

INTRODUCTION

- We are returning today to our study of 1 Corinthians
- Let me invite you to take God's Word and turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 13.
- When we left off from chapter 12, we heard Paul's final words of a "more excellent way"
- That "more excellent way" is the content of chapter 13, which is love
- This morning we are looking at the first 3 verses but for our hearing I'd like to read all 13 verses:

1 If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

2 If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

3 And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.

4 Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant,

5 does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered,

6 does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth;

7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

8 Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away.

9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part;

10 but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.

11 When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things.

12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.

13 But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.

- We have recently completed chapter 12 and the subject of spiritual gifts
- The gifts were listed in verses 8-10

- The source of the gifts, being the Holy Spirit, is mentioned in verse 11
- He is the One who decides what gift you have
- As you understand what gift you have, you are to use it in the power of the Spirit to serve the body of Christ, the church
- Paul concluded the remaining chapter by comparing the body of Christ to the human body
- Just as a human body has members that function in the body so does the church
- Each member has a function
- And each member has the gifts the Spirit has given to properly function in the church
- Now we come to chapter 13 where Paul talks about what is to motivate the gifts - love
- Without love we are nothing more than a "clanging cymbal" (13:1)
- We can even have the more prominent gifts like prophecy and knowledge or faith but without love we are nothing
- We can even be charitable and help feed the poor or even give our bodies in the most sacrificial way but without love we profit nothing
- As we study chapter 13, there are some amazing things that we will learn about love

- But before we look at chapter 13, let me say some general things about love
- First, the Bible tells us in 1 John 4:16 that God is love
- Therefore everything that we need to know about love is found in God Himself
- Love is the manifestation of His character
- And when someone has God His character is manifested through them
- But tragically, love is missing in many churches
- That's a sad reality
- Because the culture needs the love of Christ
- They need to see it in the lives of every member
- The same was true in Corinth
- But instead, what they saw was the evil foe to love, pride
- Their pride did nothing more than manifest their selfishness
- In a church that had everything, this one thing was missing
- And because it was missing it caused many problems like the ones we have seen up to this point in 1 Corinthians

Now as we look at the first 3 verses of chapter 13, we are going to see 3 principles pertaining to love

The first is...

LESSON

I. Language Without Love is Noise (v.1)

Paul begins with referencing...

- The Language of Men (v.1a)
 - He says, "If I speak"
 - This indicates a speaking gift
 - The next phrase mentions what the speaking gift is, "the tongues of men"
 - This is either talking about "human language" (Barnes) or a gift of language-- a language the apostles never learned as seen in Acts 2
 - Acts 2:4, And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.
 - Acts 2:6 says "the crowd...was hearing them speak in [their] own language."
 - Acts 2:8 says they were asking "how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born?"
 - The word Paul uses for "tongue" is glossa which, as just noted, is "the supernatural gift of speaking in another language without it having been learned"

- It's also used in Scripture as an organ of speech and as a "language" (Vine, W. E., Merrill F. Unger, and William White Jr. *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* 1996 : 636. Print.)
- The word for "language" is *dialektos*. It's where we get our English word *dialect*

Paul also mentions...

- The Language of Angels (v.1b)

He says, "If I speak with the tongues...of angels"

- There is no biblical teaching of a unique or special angelic language
- Every time we hear angels speak in the Bible, it is always in the language of the person being addressed
- But there are some that interpret "the tongues of angels" to mean that one type of "gift of tongues" involved speaking in the language of angels. (Barry, John D. et al. *Faithlife Study Bible*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016. Print.)
- Lenski says, When "Daniel, John in Revelation, and Paul himself...was caught up to Paradise, [they] heard unutterable things. Perhaps we may say that they actually heard the tongues of angels as they speak in heaven. (Lenski, R. C. H. *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistle to the Corinthians*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963. Print
- So, you can sing like a seraph, but without love it is nothing but the hiss of hell. (McGee, J. Vernon. *Thru the Bible Commentary*. electronic ed. Vol. 5. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997. Print.)

