

1Corinthians 13 – Clanging Cymbals and Burning Bodies Part 1-

I brought with me this morning a photograph that I took for one of my fine art series called Hometown Boys. The photo is of my brother and a few of our friends. This photo was printed and framed for a gallery show in Chelsea New York; but how the photograph came about is the real story. My buddies and I use to play around on race quads and dirt bikes, and we had a bike with a two-stroke motor which meant you had to mix the oil with the gas. You oiled the motor through the gas tank. So, we had five gallons of 105 octane race fuel mixed with two stroke oil but we blew up the motor and destroyed the dirt bike being stupid. So, every day my dad would come to the garage where he worked, and he would see the five gallons of race fuel sitting in a corner and out of frustration he would yell at me and say get rid of that fuel. I looked at him confused and said how. So, my dad lovingly responded pour a little out every day on an oil pan and burn it till it's gone.

Well, my brother and I took that idea of burning the fuel and we came up with our own plan. I won't tell you how we got the fire ball up so high on this abandon factory wall in the middle of nowhere; but it made an incredible photograph. And long story short we were able to burn all five gallons in a matter of a few minutes. In fact, we even made a fire tornado that reached up to the ceiling of this abandon building and poured out black smoke across the whole neighborhood and I will never forget what my fine art professor said to me. He said it looks like the baptism

of The Holy Spirit on Pentecost, but the tongues of fire seemed to have made a mistake and found the wrong four guys. Anyways my dad finally saw the photo and he laughed and said well at least the fuel is gone and out of my garage.

See my dad wanted me to do something and to complete a task but he had a specific way he asked me to do it. And even though I got the task done I didn't do it my dad's way and because I didn't do it dad's way, I really didn't complete the task. In fact, the way I choose to do it could have been disastrous and it could have caused a lot of harm.

And that is what I want to talk about this morning. Turn with me to 1Corinthians chapter 13. The love chapter.

1Corinthians 13 – 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. ² And 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. ³ If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned,^[a] but have not love, I gain nothing.

⁴ Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;^[b] ⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the

truth. ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

⁸ Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰ but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. ¹¹ When 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. ¹² For 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.

¹³ So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

1 Corinthians 13 is considered one of the great literary chapter in all of writing. It is inspiring and it holds up some of the greatest ideals for humans. In fact, 1 Corinthians chapter 13 is known as the wedding passage because it is often read at wedding ceremonies. But if you put the chapter into the context of the rest of the book of Corinthians you begin to realize that this isn't an inspiring chapter of scripture like we think but it is a rebuke and a word of correction to a church that was an absolute mess.

Why was Paul criticizing the Corinthian Church? Because even though the church was filled with gifts and activity for God, they didn't have a supernaturally changed heart.

Human nature without supernatural intervention is like an exercise ball. You can change its shape but the moment you take the pressure off it always snaps right back. See the exercise ball was constrained and restrained but it wasn't changed and reshaped. And you can see that this is what Paul is saying in the first three verses. Because Paul is showing us in these verses what a supernaturally changed heart is not.

1Corinthians 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. ² And 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. ³ If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned,^[a] but have not love, I gain nothing.

Number 1 – A supernatural changed heart is not a talented or successful person or a talented and successful ministry.

Look at what Paul says. If I speak in the tongues of men and angels and if I have prophetic powers and if I understand all mysteries and knowledge which means that I'm able to teach well and I have all faith to move mountains which means I have the faith to move demonic strongholds and to see people healed.

Now that sounds like what most people are looking for when it comes to choosing a church or a ministry to be a part of. Right? Do they operate in the gift of tongues, are

they able to communicate the word of God in an interesting way, can they bring things out of the bible things that I have never seen before, is God showing up in the ministry and the church and downloading special visions and words are people getting healed in services?

These are all good things, and they should be pursued and happening in a church congregation but none of those things in themselves prove that the church or the people are walking in a supernaturally changed heart. Isn't that crazy? And none of those things alone are what God is after or wants for His church. That sounds nuts, doesn't it? And yet that is what Paul is saying here in 1 Corinthians; Paul says I can do all these things but those things by themselves gain nothing.

But then Paul takes it a step further and really messes us up. Because many in this room would agree with the assessment that spiritual gifts and talent and success in ministry is not real evidence of a supernaturally changed heart but what Paul says next is kind of mind blowing.

Number 2 - A supernaturally changed heart is not being a moral person; it is not morality.

1Corinthians 13:3 – ESV - ³ If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned,^[a] but have not love, I gain nothing.

I don't know about you, but I have never given all I have to the poor or to a ministry. I have given some; I have given a tithe, ten percent and Beth and I have grown in our giving

to give more than that but to give everything. To be a person that gives so much that it effects how you live, it effects what you can do. To give so much that you have to make scarifies to give like that I haven't lived at that level of giving.

Paul is talking about giving so much away that he would have to take a vow of poverty. Now what is that? It is Paul making the choice to live justly. It is Paul living a virtuous life giving what he has away because other people are in need.

But then Paul talks about giving his body to be burned, some translation will say giving my body to hardship. Paul is giving himself up to persecution for the sake of the gospel. Being willing to stand for the word of God and the truth of God even if it means losing his life.

Now what is Paul getting at when he speaks about giving away everything he has and standing up for the gospel at the cost of his life? He is getting at having virtue.

Paul is talking about being a man or a woman of virtue.

