

Sermon Notes for March 7, 2010

**Sermon Series on
I Corinthians 13
“Love, The Greatest Of All”
I Corinthians 13:1-13
Text: 13:8-13**

Introduction

A. The **EXPLANATION** Of Spiritual Gifts.

1. God gave spiritual gifts to the church
 - a. When a person becomes a Christian, God gives that new believer a “spiritual gift.”
 - b. Spiritual gifts are found in three categories.
 1. **speaking gifts**
 - a. prophecy
 - b. teaching
 - c. wisdom
 2. **service gifts**
 - a. helps
 - b. mercy
 - c. administration
 3. **sign gifts**
 - a. tongues
 - b. interpretation
 - c. miracles
 - d. healing
2. Why God gave spiritual gifts to the church
 - a. the reason that God gave spiritual gifts to the church is so that the Christian can serve the church.
 - b. the gift that God gives a believer enables that Christian to “want” to serve the church.
 1. a person would have a **desire to “teach”**
 2. a person would have a **desire to “help”**
 3. a person would have a **desire to “encourage”**

B. The **EVALUATION** Of Spiritual Gifts.

1. However, when God gifted believers in the church in Corinth, they became proud of their spiritual gifts.
 - a. those with the gift of **tongues** felt “special”, “unique” and “blessed”, as if God’s supernatural hand was upon them.
 - b. those with a gift of **prophecy** were able say things that others could not
 - c. those with the gift of **knowledge** knew Biblical information that others did not.
2. As the Pastor of the church in Corinth, what would Paul say to deal with their spiritual pride?

C. The **EVENTUALITY** Of Spiritual Gifts

1. Paul had “a way” of dealing with their spiritual pride.
2. and he does so in this text by making the church at Corinth realize the proper perspective of spiritual gifts,
 - a. Paul did this by explaining that spiritual gifts were temporary.
 - b. Paul did this by explaining that there was something far more important than spiritual gifts.

I. The **EXCELLENCE** Of Biblical Love.

A. The **DOMINANCE** of Biblical Love.

Vs. 8a – “Love never fails”

1. The **MAIN POINT** that Paul made to the **CORINTHIAN** church about spiritual gifts was that spiritual gifts were **LESS IMPORTANT THAN BIBLICAL LOVE!**
 - a. **RIGHT OFF THE BAT**, Paul admonished and “corrected” the Corinthian church by saying that **LOVING WAS MORE IMPORTANT** than **ANY OF THE SPIRITUAL GIFTS**
 - b. **RIGHT OFF THE BAT**, Paul said that one’s **ATTITUDE WAS MORE IMPORTANT THAN ONE’S ACTIONS.**
2. Paul is **CLEARLY** saying that Biblical love is **MORE IMPORTANT** than spiritual gifts.
 - a. as Paul said in I Corinthians 13:1-3, if a person did not express love while using their spiritual gifts, then the use of that spiritual gift **WAS A WASTE OF TIME!**
 1. without love, the supernatural gift of tongues was no more than **BANGING GARBAGE LIDS TOGETHER!**
 2. without love, the person with the amazing gift of **FAITH IS UNIMPORTANT**
 3. without love, even the person who gives his body as a martyr, **HAS WASTED HIS TIME!**
 - b. spiritual, sacrificial, Biblical love outranks, supersedes, and is more important than spiritual gifts.

B. The **DURATION** of Biblical Love

Vs. 8a - “Love never fails”

1. but, Paul also wanted to make the point that, not only was Biblical love more important than spiritual gifts, **BIBLICAL LOVE WOULD OUTLAST SPIRITUAL GIFTS.**
 - a. it was never God’s intention that spiritual gifts would last forever.
 - b. God gave the church spiritual gifts for the ministry of the church **AS LONG AS THE CHURCH EXISTED ON THIS EARTH!**
 - c. but love would continue long after the termination of spiritual gifts
2. let us see now why Paul believed that Biblical love was more important than spiritual gifts

II. The EXCEPTION Of Spiritual Gifts

A. The LIMITATION OF PROPHECY

Vs. 8a – “But where there are prophecies, they will cease”:

1. The function of prophecy

a. foretelling

1. prophecy is first of all defined as being able to “foretell” the future
 - a. the prophet Isaiah prophesied that a ruler by the name of Cyrus would one day conquer Babylon. As well would this same king allow the Jews to return to their homeland. These prophecies were made some 150 years before it happened.
 - b. the prophet Micah prophesied the birth of Jesus Christ some 700 years before His birth.
2. a true prophet would be “true” only if his prophecy came true

b. forthtelling

1. Prophets were also known for teaching and telling the truth of the Word of God.
2. “Today’s prophet” would be known as a preacher
 - a. those who are able to powerfully present the Word of God
 - b. those who speak to the soul and heart to produce a response.

