

Challenges Christians Face

Love – Part 2

1 Corinthians 13:8-13

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Love – Part 2

Scripture

We continue our study in *The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians* in a series I am calling *Challenges Christians Face*.

One of the challenges that Christians face is the issue of spiritual gifts. Let's learn about more about that in a message I am calling, "Love – Part 2." This is a continuation of a message that I began three weeks ago.

Let's read 1 Corinthians 12:31-13:13, although I shall be focusing today on verses 8-13:

³¹ But earnestly desire the higher gifts.

And I will show you a still more excellent way.

^{13:1} If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 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.

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

⁸ **Love never ends. 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. 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. (1 Corinthians 12:31-13:13)**

Introduction

Chapter 13 in *The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians* is often called “the love chapter.” And although it gives us a wonderful description of love, it is not fundamentally about marital or sentimental love. Chapters 12 – 14 are a discussion of spiritual gifts, and chapter 13 in the middle of this discussion.

The Corinthians were interested in personal fulfillment and prestige. They were not interested in building up their brothers and sisters in Christ. In this chapter, Paul gave them a new orientation toward life that focused on putting other people first. He taught them to love, knowing that if they loved one another rightly, they would use their spiritual gifts properly.

If there is any similarity between ancient Corinth and our modern-day church, it lies in our failure to love one another well. In fact, by many accounts we are often worse than the Corinthians. They had at least managed to stay united, in spite of the many abuses that were taking place in their fellowship. Today, most Christians are so self-centered that if we don’t get our way, we simply go to the church down the street. We do not place others first, and we certainly do not commit ourselves to loving others in the way that Paul teaches.

Review

I would like to review briefly what we covered last time. In our last lesson we learned that Christian love is the most important of all the gifts from God. We are called to pursue love, without which all of our spiritual gifts amount to nothing.

I. The Preeminence of Love (12:31)

First, notice the preeminence of love.

Paul introduced chapter 13 with the last verse in chapter 12.

He said in 1 Corinthians 12:31: **“But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.”**

Paul was about to show the Corinthians **a still more excellent way** to live as a Christian in the body of Christ. And that **still more excellent way** is the way of love.

II. The Necessity of Love (13:1-3)

Second, let's look at the necessity of love.

As we move into chapter 13, it is important to note again that Paul was talking about the way in which Christians exercise their spiritual gifts. Chapter 13 is not about sentimental love. It is about the necessity of love in the exercise of our spiritual gifts.

The six conditional statements in verses 1-3 each follow the same basic structure: “If I have this particular gift, but have not love, then I am nothing.” In essence, Paul said that a particular gift is useless without love. Let's see how he put it.

A. *The Gift of Tongues Is Useless Without Love (13:1)*

First, the gift of tongues is useless without love.

Paul said in verse 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.”**

B. *The Gift of Prophecy Is Useless Without Love (13:2a)*

Second, the gift of prophecy is useless without love.

Paul said in verse 2a: **“And if I have prophetic powers, . . . but have not love, I am nothing.”**

C. *The Gift of Knowledge Is Useless Without Love (13:2b)*

Third, the gift of knowledge is useless without love.

Paul said in verse 2b: **“And if I . . . understand all mysteries**

and all knowledge, . . . but have not love, I am nothing.”

D. The Gift of Faith Is Useless Without Love (13:2c)

Fourth, the gift of faith is useless without love.

Paul said in verse 2c: **“And if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.”**

E. The Gift of Giving Is Useless Without Love (13:3a)

Fifth, the gift of giving is useless without love.

Paul said in verse 3a: **“If I give away all I have, . . . but have not love, I gain nothing.”**

F. The Gift of Martyrdom Is Useless Without Love (13:3b)

And sixth, the gift of martyrdom is useless without love.

Paul said in verse 3b: **“And if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.”**

III. The Characteristics of Love (13:4-7)

Third, let's now look at the characteristics of love.

Paul realized that the Corinthians needed to understand what love was. So, he described the characteristics of love.

