

# The Greatest Gift is Love

1 Cor 13:1-13

SS Lesson for 05/31/2015

**Devotional Scripture:** 1 John 4:7-21

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# Introduction

## Overview and Key Verse of the Lesson

The lesson reminds us that **The Greatest Gift is Love**. The **study's aim** is to understand how the more excellent way is love and to know that a spiritual gift benefits the Church when it is used in love. The **study's application** is apply the understanding that to use our gifts in love is what make them worthwhile. (*Adapted from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary*).

### Key Verse: 1 Cor 13:13

*And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.*

### Commentary from The Bible Knowledge Commentary

Some have suggested that this “hymn to love” (chap. 13) was composed by Paul on a previous occasion (under the Spirit’s inspiration, of course) and inserted in the letter at this point (under the Spirit’s direction) because of its telling appropriateness. This may be so, for the balance in form and substance reflects Paul at his best (but cf. 1:25-29, a passage which exhibits superb parallelism). Still, these verses so directly touch the many issues raised in this letter that if they were previously composed, the Corinthians and their problems were never far removed from Paul’s mind as he wrote. Eloquence was greatly admired in the first century and the Corinthians were no exception, though they found little of it in Paul (cf. 2:1, 4; 2 Cor. 10:10). This may explain in part their fascination with tongues. Paul’s application of this and the following conditional clauses (1 Cor. 13:2-3) to himself was forceful since he could claim exceptional experiences, particularly in regard to the languages of **men** (14:18) **and of angels** (cf. 2 Cor. 12:4). But the statement was probably meant to include every imaginable mode of speech. It was a statement of hyperbole concerning exalted eloquence, which if void of love might be momentarily electrifying like a clash of **gong** or **cymbal** but then vanished just as quickly. **Love** on the other hand produces eternal effects (cf. v. 13). Even **the gift of prophecy** (cf. 12:10) which Paul championed as a great gift for the Corinthian church (14:1) or the gifts of wisdom, **knowledge**, and **faith** (cf. 12:8-9) were nothing compared with **love**. Paul was not depreciating those gifts but was appreciating love by showing it to be incomparable. Even self-sacrifice can be self-centered (cf. Matt. 6:2), and the ultimate sacrifice, here depicted as self-immolation (cf. Dan. 3:17-18; [apocryphal] 2 Maccabees 7:5; Strabo *Geography* 15. 1. 73) is ultimately futile without **love**.

Paul shifted from the first person to the third person and replaced himself with a personification of love. Some have seen in verses 4-6 the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23); others have seen here a description of Christ Himself. As different sides of the same coin, both are applicable and provided a solution to the many Corinthian problems. Love, defined by 14 predications (half of them negative, half positive) constituted the “way.” **Love**, Paul wrote, **is patient... kind... does not envy or boast, and is not proud**. Patience (*makrothymia*) is the capacity to be wronged and not retaliate. The Corinthian church had many members who had been wronged (e.g., in lawsuits [1 Cor. 6:8] and the poor at communal meals [11:21-22]). The response of love to these wrongs would be a display of kindness and goodness. Envy and boasting seemed to abound as two poles of the same problem (e.g., divisions [1:10; 3:3, 21]; gifts [12:14-25]). The Corinthians had no monopoly on pride though they seemed to. The verb *physioō* occurs only seven times in the New Testament, six of which are found in this letter (cf. 4:6, 18-19; 5:2; 8:1). Paul then gave four negative descriptions of love: **It is not rude** nor **self-seeking** nor **easily angered**, and **it keeps no record of wrongs**. Rudeness found expression in the problem of women in worship (11:2-16), the disorders at the Lord’s Supper (11:17-22), and the general organization of worship (14:26-33). Self-satisfaction was a pervasive disorder particularly manifested in the eating of food sacrificed to idols (8:9; 10:23-24). People who are not easily angered usually do not start lawsuits (as in 6:1-11). Love does not record wrongs, though there was ample opportunity for doing so in Corinth (e.g., 6:8; 7:5; 8:11). **Love does not delight in evil** (e.g., incest [5:1-2, 8]), **but rejoices in truth** (5:8). Love **always protects** (cf.

