

1 Corinthians Series #35 "A More Excellent Way" - 1 Cor. 13

I. INTRODUCTION

A. The Missing Ingredient

1. Lynn loves making cookies; especially chocolate chip
2. Will never forget one batch she made not long after we were first married
 - a. I love her cookies
 - she has to keep shooing me out of the kitchen
 - (I love the dough - and steal it)
 - b. got home from work, saw them cooling in kitchen
 - c. took one; Looked good but tasted really bad
 - d. she had left out the salt
 - e. now, you only put a little bit of salt in cookies, but when it's left out, they really don't taste very good.
 - f. we went ahead and ate them anyway
 - g. but each and every cookie was a reminder that something was missing form the batch
3. There was something critical missing from the church at Corinth
 - a. an essential ingredient that had made the church distasteful
 - b. they looked good, but there was something missing that hindered them from being the pleasing community of disciples they should have been
4. The missing ingredient was love
 - a. they had the gifts of the Spirit
 - b. they had the miraculous in full swing
 - c. but they lacked love
 - d. and as a result, they were off balance and headed for serious trouble

B. This Chapter

1. Paul addresses this most serious problem in ch. 13 and we'll be looking at it today
2. But before we do, we need to say a few words about this chapter . . .
 - a. chances are, you've already heard someone or another read this chapter in a formal setting
 - wedding
 - funeral

- some other solemn event
 - b. it has been called -
 - "A Hymn To Love"
 - "Love's Portrait"
 - c. people get all teary-eyed and sentimental when it is read
 - d. many have committed it to memory who have no knowledge at all of the rest of the bible
 - e. they see it as a jewel in the midst of so much mud
 - f. and in doing so, they take it completely out of context and try to apply it in ways Paul and the HS never intended.
 - g. if Paul could sit in one of the audiences in which this chapter was read, I'm sure he would jump to his feet, wave his hands in the air and shout his objections at the way it was being used.
3. You see, ch. 13 is a part of his whole context of chs. 12 and 14.
- a. he was dealing with a specific problem in Corinth
 - b. that problem was their divisions
 - c. they were a church that had all the gifts of the HS in operation but had failed to go on to full spiritual maturity.
 - d. instead of the gifts being used in such a way that they were ministering to one another and growing thereby,
 - e. they were factious and divided over which gifts were best
4. In ch. 12, Paul wrote very clearly about how the gifts of the Spirit are given by God according to His perfect will
- a. each person is given gifts so that they might have an active part in the body of Christ
 - b. what each believer must do is be faithful with their gifts, to use them in the service of others
5. In ch. 14, Paul focuses on which gifts were of greatest importance when the church gathered together for public worship
- a. he lays down there the proper order for the use of the gifts
 - b. and what he shares there is much needed guidance for the church today, as we'll see.
6. But right in the middle of these two chapters on spiritual gifts, he takes the time to reveal what the goal

of the Spirit's work in them is

II. TEXT

A. Vs. 1-3

- 1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.
- 2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.
- 3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.

1. These words would have been a stinging rebuke to the Corinthians
2. In the midst of all their debates and fighting over spiritual gifts, they had lost the sense of the primacy of love
3. You see, there is one issue of the Christian faith that is beyond dispute and has been well known by believers since the beginning of the church
4. That one thing is the centrality of love
 - a. love is the mark and the measure of true Christianity
 - b. and they knew this
 - c. but — they had forgotten it!
 - d. just as many Christians today have forgotten it
5. The Corinthians prided themselves on their abundance of spiritual knowledge
 - a. their abundance of spiritual gifts
 - b. their familiarity with the supernatural
 - c. but they had forgotten the weightier issue of loving one another
6. So, Paul puts them in their place by saying . . .

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.

