

1 CORINTHIANS 12.12-13.13

Concerning Spiritual Gifts (2)

Intro: The Corinthians had questions regarding the use of spiritual gifts (12.1), but before Paul specifically addressed their questions, he first examined their attitude. So far, we've seen that Paul emphasized the unity of spiritual blessings: it was through the Spirit's work that they had made a common confession (vss. 1-3) and their gifts had all come from the same Spirit (vss. 4-11). Paul continues to emphasize this unity in this chapter and in chapter 13, appealing to the Corinthians to use their gifts for the good of Christ's body and to exercise them out of love.

As we noted in our last lesson, vs. 7 serves as something of a key verse. "But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." Paul has already emphasized that each gift was a "manifestation of the Spirit," now he turns his attention to how each gift is "for the common good."

12.12-13, ONE BODY BY THE SPIRIT

1. The main point of vss. 12-31 is that Christians are all members of one body, Christ's body. Every body (singular) has many members, and if a body is missing a member or a member is not functioning properly, then the body as a whole suffers or is incomplete. You see that Paul is continuing his discussion of unity by using this illustration.
2. Vs.13 concerns how we became part of the body of Christ. In short, it was by the Spirit. You will recall that Paul has already said similar in vs. 3, that our confession of Jesus as Lord is only possible by the Spirit's work. Now he says that we were all 1) baptized by the Spirit into one body and 2) we drink of one Spirit. What does he mean by this?
 - » Since Paul is speaking of a baptism that every Christian undergoes, we can eliminate Holy Spirit baptism, a baptism with only

2 recorded instances (Acts 2 & Acts 10). No, Paul is speaking of believer's baptism, baptism that forgives sin (Acts 2.38). But how is this "by the Spirit"? Two options: Paul could be speaking of the Spirit's work of revelation and confirmation that leads to baptism OR Paul could be speaking of the spiritual work that takes place at our baptism, the spiritual work of being added to His body. Perhaps we should say that Paul means ALL of the above!

- » If being baptized by the Spirit is the same baptism spoken of in Acts 2.38 (and I believe we are right in concluding so), then it would seem that "we were all made to drink of one Spirit" is synonymous with receiving the gift of the Spirit in Acts 2.38.
3. Let's make sure we keep in mind Paul's point in this passage. It was not introduce some new theology into the conversion process. Rather, his point is that the Spirit that gave the gifts mentioned in vss. 8-11 is the same Spirit that made us part of Christ's body in the first place! Furthermore, the Spirit made Jews, Greeks, slaves and free all equal members in the body. Thus, the Spirit gave the gifts already listed for the benefit of the entire body, not just a few members in the body.

12.14-26, EACH MEMBER OF THE BODY IS ESSENTIAL

1. These verses are self explanatory, so I offer only a few comments.
2. Paul focuses on presentable members with honor and those with less honor. Clearly those with "honor" in this context are those boasting of some spiritual gift. Paul not only shows that both are essential to the body, but that the member with "honor" should view it as part of his work to "bestow more abundant honor" on those that are deemed less honorable. This goes

back to his point in vs. 7, “each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”

3. “The sun does not say that it is black. The tree does not say, ‘I bear no apples, pears, or grapes.’ That is not humility, but if you have gifts you should say, ‘These gifts are from God; I did not confer them upon myself. One should not be puffed up on their account. If someone else does not have the gifts I have, then he has others. If I exalt my gifts and despise another’s, that is pride.’ The sun does not vaunt himself, though more fair than the earth and the trees, but says, ‘Although tree, you do not shine, I will not despise you, for you are green and I will help you to be green.’” (Martin Luther)

