

Battery Not Included

1 Corinthians 13:1-3

BI: Spiritual gifts and radical sacrifices are of no value when disconnected from the power of biblical love.

Read 1 Cor. 13:1-3

1 John 4:16 offers us the simplest description of God; just three words, “God is love.” If we are going to live in such a way that shows the world what God is like, therefore, our lives should be predominantly characterized by love. In the ancient church of Corinth while all of the spiritual gifts were clearly present, what was tragically absent was love. Without love, however, all their spiritual giftedness amounted to nothing in the eyes of God.

In order to understand what Paul is getting at here, we should go all the way back into the early pages of the O.T. All the way back in the days of Moses we find God revealing Himself as a God of great love. In Exodus 34, when Moses pleaded with God to show him His glory, here is what happened:

Then the Lord passed by in front of him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; ⁷ who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin (v. 6-7).

God demonstrated His great love for His people over and over again. In fact, the greatest act of love in the O.T. was when God entered into an exclusive relationship with Israel. It was a relationship bound together by covenant—very much like the relationship between a man and wife today. The main feature Israel’s part of this covenant was that they agreed *NOT* only to serve and worship God, but to love God. Listen to these familiar words from Deuteronomy 6:4-5 “Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! ⁵ “You shall love the Lord your God with *all* your heart and with *all* your soul and with *all* your might.”

This was the definition of Israel’s relationship with God. It was a relationship bound together by an eternal covenant of love. God would love His people, and His people would love their God.

But what does it mean to love? What is the definition of love? There are all kinds of misconceptions of love in our day. Generally speaking, though, most people subscribe to the Greco-Roman view of love.

The Romans viewed love as something that happens to you out of the blue. In their theology, there was a god of desire, affection, and erotic love known as Cupid. He was the son of the goddess Venus and the god Mars. In the Greek version his name was Eros from which we get our English word, Erotic. The idea is that one day you may be walking down the street and see a pretty girl when suddenly, Cupid shoots you with an arrow of love and you’re done for! All of a sudden you’re love-struck! You’re twitterpated! You can’t explain it. You can’t deny it. All you can say is “I’ve fallen in love.”

Of course the problem with relationships that are built on this kind of nonsense is that you can just as easily fall out of love. One day you wake up and look at the person on the pillow next to

yours and say, who are you? And why did I ever agree to marry you? You see, now the arrow has fallen out. Happy feeling's gone. It's over. At least until you meet someone else and Cupid show up and shoots you again. Is it any wonder our world is in the mess it's in?

Beloved, one thing we know for sure from God's word, whatever those experience are, they have nothing to do with love; at least not true, biblical love.

What is love? The simplest definition I know of biblical love is this: "To Love is to give whatever I have that you need because God wants me to." The fact is, God not only commands this kind of love, He demonstrates it in the most amazing way imaginable. Listen to the following verses and behold the awesome love of Almighty God.

John 3:16

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." (Explain in GK)

To love is to give.

1 John 4:10

"In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent [i.e. gave] His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins."

To love is to give.

Mark 10:45

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

To love is to give.

But this was not to be merely *God's* way of loving people. This is also the way people are to love one another.

Ephesians 5:25

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her."

To love is to give. To love is to give whatever I have that you need because God wants me to.

You see, beloved, when God created the church, it was His design that His love would be manifest in the world through our love for one another. As beneficiaries of God's infinite love in Christ, it is intuitive and self-evident that we should love God. But God takes it one step further by commanding us to express our love for God by loving one another.

For example, Jesus said in John 13:34-35 "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵ "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

You see, now that Christ has come, the supreme mark of being a disciple (or follower) of Christ is love. That is, love for God and love for one another. In fact, Paul says, “the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the *statement*, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

The word for “love” in our text for this morning is the GK word *agape*. It is a very rare word in classical GK literature, but one of the most common forms of the word in the NT. One commentator notes that this word “never refers to romantic or sexual love, for which *eros* was used, and which does not appear in the NT. Nor does it refer to mere sentiment, a pleasant feeling about something or someone. It does not mean close friendship or brotherly love, for which *philia* is used. Nor does *agape* mean charity, a term the King James translators carried over from the Latin and which in English has long been associated with giving to the needy” (MacArthur *1 Corinthians*, p.329).

