

Lesson Text

I. The Necessity Of Love (1 Corinthians 13: 1-3)

II. The Characteristics Of Love (1 Corinthians 13: 4-7)

III. The Permanence Of Love (1 Corinthians 13:8-13)

The Main Thought: And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity. (1 Corinthians 13:13, KJV).

Unifying Principle: Love is the primary requirement for societies attempting to make a dramatic influence on the world around them. What is it about love that is so indispensable? In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul says that love is needed to achieve fully the benefit of all spiritual gifts.

Lesson Aim: To explore the meaning of love as seen in 1 Corinthians 13 and to understand how love makes the other gifts work.

Life Aim: To appreciate one another in love and to find a variety of ways to express love in the proper manner in the Church and in the world.

HISTORY:

In Chapter 12 Paul gives evidence of the Corinthian's lack of love. Chapter 13 he explains what real love is. And in Chapter 14 he shows how love works.

There are nine spiritual gifts described in Chapter 12:8-10. The list of different gifts are given to show just how diverse the gifts of the Spirit really are. But the one and the same Spirit accomplishes all. ¹The Holy Spirit bestows these gifts "as He wills" and not as we will (vv.12-14). Paul illustrates his point by comparing the different parts of the human body to the different parts of the church (vv.15-20). Each member needs the other members, and no member can afford to become independent. No member can say "I have no need of thee" (v.21). Some parts of the body seem to receive more attention and exposure than others, while there are other parts of the body that are never noticed at all (vv.22-23). Division and alienation of feelings should never happen in the body of Christ (vv.24-26). ²For a third time, Paul stresses the fact that God, not man, assigned the gifts (vv.18, 24, 28). All don't have the same gifts, but we are to desire the greater gifts; the more important gifts. Paul tells us that there is something even better than any of them (vv.29-30).

1 Corinthians 13:1-3 The Necessity Of Love

13:1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. Paul is writing to the Corinthians who were so distracted with contentions, divided by parties, and envious of each other's gifts, that unity was nearly destroyed. Therefore, gifts are explained to them. The phrase "*the tongues of men and angels*" may be the equivalent of saying he is able to speak in all languages, both human and divine. This person can speak to anyone anywhere about the gospel of Jesus Christ. There is no language barrier to him. Yet with that ability this man is able to produce nothing of value for God without love. If he is not careful, it says he becomes something else; he becomes useless in his life and ministry for Christ. All his language abilities are just noise; "*a tinkling cymbal*" apart from love. ³He is just "*as a sounding brass or a clanging cymbal*." Unless it is done in love, ministering the gift of languages, or speaking in any other human or angelic way, amounts to no more than those pagan rituals. It is only meaningless gibberish in a Christian guise (*disguise*). Charity or love; that is "*agape*" love is the gift missing that goes with the other gifts. This love is not natural. It is possible only if God supernaturally helps us set aside our own desires and instincts, so we can give love while expecting nothing in return.

13:2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. We can explore these three gifts here.

1. *The gift of prophecy.* A person may have the gift of speaking under the inspiration of God's Spirit, both

¹ <http://www.family-times.net/commentary/spiritual-gifts-that-unite/>

² <http://www.family-times.net/commentary/god-assigns-spiritual-gifts/>

³ http://www.bereanbiblechurch.org/transcripts/1corinthians/loves_priority.htm

predicting the future and proclaiming the truth of God's Word.

2. *The gift to understand all mysteries, and all knowledge:* He may possess all the charisma, stature, eloquence, and descriptive language in the world, but if he does not have love, he nor his gift is nothing. One can always steer in the danger of feeling and acting superior because of one's prophetic gifting and eloquence; understanding all mysteries, and all knowledge. That danger is looking down upon others, feeling that one is more knowledgeable or better equipped than others. And lastly...
3. *The gift of all faith:* given by the Holy Spirit to remove mountains and to do great and miraculous things for God. Imagine a person possessing "*all faith*", yet, if he does not have love, he would be nothing. Love is necessary!