12.27-31, EACH MEMBER OF CHRIST IS ESSENTIAL

1. These verses serve as the application of Paul’s extended imagery in vss. 14-26.
2. There is one body, it is Christ’s body. We are many and individually members of the one body. It is another call to unity.
3. In that body are many gifts, vs. 28. Paul does not have to spell it out here, because he has already made the point that every gift should be used for the benefit of the entire body.
4. No member has every gift, vss. 29-30. Again, Paul does not have to spell out the conclusion they should read. Just like in a body no member does everything, so each member should focus on doing it’s part in service to the whole.
5. Vs. 31 serves as the transition to Paul’s discussion of love in chapter 13. You will note that Paul is not opposed to their desiring gifts, but he wants them to desire the greater gifts. As he will make clear in chapter 14, the greater gifts are those that benefit God’s people. Thus, this isn’t a selfish desire, but a desire to be of service to Christ’s body. That desire will make one willing to follow the “still more excellent way” detailed in chapter 13.

13.1-3, THE INDISPENSABILITY OF LOVE

1. Again, Paul’s point in this passage is simple. It matters not what the gift is, if it is not exercised in love then the one using it has not profited. Note: the gift itself may have done some good. A prophecy may have been given, a healing may have occurred, but Paul’s point is on the one exercising the gift. If done without love the user of the gift has “become a noisy gong...” is “nothing” and has profited “nothing”.
2. Before we move on, just a note about the word love. Paul uses the term agape throughout the chapter. Some have concluded that this word denotes a deeper or fuller love than other Greek words. However, it’s usage in the Bible does not bear this out. (For instance, God’s love for the Son is termed as both agape and phileo, see John 3.35; 5.20). What the term agape may indicate is the motive for love. This kind of love is a choice, a love motivated by the nature of the one who loves rather than the worthiness of the recipient. Thus, God loves us who are unworthy of His love (John 3.16). Thus, we are to love others, not because they are worthy of such love and often in spite of their unworthiness.

13 4-7, CHARACTERISTICS OF LOVE

1. This passage is interesting in that it enumerates both things that love is and things that love is not. Note that Paul does not describe love as emotional, but behavioral. “All you need is love” is true when viewed in this context, when love is viewed not as how we feel but how we act.
2. A few notes on the characteristics:
 - » That Paul is addressing both those with spiritual gifts and those without is clear. Those without the gifts should not be jealous, those with the gifts should not brag or become arrogant.
 - » Does not act unbecomingly: “It is well said that you can spot a gentleman not by the way he addresses his king but by the way he addresses his servants. The former may not

be courtesy at all, but merely enlightened self-interest.” (DA Carson)

- » Does not take into account a wrong suffered: “It is a word connected with the keeping of accounts, noting something down and reckoning it to someone. Love does not take notice of every evil thing that people do and hold it against them. Love takes no account of evil. It does not harbour a sense of injury.” (DA Carson)

manifest and show love.

13.8-13, THE PERMANENCE OF LOVE

1. To conclude and top off the argument, Paul shows the superiority of love by emphasizing its permanence. Love never fails. The gifts of prophecy, tongues and knowledge (miraculous knowledge) will be done away, but not love.
2. The main question in this passage is regarding when these gifts cease. Most commentators, even those that do not believe we still have the gifts of prophecy, tongues, etc., think that Paul is speaking of Christ’s return. However, such is not necessary in the text.
 - » Recall that the purpose of these gifts was revelation (John 16.13) and confirmation (Mark 16.20). These gifts were essential so long as God’s revelation was being given. However, once God’s will had been fully revealed, the gifts would no longer be needed.
 - » This makes the most sense of vs. 9-10. During the time of miraculous gifts they “know in part and we prophesy in part,” but once the will of God was fully revealed, there was no need for the partial, i.e. the spiritual gifts.
3. Returning to Paul’s main point, those who boasted in the gifts they had needed to be reminded that God’s people are marked by greater attributes, namely faith, hope and love. That the greatest of these is love is not explained. Some conclude that this is true because in heaven only love will still exist. However, may be more related to the fact that God is love (1John 4.16), thus the greatest attribute of any Christian is to act like the Father. To