

Introduction

Today, I'm preaching the tenth and last sermon in a series of sermons from 1 Corinthians 13 titled *Be a Star*.

I'd like to introduce it by reciting two versions of the old rhyme *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star*. The first is the child's version: **"Twinkle, twinkle, little star, how I wonder what you are. Up above the world so high, like a diamond in the sky."** The second is the adult's version: **"Twinkle, twinkle, little star, now I know just what you are. An incandescent ball of gas, condensing to a solid mass."** Those two versions illustrate how children and adults think differently about stars, and by way of analogy, everything else, including love. 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 is about just that.

Think and Reason like an Adult

Look first of all at verse 11 and the words "speak," "think," and "reason." The word "think" connotes what we normally mean when we say someone's thinking about something – like some of you thinking about lunch now. To "reason" is an advance on thinking. The Greek word means, "to reckon" or "to sort things out." It's a mental process that goes like this. We study to gather facts about things. We then use logic to draw inferences from those facts. One of you told me last week that a middle class tax increase is coming. You reasoned to that conclusion. How people think and reason is discernible in the things they say, which is why Paul mentions speaking as well.

He goes on to tell us in verse 11 that you and I think and reason in one of two ways, like a child or like a man, meaning, an adult.

There's obviously a dramatic difference between the two ways. The versions of *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star* reveal what that difference is. The child's version declares, **"How I wonder what you are."** The adult version, in contrast, declares, **"Now I know just what you are."** The child's primary cognitive process is thinking. He thinks the star looks

like a diamond and defines it in those terms. But the adult actually “considers” the star. He reasons about it far more deeply than the child does. Doing so, as the adult version shows, gets him to the reality of it.

But it isn’t just stars. It’s everything in the universe and life in it, all the way from cell phones and small children playing organized sports to God Himself. We think and reason about those things either like a child or like an adult and the difference is dramatic.

I remember answering a question my Sunday school teacher asked when I was nine years old. She asked us who the devil was and I blurted out, **“He’s the opposite of God.”** What I said shows that I was thinking about God like a child. Last year, in contrast, I preached a sermon about God titled *One of a Kind*. Remember what I said. He is the only one of His kind. Just as the number 1 is different in nature than any other number, being the only singular, so He is different in nature than anything else that exists. He’s a separate and unique kind of reality and therefore, has no opposites or equals. He’s further above the devil than the devil is above the slug in your garden. Contrast the child’s way of thinking about this aspect of God and the man’s. The difference is huge.

Which illustrates Paul’s ultimate point in verse 11. It’s detrimental to think and reason about things like a child. It diminishes our persons and lives when we do. But it’s beneficial to think and reason about things like an adult. It enhances our persons and lives when we do. So think and reason about things like an adult – including love.

Think and Reason like an Adult about Love

That’s what Paul tells us to do and he practices what he preaches. In verses 8-10, he thinks and reasons about love like an adult.

He begins with the celebrated spiritual gifts that he mentioned earlier in verses 1-2, prophecy, tongues, and knowledge. Those are sign gifts that God gives Christians to build His kingdom on earth. But according to verses 8 and 10, when the “perfect comes,” they’ll “be done away” or “cease.” The word “perfect” means literally “the ultimate end

or aim," in this case, of God. The ultimate end is our full redemption at the Second Coming of Jesus. When Jesus comes again, in other words, these spiritual gifts and all the others in chapter 12 will cease to function. They'll not be a part of our eternal life in heaven.

But love will, Paul says in verse 8. It "never fails" or as the word means literally "never suffers ruin." It will not be done away or cease when Jesus comes again. It's permanent. It will be a central part of our eternal life in heaven. Familiar friends of Jesus won't prophecy, speak in tongues, or exercise the gift of knowledge in heaven. But they will love.

Those then are the facts Paul knows and reveals. Spiritual gifts will pass away but love will last forever. Those are the facts and Paul expects us to reason and draw the right inference from them. That inference is this. Love is far more important than spiritual gifts are.

That clarifies for us what it means to think and reason like a child and like an adult. If I believe spiritual gifts are equal to or more important than love, then I'm thinking and reasoning like a child. If I believe love is more important than spiritual gifts, then I'm thinking and reasoning like an adult. That's what Paul is saying here.

A pastor tells about a long established Christian who is zealous for spiritual gifts. They are the center of his study, the center of his conversation, and even the center of his battles. He left the pastor's church in fact because it didn't, in his opinion, give them strong enough emphasis. But at the same time, he is one of the most caustic, cutting, and critical individuals you'd ever want to meet. It's obvious that He desires and pursues spiritual gifts far more vigorously than he does love. He thinks and reasons about love, in other words, like a child.

That then is what Paul calls us to do in verses 8-11. Think and reason about love like an adult, not like a child. We'll grasp that love is far more important than spiritual gifts if we do.

Value Love Most of All

But it isn't just far more important than spiritual gifts. It's far more

important than anything. That's Paul's final point in verses 12 and 13.

