

# 1 Corinthians

## Chapter 13:1-13

*June 23, 1996*

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- Spiritual gifts are not a measure of spirituality.
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- Spiritual gifts are distributed according to God's purposes.
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- Miraculous gifts were used by God to testify to something.
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- Spiritual gifts are given for the edification of the body of Christ.
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- **1 Corinthians Outline:**

- Chapter 1 Ungodly divisions result from man's wisdom.
- Chapter 2 Carnal man cannot understand our Spiritual God.
- Chapter 3 All Christians will have their labors tried by fire.
- Chapter 4 Boasting in our leaders puffs up and destroys fellowship.
- Chapter 5 Maintain the purity of the Church.
- Chapter 6 Do not dispute before the world and do not partake in sexual immorality.
- Chapter 7 Principles of marriage
- Chapter 8 The responsibility of liberty
- Chapter 9 Those who preach the Gospel should live from the Gospel
- Chapter 10 You cannot partake of the Lord's table and the table of demons.
- Chapter 11 Propriety in corporate worship and communion
- Chapter 12 The body of Christ is unified around a diversity of spiritual gifts
- Chapter 13 Some spiritual gifts are temporary but love never fails

- **1 Corinthians 13:1-13**

- **Introduction & Review**

In the previous chapter, Paul used the analogy of our bodies to explain how we are blessed by a diversity of gifts rather than a homogeneity of gifts. In addition, Paul goes out of his way to drive home the point that we are called to exercise our gifts in such a way that the body as a whole is blessed.

In this chapter, we will go to the heart of spiritual gifts and find that the most important truth isn't simply exercising our gifts but rather doing so in love. Just because someone is using their gift within the body doesn't mean that they are doing so motivated by love. Notice here that this classic chapter on love is between two chapters on spiritual gifts. This chapter is not a side thought or unrelated topic. Rather, the context is spiritual gifts and the primary application is the administration or use of those gifts.

- **Exposition**

### 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

*Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup> And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup> And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.*

- Having promised to show the Corinthians a better way at the end of the previous chapter, he uses a number of hyperboles to drive home his points. Even if I manifested a spiritual gift of being able to speak numerous tongues or even an angelic tongue, if I am doing so selfishly or for some other gain, then my gift does not accomplish its purpose.
- These verses strengthen further our first foundational point that the presence of spiritual gifts does not imply spirituality. It is possible to be blessed with significant, important spiritual gifts and yet not be spiritual.
- The faith mentioned in verse 2 is not a saving faith but it appears to be a special endowment of faith which accomplishes things. However, if this faith is exercised only for show or to puff up the gifted, then even the movement of mountains would be of not value.

***<sup>4</sup> Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up;<sup>5</sup> does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil;<sup>6</sup> does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth;<sup>7</sup> bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.***

- This section can be described not as a description of what love *is* but rather of what love *does*. Frequently we mistake love for the fond emotions we have toward someone. The warm feelings that we get when around others we enjoy is not love; they may be a byproduct of love but the feelings themselves are not love.
- Love is really embodied in what we do. Love is manifest in the way we treat someone or the things we do for someone. Remember how Christ summarized all of the Law; "love the Lord your God..." and "love your neighbor as ...". If we were to summarize these two greatest commands we could say "love God and love people". Going further, we could render the imperative, "love". Isn't it remarkable how the Law of God is equated with love yet the modern church thinks of the Law as unloving. This thinking comes from being under the curse of the Law as a law breaker rather than a law abider.

***<sup>8</sup> Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away.<sup>9</sup> For we know in part and we prophesy in part.<sup>10</sup> But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.<sup>11</sup> When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.<sup>12</sup> For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.***

- In this section Paul contrasts the eternal existence of love versus the temporary existence of some of the spiritual gifts. Love is not just a tool we use now to get by and will have no need of when we go to be with the Lord. Love is necessary and it is at the heart of all good things. Those things done without love are of no value.
- This section introduces the temporary nature of the revelatory gifts. We see that prophecy, tongues (remember tongues plus interpretation equals prophecy) and the spiritual gift of knowledge (the "gift to correctly understand and properly exhibit the truths revealed by the apostles and prophets." Hodge) Paul declares that these gifts will be gone when the perfect comes. Obviously if we are attempting to understand whether these spiritual gifts are extant today and functioning as they always have, then it is important to understand these verses. However, these verses are difficult to understand and true believers differ on their meaning but this does not mean that we should not study the topic, nor should we fail to declare what we believe the verses to say.
- Reasons why the "perfect" does not pertain to the second coming of Christ:
  1. Paul starts this point by stating that he knows now in part and that he prophesies in part. It is clear that the perfection is speaking of perfect prophecy or perfect knowledge. He is contrasting imperfect knowledge versus perfect knowledge and imperfect prophecy versus perfect prophecy. So, he is telling the recipients of a time when there would be perfect prophecy and knowledge. When would that be?
  2. We know that the time he is speaking of is not the return of Christ because in heaven we will have no need of prophecy; not even perfect prophecy. All things will be revealed and known. We will have no need of prophetic understanding. But in the Scriptures today, we find perfect prophecy and we find perfect instruction such that all we will ever need for righteous living can be found in its pages.
- The cessation of the revelatory gifts would also indicate the end of the miraculous gifts given that these miraculous gifts were used to testify to the validity of those who possessed the revelatory gifts. These gifts would be unnecessary now in that they don't authenticate anything that hasn't already been authenticated. This is not to say that miracles have ceased. Clearly God has not just wound up the world like a top and walked away. No, He answers prayer and allows His hand to be moved by the righteous. Sometimes when He does so He will use the natural course of events to answer prayer. At other times, He will intervene and do something that from our vantage point is miraculous. But the fact that God still performs the miraculous is not

the same thing as saying that someone has been vested with the power to perform biblical miracles at will.

**13** *And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.* NKJV

- When we go to live with the Lord for eternity, we will have no need of faith or hope. These are simply necessary now because we cannot see nor be with the Lord. Clearly, faith and hope have not ceased yet. Sinners are still saved by grace through faith just as they always have. However, one day, when we are with the Lord, faith and hope will be things of the past for we will have no need of them.