

February 13, 2010 Florida Hospital Seventh-day Adventist Church
1 Corinthians 13:1-3 All You Need Is Love: Tongues of Angels by
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Let me start with a simple, straightforward reminder for any who may have forgotten—tomorrow is Valentines, and no matter how bad a procrastinator you may be, since it is tomorrow its not too late.

But with all its mushy sentiment and over use of pink, red, and white, Valentines is not a neutral celebration

For everyone in a relationship there's the pressure and accompanying uncertainty of doing the "right" thing for the one you love.

If you are not in a relationship and wish you were the day can be depressing.

If you were in a relationship that you wished would continue but your partner didn't share that wish it can be a sad day.

Even a grade school kid can feel triumphant at receiving more valentines than were given or they can go home in tears feeling the pain of giving more valentines than they received!

However you relate to the day I just want to be helpful and remind you the clock is ticking it is TOMORROW!

I must confess that when I outlined the series we begin today, I didn't have it starting on this weekend, it originally started last weekend on our schedule, but my confession is that I did want it to occur in this season.

Today we begin a series on Paul's famous, and over used at weddings, love chapter, 1 Corinthians 13. It is a piece of literary work famous to believers in the inspiration of scripture and skeptics alike.

Paul first came to the cosmopolitan city of Corinth after his rather short visit to Athens where he used their shrine to the unknown God as a way to introduce them to Jesus. Corinth was a city that sat on the narrow isthmus connecting lower Greece to the mainland. All north south land travelers and merchants had to pass through Corinth. In addition treachery and dangerous waters of the Aegean Sea created the demand for ships sailing east or west to have their cargo if not their whole ship hauled over the narrow piece of land where Corinth was located.

Paul proclaimed the gospel of Jesus Christ in the synagogue there with some success among the Jews before turning and making a commitment to reach a non-Jewish population. Paul, who often was more of a hit and run evangelistic type, stayed in Corinth for 18 months, teaching, training, modeling the Christian faith.

Paul opened scripture and people grasped the truth. They celebrated the forgiveness of sins that Jesus brings. They wanted a full on experience with him but after Paul left Corinth they went too far. They began to practice a Christianity that ignored the Christian ethic.

They knew they were forgiven by Christ—and they pushed it to believing that since they were forgiven they could do anything they wanted. Somewhere Paul had not taught them enough or they missed a lesson or two.

In this distinctly anti-Christian culture they were now bumping into sexual immorality, greed, excess, self-interest, opportunity for litigation, So when Paul gets word of trouble in the church he established there he writes letters to them and we have two of those in 1st and 2nd Corinthians.

Just like our lives today the people of Corinth had a reputation. A reputation is simply what a person is known for. When a parent or friend warns someone to be careful around so and so because they have a reputation we don't think of it as positive.

But the truth is our life practice, the way we do business, how we engage with people, the friends we have, our patterns of behavior create for each of us a reputation.

Marketing is an attempt to establish a reputation true or not.
See if you can identify the reputation of these companies.

Like a good neighbor---State Farm is There!
The money you could be saving-Geico
You are in good hands with—Allstate
Have it your way—Burger King
You deserve a break today—McDonalds

Whether it is deserved or real, false or accurate products and people have reputations.

I remember it being used primarily in the negative as a kid when parents would warn me about hanging out with a kid who had reputation!

Well the truth is everyone has reputation good, bad, or apathetic.

One of the challenges we face as Christians is that however we live our lives we are never just establishing our own reputation. The way we live our lives, the way we treat people, the practice of life is always building two reputations—our own and the reputation of Christians.

The Corinthians had a reputation—it was such a corrupt city that it had been turned into a slang verb. When a person was corrupt people of the day would say they had been “Corinthianized” and it wasn’t meant as a compliment.

What reputation will these Corinthian Christians make for themselves and for the fledgling church of Jesus Christ in their city?

Paul is compelled to write because they are building some unsavory reputations.

Some are creating the reputation that being part of the Body of Christ can mean you can get your way and do whatever you want because you are forgiven!

There are believers gaining a reputation for having their favorite apostle on a pedestal,

Some want the church to have the reputation of being accepting, even of gross sexual practice.

They are gaining a reputation for taking each other to court for personal profit and settling quarrels,

They have the reputation of putting church members in a hierarchy based on which spiritual gift a person has,

They were becoming known for selfish feasting at the meal connected with the Lord's Supper.

Paul loves the church, the body of Christ too much to let it develop a reputation that falsely represents everything it was meant to be. And Paul speaks to each abuse.

What is the right reputation for the church? What is it that we, as part of the universal body of Christ, what should be our reputation?

What do we want, what is the right thing, to have a reputation about?

I think we can build a pretty good case that it would be good to have a reputation as a Spirit filled church!

It is certainly a good thing to be Spirit filled.

We've had whole series of sermons here at the Hospital Church on the Holy Spirit. The doctrine of the Holy Spirit; the work of the Spirit; the gifts of the Spirit and of course permeating all of these is the fruit of the Spirit.