When the word *agape* is used in the NT, it always refers to the kind of love Christ showed us. It is a love that freely gave what He had that we needed simply because the Father wanted Him to. This kind of love is not a feeling. It is action done for the well-being of another person even if it costs us dearly. And it is especially appropriate for Christians to exercise because every time we love someone biblically, we show the world what God is like.

The question then becomes, what happens when Christians—even those who especially gifted and passionate about what they believe—; what happens when they fail to love?

Paul’s answer to that question is found in our text for today.

Context:

Before we step into this text in earnest, let’s remember that Paul has just finished a section wherein he explains to the church at Corinth (and the one in Fort Worth also) that the church is not just a bunch of individual Christians loosely associated in a religious organization. Rather, the church is a group of Christians whom God has put together as a body. Each member of that body is specifically gifted to minister to the other members of that church in such a way that produces spiritual health, strength, and unity in the body so that we become the tangible and visible manifestation of Christ in the world.

The problem was that the believers in Corinth loved the spiritual gifts but failed to love each other. They were divided over who had the greatest gifts.

Read 12:27-31

The last verse (31) has given commentators fits for centuries because it seems to miss the point. It sounds like he is telling the Corinthians to do the very thing that was causing division among them. I’ll let you study this for yourselves and not get into a full discussion about it today. Let me simply point out that in the GK you can’t tell whether Paul is speaking in the indicative or the imperative. The imperative is what we find in most English texts, where Paul is commanding them to “earnestly desire the greater gifts.”

It seems to me, however, that Paul is speaking in the indicative. In other words, he is *indicating* their present, problematic attitude. He is not commanding them to desire the greater gifts. He is saying, “But *you* earnestly desire the greater gifts.” The word “But” indicates a contrast between what their attitude should be and what it actually is. In effect, Paul is saying, God made

you to be a body in which all the parts serve all the other parts according to their spiritual giftedness for the well-being of everyone. “But you...” instead of being concerned about the needs of everyone else in the church, your only concern is “I want the greater gifts!” You want to be on top! You want to be the respected, the honored, the wise and noble and exalted. But I show you a more excellent way.

For the remainder of our time together and for at least one more message, we will be asking God to teach us the “more excellent way.” What is the more excellent way for members on the body to function and use their spiritual gifts? It is the way of love. It involves ministering to others by giving whatever I have that you need because God wants me to.

What happens when we don’t love each other like that? Notice what Paul says.

I. It Reduces Tong’s Speaking to Meaningless Noise:

1. Read v. 1

2. Paul is saying, “You can be the greatest tongues speaker in the world, but if you’re not loving the people you’re speaking to, all they hear is noise.”

3. By the way, it’s important to note that Paul is speaking in hyperbole in these three verses. No one in the Bible ever spoke in the language of angels. The angels always speak in the language of the people they address. But Paul is intentionally taking his logic to the extreme.

4. You see the gift of languages was a great gift, but without love it was like a portable power-tool without a battery. All of you boys know what this is like because you have probably received a gift at Christmas or on your birthday that you really were excited about when you opened it, but then disappointed when you discovered it didn’t come with the required battery.

5. When buying presents, Parents should always be careful to look for the all-important small print that says “Battery Not Included.” That’s important because if you realize it ahead of time, then you can run to Walmart before the party and make sure your son or daughter will actually be able to use the gift you purchased.

6. Now, think about this. What happens if you attempt to use a tool without a battery? Best case scenario is that the tool won’t work. Worst case scenarios is that the tool will actually cause harm.

