

**“The Greatest of These...” I Corinthians 13 (DBR) Pleasant Plains 9-27-2015PM NICK ANGEL**

- **\*Read I Corinthians 13\*** In the midst of a deep letter to the church in Corinth, the Apostle Paul includes this great message about the subject of love. We come to understand the reason for doing so by looking at the surrounding chapters. The Corinthian brethren certainly had some serious issues, and we see them all throughout this letter from Paul. They had a divisive and sectarian attitude in the first couple chapters. They were not keeping the church pure from sin in chapters 5 & 6. In chapter 11 they were abusing the Lord's Supper. In the current context, they were using their gifts as badges to elevate some and put down others in this current context. And then later on Paul had to deal with misunderstandings of baptism and the resurrection. Paul puts great effort into doing his best to correct their actions and misunderstandings, and **chapter 13** is just another effort to correct their misunderstandings of their spiritual gifts.
- You might be asking, “well what does love have to do with spiritual gifts?” The answer to that question is found in the segue from chapter 12 into chapter 13. Of course, Paul and the other inspired writers did not write with chapters and verses, but the translators have inserted them to make it easier for us to find specific portions of text. Sometimes they do a good job of the chapter breaks and such, but sometimes they don't. thankfully, I think they did a good job here because Paul is transition from this discussion on the church, its members, and their gifts into a discussion on what is even far more important than those gifts. Here we find ourselves in **I Corinthians 13** as Paul talks about that “more excellent way” (**I Cor. 12:31**) of love. His final point that we will be building up to is that love is the greatest of all these things so lets consider the greatest of these things.... which is love from **I Corinthians 13**.

**I. Without love, great deeds are useless. (vv.1-3)**

- A. The Corinthians were boasting of their ability to do great things, but Paul impresses upon them with hyperbolic statements the fact that great works are nothing if love isn't present. He uses himself as the subject of the illustrations.
  1. He could speak not just with tongues of men, but also of angels, however it does no good if he didn't have love. He would just sound like a noisy gong or clanging cymbal.
  2. He might be the greatest prophet in the world, able to reveal all sorts of amazing things, and even able to move mountains with his faith, but if he didn't have love then he would be nothing.
  3. He might even give up all that he had for the poor and give his literally body to burn for God, but if he didn't have love then it would do him no good.
  4. These are exaggerated and drastic examples, but Paul is using that type of language to get his point across.
- B. This should get us to realize that love **MUST** be the motivating factor in all that we do for the Lord. Our love for God **MUST** be present for Him to be pleased.
  1. You might consider the Pharisees and Scribes in this discussion. They were certainly a people who did many things in the name of God. They were even described as white tombs in **Matt. 23**, but we know that Jesus was rebuking them for their hypocrisy.
  2. They did many great things “in the name of the Lord”, but their motivations were selfish and they were not focused on God.
  3. Likewise, the Corinthians were puffed up and glorifying in themselves instead of glorifying God through their gifts. God was not, nor should He be pleased with such.
  4. We can easily get to a place where we are doing what we do in our faith simply out of habit or obligation and not because we love the Lord. Jesus didn't say to just keep His commands. No, He said that the one who loves Him should keep His commandments. (**John 14:15**)
  5. Our Lord is not pleased with us if we act with no heart of love for Him. Even if we gave our lives for Him, like Paul said, if we did it for any other reason than love for God, it would be useless.
  6. Love is greatest and we must love God and allow it to be the motivation for all that we do.

## **II. Love must be shown, not just spoken. (vv.4-7)**

- A. Too many believe that expressing love through words is enough for anyone, much less God to be satisfied, but Paul makes it abundantly clear that the one who loves must show his love through his actions towards God and others.
  - 1. These characteristics were all first found in Christ. We are to imitate Him just as the Apostle Paul, himself, imitated Him. **(I Corinthians 11:1)**
  - 2. The love of Christ and our God is expressed to use through each and everyone of these attributes.
  - 3. God is patient, God is kind, He is not jealous (unrighteously, but instead there is godly jealousy **II Cor. 11:3-4**, which simply is a great passion for others), He does not brag and He is not arrogant. On and on in these verses we could insert God or our Lord and the sentence would be just as true.
  - 4. Our God does not ask more of us than He Himself has done or is willing to do.
- B. Our God is to be able to put our names in the place of 'love' and the sentence be just as true as it was before.
  - 1. Can it be said about us that we are patient? Can it be said that we are kind? And so on and so on?
  - 2. Can I look in the mirror and say that "Nick is patient. Nick is kind. Nick is not jealous. Nick does not brag. Nick is not arrogant." Can I say those things and the sentences be true?
  - 3. That might sound a little silly, but the point is serious. If we want to love as Jesus loves. If we want to love as God loves. If we want to love as Paul loved, Then we need to be able to have those things all said of us and they be true.
  - 4. Our love must be displayed in our actions, not just in our words. Words are easy to say, but our actions show the true intents of our heart. Our love for others ought to be greatest and it should show.

## **III. Love will never fail. (vv.8-13)**

- A. Paul concludes this section by showing flaws in the things that the Corinthians were boasting in.
  - 1. They boasted in their gifts of prophecy, tongues, and knowledge. They acted as if these things would be theirs forever and they could continue to lean upon them.
  - 2. However, that just wasn't the case at all. Paul makes the point that these things would only last for a time and then they would be gone. This knowledge and prophecy would only get them so far. **(v.8,9)**
  - 3. Once God's complete revelation was given to man, then those things would no longer be necessary. **(v.10)**
  - 4. As a immature person, Paul said that he dealt in immature things, but as an adult he would put away those childish things, alluding to the spiritual gifts. **(v.11)**
  - 5. They only knew part of God's revelation as if looking into a dimly lit mirror, but there was coming a time when everything would be revealed and they would fully know God's will. **(v.12)**
- B. We have God's completed Will, so no miraculous gifts are necessary. However, we must continue to have love for God and others because that will endure forever, even into eternal life. **(v.13)**
  - 1. Once we get to heaven, faith and hope will be fulfilled and realized, but our love for God and others will continue on.
  - 2. We cannot expect to glorify God in this life without have a true founded love for Him and His Will for us. That isn't logical and we can't expect God to be pleased with that.
  - 3. It is easy for us to sometimes forget about the importance of love, but we must truly love God as Paul did. We must be fully invested in growing our love for God and others.
  - 4. We must not become distracted by other things to the point where we do not remember why it is that we do what we do. We do it because we love God, and that love will be shown in what we do for Him in this life. Our love ought to be greatest.

Love....It truly is the greatest. It matters more than anything else. We cannot say that we love God without doing His will and we can't faithfully do His will without truly loving Him and having that as our motivation. Miraculous gifts were pretty cool, and the Corinthians took great pride in them. However, Paul wanted to show them the more excellent way and that way was the way of love. May we come to understand the more excellent way of love as well. May God help us to love just as He loves, and we glorify Him because of our greatest love for Him.