Paul is saying even if I have virtues like self-control or courage or justice or prudence where I stand up for the word of God and I live justly by giving what I have to the poor; even if I do all that but if I don't have love in the eyes of God none of it matters.

Paul is saying that living a virtuous life or a moral life does not mean that you have a supernaturally changed heart.

WHAT!!!!!!! That sounds theologically off doesn't it. How in the world do we reconcile this? And how do we know if we have a supernaturally changed heart? Well, the key is in verse 1.

1Corinthians 13:1 – 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.

A noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. I have heard that verse preached so many times and I always thought that what Paul was saying is that if you speak in tongues without love you are just making a lot of noise but you're not helping anyone. That is what I thought until I was reading a commentary by Gordon Fee. And Gordon makes the observation that in the city of Corinth many of the pagan gods were worshiped by people hitting a gong or clanging cymbals together and the idea was that the pagan gods needed to be woken up or they needed something to get their attention so that they would notice the people and bless them.

And when you realize that is what Paul was talking about it changes everything.

See watch this many Christians throughout the world are using their talents and their gifts and are living virtuous lives; giving so much money away to the poor, standing up for what is right and losing their jobs, but they are living like that and using these moral things as a type of cymbal or gong that they are clashing to try and get God's attention.

It is a way to say to God look at how good I am, look at what I am doing for you; because I am so good God you have to answer me, you have to favor me, you have to bless me.

You're not using your gifts and talents and living a moral life for God but for yourself.

Let me take it further and really nail the point home.

You can even be using gifts and talents and morality to cover over something deep inside of you.

When you give a lot of money away to the poor, which by the way I am not saying you shouldn't do that, I am just asking the question what is the motivation of your heart? When you give like that, or you stand up for Christ, those things from the outside look sacrificial and brave and courageous.

But the question is are you doing those things and acting that way out of love, out of a supernaturally changed heart or to cover up how you really feel about yourself?

That deep down you feel like a failure, or you feel guilty because of a sin in your past that you have asked God to forgive but you can't forgive yourself. Do you feel inadequate or envious of other people and how they always seem to be perfect and blessed?

Are you doing these things because you and a friend entered into full time ministry, and he is succeeding, and you are having a hard time seeing any fruit?

Is it because you had a father or a relative that was always successful, and they were able to accomplish things you can't, and you are using the virtues of Christianity or the gifts of the spirit to cover over your shame and make yourself feel better about where you are in life?

Did you go through a divorce, and you feel ashamed of being a divorced Christian so you're severing in the church and you giving everything you got to the kingdom, but it is really all about feeling better about your wound from your past.

Many times, we are doing these Christian things and asking for more spiritual gifts and looking for more opportunities to be used or opportunities to make greater sacrifices as a way of hitting the gong of religion as a way of clanging the cymbals of morality to get God's attention so that we can make God approve of us. So that we can feel approved by God. So that we can approve of ourselves. And that is a very dangerous place to be.

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.

Write this down; ***There is a type of Charismatic and Moral Christianity that doesn't put a stake through the***

heart of self-centeredness, but it actually nurtures it and cultivates it.

Let that sink in for a moment. Are the gifts of the spirit and the morality of God's word being used for yourself or for God and others?

So, what's the answer? How do we get out of this type of cymbal crashing Christianity? Well to answer that you need to understand the rest of 1Corinthians chapter 13.

1Corinthians 13:4-7 – ESV - ⁴ Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful,^[b] ⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

When you first read the rest of the chapter it sounds like Paul is putting together a list of different characteristics of love. So, most Pastors preach this portion of scripture by saying that it isn't enough to be a talented or gifted Christian it isn't enough to do all these moral and virtuous things you also have to be patient and kind and humble and full of hope and endurance. So, everyone leaves the service thinking okay to have a supernaturally changed heart I have to do all the stuff spoken about in verses 1 through 3 and I have to add the list of virtues and character in verse 4 -8.

Now do you see what just happened there. We didn't really deal with the fact that our hearts have not been supernaturally changed instead we just found another list of things we need to do to feel approved by God and to make ourselves feel better about our Christianity.

1John 4:8 – ESV - ⁸ Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

God is love. Love is a person; it is not a virtue or an action or a list; it is God Himself.

And when you get that you understand that no one and I mean no one learns to love by trying to follow a list. You learn to love because someone picks you up and loves you.

See Paul isn't writing a list in 1Corinthians 13 he is describing a person. He is saying if you want to be supernaturally changed by God you need to be loved by Him in such a way that His love heals you and changes you and causes you to love other people selflessly. And the only way to do that is through intimacy with the Person who is love. Love is patient and longsuffering now when Paul is writing that He is thinking about the one that is love He is thinking about Jesus and how patient He was when He went before the Sanhedrin and the Pilot and how he was mocked and ridiculed and beaten and never said a word or tried to defend Himself because of how much He loved us.

Or when Paul talks about love enduring all things Paul was talking about how Jesus sweat blood in the garden because he was experiencing the wrath of God and what He was about to go through but He endured it and kept going to the cross because He knew we would never make it to eternity without Him.

Or when Paul says that love believes all things he was talking about Jesus crying out on the cross into your hands I commit my spirit; Jesus was saying I am going through this hell and believe that my Father will raise me up after three days after I give myself over to death and I am going to trust Him and believe Him I am going through all of this for Michael or for Beth or for Billy because I love them so much.