2. The fulfillment of prophecy.

- a. however, please notice that Paul says that one day prophecy will be “done away with” (KJV)
 1. the sense of the greek here is that “someone” will “cause prophecy to end”
 - a. and that “someone” is God
 - b. when this world ends, God will “withdraw” the gift of prophecy from the church.
 2. there will be no prophets in heaven, only believers.
- b. why will prophecy be done away with?
 1. what does a prophet do?
 - a. **a prophet predicts what will happen in the future.**
 1. at the end of the world, when believers are all in heaven, there will be no need to predict the future because we will not need to know the future.
 2. all of the prophecies about Jesus will have been fulfilled
 3. **the only information that we will need about the future is that WE WILL BE IN HEAVEN FOREVER!**
 - a. there will be no sun and moon because there will be no nights in heaven
 - b. we will not look ahead to days, weeks and months

- c. we will simply experience ETERNITY IN HEAVEN FOREVER.
 - 4. thus, we will not need to hear from ANYONE what to expect in the coming days – for we will KNOW what to expect.
 - b. **a prophet teaches the Word of God**
 - 1. **WE WILL NOT NEED PREACHERS IN HEAVEN!**
 - a. after all, what would the preacher preach on?
 - 1. “You need to know the Lord”
 - 2. “You need to commit your life to Jesus”
 - 3. “You need to understand how to live the Christian life.”
 - b. **WE WILL NOT NEED PREACHERS IN HEAVEN BECAUSE WE ALREADY KNOW EVERYTHING ABOUT WHATEVER THE PREACHER WOULD PREACH ON!**
 - 2. we will not need to be counseled, directed, encouraged, or admonished in the Word of God.
 - 3. we will all simply be believers, experiencing the fullness of eternity.
 - 3. thus, in heaven, there will be no titles, no Reverends, no Doctors, no seminary professors, no theological authors
 - a. we will not be running over to sit under the greatest teachers and theologians of the church.
 - b. Paul and Luther and Calvin will be “just like you and me” ; just glad to be a member of the heavenly family.
- B. The LIMITATION OF TONGUES.**
- Vs. 8b – “where there are tongues, they will be stilled”**
- 1. The **function of tongues:**
 - a. the “basic” purpose of being able to speak in tongues was as a testimony of the supernatural work of God to UNBELIEVERS!
 - 1. at Pentecost, after the death, resurrection and “ascension” of Jesus, God sent the Holy Spirit with power.
 - 2. and the “evidence” that the Holy Spirit had actually been sent was that individuals began to speak in a language that was not their own

Acts 2:7-12 – “Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both

Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs--**we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!**"

3. notice what Paul said the purpose of tongues was:

I Corinthians 14:22 - "Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers **but for unbelievers;**"

b. you can imagine what an unbeliever would think to hear a person who only spoke Greek suddenly speak Hebrew!

2. The **fulfillment of tongues**

a. **WHY WOULD ANYONE NEED TO SPEAK IN TONGUES IN HEAVEN?**

1. if tongues is an evidence of God's power to unbelievers. . .

2. why would anyone speak in tongues in heaven? **THERE WILL BE NO UNBELIEVERS IN HEAVEN!**

b. and, for those who believe in a "private prayer language" of tongues, to "get close" to God, why would you need ANY HELP to get close to God in heaven?

c. notice, that Paul says that tongues will "cease" (KJV)

1. the meaning of the Greek verb here is that after tongues have been used for God's intended purpose,

2. they will simply "cease" to be used, as if a water faucet was turned off.

d. so, Paul says, those of you who feel "so important" and "so spiritual" to be able to speak in tongues. . .

1. first of all, realize that your spiritual gift of tongues came from God not because of anything that you have done

2. you were given that gift to show unbelievers of the power of God.

3. and when God has used your gift as He wants to, He will turn it off as quickly as He gave it to you.

C. The **LIMITATION OF KNOWLEDGE**

Vs. 8c – "where there is **knowledge, it will pass away.**"

1. The **function of knowledge**

a. the person with the gift of knowledge has been blessed by God to understand and amass great Biblical knowledge.

b. this would be one who can understand deep Biblical theology, and Biblical information

c. these people would be ones to teach in a seminary, a Sunday School class: one who would write theological papers and write commentaries.

d. people would come to them to learn; they would speak at conferences and Bible colleges.

2. The **fulfillment** of knowledge.

a. however, in heaven, there will be no Bible Conferences, no seminaries, no Sunday School classes.

b. we will not go to a conference to sit at the feet of the Apostle Paul or John Calvin or even Jesus!

c. **FOR THE BELIEVER IN HEAVEN WILL NOT NEED TO BE TAUGHT ANYTHING!**

d. **WE WILL NOT EVEN NEED A BIBLE IN HEAVEN BECAUSE WE WILL ALL KNOW WHAT IS IN IT!**

1. so, those who have the gift of knowledge, with all of your influence, have a “temporary gift.”
2. you will no longer be a teacher, a professor, a preacher –you will be “just a believer,” like all of the other believers in heaven.