8:13), **trusts** (cf. 15:11), **hopes** (cf. 9:10, 23), and **perseveres** (*hypomenei*, “remains steadfast in the face of unpleasant circumstances”; cf. 9:19-22).

Following this elaboration of the preeminence (vv. 1-3) and perfections (vv. 4-7) of love, Paul concluded with a discussion of its permanence (vv. 8-13). **Love never fails**, in the sense it will never come to an end. Positively stated, it is eternal. This is not true of the spiritual gifts. Some of the gifts were foundational (e.g., **prophecies** and **knowledge**; cf. Eph. 2:20) and confirmatory (e.g., **tongues**; cf. 2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:4). Every gift is linked in some way to building up the church to maturity—some (prophecy, knowledge, tongues) functioning in the early years of the Church Age and others continuing on till the church is perfected. When that perfection is achieved, the gifts will have served their purposes and will be rendered obsolete. But this will not happen to love. As Paul explained it, the gift of knowledge (v. 8), essential as it was, was not exhaustive. The ability to **prophecy**, however crucial for the church’s life, was of limited scope. The gifts were temporary blessings in an **imperfect** age. One day they would give way to **perfection**, toward which all the gifts pointed. What Paul meant when he referred to the coming of perfection is the subject of considerable debate. One suggestion is that perfection described the completion of the New Testament. But verse 12 makes that interpretation unlikely. A few have suggested that this state of perfection will not be reached until the new heavens and new earth are established. Another point of view understands perfection to describe the state of the church when God’s program for it is consummated at the coming of Christ. There is much to commend this view, including the natural accord it enjoys with the illustration of growth and maturity which Paul used in the following verses. Paul elsewhere described the purpose of gifts by an illustration employing the imagery of growth and maturity. According to Ephesians 4:11-16, the gifts were to be used to bring the church from a state of infancy to adulthood. The word translated “mature” in that passage (Eph. 4:13) is the word translated “perfection” (*teleion*) in 1 Corinthians 13:10. In the Ephesians passage, maturity is defined as “attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” Such a state will obviously not exist until Christ’s second coming. It would appear that the same perspective was developed in this passage to the Corinthians. Paul applied the illustration to himself (cf. vv. 1-3). The threefold talking, thinking, and reasoning were probably meant to balance the thrice-mentioned gifts (v. 8). With the coming of adulthood, such gifts become passe. Paul’s use of the word **became** (*gegona*, a perf. tense verb, probably proleptic; cf. Rom. 13:8; 1 Cor. 14:23) was of course to be understood in the context of the illustration. It does not indicate that he personally or the church collectively had yet arrived at that point (cf. Phil. 3:12). It would not, on the other hand, necessarily rule out a gradual obsolescence of certain gifts as the church progressed toward maturity. A city like Corinth, famous for its bronze mirrors, would have particularly appreciated Paul’s final illustration. The perfection and imperfection mentioned in verse 10 were deftly likened to the contrasting images obtained by the indirect **reflection** of one’s face viewed in a bronze mirror and the same face when viewed directly. Such, Paul said, was the contrast between the imperfect time in which he then wrote and the perfect time which awaited him and the church when the partial reflection of the present would give way to the splendor of perfect vision. Then Paul would **see** God (cf. 15:28; 1 John 3:2) as God now saw Paul. Then partial knowledge (cf. 1 Cor. 8:1-3) would be displaced by the perfect knowledge of God. Paul completed his three-paneled portrait of love (vv. 1-3, 4-7, 8-13) with a final triad: **faith, hope, and love**. Much discussion has focused on whether faith and hope were portrayed by Paul as being (with love) eternal. The solution is probably found in verse 7. Faith is an expression of love (the word “trusts,” *pisteuei*, v. 7, is the verb form of the noun “faith,” *pistis*), as is hope (cf. Gal. 5:5-6). Faith and hope, as manifestations of love, will endure eternally. So too everyone who follows the way of love (1 Cor. 14:1) finds “the most excellent way” (12:31b), because every individual characterized by love carries that mark eternally. The spiritual gifts will one day cease to exist, but love will endure forever.