He gave fifteen characteristics of love in verses 4-7. Not one characteristic is a noun or adjective. Every single one of the fifteen characteristics is a verb. In other words, Paul did not focus so much on what love is as on what love does and does not do. Love is not so much a feeling as much as it is an action.

So, let us examine briefly the characteristics of love.

A. Love Is Patient (13:4a)

First, love is patient.

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Paul said in verse 4a: **“Love is patient.”**

B. Love Is Kind (13:4b)

Second, love is kind.

Paul said in verse 4b: **“Love is. . . kind.”**

C. Love Does Not Envy (13:4c)

Third, love does not envy.

Paul said in verse 4c: **“Love does not envy.”**

D. Love Does Not Boast (13:4d)

Fourth, love does not boast.

Paul said in verse 4d: **“Love does not. . . boast.”**

E. Love Is Not Arrogant (13:4e)

Fifth, love is not arrogant.

Paul said in verse 4e: **“Love. . . is not arrogant.”**

G. Love Is Not Rude (13:5a)

Sixth, love is not rude.

Paul said in verse 5a: **“Love. . . is not. . . rude.”**

H. Love Does Not Insist on Its Own Way (13:5b)

Seventh, love does not insist on its own way.

Paul said in verse 5b: **“Love. . . does not insist on its own way.”**

I. Love Is Not Irritable (13:5c)

Eighth, love is not irritable.

Paul said in verse 5c: **“Love. . . is not irritable.”**

J. Love Is Not Resentful (13:5d)

Ninth, love is not resentful.

Paul said in verse 5d: **“Love. . . is not. . . resentful.”**

K. Love Does Not Rejoice at Wrongdoing (13:6a)

Tenth, love does not rejoice at wrongdoing.

Paul said in verse 6a: **“Love. . . does not rejoice at wrongdoing.”**

L. Love Rejoices with the Truth (13:6b)

Eleventh, love rejoices with the truth.

Paul said in verse 6b: **“Love. . . rejoices with the truth.”**

M. Love Bears All Things (13:7a)

Twelfth, love bears all things.

Paul said in verse 7a: **“Love bears all things.”**

N. Love Believes All Things (13:7b)

Thirteenth, love believes all things.

Paul said in verse 7b: **“Love. . . believes all things.”**

O. Love Hopes All Things (13:7c)

Fourteenth, love hopes all things.

Paul said in verse 7c: **“Love. . . hopes all things.”**

P. Love Endures All Things (13:7d)

And fifteenth, love endures all things.

Paul said in verse 7d: **“Love. . . endures all things.”**

Lesson

Now, in our lesson today, we learn that, because of its enduring quality, love is God’s greatest gift. In contrast to love’s permanence, spiritual gifts are temporary, partial, and elementary.

Let’s learn about this as follows:

4. The Permanence of Love (13:8-12)
5. The Superiority of Love (13:13)

IV. The Permanence of Love (13:8-12)

Fourth, observe the permanence of love.

Paul said in verse 8a: **“Love never ends.”**

By nature **love** is permanent because, as the apostle John says, “God is love” (1 John 4:8, 16). In verse 13 Paul says that “faith, hope, and love abide.” However, in heaven we will have no more need for faith and hope, but we will still have **love**. In heaven we will no longer need the spiritual gifts of wisdom, knowledge, healing, miracles, prophecy, discernment, tongues, interpretation of tongues, teaching, mercy, leadership, and so on, but we will still have **love**. John MacArthur says, “Yet love is, and forever will be, the very air of heaven.”¹

In the rest of verse 8 Paul then contrasts the permanence of love with the impermanence of three spiritual gifts: **prophecies, tongues, and knowledge**. Each of these three gifts will eventually pass away, but love will continue.

A. *Gifts Are Temporary (13:8)*

First, gifts are temporary.

Look how Paul put it in verse 8b: **“As for prophecies, they**

¹ John MacArthur, *1 Corinthians* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1996), 358.

will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.”

Though Paul said that all three spiritual gifts would one day pass away, two different verbs are used to indicate their cessation. Look closely at the text. Paul said **prophecies** and **knowledge** will **pass away**, whereas **tongues** will **cease**.

