

1 Corinthians 13, Love, the anchor of the Spiritual gifts.

What a beautiful chapter. It has found a special place in weddings and general discourse regarding that universally sought after treasure - Love (agape) - rendered charity in the KJV.

This is that term found in John 3 and John 21 and now 1 Cor 13.

Vines describes this term as such: "Love can be known only from the actions it prompts. God's love is seen in the gift of His Son...this is not the love of complacency, of affection, that is, it was not drawn out by any excellency in its objects. It was an exercise of the divine will in deliberate choice, made without assignable cause save that which lies in the nature of God Himself.

It is imperative that we enter this chapter understanding holiness of this Love Paul is referring to - otherwise we might believe we could conjure it up ourselves.

That is not the case. Paul has spent the previous chapter laboring to instruct this church in the gifts of the Holy Spirit - some of which people get quite squeamish about - he then hammers home this tent peg of love - by saying: 12:31 "...earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way."

And if we didn't have that pesky chapter marker there we might just move seamlessly right into this concept of love as a spiritual gift.

Let's read it straight through - 12:31-13:13

The Corinthian church LOVED the Gifts of the Spirit! And that is admirable. They had a powerful relationship with God, for all of their shortcomings (what church doesn't have some), they were deeply in tune with God's Spirit as evidenced by their worship. They believed that God could and does move among His saints, that He could and does use His people as His mouthpiece.

BUT - in all of this focus on the gifts of the Spirit - some of them had fallen in love with the spectacle. They had forgotten that first and foremost they were to faithfully exercise that most excellent of spiritual gifts - LOVE.

You may say - wait a second, how could it be that these people were legitimately filled with the Holy Spirit AND forgot to love people.

May I remind you that it is in fact possible for people to receive the Spirit and be boneheads.

First and foremost - we know this from our own experience. We who are counted as saints, who have received God's Spirit - have we never fallen short? Have we never missed the mark?

[Jdg 11:29-31 NKJV] 29 Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah, and he...advanced [toward] the people of Ammon. 30 And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD, and said, "If You will indeed deliver the people of

Ammon into my hands, 31 "then it will be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the people of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD's, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering."

The Corinthian church is no different. Prone to failure as we have seen.

v.1 - the Holy Spirit hero - the brave soul who obediently exercises their gift  
- Paul doesn't say it's impossible to do speak in tongues and not have love  
- he says if I do that, but have not love it is pointless. Furthermore, it is noisy, disruptive, and....irritating. (object lesson) - beat the cymbal.

Incidentally, this is where we infer that it is in fact possible for people to speak in an angelic language.

Nevertheless, speaking in tongues must be anchored in love in order to have value to the hearer. Otherwise it's just noise.

v.2 - God's gift to ministry - Quite an accomplished minister that would make! Has the gift of prophecy (speaking forth God's word strongly and consistently, understand all mysteries, possess all knowledge, has all or complete faith so they could actually move mountains - remember Jesus talked about that. That's the pastor we want. This guy's resume is impressive. Look further, does that believer have a genuine, Spirit gifted, agape love? If not...Paul says, I am nothing.

Paul is skillful in his delivery here btw - he puts himself in that position - not the audience.

v.3 - the social justice crusader! - a kind, benevolent person, mindful of the poor, giving of their own goods and their own self! Not afraid to suffer for the gospels sake, even to the point of death. All of that great work - void of love - accrues a net balance of \$0. After everything it cost that person, there is no gain, without love.

v.4-8 Characteristics of a Spirit gifted, God given, love - a Christ-like love.

Interestingly Paul tells us what it looks like AND what it doesn't look like.

We can't fabricate an authentic Spirit gifted love - eventually the carefully crafted veneer will show and our charade will be known.

suffers long - to be of a long spirit, not to lose heart; to persevere patiently and bravely, enduring misfortunes and troubles; to be patient in bearing the offenses and injuries of others.

kind - how many of us would question our love on this one characteristic alone, kindness as opposed to coldness or sarcasm or passive aggressiveness?

does not envy - I have been teaching about this a lot lately, that most wicked of undercover transgressions - envy.