## ***Lesson Introduction and Background***

### **From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary**

Our world chatters about spirituality. While religion has negative connotations for many, spirituality is widely seen in positive terms. “I’m not religious, but I am very spiritual,” say many. If we were to accept such a

distinction for the sake of argument, we would still have to ask how we can distinguish authentic spirituality from the inauthentic kind. What makes a person truly spiritual? To get the answer to that question, we need to begin with a conceptualization of spirituality. The apostle Paul has done just that for us. His conceptualization is grounded in a most essential expression of God's character: love.

The Christians to whom Paul wrote the letter we call 1 Corinthians had come to equate knowledge with spirituality (1 Corinthians 8:1-3). They also had associated certain Holy Spirit-given abilities, such as the ability to speak in tongues, with spirituality (14:1-5). Do such things make a person spiritual? Paul's answer is a qualified no. Things such as knowledge or the ability to speak in other languages are indeed gifts from the Holy Spirit (12:8, 10), but these gifts by themselves do not make a person spiritually superior. In fact, the very idea of being spiritually superior is unspiritual! In the midst of that discussion of spiritual gifts—but really in the midst of all the discussions of church problems at Corinth—Paul offered an extended, lyrical discourse on godly love. This text, our lesson for today, is in many respects the climax of 1 Corinthians. The Corinthian church was rife with problems and divisions. With God's kind of love, Paul said, the rivalries infecting the Corinthian church would disappear.

## Major Theme Analysis

*(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)*

### **Priority of Love (13:1-3)**

1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging 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, but have not love, I am nothing.

3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it

### **Seek the greater gift love (1)**

*What is love and how does it fit into our Christian life (from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator)*

Amazingly at first glance, Paul spoke of love in very simple terms. He chose to define it with a series of things that we should and should not do. One thing in particular stands out in Paul's definition. Everything on the list reflects a mind-set or, if we could coin a new term, a heart-set (a way of looking at things that reaches beyond obvious). Love is the fabric that holds the exercise of the gifts together. Imagine a collection of beautifully cut stones capable of being placed to form a building. Without cementing material, they would collapse in a heap. People passing by that heap would see potential in the pile of stones but would feel that, in their present form, they were performing no useful function. Love is the cementing material in the exercise of our Christian faith.

*Seeking love always is seeking the building up of others (1 Corinthians 8:1)*

1 Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.

*In seeking, we must be willing to follow its way (1 Corinthians 14:1)*

1 Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.

*We must try to excel in the gift of love so as to help others (1 Corinthians 14:12)*

12 So it is with you. Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church.

*Everything we do should be done in love (1 Corinthians 16:14)*

14 Do everything in love.

### **Gifts without love (2)**

*Gifts without love can become a stumbling block to others (Romans 14:15)*

15 If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died.

*Gifts in themselves is nothing, only faith and love working through the gifts (Galatians 5:6)*

6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

*Gifts are only effective if they are done out of a pure heart and good conscience toward God (1 Timothy 1:5)*

5 The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

### **Giving without love (3)**

*Giving in the wrong way is mistreating God (Matthew 25:45)*

45 "He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'

*Giving without love is not edifying others (1 Corinthians 14:17)*

17 You may be giving thanks well enough, but the other man is not edified.

*We must excel in love to excel in giving (2 Corinthians 8:7)*

7 But just as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

*One must give in love to please God (Phil 4:18)*

18 I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.

### **Practice and Description of Love (13:4-7)**

4 Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up;

5 does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil;

6 does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth;

7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

### **What Love Does (from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)**

A man visits his wife in a nursing home. She has Alzheimer's disease. Daily he stops by to see her. He reads to her from the Bible. He tells her how nice the weather is and how the children and grandchildren are doing. He holds her hand and sings some of her favorite hymns to her. After two or three hours he leaves, only to return the next day for the same routine. Only this is not a routine. This is love. Another man has a wife in the same nursing facility. She too has Alzheimer's. For the first few weeks he visits daily. Then the visits become every other day, then weekly. Then he comes only at Christmas and on his wife's birthday. His thought is, "This is not fair. I've got a life to live." Both couples had stood before the same minister years ago. They

recited vows to each other that said they would love, honor, and cherish each other in sickness and in health. Those vows were to be in effect until death would separate them. One's man's love suffered long, the other refused to "suffer" for long. One man was self-seeking while the other man served his wife and his Lord. Which choice would you make?

