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Christianity without love: The not-so-excellent way

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1 Corinthians 13:1-3

When Eric preached on the end of chapter 12 he spent the majority of his time emphasis that the “still more excellent way,” which is Paul’s last statement in verse 31, is in fact God’s way. It is the way God the Father sent his Son. It is the way the Son, Jesus, obeyed the Father and the way he acted toward those around him. This “way” of course is the way of *love*. And Paul is about to go into the “way” true love, God’s love is expressed, how it is manifested, among his people. But before he says how love is, he goes to great lengths to show that spiritual things done without love are useless.

1. Supernatural gifting without love benefits no one
 - a. “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels”
 1. The context of chapter 12 leaves no doubt that Paul is referring to the spiritual gift of speaking in a language previously unknown to the speaker. This is a miraculous work of the Spirit to overcome the division in humanity we know as language, which was brought about by God because of the disobedience of man at the Tower of Babel (Gen 11)
 2. Paul then doubles down on this miracle and adds the hyperbolic element that will carry through verse three when he adds “and of angels.”
 - a. In any instance of angelic or divine/heavenly speech in scripture we are always lead to believe that the conversation is happening/heard in the know tongue of the non angelic participant/hearer of the conversation
 - i. God speaking to Moses throughout the book of Exodus
 - ii. Joshua 1 God speaks to Joshua, 5:13ff Josua speaks to the commander of the army of the Lord
 - iii. Isaiah 6 - Isaiah sees the throne of heaven and hears the flying seraphim who called to one another “Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is filled with his glory!” and then he converses with one of them and nowhere are we lead to believe that it was in a different language
 - ii. The most miraculous giftings carried out without love create only confusion and annoyance.
 1. The vibration of metal has the amazing ability to resonate not only our eardrums but also our whole bodies. Thus the use of cymbals and gongs have become synonymous with announcement,

importance and crescendo. They are loud and when struck unintentionally, out of time and out of tune causes a cringe.

- a. This is different than other noises which we may not enjoy but we will however tolerate because it is serving a purpose. A squeaky door or rusty gate, while it might need some oil, produces its noise because it is performing its function. Paul's illustration here goes deeper than things that annoy us to something that fails to function in its purpose
 2. For years now we have had a friendly competition with my brother and sister in law so see who could give the most obnoxious object to one another's children as gifts. Musical instruments are a favorite for the 2-4 age range because toddlers and young children will make noise simply for the novelty of making noise.
 3. I wonder how many of us use our gifts simply to hear ourselves make noise forgetting that our giftings are not for us alone, but for the body of which we are a part
- b. "If I have prophetic powers and, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge"
1. Hyperbole continues here as Paul speaks of something that can only be said of God. Only God is all knowing.
 - a. Paul is using what is humanly impossible to illustrate two things:
 - i. The importance of Love
 1. To be all knowing and unloving means you are nothing
 - ii. The Character of God
 1. To be all knowing and loving means your God
 2. Even if God gifts one of his saints to know all things it is of no value unless it motivated by and carried out in love

c. "If I have all faith, so as to remove mountains"

 - i. This again is a reference to a gift previously mentioned - faith
 1. This is not the gift of saving faith that is common to all believers but rather the gift of faith which God grants to certain believers to be sure of wondrous things that God will do.
 - a. If this happens without love the faith filled person is nothing
 - i. Think of the story of Jonah. He had faith that God would save but did not love the Ninivites. Jonah 4:1-3

d. "If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned"

 - i. We often use self sacrifice as a gauge of spirituality and love. Paul's extreme example with giving everything away even one's life sounds like

the most loving thing someone could do, yet he says it is possible to give charitably and even die for another in an unloving manner.

1. How this happens is through selfishness. We can do selfless things for selfish reasons. This is not love and it gains nothing.
 - a. Philanthropy is not bad but it can be completely void of biblical love and doesn't gain anything for eternity.
 - b. Martyrdom for a cause, while it may be noble if the cause is noble, can be deficient in love and totally selfish

2. Application:

- a. How many of us make the mistake of trying to do for God without loving like God loves? Dear ones, did you notice that all of the application in this passage is to me: I'm a noisy gong, I'm a clanging cymbal, I am nothing, I gain nothing. God is not changed Jesus is not changed the gospel may still go out but I, I am noisy, worthless and without prophet if I don't love. These are statements that are incongruent with Christian because followers of Jesus speak words of peace and hope, disciples of Christ have been given a standing as sons and daughters of God, God's children have gained the inheritance of eternal life.