13:3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor,— Two acts of giving are mentioned. Both of these we would consider the supreme act of love. The **first** illustration of giving is giving everything that a person has— bestowing all my goods to feed the poor. There are several dangers here:

- Giving out of duty.
- Giving with contempt because one is forced to give.
- Giving with an air of superiority because one has and the needy do not have.
- Giving with a rebuke because one feels the needy are just irresponsible and ought to make their own way in life.
- Giving unsacrificially.

We are to give from a free heart, expecting nothing in return. If he did not give it from a loving heart, he should have kept it. It will do him no good.

...and though I give my body to be burned, — The **second** illustration of giving is of martyrdom—of being burned alive at the stake. The danger is if done as a thing of glory and of pride. If a believer is ever called upon to die as a martyr, he is to die only out of love for Christ and for his fellow man.

...and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. Neither volunteering for giving up all your possessions or being burned would produce any spiritual benefit if not done out of love for the body of Christ.

All we do is done for someone else, and if there is no love for others; if we miss out on that small detail, we have done it for naught in God's eyes. Love is greater than any spiritual gift. That's what Paul was saying at the end of Chapter 12—"*I'll show you a more excellent way.*" In this next verse, the acts of love are given—the very behavior of a person—the very way a person is to live among and with others.

1 Corinthians 13: 4-7 The Characteristics Of Love

13:4 Charity suffereth long, •Love suffers a long long time without resentment, anger, or seeking revenge. Love controls itself in order to win the person and to help him to live, work, and serve as he should. **...and is kind;**— •Love is kind; courteous, good, helpful, useful, giving, showing and showering favors. Love does not resent evil; it does not revel in the hurt and neglect. Love reaches out in kindness; in helpfulness. **...charity envieth not;**— •Love does not envy; is not jealous; does not have feelings against others because of what they have, such as gifts, position, friends, recognition, possessions, popularity, abilities. Love does not begrudge or attack or downplay the abilities and success of others. Love shares and joys and rejoices in the experience and good of others. **...charity vaunteth not itself,**— •Love does not vaunt itself; is not boastful; does not brag nor seek recognition, honor, or applause from others. On the contrary, love seeks to give; to recognize, to honor, to applaud the other person. **...is not puffed up,**— •Love is not puffed up; prideful, arrogant, conceited; does not think nor act as though oneself is better of above others. Love is modest and humble and recognizes and honors others.

13:5 Doth not behave itself unseemly,— •Love does not behave itself unseemingly; unbecomingly, rudely, indecently, unmannerly, disgracefully. Love does nothing to shame oneself. Love is orderly and controlled, and it behaves and treats all persons with respect, honoring and respecting who they are. **...seeketh not her own,**— •Love seeks not her own; is not selfish; does not insist upon its own rights. Love is acknowledging others, not insisting that others acknowledge oneself; it's giving to others, not insisting that others give to oneself. **...is not easily provoked,**— •Love

is not easily provoked; not easily aroused to anger; does not become exasperated. Love controls the emotions and never becomes angry without a cause. ...**thinketh no evil;**—• Love does not think evil; does not consider the wrong suffered; is not resentful; does not hold the evil done to oneself. Love suffers the evil done to it and forgets it.

13:6 Rejoiceth not in iniquity,— • Love does not rejoice in iniquity; unrighteousness, evil, wrong-doing. Love does not take pleasure in the unrighteousness and sin of others; it does not feed upon sin and wrong, nor does it pass along the stories of sin and wrong. Man's nature is too often fed the tragedy of evil, whether personal sin or natural disaster. ...**but rejoiceth in the truth;**— • Love rejoices in truth; rejoices when the truth is known and when it prevails; rejoices when others are recognized and promoted for whom they are and for what they have contributed. Love rejoices when the truth is rooted and grounded in a person and among the people of the world. Note that love never covers nor hides the truth. Love is courageous in that it faces the truth.

