

- ***READ I Corinthians 12:27-31*** We have observed in previous lessons on Paul's letters to the Corinthians that there were a number of problems present within the church in Corinth. They had problems with creating divisions amongst themselves. They struggled with immaturity and relying upon human wisdom. They were allowing sin to be present and unabated within their number, and the list could go on and on until we arrive in chapters 12-14 of this first letter.
- Within these chapters, Paul is having to address issues that centered around the use of miraculous spiritual gifts within this church. This is made abundantly clear in **12:1** where Paul plainly notes his addressing of spiritual gifts. *"Now concerning spiritual gifts: brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be unaware."* What was he wanting them to be aware of? The issue seem to be that these brethren were using their spiritual gifts as a means of boasting. This seems probable based upon what Paul says in **12:4-11**. His main point in this section is to emphasize that God and His Spirit are the source of each of their individual gifts, and therefore they shouldn't behave as if some were better than others. *"One and the same Spirit is active in all these, distributing to each person as He wills."* (**12:11**)
- The Apostle then goes on to illustrate the necessity of each of the gifts that God distributes by using the example of how a human body operates. Just as there are many different parts to the human body that function in different yet equally important ways, so are there many different members within a church that function in many different by equally important ways. (**12:12-26**)
- We read the application of Paul's example beginning in **v.27**, and we also read Paul's advice on what these brethren ought to be focusing their attention and efforts upon which are those things that can do the most good for the church, but he then introduces a thought that will carry over into the following chapter. This thought centers around what they ought to be focusing their minds upon above all else whether or not they have one of the "greater" gifts. The CSB renders this thought as, *"I will show you an even better way"* which is accurate to the thought Paul is introducing, but the NASB puts Paul's thoughts in a much more distinguished way. The even better way is described as *"a still more excellent way."* What is this still more excellent way? It is the way of love.
- This morning, we are going to focus our time of study upon this text that shows something that every single person ought to strive for regardless of what we are doing within our faith. This year we have focused on being excellent as disciples, in our Bible reading, in our marriages, as parents, as we strive to be holy, and in many other ways. All of these studies have been worthwhile for us, but this study this morning will be crucial to everything we do in every other area of our lives. We're going to see that our failure to be a people of love will cause for every other effort we make to null and void. Missing love will cause us to be missing the crucial element to everything that we do. These are pretty serious claims to make concerning the demand for love within our lives, so let's get into the text to show just how important love is. Let's consider some important characteristics of the more excellent way of love from **I Corinthians 13**.

The More Excellent Way Of Live Is:

I. Valuable (vv.1-3)

A. Paul begins by showing the results of not having love as the motivation for what we do in our faiths.

1. These three verses present three different instances in which incredible deeds are seen as nothing before God if they are not done from a heart of love.

- a) Someone could miraculously speak in a human language in order to preach and teach or they could go so far as to even speak in an otherworldly language...but it wouldn't be any different before God than if that person was hitting a gong or clanging together cymbals. Any ability we might be blessed with is nothing without love.

- b) Someone else could have the gift of prophecy, could understand all of the mysteries of God, and could have all knowledge of things pertaining to God, and that that person could even have a faith that can move mountains...and yet if those things don't come from a foundation of love then they are nothing before God. No amount or level of knowledge or faith will mean anything before God if it is not accompanied by love.
 - c) Finally, if someone was willing to serve others by giving away all of his or her possessions, and if that person went to the ultimate degree to give up his or her body for the Lord, but did it all without love...well...even that person would gain nothing before God. Therefore, we must understand that no act of service will stand before God if there is no love involved.
2. It is almost stunning to read such words from Paul and recognize the truths that are found within them, but I'd like to point out something that adds even more weight to these verses. I framed these verses in the context of just any person, but let's recognize that Paul wrote these verses from his own perspective. This means that Paul understood that even if he, a chosen Apostle of Christ, failed to be motivated by love...he would be nothing in the sight of God. We don't have any account of Paul speaking in tongues, but he was someone who had the gift of prophecy and had knowledge concerning the greatest mystery that was the Gospel, and he would go on to eventually give his life for the the cause of Christ...and yet he says that none of this would matter if he did not have love. If this is true for Paul, then how much more true is this going to be for us? Paul's point is clear...love must be our motivation for everything we do before the Lord! But what is it that makes love so valuable?

