

## 1 Corinthians 14A

- Last week we ended in Chapter 13 of 1 Corinthians, the well-known chapter of scripture describing what love looks like
  - Paul's description is so well-known because he captures perfectly the way love is a verb, not a noun
    - It isn't a feeling, it's an action – a set of actions, actually
    - Love is how we treat others, not merely how we feel about others
    - In fact, we might feel an emotion for someone and call it love, but they won't know what we feel unless we demonstrate it by our actions
  - Nevertheless, for those of us who struggle to put love into words, Paul's thirteenth chapter is a wonderful study in eloquence
    - Many men wish they could be as eloquent when expressing love to the object of their affection

**A wife once submitted a Reader's Digest anecdote about one such attempt. The middle-aged couple was attending a wedding for a young couple. The wife was noticing the beautiful, young bride and her bridesmaids, wistfully remembering her own lost youth.**

**The husband noticed his wife's melancholy at the sight of so many younger women on display, and so he leaned over to encourage her with a few sweet words.**

**He said, "Darling, you're more beautiful than half the women here."**

- Clearly, men don't always have the right words to describe their love
- But Paul certainly had the right words in Chapter 13
- But in our study last week, we were also careful to note that Paul was talking about love in the context of spiritual gifts
  - He was explaining to the church that our use of spiritual gifts must spring from a desire to show God's love to others

- They must be guided by a self-sacrificial motivation that keeps God's glory and the spiritual needs of others as the motivation for our service
- They cannot become an excuse to show off, to draw attention to ourselves, to provoke jealousy in others or divide the body
- As we ended, we reached vs.8-10, which I read but did not explain
  - So we will pick up again at that point in Chapter 13

**1Cor. 13:8** Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away.

**1Cor. 13:9** For we know in part and we prophesy in part;

**1Cor. 13:10** but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.

- Paul summarized the list of characteristics that define love with the statement that love never fails
  - When Paul says love never fails, he is speaking in terms of its longevity in the human experience
    - Love is a single word that describes all the characteristics of a perfect, sinless existence
    - God is love, in the sense that His existence is the embodiment of all the characteristics of love
      - He is kind, merciful, just, wise, etc.
      - Everything Paul wrote in his list (and even more) describes the character of God
  - And so in that sense, love never fails, speaking in eternal terms
    - Love will always be a part of our experience
    - In fact, once we reside in our glorified bodies, we will fully know love in our everyday experience
      - Our every action will be in keeping with love
      - The list in 1Cor 13 won't be an ideal; it will be a reality for all of us
    - Which is why Paul calls us to even as we are called now to walk in love by the power of Spirit...to set our minds on love in all we do

- But in contrast to love, Paul says the gifts we possess now will fail one day
  - Unlike love, spiritual gifts are temporary features of our existence
    - One day they will no longer be present in us
    - Because one day they will no longer have a purpose
  - Once more, Paul presents a list of gifts, and once more we can tell it's merely a set of examples to illustrate his point
    - Paul says that the gift of prophecy will come to an end one day
    - As we defined prophecy in an earlier lesson, we can already see a partial fulfillment of Paul's statement
    - Some kinds of prophecy have ceased already, while others continue for a time
    - But eventually, all forms of prophecy will end
  - Likewise, Paul says the gifts of tongues and knowledge will cease as well
    - Notice once more that Paul included tongues in this list
    - As I said last week, there is only one gift that Paul is careful to include in every list of gifts he provides in 1Cor: tongues
    - One day, like prophecy, men will no longer have need of these spiritual abilities
    - But long after the gifts have departed, love will remain our preeminent concern within the family of God
- Some interpreters have concluded that Paul was speaking about a near-term cessation of gifts when he wrote this list
  - They anticipate the end of prophecy and tongues at the end of the apostolic age
    - Therefore, they teach that these gifts are entirely unavailable to the body of Christ today
    - While it may be true that some of these gifts have ceased, at least in part (like prophecy for the purpose of revealing scripture), the text doesn't support a cessation view overall
  - We know some forms of prophecy are still in service