13:7 Beareth all things,— • Love bears all things; the word "*bears*" means both to cover all things and to bear up under all things. Love does both. It stands up under the weight and onslaught of all things and it covers up the faults of others. It has no pleasure in exposing the wrong and weaknesses of others. Love bears up under any neglect, abuse, ridicule—anything that is thrown against it. ...**believeth all things,**— • Love believes all things; is completely trusting; ever ready to believe the best. Love sees and understands the circumstances and accepts and forgives and believes the very best about a person. ...**hopeth all things,**— • Love hopes all things; it never ceases to hope; it expects the good to eventually triumph and to gain the victory; it refuses to accept failure; it always hopes for the best and for the ultimate triumph of the good—no matter how fallen or how tragic the fall or how difficult gaining the victory may seem. ...**endureth all things.**— • Love endures all things; the word "*endures*" is a military word meaning to stand against the attack of an enemy. Love actively fights and endures all attacks. Love is strong, full of fortitude and fight, and it struggles against any and every assault. No matter what attacks love, named or unnamed, it endures the attack and continues to love. Love conquers and triumphs—always—because it endures all things.

1 Corinthians 13:8-13 The Permanence Of Love

13:8 Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. This verse talks about three spiritual gifts of the Spirit called ⁴the manifestation gifts which serve to reveal the power of God. These gifts are supernatural or spiritual in nature. They can be further subdivided into three groups: Utterance, Power, and Revelation Gifts:

UTTERANCE - These gifts say something:

- **Prophecy** - This is the "*forth telling*" of the inspired Word of God primarily to the church, for the purpose of confirming the written Word and building up the entire body. The message is usually one of edification, exhortation or consolation; although it can declare God's will in a particular circumstance, and in rare cases, predict future events.
- **Speaking in Tongues** - This is a supernatural utterance in an unlearned language which is interpreted so that the entire body will be edified. Tongues may also be a sign to unbelievers. Most believe they are uttering a heavenly tongue.

REVELATION - These gifts reveal something:

- **Word of Knowledge** - This is supernatural knowledge of facts and information that can only be revealed by God for the purpose of applying doctrinal truth.

"Prophecies" (the gift of prophecy) will fail; "tongues" (the gift of tongues) will cease; and "knowledge" (Word of knowledge) will vanish away, but "Love" never fades and will never fail. Spiritual gifts are not the same as Love, They are not permanent; therefore, they are far inferior to love. Note how believers become guilty of the very things they accuse the world of doing: focusing upon the temporary instead of the eternal. Too many believers glory in their earthly gifts and abilities instead of serving and ministering in love. When we stand in eternity before God, spiritual

⁴ <http://christianity.about.com/od/holyspirittopicalstudy/a/spiritualgifts.htm>

gifts will not be what God is looking for, but how did we reach and minister to a lost and needy world, did we minister in love? Love is far superior to the spiritual gifts.

13:9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. Knowledge and prophecy as we now know it are suited only to an imperfect state of existence. No person knows all the truth. We can proclaim and predict the truth only with partial certainty; only what God wants us to know. We prophesy in part; we speak in tongues in part; we give Word of knowledge in part. "That which is in part" refers to the gifts (vs. 8-9). Something better (the perfect) will replace them. All of our understanding and ability to minister here on the earth is limited. We are in flesh, and flesh has weaknesses.

13:10 But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. We know nothing perfectly, and we can proclaim and predict the truth only with partial certainty.

"Perfect" means complete and mature. So, that which is complete will come, and then what is not complete will disappear "*That which is in part shall be done away*" refers to spiritual gifts. These are the things spoken of in the above verses which are in part and shall be done away with. But it's here until the perfect comes. A day of perfection is coming, and when it comes, only that which is perfect will stand and endure; that which is in part disappears; it only pointed to the perfect to come. Love is the only lasting eternal gift. It is love through Jesus Christ that is perfect and that will bring the day of perfection to reality for man. Once the perfect has been achieved, there will be no need for that which is in part. A day is coming when we shall know God even as He knows us—perfectly.

