

Title" The Greatness of Love (Part 4)

Text: I Corinthians 13:8-13

(The Imperishable Quality of Love)

The key verse to this wonderful 13th chapter of I Corinthians is really Vs 31 of chapter 12. It says, "and I show you a more excellent way". Then Paul goes on and records chapter 13. The "way" to live the christian life is the way of "love".

Now, we have learned so far that the way of love is necessary for all Christian ministry. That is chapter 13 verses 1 to 3,. If you don't have it you are like a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. It says that you are nothing if you don't have it.

We also learned that ^{the way of} love is different from natural human behaviour. That was verses 4 thru 7. Here we learned that Love ~~was~~ ^{is} patient. Love is kind. And then there were eight negative principles. And then four ways in which love reacts to all things. It bears, believes, hopes and endures.

We come, now, to Vs 8. A very controversial section of scripture. But, I pray that as we deal with controversy that we will not miss the main point of the context. Which deals with LOVE. That love is the greatest.

() But today we are going to look at the truth that love is greater than all the gifts. Vs 8....

(Read Vs 8-13)

Prayer

Now, there are two points, here, about how love is greater than all the gifts. It stand out very clearly here. You could probable pick them out yourself.

(1) In vs 8 "LOVE NEVER FAILS: That is simplyly saying that Love is greater in endurance then all the gifts. The gifts are not going to last forever. But God's love will.

The second point doesn't come until verse 13. Here he says that it is greater than present experiences.

So, let's look at how love is greater in future endurance. And as we start out with Vs 8 there are a lot of problems.

First of all, let's look at the results that you can expect in the future as you look at gifts. God says that "Love never fails." The word is "to fall." It literally at any one moment of time never falls. Love never collapses. It is there when you need it. It is love that does God's work. When ever and at whatever point in your life. So, there isn't any point at which love collapses or falls. It endures forever because God's is eternal. God is love. And love comes from him. But the gifts will not last like that. They will collapse. They will accomplish their purpose. And thus we will not have them forever.

Now, he names three: PROPHECY..TONGUES..AND KNOWLEDGE.

Dear friends, I would like you to follow along in your Bibles very carefully this morning. You might want to make a few notes and lines here and there.

First of all, notice in Vs 8 that the phrase "THERE ARE GIFTS". Do you see that phrase. Did you notice that it is in italics? That means that it is not in the original Greek text. It has been added.

My NAS Bible has the word "prophecy" in the singular. But the Greek word is plural. It should read "prophecies." And it is referring to content. It is not referring to "the act" of prophesying. It is referring to the result of prophesying.

So, this verse is saying if there are prophecies (and there are). The little word "if" by the way means "if..and there certainly is." And it is connected with a little word that is a "time word." And it goes like this: "If at any moment of time there are prophecies, and there are, they will be done away."

Now, that is simply saying that God has throughout his program given revelation to us, communicated truth to us, at various times. And he has done it partially. If you would like a cross reference of this look at Hebrews chapter 1 verse 1. "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways,"

Now, if there is at any point of time prophecies - communicated by God- he says that I want you to know that there is going to be a time when it stops.

Now, he says the same thing about knowledge. If at any time we received knowledge from God, no matter how partial it may be, there is going to come a time when it also will stop.

Now, also, notice, please, when he mentioned tongues he changed the word. Following the words "prophecy" and "knowledge" he says "they will be done away." But when he came to tongues he changed it. And he said, "they will cease." The word means "to ^{come} to a sudden stop." It is a middle voice in Greek which means "in and of itself." Tongues in and of themselves will come to a sudden stop.

But prophecies and knowledge which is God's truth being communicated is going to be phased out. It is going to be done away..rendered inoperative.. until a point of time...which is described in Vs 10, as the perfect thing coming. Whatever the perfect thing is at that point in time prophecy and knowledge will be phased out.

All of God's communication to man which he has been giving at various times in history will be phased out when the perfect is here.

And tongues will come to a sudden stop..they will no longer have any purpose at all.

Prophecy and knowledge being phased out, the Greek indicates that something is going to replace it. Whatever is partial there is going to come something that is complete which will replace the partial. Thus you will not need the partial any longer.

Whatever tongues is and whatever it does it will never be replaced. That is why he changed the word. It will stop, when the perfect comes.

Now, taking this one step further. The reasons why these gifts will not be permanent are suggested in verses 9 and 10.

(1) The first reason is this: they give only partial understanding. These spiritual gifts: prophecy and knowledge are giving only partial understanding. They don't tell you everything. Now, let me explain that. I want you all to understand.

