

Christian Love: Living It Out In Loveless Times

Introduction/1 Corinthians 12

Dear Christian, do not miss the brevity of this verse:

John 13:34-35

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

The world is most certainly watching us, the Body of Christ, and they may have questions concerning how we behave one to another. In addition, our Adversary the Devil will take any and all missteps of God's children and direct them back at us as fiery darts. He accuses us 24/7. We dare not give our enemy any latitude to form guilty verdicts against us. We do not accept condemnation in any form, do we?

Romans 8:1

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

However, we do accept God's correction:

Hebrews 12:6-7

For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?

In these days God is moulding and shaping us into the image of His Son—Who loved perfectly while on this earth, and Who continues to love us perfectly through His Spirit Who lives inside of us. Hallelujah!

Context, context, context! We begin our study about Christian love by getting the context of Paul's teaching. Keep in mind the four W's of reading critically—who, what, where, and why. We may know the love chapter of 1 Corinthians 13 perhaps a little too well, thus we need to slow down and break down the verses a bit more carefully. Our first order of business is to understand Paul's flow of thought in 1 Corinthians 13 by chiming into 1 Corinthians 12.

1Corinthians 12:1

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant.

Paul's two-fold purpose for writing here is to correct and teach his flock. As indicated here, he is about to address the subject of spiritual gifts—for the purpose of correction.

1Corinthians 12:2

Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led.

As humankind we are all subject to the sin of idolatry. Oh beloved, how easily the idol of self slips into our hearts and, yes, even our churches. This is why we must guard our hearts from outside voices:

Proverbs 4:23

Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.

1Corinthians 12:3

Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.

Paul stresses here that we must view spiritual gifts as spiritual, coming from a spiritual source, namely God—the good gift-giver. The Body of Christ was not formed through man-made constructs. Man-made structures are foolishly built on quicksand and will collapse in the end, because they are not founded on Jesus Christ. They will burn!

1Corinthians 3:10-13

According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.

1Corinthians 12:4

Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.

So many gifts, and they are to be celebrated! God made them and He distributed them. He alone deserves the glory.

1Corinthians 12:5

And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord.

The gifts of God are diverse and comprehensive with God Himself as the single source.

1Corinthians 12:6

And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.

The purpose of God's giving of diverse spiritual gifts in the Body of Christ is so that He may work in them divine, spiritual power and thus receive the glory. No mere carnal religiosity here, folks. This needs to be emphasized because there is a form of godliness that is void of power—rendering it powerless!

2Titus 3:1-5

This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, thankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.

1Corinthians 12:7

But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.

What a stark contrast to the false prophets of Biblical times up to present day! Our spiritual gifts are for the benefit of the whole Body, and for the glory of God. Not for my benefit and my glory!

1Corinthians 12:8

For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit;

We may ask for wisdom with a single mind, and without doubting—for both our own battles and for blessing others (James 1:1-18). Those with knowledge of the Bible and how to teach it and apply it are a blessing provided by God to His Body.

1Corinthians 12:9

To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit;

Faith and healing are companions, and those with great faith—who truly believe God's promises of healing—can lay hands on the sick and expect results. Let us not forget that we all carry brokenness, though not perpetual brokenness. God may break us for a time and season and reason. Still, whatever our need for healing may be, we value greatly those with the faith/healing gifts.

1Corinthians 12:10

To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues:

What miracles our lives are through the salvation of Jesus! And what prophetic blessings we receive as prophesied Bible verses provide focus and direction to local churches and individual believers all over the globe. What about discernment, one of our most needed gifts in the Body of Christ today?

1John 4:1

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

Also, God provides the prayer language of tongues so that we can go deep with Him—deeper than with our native tongues. And publicly He may want to communicate to

brothers and sisters in our church families through public tongues, provided we have an interpreter so that outsiders may understand the prophecy. Then God is glorified!

1Corinthians 14:4

He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church.

1Corinthians 12:11

But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.

Is this amazing? God perfectly distributes His gifts as He will and we receive and refine our gifts as He empowers us to do so through the Holy Spirit.

1Corinthians 12:12

For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ.

Think Jesus on the cross. He is the culmination of all spiritual gifts. It's only natural that His body represents the church. The church is His physical body crucified for our sins and His resurrection body risen from the grave unto eternal life—never to die again! Now you can see clearly where the Body of Christ gets its parts, purpose and power. The church is life everlasting!

1Corinthians 12:13

For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.

Your baptism, my baptism. Think of the diversity of God's baptized saints across this earth throughout the ages! A public symbol of our identification with the death of Jesus on the cross and His subsequent resurrection from the grave—unto our grafting into the Body of Christ, replete with assigned glorious spiritual gifts.

1Corinthians 12:14

For the body is not one member, but many.

And we ought to thank God, believer, for this reality. We do not have to sojourn alone, but understand that God has provided brothers and sisters around us to hold us up when we are weak.

This verse comes to mind:

Exodus 17:12

But Moses' hands were heavy; and they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat thereon; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun.

Or this:

Ecclesiastes 4:12

And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

1Corinthians 12:15-18

If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.

Every one of them. Beloved, we need every member of the Body to be a healthy church. Not one missing! We need each other in the Body of Christ. We need Biblical fellowship to encourage one another daily:

Hebrews 3:13

But exhort one another daily, while it is called today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

As it hath pleased him. We are each fearfully and wonderfully made, knit together in our mother's womb (Psalm 139:14), made on purpose for a purpose—not with independence, but ultimate interdependence in the Body of Christ. And it pleased God to knit together His church this way, with each part needed and valued highly, the less seen parts honoured the most. God knew that the most seen parts are to be faithful and humble as they serve Him—they need not be exalted.

Read on:

1Corinthians 12:19-25

And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked: That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another.

Here we observe why Paul is addressing spiritual gifts in the church. The Corinthians had made a grave error in devaluing or dismissing less visible gifts in favour of the more obvious ones—namely, tongues. And they did so void of care and love for one another. This kind of heart attitude of pride could only yield one result—division in the Body of Christ. And what does God hate?

Proverbs 6:16-19

These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.

The Corinthians had become selfish and arrogant:

1Corinthians 8:1

Now as touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth.

In the following number of verses, Paul describes how the Body of Christ should function, to the end of his argument, culminating with his main point—spiritual gifts mean nothing without love. Without love we could do without spiritual gifts.

1Corinthians 12:26

And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.

The church that prays together stays together! We grieve or we celebrate—together!

1Corinthians 12:27-30

Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?

Answer: no!

We should celebrate the diversity in the Body of Christ. Different religious backgrounds, cultures, customs all brought together by God the Father under the banner of His Son Jesus Christ. Hallelujah!

1Corinthians 12:31

But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.

We earnestly desire supernatural spiritual gifts for the blessing of the Body of Christ and for the glory of God by manifesting them in God's power and love!

Even so and even still, Paul is about to show us something more excellent.

~ Reverend Darren McClelland