

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

The One Thing that Lasts, Love

1 Corinthians 13:8-13

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PowerPoint Presentation included: NONE

SermonAudio Blurb: Like so many things, the church at Corinth misses the point about spiritual gifts. Because they have no love in the exercise of them, they are wasting their lives! What a challenge to every believer today. Paul goes on to show that not only are gifts to be done out of love, but that long after gifts are gone, love will still remain. Love is supreme, so we are called to get over our focus on details regarding gifts and start looking at what is eternal.

I. Introduction.

A. Review:

1. Christian love is what Paul calls the “more excellent way” in 12:31.
2. And from there he began an entire chapter on this subject.
3. Without love we are obnoxious people who waste our time and the time of everyone around us.
4. Without love we are an annoyance to both God and man.
5. And just to make sure that love is not seen as some sentimental, lovey-dovey thing Paul describes how love works itself out vs 1-7

B. If you are a normal human being, you want to leave some kind of mark on this world.

1. I am not saying that you have to be something great, you just want to have some type of influence.
2. And for so many, this becomes the great idol of their heart and life.
 - a. Happy children.
 - b. Good paycheck.
 - c. Land up north or down south.
 - d. The smallest carbon-footprint known to man.
 - e. Blah, blah, blah.

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3. We make choices that are designed to make those goals a reality, and all the while we forget what lasts.
4. Churches do anything and everything to grow and succeed, forgetting that it is Jesus who builds His Church.
5. And in the process we lose sight of eternity.
 - a. Our kingdom is this world.
 - b. Our God is our happiness.
 - c. And our hearts and souls are sold to the devil.

Propositional Statement

Paul addresses this very issue in 1 Corinthians 13. And he confronts this church in Corinth about their great deception. It is the deception that tells them that their spiritual giftedness is what matters. Who comes out on top. Who is the new spiritual gift champion. And while they all line up awaiting their awards they are filled with alarm as the award goes not to the greatest of those who are gifted, but to those who are the most loving.

Paul shows us that though gifts shall pass away, love shall never fail nor fade away. All things that we know and cherish shall find themselves either destroyed or fulfilled . . . except for love.

C. Read 1 Corinthians 13

II. The Permanence of Love.

A. The Permanence of Love.

1. “Love never fails.”
 - a. Simplest meaning of this word is to “fall.” But it carries here more the sense of “to fall into decay” or “to be abolished.”
 - b. Luke 16:17 uses it to speak of the fact that not one stroke of a letter of the Scripture will ever fail.
 - c. “Never” is a time word and means exactly what it says. There will never be a time in all of eternity where you and I will find love to fail.
 - (1) Not at any time and not in any place.

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- (2) Love is ever and always victorious. Love always stands. Love is ever present.
 - (3) Now, I have some questions to ask you about those statements, but not yet, first we must deal with what the Apostle Paul says in connection to the truth that love will never fail.
2. Love never fails.....but.
- a. Paul now moves our attention to spiritual gifts.
 - (1) **But hear me well on this point.** Spiritual gifts are not his real point, love is. And if you miss that, then you have missed the point of this whole chapter.
 - (2) We are going to deal with these verses here on tongues and prophecy. But I don't want us to get bogged down on what is not the point of the chapter.
 - (3) To fail to do this would mean that we get up and leave with a better understanding of spiritual gifts and yet as a church run the risk of being nothing because we do not love!

A simple, though not-so-simple, observation regarding how we read our bibles. Be wary of understanding a verse by itself. If you are unable to explain how it fits into the chapter it is in then it is likely you do not understand it yet. Or you understand it but you fail to see its actual purpose. Test yourself on this in some well-loved verse to see if you know the context that it is in and the purpose it serves in that context.

- b. Paul chooses out of all the gifts these three to use.
 - (1) But these are not the only ones he is concerned about. They are merely examples, illustrations to make his point that love, not spiritual gifts, is what remains when all is said and done.
 - (2) Why these gifts then?
 - (a) Tongues and the gift of knowledge were the gifts most desired in that church and they were causing massive problems. Rather than promoting love, it was helping create evil speech and actions by many in that church.