B. Love is so valuable in these situations because it shows that it isn't all about us.

- 1. When it comes to the speaking in unknown languages...are the languages being spoken to show off or for the benefit of others now having a better knowledge of God and His will? When it comes to the the knowledge that we have, the same questions apply. Are we sharing this knowledge as a means of, *"Look at what I know!"* or are we doing it for the benefit of others in their ability to serve God to a greater degree? When it comes to our service to God and others...are we doing it to look good before God and others, or are we simply trying to to be servants to God because of our love for Him and to others because we love them and want what is best for them?
- 2. We must embrace the fact that our actions are a reflection of who we are, but they also be a guise that hides what is truly within our hearts. Judas Iscariot was a man, who on the outside, seemed to be a part of Jesus's Apostles just like the rest, but his heart was overflowing with greed. Ananias and Sapphira looked to be generous people on the outside for the gift they laid at the Apostles' feet for the poor, but they were struck dead because they were doing such a thing only to look good to others. Our actions and our hearts must be in sync if we want to live in such a way that God truly values what we offer up before Him. If we will be committed to love in everything that we do, then everything we do will have immense value.

II. Virtuous (vv.4-8)

A. Paul continues by showing the virtuous nature of love.

- 1. What about other aspects of our lives? It is one thing to do things out of love for God and others in a religious context, but what about how we live from day to day? How can love help for us to be excellent day in and out day? It does so by being the virtuous way of living life. By virtuous, I mean that it is the way of living life that shows one possesses high more standards. This seems to be the idea behind what is found in **II Peter 1:5** with what it means to add to our faiths goodness or virtue. We are to be people a good and virtuous people.

2. So what does this look like? I believe this is a question that Paul answers in **vv.4-7**, and he does so from a positive and negative perspective. There are some things that love will cause us to do, and there are some things that love simply will not allow us to do. These are the characteristics of the person who lives in the better and excellent way of love.
 - a) Love does not envy, is not boastful, is not arrogant, is not rude, is not self-seeking, is not irritable, and does not keep a record of wrongs.
 - b) Love is patient, is kind, finds no joy in unrighteousness but rejoices in the truth, it bears all things, it believes all things, it hopes all things, and it endures all things.
- B. **The Corinthians would have quickly recognized that many among them were failing to live up to this level of a virtuous lifestyle.**
 1. All of these characteristics of love could be looked at in depth, and I would encourage you to think upon each of these characteristics on an individual level, but for now...simply consider that these negative characteristics all center around being a person that is not selfish or self-centered. Think about it...those people who envy others believe others have what they ought to have. Boastful and arrogant people think they are better than others. People who are rude don't care for the feelings of others. Self-seeking people are willing to do whatever it takes to get their way. Irritable people have no patience, and those who keep wrongs are people who are simply waiting to get the revenge that they deserve!
 2. Further, consider that these positive qualities can all be found within people who seek to put others before themselves. They are people who are patient with others and their shortcomings. They are people who are simply kind because they genuinely care for others. They are people who only want for others to hold tightly to the truths of this world. They are people who bear, believe, hope, and endure throughout the many different circumstances they find themselves in...even circumstances that might be negative for themselves. These are the types of qualities that show the inner virtue of God's people, and they will only be present if we are a people who are founded in love.
 3. Think for a moment about what was taking place within the church in Corinth? People were seeking to show themselves as more important than those around them based upon the abilities that had been granted to them. Do we doubt for a second that there was selfish and self-centered attitudes? Surely there was much envying, boasting, arrogance, rudeness, irritability, and remembering of wrongs. Is there any doubt that there was a lack of patience, kindness, hoping, and enduring in every situation? Before these people worried about their use of gifts...they first needed to embrace the greater and more excellent way of virtuous love. The same truths remain for us. If we want to do anything of note to the glory of God then we must be a people who embrace love and allow for its virtuous benefits to be present within our lives.

