

The Patio Pulpit For December 2, 2020

“A more excellent way”

1 Corinthians 12:31-13:13

I love seafood, fried seafood, fried in cornmeal seafood. And Beverly and I have found the best place in N.C. to eat seafood fried in cornmeal. We are spoiled by Jay’s Seafood Restaurant in Albemarle, N.C., and will drive up there at least once a month to enjoy their fish. They also have a great buffet with all kinds of fixin’s like mac and cheese, all kinds of beans and a great okra/tomato dish I get everytime we go up. And they have the best buffet corn we’ve ever tasted. They have a salad bar and a dessert bar that I seldom visit but they’re there if you want them. What could possibly be better than that for a seafood lover.

As you know, I have just finished a series on the gifts of the Spirit that we find in 1 Corinthians 12 with a great explanatory section on the gifts in chapter 14. What I’m going to teach on tonight is what Paul introduces his readers to at the end of chapter 12 that he connects directly to the gifts. This is what that verse says, ³¹ *But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way. (1 Cor. 12:31)* This “more excellent way” is to the student of the word of God what cornmeal cooked seafood is to a seafood lover. It is more excellent.

Now, what he’s talking about when he says *But earnestly desire the greater gifts*, goes back to his argument that any gifts that glorify God and edify the church are the greater gifts. Rather than going in pursuit of flashy gifts like tongues and healing, strive to prophesy. And he says it plainly in chapter 14 and v.1, **1 Corinthians 14:1** *Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.*

² *For **one who speaks in a tongue** does not speak to men but to God; for no one understands, but in his spirit he speaks mysteries.*

³ *But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation.*

⁴ *One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church. (1 Cor. 14:1-4 NAU)*

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The gift of tongues is a legitimate gift and I cannot forbid the speaking in tongues in my congregation except when we have found that there is no one in our congregation to interpret the tongue. ⁵ *Now I wish that you all spoke in tongues, but even more that you would prophesy; and greater is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edifying. (1 Cor. 14:5 NAU)*

¹² *So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek to abound for the edification of the church.*

¹³ *Therefore let one who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret. (1 Cor. 14:12-13 NAU)*

²⁷ *If anyone speaks in a tongue, it should be by two or at the most three, and each in turn, and one must interpret;*

²⁸ *but if there is no interpreter, he must keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God. (1 Cor. 14:27-28 NAU)*

³⁹ *Therefore, my brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak in tongues. (1 Cor. 14:39 NAU)*

Beloved, love can resolve any conflict that the church may have with the gifts of the Spirit. **This God-kind-of-love is a mark of the mature.** And that is Paul's point in *1 Corinthians 13:11* *When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. (1 Cor. 13:11 NAU)* The God-kind-of-love has that effect on the disciple of Christ.

There are 260 chapters in the New Testament. The word love occurs 215 times in the NT. How many times on average then, does the word love occur in each chapter? Less than 1 time per chapter, if we went only by math. But here is how the word actually breaks down in the NT: (excuse the lack of capitalization on the book names)

11 in mt.;5 in mk;12 in lk;26 in jn;0 in acts;13 in roms;16 in 1 cor;11 in 2 cor;4 in gal;15 in eph.;4 in phil;5 in col.;7 in 1 th.;3 in 2 th.;7 in 1 tim.;

4 in 2 tim.;4 in titus;2 in philemon;4 in hebs.;3 in jas;8 in 1 pet.;1 in 2 pet.;36 in 1 Jn.;6 in 2 & 3 Jn.;3 in jude;4 in rev.

Read along in your Bible tonight as we begin working our way through 1 Corinthians 13.

This chapter is known around the world by theologians and laymen alike as “the love chapter.” And that it is. You probably were unaware of this fact, but the Biblical word for love in this chapter, agape, was practically unheard of in the time of Jesus and the apostles. It wasn’t used by the secular culture but a scant few times in world history. When the Lord Jesus walked on earth, He and His apostles owned this word, they adopted it and made it the heart and soul of the gospel. It wasn’t used by the world at that time because it was considered weak and childish. But the early disciples saw it as the language of the cross. This info comes from the Bible commentary series “Tyndale New Testament Commentaries” by one of my all-time favorite theologians, Leon Morris.

Agape is what I have been describing as “the God-kind-of-love.” And that is the best way to describe it.

^{NAU} **1 Corinthians 13:1** *If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.*

The gifts of the Spirit are all to be manifested in love for the sake of the rest of the congregation where the gifts are being manifested. I have heard many, many times people in the Pentecostal churches where my former band once ministered, just blurting out in what they said were tongues with no regard for those around them. There was never an interpretation given. I don’t recall one time when there was an interpretation given in these assemblies. The so-called tongues those people were supposedly speaking in sounded to the other folks in those churches like what I imagine my drumming sounds like to mine and Beverly’s neighbors. I practice without music. They spoke in tongues without an interpreter. Our neighbors hear my drumming without any accompaniment as just so much noise.

Love regulates our speaking in tongues in such a way that we will not speak in tongues in the assembly without an interpreter.

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Now this next verse is pretty amazing in what Paul says about someone who is incredibly gifted yet does not have love. I'm going to break it down in order to emphasize Paul's point. You will be able to see the breakdown on the notes that will accompany this lesson.

² If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

We wouldn't say that, would we? "I am nothing?" I mean, if it were possible for any of us to have the gift of prophecy *and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.* I would be more likely to call myself a super disciple. And that's Paul's point precisely. With all that going for me yet without love, I really would be nothing. It would all be done in vain and for completely selfish reasons.

That reminds me of the men and women in the health and wealth and prosperity movement who claim to be prophets and so forth who live just to get richer. What they do is done without love and without Christ. What they do is done without love, except of course, the love of money.

Now, one more verse from our text and I will close tonight's Bible study with this. Verse three ends the first division in our text.

³ And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.

That really does blow my mind. That has to be of God, doesn't it? *I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned.* We're talking about a major sacrificial kind of life. That has to be pleasing to God...or does it?

That verse begs the question, "why did I do that? Why did I live this way?"

Are you familiar with the term “humanism?” “A doctrine, attitude, or way of life centered on human interests or values *especially* : a philosophy that usually rejects [supernaturalism](#) and stresses an individual's dignity and worth and capacity for [self-realization](#) through reason.” So it’s a man-centered way of life. Man is the end of all things. There is nothing greater or higher than man.

A humanist will give himself/herself to serving what they consider the greater good for humanity while rejecting any notion of God or a god. It often involves a humanist going to some poor region of the world or even in their own hometown doing what they consider to be good works. That makes them feel better about themselves, especially if they come from a well-to-do family. Their motivation is a combination of sincere concern about the suffering and guilt for their having lived in luxury and comfort all their lives. It is without the genuine love they have convinced themselves they are living out.

³ *And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.*

To know Jesus Christ is to know the God-kind-of-love. Everything we do can be in step with the revealed will of God which among many other truths is to love one another as He has loved us.

In Jesus’ name. Amen. I hope to see some of you this coming Sunday morning.