

Message #56

I Corinthians 13:1-3

When it comes to the local church, it is to be a place that is known for Biblical love. It is possible for a church to be very gifted, very knowledgeable, very active and even very sacrificial and still not be loving. It is possible for an individual to be in the church using his or her spiritual gift, being very active and making many sacrifices and not be one who Biblically loves. In God's evaluation, it is all for nothing; it is all worthless.

The Corinthian church was a church that lacked love. There was a lot of jealousy, there was a lot of carnality and there was a lot of envy; but there wasn't much love.

WITHOUT A BIBLICAL LOVE FOR OTHERS THAT IS WILLING TO ESTEEM THEIR WELFARE BETTER THAN ONE'S OWN, A BELIEVER'S SPIRITUAL ACTIVITY IS WORTH NOTHING IN THE SIGHT OF GOD.

First Corinthians is the great love chapter of the Bible. The love that is described in this chapter is agape love, the highest type of love there is. It is not so much an emotional love as it is a volitional love. It is the kind of love that chooses to do what is best for another and not what is best for one's self. This is the "more excellent" (12:31) way to operate a church. This is the most superior and highest level that any church or individual can reach in the mind of God.

It is possible to do things in God's church with selfish and self-centered motives. Although we perhaps cannot see the motive for service, God does and if it is not done out of a Biblical love, it is worthless in His estimation. There are three introductory main thoughts that Paul sets forth in **verses 1-3** that communicate this key point. The definition of love Paul will give in verses 4-7.

All of the "if" clauses are 2nd class conditional, meaning that these illustrations are unreal and contrary to fact. These possibilities are given in such a way grammatically that is contrary to reality. These are cases which, as Dr. Henry Alford, the esteemed grammarian observed, are those which have never been exemplified. In other words, there has never been a man who spoke in all languages, there has never been a man who had all knowledge, and there has never been a man who had all faith. Paul's point was even if such a person had existed, without love it would all be useless and worthless.

THOUGHT #1 – The utilization of a spiritual gift without love makes the gift meaningless in the sight of God. **13:1**

Tongues is selected out of the gift list because this was a gift that almost every person in the Corinthian church seemed to esteem the most. Paul's point here was even if there were a man who could speak all of the languages of men and angels, if one did so without love, it would be meaningless in the sight of God.

Pagan worship services featured both ecstatic speech and noisy gongs or clanging of cymbals. In and of itself, a cymbal or gong does not play pretty music.

What Paul is saying here is if one were to utilize his spiritual gift, no matter what it is, and it is not in the context of esteeming other members as important, then the utilization of that gift is as meaningless as the noise of a heathen worship service in the sight of God. God is not pleased with any worship not done in the context of Biblical love. To Him, such a service is nothing more to Him than the clanging gong of heathen worship!

THOUGHT #2 – The possession of a spiritual gift without love makes the person a nobody in the sight of God. **13:2**

The list of spiritual gifts in this verse is very impressive and if one had these gifts, certainly one would be something very special in the sight of men. The first three spiritual gifts pertain to knowing and communicating God's Word. The last gift pertains to believing God's Word. The impossibility factor is the word "all." No man, not even an apostle, had an "all" ability level.

Gift #1 - The gift of prophecy. **13:2a**

As we have said, the gift of prophecy was the number two ranked spiritual gift (12:28). It was a supernatural ability to receive and communicate direct revelation and messages from God. Prophecy was both a forth-telling and foretelling gift.

Gift #2 - The gift of knowing all mysteries. **13:2b**

This is a gift that would mean one could bring to light everything about God. It would be a supernatural ability to reveal all unknown things about God.

Gift #3 - The gift of having all knowledge. **13:2c**

This is a gift that would mean one possessed a supernatural ability to discern and perceive everything about God and His program. It would be the ability to know everything.

Gift #4 - The gift of all faith. **13:2d**

This is a gift that would mean one had an ability to trust God to the point that by faith he could do the miraculous, like move a mountain. To have "all" faith would mean there has never been any lack or doubt.

Of course there is no man who is at this level; but let's face it, if a person were in the church and had all of these things that person would be greatly esteemed by men.

However, Paul says if a person had all of these gifts and could do all of these things or be all of these things and did not do these things in the context of a Biblical love that cares for others that person would be nothing in the sight of God. That word "nothing" means, in the sight of God, he was a no one; a nobody!

A lot of knowledge, much learning, great education, great philosophical wisdom, and great academic achievement mean much to men, but it may mean nothing to God.

A person could be highly educated, a person could be a great theologian, a person could be very skilled at unlocking the mysteries of God and a person could trust in God greatly; but if he doesn't love others in a Biblical sense, he is a zero in God's sight.

The use of a spiritual gift means something in the context of love; it means nothing when not done in love.

THOUGHT #3 – The contribution of a personal sacrifice without love profits the person nothing in the sight of God. **13:3**

Sacrifice #1 - Give all possessions to help the poor. **13:3a**

The word “possessions” refers to everything at one's disposal, including possessions, property and resources. But, as Richard Lenski said, if this action of the hands were not a true action of the heart, it would profit nothing in the sight of god.

Sacrifice #2 - Give your life in martyrdom. **13:3b**

The word “profit” carries with it the idea of something God views as useful, beneficial and valuable.

One might ask how it would be possible to do these things such as give all your possessions to the poor and to give your life in martyrdom and not be commended by God. How could a member of a church give everything away to the poor or allow himself to be martyred for the cause of Christianity and have it mean nothing to God? The answer is the motive of the heart.

When a person makes a sacrifice, other people look at the act; God looks at the heart, the motive and the level of love. If a person were doing these things and making these sacrifices out of a love for God and others, these two sacrifices would bring great honor in eternity. However, if a person were doing these things for self-gain or self-glory, even if these extreme type of acts were done, it would profit nothing in eternity.

If a person is jealous, hateful, stubborn and proud, it doesn't matter how gifted or sacrificial that person might be; that one is nothing more than a clanging gong in God's sight.

When we esteem others better than ourselves, the gift counts, the ministry counts and the sacrifices count. But when we don't, they mean nothing to God!