- a. no doubt Paul is thinking here about the worship of two of the Greek gods, Dionysus and Cybele
 - worshippers were called to music by loud trumpets and cymbals
 - when at a distance, they would be clearly heard as a summons to the temple
 - but once inside, worshippers would be driven nearly deaf by the noise

- the trumpets and cymbals did not produce music, they were merely used as noise makers
- b. speaking in tongues is a marvelous gift and not to be neglected if one has it
- c. but if it is not operated in love, then it is little better than the empty noise of pagan worship
- d. it is so tragic to see how certain groups who believe tongues are THE sign of being saved, will push and become some rude in trying to get others to speak in tongues
 - put them in a room
 - keep them there for hours
 - badger, coerce, cajole
 - suggest words to say
 - and if they don't, they are accused of being demon possessed or at least lost

And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

- e. it is possible to speak for God and still misrepresent Him
- f. it is possible to understand the deep things of God, and still miss His heart
- g. it is possible to do mighty deeds of great faith, and still miss the mission of God
- h. John tells us that God is love
- i. if love does not motivate our lives, then no matter what we accomplish, it is empty!

And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.

- j. Paul here turns from spiritual gifts to acts of charity
- k. it's possible to give all one has to help others
- l. yes, it's even possible to give one's self in martyrdom
- m. FOR THE WRONG REASON!!!
- n. history is filled with people who gave much simply so that others would look at them with admiration and envy
- j. Jesus tells the story of rich men who came to

the temple to give a gift
 - before them they sent trumpeters to announce their coming and their gift
 - they gave to be seen as givers
 - but there was one little widow who came and gave in secret a little tiny coin called a mite
 - worth about a ½ penny
 - but she gave out of a desire to really help
 - Jesus said that she gave more than all the rest
 - why? because she gave out of love for God and for others

7. Certainly these words of Paul would have stung the Corinthians
8. Just as they sting us today

B. Vs. 4-7

4 Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up;

5 does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil;

6 does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth;

7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

1. I'm tempted to do a word study on each of these things but time forbids us this morning
2. The love Paul describes here is not the mushy sentiment nor romantic ooze the world is familiar with
3. It is a tough minded act of the will to seek the highest good of others without concern for what it gets in return
4. The popular idea of love is far removed from what we find here
 - a. the word "love" as it is used today, is far too broad
 - b. Bumper sticker "*I [heart shape] Fishing*"
 - c. "*I love the mall.*"
 - d. people speak of "*making love*" - meaning an animalistic act of sexual gratification
 - e. songs
 - Foghat = "*Love hurts, love scars, love wounds and mars.*"
 - Linda Rondstat = "*Love is a rose but you'd better not pick it; It only grows when it's on the vine. A handful of thorns and you know you've missed it.*"

5. There are three Greek words used in the NT to describe different types of love . . .
 - a. *Eros* = sexual attraction; erotic
 - b. *philea* = the affection of friends; loyalty, devotion
 - c. another word [not used in NT]; *storgee* = family love
 - d. fourth kind of love;
 - rarely used in the Greek speaking world
 - greatest love, supreme love
 - a love which considered not it's own profit
 - a sacrificial love which sought the highest good for the one loved, with no concern for what it would get in return
 - this love was called "*agape*"
 - the reason it was so rarely used in Greek speech was because it was so rarely known
 - e. yet when Jesus came, He spoke often of *agape*
 - in fact, *agape* is what He came to reveal and bestow
 - John 3:16 = "God *agaped* the world so much that He gave His only begotten Son"
 - over and over He spoke of this kind of love
 - and said that this was God's kind of love
 - what had merely been a word for the Greeks became a living reality in the person of Jesus Christ
6. Jesus sits for His portrait in these verses.
 - a. in fact, you could easily replace the word *love* with His name in these verses

Jesus suffers long and is kind; Jesus does not envy; Jesus does not parade Himself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek His own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

- b. but there is more; for Jesus not only came to reveal this love, He also came to impart it
- c. He told His followers that they were to *agape* one another
- d. John went so far as to say that love for one another is the definitive proof that we are born again
- e. 1 John 4:7-11 Beloved, let us love one another,

for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

- f. so, as a test, we can put our names in the place of the word love in vs. 4-7. How well does it fit?

