

1Corinthians 13:1-3 "Does Your Love Result in God's Glory?"

1CO 13:1-3 "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing."

Paul's systematic exposure of the sins of these Corinthian believers, and his exhortation for them to quit being so selfish and self-centered, now turns to passion over the real crux of the matter.

And the real crux of the matter has to do with turning away from this self-serving attitude to a self-less attitude of giving to others in such a way where their best interests are considered and met. But as Paul points out, this self-less attitude can only come from an understanding and appreciation of the love we've received from God.

We looked at this love last week. It is not a sentimental love or simply a brotherly love which God has given to His people in Christ, but a love that sacrifices; a love that lays down itself for others. In the Greek it is *agape*.

In fact, to define love we must go to the one place which addresses this love, and that is the word of God, which clearly states, God is love. It's not simply that God loves us, or that He showed His love in a particular way, but that His very essence and being is love.

This of course, demonstrates itself in a practical way. That way is found in the Son of God who was sent from the Father, born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, grew to be a man and then died for the penalty of our sins. And so, now we begin to get a glimpse into who God is as we look at what He does for us.

JOH 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

God demonstrates who He is as He gives and saves through the self-less act of becoming our sacrifice for sin. And Paul's passion for God spills out in a flood as he considers this love of God which

is now shed abroad in our hearts and is meant to demonstrate itself in practical ways as we in turn love; agape.

As we come to chapter 13 Paul begins to show how this love of God must manifest itself in the lives of these believers in Corinth who seem bent on not doing that. But he also rejoices in how God can actually accomplish that through His Spirit.

This entire chapter raises the issue the apostle John raised in his first letter to the church.

1JO 4:8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

This is to say, that if we are in Christ and Christ is in us, then we are united to God who is love. We are now intimately connected with love who is God. If that is the case, and if we claim to know God in this personal sense through faith in Christ, and yet we do not take on His character, which is love, then one has to wonder, are we united to the One who is love?

This is Paul's point. He is contrasting a real intimate dynamic relationship with God, which works itself out in real life, with a "lip service" type of relationship which only goes through the motions.

And chapter 13 begins with the motions without love.

1CO 13:1 "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal."

Keep in mind that Paul is speaking in the first person. He has placed himself in this hypothetical position of not loving and yet doing a "supposed" work for God. For these Corinthians this had to be an impressive thought for them.

After all, Paul is the apostle to the Gentiles. Paul is suggesting that even as an apostle, if he were to do God's work and yet not do it in love and out of love for God's people, it would have the same result as one who is making a lot of noise.

"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels". Remember, this is still in the context of the gifts of the Spirit which Paul introduced in the previous chapter. And part of the problem he points out is that they had turned the gifts on their head. They were placing more importance on the gifts than the gift-Giver.

By that very action they were clearly showing a self-centered approach, as they promoted themselves through certain gifts, and brought attention to themselves, instead of loving God as they loved the brethren with the gifts to build each other up in Christ.

And so, as to remind these Corinthians of how they were misusing the gift of tongues, Paul uses a form of speech known as hyperbole. He uses an exaggeration to make a point. He's going to take the one gift many of these Corinthians were exalting in themselves and show how it makes little difference if you have this gift, if you do not use it in love for the brethren.

Now, some have suggested that in Paul's use of hyperbole in our text that he is actually promoting a real language of angels and equating it with the gift of tongues, as though human beings could also speak in the language of angels.

As we've already pointed out, this section is an exaggeration to make a point. If Paul could actually converse with angels in their language, or speak as one who had the same access to the throne of God, as do angels, and yet he didn't have love, it wouldn't be effective, only noise.

The other problem is that we don't know if angels have a separate language, or if they need language at all, as we understand spoken language, since they are spirit beings. In fact, whenever we see angels speaking to men in Scripture, they always speak and communicate in the language of the human, not the other way around.

But again, the issue here is not the gift of tongues or the language of angels which Paul might utilize, but the use of the gifts of the Spirit without the fruit of the Spirit, particularly love.

Now what amazes me about all of this is that this would be no small matter if Paul, as an apostle for God, were to actually use this gift of languages and yet have it accomplish nothing. That doesn't mean it may not have short-term effects, but over the long haul it will not accomplish what God desires through that gift because it's being used in the flesh, not in the spirit.

You mean to say that someone could actually use their gift given to them by the Holy Spirit of God and it can actually become counterproductive? Absolutely. In the eternal scheme of things using a spiritual gift without the *agape* which must accompany it, actually ends up promoting the gift user instead of the gift giver.

And so, for example, if someone has the gift of teaching, and they use that gift to beat the sheep, or to manipulate the sheep, or to bring attention to themselves they actually undermine the intent of why that gift was given, which is to feed and encourage and exhort the sheep, with the express purpose of building them up to be better servants for Christ and each other.

In the case of tongues, Paul points out that if this gift is not used in love, if it is not used in a way which promotes unity, promotes worship of God, promotes encouragement, but only promotes the person who has the gift, then it is mere noise, as far as God is concerned.

Now, granted those around us may think we're the most spiritual person who has the most wonderful gift, but from God's vantage point, who knows the heart and intentions of the heart, we are a noise maker.

