

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

## ***Gifts Only Matter with Love*** **1 Corinthians 13:8-13**

Keywords: Love, sacrifice, gifts, Spiritual gifts, unity, body of Christ

PowerPoint Presentation included: NONE

SermonAudio Blurb: The value of gifts cannot be ignored. They are gifts of grace given from our loving Lord to His loved Church. But though they bring much unity and edification to the church, without love they are nothing. So Paul now moves their attention away from gifts and onto the one thing that is eternally permanent—love.

In this sermon Pastor Henry introduces the subject of love in relation to spiritual gifts. He then explores the nature of what biblical love actually is as compared to what it is often perceived to be.

### **I. Introduction.**

- A. Open bibles to 12:31—Two statements:
  - 1. First, he is telling the church to earnestly desire to see the greater gifts grow and flourish in the church.
  - 2. Second, he then directs them toward a way that is described as being “more excellent.”
    - a. That word alone is enough to be intriguing.
    - b. Speaks of something more than just a little better.
    - c. It involves something that is simply extraordinary, beyond measure. It surpasses all other things.
    - d. So what comes next for Paul is simply the best.
- B. What is that extraordinary thing? It is true love—which is not an option for the Christian:
  - 1. 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.
  - 2. Matthew 22:36-40 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" 37 And He said to him, "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' 38 "This is

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the great and foremost commandment. 39 "The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 "On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."

3. Romans 13:10 Love does no wrong to a neighbor; love therefore is the fulfillment of the law.
4. Galatians 5:14 For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."
5. Colossians 3:14 And beyond all these things put on love, which is the **perfect bond of unity**.

C. Unity and Edification is what gifts are all about.

1. And yet Corinth was anything but unified. They used their gifts for the purpose of exalting themselves and had little care for the other Christian brothers and sisters.
2. When disunity is present there is the problem of a lack of love.

D. Key Point: this passage is **not** a definition of love.

1. It is an **application** of love.
2. What Paul is doing is showing them what and where they were wrong in their actions.
3. He is laying love over this hurting and hurtful church and when he does he is able to show them how they were wrong.

## ***Propositional Statement***

Paul gives us two important truths about the power of love in this chapter. The first is that it is able to repair any and all spiritual damage. And the second is that it alone in all of this universe is permanent. Think about that, everything else will pass away but not love.

Much damage has been done in Corinth. There was open sin of most every type, but what was tearing it apart was actually a blatant lack of love toward one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. So Paul brings them to this pinnacle of biblical truth where he is able to lay out the foundation that is needed for them to rebuild the ruins that they have created for themselves.

## **II. The More Excellent Way.**

- A. This is good for all of us to hear beloved.

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1. It is easy in the church to lose sight of the big picture.
  2. How easy is it to get so caught up in details that your perspective is lost as well.
  3. And in those moments Satan acts! He swoops in to find a point of advantage. And oh how he lurks about waiting for those moments.
  4. Often it starts with a little bit of bitterness. Of course we have other words that we use, but it is bitterness nonetheless. We just can't drop something, it eats at us and begins to rob us of a peaceful heart. It is something we find ourselves talking about more and more.
- B. Before we know it, things blow up and we find ourselves where we never thought we would be found.
1. Decisions are made and acted upon that have long term consequences.
  2. Damage is done to families and church.
  3. And the gospel of Jesus Christ is diminished.
- C. Well in vss 1-8 Paul begins to show this poor, miserable church the most excellent way. And the excellent way is the only way for a church to live and grow.
1. He is seeking to shift their minds away from what they think is most important to that which is truly most important.
  2. He does this in verses 1-3 by giving them three hypothetical situations.
    - a. Three points that are incredibly important for you to understand about these vss.
      - (1) The first is that they are simply that, hypothetical. He is not claiming that this is something that is actually going to take place. It is a literary device that he uses to make a bigger point.
      - (2) The second is that he is employing what is called "hyperbole" here.
      - (3) The third is that in doing so he is using a common logical argument that is from the greater to the lessor. Meaning, if

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these extreme examples are true then how much more true are these lesser things?

(a) An encouraging example—Romans 8:32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?

(b) An example of the opposite, from the lesser to the greater is also common in the bible—Matthew 7:11 "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!

b. Back then to our passage, this argument from the greater to the lesser is what is taking place.

c. Paul is pretending to be a man who possesses a certain gift to the greatest, highest degree.

3. Verse 1.

a. Here he becomes a man who has the greatest skills of known to any man. And he chooses this one first since it was creating so much of the problems in the church.

b. “And of angels” is not saying there is some angelic language that you can speak in tongues. It is simply a language that is higher than that of humanity.

c. To make the argument that what a person is speaking today is angelic speech and base it off of this verse is to use this verse in a way it is not intended.

d. Just consider what kind of person Paul would be in the eyes of the Corinthian church!

e. So, here is a man with an amazingly great gift—but has no love.

f. “Noisy gong” speaks of a worthless piece of metal. It was not a musical instrument, it was just designed to make noise—annoying noise. (Like the chapel ‘bell’ in Cameroon)

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- g. “Clanging cymbal” speaks of they types of cymbals used in pagan rituals. It too was not a pleasant sound and it would certainly have a very repulsive thought for the Corinthian.
  - h. Notice the contrast being made. Able to speak **all** tongues. . . but has **NO** . . . love. None whatsoever.
  - i. Tongues without love is just noise. If there is a lot of tongues without love, it is just a lot of noise.
4. Verse 2.
- a. Now Paul becomes a man who has the gift of prophecy to the highest extreme.
  - b. Remember that this is the gift that they should desire to see more of in their church.
  - c. Though he was able to work great works of faith and power. No mystery is hidden from him. He too is a man without love.
  - d. What is interesting here is that if he prophesies without love, the prophecies still stand.
    - (1) It is not the prophecy that is nothing. **It is the man himself.**
    - (2) An example of this is Jonah—the message still went out, but Jonah was nothing.
  - e. So though you have the gift of prophecy, without love you become worthless to the church.
5. Verse 3.
- a. Finally he takes up the gifts of helps and mercy.
  - b. Notice again the extreme nature of these gifts. Here we see the gift of serving and sacrifice to the fullest.
  - c. But no love.
  - d. And so there is no profit. Yes, you have sacrificed much, yes you have given yourself fully to a situation. But there was no profit in it if you had no love.
  - e. Nothing is really accomplished in the long run.