#### **Love is humble (4)**

*Love as a servant and rely on the Holy Spirit for power (2 Corinthians 6:4, 6)*

4 Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; 6 in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love;

*To be able to bear with others, it takes humility through love (Ephesians 4:2)*

2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.

*As God's chosen people, Christians should be covered with humility and love (Colossians 3:12)*

12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

*Loving humility shows godly wisdom (James 3:17)*

17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

#### **Love is unselfish (5)**

*Love says to seek the good of others (1 Corinthians 10:24)*

24 Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.

*Seek the good of others to aid in their salvation (1 Corinthians 10:33)*

33 even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.

*Christians should always be concerned for each other out of love (1 Corinthians 12:25)*

25 so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.

*To have the same attitude as Jesus is to love unselfishly (Philippians 2:3-5)*

3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

*If we don't show love to others, we don't have the love of God in us (1 John 3:16-17)*

16 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. 17 If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?

## Love rejoices in truth (6)

*Rejoicing in the truth is clinging to what is good (Romans 12:9)*

9 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.

*Godly repentance leads to love and rejoicing in the truth (2 Corinthians 7:9-16)*

9 yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. 10 Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. 11 See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter. 12 So even though I wrote to you, it was not on account of the one who did the wrong or of the injured party, but rather that before God you could see for yourselves how devoted to us you are. 13 By all this we are encouraged. In addition to our own encouragement, we were especially delighted to see how happy Titus was, because his spirit has been refreshed by all of you. 14 I had boasted to him about you, and you have not embarrassed me. But just as everything we said to you was true, so our boasting about you to Titus has proved to be true as well. 15 And his affection for you is all the greater when he remembers that you were all obedient, receiving him with fear and trembling. 16 I am glad I can have complete confidence in you.

*One of the most important things is that truth is spread (Philippians 1:18)*

18 But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice,

*Effective and faithful service out of love brings rejoicing (Philippians 2:17-18)*

17 But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. 18 So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.

*Faithfulness to the truth brings joy and good reputations (3 John 3)*

3 It gave me great joy to have some brothers come and tell about your faithfulness to the truth and how you continue to walk in the truth.

## Love is patient (7)

*Show love through patience with the weak (Romans 15:1)*

1 We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.

*Perseverance shows our trust and love of God (2 Thess 1:4-5)*

4 Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring. 5 All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering

*Patience through love combats pride (Ecclesiastes 7:8)*

8 The end of a matter is better than its beginning, and patience is better than pride.

*Follow the patience of biblical saints as examples (James 5:10-11)*

10 Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. 11 As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

*Mixed Message (from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)*

A twenty-six-year-old woman in Tustin, California, provided an interesting example of the “road rage” phenomenon. This term describes an aggressive driving style that some people adopt in which they take out their frustrations on other drivers. This young woman became angry at the driver of the truck in front of her because she thought he wasn’t driving fast enough. So she took a baseball bat that she had in her car and attempted to hit the side of the truck several times as she pulled alongside it. The policeman who arrested her noted that her license plate read “PEACE 95.” When he questioned her about it, she told the officer that she got the personalized plate because she thought there was too much violence in our society! Psychologists would probably call this a case of “cognitive dissonance.” It’s what happens when a person’s behavior doesn’t match his stated beliefs—and yet the person himself sees no contradiction. This was the situation in the Corinthian church that Paul was addressing. When we pride ourselves on the gifts or talents that make us seem very spiritual, and yet do not exercise them in a spirit of love, something is seriously wrong with our Christianity. —C. R. B.