In fact, the imagery Paul uses here is interesting, because these Corinthians would have had a unique perspective on this which we might miss today.

In their culture during their lives there were religious rites "honoring the pagan deities of Cybele, Bacchus and Dionysus [which] included speaking in ecstatic noises that were accompanied by smashing gongs, clanging cymbals, and blaring trumpets. Paul's hearers clearly got his point: unless it is done in love, ministering the gift of languages, or speaking in any other human or angelic way, amounts to no more than those pagan rituals." (John MacArthur)

And now, these Corinthian believers have to reevaluate the way in which they've been using this particular gift and if God was actually honored at all, or if it was spiritually effective at all, during the time in which they've used it in a self-seeking way.

And so, according to this section, they are forced to ask themselves, "is loving God above all and your neighbor as yourself pretty important?" When it comes to serving God you better believe it. Because not to love God and our neighbor with the gifts we've been given ends up producing something God views as mere babblings.

1CO 13:2 "If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing."

Now wait a minute. If I knew a person who was given the gift of prophecy and could fathom all mysteries and had all knowledge, and had the kind of faith that could move mountains, they would certainly be something in my book.

Again, using this tactic of exaggeration, Paul concludes that it doesn't make any difference how much we think we're something. If we don't love God and people with the love of God, in the administering of such gifts, we are nothing.

Consider what Jesus told His disciples in the context of addressing false prophets.

MAT 7:21-23 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' 23 Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"

You mean to suggest that a believer's works, apart from love, are no more effectual than the works of an unbeliever who claims to do the same types of things? Only to the degree that those works will be burned as wood, hay and stubble, and that in the process the gift was not used effectively.

We will not be cast away as the unbeliever who has not trusted Christ for their salvation, and yet has played the religious game. But using a gift of the Spirit without a love for the brethren or God is not much different than the religious game of the unbeliever, is Paul's point.

But what does it mean for a true believer to practice the gifts of the Spirit without love, and to be placed in that category Paul identifies as "nothing"?

The Greek phrase for, "I am nothing" is *outhen eimi*. It does not mean, "I am a nobody", but, "I am zero." (A.T. Robertson)

Now Paul is not playing mind games with these people or us. He's simply trying to shock us back into reality that to live a life in Christ, without the love of Christ being our motivation, ends up accomplishing zero, as far as God is concerned. And yet, this doesn't negate His Sovereignty in taking something and ultimately using it for glory.

So, given the choice, why not love as God loves and be someone useful in the Kingdom of God, instead of someone who produces zero. In one sense it's like those three servants in Scripture who were all given a sum of money. Two of them invested what was given to them with the understanding that it all belonged to the master, while the third buried it in the ground.

The third one thought he was doing the master a favor of at least giving back to Him what he started with. But the master was not pleased with the zero sum gain on his investment that he gave to this servant.

This is Paul's point. He wasn't trying to simply promote people in the church being busy. He wasn't trying to encourage people using their gifts for the sake of using them. He wasn't even trying to promote people doing the right thing. He was promoting the motivation for doing the right thing. And that is a love for God because He first loved us.

This is precisely the point Jesus makes when He gave John the message to take back to the seven churches, particularly the church in Ephesus.

REV 2:1-3 "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands: 2 I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. 3 You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary."

Now, if we were to stop there, we would certainly have to commend the church at Ephesus, which is what Jesus is doing. These people were not lazy, they were dedicated, they were industrious with the things of God and they were committed to the work.

The problem arose with the fact that the work became more important than the one they were working for, which translated into performance rather than a love for the Lord and His people.

REV 2:4-5 "Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. 5 Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place."

Jesus Christ wants us operating in His love, no matter what it is. I know it sounds mind boggling that a church like Ephesus could be doing all the right things and yet be rebuked by Jesus Christ Himself for leaving, or forsaking, their first love.

The Greek word for leaving as in "leaving" your first love, as the NASB and NKJV puts it, could be literally translated to send away or send forth. It's the word which is used to describe a husband divorcing his wife as he sends her away.

Now Jesus is not suggesting that the Ephesian church had divorced Him, but they have divorced the intimacy and the agape love which was given them, to the degree that they've put their lives in auto-pilot and are now going through the motions, as correct as they may be.

Our Lord Jesus wants more. In fact He demands more. And the reason He demands it is because it is His to receive back since He gave this love to us in the first place. It cost Him His life, and He wants our lives back in return so that He might have that fellowship with us that He desires.

It is when our motivation is a love for our Lord that the work we do, with the gifts we've been given, truly shine for the Lord and demonstrate that Jesus is alive and well and living in us.

By the way, in verse 2 when Paul uses the expression "a faith that can move mountains", he is again speaking in hyperbole. Our Lord has not saved us to go into the construction business of putting roads on, or around mountains.

During Jesus' day there was a Jewish proverb which conveyed the idea of making the impossible possible. We don't know if our Lord utilized this particular proverb, but He makes the point crystal clear about a faith in God who makes the impossible possible.

MAT 17:20 "... I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."