You are now in the 1st century A.D. Time to go back in time. You are now seating in the assemble of believers in the First Baptist Church in the city of Corinth....O.K... You are now back in the year 50 A.D. And there is good news this morrowing. We have a letter from the Apostle Paul to all of us. ISN'T THAT EXCITING? AREN'T YOU EXCITED? Man! we have a letter from the Apostle Paul. Oh, the meeting house is full. And the people are excited. The letter from the Apostle Paul is going to be read.

Now, we did begin the service by reading one of the scrolls from the O.T. We do not have the entire O.T. because printing presses had not been invented yet. But we do have some of our own personal scrolls of some of the books of the O.T. Let's say we had the scrolls of Isaiah and Deteronomy and Psalms. And so we had the normal reading of scripture---all from the O.T. of course. Now, one of our brothers here in our assemble has a fragment from the letter Matthew wrote about the life of Jesus. And of course those brief words were shared. And wasn't that exciting to here those words from Matthew. We hope that some day we can have the entire letter that Matthew wrote. I understand the church in Oakland has the entire Gospel of Matthew. And they promised to sent us a copy as soon as their clerk could make a copy.

Remember, now, that John had not been written yet. It wasn't written untill 90 A.D. And so that willn't hurt you. Because what you don't have can't hurt you, right? So, we read what we have. Those brief writtings from those fragment letters that we have.

But, today, it is exciting. We have a complete letter from the Apostle Paul. And this letter was written directly to us. It is a personal letter. I Corinthians. Can you imigine the excitment? 50 A.D. Only 20 years after Jesus died. What an exciting time that was.

And when they got that letter...Paul saying in that letter..."You know, that our understanding is not complete."

You mean, that the O.T. is not enough? THAT IS RIGHT!

Well, what about those fragments that we have of Matthew? They are not enough either...

Our understanding is not complete. All of the prophecies...all of the knowledge that has been communicated through out all of time..it is still incomplete. You can imagine the questions of heresy that morrowing. AH... someone believes in Progressive revelation. There is going to be new revelation How will we know whether or not this is really from God?

But they had an answer. The Jews required a sign. And the Gentiles sort of joined them in that attitude. Let's have a sign. Prove to us. Prove to us that this is really from God. And so miracles took place proving that the message was really from God.

And that is what Mark chapter 16 says. That the miracles, including speaking in tongues, would confirm the message of those Apostles. And you would know that it was really from God.

And in Hebrews chapter 2 we find the same thing.

So, our understanding is partial. Here we are...we don't know very much. But our church is already in a mess. It is carnal. We have drunkenness at the communion table. We have incest in the membership. We are all divided into various sects and groups. We are upset with one another. We have no love in our church. But, we are all here. And we got this letter from the Apostle Paul. And he writes that our understanding is incomplete.

Boy, that is the understatement of the day. These people are in a mess. I think that some times we lose the historical picture of what is going on here. He says, "We know in part...We prophecy in part."

You see, the Corinthians thought that they had arrived. They didn't think that anything was missing in their understanding.

Well, in chapter 1 tells us that the Corinthian people were proud, self-centered and carnal. And here Paul is saying, "Hay, wait a minute. you don't know anything about love. And furthermore you don't have complete understanding. We know in part. We prophecy in part. You don't know everything yet."

(2) O.K. The second reason why the gifts are not permanent is that something is coming that will bring complete understanding. Right now our understanding is partial. It is 50 A.D. And Paul is saying that there is something that is coming in the future which will give us complete understanding.

Look at Vs 10..."when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away." WHAT IS THE PARTIAL? It is the prophecies and knowledge that we already have. Will what is the "perfect" thing? Well, what ever it is, it is the complete thing of the same nature as the partial. WHAT IS PARTIAL?....Revelation from God....THEN WHAT IS COMPLETE? Probable revelation from God.

Well, when will the revelation from God be finished? When will that task be done? Paul simply says....when it comes(it is still in the future), but when it comes the partial will be done away. You will have a complete understanding. You will no longer think in part.

O.K. But, you may say...Yes, but what does the "perfect thing" really mean? That is the problem. That is where the controversy is found, right? Do you know why it is a controversy? Let me show you.

Let's talk for a moment about the word "perfect."

What does the word "perfect" means? If I were to say to you, ARE YOU PERFECT? And you said, YES. Everyone would think you have a self-centered problem, right?

So, what we unsual mean is "SINLESS." Nothing wrong with you. WHAT DOES PERFECT MEAN? In the Bible there are basical four different usages of this word.

(1) For example we have the usage of "whole" or "complete". In the O.t. the sacrifices were to be whole, without blemish. No scars, no defects, nothing. The word used to discribed the animal without blemish is our word translated here as "perfect." Same word. It means they are whole..no leg missing..no ear missing...no eye missing...or anything else. They are whole and complete.

