreciate that, too, so I want to let you know that if you'll just fill out the numbers by each statement and put your name on your survey, you don't need to worry about adding up all the scores—that's really the complicated part—but if you just give the survey with those numbers filled in, Pastor Tasha and I will take care of the scoring—but I also want you to know that the point of this survey is to ensure that everyone in our church family can say with some degree of certainty what spiritual gifts they have been given—some of you may already know that information, because there are lots of other ways to find that out, and if that's you—if you can say “my spiritual gifts are teaching and discernment and wisdom or whatever they are” then we already have achieved that goal—but if you don't know, or if you'd like some confirmation, then this survey can be a helpful tool—and that's what we want it to be—helpful, and not stressful—not a chore but a blessing—and we'll tell you more about why it's important to know what gifts each of us have been given at tonight's Second Helping at 6pm and in Pastor Tasha's sermon next week—there are exciting things ahead and I know that you are as eager to move forward according to God's direction as we are.
- But today, I want to share with you some thoughts that originated in a sermon that I preached here in Largs about 3 years ago—and not only do I think that 3 years is a sufficient time to wait before revisiting some of the

themes in a previous sermon, but I also think that this sermon's focus and content are exactly what we need to think about as we finish out this series.

- And so I want to begin by telling you a story about the first time I made chili here in the United Kingdom. It was over 4 years ago, back before Pastor Tasha and I came to Largs—we were living in Hyndland in Glasgow—we had just moved here from South Carolina not very long before
- But I was not a beginner to making chili—I had made chili many times before—I had been making chili for decades—and not to brag or anything, but people liked it, and so did I
- If you're with us at our Sunday Brunch today, you may have had my Charleston Chili a couple of Sundays ago—that's one version that I make and I have written down the recipe so that I make it the same way, and get the same result each time—but that's only one way that I make chili—I enjoy tweaking the recipe—now, I usually make it with beef, black beans, pinto beans, onion, garlic, tomatoes, sometimes Bell peppers, maybe mushrooms depending on what's available—but I have made it with lots of different ingredients, like venison, or chicken or turkey—you can leave out the meat altogether-- and sometimes I've put sweetcorn in it—chili is a flexible dish as long as you don't change TOO much
- When I first decided that I wanted to make it that first time here in Scotland, back in Glasgow way back in 2018, of course I
- Went down to the Sainberry (that's what Tasha's Mom jokingly calls Sainsbury's) and got some ingredients—beef and tomatoes and onion and

garlic—and of course I had to get chilli powder like this (SHOW)—because you can't make chili without chili powder

- What gives chilli its flavour is chilli powder—makes it taste like chili
- And when I don't follow a recipe like I do for Charleston Chili, what I do is just add chili powder to the pot until it tastes right—you can tell when you get just enough, and you stop there
- But that first time back in Glasgow I added chili powder, and tasted it, and then I added some more and tasted it again, and added some more and I kept adding more and more
- And about that time I asked Tasha to taste it—and she did and she said “Ooohh—that's good—is that a curry?” I said no it's not curry, it's MY chili—and she said—it doesn't taste like your chili, it tastes like an Indian dish—which it did
- And that's when I realised that it didn't matter how much Sainberry's Chilli powder I added, this was NEVER going to taste like MY chili—because I was not using the chili powder I had used back in South Carolina--because there's chili powder (SHOW) and then there's chilli powder (SHOW)—they're called the same thing but they are NOT the same thing
- So the next time we went to the states, we loaded up our suitcases with about a dozen of these (show)—and we do that whenever we visit the US
- SO what I discovered is that THIS AMERICAN Chilli powder is the essential ingredient of my chilli—you can do without the beef, or the beans—you can

even add or subtract other stuff, but you cannot replace THIS chilli powder with something else just because it's CALLED THE SAME THING