***Permanence of love (13:8-13)***

8 Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away.

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

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

11 When I was a child, I spoke 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 in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.

13 And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

**Love never fails (8)**

*Symbol of Lasting Love (from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)*

Yvonne Saunders runs an unusual business in West Vancouver, British Columbia: she preserves wedding bouquets. She sends an airtight shipping box to the bride who wants her bouquet preserved. When the flowers arrive at Saunders' studio, they are photographed, disassembled, and dried, flower by flower, in chemicals that will preserve even the colors of the petals, leaves, and stems. Then the bouquet is reassembled, placed on a background of velvet (or a piece of the fabric from which the bride's gown was made), and sealed in a frame. The cost of this service ranges from under \$100 to over \$600. The carefully preserved flowers are intended to symbolize the eternal nature of the love that the happy couple have pledged to each other. (One might observe that this could be a symbolic first lesson to the newlyweds of how much love can cost!). Paul describes the eternal nature of love in 1 Corinthians 13, noting that it "never fails" (v. 8). While the words of this chapter are often read as part of a wedding ceremony, they can truly be understood only by looking to the God who is this kind of love. His love is a love that lasts a lifetime and beyond. - C. R. B.

*It is the love of God that provides us hope that we can then pass on to others (Romans 5:5)*

5 And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

*It is God's love that really NEVER fails (Romans 8:35)*

35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

*We should think of love as a debt to others and therefore never stop providing (Romans 13:8)*

8 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.

### **Love is complete and perfect (9-12)**

*Love is complete in that it can cover a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8)*

8 Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.

*Perfection versus imperfection (from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)*

This verse (13:10) has been the source of considerable discussion. Some understand *perfection* to refer to the revelation of the New Covenant embodied in the New Testament Scriptures. The special spiritual gifts were necessary in the first century and shortly thereafter to authenticate this new and final revelation of God's will to man. (See the reference to how the Lord "confirmed his word" in Mark 16:20.) According to this view, the gifts ceased once the New Testament was completed. Another view is that *perfection* looks to the second coming of Christ. When he who is the perfect revelation of God returns, then special gifts will no longer be needed. Still others believe that *perfection* means "maturity," as it does in various passages (Colossians 1:28; James 3:2). As such, it may refer to a mature individual or a mature church. When a person or congregation has attained "unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God" and "the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13), there will no longer be a need for the gifts of knowledge and prophecy. Or when the church as a whole becomes "mature," it no longer needs the foundational gifts of the apostles and prophets (Ephesians 2:20).

*Love never does harm (Romans 13:10)*

10 Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

*Love should be rooted and grounded in God which makes it eternal (Ephesians 3:17, 19)*

17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge-that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

*Love helps our maturity in God and is perfect when all things work as God desires (Ephesians 4:15-15)*

15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. 16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

*Love binds into perfect unity (Colossians 3:14)*

14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

*Cheap Talk, Rotten Walk (from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)*

The young man, trying to impress his girlfriend, told her, "I would climb the highest mountain to be with you. I'd walk through a snake-infested jungle to be with you. I would swim the widest river just to be able to be with you." Then, after he kissed her, he said, "I'll see you at church Sunday if it's not raining." There is no limit to the promises some people are willing to make! We call that cheap talk. At other times there is indeed the fulfillment of a noble task but from wrong motives. At a hospital near a town where I once ministered, there was a man who would go into patients' rooms to pray with them. He seemed to be such a loving and kind individual. But it was discovered that he would slip rings from their fingers as he held their hands. On other occasions he would see jewelry or other articles on a surface and pocket them. Love was not the motivation by which he served. What a rotten walk! It is the scoundrel who makes the headline news, but the compassionate ones make the heart new. They are the ones who have answered the

call to minister to the poor and downcast through the years. No cheap talk, no rotten work, just giving themselves day after day to caring for the needs of others. This pleases God.

### **Greatness of love (13)**

*Loving God and others is the greatest commandment (Mark 12:29-31)*

29 "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' 31 The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

*All of God's law is summed up in love (Gal 5:14)*

14 The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

*God gives love through the power of His Holy Spirit therefore it is great (2 Timothy 1:7)*

7 For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.

*Love proves we have been born of God (1 John 4:7-9)*

7 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. 9 This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.

