***1Corinthians 13 – Part 2 – Clanging Cymbals and Burning Bodies –***

***Mark 11:12-15 – ESV - 12On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry. 13And seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see if he could find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. 14And he said to it, “May no one ever eat fruit from you again.” And his disciples heard it. 15And they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons.***

It is always interesting reading about the life of Jesus in the four gospels because there is so much story in the details of the stories.

For example, Mark tells us in chapter eleven that Jesus was coming from Bethany on his way to Jerusalem to the temple. And that is an import piece of information that you need in order to piece together the rest of the narrative of the passage. They were heading to the temple to ultimately worship God. Jesus and His disciples were on a journey to bring a gift of worship and thanksgiving to the Lord but on their way, they encounter a fig tree. And the fig tree stood in the middle of their journey from Bethany to Jerusalem, to the temple.

Now keep in mind that Bethany was a city close to Jerusalem, but it wasn’t Jerusalem, it wasn’t where the temple was, it wasn’t where the place of worship was.

So, Jesus and the disciples were heading from a place that was close to offering God a pure act of worship to going to the place of offering God a pure act of worship and standing in the middle of these two places was a fig tree.

The whole story is a physical picture of what Paul is talking about in 1Corithinas 13.

***1Corinthinas 13:1-3 – ESV - If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.2And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned,[***[***a***](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Corinthians%2013&version=ESV#fen-ESV-28652a)***] but have not love, I gain nothing.***

Paul is saying that there are different forms of religious service and sacrifice; people can be very gifted with spiritual gifts and be very talented in serving God and be very successful when it comes to their calling and they can be very virtuous in the way that they live and very moral and courageous for the gospel and all of these things can look like they are being done as an act of worship and obedience to God when in reality they are being done for ourselves.

It looks like worship; it is very similar to an act of worship and like Bethany it is close to Jerusalem where the center of worship is, but it is not where real worship happens.

Most people read through 1Corithinas 13, and they look at Paul correcting the Corinthians and it seems like Paul is saying that the church was using their talents and gifts and living virtuous and moral lives to try and get the attention of other believers; to feel like they were the best or most successful Christian in their community, but Paul brings out something so much deeper than that.

Remember the key to the chapter is in verse one.

***Verse 1 - If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.***

Corinth was a city that was known for its many pegan temples and gods. And one of the ways that the people worshiped the god’s was by hitting a gong or clanging cymbals in an attempt to get the their attention so that they would look down on the people and bless them.

And Paul is showing us that it’s human nature to use spiritual gifts and talents and a virtuous life as a type of hitting the gong of religion and clashing the cymbals of morality to try and get God’s attention and earn His approval to feel better about ourselves.

We all use these things to cover over how we really feel inside. To cover over our feelings of being a failure; we feel like a terrible mother or father, or we feel like we are failing in our career or in our life goals or we feel guilty about a past sin that we can’t forgive ourselves for or we use these things to cover over how inadequate we feel because of the accomplishments of someone close to us that we can’t live up to. Whatever it might be we are hitting the gong of religion and clashing the cymbals of morality to get God’s attention and to feel approved by Him so that we can approve ourselves.

And because most of our religious activity and serving and gift seeking is about us and not God it looks like obedience and worship, but it really isn’t.

It is a Bethany not a Jerusalem. It is close to the place of worship, but it is not the place of worship.

And right between being close to the place of worship and the actual place of worship is a fruitless fig tree.

This is this so important. Why? Because when Adam and Eve fell into sin in the garden their eyes were opened, and they realized that they were naked and for the first time they felt shame. They felt like something was wrong with them, they felt guilty. So, what did they do? They put together fig leaves and they covered over their nakedness; they covered over their shame and their feelings of being vulnerable and inadequate.

And that is what Paul is taking about when he says if I speak with the tongues of men and of angles but have not love I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. I am doing these things and using them as a type of fig leaf, to cover over my nakedness so I don’t feel ashamed in the presence of God.

I shared this last week from my personal journal, but I want to put it back up on the screen.

***God is not interested in hurting, wounded, unchanged people doing virtuous things; what God is interested in is supernaturally changed Christians who have been healed of their shame and who know that they are forgiven living moral lives that honor Him because of the joy and life that overflows from what He has done.***

Now we said last week that the answer to all of this is not trying to follow some list of what a supernaturally changed heart looks like, which is what we do when we read through 1 Corinthians chapter 13.

***1Corithinas 13:4-7 - 4Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant 5or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;[***[***b***](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Corinthians%2013&version=ESV#fen-ESV-28654b)***] 6it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. 7Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.***

We say okay to live out of a healed supernaturally changed heart that loves and worships God all I have to do is everything that 1Corithians verses 1-3 says as well as all the virtues and character of verses 4-8. But that never works because love is not a list of things it is a person; it is God. You don’t supernaturally change or learn to love from a list you only change and learn to love by allowing someone to pick you up and love you.

Now most of that was review but I want to hit on one more thing this morning before I move on in 1Corinhtinas 13 and it is a warning. Because one of the ways we try to fix the cymbal crashing Christianity is through an unbalanced misunderstanding of legalism and grace.

Let me try to explain. Let’s start with some definitions.