- And the gift of knowledge (discernment) is never said to cease during the church age
- And even tongues has a certain place in the church, which we'll learn more about in the next chapter
- So contextually, we must interpret Paul's examples as looking forward to the kingdom age, when all gifts are gone and love reigns
- So why does Paul say the gifts will end in the Kingdom while love continues into eternity?
  - The gifts will cease when they have fulfilled their purpose in the body of Christ
  - And their purpose, as Paul just described, is to reflect the love of God into the Church
  - So once we reach our glorified state, we will no longer have need for spiritual gifts, since at that time will know and reflect the love of God perfectly
- In v.10, Paul says when the perfect comes (that is, our perfect, sinless, glorified life with Christ), we will put away the partial form of love
  - Today, we show love within the body through the effective use of our spiritual gifts
  - When we use them for the purpose of loving our brothers and sisters, we are manifesting a portion of God's love
  - Think of it as a "coming attractions" preview of the way our life will be in the Kingdom
- But obviously, when the fullness of the Kingdom arrives, we will no longer have need for these crutches

**1Cor. 13:9** For we know in part and we prophesy in part;

**1Cor. 13:10** but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.

**1Cor. 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.

**1Cor. 13:12** For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.

**1Cor. 13:13** But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.

- Today, when someone serves in the spiritual gift of knowledge or prophecy, we experience a small taste of the Kingdom
  - We could use the example of a gift of prayer, which exposes us to a little of what it will be like to communicate with God perfectly
    - In the Kingdom, Isaiah says that our communication will be effortless

[Is. 65:24](#) "It will also come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear.

- In v.9 Paul uses the examples of the gifts of knowledge and prophecy
- No matter how many people in the Church have these gifts, nevertheless Christian will have experienced only a partial, a sample of what life will be like in the Kingdom
- Likewise, in each are of spiritual gifting, we experience a small taste of the perfection of the coming Kingdom
  - That's why it's so important that we exercise our gifts in love now
  - Because the purpose of a spiritual gift is to give a preview of what perfect love looks like
- Paul says we should understand the purpose and benefits of spiritual gifts as a temporarily measure resulting from our spiritual immaturity
  - God has assigned them to us to compensate for the spiritual weaknesses brought about by the sin living in us
    - Sin has blinded us, deceived us, creating fear and doubt and leading to many other false and destructive tendencies
    - But in His grace, the Lord has given the body spiritual gifts to compensate for these deficits, as a foretaste of the perfect love to come
    - Knowing this, Paul says we we should long for that time when we will be so perfect in love that we no longer depend on others' spiritual gifts to compensate for our own spiritual weakness
  - Once again, Paul uses an analogy to illustrate his point

- He says children exhibit certain behaviors before they become adults
- They speak like a child, saying things that are silly or perhaps inappropriate at times
  - But one day, they will outgrow these limitations and speak with the maturity of an adult
- Children think in childish ways, often very self-centered, only thinking about the near future; never planning beyond tomorrow
  - But adults think deeply and soberly, with a full appreciation of the past and the future
- Children reason in simple and incomplete ways, making decisions without all the facts
  - Adults possess a far greater understanding of the world, and that understanding informs their views and actions
- But then Paul says there comes a time to set aside the partial to embrace the fullness
  - Once a child has grown up, he or she gladly puts away childish ways and embraces the benefits of adulthood
  - No adult prefers the immaturity of childhood over the benefits of adulthood
  - Likewise, we shouldn't make the acquisition of spiritual gifts as our eternal goal
    - We should understand that we possess them only for a time to promote love
    - And we will gladly relinquish them for the perfection of love found in the Kingdom
- In v.12 Paul says we have only a faint, cloudy reflection of what Kingdom life will be like
  - My Bible describes as looking into a mirror but the word in Greek more literally refers to a crystal ball
    - Paul says that we are looking into a cloudy crystal ball as we consider what a life of perfection will be

- Our spiritual gifts offer us a partial understanding of that future state will be like
  - But in the Kingdom I will fully understand God and the life He has prepared for me in perfection and love
    - Even as God fully knows me now
    - But for the time being, Paul says we should abide or patiently rely upon our faith, hope and love
    - But the most important of these heart attitudes is love
- Let's consider this statement a little more carefully
  - Paul says until we reach our perfect state in the Kingdom, we are to patiently rely on faith, hope and love - but love is the greatest
    - Once again, the issue is one of temporary verses eternal purpose
    - Faith and hope are temporary devices that bridge our time until we reach the kingdom
  - Once we see Christ face to face, we will no longer need or even experience faith
    - Remember faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen, according to Heb 11:1
    - But Paul says that faith and hope are not required when I see