## **Conclusion and Other Thoughts**

### ***Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh***

A great deal could and should be said about love, but Paul's teaching on love can be summarized by two main statements: (1) Love is to be our priority; and, (2) Love is to be our pursuit. Let us consider the implications of these two important principles as we conclude our study of 1 Corinthians 13.

#### **The Priority of Love**

Paul interrupted his teaching on the practice of spiritual gifts in chapters 12 and 14 to underscore the priority of love over spiritual gifts. One can hardly miss this truth in Paul's teaching, here and elsewhere. Spiritual gifts have little value apart from love. Spiritual gifts do not abide, while love does. Love is even superior to faith and hope, which do abide. This truth is not unique to Paul. The teaching of the entire Old Testament and of our Lord Jesus Christ can be summed up by one word—"love." (Matthew 22:34-40; Romans 13:8-10). In the last words of our Lord to His disciples, recorded in John 13-17, Jesus spoke repeatedly of the importance of love. Love was to distinguish His disciples from others (John 13:34-35; John 15:12-13; John 15:17). Love was the goal of Paul's instruction (1 Timothy 1:5). Love is a dominant theme in Peter's epistles and in John's. Peter refers to love as the highest level of Christian growth, and Paul speaks of it as the basis for edification (1 Peter 1:22-23; 1 John 4:7-11; 2 Peter 1:5-7; Ephesians 4:1-3, 14-16). Few would even attempt to debate that love is to be a high priority for the Christian. But if love is so important, it is also so quickly and easily lost. Certainly love was lacking in the church at Corinth. The church at Ephesus all too quickly lost its first love and did not even seem to know it (Revelation 2:1-5).

#### **The Pursuit of Love**

Love is not automatic. It is quickly lost, and it comes about only when we make it our priority and our pursuit. How does one pursue love? Let me summarize briefly that about which God's Word has so much to say. In short, we should pursue love as Paul indicates in 1 Corinthians (and, of course, elsewhere). We begin by reading God's Word and meditating upon it. This epistle was written not only to the saints at Corinth but to all the saints, including us (see 1:1-2). The first thing we gain from God's Word is an accurate definition of love. The word "love" does not mean to the world what the Bible says it is to mean to us. The Bible is the only source of truth which defines what love is and does. As the Word of God speaks to us of love, we should recognize our lack of love, and repent of it. Surely as Paul's description of love's conduct begins to unfold in verses 4-7 of chapter 13, it became increasingly clear that the Corinthians lack love. As we meditate on these verses and many like them in God's Word, our lack of love must be recognized and repented of as the serious sin it is. This is what our Lord called for in His letter to the Ephesian saints in Revelation 2. It is what He requires of us as well. Having recognized our lack of love and repented of this deficiency, we must now look to God alone as the source of love. Love does not originate within us. We love as a result of God's love for us. We are to keep ourselves in this love (1 John 4:19; Jude 1:20-21). If we are to keep ourselves in the love of Christ, we must never stray from the cross of Christ, for there on the cross of Calvary was God's love for us outpoured (Romans 5:3-8). The love we have received from God came in the form of a cross—sacrificial love. That is the kind of love we are to manifest toward others (John 15:13; Ephesians 5:25-27). The way we demonstrate love toward God and toward others is by obeying His commandments. This is why the Old Testament law can be summed up in two commandments, both of which are the expressions of love. Legalism is man's attempt to keep God's law without love. Love is that state of heart which seeks to please God by keeping His commands. In chapter 14, verse 1, Paul instructs his readers to pursue love, and the rest of the chapter tells us how that is to be done. We pursue love by exercising our gifts in a self-sacrificial way that endeavors to edify others. If, as we shall see in our study of chapter 14, most of the church today ignores the instructions Paul lays down here, we may well conclude the problem begins with a lack of love, toward God and toward others. Love is not so much a warm and fuzzy feeling as the grateful disposition to please God and others at our expense, by keeping His commandments as initially laid down in the Old Testament and clarified in the New.

