

Sermon 65: Five Marks that Set Apart Christian Love: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Text: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity..."

Summary: God calls us to walk in Christian love.

Introduction:

- **Part 1: Why is Christian love so important? 13:1-3**
 - Service done without it is just noise.
 - Service done without it cannot make us something that we are not.
 - Our future reward is lost without it.
- **Part 2: What does it look like practically? 13:4-7**
 - **He defined it positively by what it does:**
 - It is patient
 - It is kind
 - It delights in what is true
 - It does not give up
 - **He defined it negatively by what it does not do:**
 - It is not envious
 - It is not boastful
 - It is not harsh
 - It is not overbearing
 - It is not easily angered

- It does not keep meticulous records
 - It does not enjoy seeing others suffer
- **Part 3: What sets it apart from all other virtues? 13:8-13**
 - It endures while other gifts do not.
 - It will continue to have value when other gifts will not.
 - As we mature, we will grow to appreciate its value to a greater degree.
 - Our comprehension of this principle will be partial till we meet Christ.
 - Not only is it the highest gift, but it is also the highest virtue.

Mark 1: It endures while other gifts do not: 13:8 "Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away..."

- **Paul sets love apart from the gifts of tongues and prophecy:** "Charity never faileth: but..."
- The church incorrectly elevated tongues to an inappropriate status.
- **Some potential reasons for this imbalance:** Pride and emotionalism
 - **Church History:** Speaking in "tongues" was a highly visible gift which was highlighted 4 times in Acts as a sign validating the Spirit coming upon certain individuals or groups.
 - **Pentecost:** Jews and proselytes from all over the Roman world
 - **The Samaritans:** Syncretistic Gentiles with partial Jewish ancestry.
 - **Cornelius:** A Gentile household
 - **Disciples of John at Ephesus:** Old Testament saints who needed fuller revelation regarding Christ.
 - **Pagan Backgrounds:**
 - History attests to several Hellenistic "mystery cults" in Corinth and the surrounding regions that practiced ecstatic utterances as part of their religious rituals.
 - People who practiced these "ecstatic utterances" often fell into highly emotional trancelike states that were associated with "divine" encounters.
- **Modern parallels to this imbalance:**
 - Believing that all Christians must speak in tongues
 - Believing that speaking in tongues is the ultimate sign that someone has the Spirit
 - Believing that tongues is a sign of a higher level of spirituality
- **His argument for the superiority of love:**
 - **Love will never "fail"**
 - **ἐκπίπτω:** To fall away or to fall off

- **Prophecies will “fail”**
- **Knowledge will “vanish away”**
- **That which is in part “shall be done away...”**
- **When I became a man, “I put away childish things...”**
 - **καταργέω:** To render something ineffective, to abolish, or to put away.
 - **Ephesians 2:14** “He is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having “abolished” in his flesh the enmity...”
 - **Galatians 3:17** “And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of “none effect...”
 - **Galatians 5:4** “Christ is “become of no effect” unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace...”
- **Tongues will “cease”**
 - **ναύω:** To restrain something
 - **1 Peter 3:10** “He that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil...”
 - **1 Peter 4:1** “As Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin...”

Mark 2: It will continue to have value when other gifts will not: 13:9-10 “For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away...”

- **Four commonly presented interpretations of “that which is perfect”**
 - **Cessation:**
 - “The perfect” is the completion of the NT
 - “The perfect” is the transition of the church from the apostolic era into the rest of the church age.
 - **Continuation is possible but not absolutely necessary:**
 - “The perfect” refers to an individual believer coming to spiritual maturity and properly prioritizing love over tongues.
 - “The perfect” refers to our glorified state when we will see Christ face to face rather than through the scriptures.
- **Why this matters:**

- Should we expect tongues and prophecy to be normative in the church?
- If yes, then how does this harmonize with this passage?
- If no, then does this passage teach or contribute to that belief?
- **Most likely interpretation:**
 - **The completion of the NT:**
 - The use of **καταργέω** which links prophecy, knowledge, and partial knowledge.
 - **Similar language is used in James 1:23-24** "If any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was..."
 - **Our glorified state when we see Christ face to face:**
 - **Face to Face:** "Now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known..."
 - **Now abides:** "Now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity..."
 - In eternity our faith will be made sight
 - In eternity our hope will be fully realized as we receive everything He has promised.
 - For all eternity, we will continue to grow in our love for Him. Love will never pass away, rather it will continue to grow forever.
- **Why this debate is not as significant as some may think:**
 - **My suggestion on the issue:**
 - Tongues have ceased as a normative gift in the church.
 - Prophecy has ceased as a normative gift in the church.
 - This passage contributes to the answer but does not articulate it with absolute clarity.
 - The explanation for the two is different:
 - **Tongues:** will be restrained when their purpose is completed.
 - Tongues was a sign given to the Jewish people to warn them of coming judgment on the generation that rejected the Messiah.
 - **Christ's Lament: Luke 19:41-44** "When he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench

about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation..."