- So it's not enough to just have "**chilli powder**" you have to have the RIGHT chilli powder, It's the *sine qua non*—that's a Latin phrase that means
- The **without which nothing, without which nothing—sine qua non**--the essential ingredient—you can fill-in that blank in your listening guide if you want to
- We use the term *sine qua non* in medicine for a test result or a symptom that you have to have in order to be diagnosed with a certain condition—for instance, if you don't have a high URIC ACID level, you don't have GOUT, IF you don't have high blood sugar you don't have diabetes—those characteristics are the *sine qua non* for a diagnosis of those conditions
- Today we're looking once again at Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth—in Chapter 12
- And you'll remember as we have pointed out that Corinth was a big, busy bustling Roman city with lots of cultural and religious influences—there were temples to the Greek and Roman Gods like Poseidon and Apollo and Aphrodite and Asclepius—and in that environment there were new Christians figuring out what a Christian church was—and what it meant to be a follower of Christ—and Paul is helping them understand that
- Now it seems that the church at Corinth was very interested in spiritual gifts, but they didn't really understand WHY there were gifts of the Spirit, because they seemed to be interested in them as a way of drawing attention to

themselves, and feeling satisfied with themselves—a way of saying “look what I can do”—as if a gift of the Spirit represented something they could do, something that made them better than someone else--and not something that God does through them

- And we noticed last week that Paul makes very clear the REASON that spiritual gifts are given—the spiritual gifts are given to EACH member of the church FOR THE COMMON GOOD—for others—not for ourselves alone, but for ME **AND** OTHERS
- Now if we look ahead a little further on in Chapter 12 PAUL uses the metaphor of the human body to remind the church at Corinth, AND US, that we are all ONE BODY, MADE UP of DIFFERENT PARTS, and that NONE, no matter what gifts or ministries or effects they demonstrate, not the hand or the head or the foot or any other part, is more important than any other—and then at the end of Chapter 12, Paul writes (as we heard Pastor tasha share with us--this is in your listening guide):
 - 27 Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. 28 And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. 29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? 30 Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? 31 **But strive for the greater gifts.** And I will show you a still more excellent way

- So what is Paul saying here?
- First--Whatever your gifts are, you are a part of the body of Christ—and you are indispensable—the church cannot do without you without losing something.
- Second—God has appointed people to do different jobs—to have different ministries—in the church—and they’re not all the same—some people are apostles, some prophets, some teachers, some have other gifts. And notice that Paul puts tongues LAST on the list once again, just as he did earlier in Chapter 12—and again I think he did that on purpose because the church at Corinth was so obsessed with that particular gift. But as we said last week—the ability to understand and to speak the language of those in our community—even when they speak English—is crucial if we are to share the Good News of the gospel with them
- Third, Paul reiterates what he’s been saying in Chapter 12 with several rhetorical questions—He asks: Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? and so on--and the answer to all these questions is NO—not everyone is an apostle, not everyone is a prophet; not everyone is a teacher; not everyone works miracles; not everyone possesses gifts of healing; not everyone speaks in tongues; not everyone interprets. Not everybody does everything—there are different gifts and different ministries that all work together to build the Kingdom.
- No problem so far—this is pretty straightforward, right?
- But here it comes—**the dreaded ambiguous sentence.** Verse 31.

- But strive for the greater gifts.
- Now, in English, this sentence seems simple. Work toward the gifts that are greater. But Paul has just said MULTIPLE times that you don't EARN spiritual gifts—you don't work toward them—they are gift that the Holy Spirit gives to whomever it pleases—that God APPOINTS—you don't "work" to become an apostle or a prophet or to have the gift of interpretation—not if it's a gift—you just have to be open to receive it
- But that word that is translated as "strive" can also mean "to earnestly desire"—so it may be that Paul is saying here that it's ok to earnestly desire those gifts that are "greater," like wisdom and knowledge as opposed to the gift of tongues that the Corinthians were so interested in for the sake of show—so that Paul's statement is a command—do this, it's ok. In the Greek, that's called the IMPERATIVE mood—when someone tells someone to do something
- On the other hand—this statement may be read in the Greek in what is called the INDICATIVE mood—as an observation—But YOU strive for the greater gifts—in which case this is a criticism—and it seems to me to make more sense when we read it that way—Paul has spent all of Chapter 12 telling the Corinthian church that the Holy Spirit gives gifts to each and every one of them, and that no one is more important than another—and God has appointed to each different roles—but you, he then says, you strive for the greater gifts—and that word for strive can also mean to be jealous of—which I think really gets to the heart of what Paul is saying to the Corinthian

church—you are jealous of the greater gifts—and you shouldn't be—one translation says, "Because you strive for the greater gifts, I will show you a more excellent way."