III. The EXTINCTION Of Spiritual Gifts.

A. We Are CURRENTLY EXPERIENCING “THE PARTIAL”

1. We have “**partial knowledge**”

Vs. 9a – “For we **know in part**”

- c. the Greek word for “part” is:
 1. a section; a portion
 2. a little of the whole
- d. what Paul is saying to those who are so “knowledgeable,” so “smart,” so “theological”
 1. you have learned only a “FRACTION” of what there is to know about God and eternity
 2. despite your commentaries, your papers, and your conferences, you have not “scratched the surface” of eternal truth.
 3. **BECAUSE, WHEN YOU GET TO HEAVEN, YOU ARE GOING TO BE ABSOLUTELY OVERWHELMED AT WHAT YOU DID NOT KNOW!**
 - a. when you face a sovereign God and fully realize who and what He is
 - b. when you fully realize just how powerful God is.
 - c. and, when you witness the power and might of our powerful God, you will be forced to fall on your knees and confess that you knew actually nothing about who God truly was and is.

2. We have “**partial prophecy**”

Vs. 9b – “and we **prophecy in part**”

- a. for those with the gift prophecy you think that you are speaking for God
- b. you revel in your position as a preacher, one who preaches the Word of God before a watching congregation.
- c. one who is accustomed to being called Reverend, Doctor, Professor and Pastor
- d. you will one day realize that you were “just talking”
 1. and that you could never adequately represent who God truly is
 2. and that you were indeed honored that God put you into a pulpit at all.
 3. and despite all of the work, all of the study, all of the preparation, you did not and could not adequately represent God as a preacher of His Word

B. We Are CURRENTLY EXPERIENCING A CHILDHOOD

1. We are currently “**talking like a child!**”

Vs. 11a – “when I was a child, **I talked like a child.**”

- a. it is my belief that Paul is comparing “talking like a child” to the gift of **tongues (talked like a child)**
 - b. for, in comparison to the heavenly language, even with your supernatural gift of tongues, **YOU ARE TALKING LIKE A CHILD!**
 - c. my granddaughter’s video
 - d. compared to language used in heaven, all that you are doing is **BABY TALK!**
2. we are currently “**thinking like a child**”
- Vs. 11b – “I thought like a child”**
- a. in my opinion, I believe that Paul is referring to those with the gift of **knowledge (“thought like a child”)**
 - b. that, despite all of your theological training and expertise, compared to being in heaven, you are **THINKING LIKE A CHILD!**
 - c. now, how does a child reason?
 1. my own reasoning as a child—the angels kept up with all of my good and bad actions on a chalkboard in heaven.
 2. my son David’s reasoning about God – As a 3 year old; “One day, God is going to come out of that tree and love me.”
3. we are currently “**reasoning like a child**”
- Vs. 11c – “I reasoned like a child.”**
- a. it is my belief that Paul may be referring to the **prophet (“reasoned like a child”)**
 1. as a prophet “learns”, he also “reasons” how he may communicate what he has learned
 2. and then share that in his preaching
 - b. what Paul may be saying here is that the most powerful, the most prepared, the most respected preacher, compared to being in heaven, **SOUNDS LIKE A CHILD!**
 1. what does this say about the importance of preachers, with their black robes and influential pulpits?
 2. what is going to happen to those preachers who **REALLY** thought that they were “something” when they face God in heaven!
 - a. when they face the Apostle Paul?
 - b. when they are introduced to Ezekiel and Isaiah and Moses?
 - c. when they meet Augustine, John Calvin and Jonathan Edwards....**WHO, THEMSELVES KNOW BY NOW WHO THEY ARE NOT!**
 - c. it is as if we are all just “playing church”
- Anne Ortlund – Up With Church – “When I was little, we used to play church. We’d get chairs into rows, fight over who’d be preacher, vigorously lead the hymn singing, and generally have a great time. The aggressive kids naturally wanted to be up front, directing or preaching. The quieter ones were content to sit and be entertained by the “up-fronters. Occasionally, we’d get mesmerized by a true sensationalistic crowd-swayer---like the girl who said, “Boo! I’m the Holy Ghost!” But in**

general, if the up-fronters were pretty good, they could hold their audience quite a while. If they weren't so good, eventually the kids would drift off to play something else---like **jump rope or jacks.**"

