

Men's Sunday Night
The Book of 1 Corinthians
“Christian Conduct”
Lesson 12 - 1 Corinthians 13
“How the Body Works (Part 2)”

It is tragic when the world takes a chapter like this and divorces it from its true Christian meaning. The unsaved man can no more experience this kind of love than can a marble statue! It takes the indwelling of the Spirit of God in the life, and the empowering of that Spirit, for anyone to display this kind of character in daily life.

Keep in mind that Paul is still dealing with the question of spiritual gifts. Here he is emphasizing the fact that gifts without graces are nothing. The fruit of the Spirit is more important in the Christian life than the miraculous gifts of the Spirit. Whenever the church strives for miraculous experiences rather than Christian holiness and character, there will be division, confusion, and carnality.

The word “charity” means “love” in action. It is not simply an emotion, it is the heart reaching out to others. “Charity” today makes us think of giving away old clothes or making gifts to “charitable institutions.” These activities can be Christian love in action, but Paul is demanding much more. The word he uses for love is *agape*, which is love that sacrifices for the good of others.

The Corinthians were spiritual babies, and, like babies, they were striving for the temporary and neglecting the permanent. They wanted passing spiritual gifts instead of lasting Christian character.

There will always be room for growth in the church, and while we are growing, we will know and see imperfectly. Corinth was famous for its metal mirrors, so Paul used that as an illustration. One saw only a dim reflection of the real person in those mirrors, just as we see only a dim reflection of God today.

The church grows closer to perfection through love: believers loving Christ and one another; holding the truth in love; and practicing the truth because they love Him. “*Building the body up in love*” is the way Ephesians 4:16 puts it, and this is a ministry all of us share. Faith, hope, love these abide forever; and love is the greatest, for “God is love” (1 Corinthians 13:13; 1 John 4:8, 16).

“What is Love”

The Greek word agape was not in common use before Christians chose it to express the characteristically Christian virtue. More common were words that mean fondness among friends and relatives (**Philia**), affection between parent and child (**Storge**), or passion between lovers (**Eros**). But (**Agape**) was the word Greek speaking Jews used to express the love between God and His covenant people. In secular Greek it represented a love in which the mind analyzes and the will chooses the object to be loved. Thus, it is a term wholly given to emotions, intellect, and will. Agape is a deliberate, free act that is the decision of the subject rather than the result of overpowering emotion. A what can I do for you not expecting anything back kind of love. Its greatest expression is the Father’s love in giving up His Son for us, and the Son’s love in giving up His own divine privileges, His purity from human sin, and His life. (See John 15:12-13; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Philippians 2:5-8; 1 John 3:16, 4:10)

Read 1 Corinthians 13:9-13. Pray and answer the following questions:

Paul discussed the necessity of love in the exercise of spiritual gifts. Christians may be talented, devoted, generous in their giving, or gifted with mountain moving faith; but those are of no value if love is not present. Without love, none of the gifts can honor God and build up the church.

5. When will we no longer need spiritual gifts?

6. How should we use them in the meantime?

7. In verses 11-12 how does Paul illustrate the difference between our present and future circumstances?

8. How does it encourage you that God fully knows you and your present situation?

Read 1 Cor. 13:1-13 again. Pray and answer the following questions:

Paul stated that “love never fails.” As he contrasted genuine love with spiritual gifts, he showed that love is greater because it is eternal not temporal. Paul closed this chapter with a brief discussion of the three great realities that will endure forever: faith, hope, and love.

9. How would you summarize the description of love in this chapter?

10. What makes it difficult for us to love this way?

11. Many people talk about love, but there seems to be few loving people. What often takes the place of love in our society?

Summing Up this Week’s Study:

The Bible’s simplest description of God, and therefore God’s own description of Himself is “*God is Love*” 1 John 4:16. Love is the most blessed manifestation of the character of God. John continues, “*and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.*” Therefore, the simplest and most profound description of Christian character also is love.

It is tragic that in many churches, as in the one in ancient Corinth, the love that is basic to Christian character does not characterize the membership or the ministry. – John MacArthur