

## 1 Cor. 13—The Most Excellent Way

### • Intro:

- Everybody seems to love this chapter—non-Christians recite it at weddings.
- This is not a wedding passage. No mistake that it is between ch. 12 and 14 where 12 ends and 14 begins by urging Christians to pursue and desire all the spiritual gifts!
- Ch. 13 is meant to shape and order the way in which we operate in our giftedness in the church.
- If love for other Christians does not control and shape how you use your gifts then they are worse than worthless, they are dangerous!
- Dr. Haddon Robinson—“Love is that thing which, if a church has it, it doesn’t really need much else, and if it doesn’t have it, whatever else it has doesn’t really matter very much.”

### • Love as the Grid:

- Love as grid—Paul is mostly concerned about the APPLICATION OF LOVE—love is a grid for Paul, onto which all of the Christian life and Christian ministry must land.
  - They were boasting in men (3:21). They were puffed up, even in wrongdoing (5:1-2). They were unwilling to suffer long and bear all things and so were taking each other to court (6:1-8). They were insisting on their own way in eating meat that caused others to stumble (8:11-12). They were acting in “rude” or unseemly ways not wearing the customary head-coverings (11:1-16). They were insisting on their own way as they ate their own meal at the Lord’s Supper without any regard to others (11:21-22). They were jealous and envious as they compared their spiritual gifts and thought that some were needed and others were not (12:21-22).
- Ultimately, they had a lot of the “religious trappings” of Christianity without the very core/heart of Christianity—love!
- Love is not set here AGAINST the gifts
  - NOT—“gifts are great, but LOVE is better”
  - IT IS—“LOVE is the way that gifts are to function”
    - In this context—earnestly desiring gifts for the building up of the body is HOW LOVE WORKS!

### • A Definition of Love:

- While love is surely not ONLY emotions it is not void of emotions/feelings. Both affections and actions are necessary in love!
  - We must CHOOSE LOVE even when we lack the affections or emotions
  - However, this is not the ideal!—where you lack the affections, pray for them!
- Sam Storms—love is the overflow of our delight in God that joyfully cherishes and seeks the best interests of another regardless of the cost to oneself.
- Hebrews 12:2—for the JOY set before him, he endured the cross.

### • In the Church, love is about Character over Giftedness (v.1-3)

- Paul is making a clear point that, in the church, CHARACTER ALWAYS TRUMPS GIFTING.
- Interesting that in the pastoral epistles, so much of the qualifications are character-based, not gifting-based.
- Beware of pursuing ministry goals/exposure without concern for your soul and godliness!
- Said another way: The FRUIT of the Spirit is always to be valued above the GIFTS of the Spirit.

- Application—Paul makes apparent that he and the Corinthians differ on what it means to be “spiritual”
  - Corinthians—tongues, wisdom, knowledge...ACTIONS that appear spiritual in nature
  - Paul—being FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT and thus, behaving as those made new by Jesus.
- The Centrality of Love (v.1-3)
  - Love is not merely one more among gifts—rather, it is the umbrella under which all the other gifts fit and flourish.
  - Love, ultimately, is more useful, valuable and beneficial than the collective power of all the other gifts.
  - In our scramble to find our gifting, function in them, etc, we must not run roughshod over love!
  - Love can seem “abstract” but for Paul it has been given concrete shape in Christ
    - Romans 5:5—God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.
  - Love—being toward OTHERS the way God, in Christ, has been toward us!
- Love is Enduring (v.4, 7-8)
  - Love Presses Through Pain (v.7)
    - “Love is patient...bears all things....believes all things...hopes all things...endures all things”
    - We know this but—where there is love, there is pain! Whether 2 people or 2 thousand, there will be pain and we will have to suffer long and bear all things and endure!
    - May we be a people who are diligent to not offend and diligent to take no offense!
    - v.7—good translation = “there is nothing that love cannot face!”
      - Fee—love has a TENACITY in the present, buoyed by its absolute confidence in the future
- Love is Humble (v.4-6)
  - “Not envious (jealous)...not boastful (proud)...not arrogant (puffed up)...not rude (offending manners)...does not insist on its own way (seeks not its own)...not irritable (not easily peeved)...not resentful (doesn’t keep an account of wrongs)...does not rejoice at wrongdoing (not boasting of sin/licentious freedom)
    - You see how this, again, lays up on the framework of all Paul has argued!?
  - We must notice that Paul’s opposite for love is not hate but PRIDE!
  - The main thing love does NOT do in this category is have arrogance!
- Love is Eternal, Gifts are Temporary (v.8-13)
  - What is eternal = the love of God as it is poured out, shared and enjoyed by himself and his people.
  - What is temporary = the gifts that God gives his people to equip them to love and serve him and others for his glory.
  - What to get caught up in = the love of God displayed in Christ for the good of all people.
  - What not to get caught up in = who is the most gifted, has the most spiritual gifts, etc.
  - While gifts shape our EXPRESSION now...LOVE shapes our EXISTENCE forever!
  - The Corinthians believed that the presence of the gifts, especially tongues, meant they were already living the heavenly experience—it was an OVERREALIZED understanding.
  - Paul’s intention is clearly to highlight the TEMPORAL nature of the gifts!
  - The gifts are momentary and partial:
    - Like childhood gives way to adulthood...(v.11)
    - Like a mirror/facetime/pictures give way to face to face! (v.12)

- Application—our current view of and understanding of God, as great as it may be, is NOTHING compared to what will be when we see him face to face!
- In the here and now, we cling to faith, hope and love:
  - Faith—in the finished work of Christ for us
  - Hope—in a secured and glorious future where we will be made perfect
  - Love—we display the love of God as we live life together with brothers and sisters!