Basically Paul is saying...

- All Gifts Require Love to Operate Properly
 - Anything less is the flesh
 - Everything a Christian does should be done in love (1 Cor.16:14)
 - Right theology is no substitute for love
 - Religious works are no substitute for love
 - Nothing substitutes for love
 - Christians have no excuse for not loving, “because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Rom. 5:5)
 - We do not have to manufacture love; we only have to share the love we have been given
 - We do not have to be humanly taught to love, because we ourselves “are taught by God to love one another” (1 Thess. 4:9)
 - We are therefore told to “pursue love” (1 Cor. 14:1), to “put on love” (Col. 3:14), to “increase and abound in love” (1 Thess. 3:12; Phil. 1:9), to be sincere in love (2 Cor. 8:8), to be unified in love (Phil. 2:2), to be “fervent” in love (1 Pet. 4:8), and to “stimulate one another to love” (Heb. 10:24).(MacArthur, John F., Jr. *1 Corinthians*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1984. Print. MacArthur New Testament Commentary

Paul says about both...

- Language without love is just noise (v.1c)
 - In New Testament times, the pagan deities Cybele, Bacchus, and Dionysus were worshipped by speaking in ecstatic noises that were accompanied by smashing gongs, clanging cymbals, and blaring trumpets
 - Paul is saying "that spiritual gifts without love make the Corinthians' worship no different from the pagans'." (Barry, John D. et al. *Faithlife Study Bible*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016. Print
 - It is only meaningless jibberish in a Christian guise (MacArthur, John F., Jr. *1 Corinthians*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1984. Print. MacArthur New Testament Commentary

In verses 2 and 3 Paul mentions 4 more gifts: prophecy, knowledge, faith, and giving and illustrates that...

II. Gifts Without Love Are Worthless (v.2)

The word "nothing" that occurs at the end of verse 2 is the Greek adjective *outheis* which is a negative reference to an entity, an event, or state (Louw-Nida)

It is "a quality of no importance." It is "Non Essential."

If you do not operate your gift with love it makes the gift void, empty, irrelevant, or non essential.

So...

- Prophecy is Nothing without Love (v.2a)
 - In chapter 14:1-5, Paul speaks of prophecy as the greatest of the spiritual gifts because the prophet proclaims God's truth to people so they can know and understand it. (MacArthur, John F., Jr. *1 Corinthians*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1984. Print. MacArthur New Testament Commentary
 - Of all people, the prophet was to speak the truth in love (Eph.4:15)
 - He was not to be like Balaam, who was a prophet, that tried to curse Israel before God stopped Him (Num.22:16-34) and had him put to death (Num.31:8,16)
 - Balaam knew the true God, knew God's Word, spoke God's Word, and feared God in a self-protecting way, but he had no love for God and no love for God's people. (MacArthur, John F., Jr. *1 Corinthians*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1984. Print. MacArthur New Testament Commentary.)
 - The same is true today -- pastors are to love God and His people by ministering their gifts in love

So prophecy without love is nothing. Paul continues by also saying...

- Knowledge is Nothing without Love (v.2b)

Paul says, "If I...know all mysteries and all knowledge"

- Knowledge is factual human understanding

- Mysteries always signifies divine truth that God has hidden from men at some time
- Most often it refers to truths hidden to Old Testament saints that have been revealed in the New Testament (cf. Eph. 3:3–5)
- If he could perfectly understand all unrevealed divine mysteries, along with all the mysteries that are revealed, without love, he would still be nothing
- That spiritual understanding would count for nothing without the supreme spiritual fruit of love

Next Paul says, "And if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing."

In other words...

