

Jason Upchurch - 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 - The Eternality of Love

Well, this morning we're coming to the end of this very long section on spiritual gifts. I mentioned several weeks ago that I jumped out of order and tackled chapter 14 when we were talking about tongues and prophecy. So I'm not skipping that, we've just already covered it. So this morning we're concluding this whole section on spiritual gifts.

I hope it has been helpful and encouraging to you. Maybe it's been uncomfortable, maybe been confirming. Maybe you're more confused than when we started. If you want a good book to reference, there's a book called "Showing the Spirit" by D.A. Carson. It's something of a commentary on **1 Cor. 12-14** that is understandable for most people. If you're looking to dive a little deeper, that's a good way to go. I found his observations years ago to be very helpful and I probably agree with most of D.A. Carson's views.

With that, I think it is appropriate to land the plane on spiritual gifts with this little section on love. We've been looking at the nature of love over the last few weeks. And, obviously, we can apply these principles of love to any aspect of life.

But Paul's point here is that in the church the most important thing we can do is to love one another. No matter how gifted you are or how much you lack in gifting from the Holy Spirit, the thing that really matters is love for one another in the body of Christ.

And at the end of this chapter he makes the argument that love is supreme because love is eternal. That's the big takeaway this morning: the reason we commit ourselves to love - that love matters the most - is because love is eternal.

Or to put it a different way: almost everything else in our lives right now is temporary. Very little if anything is eternal. Just think about your life:

Your kids? Temporary. They're in your home for a blink and then they're gone. They're not even in our lives all that long, let alone eternity.

Your spouse? Or your future spouse. Temporary. Even if you're married for 60 or 70 years - an incredibly long time. There's no marriage in heaven. Heaven, where Jesus is, the love between Jesus and his Church is eternally displayed, is the reality that marriage is pointing to anyway.

Your body is temporary. Whether you like how your body looks and operates or you can't wait for another one, this is not what you'll spend all eternity in. When we're raised in the resurrection, the body we have is the body we'll get but it will be amazing and glorified.

Our house, car, garden, computer, phone, pets, job, hobby, your sports...they're all temporary.

It's not that these things are meaningless or pointless. Many of the things we devote time and effort on are good things. But for Christians we realize all these things should be understood in light of eternity and when we do we realize just how temporary things are.

I remember going to the beach one time when I was a kid and they were having a sand castle competition. And so all these people came and were making these really elaborate sand castles and sculptures that were just amazing. Super elaborate sculptures of dragons and castles, ships. Really, quite spectacular.

But all these artists have a perspective on these incredible creations: their creations won't last much more than 24 hours. Whether you're the greatest sand castle builder in the world or a 4 year old with some buckets. The same fate comes: the tide eventually washes it all away.

So, just like the sand castle builders, something bigger has to drive us. If we know most of what we do here is temporary, then the temporary things can't be the most important aspect of our lives.

So what drives us? Love drives us.

And it should. When Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment is he said: love the Lord your God with all your mind, soul and strength. And love your neighbor as yourself.

The whole of life comes down to love. And here, that's true of how we relate to each other with spiritual gifts. No matter how gifted you are, love is what should be driving us because love is eternal.

And we see this at the very beginning of **Vs. 8**: love never ends. Or some of you have "love never fails."

Love is an eternal attribute of God and those he has redeemed. There will never be a time now, nor in eternity, where we'll reach a point where we're done loving each other. We'll never reach a point where we're done loving God.

Love is the whole of the Christian life now and forever.

1 Cor. 16:14: Let all things be done in love.

1 Tim. 1:5 The aim of our charge is love.

That's the goal: that the entirety of our lives exude love because for God's people all of eternity is filled with love. It doesn't end.

Side: One reason I don't think "love never fails" is a good translation is because if we're honest, love often fails this side of eternity. We often fail to love God. We sin, we disobey. We find our satisfaction in something or someone other than Jesus.

We also often fail to love each other. We come up so woefully short all the time. That doesn't mean our love is a false love.

I used to have a hard time expressing to God that I love him; actually saying to God that I love him. Because I know that I fail. I sin, I'm wretched.