**Rom. 8:24** For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees?

- So faith and hope are temporary accommodations for the time we spend awaiting the fullness of the promise to come
    - But love is different
    - Love doesn't fade as we enter the Kingdom, it becomes all the more real and full
    - All those characteristics of love Paul listed earlier become ours forever
- So Paul ends this chapter calling the church to see spiritual gifts with an eternal appreciation for their purpose

- To summarize what Paul taught, spiritual gifts are given to manifest the love of God to the saints
  - He uses spiritual gifts to compensate for our sinful weaknesses
  - So we may experience a small measure of the love we'll possess in the Kingdom
  - Therefore, they have a limited purpose and a limited lifespan
- Furthermore, they must be used in love if they are going to fulfill that purpose
  - Which means that we should make our goal loving each other, not merely expressing our gifts for their own sake
  - For while gifts and faith and hope have a purpose for a time, only love lives on eternally
  - Therefore, we must make our goal increasing love rather than showcasing our gifts
- As we began this chapter, I said that this was a chapter of correction, and so it is
  - Paul has been gently chastising this church for forgetting the real purpose in spiritual gifts
    - They have pushed love aside to become selfish, prideful and even hurtful in their use of their gifts
    - For the Corinthians, a spiritual gift was a badge of honor for the person who possessed it, rather than means of showing love to others
  - But Paul isn't done chastising the church for their mistakes
    - In fact, chapter 14 is a full frontal assault on the church's misuse of gifts
    - In this chapter, Paul leaves nothing to chance, spelling out exactly what the church should and shouldn't be doing in the practice of gifts
    - And there is more than a little irony to be found in this chapter, because much of what Paul writes in chapter 14 has been twisted by some to justify the very practices Paul condemned

[1Cor. 14:1](#) Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.

[1Cor. 14:2](#) 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.

[1Cor. 14:3](#) But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation.

[1Cor. 14:4](#) One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church.

- Paul begins the chapter repeating his command that the church pursue love, desiring earnestly for spiritual gifts
  - Remember, this command is stated in the second person plural
    - Paul is asking the church as a whole to see the greater gifts expressed or used where they are present in the body
    - Notice that Paul skips the highest gift, the apostolic gift
    - This makes sense because in Paul's absence there was no apostolic gift in the body
    - So the next highest gift would be prophesy
  - So in pursuing love, the church should desire to see the highest priority gift expressed in the body above all other spiritual gifts
    - But then notice that the next comment Paul makes is regarding speaking in tongues, which is the lowest gift on his list of importance
    - Why did Paul jump from prophesy to tongues?
    - He is making a contrast between the highest and lowest gifts in the body
    - And as I mentioned last week, the Corinthian church had developed an unhealthy fascination with speaking in tongues
      - To the exclusion of other, more valuable gifts in the body
- Paul wants the church to move their attention away from the bottom of the list and toward the top of the list

- Remember, the purpose of gifts is to manifest love in the body, so then we should assume these gifts are rank ordered in keeping with their ability to promote love
  - The revelation of God is far more powerful in it's ability to promote love within the body than is the gift of speaking in a foreign tongue
  - I've mentioned the gift of speaking in tongues on numerous occasions over the past two chapters
  - But as you remember, I set aside discussing it in detail, preferring to wait until we reached this chapter where Paul himself begins to focus on this particular gift
- So let's define speaking in tongues
  - First, the word 'tongue' in scripture is glossa, which has two meanings in Greek
    - It means the body part found inside your mouth
    - And it also means human language
  - Obviously, by the context we know Paul was using the word in the sense of human language
  - So the gift of tongues is a gift of a human language
- It's important to emphasize that a tongue means a real, human language
  - A language has syntax, vocabulary, structure
  - It is not merely repetitive babbling of a few sounds over and over again
  - When you hear someone speaking in a language you don't understand, you can still recognize it as human speech
  - Human speech sounds far different than the sounds of a baby babbling or a toddler speaking in nonsense sounds
  - So a tongue is always a real, human language
- Then how is it considered a "spiritual gift" to be able to speak in a human language?