(2) They also used this word in sense of maturity and knowledge. This came out of the ancient Greek philosophers. And we still use it today. Plato said: "When a ^{man} person finishes our course of study ^{he} they will be "perfect." And they means that he would need no more learning. He had learned all their was to learn

Now you know, we are still doing that today? People say, "You come to our college and when you graduate you are perfect. RIGHT?...Are you kidding? But you know, we still use that. We graduate people. Can you imagine saying like they did in ancient times. Every time you someone got their diploma, PERFECT...nothing wrong with you. But we know better, don't we? But that is the way it was used. And it is used in the N.T. like that.

Col. 1:28 Paul says "And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man PERFECT in christ." It is the same word. It is used in the Bible in the sense of arriving at a place of maturity.

Here is another usage. It was used of adults in contrast with children and youth. They were full grown. It is used in the Bible in the same way. Turn over to I Corinthians 14 verse 20 and let me show you. In contrast to children or youth the word means adults.

Vs 20.."Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be babes, but in your thinking be what?....MATURE..our word PERFECT.

So, when the PERFECT comes does that mean MATURITY? That is what some people says. But watch this. Here is what they say. Everyone who uses spiritual gifts are immature and those who don't are mature. That is how they come to this position. And there are a lot of people who teach and believe this way. The perfect thing that comes is maturity. So, therefore, it is only immaturity that causes you to use gifts.

I have a little problem with that. I don't see Paul being immature in using his gift. And I don't really think this is a good argument. But, anyway it is one of the usages of the word perfect.

Here is another usage. COMPLETING A TASK. In the O.T. when the Temple was finished, and the priest took over their office of service in the temple, 2 Chronicles 18 says it was done..it was finished...they finished the task. From the day they laid the foundation, it was done.

This word translated "completing a task" or "fulfilling a mission" is used all the time in the Gospel of John in reference to Jesus.

Jesus said, "I have come to finished my father's work" He came to fulfill the task for which he was sent into the world. Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost. And to go to the cross to die for our sins. All of that is under the word "Perfect."

Well, then, what does it mean in context of I Corinthians 13? Because it has to do with spiritual gifts. It says that prophecies and knowledge will be done away with and tongues will cease.

WHEN? when the PERFECT comes....BUT WHAT IS THE PERFECT THING?

Well, there are a lot of views...Let me share a few of them.

(1) Some people say that it is Jesus Christ himself. Do you know why?

Because look down at Vs 12.."For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face:" And a lot of people teach that that means face to face with Jesus. We will see him. We will look at Him. And of course we have that wonderful song that we sing all the time..."FACE TO FACE WITH CHRIST MY SAVIOUR." And one day we hope to see him..Face to Face....And so they say..that is what the word PERFECT refers to. ..

I have a little problem with that. The word perfect thing in Vs 10 is a neuter singular adjective. You say, "I didn't come to church to hear grammar." Now, wait a minute....

The conclusion you draw for your life from this passage is very much related to it. You see, an adjective or a pronoun in Greek as well as English most always modify that which it agrees in number(meaning singular or plural) and in gender(meaning masculine, feminine, or neuter).

The word Jesus is a masculine noun. This particular adjective in I Cor 13:10 "PERFECT THING is not masculine, it is neuter. Thus it cannot grammatical in this context refer to Jesus Christ.

So, the words "face to face" and "perfect" must refer to something else. Not seeing Jesus.

Other says, "O.K. I know that. So, let's make it the second coming as an event. That the perfect thing that comes is the new age that is coming.

But friends if you believe that they you should know that there isn't one verse in the Bible that uses the word "perfect" in relationship to the second coming as an event, as an eternal state, as the millinum, or anything like that.

Some people say that it refers to the body of Christ. But in I Cor 12:27 he calls the church at Corinth the body of Christ. So, they in themselves was the body of christ. But, some people say that mean the total body. Well, where do we get that idea. The word "Perfect" is never used in that way.

Now, I happen to believe that it refers to the N.T. being completed. That what was partial to all of church history..knowledge and prophecy being communicated..was only in part. And the complete thing ^{must} ~~was~~ was to come... came at the end of the fist century. That was the PERFECT THING that was coming. More about that in a moment.

So, according to the Bible knowledge and prophecy are going to be done away. Tongues are going to come to a sudden stop. When the PERFECT THING COMES.

Now, look at vs 11. Here we have an illustration as to why things don't last forever. LOVE DOES..BUT THE GIFTS DON'T. WHY? Here is an illustraton. "When I was a child, I used to speak as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things."

