

**The Rock: 10-31-2021****The Gifts series**

**First reading:** Hebrews 11:1-3

**Title:** Love never ends

**Scripture:** 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 (black bible Pg. 902)

**Theme:**

The gifts are given to the Church in order that we bring glory to God and edify one another. In all that they are, they empower us to be active participants, not passive observers in God's plan for the church and the lost world.

**Introduction:**

When we open up the Bible to understand God's plan for us as His children, the overarching key to Christian living, the primary driver of His plan, we learned is Love.

By way of reminder from last week, His love for us. His command to love one another. His command that we love even our enemies all come to mind as we read His word:

**-John 3:16 (ESV)**

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

**-Matthew 5:44b-45a (ESV)**

"Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven."

**-John 13:34-35 (ESV)**

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

If we pursue love first, then look for the gifts, we will be seeking them in the proper way. To desire them simply to say 'I have this gift or gifts', as though that somehow sets us apart is a self-seeking, puffed up way of being.

To know something just to know it, it seems to me to be incomplete. Paul tells us that knowledge puffs up, but love does what? It builds up.

It edifies the church and glorifies God. That is why Paul wraps chapters 12 and 14 around this powerful passage on the ways of love.

**The Story:**

Paul was not looking to write a holiday hallmark card and movie playing on our emotions and feelings. Trying to elicit some emotion out of Ebenezer Scrooge.

Rather he wants us to remember that each of us has a gifting, a purpose in life, within this church community and family. Remember 12:27:

**-1 Corinthians 12:27 (ESV)**

"Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it."

Tim Keller is very good at reminding us that the gospel itself brings us together as a people (the body) but it never takes away our uniqueness as individual people.

You see, the body of Christ does not mean we become part of some conglomeration that looks like the Borg from Star Trek, part of some bizarre collective forcing us to lose our individuality. That is a doctrine of this world and culture, but it is also a lie of the enemy.

To follow this Jesus, many believe losing out on all the fun stuff, all the good things that make us happy. Following Jesus means we really can't be ourselves.

Yet, the truth of the Bible tells us that it is just the opposite. In Christ, exercising the gifts which God gives by His Holy Spirit, you are, in fact, more yourself, more truly human than you could ever be elsewhere.

And being part of the (a) community of believers enhances those gifts, as you use them to His glory and in whatever way possible, making the world you live in a better place until Jesus comes back.

Chapter 13:1-7 is used most often at weddings -I'm guilty of it myself. While it is not wrong, we need to know it is not intended to be a wedding text. This text circles around behavioral patterns!

Paul is writing to address and to correct unloving behavior, and a poor understanding of some core principles that ought to govern the gathering together of the community of believers.

Having walked us through what love is and isn't, we land at verse 8 and I kind of wish he went right from verse 8 to 13 - because what is in between had become the subject of debate and helped create more than one point of view about whether the gifts are for today or not.

That's not our purpose, at least not today, so we will go at these verses

under the notion and with the belief that the gifts are as much for today as they were for then. Alright?

Because, what Paul is doing here for us, through this letter, is setting the gifts within their purposeful context. (Their eschatological context) IE: The here and now.

We can't really tackle this text as if Paul were minimizing the gifts or teaching that they are not for today (the future in his context).

This, as Matt Chandler says, cannot mean for us what it didn't mean for them. We have to understand how they would understand what Paul was writing. How they would have understood it in their direct context and situation.

He is actually defining for us their timely intent -from the eschatological view. In other words, they are for the present "in between" time, until Jesus returns.

We are in the in between -The first advent (Christmas) and the second advent (His return / Second coming).

The gifts then, are a signpost for us all these years on, pointing us toward perfection, meant to build us up and to edify the Church.

Paul, remember, is responding to a letter from the church, and in that letter were questions and comments on Church life, marriage, gifts, the Lord's supper and how to discern the Spirit.

We know this because of how he writes. I leave it to you for homework to look up, 5:1, 6:1-2, 7:1, 25, 8:1 and so on. All show Paul addressing specific things.

So, it's good to remember the context here as he seeks to define the gifts and their appropriate uses and place within the local body.

He emphasizes at the beginning of verse 8 the universal principle that Love never ends. It will always endure as the eternal truth.

In contrast, he makes clear that the gifts have a finite purpose -on the timeline of history and the end of all things:

**-1 Corinthians 13:8-10 (ESV)**

"Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away."

Prophecies, while purposeful now serve to point us toward the one about whom all prophetic utterances reveal. They also point us away from ourselves and toward Christ.

Why? Because in doing so we see Him as King and Lord and the Church, in that, is built up.

Tongues as well will cease. The angelic language of prayer, as well as the corporate use of tongues with interpretation for the building up of the Church, will no longer be needed then.