But that doesn't mean we're lying when we say we love God or love others. On this side of heaven where there is sin, we love with an imperfect love. Our love does fail at times.

But love itself will never end. We keep striving to love better, love deeper. But there is coming a day when perfect love will be the motivation for all we do.

So love never ends. What does end? There are 4 things that end.

1) Spiritual gifts end - specifically prophecies, tongues, and knowledge. Read 8

If you remember, these 3 gifts - and especially tongues and prophecy - were the problematic gifts in the Corinthian church. It wasn't that the gifts themselves were problematic, it was that the sinful pride of the people viewed these as the be-all, end-all gifts in the church. If you were really special, you got these gifts.

And they were special because they seem to have been more miraculous in nature than the others. It's more manifestly miraculous to speak in foreign languages and have a message obviously from God than to be filled with mercy or faith or gifts of administration. I mean, let's be honest, we like a show. We want to be floored by something. Tongues and knowledge and prophecy seem to be more miraculous than the other gifts.

That's not true of course. It's just as miraculous to be filled with the Holy Spirit in order to to manage people or teach the Bible as it is those other gifts. But on the surface it seems more impressive.

But the reality is those gifts are coming to an end. Prophecies will pass away. Prophecy is usually for encouragement and upbuilding in the church but there's also the work of the Spirit to impress upon his people messages or things to come. But there will come a day when that's no more.

Tongues will also cease. This particular phrase has been poured over by people from all sides of the charismatic issue. I won't bore you with all the grammatical details, but some say that the way Paul phrases this sentence it could be taken as "tongues will cease on their own" meaning that Paul anticipated the gift of tongues to slowly die out **before** Jesus returns. They'd say that's why the gift of tongues doesn't exist today because it ceased on its own.

I don't know that I'm willing to say that the gift of tongues is done altogether.

As I've mentioned before, though, I don't believe I've ever seen a genuine manifestation of tongues. It seems as though the gift is less prominent now than before; maybe we could even say that it's rather rare in the church compared to what we seem to see in the early church.

Be that as it may, Paul's point is just that they'll end. Tongues, prophecy, and the third is knowledge will end. Remember we don't know exactly what words of knowledge are. It seems to likely be that God reveals something to someone that they couldn't possibly know any other way.

If that's the case, it seems that happens as a means to convict sinners of God's work. Well, we won't need that in glory. We'll know God's power and presence and work first hand.

In fact it seems that all these gifts will cease in some manner. Won't need teachers because we'll all know God.

Won't need mercy because sin will be no more and God will directly provide all things.

Won't need generosity because we'll be experiencing the fullness of God's provision as the co-heirs of Christ. We'll be living like eternal princes and princesses in the Kingdom of God forever and ever.

Look over at **Rev. 5** for a minute. I was thinking about the gift of tongues as I was studying and something kind of occurred to me. It seems as though we won't need the gift because there's a chance we all might just have the gift.

Remember in Genesis at Babel God scrambled up the languages? Part of the curse is that it's difficult to communicate with each other because people speak all these different languages. It's not impossible, but difficult. There are people who know multiple languages. Daniel, Shadrach and the others learned Aramaic - so people can learn other languages. I saw a reporter a couple of weeks ago commended because he knows 6 languages fluently. That's pretty amazing.

Here's my guess about why we won't need this gift in heaven: because we'll eventually know them all. **Read 5:8-14**

So two things. First, there seems to still be a distinction in heaven between people of different tribes and tongues and nations. But: we all speak together the same thing. Somehow we know what others are saying and we all say it in unison. **Look at 7:9-12. Read**

Same thing. We're distinguished specifically by languages, but we all seem to be able to communicate the same thing at the same time. See, the reverse of the curse at Babel began at Pentecost when the Spirit gave the gift of tongues. People from all over the globe would speak in different languages the praises of God. But only some people had the gift. Only some people were gifted by the Spirit to overcome that language divide.

In heaven, it seems, Babel is completely reversed. Not that we all speak one language. But that we all speak every language. We all speak in unison, all at the same time the exact same words to the glory of God.