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- (b) Prophecy: Look at 14.1. Prophecy was the gift of choice for Paul
 - i) Why? Because it built up the body, while the speaking in other languages did not without an interpreter.
 - ii) And by speaking of the least and the greatest of the spiritual gifts, all the other gifts are embraced and carried into this argument.
 - iii) In other words, Paul is not only talking about tongues or prophecy, but all the gifts.
 - (c) You can imagine how both sides of these gifts were going to have problems. The tongues speakers would have to back down and the prophets were going to gain preeminence in the church.
- 3. So love never fails, and the reason is that love is part of God and therefore it is complete and full.
 - a. But none of the gifts are complete. They are by their very nature partial (vss 9-10).
 - b. This means that though gifts are critical for the “now.” They have no purpose in the “not yet.”
- 4. There is an important theological point present in vss 8-10. I wish to speak to it and move on back into the subject of love.
 - a. What is meant by verse 8.
 - (1) Some see that there is a difference of point between prophecy and tongues due to the word “cease.”
 - (a) Tongues would simply stop being in existence.
 - (b) Prophecy and knowledge, however will not. They will continue until the “Perfect” of verse 10 comes.
 - (c) Yet grammatically this is pushing the terms beyond what they should.
 - (2) It is helpful to know that many would see that the gift of prophecy is simply speaking forth the word of God. Now

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that the Bible is done, prophecy is best seen as preaching the Word of God. 1 Corinthians 14:3 seems to show this.

- (3) But this is not a way that prophecy is used in the New Testament. When it speaks of preaching, it uses the word preaching, not prophesying—though there is definitely overlap between the two.
 - (4) Verse 2 seems to indicate that there is a knowledge of mysteries, of things not previously known. In 14:6 there is a close connection between revelation, knowledge, prophecy and teaching. All of them are dispensing truth. But each is a slightly different way.
 - (5) 1 Tim 1:18 with 4:14 helps us see some aspects of prophecy.
 - (6) 1 Thess 5:20 tells us not to despise them, to treat them as of no account.
- b. What is the perfect of verse 10.
- (1) Better seen as “complete” or “mature.”
 - (2) Some see this as the time of the finishing of the Bible. Others see it as speaking of end of the age, when we enter into eternity.
 - (3) Others see it as a blend of the two.
 - (4) I think that it is best seen as the second point.
 - (5) Reasons:
 - (a) Paul uses two illustrations to make his point:
 - (b) The first is simple growth from child to adult.
 - i) Right now we are in the time of childhood as a church.
 - ii) All churches are in this state.
 - iii) But there will be a time when the Church of God will grow up. When we become mature and then the things related to childhood will

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no longer be needed and they will be put away.

- (c) The second is in verse 12 (read).
 - i) The idea of a mirror showing dimly is not speaking of a poor reflection. They had excellent mirrors then.
 - ii) It is speaking of the limited nature of the reflection. A mirror can't show you all things, only what can be fit into the borders of the mirror.
 - iii) We look at God and heaven right now and it is hard to see. There are millions of questions and not as many answers as we would like.
 - iv) But there is coming a time when God shall reveal it all to us. All the misunderstandings will be gone.
 - v) 1 John 3:2 Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is.
 - a) Notice the similarities with this passage.
 - b) "children" and "knowing."

(6) Paul is looking to that great day when we will finally be rid of our old sin nature. We will no longer be filled with uncertainties. And the church will finally see its Lord and God fully, just as God has always fully known the church.

c. Let me make some observations now:

(1) This means that tongues, prophecy, and the like have not ceased. They can still be in operation today.

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- (2) But we also must understand that this does not mean that tongues or prophecy must be operating in any given church.
 - (3) Also, we don't really know what prophecy looked like in the New Testament, there is not a lot of real hard evidence of how you know what is prophetic and what is not.
 - (4) But we must be very careful before we reject out of hand what God may very well be doing. We are forbidden to despise prophetic utterances. But we are also to examine them carefully and only hold to what is sound and proper.
 - (5) We will talk more of this in chapter 14.
5. But for now, I want to get us back to the central focus of the passage—love.
- B. The Preeminence of Love.
1. Read vs 13.
 - a. **Now abides** faith, hope and love. But the greatest **is** love.
 - (1) In the midst of all this hassle about gifts, there still are present these three great truths.
 - (2) This trilogy is seen often in the New Testament, but it is actually expounded upon by Paul in Rom. 5:1-6. (Be brief there)
 - (3) But the greatest is love. It overwhelms all other things, including hope and faith.
 - (4) Why?
 - (a) For faith is an idea that is trusting that what God has said he would do is true.
 - i) The Christian does not just believe in the death of Christ for salvation.
 - ii) But part of that is that there will finally come a day when we will be free from sin and death. That when we die we go into the presence of our Lord immediately.