- **The nation's stunning rejection: Matthew 27:23-25** "They cried out the more, saying, Let him be crucified. When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it. Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children..."
- **Peter's preaching: Acts 2:36-40** "Let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation..."
- **Paul's reference to Isaiah: 1 Corinthians 14:21-22** "In the law it is written, With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord. Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not..."
- **A warning concerning future judgment on a generation that would reject the Messiah: Isaiah 28:10-16** "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste..."

- **In AD 70 that judgment took place making the sign unnecessary.**
- **Prophecy:** will be rendered ineffective when its purpose is completed.
 - Prophecy served a temporary yet highly important purpose during the apostolic age validating the apostolic office and the scriptures they wrote under the inspiration of the Spirit.
 - **1 Corinthians 14:32** "The spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets..."
 - **1 Corinthians 14:37** "If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord..."
- **Voices from church history:**
 - **4th century church father John Chrysostom from modern day Turkey:** "1 Corinthians 12 is very obscure: but the obscurity is produced by our ignorance of the facts and by the cessation of tongues and prophecy since they now no longer take place in the church..."
 - **4th century church Father Augustine from North Africa:** "In the earliest times, the Holy Spirit fell upon them that believe and they spoke with tongues, which they had not learned, as the Spirit gave them utterance. These were signs adapted to the time. For there was this betokening of the Holy Spirit in all tongues to show that the gospel of God was to run through all tongues over the whole earth...and it passed away..."
 - **16th century German Reformer Martin Luther wrote:** "In the early Church the Holy Spirit was sent forth in visible form...This visible outpouring of the Holy Spirit was necessary to the establishment of the early Church, as were also the miracles that accompanied the gift of the Holy Ghost. Paul explained the purpose of these miraculous gifts of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 14:22, 'Tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not.' Once the Church had been established and properly advertised by these miracles, the visible appearance of the Holy Ghost ceased..."
 - **16th century French Reformer John Calvin:** "We certainly see that their use ceased not long after [the apostolic age], or at least, instances of them were so rare

that we may gather they were not equally common to all ages. It was the result of absurd greed and self-seeking among those who followed on [in later church history], that they made up empty fabrications in order that they should not altogether lack miracles. This threw the door wide open to Satan's lies, not only with delusions taking the place of faith, but with simple men being pulled off the right road by the pretext of signs. That gift of healing, like the rest of the miracles, which the Lord willed to be brought forth for a time, has vanished away in order to make the new preaching of the gospel marvelous forever.."

- **17th century British Puritan Matthew Henry:** The gift of tongues was one new product of the Spirit of prophecy and given for a particular reason, that, the Jewish pale being taken down, all nations might be brought into the church. These and other gifts of prophecy, being a sign, have long since ceased and laid aside, and we have no encouragement to expect the revival of them; but, on the contrary, are directed to call the Scriptures the more sure word of prophecy, more sure than voices from heaven; and to them we are directed to take heed, to search them, and to hold them fast, 2 Peter i.19.
- **18th Century American Puritan Jonathan Edwards:** "In the days of his [Jesus'] flesh, his disciples had a measure of the miraculous gifts of the Spirit...after the resurrection and ascension, was the most full and remarkable effusion of the Spirit in his miraculous gifts that ever took place, beginning with the day of Pentecost, after Christ had risen and ascended to heaven. And in consequence of this, not only here and there an extraordinary person was endowed with these extraordinary gifts, but they were common in the church, and so continued during the lifetime of the apostles, or till the death of the last of them, even the apostle John, which took place about a hundred years from the birth of Christ; so that the first hundred years of the Christian era, or the first century, was the era of miracles. But soon after that, the canon of Scripture being completed when the apostle John had written the book of Revelation, which he wrote not long before his death, these miraculous gifts were no longer continued in the church. For there was now completed an established written revelation of the mind and will of God, wherein God had fully recorded a standing and all-sufficient rule for his church in all ages. And the

Jewish church and nation being overthrown, and the Christian church and the last dispensation of the church of God being established, the miraculous gifts of the Spirit were no longer needed, and therefore they ceased; for though they had been continued in the church for so many ages, yet then they failed, and God caused them to fail because there was no further occasion for them. And so was fulfilled the saying of the text, 'Whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.' And now there seems to be an end to all such fruits of the Spirit as these, and we have no reason to expect them anymore. The extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, such as the gift of tongues, or miracles, or prophecy, are called extraordinary, because they are such as are not given in the ordinary course of God's providence. They are not bestowed in the way of God's ordinary providential dealing with his children, but only on extraordinary occasions, as they were bestowed on the Prophets and Apostles to enable them to reveal the mind and will of God before the canon of Scripture was complete, and so on the primitive church, in order to the founding and establishing of it in the world. But since the canon of the Scripture has been completed, and the Christian church fully founded and established, these extraordinary gifts have ceased..."