[Name] suffers long and is kind; [Name] does not envy; [Name] does not parade [him/herself], is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek [his/her] own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

- g. there are many things that people use to define what it means to be spiritually mature
- h. but this is the supreme test, the highest measure
- i. and that is why Paul calls this the more excellent way

C. Vs. 8-12

8 Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away.

9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part.

10 But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.

1. Love is the more excellent way because love endures
2. Long after the gifts and manifestations of the Spirit have ceased, love will continue
3. You see, the gifts of the Spirit are given to the church now to help us grow and be conformed to the image of Christ
4. But one day, that growth will reach it's climax.
 - a. we will have come to full maturity
 - b. as John says in chapter 3 of his first letter, we shall know as we are known; and we shall see Him face to face
 - c. the gifts of the Spirit are only for the present

- time, while we are still growing
5. The street lights come on only when the sun goes down
 - a. they light the highway at night and make the journey down our streets safer
 - b. but when the sun comes up the next morning, they go out
 - c. they are no longer needed because a greater light has dawned
 - d. one day soon, the day of Christ coming will dawn
 - we will no longer need tongues or prophecy of special knowledge
 - because we will know as we are known
 - the mysteries of God will be revealed
 6. Paul describes this even more fully in the next verses
...

11 When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

7. Lynn & I are thoroughly enjoying watching our nearly 2 year old daughter grow up
 - a. the things she does are so cute
 - b. she is making the transition from bottle to sipper cup
 - c. yet she still wants her bottle when she's sleepy
 - d. very soon, I hope she puts away the bottle altogether
 - e. how sad it would be if she continued to want her bottle when she was 4,5 or even 6 years old
8. There are far too many Christians who should have grown up long ago who are still nursing from the spiritual bottle
 - a. long after they should have learned how to eat meat
 - b. they are still crying for milk
9. Children are consumed with their own needs and desires
10. They have little time for thinking of the needs of others
11. One of the chief marks of maturity is the growing sense of responsibility
12. The Corinthians were acting as immature spiritual babes
 - a. for them, the gifts of the Spirit where toys to fight over rather than treasures to share

- b. very simply; while they argued over the gifts of the Spirit, they neglected the fruit of the Spirit

12 For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.

- 13. Corinth was known around the Roman Empire for its mirrors
 - a. their mirrors not like ours
 - b. made of a burnished piece of metal
 - c. usually small, and in comparison to our mirrors, gave a very poor reflection,
 - wavy & distorted
 - not unlike looking at your reflection in a spoon
 - d. would tarnish; after cleaning, lost some of its ability to reflect
- 14. No matter how spiritually mature a person is, compared to the finality of heaven, they are but seeing things in a dim mirror
- 15. There are some bible teachers who believe that the gifts of the Spirit described in 1 Cor. 12 passed away with the Apostles and their followers.
 - a. the text they use to support this idea is found here in v. 10
 - b. When that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.
 - c. they define "that which is perfect" as the bible
 - d. they say that when the NT was written and the bible was compiled in the form we have it today, the gifts ceased because they were no longer needed
 - e. that is clearly not what Paul meant; for v. 12 explains what he means by what is perfect.
 - f. clearly Paul means the coming of Jesus Christ and our gathering to Him.
 - g. besides, if the Apostles, who wrote the NT needed the gifts of the Spirit, how much more do we who merely read it and not always with perfect understanding?
 - h. no friends, the gifts of the Spirit are alive and well
 - i. our duty is to faithfully use them and grow in the more excellent way of love

III. CONCLUSION

A. V. 13

13 And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

1. There is a saying that goes, "You can't take it with you."
2. That isn't quite true; there are some things we can take with us
3. We certainly can't take material possessions or earthly treasures
4. But we can take with us spiritual treasure
5. There are some things that time will not sully or steal from us
6. These are faith, hope, and love
7. And in this trinity of virtues, the greatest is love
8. Love gives heart to faith and joy to hope

B. Finally

1. Love is the heartbeat of God
2. If we are truly His children, then our hearts should beat in time with His
3. Have you come to enjoy the love of God?