He observes in verse 12 that we don't know nearly as much now as we will know in heaven. But there is one thing we know now for sure, in verse 13. Love is the greatest. He drives that point home by declaring its superiority over two of the most indispensable and highly sought after of all conditions, faith and hope. As great as they are, love is greater. It is supreme, in other words, and we should act accordingly. We act accordingly by doing two things.

First, we value love most of all.

I logged on to a Christian web site that lists what it calls "Christian Celebrities" and explains why they are that. Here's a sampling and I'm quoting the site. **Rick Warren** – "founder of one of the largest, most prominent churches in America." **Tony Dungy** – "one of the most respected and popular NFL coaches in the league." **Kirk Cameron** – "played the mischievous teenager, Mike Seaver, on *Growing Pains*." And **Amy Grant** – "one of the first Christian artists to have successfully crossed over into the pop music artist."

That those individuals are celebrities means that Christians in general esteem and praise them the most. They're the ones who are asked to speak at Christian conferences because they draw big crowds. Christians want to meet and hear them.

But why do they? I'd make an observation in that regard. Love isn't mentioned on the web site, even once, in describing the celebrities. That doesn't mean they don't possess it. They may or may not. It just means love isn't a factor in their celebrity status. Christians don't take that into account, at all, in esteeming and praising them.

But they should. Speaking or coaching or acting or singing is the greatest. Love is. Those things pale in comparison to it. So, we should value it most of all.

Not long ago, I asked a man what his son does. He said he's an F-16 fighter pilot who is flying combat missions in Iraq. Wow, that's impressive isn't it. Not only is he serving his country on the front lines,

he's one of those who are, in my opinion, the greatest professionals in the world – American fighter pilots. **“You must be really proud,”** I said. To which he replied, **“Yes, I am - because He follows Jesus and is one of the kindest and most loving people I know.”** That man has his head on straight. He values love the most! And so should we.

If we don't, we can and here's how, by developing a vision of love. The process is this. First, we identify and consider the attitudes and actions that comprise love. We can do that by reviewing the seven sermons I preached about the 15 ways that love manifests itself, in verses 4-7. Second, we then imagine what the lives of the people around us would be like if that kind of love prevailed in us. We also imagine what our lives would be like if it prevailed in the people around us, in our homes, workplaces, and church. We do those two things prayerfully, asking the Holy Spirit to enlighten us, which He eventually will. And when He does, we'll value love most of all.

Pursue Love Most of All

Because love is supreme, we should do a second thing. According to Paul in 14:1, we should pursue it most of all.

Galatians 5:22 makes clear that love, the agape love of verses 4-7, is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. It's a transcendent condition of character that He Himself creates in us. It's primarily His work not ours. But we do have a part to play in it. That part is pursue it, most of all. The Holy Spirit won't create it in us if we don't.

“Fall in love.” That's one of our culture's favorite expressions. People use it all the time because they believe it's true. But they're thinking like children. Falling in love implies that it happens by accident or drift, which it never does. Dallas Willard shares a penetrating insight in that regard: **“Indeed, where accident, drift, or imposition dominate – as they usually do, quite frankly, in the lives of professing Christians - very little of any human value transpires.”** He's absolutely right. If we wait for the love of verses 4-7 to just

happen, by accident or drift, we'll wait forever because it never does.

Love isn't something we fall into. It isn't something that just happens, by accident or drift. It's something that we must purposely pursue. We purposely pursue it by doing two things.

First, we intend to possess it. Because we develop a vision of it, as I explained earlier, we value it. And because we value it, we desire it. And because we desire it, we intend or will it. Intend it means that we decide to do whatever is necessary to possess it.

Second, we carry out our intention. I mentioned doing "whatever is necessary" to possess love. "Whatever is necessary" refers to the means that are known to be effective in possessing it. I shared many of those means in the seven sermons about verses 4-7. I mentioned things like praying faithfully and in detail for people who wrong us, developing a Biblical view of human beings, actually practicing humility, and much more. Start there. Review the seven sermons and the means they reveal. Then, asking the Holy Spirit's help, carry out those means.

That then is what it means to pursue love most of all. We intend to possess it and carry out our intention. If you and I are disciples of Jesus and pursue love most of all, the Holy Spirit will gradually and consistently transform us until, finally, agape love prevails in us.

Conclusion

I'd like to close out this sermon series by commenting on its title. Some of you are probably wondering why it's titled *Be a Star*. So, I'll tell you. I read a *Sports Illustrated* article about marquis players in the NFL. Marquis players are the stars - the ones who excel at playing their positions, the ones around whom the owners build their teams.

Now think about God and His kingdom in those terms. God has His own stars, the ones around whom He builds His kingdom, the ones that cause Him to be esteemed and pleased. Who are they? It's all those disciples of His who excel at what matters most, agape love. So value and pursue agape love most of all. You'll be a star if you do.