The Greek word for “**pass away**” (*katargeo*) means “to be (render) entirely idle (useless)” or “to abolish.”² The spiritual gifts of **prophecies** and **knowledge** will one day be abolished. Both forms of the Greek verb in this verse, as well as in verse 10, are passive. That means that something or someone will cause them to stop. As we shall see in a moment, that something is the coming of “the perfect” (v. 10).

The Greek word for “**cease**” (*pauo*) means “to stop.”³ Unlike **pass away**, the verb for **cease** is used in Greek in the middle voice, which, when used of persons indicates intentional, voluntary action taken upon oneself. Used of inanimate objects it indicates reflexive, self-causing action. The cause comes from within; it is built in.

Thus, what Paul is saying is that God gave the gift of **tongues** with a built-in stopping point. “That gift will stop by itself,” Paul was saying. Like a battery, **tongues** had a limited energy supply and a limited life-span. When its limits were reached, its activity automatically ended. **Prophecies** and **knowledge** will be stopped by something outside of themselves, but the gift of **tongues** will stop by itself.

“So,” someone asks, “*when* and *how* will these spiritual gifts end?”

Paul addressed **prophecies** and **knowledge** in verse 9-10. He said in verse 10 that “when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.” That is the same word that is used for **prophecies** and **knowledge**. So, **prophecies** and **knowledge** will pass away “when

² James Strong, S.T.D., LL.D., vol. 1, *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and The Hebrew Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2009), 40.

³ James Strong, S.T.D., LL.D., vol. 1, *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and The Hebrew Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2009), 56.

the perfect comes.” We will look at *when* and *how* that takes place when we get to verses 9-10.

The cessation of **tongues**, however, is not mentioned in relation to the coming of “the perfect.” From Paul’s perspective, **tongues** will cease at a different time.

It is my conviction that tongues, along with the gifts of healing, and miracles, ceased to function at the end of the apostolic age. Here are some reasons for my conviction.

First, tongues ended with the apostles because it was a sign gift to authenticate the revelation of God. Tongues, along with gifts of healing and miracles, ceased to operate when the New Testament was completed. Now, let me be clear: God has never ceased to heal or perform miracles. He continues to heal people today and to perform miracles today. He does all of this in accordance with his sovereign will. What I am saying though is that no Christian today possesses the supernatural sign gifts of healing, miracles, or tongues. So, why did they occur in Biblical times?

If you study the Bible carefully, you will discover that the Bible records only three periods of history in which a significant number of human beings were given the supernatural gift of performing miracles. The first period was during the ministries of Moses and Joshua. The second period was during the ministries of Elijah and Elisha. And the third period during the ministries of Jesus and the apostles. Each period lasted only about 70 years and then abruptly ended. During these periods there was significant new revelation from God. And the purpose of the miracles, tongues, and healing was to authenticate the revelation of God.

Second, tongues ended with the apostles because its purpose as a sign confirming apostolic authority and doctrine ended when the New Testament was completed. Genuine tongues-speaking involved direct revelation from God to the speaker, though it was veiled revelation that always needed translation or interpretation, often even to the speaker himself (1 Corinthians 14:27-28). Revelation of God’s Word was completed, however, when the New Testament was completed, and to that nothing is to be added or

subtracted (Revelation 22:18-19). The confirming purpose of tongues was completed.

Third, tongues ended with the apostles because its use is mentioned only in the earlier New Testament books. Most of the New Testament books, in fact, do not mention tongues. Paul mentions it only in this letter to the Corinthians, and James, Peter, John, and Jude make no mention of it at all. Nor does reference to tongues appear in the book of Acts after 19:16. It seems clear from the New Testament record itself that tongues not only ceased to be an issue at all but ceased to be practiced well before the end of the apostolic age. Nowhere in the epistles is it commanded or enjoined on believers as a responsibility or spiritual exercise.

