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Heaven is a World of Love

1 Corinthians 13:8-13

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1 Corinthians 13 is one of the greatest chapters in the Bible! It is often chosen to be read at weddings, because it is known as “The Love Chapter.” But in actuality, this chapter is one of the toughest and most convicting chapters for any thoughtful Christian to read.

It describes a level of genuine love that very few of us ever attain in this life. It gives us a perfect standard to live up to... and in our sin, in our selfishness, in our pride, we have a great deal of difficulty achieving it.

Listen to the words again:

1 Corinthians 13:1-13 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³ If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

⁸ Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it

will pass away. ⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰ but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. 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. ¹² Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. ¹³ And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

Now when I preached through 1 Corinthians in my church, I did nine sermons on this great chapter. I culminated my preaching with two sermons leaning on the great 18th century New England Puritan pastor, Jonathan Edwards. In 1738, Edwards preached sixteen sermons on this one glorious chapter... it culminated in a magnificent chapter based on the last few verses of this chapter... he entitled it "Heaven is a world of love", and I leaned heavily on it for my two sermons. I want to condense it for you this morning into one sermon.

Context:

Paul is writing to a highly dysfunctional church in Corinth, a church he helped plant by his preaching of the gospel. But that church had so many problems...

Paul wrote this chapter, the "love chapter" in the middle of the section dealing with spiritual gifts... chapters 12-14.

It begins with showing the superiority of love to all spiritual gifts, especially the gifts of tongues and prophecy:

1 Corinthians 13:1-3 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³ If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Without love, spiritual gifts are worthless and so are the people who use them.

Then Paul describes love's timeless, enduring qualities:

1 Corinthians 13:4-8 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. ⁸ Love never fails.

Having done that, he then shows the superiority of love to all spiritual gifts in that they are temporary, but love is eternal. All spiritual gifts will cease, but love will endure into eternity... that is, into our heavenly life itself:

1 Corinthians 13:8 But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.

He also says the knowledge we have of God here on earth is like so much "baby talk" compared to the knowledge we will have in heaven:

1 Corinthians 13:9-12 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰ but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. 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. ¹² Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

There is an infinite amount to learn about God... he is infinite in his glory... infinite in all his attributes; and his works will be worthy of studying for all eternity. What we can know about God now is enough to save our souls and satisfy us... but it is as nothing compared to the knowledge of God we will have in heaven.

Verse 12 "Now we know in part... then we shall know fully, even as we have been fully known."

He concludes by speaking of the fact that love alone is eternal:

***1 Corinthians 13:13 And now these three remain: faith, hope and love.
But the greatest of these is love.***

Faith is temporary... for in heaven we will see Christ face to face.

Hope is temporary... for “who hopes for what he already has?”

But heaven will be a WORLD of love!

Now, let's learn from Jonathan Edwards's amazing work, “Heaven is a world of love”!

Let me say one thing about reading Edwards... he works and works and works the details, in ways that sometimes seem repetitive... sometimes he says things that seem to be obvious, but as he begins to put things together, suddenly your eyes start to widen and you start to see things you never saw before and in the end, it's like you've been escorted into a new world. Like the “wardrobe” ... the stand-alone clothing closet in C.S. Lewis's classic *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*... you slip into the closet to hide in your game of hide and seek; you feel the brush of coats and other garments on your face as you push further and further back into the closet... then suddenly you feel tree branches and it seems like it's winter and you push out and look around — you have stepped into another world

Jonathan Edwards divided his essay into six headings:

- 1) The Cause and Fountain of the Love that is in Heaven
- 2) The Objects of that Love that is in Heaven
- 3) The Subjects of that Love that is in Heaven
- 4) The Principle (or Nature) of that Love that is in Heaven
- 5) The Circumstances in which Heavenly Love is Exercised, Expressed, and Enjoyed
- 6) The Blessed Effects/Fruits of that Love that is in Heaven

I. The Cause and Fountain of that Love in Heaven

A. The God of Love HIMSELF Dwells in Heaven

B. The New Heavens and New Earth and the New Jerusalem will glow and be completely illuminated and will radiate with the glory of God

C. So, heaven is a world of love because the God of love especially dwells there

1. Now of course you will say, “But God is omnipresent...”
2. But God especially chooses to reveal himself more in one place than another... like the BURNING BUSH was “holy ground”
3. In the Old Testament, God was in that sense MORE in Israel than in any other nation on earth
4. And God was more in Jerusalem than in any other city in Israel
5. And God was more in the temple than in any other building in Jerusalem
6. And God was more in the holy of holies than any other part of the temple
7. And God was more in the mercy seat above the ark than any other part of the holy of holies
8. BUT God is MORE in heaven than in any other part in the universe... for it is said to be his throne and his dwelling place

