

4. The Supremacy of Agape-Love

1 Corinthians 13:8-13

Recap

Three Sundays ago the first message was on the first 3 characteristics of love:

- 1/ Love practices being patient
- 2/ Love practices kindness
- 3/ Love does not envy

Two Sundays ago the message was on the next 6 characteristics of love:

- 4/ Loves does not boast
- 5/ Love is not proud
- 6/ Love is not rude
- 7/ Love is not selfish
- 8/ Love is not easily angered
- 9/ Love keeps no records of wrongs

Last Sunday we looked at the last 6 characteristics of love:

- 10/ Love does not delight in evil
- 11/ Love rejoices with the truth
- 12/ Love always protects
- 13/ Love always trusts
- 14/ Love always hopes
- 15/ Love always perseveres

There are a total of 15 characteristics of this agape-love that the Apostle Paul describes to us.

Today I would like to speak on the supremacy of Love. We will be looking at 1 Corinthians 13:8-13.

Intro

Paul begins 1 Corinthians chapter 13 by declaring that we might have all sorts of wonderful spiritual gifts, but if we do not love, our lives are worthless.

- Without love, we show nothing about God to the world around us.
- Without love, we provide nothing of value to the people around us.
- Without love, we gain nothing for God's kingdom and glory.

In the verses we have dealt with the last 3 Sundays Paul describes what a life of love is all about. But before we finish this chapter, the Holy Spirit through Paul emphasizes the great importance of love. The basic message is this: **gifts serve today, but love serves today and forever - eternity.**

Verse 8 *“Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.”*

Gifts serve today. God gives spiritual gifts to Christians. Spiritual gifts are God-given abilities through the Holy Spirit to build the church by doing God's work.

In these verses, Paul returns to certain gifts he mentioned earlier in 1 Corinthians 12, the previous chapter.

One gift is **prophecy**. Prophecy is the ability to proclaim God's truth to God's people.

Another is **tongues**. Tongues are the God-given ability to speak in another language, without ever having learned that language.

Another is **knowledge**. Knowledge is receiving God's truth directly from God.

But these gifts will pass away because we will not need them in heaven. But love will continue, regardless here on earth or in heaven.

Verses 9-10 *“For we know in part and we prophecy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect [or partial] disappears.”*

The best we could know through the prophetic gift and the gift of knowledge was only partial, only a part of what could be known. The Bible that we have is all that the Lord has given to us here on earth, but there is more waiting for us in heaven.

Therefore, when the perfect comes – *example*, when we die and go to be with the Lord, or when Christ comes again to take us up to glory, then our knowledge will be perfected.

In heaven God will open our eyes and understanding even more because we will behold Him face to face. When our knowledge will be perfected it doesn't mean that we will have perfect knowledge of everything. But we will have full sight of the things we can only see imperfectly here on earth.

Verses 11 *“When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.”*

Because we see imperfectly here on earth, it's like the maturing of a child into adulthood. When we were children, there was only so much we could know, so much we could understand. There were many things going on in the world that we didn't have any idea as to their importance.

But when we grew up, we did understand and comprehend better. When we pass from this life into the life to come, it will be the same way. We will pass from the *reasonings* that will seem like those of a child, to those of an adult. We will no longer have need for the incomplete understanding we had here on earth, because we will have a more complete understanding in heaven.

Verses 12 *“Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face.”*

The Bible tells us about God and Christ. We see them only imperfectly here, as Paul says, “In a mirror dimly,” only knowing in part. But then we shall see Him “face to face.” Our knowledge of God will be much clearer.

Verse 13 *“And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”*

Not only will the spiritual gifts pass away, so will the other ordinary works of the Spirit when perfection comes.

1/ Faith will pass away.

The author to the Hebrews writes, “*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen*” (Heb. 11:1). But when faith becomes sight, then faith will not be necessarily needed.

Example: Remember when your parents promised you that they would get you a special gift you wanted for your birthday, and you believed what they said and counted on that gift. But once your birthday came, and they gave you that gift, you no longer needed to believe they were going to give it to you, because it was already yours.

In the same way, when what we believe is coming, comes, we will no longer need to look forward to it by faith.

2/ The same thing is true of hope.

In Romans 8:24 Paul writes, “*For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one also hope for what he sees?*”

When we are in heaven, everything we have hoped for will be ours. If that is the case, what is there left to hope for? This is another reason why Paul writes, *“But now abide faith, hope, love, these three remain, but the greatest of these is love”* (verse 13).

It’s not only because love is the tree from which the fruits of faith and hope grow. It’s also because when faith and hope are no longer needed, love will continue.

Though all of the other gifts and works of the Spirit will come to an end, God’s love will never come to an end, nor our love for Him and for one another.

The love that Christ puts in our hearts will also be there forever. This love will continue in the church as long as it is on earth, and it will continue in the church throughout all eternity. Even though when we die we will leave behind all the other gifts of the Spirit with our bodies, this is one thing we will not leave behind, but will continue to have in heaven – love, love perfected!

Paul writes, *“For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the **love of God**, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Rom. 8:38-39) AMEN!

Without love we lose the desire to live, I mean really live! Agape-love is the highest virtue of all virtues. It is powerful and the Lord commands us to love as He loves (John 15:12-13).

Love is the “glue” that holds us together as believers. Paul’s long list of characteristics of what love is and isn’t reminds us that he wasn’t talking about romantic or friendship love, but serving and sacrificial love. Love that puts the other person’s needs ahead of our own. The gift of love is the greatest gift, because when we exercise it others see Jesus in us. They see the self-sacrificing, goodness that Jesus alone exhibits in our lives. Nothing draws people more to Christ than experiencing that love from a believer. Let’s go out of this place and share that love!