

Sermon Series - The Weak, Foolish, and Victorious Gospel
Sermon Title and Text - The Eternality of Love: 1 Corinthians 13:8-13

Sermon Points:

Introduction: What Fuels Your Life?

- 1. Now: Partial, Dim Sight (vv.8-12)**
- 2. Eternity: Full, Face to Face Sight (vv.8-12)**
- 3. Love: The Excellent, Eternal End of All Things (v.13)**

Application: Let Love Fuel Your Life

Prayer Points:

- 1. Adore Christ for his self-giving love that purchased us and is our model.**
- 2. Confess where you've been motivated by things other than love.**
- 3. Thank God for his eternal, holy love that overflowed to create and redeem humanity and will bring redeemed humanity to an eternity of love.**
- 4. Ask God to make Sojourners a blood-bought family fueled by love.**

Introduction: What Fuels Your Life?

Far too often, even we as Christians are fueled by popularity, fear, comfort, prestige, immediate gratification, money, security, and lots else that has nothing to do with God. But, even in our thinking about God we can have skewed ideas. We can begin to compare ourselves to other Christians, prioritizing some parts of the Christian life over others or prioritizing certain gifts and callings over others. But, Paul has dealt with that in Corinth and with us already in chapter 13.

In chapter 13 Paul is showing the Corinthians a higher way of love. Last week we saw Paul say in verses 1-3 that the greatest experiences, the greatest knowledge, and the greatest service are nothing without love. Then, in verses 4-7 we saw Paul hold up the diamond of love and let all the facets of Christian love shine forth. And we saw this love displayed perfectly in the Father's sending his Son to save sinners in the gospel and in the Son's self-giving love in leaving the glory of his Father to die a criminal's death on the cross for sin. We see the love of 1 Corinthians 13 most perfectly displayed in the gospel.

And so, a way to sum up verses 1-7 would be this: "Corinthians, the greatest spiritual barometer in your life is not what gifts you have, it doesn't matter so much whether you have the greater gifts or the more seemingly normal gifts, but the litmus test of your life in the Spirit into the body of Christ has to do with the gospel love that dwells in you and among you by the Spirit of Christ. Therefore, instead of holding your gifts up against one another to see how you're doing spiritually, hold up your life to this diamond of love and see if the facets seen in the love of God in Christ toward you are overflowing from you to others."

Now: Partial, Dim Sight (vv.8-12)

So, Paul has shown that all experience, knowledge, and service are nothing without passing the test of love, making love the pressing priority. But, now he will show in verses 8-13 that love is greater not just because it is the true test of life in the Spirit, but because it is eternal where all of these gifts are temporary. Every point in these six verses is a contrast of some kind. So, we'll walk through this text twice. Once, we'll look at the present partial and the next time at the fullness coming.

Now, let me just say upfront that it would be mistaken to demean or devalue this partial, dim sight

completely we have now. In this paragraph, Paul is showing why love is superior because it is eternal and always necessary, while these other gifts are temporary and no longer needed someday, but that does not mean that we should despise any partial, dim sight we have now.

Rather we should consider it a precious gift that we can see true, beautiful things about God now, however they may be revealed, even though only partially. It is no small thing that you sit here and you believe that Jesus paid the price for your sins on the cross. It is no small thing that you sit here and feel the comfort or conviction of the Holy Spirit as you hear the Word of God. It is no small thing that you see beauty and love and hope when you hear about Jesus. It is no small thing that you are sustained by God's presence and grace in the midst of suffering. Any gift that gives partial sight of God now is precious, but it's not preeminent.

At the beginning of verse 8, Paul says, "Love never ends." But, then immediately that is contrasted with these other things.

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.

Paul's preferred gift of the Spirit, prophecy, as we will see in chapter 14 is the first listed and Paul says, "it will be done away with." Tongues, the Corinthians favorite gift and point of contention, will also pass away. The Corinthians loved their "knowledge" and that spiritual gift will pass away too!

Why will they pass away? Because they're all partial. Do you see that? We can only know and prophesy in part. These gifts at best give us a partial glimpse of God's will and God's ways and God's purposes in this present life. There's a time coming, referred here to as the "perfect" or the "complete," when this partial revelation will pass away. Then, Paul moves on to an analogy for what he means in verse 11:

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.

Paul says there's a natural progression here. Paul uses this idea of childhood to manhood to show the natural progression of maturity several other times in his letters (Ephesians 4 being one). People that take this to mean Paul is calling the spiritual gifts "childish" miss the whole point of chapters 12-14. Paul is not calling the gifts childish, he just told them to desire them and that God appoints them, and that they are empowered and given by the Spirit. But here he is showing them that it is foolish to let these gifts take precedence over love in light of the fact that these gifts are only for this temporary time, but love remains.

Paul then gives the foundational reason all of this is true in verse 12:

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.

Right now, the Corinthians can only see God indirectly. They see him as if in a reflection in a mirror, and the word "dimly" means a "puzzle." But, there's a day coming when they'll see him face to face. No puzzle. Right now, they can only know him at best in part, but there's a day coming when they will see him face to face and know him fully. And in the day they see him face to face, there's no more need for the gifts that give you dim "mirror-like" sight. And in the day you know God fully, there's no need for gifts that help you know him in part.