I would like you to notice something here. The word "did away" Vell is the same word in Vs 10, done away, same word in Vs 8, "done away"...WHAT IS DONE AWAY? Prophecy and knowledge. That is understanding.

Now, look at the illustration again. When I was a child...it doesn't say that I played with toys, and I ate certain foods. That is not what it says. It said, I spoke, thought, and reasoned. The point of what he is trying to show you is that children have a partial understanding. That don't know everything. Now, I know that they think they do, but they don't. O.K. And when they become adults, then they have comeple understanding.

So, I asak you...What is the perfect thing that is coming? ~~What is the perfect thing that is coming?~~

~~What is the perfect thing that is coming?~~

What ever it is...it is complete..it is whole..there is nothing missing. And it is perfect in understanding because what is in part is prophecy and knowledge.

() O.K. now let's come to Vs 12. A key verse. It says, "For now we see in a mirror..HOW?...(anyone)..dimly, but then"...

If you like to mark your Bibles you should underline the word "then".. And look back at Vs 10 and underline the word "when"..."When the perfect thing come"...Vs 12.."thenface to face; now I know in part,but then (what time is that?....When the perfect thing comes)..then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known."

Now, here is instruction concerning present understanding of those people contrasted with future understanding. So, let take a look at it.

First of all, as to present understanding two things are said. Right now in 50 A.D. with the writting of 1st Corinthians two things are true of us. And notice Paul includes himself. "NOW WE SEE IN A MIRROR DIMLY."

The second think he says is "NOW I KNOW IN PART". Even the Apostle Paul didn't have all the revelation. Let me show you why that is important.

Ephesians, which deals with the doctrine of the church, Philippians, Colassians and all of them were not even written. Paul had not even heard that information. That would happen 15 years later. Paul knew nothing about it yet. He says, "NOW,I KNOW IN PART". NOW WE SEE IN A MIRROR DIMLY.

Now, what does that mean? The word "dimly" is our English word "not clear Paul is saying, "the way we are looking now is through a mirror,but I cannot see to clearly. But when the perfect thing comes I am going to see clearly. Face to face.

Now, what I don't understand is, How do a lot of Bible believers today read the first phrase...and mean one thing..and read the second phrase and mean another one.

Let me show you what I mean. People say, "now we see in a mirror dimly, And they always say this: That refers to the partial understanding of the people then.....I AGREE.

Then the next phrase..."but then face to face" Instead of seeing the mirror, of looking clearly into the mirror, instead they jump to the second coming. And say, "oh, that means seeing Jesus."

No, it doesn't. You are messing up the illustration. We see now in a mirror, how?....DIMLY...You cannot see clearly. But when the perfect thing comes you will now see clearly. You will see your own face...Face to face in the mirror. It is so wonderful when you understand correctly.

The point is: that the mirror is the key. WHAT IS THE MIRROR? What ever it is that I am looking into at the writting of 1st Corinthians I could see everything right. But, when it comes, this mirror, I am going to see very, very clearly, face to face.

Now, how do I interpret anything in the Bible? Well, I start out by saying..DOES THE BIBLE TELL US WHAT THIS MEANS?

There is only one other place where that word "mirror" there in I Cor 13:12, there is only one other place where it appears in the Bible. And that is in the book of James. Would you turn there, please. James chapter 1 WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY THAT THAT MIRROR IS? That I am looking into. That at the time of Paul was very dim, but would become very clear in the future. WHAT IS THE MIRROR?

James 1....Verse 22...Notice what it says..(Read Vs 22-24).

NOW WATCH THIS

Vs 25.."But one who looks intently at the perfect law." WHAT IS THE PERFECT THING? Well, I know one thing. It is used of the Word of God in James 1:25. He says, "one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it,not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man shall be blessed in what he does."

Folks, I am going to give you the punch line now of I Cor 13:that most people never give you, including commentaries. DO YOU KNOW WHY? They can get bogged down in explaining the passage to you. WHAT IS THE MIRROR? WHAT IS THE PERFECT THING? We have to deal with that. Because that is our understanding of the passage.But they miss the point of the whole passage.

WHAT IS CHAPER 13 about? Anyone.....LOVE...LOVE...Why is Paul getting into such a heavy discussion about a perfect thing coming and looking into it dimly. Why did he get into that when he was talking about love? He obvisously is still talking about love because the chapter ends with the words "the greatest of these is love."

