

“The Importance of Love” 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

INTRO:

In chapter 12, Paul has underlined the source and proper function of the charismata, the grace gifts. Spiritual gifts have their source in the Holy Spirit. He gives the gifts to us **“sovereignly as He wills.” (v.11)** Although these gifts are given by the God, they are diverse in their distribution and practice. The purpose of all of the gifts is to build up and to unify the body. In both of these areas the church in Corinth has failed, and unfortunately so do many churches today.

In **1 Corinthians 12:31**, Paul wrote they were seeking after what they perceived to be the best gifts, yet, Paul wanted them to see a more excellent way. The way to measure our spirituality is not the kind of grace gifts we have, but the manifestation of love.

I. Love Is Superior to Tongues (v. 1)

II. Love Is Superior to Prophecy (v. 2)

III. Love Is Superior to Self-Denial (v. 3)

I. Love Is Superior to Tongues (v. 1)

A. Paul begins his explanation with comparisons or value judgments. No doubt the reason that Paul begins with the idea of speaking with the tongues of men and angels, is because they valued this particular gift above the others.

1. The structure indicates these were hypothetical situations. Paul is not saying that any of these situations are true of himself. But if they are the case the conclusion is valid.

2. When Paul speculated he might speak with the **“tongues of men and angels” (v.1)** do not indicate he asserted he spoke the language of angels.

B. “If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.” (1 Corinthians 13:1)

Because it appears the Corinthians considered tongues speaking the queen of the gifts, Paul began with tongues in his examples. If I, the Apostle Paul, spoke in tongues, wouldn't I be a great man? God could use me greatly and I would be so spiritual right?

1. Although they clearly thought so in Corinth, in reality the case was entirely different. If I use my grace gift without love (agape), it would be noisy and useless. I have become a sounding brass and a clanging cymbal.

2. When our children were small, some well meaning person would get them a noisy toy, like a drum. Children usually cannot make music, but they can really make a din. Paul said this is what tongues speaking is without the manifestation of God given love.

C. 1 John 4:19 *"We love because he first loved us."*

Love, agape love, can only come from the God who is love. Thus love in our lives mark us as belonging to God and it also demonstrates the control of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law." (Galatians 5:22-23)

The very first fruit that God, the Holy Spirit, is going to produce in each of us as we yield control to Him is Love.

II. Love Is Superior to Prophecy (v. 2)

A. Those who were not tongues speakers were probably rubbing their hands in glee as Paul let the tongue speakers have it in **verse 1**. However, Paul was not done with the comparisons.

B. "If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing." (1 Corinthians 13:2)

Ok, you guys who fancy yourselves as great prophets and great in faith, I have something to say to you.

1. The words are instructive. Mysteries, speaks of the hidden things of God. God has chosen to reveal some of these mysteries to us. He has chosen to not let us know all of His mysteries.

2. Knowledge, probably speaks of all that God is doing in this present world and all of the secrets of redemption.

3. This is not normal everyday faith in view here. Faith here is miracle working faith. I can say to this mountain get out of my sight and it obeys

D. These are quite the gifts. Paul wrote, If I am as close to all-knowing as a human can become, and I am very powerful because of my gift of faith, surely then I would be great in God's sight. Surely, then I would be spiritual.

E. Not quite. If you don't have Agape, God-given love, you are nothing. You and your great gifts are worthless.

1. In short, our value to God is not tied to who we are or what gift we possess. Our usefulness to God is tied to how close our relationship is with the Lord.
2. It is better to live a life characterized by the love which God produces in each of us, than to be virtually all-knowing and all-powerful.

III. Love Is Superior to Self-Denial (v. 3)

A. "And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing." (1 Corinthians 13:3)

The final condition speaks to a problem the church has always had. I may not be spiritual if I speak in tongues or have all of these showy gifts, but if I lock myself away in some monastery and deny myself I can be spiritual. Do you remember the Pharisee and publican in **Luke 18**?

"The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 'I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.'"

B. In describing this self-sacrifice that this hypothetical person gives in order to be spiritual Paul said he even gave his body to be tortured and killed for the Lord's sake. He is making the ultimate sacrifice. Yet, he lacks love.

1. If this is the case, all of this self-denial and self-sacrifice has profited nothing.
2. Self-sacrifice does not produce spirituality or greatness in God's eyes. Love does.

How do we learn how to love like this? It comes from a real growing and expanding relationship with Jesus Christ. It comes from a life yielded to the Spirit's control. Our problem is exactly that of Mary and Martha in **Luke 10:42**;

"But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

Serving God and using our spiritual gifts are important, but the growing personal relationship with the Lord Jesus produces agape love in our lives is also important.