In our eternal future, God will in some sense DESCEND forever to make heaven and earth become ONE... and there God will dwell in the midst of his people

D. The Triune God is a God of Love

1. From eternity past to eternity future, the three persons of the Trinity perfectly love each other

2. The persons of the Trinity are infinitely dear and precious to one another, with an incomprehensible love flowing and reflowing within the godhead
3. The Father loves the Son with a perfect love; in fact the depths of the Father's love for his only begotten Son cannot be measured or captured in any words... it is hotter and brighter than the sun shining in space; **but the Father also loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son on the cross for the salvation of all who believe in him**
4. The Son, Jesus Christ, perfectly loves his Father... loved him so perfectly as to die to fulfill his will; but he also loves his people... having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end; Jesus is perfect in love
5. The Holy Spirit is the one who has personally delivered the love of God and of Christ directly to the minds and souls of the elect in every generation...

E. We Will Have Perfect Fellowship with the God of Love

1. In heaven, our fellowship with God will be perfect, face to face, without any blockage or hindrance or distance
2. We will drink in God's love and swim in it for all eternity
3. God will be the limitless source of love... the love that fills heaven will never end, even out to eternity, full, eternal, overflowing
4. In this sense, it will be like the river of the water of life

Revelation 22:1-2 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb² down the middle of the great street of the city.

5. But also picture this heavenly love which flows from the throne of God also as filling up an endless ocean in which we can swim forever... a picture of complete saturation in the love of God

II. The Objects of Love in Heaven

A. There Will be Nothing but LOVELY Objects in Heaven

1. There will be nothing odious, ugly, blemished, disgusting, malformed, corrupt, diseased, repulsive, broken, dark, or evil in heaven

Revelation 21:27 Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

1. All the angels in heaven will be holy, good, glorious, radiant, filled with love for God and for Christ... all of the evil angels (including the devil himself) will have been thrown into the Lake of Fire
2. The only people permitted in that world will be the redeemed from every nation on earth
3. There will be no hypocrites, false professors of Christianity, nominal Christians... there will also certainly be no open rebels, or wicked people, or followers of other gods and goddesses

B. All the Redeemed will be Perfectly Lovely... Radiantly Glorious

1. Jesus said ***“Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father”*** (Mt. 13:43)
2. In this world even the most eminent saints have flaws and imperfections and failings; King David said “My sins are more numerous than the hairs on my head”
3. But in heaven, the saints will all have been glorified, perfectly conformed to Christ mentally, physically, emotionally, spiritually
4. Love will be fulfilled in every one of them: they will be perfectly kind, perfectly free from envy, boasting, pride, rudeness, anger

C. The Place Shall Be Perfectly Beautiful... the New Heavens and New Earth (described in Revelation 21-22)

II. Of the Nature and Degree of Heavenly Love

A. Nature

1. Altogether holy and divine... totally conformed to God’s love

2. Our Love for God perfected

- a. Our love for God will be based on a perfect KNOWLEDGE of God... we will know him fully as he has known us fully

Edwards does not mention this, but let me interject here: we will never be OMNISCIENT... therefore, our knowledge of God will keep expanding for all eternity... as we keep learning new things God has done, new reasons to praise him; therefore our love for God will also keep expanding and improving

- b. So the saints' love for God in heaven will be pure, accurate, based on truth, free from idolatrous conceptions

3. Love for others is perfected as well

- a. All the redeemed will love all the other redeemed with a perfectly pure love... free from all evil motives; no carnal lusts or selfish principles; no pride, no envy, no greed, no boasting

B. Degree

1. Our heavenly love will be perfect in degree
2. Simply put, we will love God vastly MORE in heaven than we ever could on earth; our intensity of love toward him will be overpoweringly strong

C. Key Concept: DIFFERING LEVELS OF GLORY

1. It was Edwards that pointed out to my mind that there will be differing levels of glory in the resurrection, for as 1 Corinthians 15:41-42 says ***“Star differs from star in glory... so will it be with the resurrection from the dead.”***
2. Glorification will drive away all enmity, distaste, coldness toward other saints; no ENVY or ARROGANCE toward other saints
3. We will totally delight in the honors and blessings and rewards and crowns bestowed by God on each of our brothers and sisters in heaven; the greater the prosperity and blessedness of each in heaven, the greater will our delight be for that person

Edwards: “It will not be a grief to any saint to see another saint elevated and honored above himself; actually it will draw forth greater love and admiration and honor because God has done it and God is revealed and glorified by that person.”