So, love is superior, because unlike these gifts that will one day be unnecessary because they only give partial sight and partial knowledge, love will always remain. Yes, that partial sight and partial knowledge is precious and appropriate, but one day something so much more perfect will come that it will render these gifts useless.

Eternity: Full, Face to Face Sight (vv.8-12)

So, now let's look together at the what and the when of this "perfect" that will swallow up the partial.

Verse 8 tells us that love never stops, it never ends. Then verse 10 tells us that these other gifts that give us partial sight and knowledge will cease when the “perfect” comes.

Now, the two main options (chronicled in almost every commentary) for what the “perfect” is are these: 1) The time when the Bible is completed, meaning Paul is saying that once the Bible is complete, then the Corinthians won’t need these gifts. Or: 2) The time when Jesus returns a 2nd time to judge those who have rejected him and bring all those who have trusted him to glory, meaning these gifts are necessary and appropriate until the time Jesus returns.

So, if the Bible view is correct we must assume these gifts are not for today because Scripture is complete. But, if the 2nd return of Christ view is correct then we assume Paul can envision these gifts being helpful until then. So, let's simply walk through verses 11-12 together and see which one seems to make the most sense of things and while we do that, we will not lose sight of the beauty of what this complete, perfect reality will be like either way.

Read verse 11 with me again:

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.

Now, I don’t think this answers our question of what the “perfect” is at all. Instead, this tells us what it will be like. Right now, Iris often asks me about song lyrics that come up as we worship or sometimes when we’re driving and the kids see something they want an explanation for what they are seeing. But, when Iris is my age, she won’t need to ask me about the lyrics on the screen. And when they are the one’s driving the car, they won’t be asking about what they are seeing on a street sign because they’ll know what it is themselves.

That is the glory of when this perfect comes. Right now, even with the best gifts that help us get glimpses of God and have some thoughts about God, we’re still so hazy. We still have so many questions. We’re still so marred by sin. We’re still so limited by our human nature. Sometimes we study hard with no clear answers. And even when we have breakthroughs in our understanding there is always far more to learn than there is we have actually known. We should still work hard to know more and to see more of God now, that is the great longing of our hearts, but no matter how much we know and see now, it’s only partial. Now, for those who find their happiness in God, more of God means more holy joy.

And, there’s a day coming when that holy joy, that love, will be full. There’s a day coming when we will know perfectly and see perfectly and speak perfectly about things. There’s a day coming when our knowing and seeing God will be like the difference between a child and an adult. Think of the best, deepest, sweetest things you know of God the Father and Son and Spirit and how they make themselves known to us and save us in the gospel, and then imagine that knowledge as infant knowledge and infant sight compared to what’s coming on this day! Oh, the depths and riches that we will see! Now look at verse 12 with me:

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.

This verse starts by repeating our dim sight and our partial knowledge. But, then it says one day it will be face to face and we will know fully even as we are known. And it because of those contrasts, because of the face to face and fully known language that I think the “perfect” or “complete” comes at the 2nd return of Christ. Let me give you three reasons why and then rejoice over this reality with you:

- 1) Every other time Paul uses the phrase “face to face” (5x, Col. 2:1, 2 Cor. 10:1, 1 Thess. 2:17, 3:10, and Acts 25:6) he uses it to talk about actually being in the presence of the people he is talking about. Therefore, it makes more sense to me that Paul is thinking of the day he comes face to face with Jesus than simply a day when the Bible is complete.
- 2) The idea of knowing as we are fully known simply makes no sense apart from the 2nd coming of Christ. Even with this Bible that is sufficient for life and godliness, we don’t know God like he knows

us. But, on that day, because of the blood of Jesus, we will see him and we will have no more wrong notions or incomplete thoughts or partial understandings of who he is. We will know him as he is known. John says one day we will “be like him, because we shall see him as he is.” This is a similar idea to knowing him as we are known.

3) The last time Paul talked about the timing of spiritual gifts was back in chapter 1:7-8:

- a. *You are not lacking in any **gift**, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.*
- b. This seems to imply that God will give Spirit-empowered grace-gifts to his church until that final day when he returns.

So, it seems that Paul is saying to the Corinthians, “You should prioritize the love that comes from the Spirit above the gifts that come from the Spirit, because while these gifts are helpful for you now, they are only partial. And on the day when you see Jesus face to face in all his glory, on the day when you know God as you are fully known, these gifts will be gone, because they will be unnecessary. You won’t need the help of partial knowledge or sight, you’ll see completely and know fully. Yes, you need them now. But, don’t prioritize them over love, because even when the day comes when these are unnecessary, the thing that will still remain is love! In fact, love will be even greater, because you will know fully the God who is love and will be caught up into the very love of the Father and the Son and will see it with dazzling, awe-inspiring clarity of sight!”