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- D. Having shaken these proud, unloving people out of their self-centered stupor, Paul now moves on to describe love.
1. Love is not explained by a series of adjectives, rather it is a series of verbs.
    - a. As one book's title said it, "Love is a verb."
    - b. It is not really possible to describe what love is, rather, only by seeing it in action do you see what is or is not love.
  2. *Agape*: (Adapted from MacArthur's sermon on 1 Cor 13)
    - a. *Agape* Is Not:
      - (1) Romantic or Sexual Love.
        - (a) The word love, as it appears in the Word of God, never means romantic or sexual love. The Greeks had a word for that (*eros*), but it never appears in the New Testament.
        - (b) Example, when it says in Ephesians 5, "Husbands, love your wives..."(v.25a), it isn't talking about romance. Yet how many sermons have you heard, or how many books have you read where someone says, "Husbands, love your wives," and then gives illustrations about opening the car door, buying flowers, and feeling romantic? That isn't what it's talking about.
      - (2) Biblical love never means...Emotional Love.
        - (a) When you begin to frame *agape* with the words, "I don't feel . . ." you are not in the arena of this type of love.
        - (b) Paul's not talking about a tingly sensation or sentimentalism. He's not saying, "The greatest of these is sentimentality." That, too, is not scriptural love.
      - (3) Thirdly, the word love, as it appears in the Bible, never means... Ecumenical Love

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- (a) Biblical love is never a friendly spirit of tolerance and brotherhood toward others, without any thought of convictions.
  - (b) In other words, when people say, "Well, it doesn't matter what anybody believes, as long as there's some kind of common ground. We just have to love them all," they don't understand the biblical meaning of love.
- b. *Agape* Is:
- (1) John 3:16 (turn).
    - (a) Now see if any of the previous definitions fit this verse: "For God so loved the world...that He felt romantic about it...that He got a tingly sensation down His spine...that He had a friendly spirit of tolerance and brotherhood no matter what they believed.. . ."
    - (b) What is love, then? Love is an act of self-sacrifice, not a feeling.
    - (c) Biblically, this is seen again and again. Love is an act of self-sacrifice. There's no such thing as *agape* without action. There's no such thing as the feeling, or the emotion, or the sensation of *agape*. It is an action. Now the sensation may or may not be there, but the action is always there.
  - (2) John 13:1, 4-5, 34 (turn).
    - (a) In John 13:1, Jesus was meeting with His disciples for the last time."...having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them unto the end."
    - (b) The Greek literally says, "He loved them to perfection." In other words, He loved them to the limits of love.
    - (c) In verses 4-5, we see the extent of Jesus' love for the disciples:

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- i) He washed their dirty feet while they sat around and argued about who was going to be the greatest in the Kingdom, and about who was going to sit next to Jesus.
- ii) They weren't about to wash each other's feet, so Jesus stooped and did it. Why? Because He loved them.
- (d) He drives this all home in vs 34.
  - i) How had He just loved them? By washing their feet.
  - ii) Love is an act of self-sacrifice. It is an act of sacrificial giving. It's washing feet. It's God giving His Son.
- (3) John 15:9-10a, 13.
  - (a) Read vs 9.
  - (b) Now he turns to them and says . . . (vs 10).
  - (c) Here is love toward God. It is the act of sacrificing my will to do His will. That's it. Love is an act of self-sacrifice.
  - (d) To say, "Hey I love Jesus." Do you? Do you love him like this? Or is it mere empty sentimentalism?
- (4) John 21:15-19.
  - (a) Over and over he is asked if he loves Jesus (make note of the play on words and the argument that there is actually a play on words).
  - (b) Show how vss 18ff is merely an application of "loving Jesus."
  - (c) Basically, Jesus told Peter, "If you love Me, then follow Me. But it will cost you your life."
  - (d) Love is self- sacrifice.

### **III. Conclusion.**



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- A. But *agape* love is not merely sacrificial.
  - 1. It is also giving.
  - 2. And it is a gracious kind of giving (explain again the word ‘grace’).
- B. John 15:13.
- C. Romans 5:8.
  - 1. God does not look for the righteous and good person and then grant them salvation and eternal life.
  - 2. He looks for the rebel.
- D. 1 John 3:1.
  - 1. From slaves to friends.
  - 2. From rebels to children.
- E. 1 John 4:9-10.
- F. Beloved, everything else that I might teach or you might seek to do matters little if you do not learn this.
  - 1. Let us not be a church who is strong in doctrine and yet lacks true, biblical, gospel-defined love.
  - 2. Let us not be foolish and lower true love down to some silly feeling.
  - 3. But let us first establish our sense of love from the glory of the gospel, for it is there that we see it fully on display.

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## Small Group Questions

- What are some ways that gifts can be used faithfully but without love?
- Can spiritual gifts be exercised in the flesh? Explain.
- How does the fact that love is not a feeling challenge your day to day thinking in relationships?
- Read and comment on these following verses in relation to love not being feeling oriented by action-oriented: 1 John 4:8-10; 2 John 1:6.