

Love and Spiritual Gifts

1 Corinthians 13:1–13 (ESV)

INTRODUCTION: Our study of 1 Corinthians brings us to this chapter that is very familiar to many of you - chapter 13. A needle work version of this passage hung on the wall of my childhood home. This is a passage that is requested to be read at weddings on a regular basis. It ranks among the 23rd Psalm, and the Lord's Prayer as one of the most recognizable passages in all the Bible. It is the great Love chapter.

In over 25 years of ministry I have never taught on this chapter, and I will tell you why. As a young man I noticed something. The ministers in my church always seemed to preach on, what I call, "the mushy middle". They would choose texts that emphasized those aspects of Christianity that we can all easily affirm.

- We ought to pray more, for example.
- We ought to serve more
- We ought to love more.

Certainly, those texts and concepts should have been addressed, but when they are addressed to the exclusion of everything else in Scripture, it results in a very vanilla, uninteresting, impotent form of Christianity that held very little appeal for a young man trying to find his way in the world.

My commitment was to take an expositional approach to the scriptures. Teach them as they are, verse by verse, to men and women as they are, and trust God for the results.

If my theory is accurate and if my practice has been consistent, when we come to those passages that address concepts like, "love", they should shine forth as a crown on a King's brow and take their rightful place as the supreme concept of the church.

CONTEXT: Chapter 13 is not meant to be understood independently from the whole of Paul's letter to the Church at Corinth. It must be read within its greater context.

What is the context? The misuse and abuse of Spiritual Gifts, as we've seen the last couple of weeks. The Church at Corinth was simultaneously one of the most gifted and one of the least spiritually mature congregations in the Bible.

The gift of tongues had arisen as the SUPER gift, that some boasted in and others envied.

ILLUSTRATION: Have you ever been a foreign country without an interpreter? I have. As an English speaker we have an advantage, because we can typically find someone who speaks our language.

Joke: You do understand, what we call a person who speaks 2 languages, “*bilingual*”, a person who speaks 3 languages, “*trilingual*” and a person who speaks one language, “*American*”.

I was in Tegucigalpa, Honduras - the 6th most dangerous city in the world, and I needed some medication. I found a Pharmacy and was trying to tell the gentleman what I needed. He didn't speak a word of English and I spoke very little Spanish. It was then that a hero arrived and could interpret for us. That man seemed like Einstein in the flesh. I was so thankful and so impressed.

Well imagine how it was when a person at Corinth had the gift? If a Parthian was in the congregation, not a problem, Egyptian, not a problem. Someone had the gift. Which also gave that person remarkable control. Suddenly - every speaking gift in the church had to pass through the person with the gift of tongues.

ILLUSTRATION: Many of you know Hernan Sierra my Pastor friend from Honduras. What you may not know is that he is one of the most sought after English to Spanish interpreters. Not only can he translate accurately, but he amplifies the delivery so that even a dull speaker sounds fantastic.

Well, Hernan is also a very faithful, solid, bible teacher. I asked Hernan, “do you ever get hired to translate for a preacher who is teaching in error?” He said, “certainly”. I said, “How do you handle that?” He said, “Well, let's just say, I eliminate the error in my translation”.

Do you see? So every preacher, every teacher, every person with wisdom was at the mercy of the man or woman with the gift of tongues. He was the spiritual gift mafia.

Now in chapters 11 and 12, Paul has gone to great lengths to correct that problem. He explained the priority of bible preaching in his emphasis of the Apostles and the Prophets. Now, in chapter 13, Paul speaks to the heart of the matter.

He begins in verse one with...

1. The Problem Gifts without Love

1 Corinthians 13:1–13 (ESV)

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

We've already indicated how impressive tongues could be, but imagine that if an Angel came to church and a person had the ability to converse with that angel in his native tongue. Now that's Variety level stuff, that's travel team.

But Paul says, “without love” it's just an annoyance.