So, he is still talking about love. Now way? James 1 acturally gives you your answer. DEAR FRIENDS..THE PUNCH LINE IN LOVE IS SIMEPLEY THIS: You and I want to love God's way. We really do. If you are a Christian, you can sincerely say, Man! I want to love like Jesus loved. I want that love in my life." But, if you have noticed, lately, it is a pretty difficult struggle. And every time we want to love like God wants it seems like we blow it. And what James says is: a lot of us simpley hear the word, but when you leave the mirror you forget what you saw in the Word, and you don't do what the Word says. So, dear friends, put it all together in your minds. WHY THE ILLUSTRATIO OF THE MIRROR?

WHY A DISCUSSION ABOUT THE PERFECT THING THAT IS COMING? Because the PERFECT THING is the only thing that will help you and I to love with God's love. The root behind loving God's way is obedience to GOD"S WORD.

The difficult is in submission. James 1:25 says "whoever looks intently at the perfect law."

The Greek words means to "bow down..like a begger or a slave." God is saying untill you bend in front of the PERFECT WORD and do it, obey it., it does matter how much you hear it, it will not operate in your life.

So, the point of loving in 1Cor. 13 ...HOW WILL I LOVE WITH GOD'S LOVE?.. Only when I obey the Word. When I see the complete truth in the Book. And I look into the mirror, I will see face to face. I will see a complete truthful discription of who I am. I will see myself in that Word. God tells me more about myself, then anyone else has ever told me.

And I want to tell you. I am not always happy with what I read .

God tells me more about myself in that book then anyone has ever discribed to me. God also tells me more about what I can be. About His plan for me.

And if I will do what I see in that mirror, God's love will be produced in my life. I cannot love with God's Love until I am obedient to the perfect thing that is coming. I can't. It is impossible.

And the big problem in the christian life is that a lot of us want to love, and we want to be like God wants us to be, but we don't want to submit and obey God's Word.

Paul knew this was coming because Jesus said in John 16:13 to the disciples "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you (you men) into all the truth."

DO YOU BELIEVE HE DID THAT? Think about that for a moment. There are those who teach that we do not have all the truth in the Bible. There is more to come.

And yet, Jesus said to the Apostles , "The Spirit of truth, when he comes, will guide you (you apostles) into all the truth."

Now, dear friends, He either did it, or He didn't do it. WHICH IS IT? Either this is God's complete final Word, or it isn't. I happen to believe He did guide them into all the truth. And I believe with the death of the Apostle John around 95-96 A.D., ended the truth that God was communicating to man. He sealed it and fix it. It is complete. And it is done. And you cannot add anything to it.

And that is why He had that last man alive, John, who out lived all the other Apostles. That is why He had him write in the last book of the N.T., chapter 22 verse 18 that "no one can add to the prophecies of this book or He will add to him the plagues which are written in this book." "And no one can take away the words of this book, or God will take away his part from the tree of life."

It is tremendous when you think about it. Do you know what that means? There isn't any truth being communicate to man that isn't already in the Bible.

People say, "Well, God can do anything if He wants to." TRUE. But it isn't a question of whether He can do it or not. It is a question of whether he said He would do it.

He has sealed it. He has confirmed it. He has settled it.

You say, "Well, what about tongues ceasing?" Listen, tongues was necessary to confirm the message of the Apostles. Mark 16 and Hebrews 2 both say so. So, we had to have tongues up until revelation was complete. That is why tongues come to a sudden stop. When the revelation was completed. That is why giving new revelation like prophecy and knowledge is not allowed today. WHY? Because the perfect thing came. Jesus said to the Apostles that he would guide them into all the truth. There isn't anymore truth, dear friends then what is in the Word of God.

And that is why a lot of us never love. Because we don't see that the totality of what God wants from us is found right here in His Word.

Submission, therefore, to God's Word is the key to having God's love in your life and mine.

I ask you simply: is there any area of your life that God's Word speaks about that you haven't submitted to the Lord? Whatever area that is, it is grieving the Holy Spirit of God. And his love is not being produced in that area in your life.

Until we submit to the Word of God, we will never love like God wants us to love. This book is God's Word. It is His revelation to us. So, when you leave church today, you should carry your Bible very carefully. BOTH HANDS.. So, it doesn't drop or you lose a page or anything. You have a full complete revelation.

You say, "Bill, you are hammering that point pretty hard." YOU HAD BETTER BELIEVE IT. It is the most important and significant issue, as far as I am concerned, behind all Christian practice and doctrine.

If we do not believe this, then any person, any individual can form his own cult and his own church. In fact that is what is happening in this day and age. THIS BOOK IS GOD'S FINAL COMPLETE REVELATION TO US.

And we need to bow down and submit to GOD'S PRECIOUS HOLY WORD... And Vs 13 sums it all up.. "Now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love."

LET US CLOSE IN PRAYER