



**Sunday School Lesson for July 30, 2006
Released on July 26, 2006**

"Called to Love"

**Printed Text: 1 Corinthians 13
Background Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13
Devotional Reading: John 3:16-21**

1 Corinthians 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.

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.

3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

4 Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,

5 Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;

6 Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;

7 Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

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.

9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.

10 But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

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.

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.

13 And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:

1. List the features that characterize Christian love.
2. Contrast the nature of Christian love with the worldly idea of love.
3. Identify a unique, personal way to demonstrate Christian love.

Introduction -- Action Love

"I just don't know," Jane said, "whether we can learn to love each other again." She was speaking to a counselor while Craig, her husband, sat next to her in silence. Several months earlier, Jane had discovered that Craig was having an affair with a woman he had met on a business trip.

Jane responded by forcing Craig to leave their home until he made up his mind. After three weeks in a hotel, he renounced his sinful behavior and begged for forgiveness. She was willing to try but was skeptical about the future. "Could it really ever feel the same?" she asked. "We've been through so much together, but I just don't know if I even love him anymore."

In response the counselor pointed out that love is primarily a sense of commitment rather than an emotion, although we do often have loving feelings. Loving commitment to another manifests itself in a way of living. Love, in other words, is a set of behaviors, a way that we act toward others. Despite her anger, Jane was clearly acting in a loving way by attempting to forgive Craig. The counselor was, therefore, hopeful that the relationship could be healed.

Many of us live in a culture where the word *love* is used so often and so casually that it has become virtually meaningless. We say that we love God, but we also say that we love our family members, chocolate ice cream, and the sales at Wal-Mart®. Paul clarifies that love is not a feeling but rather a mode of living. He stresses that nothing we do can possibly bring glory to God if we do not exhibit a loving spirit.

Lesson Background

First Corinthians 13 is a key part of Paul's solution to the problems of a divided church. Up to this point in the letter, he has discussed several serious issues that were points of conflict for the Corinthian church. These ranged from sectarianism, to sexual sin, to lawsuits among believers, to divorce, to Christian liberties, to propriety in worship.

Chapter 12 begins a long section on the pride and arrogance that had entered the church through, ironically, the use of spiritual gifts. That discussion continues into chapter 14, but Paul pauses to give the short answer to all the questions thus far: love. Love for one another, properly understood, will put everything into perspective. Love will unify the church and empower believers to glorify Christ together.

The Preeminence of Love (1 Cor. 13:1-3)

1. Why is it important to study 1 Corinthians 13 in the context of spiritual gifts?

Often, this passage is studied independently. Many sermons have been preached just on this passage of scripture. However, in order to understand the true mean of 1 Corinthians 13, we must understand the context of this scripture.

Paul was answering questions to the church at Corinth concerning spiritual gifts. In chapter 12, he describes the different types of spiritual gifts and their uses in the body of Christ. Chapter 13 focuses on love, which is greater than any spiritual gift from God. Verse 31 of chapter 12 implies that there were some envy in the Corinthian church concerning spiritual gifts. Paul contrasts the gift of tongues with the gift of prophecy in chapter 14, which indicates that the gift of tongues was a popular gift.

2. How did Paul view those who had spectacular spiritual gifts but did not have love (v. 2-3)?

Everyone who is in the body of Christ has at least one spiritual gift. Ideally, Christians will use that gift to glorify God and advance His kingdom. However, there are some individuals who use their gift(s) to gain glory from other people. Some use their gift for personal gain instead of advancing God's kingdom.

Paul's point in verses 2 and 3 is that without love, a spiritual gift is meaningless. Whatever we do in this life, we need to do it because we love God. And if we love God, then we will love other people as well. Our gifts are meant to help lost souls find Jesus Christ. It is important that we let God change our hearts so that we can do everything in love.

The Performance of Love (1 Cor. 13:4-7)

3. What are some of the characteristics of love? (v. 4-8)?

Paul gives a long list of characteristics of love. In this list, there is probably at least one characteristic that each of us needs to work on. As we strive towards godly love, we will continually improve on these characteristics.

The first characteristic that Paul gives about love is that it is patient. There are a lot of people who suffer in this area. Obviously, the Corinthian church had to suffer from this problem since Paul listed this characteristic first. It takes time to develop patience; it does not come overnight. It is a characteristic that most people don't want to work on. It is, nevertheless, the outgrowth of genuine Christian love.

Love is kind. We should not mistreat anyone. Too often, Christians exhibit an unkind attitude towards others. The Bible says, "Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Eph. 4:12).

Love is not envious or jealous. When someone receives blessings and successes from God, we should all rejoice. We should not get mad because we did not get that particular blessing or success.

Love does not try to show off. People who truly love do not boast about their successes. There is a difference between testifying of God's blessings and boasting about them. When you testify, you show how God has been good to you, and the listener understands that God can bless himself or herself in the same manner. When you boast, you might still talk about how God blessed you, but the listener does not see how God can be a blessing in his or her life.

The phrases "doth not behave itself unseemly" (v. 5) and "seeketh not her own" refer to rudeness and selfishness. These attitudes do not find motivation in Christian love.

