

# Understanding Spiritual Gifts

I Corinthians 12.31-13.20

## 12.31

- Raises a question, in light of 12.6, 12.8-9, 12.11, 12.18, 12.24, 12.28
- Which is repeated in 14.1 and 14.39, and as a noun in 14.12
- What does Paul mean?

## Some of the options

- Paul isn't giving a command. We should read the verse as a statement of fact, not a mandate. Therefore, Paul is rebuking them.
- Paul is quoting the Corinthians. "Covet the best gifts" is what they said. Therefore, Paul is correcting them

- What I think is the best understanding: Paul is encouraging them to be zealous, and then is constraining their zeal
- The word “covet” means zeal. It is “zeal” in the Greek
- They **SHOULD** be zealous for the “best” (most useful) gifts in the Church, and this can be done without dishonoring other gifts

- But every time Paul says that to them, he's restraining that zeal
- They don't have to be sinfully zealous for the best gifts: it is possible to be very eager for the Church to have the most useful gift, even if its not your gift
- That's what chapter 13 addresses

- 14.1 resumes the subject matter of 12.31

# What is the “best” gift?

- To the Corinthians, it was tongues. Chapter 14 makes that clear
- To Paul, it was prophecy
- But before Paul talked to them about the utility of gifts, he talked to them about the priority of love
- Love transcends all gifts

## 13.1-3: Love is indispensable

- Paul speaks in hypothetical superlatives
- If I COULD speak with the tongues of men and angels...
- And if I COULD understand EVERY mystery, and know EVERYTHING, and have TOTAL faith...
- And gave ALL my goods and my own body...



- He also speaks about the two main gifts under consideration: tongues and prophecy

What if Paul was that gifted, but without love?

- The exercise of the gift of tongues would be a noisy nuisance
- The exercise of the gift of knowledge and faith would leave him a “zero”
- And if he gave all that he had, including his life, he would get no gain from it

## 13.4-7: Love has clear characteristics

- All of those characteristics are practical, not sentimental
- It is longsuffering, kind, protective (bears all things), hopeful, truth-loving, and enduring (no one “falls out of love”) in the Biblical usage of the word

- It does not boast about itself, is not inflated, does not act unbecomingly, isn't selfish, isn't easily provoked, doesn't assume the worst, doesn't love iniquity

13.8-13: Love outlasts any gift