- **20th Century British Presbyterian D. Martyn Lloyd Jones:** "Once these New Testament documents were written the office of a prophet was no longer necessary. Hence in the Pastoral Epistles which apply to a later stage in the history of the Church, when things had become more settled and fixed, there is no mention of the prophets. It is clear that even by then the office of the prophet was no longer necessary, and the call was for teachers and pastors and others to expound the Scriptures and to convey the knowledge of the truth. Again, we must note that often in the history of the Church trouble has arisen because people thought that they were prophets in the New Testament sense, and that they had received special revelations of truth. The answer to that is that in view of the New Testament Scriptures there is no need of further truth. That is an absolute proposition. We have all truth in the New Testament, and we have no need of any further revelations. All has been given, everything that is necessary for us is available. Therefore if a man claims to

have received a revelation of some fresh truth we should suspect him immediately...The answer to all this is that the need for prophets ends once we have the canon of the New Testament. We no longer need direct revelations of truth; the truth is in the Bible. We must never separate the Spirit and the Word. The Spirit speaks to us through the Word; so we should always doubt and query any supposed revelation that is not entirely consistent with the Word of God. Indeed the essence of wisdom is to reject altogether the term 'revelation' as far as we are concerned, and speak only of 'illumination'. The revelation has been given once and for all, and what we need and what by the grace of God we can have, and do have, is illumination by the Spirit to understand the Word..."

- **Modern practices often fall short of the genuine gifts:**
 - Is it a genuine language?
 - Is it truly spontaneous or is it worked up or taught?
 - Is it different than similar experiences in pagan or "cult" groups?
 - Is there theological clarity on the gospel where it is being practiced?
- **Where arguments are made for contemporary practice, they are rarely following the Biblical pattern:**
 - **1 Corinthians 14:27** "If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret..."
 - **1 Corinthians 14:34** "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak..."
 - They were to limit speakers and to speak one at a time.
 - They should only speak if someone present had the gift of interpretation.
 - Only men were permitted to speak.
- **The most careful "non-cessationists" properly emphasize wisdom in decision making:**
 - "Prophecies" are to be judged according to scripture.
 - God's will is discerned primarily through ordinary wisdom gleaned through properly interpreted scripture.
 - Decisions are to be made according to wisdom and "impressions" are to be considered cautiously.
 - "Words from the Lord" are not normative but are possible.
 - Prophecy will be active and normative during the Tribulation, so it has not technically ceased.

Mark 3: As we mature, we will grow to appreciate its value to a greater degree: 3:11 "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things..."

- **The illustration of physical, mental, and emotional development:**
 - It is normal and completely acceptable for children to look and act like children.
 - As children grow older, our expectations for them should change.
 - We should expect adults to act like adults, not children.
- **The relationship of his illustration to the topic:**
 - The church needs to grow up.
 - The people in the church need to act like mature Christians.
 - If they do, they will appreciate and follow his instructions.
 - Their conformity to his teaching will be a reflection of the true spiritual maturity.

Mark 4: Our comprehension of this principle will be partial till we meet Christ: 13:12 "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

- **Paul contrasted their current and future situations.**
 - **"Now"**
 - Their current knowledge was real but clouded.
 - Their current knowledge was sufficient but still incomplete.
 - The quality of their current service was not yet fully realized.
 - **"But then"**
 - **When we are glorified, we will see Him face to face: 2 Corinthians 5:8** "We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord..."
 - **When we are glorified, we will have a complete, though not exhaustive knowledge: 1 John 3:2** "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is..."
 - **When we are glorified, the true quality of our service will be revealed: 1 Corinthians 3:13** "Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is..."
- **In glory:**

- We will have a more complete knowledge of God than we do now.
- Our hope which has been built on His unshakeable promises will be fully realized.
- Our view of Him that has been built by Scripture will be shaped by a visible, unhindered, and everlasting interaction.

Mark 5: Not only is it the highest gift, it is also the highest virtue:

13:13 "And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity..."

- Faith, hope, and love are genuine Christian virtues.
- These virtues are the result of the work of the indwelling Spirit.
- Love separates itself from these two other noble virtues.

Final Thoughts:

- Our lives must be shaped by godly virtues, and the highest of these virtues is Christian love.
- Everything we do as Christians should flow out of this virtue.
- We will never express it fully and perfectly.
- Even in eternity, love for God and one another will endure and grow deeper and more meaningful.
- May God help us to grow in this grace.