ILLUSTRATION: He refers to a noisy gong, or a clanging cymbal. There in the city of Corinth was a temple to Dionysus, or as the Romans called him Bacchus, the god of wine and fertility. We've talked before about how one would worship the god of wine. What you may not know is that part of the ceremony and ritual was a banging of a loud GONG and the clashing of a CYMBAL. It basically signified that the bar was open for happy hour.

Paul is saying, that when people use the gift of tongues without love - it's like one of those cymbals blasting in church while the preacher is trying to teach.

[HAVE COLE BANG A CYMBAL THREE TIMES AS I CONTINUE]

People are trying to listen and learn and this guy is just banging the cymbal. It would be very distracting... as you can see. Paul says, "that is what it is like when you use your gift without a heart of love".

He continues...

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 have not love, I am nothing. ³ If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Heaven's accounting is different than Earth's. On Earth, the scoreboard is clear, measurable, we look at the bottom line results. But Heaven counts differently.

You see, Paul has already taught back in **1 Corinthian 3**, that one day we will appear before the Judgment seat of Christ to give an account and to receive recompense for what we did during our earthly life. On that day, God is not concerned as much about the QUANTITY of our work, but rather the QUALITY.

- So you preached powerful sermons, wonderful, but what was your heart motive?
- So you sold everything you had and gave it to the church? Why was your heart?
- So you were literally burned at the stake for Christ? But what did you hope to accomplish?

You say, "well Pastor, why would a person do those things apart from love?" Well there are many reasons. It may be to gain spiritual notoriety. It may be to earn God's favor. But motive matters greatly.

If your work for God is not motivated by love for God and people... it is an utter waste in the light of eternity.

Not only, the Problem of Gifts without Love... notice secondly...

2. The Perception of Gifts with Love

In verse 4, Paul begins to describe love...

He gives **10 Adjectives** to describe AGAGE, which refers to a type of love that God produces within the heart. Now, keep in mind the context - this is how Love is demonstrated in the use of spiritual gifts in the context of the church.

Does it have implications for marriage and family? Yes, but that's not the primary point here.

1. Love is patient

A person motivated by love is not unreasonable with people. She doesn't forcibly insist that things happen her way.

- In the context of the church, love is willing to not go first, allow others to use their gifts and talents.
- In the family, love allows children time to grow and mature. It does not expect them to get it right every time.
- Love is not given to road rage. It is calm, cool, and collected. If you are easily annoyed in traffic, consider that you may not have an anger issue, perhaps you have a love issue.

2. and kind

In other words a person motivated by love doesn't seek to assert his or her will at the expense of other peoples well being. Collateral damage is to be avoided.

Jerry Vines once said, "A Christian never has the right to be unkind".

Now that does not mean that a Christian is never angry. Jesus was angry when he saw money changers in the temple.

There are occasions when it is UNKIND NOT TO BE ANGRY. There are things in life that should cause righteous indignation to well up inside of you. But nevertheless, our heart motive should be truth and the greater good.

3. love does not envy

The person motivated by love is secure and at peace. They hope to reach their personal potential, but they aren't necessarily driven to surpass everyone else.

They aren't driven by a competitive spirit.

For a Christian, your only true competition is yesterday's version of yourself.

4. *It does not* boast; it is not arrogant

Boasting is easier to identify than arrogance. Both are a bit subjective. But the point

is not to discern love in others, but in ourselves.

If we are motivated by love we aren't championing SELF. We champion Christ, we champion others, but we aren't in the business of drawing attention to ourselves and our accomplishments.

5. love is not rude

That's basically the opposite of kindness.

This means the person motivated by love is aware that how he or she behaves effects other people. They behave and speak in such a way that enables them to get along with others.

6. It does not insist on its own way

Everyone has an opinion, a preference, a way... but the person motivated by love recognizes that your opinion is just as valuable as hers. It in fact it may be more valuable. Even if it is less valuable, the only way for you to learn that may be for you to be heard.

This doesn't mean that love compromises things that will ultimately harm others. But in the negotiable areas of life they get along with people.