We don't need the gift in heaven because we won't need supernatural abilities for languages. Part of the effect of the fall is that we can only know so many languages. When there's no more effect, there's no more limit.

How many of you spent 2 years in high school learning just enough of a foreign language to not remember any of it? It's kind of an American right of passage.

Part of the problem is we just don't retain languages very well. But in heaven, I think we'll know all the languages and it won't even be hard for us to know them.

This really cool, miraculous gift of God of tongues now, will be so overshadowed by the fullness of glory in heaven it'll seem like gibberish.

Look back at 1 Cor. 13. This is why Paul says it's not that these gifts go away. It's that we grow into full maturity. **Read 9-12**

He doesn't say when I was a child I spoke like a child and now I don't speak any more. No. He says now I speak like a man. What is talking with the speaking? He's talking about tongues.

In glory we'll grow up and speak fully. And I wouldn't die on this hill, but I think that means we'll speak every language with perfect precision to the glory of God. We will have the mental capacity and facility to do that. We won't need a special gift.

Now, let me ask: if love is eternal, but the gifts are not eternal, does that mean they don't matter? Does that mean we can just toss them aside?

No, they are crucial for the redeemed people of God until Christ comes back. The Spirit himself has given you these gifts, these tools, to serve the church and proclaim the glories of the risen Jesus. Just because they're temporary doesn't mean they're unimportant.

Imagine a life boat on an ocean liner that's going down. Is the life boat temporary? Yes. Is it important? Absolutely. Same thing with the gifts: they're temporary in this life, but they are important in the grand scheme of things.

What else is temporary?

2) This world is temporary. Read 9-10

What's Paul getting at here? He's getting at 2 things. First, he's saying that all spiritual gifts are partial gifts. Remember at the beginning of 13 where he was getting all hyperbolic? **Read 1-2**

No one has ever spoke in every language ever. No one ever had all knowledge ever. No one ever had all faith. Well, one caveat - Jesus did. John's gospel says he had the Spirit without measure.

But the rest of us, no matter how well gifted we are, only have a partial gift. But when the perfect comes, all our partial gifts pass away.

What is the perfect? "The perfect" is the return of Jesus. Literally, it's the telos - the end, the end goal, the terminus. It's when Jesus returns and all things are consummated. How do we know that? Look at **12. Read**

Who are we going to see face to face? Jesus. When do we see Jesus? Well, it's either at death when the Bible says we go to see the Lord. Or it's at his return. Since we've had 2,000 years of people dying and the gifts continue, then what we're waiting for is Jesus to come back.

The end goal of all history is the second coming of Jesus. And I want to show you some amazing truths about the coming of Jesus. Because there's a lot of temporary things that are done away with.

Turn to 1 Cor. 15:50-57. When Jesus comes back, death is over. Once Jesus returns, no one ever dies again. We'll unpack this a little more in the coming weeks when we get here but just know dying is a temporary thing that ends when Jesus comes. **Read**

Paul says we shall not all sleep - not everyone is going to die. There will be a generation that doesn't die. Those who are believers in that generation shall be changed. Transformed, glorified,

Phil. 3:20-21: says that our lowly bodies will be transformed into glorious bodies.

That happens at the last trumpet. There will be a trumpet sound that the entire earth will hear. When that trumpet blows everyone who has ever died will rise. Believers to eternal life in transformed, glorified bodies. Unbelievers will rise and be thrown into eternal damnation.

Every believer who has ever existed will have a body that goes from perishable - breaking down and dying - to imperishable. You'll have skin that never gets wrinkly. Joints that never fail. Eyes that don't need glasses. No cavities. No surgery or disease. They are imperishable bodies.

And at that moment, death will cease to ever be a thing again. **Read 54-55**

Death will be gone forever. No more dying. No more funerals, no more saying goodbye. Death is swallowed up in victory never to be seen ever again.

Death is temporary. This universe is temporary. **Turn to 2 Pet. 3:8-13.**

Here we see the admonition to Peter to stay faithful even though our lives get weary. **Read**

Peter says the Day of the Lord is coming. He also calls it the Day of God - same thing. That's the day Jesus returns. What happens on that day? The heavens will pass away and everything will be burned up and dissolved.