***Legalism – is a web of attitudes of the heart. It is the idea that God’s love for me is dependent on something I can be or do. It is the attitude that if I offer certain things; my faithfulness to the bible and the church, my support of Christ’s work in the world, my avoidance of deliberate sin that will earn God’s goodwill toward me.***

***Hyper Grace (defined by many believers not the bible) – is the idea that since God loves me regardless of my record, he doesn’t mind how morally or immorally I live. God accepts me as I am; He only wants me to be myself.***

Now in the mind of most believer’s legalism and this misunderstanding of grace are opposites of each other. And since we think that they’re opposites, we naturally try to heal the one with the other. And that is a big mistake.

See when we read and hear a preacher expound on a passage like 1Corithinas 13 where Paul talks about using spiritual gifts and giving away all our money to the poor and standing up for the gospel even at the cost of our lives but doing all of these things without a supernaturally changed heart many of us say well that’s just legalism and I know how to fix legalism I just need to lighten up and walk more in the grace of God.

So, then we end up swinging the pendulum to the other side and we think to ourselves well God doesn’t really care how I live or what I do because He accepts me just the way I am so from here on out I am just going to live and do whatever I want and trust that God loves me.

But then we see ourselves or other people pushing the pendulum in that direction, and we start thinking wait this doesn’t seem right living however I want God can’t be pleased with this, I know what I need, I need to go back to working to earn God’s approval again.

So, we are constantly adding a little legalism and a little misunderstood grace to try to get the perfect balance in our lives till we feel like okay I have just the right amount of trying to earn God’s love and acceptance with just the right amount of living however I want and not worrying about the commands in the bible. I got the mixture just right so my conscious feels better about myself and I don’t feel overwhelmed and weighed down by some heavy burden. And for most people that is their Christian walk until the day they die trying to figure out this perfect balance.

But what most Christians don’t realize is that legalism and this misunderstanding of grace have the same root, they are not opposites they are non-identical twins from the same womb.

See; ***Legalism stems from the belief that we have to pry blessings out of God’s begrudging, unwilling hands with all sorts of observances and performances.***

***But the hyper grace Christian sees God the exact same way. They see Him as an ungenerous, hard God who gives us commands for His own pleasure and not for our benefit or good.***

***Both the legalist and the hyper grace Christian see God and His law as something that is imposed on us as a burden and a test to see if we are good enough and worthy enough for God’s love and kindness.***

The only difference is the legalist takes on the heavy burden of trying to live a moral life in their own strength and follow the law while the hyper grace Christian refuses it and cast it off.

The root of these two extremes is the same. It’s a mistrust in God’s character and His word. Neither one believes that God is good and that even though He is Holy He is committed to our joy and our benefit. And you can’t cure the one with the other because they have the same root.

For example if you think a community group you attended or an individual in the church is embracing a misunderstanding of grace your immediate reaction might be to hammer them over the head with how holy God is and how he deserves our obedience and how we should only live for the glory of God but when you do that it reaffirms the lie inside of them that God is only concerned about Himself and He cannot be trusted with my life.

The same is true with try to heal legalism with hyper grace. Legalists don’t believe God law is good; instead, they believe obedience is just a way to get things from an unloving God. So, when you say the commands of the bible are not really that important God accepts you just the way you are you are feeding the lie that they can’t trust that God law is an expression of His love; and that He give us commands and boundaries for our life to protect us and to lead us into a greater revelation of Himself. And the fact that God would give something that is harmful and damaging for us means that He can’t really be trusted.

The only way to heal mistrust in God’s character is not more legalism or more hyper grace it’s the gospel.

***1Corithinas 13:8-12 ESV - 8Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. 9For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. 11When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. 12For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.***

Then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. 1Corinthians 13 gives us the solution to getting out of this cymbal crashing Christianity, it shows us how Jesus heals and delivers us from the barren fig tree in our lives. Paul says that I shall know fully even as I have been fully known. Fully known. Let those word sink in for a moment.

The bible tells us that even while we were enemies of God, God through His love reconciled us to Himself through the death of His son. Even though deep down humanity doesn’t trust in God’s goodness, even though deep down humanity think that God is egotistical, and self-absorbed and selfish and only wants to use us for His own good God came down to the Earth and became a man and allowed Himself to be used by the most self-absorbed and selfish creatures in all of His creation, us. He feed us with bread, and He healed our sicknesses and He delivered us from demonic oppression knowing that deep in our hearts it was all about us and even though He did all these things He knew that in a short time humanity would reject Him and be yelling crucify Him.

He sat and listened to His disciples as they argued about who would be the greatest some of the most self-absorbed conversations ever uttered. He listens to all our selfish requests and after bearing with all of that He made the decision to do the most unselfish thing that has ever and will ever be done He decided to give up His life and die on a cross for the most selfish and self-absorbed people. He took our punishment so that we could go free even though deep in our hearts after all of that He knew we still wouldn’t truly trust that He is good and that He loves us unconditionally.

And when you see that, when you truly get it legalism, hyper grace, all the spiritual things we trying to do to earn God’s approval goes away and this surrender comes into our hearts, and we say God I just want you. You have won my heart; I just want to love you and obey you and live surrendered to you because of how wonderful you are. The Gospel is the only thing that can heal us and transform us from the inside out.