- When is that day coming? The day love is perfected between God and man.
- What will bring the day about? Love—God's perfect love for man.

It is love that will be perfected and will bring the day of perfection to reality for man. It is love that will bring us into a face to face relationship with God and into a perfect knowledge of truth. Therefore, love is far superior to the spiritual gifts.

13:11 When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. A child's speech is undeveloped, his understanding crude, and knowledge incomplete. But when the child becomes a man, his speech becomes subject to his mind, his understanding is tempered, and his knowledge is not that of a child; it's that day of setting aside all the childhood understanding and thoughts to become a mature man. This is what Paul says the Corinthians should be striving for. Speaking as a child, understanding as a child, thinking as a child is what a child is expected to do, however, the day of maturity is when believers will become mature men, putting away childish things.

13:12 For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. Ancient mirrors were made from polished metal (such as bronze), and thus one's reflection was even more dim than in modern mirrors. Our present relationship with the Lord is comparable to the reflection we see through a dark mirror. We can faintly see the figure, but it is neither fully distinct nor clear, therefore, we only see God and the truth in part and we only know God and the truth in part. I ask? When is that day coming? The day love is perfected between God and man. What will bring the day about? Love—God's perfect love, His Son Jesus. Love is being face to face with God.

13:13 And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity. Faith and hope are great qualities and gifts, but love is far superior.

- "Faith" focuses upon the revelation of God, whereas love focuses upon God Himself.
- "Hope" focuses upon being eternally with God in a perfect world, but again, love is superior because it focuses upon God Himself. A person can have hope in someone without loving him, but a person who loves someone always hopes in him.
- "Love"—true love (agape love)—does not originate in the nature of man, but in the nature of God. God is love; love is the basic trait of His nature.

- "True love" is a gift of God. A man can know true love only as he comes to know the love of God. Faith arises from the heart of man, but love is deposited or given to man by God. It is shed abroad in the heart by God. Apart from God, man loves only those who love him; he either opposes or withdraws from those who hate him. A man can only love (agape love) his enemies through the love of God. Therefore love, being the very special gift of God, is far superior to faith and hope.

"Faith and hope" reach and grow people, but love reaches and grows people far more than any other gift or quality.

A person can believe in God, yet feel he is above others. He can act prideful, arrogant, and superspiritual. He may hope for an eternity to be with God, and with other believers, yet he can be cold and distant. But love—true love has no weaknesses or dangers.

SUMMARY:

The Corinthians were seeking the lesser gifts instead of the greater from God. The greater gift is Love. Therefore, Paul begins this chapter by contrasting the worth of the spiritual gifts with the worth of love. If one spoke with tongues of men and of angels, without love, the person would be like sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. Even if one had the gift of prophecy, to understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and the gift of faith sufficient to remove mountains, without love, such a person is nothing. Even if one gave all his goods to the poor...; were willing to be burned at the stake...Without love, it profits the person nothing (**13:1-3**).

The great acts of love (**13:4-7**):

Love never fails, but spiritual gifts will cease (**13:8**).

Spiritual gifts cease when that which is perfect comes (**13:9-10**) Spiritual gifts are compared with "*childish things*", which are put away at maturity (**13:11**). Now we see in a mirror dimly, but it will be face to face, knowing Him up close and personal. Just as clearly as God sees into

our hearts right now, we shall understand as completely as we are understood (**13:12**). Faith, hope, and love will abide after spiritual gifts, but the greatest of these is love (**13:13**) (**13:8-13**).

<i>Love is:</i>	<i>Love isn't:</i>
•Patient	•Envious
•Kind	•Proud
•Rejoices in truth	•Boastful
•Bears up under all problems / Protects	•Inappropriate / Rude
•Believes / Trusts	•Selfish
•Hopes	•Short-tempered
•Understands the of faults of others	•Evil
•Never fails / Perseveres	•Accepting of sin