Amazing Grace:

The earth will soon dissolve like snow
The sun forbear to shine
But him who called me here below
Will be forever mine.

It seems as though God will take everything we know, and reform it through fire, just like he raises bodies from the grave. The earth and everything we know will be recreated in glorified form.

Think of the resurrection that will happen to David or Abraham. Is there even a body left anymore? No, they're all dust. But the atoms still exist. And God if God can reform those atoms into glorious bodies, he can reform the earth into a glorious earth as well.

Rom. 8:23 seems to indicate the world is waiting for redemption. A purging of sin and sickness and death that will happen at the return of Jesus.

This is the telos, **back** in **1 Cor. 13**. This is the end that Paul is looking to.

Have you ever been on a long vacation or a long road trip. Sometimes it's good, sometimes it's bad, sometimes it's just okay but you really want to get home? The end goal is just to get home to comfort and peace. That's what we're talking about here.

That's the end. When the perfect comes - the end, the return of Jesus - all these other things pass away. There's no more partial stuff. It all comes to fulfillment.

There's no more prophecy because we'll be at the complete fulfillment.

There's no more supernatural dropping of knowledge because we'll be staring at God in his awesomeness forever.

There's no more tongues because we'll know them all.

We'll be at the completion of everything, once and for all. So spiritual gifts are temporary, this world is temporary.

3) Our confusion in this life is temporary. Read 12

You ever get frustrated that we just don't understand everything 100%? How is it that we come up with different interpretations of end times or roles of men and women?

I mean, couldn't God just drop down a systematic theology for us? That seems like it'd be easier.

The problem is it wouldn't be. God can be as clear as he wants or as vague as he wants and in our sinfulness we often find ways to do our own thing anyway.

"Hey Jonah, go to Nineveh" - "Nah. I'm going to go the absolute opposite direction."

Even on the clear things we don't obey or understand sometimes. Well, there are other things that God hasn't given us precise clarity on. We see as in a mirror dimly. We get glimpses. We get a partial understanding of God.

We don't always understand every passage we read. That's okay and by design.

The secret things belong to the Lord. That's a good thing. There are some parts of the Bible - try as we might - we just don't have a comprehensive understanding.

We'll read in **1 Cor. 15** that there's a mentioning of people being baptized for the dead. What in the world is that all about? We have no idea. There are no less than 200 possibilities scholars have suggested. We see in the mirror very dimly.

Other things are clear. Jesus is God. Jesus rose again. Salvation is by faith alone.

The confusion and frustrations that we experience now are just temporary. In glory those things we'll be more clear.

So the gifts are temporary, this world is temporary, our partial understandings and confusions are temporary.

4) Finally, faith and hope are temporary. Read 13

This is an interesting way to finish out this section. There are many other places in Paul's writings where he puts faith, hope and love together.

Col. 1:4-5: Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven.

These are all good things. These are essential to the Christian life. Faith is trust, belief. And usually in the object of faith is Jesus. We have faith in Christ.

Hope isn't just a wish. Hope usually looks to the reward of heaven: being in the presence of God.

Hope laid up for us, hope of righteousness, we have a living hope. We have a hope in all the promises of God as co-heirs of Christ. We have hope that we will see God face to face. Not a half hearted hope that we wish will come true. No this is a true hope, a certainty that centers our lives and encourages us to go on.

Why is love the greatest? Faith and hope are given by God. Faith and hope are what secure our eternal life. We're saved by grace alone through faith alone. Isn't that more important than love?

No. Because the end goal is that our faith and our hope are no more. One day we won't have faith or hope. We'll have sight. We'll be experiencing the things that we've always trusted were true.

We'll see God on his throne in glory and majesty. We'll be free from sin and guilt and shame. No more weeping or pain or crying anymore. It won't be faith, it'll be sight.

You know what will still remain? Love. An eternity of unending love.

Whether God has gifted you in many ways or in a few. What matters most to God is love for one another. **Pray**