And fourth, tongues ended with the apostles because they were an inferior means of edification. When properly interpreted, tongues had the ability to edify in a limited way (1 Corinthians 14:5; 12-13; 27-28). But the primary purpose of 1 Corinthians 14 is to show that tongues were an inferior means of communication (vv. 1-2), an inferior means of praise (vv. 13-19), and an inferior means of evangelism (vv. 20-25). Tongues provided limited and inferior edification, whereas prophecy is far superior in every way (vv. 1, 3-6, 24, 29, 31, 39). Five words spoken intelligently and intelligibly in ordinary language are of more value “than ten thousand words in a tongue” (v. 19).

B. Gifts Are Partial (13:9-10)

Second, gifts are partial.

The cessation of tongues took place a short while after Paul wrote this letter, but the gifts of prophecy and knowledge have not yet passed away, because the perfect has not yet come.

Paul said in verses 9-10: **“For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.”**

It is clear that Paul wanted the Corinthians and his readers to know that knowledge and prophecy are partial gifts. That is, the

gifts will one day pass away. It seems that Paul also was using knowledge and prophesy to represent all the other spiritual gifts.

One day, **when the perfect comes**, we will have no more need of knowledge or prophesy, preaching or teaching, wisdom or interpretation, mercy or leadership. We will not have need of the Bible. We will no longer need the written Word of God because we will be eternally in the presence and full comprehension of the living Word. **“The perfect,”** therefore, refers to the eternal state of believers. Paul is saying that spiritual gifts are only for a time, but that love will last for all eternity. His point is simple and clear.

C. Gifts Are Elementary (13:11-12)

And third, gifts are elementary.

Paul now illustrated what happens when “the perfect comes.” In our earthly lives all Christians are children compared to what we will know when we are perfected in heaven.

So Paul said in verses 11-12: **“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. 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.”**

Perhaps Paul was comparing his present spiritual state to his boyhood, as **a child**. A Jewish child was considered a boy until his bar mitzvah (“son of the law”), after which he was considered **a man**. One moment he was a boy; the next he was a man.

Our perfection in Christ will be a type of spiritual bar mitzvah, a coming into immediate, complete, and eternal spiritual adulthood and maturity. At that moment everything **childish** will be put away. All immaturity, all childishness, all imperfection, and all limitations of knowledge and understanding will be forever gone.

In this present life, even with God’s Word completed and the illumination of the Holy Spirit, **we see in a mirror dimly**. In our present state we are not capable of seeing more. But when we enter

the Lord's presence, we will then see him **face to face**. **Now** we can only **know in part**; **then** we **shall know fully**, **even as** we **have been fully known**.

V. The Superiority of Love (13:13)

And finally, notice the superiority of love.

Paul said in verse 13: **“So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”**

Returning to the temporal, to the Christian's earthly life, Paul mentioned the three greatest spiritual virtues: **faith, hope, and love**. These three spiritual virtues are also known as the “Pauline triad.”

Actually, **faith** and **hope** are encompassed by **love**, which “believes all things,” and “hopes all things” (v. 7). Because **faith** and **hope** will have no purpose in heaven, where every truth will be known and every good will be possessed, they are not equal to **love**.

Love is **the greatest of these** not only because it is eternal, but because, even in this temporal life, where we now live, love is supreme. Love already is the greatest, not only because it will outlast the other virtues, beautiful and necessary as they are, but because it is inherently greater by being the most God-like. God does not have faith or hope, but “God is love” (1 John 4:8, 16).

Conclusion

Gifts, ministries, faith, hope, patience, all one day will cease to exist because they will cease to have purpose or meaning. But in that perfect day, when we see our Lord “face to face,” love will be for us just beginning. But our showing love, practicing love, living love *now* are of utmost importance, more important than having any of the other virtues or gifts, because love is the link God gives us with himself in his eternal Self. Amen.

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*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

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PRAAYER:

O God, you are love. And you have called us to love as well. You have called us to exercise our spiritual gifts with love, because love is the greatest of all gifts that you have given to your people. Help us to use our spiritual gifts with a God-like love.

And for this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

CHARGE:

Now, brothers and sisters, go and use the spiritual gifts that God has given you for the common good!