The Corinthians were big into teaching, and believing and expecting the Holy Spirit. Many commentators believe that Paul's letter reveals

that they had elevated some kind of spiritual speaking in tongues as the most elevated gift.

Paul later makes it clear, the gift of tongues is only to be used or exercised in the church if there is an interpreter. Just hearing words in another language doesn't edify the church. But only when interpreted for understanding.

In our text for today, the first three verse of 1 Corinthians 13, it is clear that Paul begins with a reference to tongues as a reference not just to their seeing a reputation as a Holy Spirit filled congregation, but Paul is also using this as an illustration of a reputation for being "spiritual."

Now lets be really clear, it is good to be spiritual and to be a place filled with the Holy Spirit,

But hear what Paul is saying. If you have what you think is the greatest and highest and best manifestation of the Holy Spirit. If you have a reputation as a super spiritual place but don't love others it is all just a bunch of meaningless noise—like a loud gong or a clanging cymbal.

Maybe a church would do well to have a reputation as having the gift of prophecy.

A prophet is one who speaks on God's behalf. But here Paul seems to emphasize the aspect of prophetic understanding of the future. What could be better than being known as the church that understands all the mysteries of the future, and knows everything about everything.

It sort of sounds like a church that would have a reputation for having, knowing, holding the truth. Understanding what is coming. There's this human craving to be able to know the future, and what could be better for the kingdom of God than a church that can tell you how the story ends, and serve as the bastion of truth.

Or what about developing a church a body of believers that epitomize a walk of faith! Maybe there's a reputation of such faith that there's no doubt that if this body asks for a mountain to be thrown into the sea you could anticipate an instantaneous splash! Wow, who wouldn't want a church with that reputation. People are healed, lives changed because the church asks and has this enormous faith. What could possibly be better than a reputation of having the faith of Jesus?

Of course all of that is great but a picture is worth a thousand words and so what if a church had a reputation for generosity and service. To be known as a church that gives sacrificially to care for the poor. What would be better than having a church known for a willingness to actually lay down their lives for other people!

Paul doesn't say that any of these reputations is right or wrong.

He doesn't really put one above the other in any hierarchy

No fault is found with being a spirit filled, spiritual, prophetic, knowledgeable, place of faith and sacrificial giving and service to humanity to the point of martyrdom.

Except—if it is without love.

Listen carefully without love, agape—self-sacrificing, self-giving, self-abandoning love

Without love at the root and heart

Without love as the motive and the action

Without love permeating every aspect

Without Love Spirituality, spiritual gifts, prophecy, knowledge, faith, sacrifice, service, and even martyrdom is NOTHING.

If you take a piece of paper and write down one zero or hundreds of them in a line they are zero, nothing. But if you write a 1 in front of those zero's everything changes.

Paul wanted the Corinthians to grasp it, and God wants us to grasp it. Everything we do in just our regular lives, or in our spiritual walk, or in our church as part of the Body of Christ, it is all just a collection of zero's without love.

John got it. He remembered Jesus words the night he was betrayed. After he washed the disciples feet and instituted the bread and wine of the last supper he told his disciples. "So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples." John 13:34-35

It won't be your spiritual gifts, or your prophetic understanding, your great knowledge, or unsurpassable faith, not even your sacrificial giving or your death as martyr that will reveal to the world that you are my disciples—it is the love you have for one another.

John got it. In 1 John 4 he communicates it plainly.

"Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is born of God and knows God. But anyone who does not love does not know God—for God is love. God showed how much he loved us by sending his only son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love. It is not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.

Dear friends, since God love us that much, we surely ought to love each other. No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love has been brought to full expression through us."

This chapter 13 of 1 Corinthians is critical.

Our mission as a church, what we have adopted as our mission that matches the Great Commission given by Jesus to all his disciples, our mission is "Loving people into a life-long friendship with God."

Sure we may use our spiritual gifts, and prophetic understandings, and knowledge, and faith, and it will undoubtedly call for sacrifice and laying down our lives for others, but we are about loving people.

I agree with Douglas Cooper when he wrote: "...the gosel in its most dynamic form consist of loving people well. Loving them where they are and as they are. This is pure evangelism at its best.

Loving each other. Loving people. And as we investigate all of this chapter we will learn how that love behaves, and what means and the importance. Of loving people into a life-long friendship with God. A friendship that supersedes all parochialism, a friendship that demands our friendship with all his family, a friendship with him whom to know is life eternal.

Treasure your spiritual gift and use it for kingdom benefit.

Study God's word and share those understandings, prophecies, knowledge.

Be people of faith, taking God at his word and believing him.

Share your goods with the needy

Lay down your life but smother it all in love.

God is love are you?

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It is just after he has been waxing eloquent regarding how the church is one body and all the parts are important, and each gift is significant, and how some of the more essential parts aren't even able to be seen, and that no one person can do everything, that Paul sort of stops himself short and abruptly just says, Wait let me show you the most excellent way, or Wait, let me tell you about something that is superior to all the spiritual gifts.