

1 Corinthians 13:3 (NIV)

3 If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

46-13-08-No-Gain Sacrifices

sacrifice, giving, love

1 Cor 13:3

No labors inspired by pain bring the gain that labors of love attain.

INTRODUCTION:

–The previous verse in this sermon series, v.2, listed 3 great assets in the Christian life as worthless without love. In 1 Cor 13:3, the virtues mentioned seem to be the highest imaginable: “*If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.*”

–While v.2 was puzzling, v.3 puzzled me even more. *What shows more love than giving all you own to those in need or dying a martyr’s death? On the surface, nothing. But 1 Cor 13 doesn’t deal just with the surface of our lives. We go deeper by applying the Love Chapter through the lens of v.11*. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.

–Confronting *childishness* and embracing *childlikeness* are *below-the-surface* activities. *Extreme virtues observed in the tip of the iceberg* can have painful biographical sources other than *divine love*. They may come from an *inner child of the past* who needs love’s healing. In this case, “*No pain, no gain*” isn’t true. **HOM.idea**. *So, let’s look first at...*

I. Wrong Motivations for Sacrificially Giving Away Possessions–

“*If I give all I possess to the poor*” [“*to the poor*” isn’t in the Greek; a literal translation would be “*if I give morsels, give portions, dole out all I possess*”].

- A. To make his point emphatically, Paul alludes to an example from Christ’s own words– Luke 21:1-4. As he looked up, Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. “I tell you the truth,” he said, “this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.”
1. Jesus had just denounced the *attention-drawing* religiosity of “the scribes.” (Then He used the *extreme gift* of “a poor widow,” giving “all she had to live on” as a contrast to *false tokens of devotion*.)
 2. These religious leaders needed *childlike humility and sincerity* to replace *childish habits* of trying to *gain attention* from others.
 3. This widow’s *full surrender* of her means of *self-preservation* was a *rebuke* to their efforts to *preserve their own self-exaltation*. (She’d put *all her trust* in God as her Provider.... They had not.)

- B. Extreme giving can be rooted in a *love for God*, but it can also come from motives or conditions not connected with love.
1. Some people sacrifice everything for a **career**, morseling out their time, their *relationships*, even their *health*. (A driving focus on achievement blinds them to *life's big picture*, but the roots of that focus may be from their inner child's early upbringing.)
 2. Some *lonely* people are so starved for friendship that they'll *give and give*, till they're *broke*. (Such people are in need of the love that **begins** with a *relationship with God* and **continues** with others in *authentic friendships* that money can't buy.)
 3. Some join *visionary movements*, putting themselves and all they own at the disposal of **a cause** which promises *revolutionary hope for the world*. (Yet they fail to put their trust in the *God of hope*, Who "so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.")

TRANS: Extreme sacrificial giving may be only the *tip of the iceberg*. Underneath may lie a large and *painful biographical mass* of emotional deficits, parental misguidance, or past wounds to self-esteem. Extreme acts of giving "*gain nothing*" without *God's love*. They become **no-gain sacrifices**, because **no labors inspired by pain bring the gain that labors of love attain**. What is even sadder is when there are...

II. Wrong Motivations for the Self-Sacrifice of Life Itself– "If I...

surrender my body to the flames..." [**Many Greek MSS** and early church fathers, have "*for glory*" rather than "*to the flames*," as in the NRSV: "*if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.*"]

- A. Humans are known to risk their lives for saving the lives of others OR for winning glory by performing physical feats of *skill* or *strength* or *endurance*. (We end up applauding both *risky attempts*, even though the *motivation* behind them is different.)
1. If Paul was using the idea of martyrdom to make his point about *self-sacrifice* it would seem much more effective than if he put self-sacrifice in terms of *boasting* or *gaining glory*.
 2. But whether by *instinct* or by *habit*, risking life is just that: a *risk*, a *potential sacrifice*. (To die recklessly in a hopeless rescue is seen as "*a waste of life*," or perishing while performing an impossible feat is called "*a foolish attempt*.")
 3. Paul's words in this verse don't assume a risk but an eyes-wide-

open surrender of life, either for *martyrdom* or for *glory*. (The *hypothetical sacrificer* would end up leaving this earthly life.)

- B. Paul's readers weren't ignorant of what Jesus taught. (He used two of Christ's teachings as a backdrop for making his point.)
1. Jesus not only gave us the example of laying down His own life for others but said, "Take up your cross and follow Me." (All in those days knew a "cross" was a form of execution: it meant death.)
 2. Jesus also said in **John 15:13**, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." (Today, we think of a fireman dying to rescue a co-worker: *no greater self-sacrificing love than that!*)
- C. But Paul wanted us to have in mind self-sacrifices not motivated by love, and we can find them in modern examples:
1. [Why did **kamikaze pilots** dive-bomb US ships? It was the *honorable* thing to do. Japanese youth had been raised with "*sociocultural compulsions, such as face-saving and symbolic gestures of contrition regarding failure*."]]
 2. [In 1963, **Thích Quang Duc**, a Buddhist monk, set himself on fire in a public square. His protest against the Vietnamese government *gained nothing*, for an *even more religiously oppressive* Communist regime soon replaced it.]
 3. [**Suicide bombers** are synonymous with *Islamic terrorism*. About once a day, one of them kills themselves to kill others. Before doing just that, a young Muslim said, "*I am not going to become a martyr for people. I am doing it for God.*" (But which God? The God who says, "*Love your neighbor*," or "the *god of this world*," described by Jesus as "*a murderer from the beginning*"?)]

CONCLUSION:

–**1 Cor 13:3**, *If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. Extreme sacrifices may have underlying causes that have nothing to do with *divine love*. A *cultural, political, or religious ideal* may drive a person to surrender life uselessly, if they're not surrendered to God Son, Who is *the King* in the *Kingdom of love*. –We all have an *inner child* capable of taking the wheel in the driver's seat with *reckless abandon* rather than *godly stewardship*. Immaturity can sacrifice all for a *childish wish... or whim... or wound*, but receptive childlikeness listens attentively for God's will and loving guidance, in order to practice proper stewardship of possessions and life. **No labors inspired by pain bring the gain that labors of love attain**. Jesus wants His divine love to motivate our *giving*, our *living*, and our *dying*.*