

Exegetical Notes – 1 Corinthians 12:31b-13:13

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Introduction: In Chapter 12, Paul addresses the way Spiritual Gifts work in the Church and their purpose. In 1 Corinthians 12:31b-13:13, Paul explains what happens when the body of Christ functions properly in unity.

1 Corinthians 12:31b-13:13

Verse 12:31b

And yet I will show you the most excellent way.

- Paul has been discussing how the Holy Spirit gives **GIFTS** to individual Christians to enable the ministry of the Church. Christians are to use these gifts to build each other up in unity. When the Church, the body of Christ, uses its gifts together for ministry, it is healthy and whole and the Church prospers.
- Paul now turns to the **FRUIT** of the Holy Spirit (see Galatians 5:22-23). Properly read this passage says, “The fruit of the Holy Spirit is love.” The attributes which follow describe the character of love.” Thus 1 Corinthians 13 and Galatians 5:22-23 amplify and explain each other. When the gifts are exercised in unity the fruit is love!

Verses 13:1-3

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³ If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

- Tongues, prophecy, faith are all gifts of the Holy Spirit given to enable the ministry of the Church. If these gifts are used to their absolute best but are not exercised in love (the Greek word is “agape;” the kind of love with which God loves us), they are without value and produce nothing of value.

- Giving away all of one's possessions and even being martyred produce no good if they are not done in love.

Verses 4-7

⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

- In these verses, Paul describes what love is (compare this description of love with that given in Galatians 5:22-23). Love is kind. It is not envious of others or what they have. Love is not boastful. Love is not proud. Love honors others above self. Love does not look out for its own best interests first. Love is not easily angered. Love does not keep a record of the wrongs done by others. Love does not delight in evil but loves the truth. It always (meaning without fail) protects others, trusts others, hopes for the best, fights for the best without considering the costs. It never quits.

Verses 8-9

⁸ Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.

- Love always wins. The gifts of the spirit are not permanent. They may change with time as the Spirit decides. Not so with love. It lives forever.

Verses 10-12

For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰ but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. ¹¹ When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. ¹² For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

- At this moment, or at any particular moment in time, no one understands everything. But there will come a time for those who are in Jesus when Jesus makes all things clear. When that moment comes, Christians will see all things with the mind of Christ. Everything will be understood

Verse 13

¹³ And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

- Faith is the ability to believe what God says without doubt. Hope is the ability to believe what God says when circumstances deny what we believe. Love is the fruit of the Holy Spirit as described above.
- Though all of these are important attributes, the greatest of them all is love. Love is the glue which makes the Church the Church. It is the most excellent way to live and to serve each other.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon based on 1 Corinthians 12:31b-13:13. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen. All rights are reserved by *Cornerstone Fellowship* & The Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen. They are used here by permission.)