Paul tackles prophecy, tongues and knowledge here as the primary modes of God's building up of the Church - especially here in Corinth.

These gifts help us, in part now, to understand what, in the end (eschatological) will be fully known and revealed.

Paul continues with his analogies of the new and not quite yet by using something we ought all to be familiar with. Being a child:

**-1 Corinthians 13:11 (ESV)**

"When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned

like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways."

What Paul is not saying is that to chase after these gifts is childish, and really what you need is to be shooting for spiritual maturity.

You need the meat of the word -just study of doctrine and the word, not this childish chasing after these gifts, as if they serve some sort of purpose for "mature Christians".

Well, they do actually, and that's what Paul is trying to get across.

We need both heart and head functioning. You see, you can have all the head knowledge in the world and still not have a softened heart (Spiritual side) to understand the tender love of God.

We need both. A good deep understanding of God's word that brings us to maturity, as well as a loving, tender heart that helps us to understand how to apply what we know.

That's wisdom, and the gifts lead us into that. It is one thing to know that a tomato is actually a fruit. It is an entirely different thing to know that you don't put it in your fruit salad with watermelon, grapes and pineapple.

This section is as much about proper perspective and wise application as it is about growing in maturity.

The gifts are good and necessary in this "age to come", as we learned on Pentecost Sunday.

We live in the in-between, don't we? The now and the not yet -where Jesus has ascended and the Holy Spirit has been poured out in order that we can live as God always intended us to -until He returns.

Therefore, we need the gifts. It's like there are certain things children need, and do, that adults don't. Or at least they shouldn't.

They are childish things, and perfectly fine and acceptable, and expected from a child. But, just as a parent guides, teaches, encourages, edifies even, the child, they begin to grow up into adulthood.

Hopefully leaving behind them all of their childish ways. As God's children living in this now and not yet, these gifts are given to us for just such purposes.

Paul opens this letter to the Corinthians telling them:

**-1 Corinthians 1:4-7 (ESV)**

"I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge— even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you— so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ..."

He said again at the start of chapter 12:

**-1 Corinthians 12:1 (ESV)**

"Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed."

The gifts are to encourage, to open a window into the heart of God for His people and His world.

Well, what about having just the Word? How about all the abuses and weirdo things that people do and say? How do you know it's the Holy Spirit? What gives you the right to decide?

Good questions, all of them. So, a few points here and then we close.

**1-The Word (The Bible) for a start -we do need it!**

Core values number one: The Bible is my guidebook for living. Paul goes to great lengths to map out some good guidelines:

The gifts are given to: Glorify God, to edify the body. IF what is happening doesn't line up with those principles, we are stepping outside the bounds. They must line up with the written and revealed word of God.

## **2-The pastor's responsibility.**

Part of the pastor's job is the opening up of and unpacking of the Word of God and the truths contained there.

That doesn't mean that as a priesthood of believers -only the pastor has the ear and mind of God. What it does mean, is that the pastor has been set apart and called to preach and teach, as Paul was, is responsible, to the best of their ability to teach rightly:

### **-1 Timothy 5:17-18 (ESV)**

"Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer deserves his wages."

### **-2 Timothy 4:2 (ESV)**

"...preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching."

**-2 Timothy 4:5 (ESV)**

"As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry."

That doesn't mean you are excused your personal responsibility to study, read, research the things I say to make sure what I am saying is actually in this book.

I do my best because the pastor is responsible before God for not only what I teach, but for those to whom it is taught. It's why prayer for your pastor(s) and all pastors is essential.

**3-Never judge a system by its abuses.**

That's clear enough. You see, Paul has every desire that they know, that they are equipped and living out the life of Christ in a way that glorifies God.

When Jesus comes, He will clear everything up, and the fog will be lifted:

**-1 Corinthians 13:12 (ESV)**

"For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known."

We will see Jesus face to face, and all of our questions will be answered. How? I don't know, it's a bit unclear at the moment, but then...well, it won't be unclear.

The gifts help us get there. But you see, once we are there, we won't need them anymore. But we aren't there yet:

**-1 Corinthians 13:13 (ESV)**

"So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love."

Love remains eternal. Why? Well, faith is the substance of things hoped for as the writer to the Hebrews tells us:

**-Hebrews 11:1 (ESV)**

"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

We weren't there when Jesus rose, and ascended. But the gifts give substance - yes? They point the way to Him. We believe then based on the evidence -our hope isn't based in nothing!

Then -our faith will be fact, and our hope will be fulfilled. Why? Because the fog will be lifted and we will see Jesus.

Love however, continues as the eternal fruit of the Spirit, as it were.

Love never fails. When the substance of our faith and our hope stands right in front of us, what have we left but the love we have for our savior and King.

It's why love remains and why it is the greatest.