7. it is not irritable or resentful

This person has two essential ingredients for anyone who wished to serve the Lord, "a thick skin and a tender heart". Skin like a rhino and a heart like butter".

If you are a resentful person, you will never make it far in the Kingdom of God.

8. It does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth

This speaks of what a person motivated by love celebrates.

What do you get pumped about? What do you celebrate?

I think this is a challenge for Parents. There is a tendency for us to live our lives through our children. So if we were not popular, we celebrate when they are. If we did not get good grades, we celebrate when they do. That's not wrong necessarily. But, do you celebrate when they are faithful to student ministry? When they choose youth camp over travel ball? When they don't have many dates because they are looking for someone with christian values? Love celebrates and rejoice in truth.

9. Believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things

That doesn't mean that a loving person is gullible.

I call this, **Motive Reciprocity** - WE tend to assume that others are motivated by the same heart motive we until we are proven wrong.

Pauls says it this way in **Titus 1:15 (ESV)** ¹⁵ To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled.

So, if you are motivated by love, you assume others are until they prove you wrong.

So in other words, you don't walk around suspicious that people are up to no good. You give them the benefit of the doubt.

Because you know a measure of theology, you expect they will sin, so you endure all things... you don't give up on them easily.

10. Love never ends

Since Love is something God produces, it doesn't die. If it goes dies, it was not Agape love to begin with.

That is where the Greek is helpful. Here he uses that word, Agape. Agape never ends.

Eros end - that's sexual romantic love.
Phileo may end - that's the love between friends.

But Agape, God's love never ends.

Then he says, As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰ but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.

The problem of Gifts without Love, The Perception of Gift with Love

3. The Prospect of Love Perfected

¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. ¹² For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. ¹³ So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

ILLUSTRATION: I remember when I got my first VCR. My dad was so proud of that thing. I felt the same way when I bought a blue ray player....remember those? But

when everything went digital, that blue ray player was obsolete. It was just in the way.

Well there will come a day when Faith and Hope will be obsolete... but not love.

- There will come a day when all of the things you have to have **FAITH** for will become sight and faith will become obsolete. Understand, in Heaven you won't have to trust that Jesus is their.... You will see Him.
- There will come a day when **HOPE** will become obsolete. People must have hope today to survive, if we loose hope that things will some day get better... we loose the will to go on. But in Heaven - there will be no longing for things to improve... there will be no need for hope.

But when it comes to **LOVE**, throughout eternity it will saturate, and radiate every fiber of our being. Nothing better will come along. There will be no Love 2.0. Jesus will never step onto a stage like Steve Jobs and explain how he has created something better than love.

- **1 John 4** tells us that God is LOVE, it is the nature of His very essence.
- Jesus tells us in **John 13**, that love is the dead giveaway that you are disciple of Christ.
- **Romans 13** tells us that the entirety of the Law of God can be summed up with the command to Love God and Love People.

Martin Luther called that reality the Dilemma of Love. You see Love by its nature is something that you cannot command.

ILLUSTRATION: I hate tomatoes with a passion. If you are big enough, you might be able to force me to eat a tomato, but no man on this earth can make me love a tomato.

You can't make someone love. So why does God command humanity to LOVE Him and each other?

Because God can do something that we cannot. He can step into your heart and produce a love that is not native to you. That's the meaning of the word Agape, a God produced love.

CONCLUSION/INVITATION:

1 John 4:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ We love because he first loved us.

LOVE expressed is always a response to LOVE experienced.

You will never love as you should love until you have experienced the love of God.

John 3:16 (ESV)

16. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

You see... you can take that famous passage and replace it with the name Jesus and it works perfectly.

1 Corinthians 13:4–7 (ESV)

4 JESUS is patient and kind; JESUS does not envy or boast; JESUS is not arrogant
5 or rude. JESUS does not insist on his own way; JESUS is not irritable or resentful;
6 JESUS does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. 7 JESUS bears
all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Spiritual gifts may fail.... Jesus never fails.

If you want to know LOVE, know JESUS.
If you want to LOVE more, get to know JESUS more.