Again, Jesus was not suggesting that His disciples camp at the foot of a mountain and try moving it to demonstrate their faith. He was making the point that if they placed their absolute faith in God, nothing would be impossible for the Almighty One who would work in their lives.

And yet, even if they had such faith to move mountains and didn't have love it wouldn't even be a bleep on the radar screen as far as God is concerned. Moving a mountain might impress the locals, but it doesn't impress God if not practiced in love.

Now, when we look at this section we see that the first verse of chapter 13 deals with the way we communicate with God; the way we use gifts to express our thoughts and devotion to God. And yet without love, those expressions are so much noise.

The second verse deals with the way we gain more knowledge about our God; be it through prophecy, understanding His mysteries and knowledge and then utilizing that knowledge through faith. And yet, without love all of the knowledge and faith means nothing.

And now, we come to verse 3 which then takes the gifts and the knowledge and puts them into practice for someone's good.

1CO 13:3 "If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing."

We hear a lot about the poor today. Unfortunately, the poor are often used as political pawns for politicians to make themselves look good. In most cases these politicians don't love the poor, they only love themselves as they try to increase their chances of being reelected.

And in a similar way, Paul points out that without love, without that agape, you can give everything to the poor, and it wouldn't add one brownie point to your ledger as far as God is concerned.

This verse is interesting in that the intent here in the Greek suggests that you don't give all you possess to the poor in one sweep, like the rich young ruler was encouraged to do by Jesus. Rather, the language here is to systematically, over a long period of time, always be giving to the poor until you run out of anything to give.

The intent is to show how you can always be in the limelight for a long period of time so that people are always noticing how generous you are. And yet, Paul says, you can give to the poor until the cows come home or Jesus comes back; if you do not have love, if you do those things with your own interests in mind, you gain nothing.

Again, the motivation is what Jesus is looking for. What was the motivation for the Jews giving in the Synagogue as they gave out of their wealth? Remember, when Jesus parked Himself across from the offering box and watched as everyone put their money in?

And then a poor woman gave all that she had, not out of wealth, [and by that I mean that she gave sacrificially while the others didn't], and Jesus commended her little offering more than that of the others.

Her motivation was to give in a way that honored God. The motivation of the others was to give to be noticed. Speaking of being noticed, how much more can you be noticed than to give your body to the flames?

Burning at the stake brought everyone out. In fact, Nero would take Christians and tie them to posts and line the streets with them and light them on fire at night as he covered them in tar. They were noticed. They gave their lives out of love for Christ as they would not deny Him.

And yet, amazingly, there were Christians who actually volunteered to be burned at the stake, or executed, so as to be identified with the Christian faith. These were not martyrs, but were exhibitionists. Their motivation was not out of a love for Christ, but for a love for themselves. As sick as this sounds it's actually documented.

In Philip Schaff's "History of the Christian Church" he writes of professing Christians that "they delivered themselves up to the heathen officers, and in every way sought the martyr's crown, that they might merit heaven and be venerated on earth as saints....

... Thus Tertullian, [second century Christian historian], tells of a company of Christians in Ephesus, who begged martyrdom from the heathen governor, but after a few had been executed, the rest were sent away by him with the words, "Miserable creatures, if you really want to die, you have precipices and halts [ropes] enough."

To give your life without agape love, profits you nothing. It sure sounds like agape is essential, from God's perspective, how we live for Him, how we serve Him and even how we die for Him.

What this forces us to do is to evaluate our motives for the Lord. It forces us to consider our first love. It forces us to look at our lives in the context of being in Christ and He in us.

Unfortunately, in many ways, the church has been relegated to one big religious club, with a lot of people being very busy for the Lord.

Now, I'm not suggesting that everyone in the church-at-large is self-serving. I'm not suggesting that even in those times when we don't serve in love that we haven't served in love in the past or will in the future. No one serves perfectly in the love of Christ all of the time.

Paul writes this so as to put a check on our spirits. He writes this as a warning to approach the Lord in the Spirit, not in the flesh. He writes this to contrast the motivation of people who are serving for self with those serving in the love of Christ, and makes it clear that to serve in the flesh amounts to zero.

With that being the case Paul assumes that a Christian, who obviously has the Spirit of God, will be touched by this truth and not want to show an appreciation for God's love simply by going through the motions, but rather will want to make the changes to really demonstrate that love shed abroad in our hearts.

Paul wants us to demonstrate the real thing, not some substitute we come up with to satisfy ourselves, but a real love for Christ. The same love Christ has for us.

JOH 15:13-14 "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command."

God's gift to us is love, who is His Son.

ROM 5:10-11 "For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be *saved through his life!* 11 Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation."

Having received this reconciliation we must now show our gratitude with lives of love for Jesus Christ. That is our first love, a love which desires to give love away to the glory of God.

2CO 4:11-15 "For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. 12 So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you. 13 It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken." With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak, 14

because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence. 15 All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God."

A number of prominent theologians once asked, what is the chief end of man? Their answer was very simple. "To glorify God and enjoy Him forever." To enjoy God is to love God, and to truly love God is to enjoy Him.

May we learn to enjoy our Lord's fellowship and to rejoice in His salvation as we love Him above all and our neighbor as ourselves, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.