- So Paul is either saying it's ok to earnestly desire the greater gifts—do this—imperative--or he's saying you are jealous of the greater gifts—implying don't do this--indicative
- So make a mental note, and I will too, when you get to heaven, find the Apostle Paul and ask him—In 1 Corinthians 12:31—was that a command or a criticism? Were you using the imperative or the indicative mood?
- **But either way, what's crucial is the next part of verse 31. And I will show you a still more excellent way.**
- So Paul is closing Chapter 12 with a teaser—something important is coming next--Paul is about to share with the Corinthian church a more excellent way of understanding spiritual gifts and their ministry. **He is about to share with the Corinthian church the *Sine qua non* of the Christian life, the *sine qua non* for the body of the church.**
- **But first . . . we have a fun little quiz to take—let's see if you can predict what the SINE QUA NON is—just shout your answer right out if you know it, whether you're at our brunch or online just shout it out—first question:**
 - **Elvis Presley sang "I can't help falling in _____ with you."**
 - **I hope you got that right—if you didn't here's another chance**
 - **The Beatles said "All you need is _____."—ok and one more**

- **Charles Wesley wrote in his timeless hymn “And Can It Be” that Jesus emptied himself of all but _____.”**
- **Ok last one--In 1 Corinthians 13, the *sine qua non* is _____.**
REPEAT (you can fill in that blank in your listening guide if you’re following along)
- **The answer of course to all of those was LOVE.**
- So that is the punch line—love-- now let’s see WHY that is. Now we know that Paul has spent Chapter 12 talking about spiritual gifts and ministries—how individuals in the church are gifted and empowered to serve God and OTHERS—he’s talked about WHAT the church is called to do—**but now he’s going to tell us that HOW we do it is as important as WHAT we DO.**
- Verse 1: 13:1 If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.
- Paul is saying, “I can have the gift of tongues that the Corinthians are so interested in, but without love, I’m just making noise”—even worse, the words Paul uses here refer to the kinds of noises that are used to call for battle—the gong and the cymbal—without love, I’m not just noisy, I’m stirring up trouble—I’m preparing for a fight. And notice that Paul talks about speaking here—if I SPEAK in the tongues of mortals and angels but have not love—he doesn’t say “if I can listen and understand the tongues of mortals and angels”—you know it’s a lot easier to SPEAK without love than it is to listen and understand? Listening and understanding take openness and

- acceptance—speaking just takes a mouth—and if you do it without love, you’re just going to make troublesome noise. Man, that’ll preach, won’t it?
- Verse 2 of Chapter 13: And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.
 - Paul started out with the gift of tongues that he had put at the bottom of the list of gifts twice in Chapter 12—but now he moves to the top of the list, and talks about even those gifts that might be understood by some as the “greater gifts”—Prophecy, wisdom, knowledge and faith—the biggies--even these are useless without LOVE—I can have Prophetic powers and the understanding of all mysteries and all knowledge and all the faith with which to accomplish amazing things, but without love, Paul is quite dramatic here, **I AM NOTHING—I am NOTHING—nought, nada, nil, zip, zero, zilch**—so here we see that Paul is saying quite directly, that LOVE is **that without which nothing—the sine qua non**
 - **Now Paul’s about to go even further—here it comes—in verse 3 he writes**
 - 13:3 If I give away **all my possessions**, and if I hand over **my body** so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.
 - I can sacrifice everything—all I have and all I am—**SO THAT I MAY BOAST**—because without love that’s all you’re doing, just doing something for your own satisfaction—something you can brag about as if it’s something you possess--because that’s remarkable sacrifice, right? Everybody look at how

much I have given up--But if I don't have LOVE, I gain nothing—I get
NOTHING back, I've only LOST IT ALL

- So Paul is telling us **I can SAY great things, I can KNOW great THINGS, I can even DO great THINGS**—but If I don't have love—I am NOTHING—love is that WITHOUT WHICH, NOTHING
- Love is the *sine qua non*—**that essential ingredient—like chilli powder**
- **(SHOW)** But you'll remember, there's chilli powder, and then there's chilli powder
- Now, here's one more question in our little quiz—just shout out the answer:
- Aphrodite was the Greek Goddess of _____. Love
- Love, yes, that's right—and Aphrodite was especially important for the City of Corinth—she was its “protector goddess”—and there were at least 3 temples to Aphrodite there
- Now Aphrodite is a Greek Goddess, and Greek gods and Goddesses have Roman counterparts, so ancient gods will have a Greek name and a Roman name—Aphrodite's Roman name is Venus
- Aphrodite is often depicted with another god, who is sometimes said to be her son—his name is Eros—now, all three of these names have given us words in the English language
- From Aphrodite we get the word aphrodisiac, From Venus the word venereal, and from Eros the word erotic