[Jas 3:14-16 NKJV] 14 But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. 15 This wisdom does not descend from above, but [is] earthly, sensual, demonic. 16 For where envy and self-seeking [exist], confusion and every evil thing [are] there.

does not parade itself - This can take many forms - the name dropper, the credibility builder, the know it all. This is boasting in one's self. Love doesn't do that.

is not puffed up - speaks for itself, this is pride

does not behave rudely - sometimes as Christians we give ourselves license to behave rudely to others because of our perceived holiness - which is really self-righteousness. Love has manners.

does not seek its own - Remember James 3 - self-seeking, which is so counter to our culture of looking out for ourselves.

is not provoked - since this unique love is long-suffering and kind, it makes sense that it is not easily provoked to anger - this love is stable, not easily pulled into confrontation.

thinks no evil - wow -

[Col 3:2 NKJV] 2 Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.

[Phl 4:8 NKJV] 8 Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things [are] noble, whatever things [are] just, whatever things [are] pure, whatever things [are] lovely, whatever things [are] of good report, if [there is] any virtue and if [there is] anything praiseworthy--meditate on these things.

\*Eventually when considering this perfect love we realize how imperfect we are - saints under grace - being transformed into Christ's image.

does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in truth -

bears, believes, hopes, endures ALL THINGS - Because of our belief, our hope (looking to the horizon) this love is able to bear up against, to hold out against, and so to endure.

Many have been lost along the way, lacking endurance, who have forsaken love in favor of something else.

[Rev 2:1-5 NKJV] 1 "To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, 'These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: 2 "I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; 3 "and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. 4 "Nevertheless I have [this] against you, that you have left your first love (same word). 5 "Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else

I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place-- unless you repent.

Love never fails - ever - because it is not our love - it is God's love. Our worldly concepts of love are counterfeit apart from Christ.

v.8 - ...prophecies/tongues/knowledge - fail/cease/vanish - as they most certainly have in large swaths of the church.

People like to use this to imply that Paul was instructing the church to dispense with them - as if it is ever our choice to decide what gifts of the Holy Spirit are no longer useful or pertinent. These words are prophetic... they will fail/cease/vanish. This has happened and continues to happen in cold dead churches who have rejected the Holy Spirit.

v.9-10 Now(currently/contemporarily in Paul's day) - we can only know and prophecy in part because we are not yet complete. We are not yet perfect. This is a fact. That's why we test the spirits and test prophecies.

v.10 - that which is perfect has come - those who adopt the cessationist view of the gifts of the spirit, who reject these blessed gifts that God has given to the church argue that this verse refers to the canon of scripture. But let me ask you, you have your Bible, has your incomplete knowledge vanished? NO! We need the Holy Spirit to be our instructor in God's word too! There are great mysteries in Scripture that we don't fully understand - maybe safely so.

[1Co 15:51 NKJV] 51 Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed--

[Eph 5:32 NKJV] 32 This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

[1Ti 3:16 NKJV] 16 And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory.

Here's a better way to look at this. We are not yet perfect or complete, nobody would argue that. But we are becoming complete: [Phi 1:6 NKJV] 6 being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete [it] until the day of Jesus Christ;

So, when will we be made complete? The day of Jesus Christ. When the Lord God comes in His glory - when that which is perfect has come - then we shall be made perfect.

When Jesus comes to claim His church then that which is in part will be done away with. We will be with Him, the Perfect One, forevermore. He is the one who is perfect. And nothing else has claim to that title.

v.11 - good or bad? shouldn't we be children? we might be tempted to infer that if we grow up we'll stop babbling, stop being silly...Is the Holy Spirit sill?! No. The third person of the trinity, God the Spirit, is Holy!

*(Guzik) Paul is not trying to say that if we are spiritually mature, we will not need spiritual gifts. But he does say that if we are spiritually mature, we will not over-emphasize spiritual gifts, especially at the expense of love.*

Paul goes on to say that we aren't going to be fully mature until we are face to face with Christ.

v.12 - Now/then - the present condition of imperfection and incompleteness compared with the future and permanent condition of completeness with Christ.

v.13 - AND NOW - since we are in this world, since we exist in the present - we are not yet fully mature, we are still children growing and learning, we are still incomplete, we live with these things as our anchor - faith, hope, love.

Keep love at the center. This isn't trading gifts for love, Paul says in v. 1 of chapter 14 pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts...

This is realizing that love IS a gift, a more excellent way, and by it all other spiritual gifts derive their worth.