- Don't all humans naturally speak in a language from a very early age?
  - Yes, but the gift of tongues is a supernatural ability to speak in a foreign tongue that the speaker doesn't understand themselves
  - For example, I speak English, and I know a little Spanish, but I know absolutely no Japanese
  - So if I were to suddenly begin speaking to you in perfectly fluent Japanese, it would truly be a miracle
  - You wouldn't understand what I was saying
  - If a Japanese speaking person were present in the moment, they could understand what I was saying with no trouble whatsoever
- But the miracle of the gift is in speaking something I don't understand
  - My own words would be a complete mystery to me
  - I hear them coming out of my mouth, I recognize it as speech, but I have no idea what I said...in fact, I probably wouldn't know what language I was speaking
  - And that's the miracle, that by the power of the Spirit, someone can speak a language they don't understand
- We can see an example of this gift working in exactly this way when we look at what was happening in the day of Pentecost

**Acts 2:1** When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.

**Acts 2:2** And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.

**Acts 2:3** And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them.

**Acts 2:4** And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.

**Acts 2:5** Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under heaven.

**Acts 2:6** And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and were bewildered because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language.

**Acts 2:7** They were amazed and astonished, saying, "Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans?"

**Acts 2:8** "And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born?"

- Luke describes the moment when the Holy Spirit first indwelt the church saints on the day of Pentecost
  - On that day, many believers received the gift of tongues simultaneously, which is a very unique event in the church
    - In the book of Acts, there are only two other occasions when a large group of believers are given the gift of tongues in a mass gathering
    - Paul will explain why this was necessary later in chapter 14
  - Then notice what Luke reports as this crowd begin speaking in foreign languages
    - In v.4 Luke says that there were Jews living in Jerusalem at this time, having come from every nation under heaven
    - This means that within the crowd were expatriate Jews who had come from other nations and who understood virtually every language on earth
  - Then in v.6 Luke writes that these men were amazed as and astonished by the display of speaking in tongues
    - And they say are not these the men who speak in the language of the Galileans (which was Aramaic)?
    - Then they go on to say in v.8, “then why do we hear them speaking in our own languages, the languages we’ve had since birth?”
- By their statement, we see proof that speaking in tongues is not babbling in unintelligible manner or speaking in mysterious sounds no one understands
  - On the contrary, speaking in tongues is speaking in a normal, understandable human language
    - The miracle is that the speaker himself doesn’t understand the language
    - The Spirit is prompting the speech supernaturally
  - This leads us to the final thought for today...what is the edifying purpose of such a gift?
    - How does anyone benefit spiritually from someone speaking in a language that the speaker himself can’t understand?

- Paul answers that question in v.2
- He says that the one who is gifted to speak in tongues is speaking to God alone, not to men
  - This makes sense, since the speech is likely to be foreign not only to the individual speaking but also to his audience
  - Had God not assembled the group of foreign Jews on Pentecost, no one in the crowd of Galileans would have understood the speech that day
  - And so in most cases where tongues takes place, we might expect few of any observers to understand what's said
- Therefore, the gift serves the purpose of edifying only the one who speaks
  - No one else benefits from the speaking in tongues gift except the speaker alone
  - And even then, the benefit to the speaker is minimal
  - Notice Paul says the speaker is communicating in mysteries
  - He means the speaker is actually cut out of his own conversation with God
- So the edifying impact of speaking in tongues is limited to the degree of encouragement that comes in knowing God is working in you
  - This is why the gift ranks last in importance in the body
  - It serves to edify only one person, and even then only to a limited degree
- But in contrast to that gift, the gift of prophecy has tremendous potential to edify the body
  - In v.3 Paul says that prophecy can impact many people in the body for the purpose of edification, exhortation and consolation
    - I can strengthen others with revelation from God
    - Prophecy can move the body of Christ into taking action for the sake of righteousness

- And I can console those who are under trials or persecution with a word from God
- These are great benefits that far outweigh the limited benefits of speaking in tongues
- So Paul concludes his introduction to chapter 14 by saying the one who uses the gift of prophecy edifies the church, while the one who speaking in tongues only edifies himself
  - Clearly, if the goal of spiritual gifts is to show love to the body and strengthen the body, then prophecy is a much more important gift than tongues
  - Which is why Paul says the church should seek after prophecy when it's available in the church far more than it should seek to see the gift of tongues utilized in the church
- With that, Paul is ready to expose the problems with the manner and practice of tongues in this church, beginning with our study next week