If you are sitting here today in sin, it is because somehow you don’t see the glory of God rightly or know God like you are known. But, on that day, you will and there will never be a temptation to sin again that could steal from love. And if you are sitting here today suffering, unsure of what God is up to, take heart. On that day, you will meet your suffering Savior face to face and know him as well as he knows you right now and what you need and it will all make sense and you will agree that it was for your good, it was LOVE, and excruciating as it is now that love will continue forever. Christian, this day IS coming. We will see him face to face. We will know him fully as we are known. And there will be no need for any prophecy, knowledge, preaching, teaching, evangelism, administration, and hospitality to make him known.

Love: The Excellent, Eternal End of All Things (v.13)

But, Paul has one more level he wants to take this discussion on love. He ended chapter 12 by saying to desire the “greater gifts” but that there was a more surpassing way of love. But, now Paul will show us love isn’t just a way that surpasses the greater gifts, but it’s also the greatest virtue in the universe and in the Christian life. Read verse 13 with me:

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

Paul has already called their attention to how love continues but the for “now” gifts do not. And here he calls their attention to the most important “now” characteristics of Christian life in this world, and how love is the greatest.

Without faith, there is nothing. Without faith in Christ there is no salvation, no future eternity, no glory. Without hope there is no reason to press on. Without hoping in the future promises there is no reason to go on believing. Without faith and hope in this life we are nothing. So, how can Paul say that love is the greatest of these? Let me give three reasons:

- 1) Believing all and hoping all are facets of love. They are aspects of love. I’d even say they are the highest aspects. There is no Christian love in this life without a heart trusting in Christ and hoping in his promises. But, they are still only aspects. Love is much more.
- 2) Faith and Hope, I believe, are temporary, love is eternal. Let me read you two verses:
 - a. For we walk by faith, not by sight. (2 Corinthians 5:7) In 2 Corinthians 5 Paul is talking about

longing to be home with the Lord and the excitement he has for it. This is how we walk right now, by faith until we go to be with him or he comes to us. Faith is a precious gift from God now. But, not always, one day, we'll see him.

- b. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we await for it with patience. (Romans 8:24-25) We don't hope for what we see. We wait patiently for what we hope in until the day we see it! And what a great hope we have! A living hope in Jesus! But, one day, we will see what we've hoped for, and we will have it, full joy in the presence of God!

- 3) While there is no Christian love apart from a heart trusting in Christ and hoping in his promises in this life, the very reason hope and faith are so necessary is that sin and suffering cause so much pain and blindness. We need faith and hope to persevere in this life, precisely because this life is so broken! And every sinful brokenness in this life in ourselves and in others, distorts Christian love.

In other words, in our best moments in this life, the Spirit grants us measures of faith and hope that spring up out of our hearts, remind us of the self-giving love of God the Father and the Son in the gospel and helps us overflow in some measure of that kind of love to others and others overflow in that kind of love to us. But, it's necessarily connected to how much we are seeing rightly God and the gospel and how much we are hoping rightly in God and the gospel.

But, one day, the facets of faith and hope that helped love endure in this life, which were in fact the staples of love in this life, will pass away, but LOVE will continue and only be amplified. We will be caught up into perfect sight of the glories of God so that we won't need faith. We'll be caught up into perfect paradise of the glory of God and our hopes will be completely fulfilled! And do you know what we will call that feeling of perfect sight and perfect hopes fulfilled in the presence of God and in the splendor of his glory? LOVE! We'll call it love. We will experience firsthand the infinite, perfect, delight of the Father for the Son and we will see the Father well-pleased with the Son for his work on the cross and we'll hear the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Master!" said to us because of Jesus. His joy! His love! For us! We'll see the infinitely, holy, loving relationship that created, sustained, and redeemed the world and we will enjoy it as part of the family for all of eternity!

Faith and hope in this life give us measures of true, Christian love. But, when they leave and we're with God in his glory, we get love without measure! Let me say it one more way.

Heaven will be a place where all of the facets of love are so intensely fulfilled that they will simply be called, "Love." There will be no more sufferings inflicted on each other, instead, "Love" so no more "Patience." There will be complete eagerness to always be doing perfect good to everyone, but we'll just call it "Love" not kindness. We'll all be in eternity with God so there'll be no more envy, pride, or arrogance, but only a people totally content, totally humble, and totally happy with their place, which we will call, "Love." There will be no sin to be irritated about. There will be no wrongs to keep a record of, only "Love." There will only be truth and no evil, so all the rejoicing will be rejoicing we will call "Love." Our faith and hope will be so fulfilled that we will just call the culmination in the presence of God and other believers, "Love." And this existence of "Love" will always endure and never fail.

Right now, we desperately need, faith, hope, and love, but the greatest of these is certainly love. In the end of all things for the Christian, will be love.

Application: Let Love Fuel Your Life

So, in the beginning we talked about all the different things that can fuel our lives. Right now, I'm begging you to make it love. Christian love.

Whatever gifts you have, use them in the name of love. Whatever money you have, use it in the name of love. Whatever time you have, use it in the name of love. Whatever relationships you have, live them in love.