I have been speaking throughout these lessons on chapter 13 primarily to Christians because this epistle was written primarily to Christians. Let me now say a word to those who have never yet acknowledged their sin and trusted in the sacrificial death of Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. You cannot express the love of God until you have first experienced it. Love, Christian love, is impossible for those who have not yet accepted the love of God in the person and work of Jesus Christ. I urge you to consider the awesome reality of God's love, expressed toward you in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. Even while we were sinners, Christ died for us, to bear the penalty for our sins, and to give us His righteousness, as we place our trust in Him by faith. May you trust in Him this very hour and thus come to experience His love.

*(Adapted from URL:<https://bible.org/seriespage/what-thing-called-love-1-cor-131-13>)*

### ***Heart of the Lesson from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator***

Christian love is the motive for exercising the spiritual gifts. Paul included himself with the Corinthians by writing in the first person when making his case for genuine love. A believer motivated by love conducts himself in special ways toward others, himself, sin, and the circumstances in which he finds himself.

#### **The supremacy of love (1 Cor. 13:1-3)**

Paul used several examples regarding the necessity of love in exercising the spiritual gifts. Beginning with tongues speaking, he said if he spoke in tongues without showing love to others, he was just producing a loud noise. Even if a believer had the gift of prophecy, could understand mysteries, and had the gift of knowledge, he would be nothing without love. Even the special ability to trust God when facing overwhelming circumstances is useless if one is deficient in love. Turning to deeds of mercy and devotion, Paul said that if he sold everything that he owned and gave it to others, it would mean nothing without love. He could even sacrifice his body as a martyr, but without love it would gain him nothing.

### **The description of love (1 Cor. 13:4-7)**

Christian love acts properly toward others. It is patient with people, even enduring other people's unpleasant character traits and actions. Love is also kind, responding with kind words and acts to those who mistreat us. Love does not envy others. It never exhibits jealousy over their successes. Love includes a proper attitude toward self. It does not boast of itself to make others jealous. Love is not proud, for pride is incompatible with love. Christian love does not act in a disgraceful or dishonorable manner. Love is not self-seeking, which is replacing God with self. Love puts the interests of others first. Love is not easily angered by things said or done against it. It does not keep a record of wrongdoing while seeking an opportunity to get even. Christian love does not rejoice in sin. Love finds no pleasure in any kind of evil, for love rejoices only in the truth. Despite circumstances, love protects others from contempt and slander. Love is always ready to believe the best in others, giving the benefit of the doubt. Love hopes for all things, being assured of the ultimate fulfillment of God's purpose for us (Phil. 1:6). Love endures whatever difficulties are encountered.

### **The permanence of love (1 Cor. 13:8-13)**

Paul explained that prophecies, the gift of tongues, and knowledge all will eventually pass away. We will be transformed and glorified when Christ returns for us (Phil. 3:20-21), which is when perfection will have come (1 Cor. 13:10). The partial and incomplete knowledge that we have now will give way to full revelation from God. Paul gave two illustrations of his point. Just as he left his childish ways behind him when he became an adult, so our present partial knowledge will be done away with forever when we enter the perfect state. Just as the image reflected in an ancient mirror was unclear, so our present knowledge is incomplete. When we enter into the perfect state, we will see the Lord "face to face" (vs. 12). We will know the full measure of what we were designed to be and to know. Faith, hope, and love are three permanent virtues in contrast to the temporary spiritual gifts. The greatest of the three is love.

### ***Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator***

1. Our gifts and actions mean nothing without love (I Cor. 13:1-2)
2. Great sacrifice is worthless if it is not motivated by love (vs. 3)
3. Christian love is directed toward others (vss. 4-5)
4. Christian love looks for the best in others and gives the best it has (vss. 6-7)
5. Love will continue when all that we know has passed away (vss. 8-10)
6. Christians mature in their relationships with others as they mature in faith (vss. 11-12)
7. Love is the greatest gift we offer to others and to God (vs. 13)