People who have Christian love are not easily angered. Those who love do not keep a record of wrongdoings for vengeance later. People who love have no desire to listen to bad reports about anyone. They will rejoice when they hear good reports.

Paul sums up his description of love by saying that it "beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, and endureth all things" (v. 7). Love is positive and not negative. It hopes for the best. All love is apt to make the best of everything; it will judge well and believe well.

The Performance of Love (1 Cor. 13:8-13)

4. What did Paul envision concerning the future of spiritual gifts? (v. 8)

As Paul continues to talk about love, he returns to the topic of spiritual gifts. By their very nature, spiritual gifts were temporary. They were going to "fail," "cease,"

and "vanish away." In contrast, love never fails and is eternal. That is the essence of God since God is love.

5, What kind of knowledge was Paul talking about? (v. 8)

This knowledge does not refer to something that can be gained in an educational way, and it does not refer to knowledge in general. This knowledge comes only from revelation from God, such as the knowledge Paul himself received (Gal. 1:12).

6. What does "perfect" (v. 10) refer to? Why?

Bible scholars debate the meaning of the phrase "that which is perfect." The word for "perfect" in the Greek can be translated as "mature" or "complete." Some refer to the completed New Testament Scriptures. Others, however, see this passage as a reference to the second coming of Christ. The conclusion a person reaches has implications concerning the ongoing availability of these spiritual gifts.

7. What was Paul's point in comparing childhood and adulthood (v. 11)

Paul uses a comparison that the readers at Corinth (and today's readers) can relate to. Each of us has been a child at one point, and can relate to Paul's comparison of childhood and adulthood. When we were children, we spoke, thought, and understood as children. As we grew older, though, we outgrew our immaturity.

Childhood is an important part of human development; however, we don't want to remain in childhood. We need to grow up. The spiritual gifts were meant to bring the Corinthian church from childhood to adulthood. There comes a time when we need to "put away childish things." Paul wanted the Corinthian church to understand that spiritual gifts were not part of God's permanent plan for His people. They needed to "put away" their childish ways towards spiritual gifts.

8. What was the "glass" (v. 12)?

The "glass" to which Paul refers was an ancient mirror, usually made of polished bronze. Even though a person could see a reflection of himself in such a mirror, it was less than perfect. It was a dim reflection, and not the real thing. It was not like seeing someone "face to face." The temporary things of this world will one day give way to the permanent realities of heaven (cf. 2 Cor. 4:18).

9. How will we know as we have been known? (v.12)

There are a lot of Christian resources that are available in Bookstores, in Churches, and even online. Even with all that knowledge that is available to us, it is only partial. There is so much about the things of God that we are still learning about. There are things that we will not understand until we meet the Lord in Heaven.

Paul envisioned a time when knowledge will be complete. In the final state of redemption, we will have a full knowledge similar to the complete knowledge God has of mankind. In heaven, all doubts will be removed, all questions answered, all fears eliminated, and all hopes realized.

10. Why is charity (love) greater than all gifts? (v. 13)

Faith, hope, and charity (love) are all essential for our lives. "We walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7); likewise, "hope that is seen is not hope" (Rom. 8:24). Faith brings us to Christ (5:1), and hope inspires us to wait for him (Titus 2:13). But faith will become sight, and hope will be fulfilled in heaven. "And there shall we perfectly love one another. When faith and hope are at an end, true charity will burn forever with the brightest flame" (*Matthew Henry's Commentary*).

Conclusion -- Know Yourself

In Paul's day the great Oracle at Delphi was a major tourist attraction. Legend had it that Delphi, a little over 100 miles northwest of Athens, was the center of the earth. A famous temple to the god Apollo housed a sacred stone marking the spot. Worshipers of Apollo could come to this temple to ask the idol for advice, similar to modern fortune-telling.

Answers came cryptically through a prophetess, who went into a trance and spoke in nonsensical gibberish. These ravings were "interpreted" by priests at the temple to provide the answer to the supplicants' questions. Despite the obvious flaws of these practices, the oracle at Delphi remained a significant aspect of Greek religion for hundreds of years.

The best advice that pilgrims to Delphi received did not, however, come from a raving prophetess or priest of Apollo. Rather, the best advice came from the famous inscription over the doorway to the temple: *Know Thyself*. Worshipers were, in other words, to reflect on their own motives, weaknesses, and limitations before approaching.

The Corinthians were obsessed with spiritual gifts that offered special insights. As a result, they knew marvelous things about God and His ways, but they obviously did not know their own hearts. For this reason they failed to see that their actions were not truly driven by love or a desire to please God. Without love their greatest efforts could never truly glorify Him.

Prayer

Father, You called us to love one another, and we love You. Help us to show your love towards others. Give us the heart to love as you do. Take away our pride and envy, and help us becoming forgiving people since you so graciously forgave us. Give us the wisdom to use the gifts that you have so graciously given us so that we can win souls for you and give you the glory. In Jesus' name we all pray. Amen.

Thought to Remember

Love lasts forever; implement it now!

Anticipating Next Week's Lesson

Next week's lesson deals with the giving of forgiveness in 2 Corinthians 2:5-11 and 7:2-15. All of us need forgiveness, and needs to be forgiving.

Lesson Summarized By

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