D. Variable Experiences in Heaven

1. This varying level of glory in heaven opens up the concept of varying levels of experience in heaven
2. Edwards said “**All shall have as much love as they desire and as great manifestations as they can bear; and so all shall be FULLY SATISFIED, and where there is perfect satisfaction, there can be no envy.**”

HOW WE LIVE ON EARTH WILL AFFECT HOW MUCH OF GOD’S GLORY WE EXPERIENCE AND ENJOY IN HEAVEN!
“The measure you use on earth will be the measure you receive in heaven.”

3. There will be some saints vastly more honored and radiantly more glorious than I will be... their service to Christ on earth will merit such glory; but I will not be jealous in the least, but will feel absolutely delighted that they are so glorious... and will see the justice and rightness of the way God honored them above me

E. Perfect in Glory = Perfect in Humility

1. Those most glorious in heaven will also have the greatest vision of the glory of God and a clearer sense of their own LITTLENES before him... so they will paradoxically be the most HUMBLE... the most HONORED in heaven will also be the most HUMBLE!

III. The Excellent Circumstances in which Love Will Be EXERCISED, EXPRESSED, and ENJOYED in Heaven

A. Love in Heaven is Always MUTUAL

1. As it is expressed, so it will be answered in proportion
2. Love always seeks an answer... unrequited love is one of the greatest tragedies and causes of sorrow in this world

- a. How many popular songs are effectively primal screams over this issue? I could list songs right now in which a singer is in absolute anguish over a love that never bloomed or that flourished once but is now dead... the grief is real and powerful and can even lead to suicide in extreme cases
3. BUT in heaven, that will all be over forever! Love expressed from one saint will be reciprocated in another saint
 - a. Keep in mind that marital love is finished... in heaven, we will neither marry nor be given in marriage
 - b. Exclusive love relationships will be obsolete, consummated in the perfect oneness all the saints will have in God with each other
 - c. There will be no coolness, no aloofness, no jealousy...
 4. MOST IMPORTANTLY, the most painful and powerful unrequited love in this sin-cursed world was God's love for his people
 - a. The Book of Hosea portrays the prostitute/wife Gomer, whose affections were constantly wandering from her husband... whose time had to be purchased by him or she would not be with him
 - b. How much grief our wandering hearts brought to our heavenly Father! How much was his perfect love for us so often unrequited because of our idolatry and lustful desire after the world?!
 - c. But in heaven, we will love God perfectly and ardently; his love for us will no longer be unrequited, but we will finally and perfectly LOVE HIM BACK!!!
 5. And not only that, we will have eternity to probe the MAGITUDE and DIMENSIONS of God's love for us in Christ... larger than the universe

Ephesians 3:18-19 [YOU WILL EACH] have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of

Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge-- that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

These words will be fulfilled only in heaven! That is dimensional language... think of the extremities of the universe... God's love for us in Christ fills the universe!

B. Our Love in Heaven will be Uninterrupted, Never Damped

1. Here our hearts grow weary... our love dims... the church at Ephesus had "forsaken their first love"; so also Israel's love for God waned

Jeremiah 2:2 "I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the desert, through a land not sown.

2. So also in human to human love relationships, our hearts are so weak and changeable; people "fall out of love" with each other;
3. But in heaven, our love and ardor will never wane... it will only continually mature and grow stronger
4. No fear of flattery or fakery or deception... the saints in heaven will not merely APPEAR to love each other; they actually WILL

Sadly so much of our love is like a thin veneer of gold plating; I remember years ago, I worked in a wet metallization laboratory in which we plated things with a thin layer of gold for making electronic devices; I was allowed to gold plate a cross I owned... and it looked beautiful and sparkly... for about a DAY! But every time I touched that cross, a little of the gold came off... within 48 hours, it was almost completely gone. So it is with our love... it is often a thin coating over a corrupt heart

5. Not so in heaven! Hearts shall be pure and perfectly united behind every expression we make of love... no FAKE LOVE!
6. And no evil influence can come from the outside to corrupt the pure expressions of love in the inhabitants of that happy world!

7. Furthermore, nothing will bubble up from deep within us to hinder or block love or the enjoyment of that love
 - a. In this world, we are so dull... like clods... we don't GET IT; we are too obscure to realize the feelings of another
 - b. Also in this world, we are guarded and careful and closed because of past wounds; we are fragile and cautious; we don't believe it when people are nice to us or express love
 - c. BUT in heaven, we will have been healed perfectly! We will be open and bold and confident in love for one another

C. Our Resurrected, Glorified Minds and Bodies will AID Love for All Eternity

1. Our flesh hinders the expression of our love here on earth
2. But our resurrection minds/hearts/bodies will greatly aid our expression of heavenly love, especially to God
3. Our minds will perfectly perceive the truth about God and others; our hearts will perfectly delight in the truth, and our bodies will perfectly and energetically express love... tirelessly!!
4. TRUTH + ENERGY!!