III. Victorious (vv.8-13)

- A. **Paul begins to conclude these thoughts by showing that love supersedes the very things over which these brethren had been fighting and feeding amongst themselves. (vv.8-10)**
 1. Finally, Paul concludes these thoughts on love by recognizing that love never ends or fails. It is that which has had the victory, is victorious, and will be victorious, and we can experience that victory if we embrace love above all else.
 2. Paul really drives the overwhelming need for love home at this as he addresses those things that the Corinthians had been leaning upon. They had been leaning upon their abilities with speaking in tongues, possessing knowledge, and prophesying, but Paul plainly tells them that those things are all only done "*in part*." This means that these things are not enduring forever. This isn't to say they aren't beneficial, but it is to say that they have a limited necessity.

3. Paul states that there will be a time when that which is “perfect” will come, and it will cause those things which are partial or in part to come to an end because they will no longer be necessary. Paul’s argument simply asserts that these miraculous spiritual gifts that were given to impart the truth of God and His Will would no longer be needed one day because the full revelation of God would be given. There would come a time when God’s Word would be once and for all delivered to the saints (**Jude 3**), and there would no longer be any further need for miraculous revelation because all people would be able to go to God’s Word for everything pertaining to teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness.

(II Timothy 3:16) But even once that time had come...love would still be needed because it is valuable, virtuous, and that which gives the ultimate victory. This is the first layer of what it means for the perfect to come and how it relates to the victory of love.

B. However, I think there is another layer that Paul is alluding to in this text that pertains to our perfection in the next life. (vv.10-13)

1. On the front side of the statement, Paul hits on the ending of these spiritual gifts, but on the back side he then hits on the ending of the limitations to our faith and hope in God once we get beyond this life. We recognize that our faith and hope are founded upon our knowledge of God through His Word, but there are so many things about God that we simply don’t know or don’t know fully because of the limitations of our own ability to comprehend. Yet, Paul seems to speak to the fact that there will be a time when those limitations will be gone.
2. Paul speaks of this being the case already to some degree in this life based upon his own growth in knowledge and therefore faith and love. At one point he spoke and thought like a child, but as he matured he put away childish things. He reached a point where he was able to know more and therefore be more. In the same way, Paul states that *“for now we see only a reflection as in a mirror...”* Right now we are only able to see Jesus through the *“mirror”* of Scripture and therefore faith and hope are needed. However, there will be a time in the future when we will then see Him face to face. Right now we know Jesus in part through the mirror of Scripture, but on that day when we are in His presence we will see Him and know Him fully. That will be the perfect and complete day when we will no longer need faith and hope. Only love will remain, and we will be victorious with it!
3. So whether we are talking primarily in the context of these brethren in Corinth and their spiritual gifts or secondarily and more profoundly of our own lives with our hope and our faith and what comes in the next life...love trumps them all! The revelation came in fullness and those individualistic spiritual gifts were no longer necessary, and one day we will stand before Jesus face to face when faith and hope will no longer be necessary. The commonality between these two circumstances is that love will still remain and be victorious.

Value, virtue, and victory. Any efforts that we put forth in our faiths will sure be bettered with these three being present, but we must recognize that they will only be present if love accompanies them. It is good for us to strive to be good disciples, mothers, fathers, children, and so forth...but any efforts we put forth that are motivated by anything other than love will surely leave us floundering in the end. May we recognize that the greater and more excellent way to serve God is done through the lenses of love, and may we establish it as our foundation and motivation. In the end...love is all that will remain. Will we be there empty-handed? Or will we see Jesus face to face with hearts full of love for our Lord and Savior who first loved us and gave Himself for us so that we might live with Him for eternity? His way is the way of love. Will it be ours, as well?