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- (b) This is our hope as well.
 - (c) But when Christ calls us home and the end has come, then our faith and hope will be realized.
 - (d) But love will remain. We will be filled with the love of our God and we will express love for him in a fulness we cannot even comprehend.
- b. Love is permanent and love is preeminent. If we keep this close to our thinking then we will do well as a church of Jesus Christ.
- C. Now let me conclude by these words. And this is not a brief conclusion so don't start putting your stuff away.

III. Conclusion.

- A. Vs 8 and 13 are bookends. Love **never** fails and it always abides and is the greatest of all things.
- B. But do you really believe that?
 - 1. How often have you or I concluded that love has failed us?
 - 2. How often have you thought that things were hopeless, but they weren't.
 - 3. How often have you thought you lost faith, but found that it was always there, just weak?
- C. Beloved we are creatures who are weak. God has a way of slamming us down and all of our certainties, all of our wisdom, and all of what was really our self-satisfied pride come crashing down.
- D. Have you been in this situation? Where you have thought that love has failed? Why would this happen? I want to end today talking about the why.
 - 1. It is because we seek to find and understand love apart from the One who is the very definition/source of love.

1 John 4:7-8 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸ The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

- a. We tend to know that verse, but we somehow manage to separate God from true love when life is at work in us.

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- b. When we had bad things happen to us. We prayed and prayed that something would or would not happen and we didn't get it answered our way. Now we pout and are depressed.
 - c. Why? Because we don't see that this thing is really the expression of a loving father.
 - d. Hebrews 12, ". . . whom the Lord loves he disciplines"
2. We fall into the error of idolatry.
- a. We do this because we buy into the lie of this world. Love fulfills our desires. But when we don't have our desires filled, then love has failed us somehow.
 - b. But that is because our desires are too often cheap and worldly. They are fleeting. They involve things like loving our kids or our wife or husband. These are the people who are to fulfill our desires.
 - c. But this is not where it is at. God is to be the essence of our desires.
 - (1) Love the Lord God with all our....
 - (2) Luke 14:26 "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.
 - (a) These things can never be the final source of our desires.
 - (b) God must be, and when he is, then we will discover that the only thing that failed was this world's cheap substitute for love.
 - (c) But our God remains ever faithful and ever loving.
3. In fact, when we fall into the lie of believing that love has failed somehow, we really are saying that God has failed.
- a. May God grant us repentance in heart and deed.
4. I think that much of our problems is that we are too similar to those mentioned in 2 Timothy 3:2-5:

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For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power. . . .

- E. So what is the answer? Some quick suggestions.
1. We must admit that when we love poorly and understand love poorly because we know God poorly.;
 - a. We must fight against the constant assault of the world that dulls our minds and makes us cold to the love of God.
 - b. We must learn to lean fully on Jesus Christ, he is the fullest image of the invisible God. If we hope to love, then we must turn our eyes fully upon Jesus.
 - c. We must learn to walk by the Spirit in obedience to the Word.
 - (1) Gal. 5 says that the fruit that naturally arises from this is firstly 'love.'
 - (2) Jesus says that if we love him, we will keep his commandments.
 2. We must be students of the faithfulness of God. We will never truly believe that love cannot fail until we firmly believe that God cannot fail.

Psalm 95:1 O Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD; Let us shout joyfully to the rock of our salvation.

Psalm 46.1 God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble.

3. God has shown us the permanency of love by putting at the heart of the gospel itself.
 - a. “For God so
 - b. His love is bound up in giving us His beloved Son. A son who tasted death in our place....our death, not his. **But he tasted that death in it fulness and it could not hold him!**
 - c. Our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the very gospel itself, is eternal. The greatest of powers was death and it had no hold on Him. He is lord over life and lord over death, he is eternal.

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- d. Therefore, since He is God, He is also love. And because he is eternal, that love is eternal as well. And because he cannot fail, love cannot either.
4. Let us finish this by looking at Romans 8.28ff.

Small Group Questions

- What are some ways you show that things, other than love, are more important?
- What has been your understanding of tongues and prophecy? How has this sermon perhaps challenged you to rethink those positions?
- How can this small group love better?