

1 CORINTHIANS 13

Intro.

1. William Barclay wrote, “For many, this is the most wonderful chapter in the New Testament.
 2. J. W. McGarvey wrote, “It has been admired by all ages, but, unfortunately, practiced by none”.
 3. Just think if the contents of this great Bible chapter were put into practice throughout society.
 - a. There would be an end to all wars.
 - b. There would be an end to all terrorism.
 - c. There would be an end to all of the social ills we see in the news every day.
 4. Just think if the contents of this chapter were put into practice in the church.
 - a. There would be an end to division.
 - b. There would be an end to church politics.
 - c. There would be a much greater attraction to the church by those who are outside of Christ and we would be much more effective in our evangelistic efforts.
 5. This, of course, is the great chapter on love.
 6. However, we can’t forget its context.
 - a. Paul just didn’t break out extolling the virtues of love.
 - b. This is in the middle of a discussion about miraculous gifts, set in a letter to a congregation that was having problems with division.
 7. Throughout the discussion of love, the brethren would be brought back to a reminder that they needed to be one and that miraculous gifts, though necessary and needful, were not the source of their becoming one.
 8. What we want to do in this sermon is see what the apostle wrote, by inspiration, to a divided congregation, split over the miraculous gifts present in their day, and see how love would be, and still is, the unifying force.
- I. The purpose of love (1 Cor. 13:1-3).**
- a. Paul finished the point he was making, recorded in chapter 12, about the oneness of the body and the necessity of all gifts, by saying there was a greater way of living as a Christian.
 - b. The purpose of living the way of love is that it makes one godly.
 - i. God is love (1 John 4:8).
 - ii. We are called to love like God loves (1 John 4:16).
 - iii. Love is shown to God by keeping His commandments (1 John 5:3).
 - c. When a Christian is living the agape love life God wants us to live, we are as godly as we can ever be.
 - d. Paul points out that if we could speak every language known to man, or even like the angels, but not possess love, we would be useless.
 - i. The phrase sounding brass is translated “noisy gong” in other translations and tinkling cymbal is translated “clanging cymbal”.

- ii. Both gongs and cymbals were used in the idolatrous practices so common in Corinth.
- iii. It seems that Paul was saying that the worship you are offering while fighting with one another about speaking in tongues is equal to idol worship in the eyes of God.
- iv. All of it is noisy and useless to God.
- e. Paul then turns to other miraculous abilities and says that if you could perform them and know things miraculously, you would be nothing.
 - i. Could you imagine being able to move a mountain into the sea, as Jesus said could be done, but be nothing?
 - ii. The word nothing indicates to be of no account or worthless.
 - iii. David Lipscomb pointed to Judas Iscariot as a man who fit this passage.
- f. Paul then turned from miraculous works to being sacrificial without love.
 - i. What would we think of someone who gave everything he had in order for the poor to be fed?
 - ii. What would we think of someone who gave his life for the cause of Christ?
 - iii. If it was done without love for their brethren and God, it would be worthless effort.
- g. Love shows us to be like God as much as is humanly possible.
- h. Love is the badge of discipleship that sets us apart from the world (John 13:34-35).
- i. Effort given without love is useless, worthless effort.

II. The performance of love (1 Cor. 13:4-7).

- a. How do we know when someone is truly loving?
- b. Love is part of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23).
- c. Like other things, love is shown in our actions and Paul points this out.
- d. Paul points out numerous attributes of love – some positive and some negative.
- e. We will join these together in groups to show what love is capable of doing:
 - i. Love helps us live in peace with other.
 - 1. It suffers long or is long in coming to anger – love doesn't allow us to fly off hot.
 - 2. It is kind – the only time this particular Greek word is used and it carries the idea of being gentle towards others, showing oneself to be mild in disposition.
 - 3. It does not envy – instead of seeking revenge but responds with kindness (Romans 12:17-21).
 - ii. Love removes vanity.
 - 1. It does not vaunt itself – love refuses to brag about itself.
 - 2. It is not puffed up – love won't let us swell up like a toad trying to bring attention to ourselves.
 - iii. Love helps us be better people.
 - 1. It does not behave itself unseemly – which means moral deformity.
 - 2. It seeks not its own – it doesn't demand its rights.

- iv. Love helps us control our feelings.
 1. It isn't easily provoked – isn't easily stirred to anger.
 2. It doesn't think evil – this doesn't mean one is naïve, but it does mean that we don't go straight to thinking the worst about someone, but instead thinks the best until proven otherwise.
 3. One writer said these mean we don't act like an accountant and record the mistakes of those we love.
- v. Love helps deepen our convictions that are based on God's word.
 1. It rejoices not in unrighteousness but does rejoice in the truth.
 2. God's word is truth, so those things that are good and right with God bring joy and those that aren't bring sadness.
- vi. Love helps us to reach out to others.
 1. It bears all things – protects or hides the faults of others.
 2. It believes all things – it believes the best about others.
 3. It hopes all things – wanting the best and refusing to jump to conclusions.
 4. It endures all things – it will cause us to take whatever is given us and make something much more beautiful out of it.

III. The permanence of love (1 Cor. 13:8-13).

- a. Paul contrasts the permanence of love with the limited duration of miraculous gifts.
 - i. Paul said that love would never perish or fail.
 - ii. However, the gifts would all fail, cease, or vanish.
 1. Each of those indicated the temporary nature of the miraculous gifts.
 2. They were never meant to last forever but love would, thus it is the more excellent way.
- b. Love would and will always hold a place of prominence in the life of a Christian.
- c. There are at least five different ideas about what that which is perfect is.
 - i. However, if we let the passage itself dictate the meaning, it is easy to see.
 - ii. Paul said that prophecy and knowledge were parts of something.
 - iii. Of what would they be parts?
 - iv. It has to be God's word.
 - v. That which is perfect is the completed revelation of God's will in written form.
- d. When that was finally brought to fruition, the miraculous would and did cease, but love would still continue to remain a vital part of the life of a Christian.
- e. The miraculous life was compared to the maturing of a child into an adult or looking into a mirror as opposed to looking face to face.
- f. As great as faith and hope are in the life of a Christian, love is the greatest.
 - i. There is great debate as to why love is said to be preeminent.
 - ii. The best answer to me is that love is more influential on others.
 1. Faith and hope are more internal.
 2. Love is shown to others, thus having a greater impact on the lives of those around us.
- g. Each has a part in saving us, but love for others helps save them as well.

Conclusion

1. In some form the word love appears around 500 times in the Bible, split nearly evenly between Old and New Testaments.
2. Love is the badge of discipleship of Jesus.
3. It is vital to the life of a Christian because of the way it causes us to treat others.
4. Our love for God first and others second will lead those others to God.
5. Just think if we all practiced this chapter in every aspect of our lives!
6. Think of the impact it would have on the church and then the world.
7. God loved man enough to send His Son for us.
8. Jesus loved man enough to die for us.
9. We must love God enough to die to self and live for Him.
10. When we do this, we will live for others.
11. Is that how you are living your life tonight?

Much of the material in this sermon came from an article by Dan Winkler