- Faith is Nothing without Love (v.2c)
 - This is not saving faith but a confident trust in the Lord
 - This is a faith that can "remove mountains"
 - That's a figure of speech for doing the impossible. Faith enough to move a mountain is hyperbole for great faith. (Richison, Grant. *Verse by Verse through the Book of 1 Corinthians*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2007. Print.)
 - Paul says without love, my faith is nothing

Prophecy, understanding, and faith without love are empty. They are a big religious zero if exercised without love. Note the parallelism: "I became

nothing,” I am nothing,” “It profits me nothing.” It is zero, zero, zero. The word “am” in “am nothing” is our status quo. Our status is a religious zero if we minister without love.

Richison, Grant. Verse by Verse through the Book of 1 Corinthians. Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2007. Print.

Last, Paul says in verse 3, "And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing."

In other words...

III. Giving and Martyrdom Without Love is Unprofitable (v.3)

In other words, what's the point?

Yes to help the poor who benefit from such generosity but to sacrifice your body by martyrdom is foolish if you didn't have love for God or man

Neither volunteering for giving up all your possessions or being burned would produce any spiritual benefit if not done out of love for the body of Christ.

MacArthur, John, Jr., ed. The MacArthur Study Bible. electronic ed. Nashville, TN: Word Pub., 1997. Print.

Martin Luther said, “To give is, indeed, a fruit of love though not yet love itself. Love is a spiritual gift which moves the heart and not only the hands. Love is the name, not for what the hand does, but for what the heart feels.”

Lenski, R. C. H. The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistle to the Corinthians. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963. Print.

Paul's first illustration is...

- Giving Your Possessions to Feed the Poor (v.3a)
 - Deuteronomy 15:11 says, "For the poor will never cease to be in the land; therefore I command you, saying, 'You shall freely open your hand to your brother, to your needy and poor in your land.'"
 - Jesus said in Matthew 6:1-4, "(1) 'Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven. (2) 'So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. (3) But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, (4) so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.'"
 - This is exactly what Paul did
 - In Galatians 2:10 he was told by the church at Jerusalem to "remember the poor." He said this was "the very thing I also was eager to do."
 - In 1 Corinthians 13:3 Paul uses the word *psomiso* for the word "give" or "bestow."
 - It meant properly to break off, and distribute in small portions;
 - to feed by morsels; and may be applicable here to distributing one's property in small portions.

- Charity or alms to the poor, was usually distributed at one's gate (Luke 16:20,) or in some public place. (Barnes, Albert. *Notes on the New Testament: I Corinthians*. Ed. Robert Frew. London: Blackie & Son, 1884–1885. Print.)

The second illustration is...

- Surrendering Your Body to be Burned (v.3b)
 - We an example of this in Daniel chapter 3 with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego
 - They would not worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar erected, so he threw them in the furnace of blazing fire
 - If they didn't love God or His Word they wouldn't have surrendered their bodies to be burned
 - They said to Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 3:17-18, "(17) If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. (18) "But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."
 - What about those in church history that gave their bodies to the fire like William Tyndale
 - He loved people so much that he gave his life so that even the plow boy would have the Bible in English
 - Jesus said in John 15:13, "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends."

CONCLUSION

- It doesn't matter what spiritual gift you have, if you do not love then they are worthless, of no advantage
- Love is the motivator of spiritual gifts
- We are to minister our gifts in love to each other
- So the "more excellent way" is to love
- Don't pursue after the gifts, pursue love
- Love one another from the heart
- In the words of Galatians 5:6, "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love."
- That's Paul's point.
- So This chapter is a breath of fresh air, an oasis in a desert of problems. It is a positive note in the midst of almost continual reproof and correction of wrong understandings, wrong attitudes, wrong behavior, and wrong use of God's ordinances and gifts. Paul's scribe must have breathed a sigh of relief and amazement when the apostle began dictating these beautiful, Holy Spirit-inspired words. (MacArthur, John F., Jr. *1 Corinthians*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1984. Print. MacArthur New Testament Commentary.)
- Do you know Jesus?
- Surrender to Him now and receive His love given to you by His Spirit

- Romans 5:8 says, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."
- Let's pray.
- Lord's Supper.