IV. The ETERNITY Of Biblical Love

A. The LIMITS OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

1. Paul is clearly teaching that DESPITE the importance of spiritual gifts, compared to being in heaven. . .
 - a. spiritual gifts have their "limits"
 - b. spiritual gifts have a "shelf-life!"
 1. **spiritual gifts will not last forever**
 2. because spiritual gifts will not be needed forever!
2. so, those of you who think that you are "so important; think eternally"
 - a. after you die and go to heaven, you will be "just like everyone else" in heaven
 - b. you will have "no more importance" than anyone else in heaven

B. The LIMITS OF SPIRITUAL VIRTUES

1. in addition to saying that spiritual gifts will no longer be needed in heaven
2. likewise, Paul says that even some Christian virtues will not be needed in heaven

a. the **virtue of faith**

Vs. 13 – "And now these three remain: **faith,**"

1. seen by all as one of the greatest virtues of all
2. that someone has:
 - a. the faith to move mountains
 - b. the faith that God can do anything
3. we will not need the virtue of faith in heaven

a. after all, what is faith?

Hebrews 11:1 – "Now faith is being sure of **what we hope for** and certain of **what we do not see.**"

1. we will not "need" faith in heaven
2. we will be "living" in the reality of Jesus Christ Himself

b. our faith will be "realized"

b. the **virtue of hope**

Vs. 13 – "And now these three remain: **faith, hope**"

1. today, we "hope" that we will be in heaven
2. heaven is our hope – not yet a reality
3. in actuality, hope, in Scripture is a noun, not a verb

a. **Titus 1:1-2** – "Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God's elect and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness--a faith and knowledge **resting on the hope of eternal life,** which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time,"

b. **Romans 8:24-25** – "For **in this hope** we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently."

D. The Limitlessness Of Love

Vs. 13b – “But the greatest of these is love.”

1. spiritual **gifts will cease**
 - a. all of the Spiritual gifts that have been given to the church will no longer be needed, once we go to heaven
 - b. so, no matter what your spiritual gift is, no matter how important you believe that you are, these gifts are only temporary, to be used until we get to heaven.
2. spiritual **virtues will cease**
 - a. despite the impressiveness of one who has faith, faith will not be needed when we get to heaven for we will “see our faith”
 - b. likewise, we will no longer need to hope, for our hope will be fully realized and experienced in heaven.
3. spiritual **love will never cease**
 - a. after all, love is:
 1. the reason that God sent His Son to this earth to die
 2. the power that enabled Jesus Christ to continue His torturous walk to the cross
 3. the reason that God continues to deal with those of us who are His children
 4. will be the atmosphere of heaven when we get there
 - b. **James May**
 - When I have placed my trust in the riches of this world that cannot deliver and turn away from God – **He still loves me!**
 - When I have forsaken Him days without number to chase after the pleasures of sin that can only condemn me to eternal death – **He still loves me!**
 - When I have omitted from my life those things that I know I should do, and I do those things that I know I shouldn’t – **He still loves me!**
 - When I have failed to love him – **He still loves me!**
 - When I have abused this body, that is supposed to be the Temple of the Holy Spirit – **He still loves me.”**
 - c. God’s, sacrificial, supernatural, unconditional love is the most important, most vital, most enduring attitude of all
 1. it is more important than your spiritual gift.
 2. God’s unconditional love is the way we are to serve, the attitude we share with others and **THE WAY THAT WE SHOW THOSE AROUND US WHO GOD TRULY IS.**
 3. if God’s sacrificial love is not your greatest passion, your greatest goal, your greatest purpose – confess your failings to Him that He may love through you

Conclusion:

1. A visitor to **Ystad, Sweden** tells of a Lutheran church located there. It is not a particularly beautiful church, and is exceptional in no way except when you go inside you notice there is a crucifix hanging on the wall opposite the pulpit. The figure of our Lord Jesus is **life-sized** and **life-like** even to the use of real hair mangled beneath a crown of thorns.

How did this unusual crucifix happen to be in a Swedish Lutheran church?

Well, it seems that around **1716, the King of Sweden, King Charles the 12th** paid an unexpected visit to this church. When the Pastor saw the king in attendance, he was overwhelmed. He ignored the Scripture for that Sunday, and replaced it with an oratorical outburst of tribute and praise for the king.

Three months later, a gift arrived at the church in a big box. The Pastor opened it up. It was a present from the King. Inside was a **life-sized crucifix, a life-like statue of Jesus on the cross**, with this instruction: **“Place this on the pillar opposite the pulpit, so that the one who stands there will always be reminded of his proper subject.”**

2. There is no greater illustration of love than a dying Lord Jesus on the cross.
 - a. it was love that put Him there
 - b. it was love that kept Him there
 - c. it will be love that welcomes us to a heaven filled with love.
 - d. **DON'T MISREPRESENT WHO GOD TRULY IS!**