*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

March 2 - 7

*First Corinthians Chapter Thirteen*

**Monday, March 2 1 Corinthians 12:31b-13:3**

*“The most excellent way”*

 Love is more important than all the gifts listed in chapter 12, for without love the gifts are worthless. That truth is driven home in verses 1-3 by using five of the spiritual gifts as illustrations. In verse 1, Paul makes the point with reference to speaking in tongues: without love the use of such a gift merely results in unwelcome noise. In verse 2, Paul uses the example of gifts of spiritual insight and of a faith that work miracles; they gain nothing without love.

 Verse 3 hammers home the point one more time with the most extreme example yet – seemingly total self-abandonment in exercising the gift of giving. Here “giving up one’s body” could include the martyrdom of being burned at the stake for one’s faith, but might also refer to the ancient practice of selling oneself into slavery to raise funds for distribution to the poor.

 Love itself is not a spiritual gift. Rather it is the supreme Christian virtue which must be present with all the gifts if they are to be used in ways that will please God and have eternal value.

*May love be my way of life, Lord, infusing all that I do. Amen.*

**Tuesday, March 3 Mark 12:28-34**

*“The greatest commandment”*

 The teacher is not asking which laws need to be obeyed and which can safely be ignored. He is asking, “What is the fundamental premise of the law on which all the individual commands depend?” Jesus’ response is to proclaim that God is the only God, and one is to love him with one’s whole being: heart, soul, mind, and strength. But one cannot love God in isolation from one’s other relationships in life. For this reason, Jesus couples the command to love God with the command to love one’s neighbor as oneself.

 Love is our inner commitment to God that is expressed in all our conduct and relationships. Those who do not show love to others can hardly claim to love God. The statement that no other command is greater than these two can mean that the other commands simply spell out different ways in which to apply these two primary ones. Or it may be more radical: These are the only two commands that matter. Paul reflects this radical understanding in Romans 13:8 when he writes that “he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.”

*Our love for you, Lord, is a response to your love for us. Amen.*

**Wednesday, March 4 1 Corinthians 13:4-7**

*“Love is . . .”*

 In fifteen succinct phrases Paul defines love by the way it acts. He is not describing a natural human kind of love but that love which was defined by God’s gift of Himself in Jesus Christ. If we were to go through these four verses and everywhere the word “love” appears substitute the word “Christ,” they would still be true because the kind of love being described is love that has its source in God. And as we look at each of the phrases it becomes obvious that we are defining a style of life that is beyond our reach at a human level – something absolutely impossible unless God’s Spirit dwells within us and helps us.

 Were we to hold this list of the characteristics of love up before our life like a mirror, we would be immediately shaken by the many ways in which we fall short of the perfect love that Christ modeled for us. But we also know that nothing will be more important to our life than letting God perfect the gift of love in us, not in some abstract theological way but by helping us to learn to truly love every person as God loves us.

*We treat our neighbors, Lord, as we know you have treated us. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

March 2 - 7

*First Corinthians Chapter Thirteen*

**Thursday, March 5 Romans 15:1-7**

*“Accept one another just as Christ has accepted you”*

 Paul is encouraging the believers to put the good of others before their own. When they act in this way, they will be following the example of Christ who “did not please himself.” If Christ could give up his own right to life itself, these believers should certainly be able to give up their right to eat meat or to drink wine or to ignore Jewish holy days, when such actions caused their fellow believers to stumble in their faith. When the community treats one another with this kind of love, a unity is achieved which brings praise to God.

 To “accept” one another in verse 7 means not just to tolerate other believers but to welcome them as brothers and sisters in the body of Christ. The “just as” in the next clause may suggest Paul is drawing a comparison: We should accept one another *in the same way* as Christ has accepted us. But “just as” probably has a causal sense here: We are to welcome one another *because* Christ has welcomed each one of us. What right do we have to refuse fellowship with a person whom Christ himself has accepted into the body?

*When we seek the good of each other, Lord, we follow your example. Amen.*

**Friday, March 6 1 Corinthians 13:8-10**

*“Love never fails”*

 Paul continues his thesis of the superiority of love over spiritual gifts, giving a list of sample gifts that were of particular importance in Corinth. There will come a time when these (and all other) gifts will “become useless” (New Living Translation). The New International Version states that the gifts will “cease,” “be stilled,” “pass away,” and “disappear.” When will this happen to the spiritual gifts? When “perfection comes,” that is, when Jesus Christ returns to earth at his Second Coming.

 In the meantime, the spiritual gifts are present in the church and are be to be used to build up and encourage the faithful, but even their best use does not provide perfection in Christ. They are partial and incomplete when compared to the fullness of God’s love. So, while it is important for every believer to know that they have received at least one and perhaps several spiritual gifts, and to use them as God directs and for God’s glory, we must never think that they in any way can replace the priority of love for God and for neighbor.

*The most important ingredient in our relationship with you, Lord, is love. Amen.*

**Saturday, March 7 1 Corinthians 13:11-13**

*“The greatest of these is love”*

 Even of those things that abide forever, such as faith and hope, love is the greatest. When I was a Junior High Minister, the young people would ask me to tell them what God is like. I would respond by asking and answering four questions (all based in John 3:16). How does God feel about you? He loves you. How has he shown his love for you? By sending his Son to die for you. What does he want you to do? He wants you to believe in him. What will God bring to your life when you respond to his love? He will give you life with him in heaven that never ends.

 Of course, this greatest-of-all quality of love is true only of God’s love, not of human love. Sadly, all too often human love fails. The song “Love Will Keep Us Together” by the ‘70s husband-wife duo "Captain & Tennille" was a world-wide hit and the number one pop song in the United States in 1975. Unfortunately for them, and for so many others, the kind of love they sang about was not enough to keep them together and they eventually divorced.

*May I see your love clearly, Lord, and not be fooled by weak imitations. Amen.*