7. For example, you men who have beards or some level of facial hair like mine. Most of you have a battery-powered razor you use to trim your beard or your ‘stash. But what would happen if you ran the trimmer through your beard if the trimmer had no battery to power it? Talk about pain! I mean, you would never consider even giving that a try! It’s dangerous! Not to mention dumb!

8. But this is what it's like to use a spiritual gift without love. You see, the believers at Corinth failed to read the small print that said, "Battery not included." It is a wonderful thing to receive gifts from the Holy Spirit. But it is our responsibility to make sure they are connected to the appropriate power supply.

9. If we try to power up our spiritual gift with pride, or personal ambition, or a hunger for power, or respect, honor, acceptance, or attention it will be like putting diesel fuel into a gasoline engine. Then it won't matter how gifted you are. Your gift is not going to work and it may even cause serious harm.

10. So a person who attempts to power up his gift of languages (tongues) with pride or one of its subsets, is going to find that his gift is useless for building up the body of Christ. (Use a pot and spoon illustration with John 3:16).

II. It Reduces Prophecy, Knowledge, and Faith to a Spiritual Zero:

1. Read v. 2

2. You see, some in Corinth were gifted with Prophecy, and Knowledge and Faith. But they failed to read the fine print "Battery Not Included." They didn't realize that attempting to use their gifts without the power of love reduced them to "nothing."

3. Paul is saying that a loveless prophet, a loveless scholar, or a loveless leader is worthless for discipling the people of God. In fact, even though their spiritual gift is great, God's evaluation is "You are nothing." You're a "zero" in terms of helping to accomplish My purposes for the church.

4. As Alexander Strauch says, loveless people often possess a "theology that is as clear as ice and twice as cold" (*Leading With Love* p. 11). Knowing lots of stuff about the Bible is worthless, even dangerous, when it is not accompanied with a love for God and a love for His people.

III. It Reduces Radical Sacrifices to Profitless Ministry:

1. **Read v. 3**

2. In other words, there is no reward in heaven for people who make loveless sacrifices. All kinds of people make great sacrifices to save the whales, protect the trees, and prevent global warming. Many people make even make financial sacrifices for the church (like Ananias and Sapphira) but it was worthless in the eyes of God. Why? Because it was not empowered and motivated by love.

3. Beloved, do you know why Paul's ministry was so powerfully blessed of the Lord? I would suggest that 2 Cor. 5:14-15 points us to the answer. Paul writes:

“For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one had died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised” (2 Cor. 5:14-15).

4. Paul never could get over the reality that God actually loved him. He knew the depths of His sin. He remembered that he has been a persecutor of the church. At one time there is no one he hated more than this Jesus and the people who followed Him. Nevertheless, Jesus loved him. God loved Paul enough to send Jesus to die for his sins.

5. It was Paul who wrote to the Ephesians, “But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).” This love that God poured out upon Paul was the power that controlled his ministry. It caused him to love God more than he loved his own life. And it caused him to love people so much that he could write of his fellow Jews, “I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh” (Rom. 9:3).

6. Paul loved the people he ministered to. It was the battery that supplied the necessary power to His spiritual gifts. His love for God and his love for people made his gifts effective and power for the kingdom of God.

7. And it will do the same for you, beloved. No matter how small you think your gift is, when you charge it up with love for God and love for people, it becomes a powerful tool for the health, strength, and spiritual well-being of the church.

8. On the other hand, when we attempt ministry without love, we are in danger of causing great harm to the body. When Amy Charmichael was ministering in India in the 1800’s, she wrote these powerful words of warning.

“Unlove is deadly. It is a cancer. It may kill slowly but it always kills in the end. Let us fear it, fear to give room to it as we should fear to nurse a cobra. It is deadlier than any cobra. And just as one minute drop of the almost invisible cobra venom spreads swiftly all over the body of one into whom it has been injected, so one drop of the gall of unlove in my heart or yours, however unseen, had a terrible power of spreading all through our family, for we are one body—we are parts of one another”(from Strauch, p. 22).

