

Christian Love: Living It Out In Loveless Times

1 Corinthians 13:11-13

1 Corinthians 13:11

(KJV) When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

(NIV) When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me.

Paul here does not negate the value of our present childlike state—that is the importance of prophecy, wisdom, and knowledge—as incomplete as it is. We need these gifts to give us confirmation, direction, and confidence to move ahead in God’s Word.

Believing in God’s Word is not a given. It requires faith! Thankfully, the Holy Ghost within us always points us to Jesus and His Word.

*QUESTION FOR MEDITATION: What has been your understanding of the spiritual gifts? Do you know which ones God has imparted to you? How are you exercising and refining these gifts? Why is this important?

So, what is Paul doing here? He is giving us a poignant word picture of what it means to mature, to move on from childhood and its imaginations, and come to a more complete understanding. Our receiving and our exercising of spiritual gifts is, in a sense, childish. We don’t yet have a mature and complete insight into God and His love. And when He calls us home, we will finally see Him as He really is—love! Then these childish, incomplete ways will be put to rest forever in favour of our newfound full revelation. Praise God!

Paul wanted the Corinthians to have a balanced perspective about their temporal spiritual gifts, in light of the more lasting quality of enduring love. He uses these word pictures to help them understand and have a mature view of their gifts given of God. Paul is speaking the truth in love:

Ephesians 4:14-16

That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

So, our spiritual gifts are expressions of God’s agape love as we serve each other in the Body of Christ with these gifts, and as we speak the truth in love one to another. Indeed, the Body of Christ matures and grows as each part of the Body functions healthily in love. God designed it this way. Amazing? Yes, miraculous!

STUDY POINT: Find three passages in the New Testament where spiritual gifts were elevated above obedience to God? Why is it so important to minister these gifts in love—obedience being our most sincere expression of love?

Ultimately, Paul wants his spiritual children to catch the love of God—to understand that they are but children—immature and able to see just a part of who God is and what He gloriously has in store:

1 Corinthians 2:9-10

But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.

1 Corinthians 13:12

(KJV) For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

(NIV) For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

Another word picture from Paul. He emphasizes again that we see only an unclear image of God and eternity. But when Jesus returns we will see the whole picture! Paul explains it this way to the Corinthians—and to us today—to help us understand spiritual gifts with brevity and Biblical perspective illuminated by God’s promise of eternal life. Paul here declares that he is fully known by God, and one day we will see God completely and worship Him forever.

1 Corinthians 13:13

(KJV) And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

(NIV) And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

We need faith in God’s Word today. We need hope to get us out of bed in the morning and to help us stay in the race and finish well. Faith and hope together yield love which not only makes us fruitful in our gifts but carries us into eternity where we will dwell with God—Who is love—forever.

Hallelujah!

~ Reverend Darren McClelland