

The Patio Pulpit For March 24, 2021

Not Either/Or, but Both

1 Corinthians 13

Do you remember the twisted lesson on logic that went this way? “God is love. Love is blind. Ray Charles is blind. Ray Charles is god.” The first time I heard that was in a class at CPCC in 1973 and I thought that was so clever. And it is.

Now, listen to this bit of logic: “God is love. But love is not God.” Amen? Amen.

In the early ‘90’s there was a popular “Christian” song titled “Love will find a way” that portrayed love as being an entity. The song was written by Michael W. Smith and recorded by Amy Grant and was considered a “cross-over” song for Grant, a way to break into secular popularity, and never even comes close to mentioning or alluding to God or Jesus or the Holy Spirit. Love is wonderful, but it is not God. And the love will find a way kind of love is more like the eros kind of love, not the agape kind of love. And it is bordering on idolatry, in fact, in my humble opinion, it is like an illegal immigrant, it has crossed the border.

Quite possibly the most important verse Paul ever penned about the gifts of the Spirit is 1 Corinthians 12:31, ³¹ *But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way. (1 Cor. 12:31 NAU)*. Can you see why I say this verse is so important in the discussion of spiritual gifts? Paul’s choice of words is why I say this.

The Greek word translated “more excellent,” ὑπερβολὴν is much richer than those two English words. It means this, excess, or excessively, superior, surpassing greatness, a degree which exceeds extraordinarily a point on an implied or overt scale of extent - 'extraordinary, extreme, supreme, far more, much greater, to a far greater degree. So on a scale of 1 to 10, love is 32. That’s just a silly arbitrary number. That more excellent way is hard to top.

Back in the mid ‘70’s when I was fellowshipping with my Charismatic and Pentecostal friends, we would have said, “Really. What can be better than speaking in tongues? What could possibly be better than being ‘slain in the spirit?’ What could be better than hearing a

brother or sister prophesying?” And seriously, that was how we thought. It’s how they still think. And it was how the Corinthians thought. And it was wrong then and it is wrong now.

I have seen a truth in our text for tonight that I have never seen before this week. What Paul describes in the love chapter I am wording in a not either or proposition, but a both proposition.

First, Not either/or, but both: speaking in tongues with love.

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.

And make no mistake about it, Paul and many in the church in Corinth spoke in tongues.

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)

¹⁸ I thank God, I speak in tongues more than you all; (1 Cor. 14:18 NAU)

²⁶ What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.

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. 14:26-28 NAU)

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

Speaking in tongues as proscribed by the word of God is legitimate and Biblical. If done in a chaotic manner, it is not being done with love. And speaking in tongues does not signal a superior spirituality as Charismatics and Pentecostals and others believe it does.

Second, Not either/or, but both: prophesying with love.

² *If I have the gift of prophecy, but do not have love, I am nothing.* The gift of prophecy in this context is not the gift of prophecy we have read about in the Hebrew Scriptures. It is not foretelling but forthtelling. It is preaching the word. **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. (1 Cor. 14:1-3 NAU)* Prophesying is a means for building up the body of Christ through preaching the word. And that is supported by 2 Timothy 3:16-17, ¹⁶ *All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;*

¹⁷ *so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.*

^{NAU} **2 Timothy 4:1** *I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: ² preach the word;* (2 Tim. 3:16-4:2 NAU)

And this make sense then, ²⁹ *Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment.* We cannot pass judgment on the Old Testament kind of prophecies until we know if they have come to pass or not. But when a brother stands to preach, the rest of the men in the assembly can tell immediately if he is Biblically correct. We can do that by knowing the Scriptures. We can all be Bereans.

Third, Not either/or, but both: if I know it all with love.

and know all mysteries and all knowledge; but do not have love, I am nothing (1 Cor. 13:2 NAU). Of course there's no such person who knows all mysteries and has all knowledge, not even Paul. I would guess that you and I have run across people who were know-it-alls and when we reflect back on those pitiful creatures it is difficult to see love as the

guiding principle in their lives. They were legends in their own minds. I would not mind being around a know-it-all who didn't know he knew it all. I would enjoy being around a humble know-it-all. When a know-it-all passes some of his or her knowledge along, most people won't hear it. They just hear someone who is braggadocios. I guess we could say **love is a great way to communicate.**

Fourth, Not either/or, but both: faith with love.

“and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.” Remember what Jesus said when His apostles pointed out the dried up fig tree just outside Jerusalem? ²¹ *Being reminded, Peter said to Him, "Rabbi, look, the fig tree which You cursed has withered."*

²² *And Jesus answered saying to them, "Have faith in God.*

²³ *"Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it will be granted him. (Mk. 11:21-23 NAU)*

If anyone ever loved, it was Jesus. It took mountain-moving faith to curse the fig tree so that it dried up. No one has ever cast a mountain into the sea anywhere, not because there has been a shortage of mountain-moving faith, but because there has never been a legitimate need to do so. And, after all, God is the one who gives us the faith needed to do His will.

Fifth, Not either/or, but both: sacrificial living with love.

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.* Now that's what I call commitment. It's precisely what the rich young ruler couldn't bring himself to do, sell what he had and give half to the poor. He didn't have any love. ²¹ *Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."* ²² *But when the young man heard this statement, he went away grieving; for he was one who*

owned much property. (Matt. 19:21-22 NAU). Does that remind any of you of the generosity of televangelists like Jesse Duplantis and Creflo Dollar and the Copelands? Me either. They will let you know that they don't want to wait to get treasures in heaven, they want theirs now.

But the next part of this verse is what burns me up. “... *and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.*” Now come on. That has to count for something. Anyone who surrenders his body to be burned for some worthy cause has to rank pretty high in heaven. But not if it's done for show or for selfish reasons.

The absence of love is a marker of those who do not know God. The apostle John said this, ⁹ *The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now.*

¹⁰ *The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him.*

¹¹ *But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes. (1 Jn. 2:9-11 NAU)*

¹⁴ *We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. (1 Jn. 3:14 NAU)*

⁷ *Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.*

⁸ *The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. (1 Jn. 4:7-8 NAU)*

The most spiritual people you and I know are wasting their time pretending to be spiritual if they do not love the brethren. But not so us.

¹⁹ *We love, because He first loved us. (1 Jn. 4:19 NAU)*

All that we do as Christians can be guided by the love of God and by the Spirit of God. We never have to say, “I am nothing.”