Edwards: "Often [the saints on earth] want to fly, but they are held down as with a dead weight upon their wings. Often they would be active and mount up as a flame of fire, but they find themselves hampered, chained down so they cannot do as their love inclines them to do... Love for God pushes them to erupt and burst forth in praise, but their dull, weak, lifeless flesh holds them back.

In heaven, the redeemed shall have no such hindrance. They will have no dullness... and no corruption of the heart to wage war against divine love and hinder its expressions. ... **Their souls being on fire with holy love shall not be like a fire pent up, but like a flame uncovered and at liberty. Their spirits, being winged with love shall have no weight upon them to hinder their flight.** There shall be no lack of strength or activity, nor

any lack of words wherewith to praise the object of their affection.”

D. Nothing External Will Ever Separate Us or Hinder our Most Perfect Enjoyment of Love Relationships in Heaven

1. John Bunyan was arrested and imprisoned in 17th century England for illegally preaching without a license; he said that the separation from his wife and blind daughter was like the pulling of his flesh from his bones
2. In 1858, when John Paton said goodbye to his godly and loving father so that he could sail for the South Pacific islands to bring the gospel there, the separation scene was almost more than they could bear... it was like death
3. Obviously the single greatest separator of love relationships in this world is death itself... it is written into even the marriage vows: “til death do us part”; but our love relationships in heaven are eternal, and nothing will ever separate us again
4. Beyond that, there is no man-made wall of separation that will hinder love relationships... no man-made customs or cultural differences or language barriers or imposed regulations that could possibly separate the people of God one from another
5. All past history of wrongs... bitterness from the way one group has treated another group—like racism, or the brutality of soldiers from this or that country, or long-standing feuds between clans... all that bitterness will be gone, swallowed in a sea of love and forgiveness
6. In heaven, we shall all be clearly members of one large family of God... truly brothers and sisters with a common heritage and lineage and one heavenly Father and one Savior who is not ashamed to call us brothers!
7. We will truly BELONG to one another... and we shall BELONG to GOD, and he will BELONG to us

E. Uninterrupted Prosperity

1. No difficulties, afflictions, trials will hinder our relationships
2. No famine will put a strain on resources; no natural disaster will devastate all that we've worked to accomplish

F. Our Ownership of Property will Serve Our Perfect Love for Each other

1. There will be private ownership in heaven
2. But yet, we will have an expansive heart of sharing with others

Acts 4:32 No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had.

G. The Inhabitants of Heaven Will Know Peacefully and Confidently That This Experience Will Go On Forever

1. In this world, we know that ALL GOOD THINGS MUST COME TO AN END... because we are cursed to die
2. But in heaven, it will be exactly the opposite... we will know that ALL GOOD THINGS MUST ONLY CONTINUE or even IMPROVE!!

Edwards: "All in heaven shall flourish in immortal youth and freshness. Age shall not diminish anyone's beauty or vigor. Attributes shall not wither. Like a river flowing forever deeper, increasing, always springing forth, always blossoming, always bearing fruit... not static

IV. The Blessed Effects and Fruits of this Love as It Will Be So Expressed in Heaven

A. Most Excellent/Perfect Behavior Toward God and One Another

1. Heavenly society will be perfect in every way... saturated with love for one another
2. No one will be isolated, unpopular, left out... all will be welcomed at all times

B. Perfect Tranquility and Joy in Heaven

1. Sin brings disturbance... churning like the waves in a hurricane
2. But the heavenly sea is placid, calm as glass

V. Applications

Non-Christians:

- A. Come to Christ! There should be no greater “fear of missing out” than this one! You don’t want to miss this perfect world of love... hell is a “world of hatred”

Christians:

- B. Spend more time (even daily) learning about and meditating on heaven (Colossians 3:1-4)... “Set your hearts on heaven, not on earth”
- C. Think of yourself more and more as an “alien and stranger” here on earth... “This world is NOT MY HOME!” Let meditation on heaven make you realize “Whom have I in heaven but you, and earth has nothing I desire besides you.” (Ps. 73)
- D. Let study of heaven as a “world of love” move you to love God and others more and more. Go back over 1 Cor. 13 daily in prayer
- E. Pray Ephesians 3:17-19 over yourself and others

Ephesians 3:17-19 And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge-- that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

- F. Let thoughts of heaven’s holiness and purity drive out all lusts and sin habits that you may be struggling with
- G. Let zeal for the glory of God in the salvation of sinners move you to TAKE MORE RISKS in evangelism and missions
- H. Let the comforts of the heaven we have described today greatly reduce any sorrows you may have over earthly “losses and crosses”