- Now, if you think about what all those words have in common, you'll know that what Aphrodite is the Goddess of and what Paul is talking about are **two different things**
- But in English, we often call both of those things "LOVE"
- If you asked someone who lived in Ancient Corinth whether they'd use the same word to describe what Aphrodite is the goddess of and what Paul is talking about, they'd probably laugh out loud
- (DEMO) Because the love Paul is talking about and Aphrodite's love are like CHILI POWDER and CHILI POWDER—**they may be called the same thing in English, but they ain't the same thing, and only one of them is the SINE QUA NON**
- In fact, there are 4 Greek words that the Corinthians would have known that are translated into English as just LOVE—CS Lewis wrote a book called "The Four Loves" that you may have heard of
- Let's look at those 4 words: (you can fill in the blanks in your listening guide if you'd like)
- **First, Eros—just like that god that was Aphrodite's son we just mentioned—Eros** is romantic love-- the love of sexual attraction or erotic desire; It's what Aphrodite is the Goddess of-- sometimes though, eros is used for general desires, things that "I want" That's not what Paul is talking about
- Next

- **Storge** is family love—the love shared between those who are familiar, who are related to one another. That’s not what Paul is talking about
- What about Philia?
- **Philia** is the love of true friendship, the love you would bear for those who share in common groups and activities—the love that says “you are my brother.” It’s the love that my male friends are expressing when they say “I love you, man” –which is very different from “I love you”—that makes us uneasy—I have a hard time telling my guy friends “I love you,” but I’ll tell them “I love you, man” all day long. Philia is the reason **Philadelphia** is called the city of **brotherly love**—because that’s literally what it means, but That’s not what Paul is talking about—what Paul is talking about is
- **Agape**
- **Agape** is Godly love—it’s the love God demonstrates in the incarnation, in emptying himself out for the world in the crucifixion—it’s the **self-sacrificial** love we are called to--the love of charity (and it’s translated as charity in the King James Version), the love of stranger, that causes you to give to the poor, support the homeless, visit the imprisoned, feed the hungry, and care for creation. It’s the love that makes it possible to love our enemies—**to love God with all our heart soul and strength and our neighbour as ourselves—to LOVE OUR NEIGHBOR—AS OURSELF--** It’s the love that makes it possible for Paul to say of the spiritual gifts in Chapter 12 verse 7 that they are **FOR THE COMMON GOOD.**

- What's the SINE QUA NON for Paul here? It's not simply LOVE---it's agape.
- 13:1 If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have agape, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.
13:2 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have agape, I am nothing.
13:3 If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have agape, I gain nothing.
- We all have gifts that we are given, gifts that lead to ministries that have effects, and each of us has an important role as a member of the body of Christ, but the SINE QUA NON—the essential ingredient is AGAPE
- The Apostle Paul might translate his words for the contemporary church and say to us
 - If I show up to pre-brunch worship every Sunday, and sing louder than everyone else, and raise my hand and say “Amen” but have not agape, I am just making noise.
 - If I spend hours of preparation writing a sermon, and if I read commentaries and word studies and my exegesis is impeccable but have not agape, I am just wasting my time.
 - If I spend every spare moment volunteering at my local church and in the community, and if I give above and beyond in my tithes and offerings, but have not agape, I gain nothing.

- It's a wonderful coincidence that agape, the Greek word, can also be read as an English word—agape. As my mentor and friend Craig Keen points out, living out AGAHPAY is being AGAPE: split wide open—like Jesus on the cross—
- And Paul is reminding us here in 1 Corinthians that we as members of the body of Christ are called to live out that agape, to be agape—wide open
- **As members of the body of Christ are called to live out that agape, to be agape—wide open**
- wide open to the infilling with the power of the Holy Spirit
- wide open to the future
- wide open to the Kingdom
- wide open to the needs of others
- Wide open to our brothers and sisters in Christ
- Wide open to the community
- Wide open to the gifts of the Spirit and the ministry we are called to
- wide open to the call of the gospel to take up my cross and follow Jesus wherever he leads me
- wide open to **whatever** God calls me to, and
- wide open to receive His provision and His blessing
- May God grant that we as individuals and as the collective church would stand agape, that we would be wide open to that agape love without which **we are NOTHING**