9. Beloved, whatever your spiritual gift is, make it your resolve to use it in such a way that gives to other people whatever it is that you have simply because God wants you to. That is true, biblical love. And it is the power that makes you ministry effective.

BI: Spiritual gifts and radical sacrifices are of no value when disconnected from the power of biblical love.

- I. The Definition and priority of love**
- II. The presence of Spiritual gifts and lack of love**
- III. The more excellent way.**
- IV.**

¹² So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual *gifts*, seek to abound for the edification of the church.

Key Scriptures:

Proverbs 8:13 "The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way And the perverted mouth, I hate."

Proverbs 11:2 "When pride comes, then comes dishonor, But with the humble is wisdom."

Proverbs 16:5 "Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD; Assuredly, he will not be unpunished."

Proverbs 16:18-19 "Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before stumbling. 19 It is better to be humble in spirit with the lowly Than to divide the spoil with the proud".

Proverbs 29:23 "A man's pride will bring him low, But a humble spirit will obtain honor."

Proverbs 21:24 "Proud," "Haughty," "Scoffer," are his names, Who acts with insolent pride.

Isaiah 2:12 "For the LORD of hosts will have a day of reckoning Against everyone who is proud and lofty And against everyone who is lifted up, That he may be abased."

Isaiah 2:22 "Stop regarding man, whose breath of life is in his nostrils; For why should he be esteemed?"

Daniel 4:37 "Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride."

Habakkuk 2:4 "Behold, as for the proud one, His soul is not right within him; But the righteous will live by his faith.

Matthew 11:29 "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS."

V. 26

Key Terms

Rev. 2:4 “But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. “ The object of this love is not specifically stated in the text. It does not say love for Christ, one another, and the lost). (Strauch, p. 21).

Amy Charmichael: “Unlove is deadly. It is a cancer. It may kill slowly but it always kills in the end. Let us fear it, fear to give room to it as we should fear to nurse a cobra. It is deadlier than any cobra. And just as one minute drop of the almost invisible cobra venom spreads swiftly all over the body of one into whom it has been injected, so one drop of the gall of unlove in my heart or yours, hoever unseen, had a terrible power of spreading all through our family, for we are one body—we are parts of one another.

We owe it to the younger ones to teach them the truth that united prayer is impossible, unless there be loyal love. If unlove be discovered anywhere, stop everything and put it right, if possible at once” (Strauch, p. 22).

Satan, who labors to destroy churches, endeavors to kill love” (Puritan preacher Nathaniel Vincent. Quoted in Strauch, p. 22).

“Leadership is to be motivated by threefold love: Christ’s love for us, our love for Christ, and love for others.

“For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one had died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised” (2 Cor. 5:14-15).

Strauch: “Notice that Paul is not speaking about his love for Christ, but about Christ’s love for him. Paul never ceased to be amazed by Christ’s love for sinners as demonstrated by His death on the cross.

The Hymn *When I Survey The Wondrous Cross*, Isaac Watts ends the hymn with this line: “Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.”

Paul prayed “that you... may have the strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge” (Eph. 3:17-19)

Later, when Moses wrote the book of Deuteronomy he explained that the reason God rescued Israel from Egypt was because of His great love. He writes, (Deut. 4:37) “Because He loved your fathers, therefore He chose their descendants after them. And He personally brought you from Egypt by His great power.” Did you hear that? Why did he personally escort Israel out of their bondage in Egypt? Because **He loved them.**

Exegetical Outline

1 Corinthians

²⁷ Now you are Christ’s body,
and individually members of it.

²⁸ And God has appointed
in the church,
first apostles,
second prophets,
third teachers,
then miracles,
then gifts of healings,
helps,
administrations,
various kinds of tongues.

²⁹ All are not apostles, are they?
All are not prophets, are they?
All are not teachers, are they?
All are not *workers of* miracles, are they?

³⁰ All do not have gifts of healings, do they?

All do not speak with tongues, do they?

All do not interpret, do they?

³¹ But earnestly desire the greater gifts.

a still more excellent way.

And I show you
