

Beulah Baptist Church – The Reverend Jerry D. Black, Pastor
Sunday School Lesson - October 25, 2020
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Quarterly Theme: Love - Unit 2: Inclusive Love

Lesson 4: Love Divine – Printed Text: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13; Devotional Reading: Romans 12:9-21;
Bible Background: 1 Corinthians 12:27; 14:1

I. Aim for Change/Learning Objectives

By the end of the lesson, we will:

1. **DEFINE** Paul’s understanding of love as the apex of the Spirit-led life;
2. **APPRECIATE** love as motivation to share our God-given gifts; and,
3. **ACT** in love when sharing our God-given gifts.

In-Focus: (Text) - The story encompasses all three Learning Objectives, but the overarching focus is on how we can—*Act in love when sharing our God-given gifts.*

II. Unifying Principle – **The Most Excellent Way.** Special gifts such as **knowledge** and **wisdom** can easily make us lose sight of our obligations to others. How can we avoid being pleased with ourselves? Paul suggested that **love** is the **best** way to relate to others and forget one’s own status.

III. Key Verse – “*And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three, but the greatest of these is charity*” (1 Corinthians 13:13, KJV).

IV. People, Places, and Times – (*Who, Where, and When*)

Corinth. The city of Corinth, the capital of the Roman province of Achaia (ah-KIE-ah), was a socially, culturally, and religiously diverse city. It included the southern half of Greece and was a major trade city located on an isthmus that connected cities in northern Greece (Athens and Delphi) with cities on the Peloponnesian peninsula (Sparta and Olympus). Corinth enjoyed the maritime trade on the Aegean Sea to the east and the Gulf of Corinth to the west. This made Corinth a bustling trade and cultural center. The Christians of Corinth reflected the diversity of the city. Many of the Jews who were expelled from Rome (AD 49) resettled in Corinth. Congregations included the wealthy, merchants, slaves and former slaves. During the time in which Paul wrote, Corinth was known for its wanton immorality. This was so much so, that the Greek word, *korinthiazesthai*, to live like a Corinthian means — “**one who lives immorally.**”

V. Background – (*Who, What, and Why*)

Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, one of two epistles written to the congregation at Corinth, while living and ministering from Ephesus. He had also received a letter from the church at Corinth (7:1) expressing concerns and confusion in the areas of marriage, divorce, corporate worship, bodily resurrection, and overall life in a pagan society.

Paul wrote to encourage the church at Corinth and highlight the importance of holiness. However, Paul also had to correct their misunderstanding **and** abuse of spiritual gifts that he discussed in Corinthians 12. It is in 1 Corinthians 13 (often misinterpreted and improperly applied) where Paul addresses specific issues in the Corinthian church such as selfishness, division, abuse of gifts, and envy. He did so by redirecting the church’s focus to the Greek term for love, *agape* (**self-sacrificing love for others**), or charity, discussed a few weeks ago. Charity, in this sense, means **to cherish**. This Greek word is closely associated with the Hebrew word, *chesed* (KHESS-ed). This type love refers to **God’s covenant love for**

His people. Because of the connectedness of the word *chesed* to *agape*, it (*agape*) became the keyword for describing God's character and took on the meaning of **a divine love** that is deeply loyal. According to Paul and what he conveyed to the church at Corinth...believers should emulate this love. Nothing else matters if this is not done!

VI. The Lesson-at-a-Glance - (1 Corinthians 13)

1. Love is Superior (vv. 1-3)
2. Characteristics of Love (vv. 4-7)
3. Love Endures (vv. 8-13)

VII. In Depth/With More Light on the Text

1. Love is Superior (1 Corinthians 13:1-3)

The apostle Paul addressed the Corinthians and pointed out where their focus should be by first highlighting areas that they valued and thought were so important, such as the spiritual gifts (*charismata*). The Corinthians held eloquence in high esteem and were preoccupied with the gift of tongues. Tongues without love are nothing but noise! The gift of prophecy (preaching) was also a desirable gift (14:1); desiring to know the deepest mysteries (knowledge) was good and having enough faith to move mountains is great, but this could lead to false pride. They could be as generous as possible by feeding and giving everything to the poor, taking care of the sick, or being willing to suffer and give their lives (martyrdom), but in terms of the spiritual maturity of the Corinthians/Christians, none of these things have any value without love. Love/charity is essential and superior to the spiritual gifts. It is love/charity that enriches the spiritual gifts. Without love/charity, the spiritual gifts can even be destructive. No matter the gift, Paul tells the Corinthians, love should be the motivating factor, with the focus on the other person while edifying Christ and pleasing God as the objective. **Love is Superior!**

2. Characteristics of Love (vv. 4-7)

Paul gives an elaborate and poetic **description** and highlights the **character** of love and the manner in which Christians should express it. The very language that he uses indicates that love/charity requires action. It is something that one does and is not merely an emotion. Clearly, if we receive the love of God, we should and must show love to others. Love is not an abstract concept. In case you wonder, or ask, as the Corinthians might have asked, whether or not you have charity/love, the apostle Paul provides 14-15 descriptions or characteristics of a charitable person. In Verses 4-6, Paul describes what a life characterized by love is and is not, as well as what it looks like as an **“other-centered” life** in action. In Verse 7, Paul ends the characteristics of love on a positive note by revealing and summarizing four things (virtues) that love does, and states that love never tires of doing those things.

3. Love Endures (vv. 8-13)

Paul concludes the topic of love and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Paul states that we exercise all other spiritual gifts imperfectly, to be used for the time being, will pass away, but love/charity endures and surpasses them all. The time will come when prophecy and knowledge, given by the Spirit for the building and maturation of the church, will not be necessary. In other words, in heaven we will not need those things, but we will experience love there. Right now, we are maturing spiritual human beings or babes in Christ. Everything that we do is distorted or imperfect. When “the perfect” or “mature” is come and we are able to see “the whole” rather than “the part” during this imperfect age, we will experience completeness. Not only will we come to know, but we will also be known! Spiritual gifts are given for a particular purpose for a particular time. Faith (by which we are saved, according to the grace of God) and hope (in which we wait upon the return of Jesus and the coming of the reign of God) are both good and needed. They are given due to God's love for us and are what remain when one matures in Christ. However, the most essential “gift” is charity/love, which will never pass away. When Jesus returns, the reign of God will be fulfilled. We will have no need for hope! When we stand face-to-face with God,

and clearly see all that there is to see, we will have no need for faith. We will continue to love and be loved by God. Love is eternal and is the greatest gift of God. **Love Endures!**

VIII. Discuss the Meaning

1 Corinthians 13:1-13 is a well-known and much-recited passage from the Bible. In His letter to Corinth, Paul places this passage after the discussion regarding spiritual gifts. He did so to emphasize that while the gifts are good, useful and even impressive, used and attempted without **agape love (self-sacrificing love for others)**, the spiritual gifts mean nothing and might even be destructive! Thus, this passage of scripture is less about romantic or erotic love, and more about godly love! A whole way of life.

IX. Liberating Lesson

Do not make gods or idols out of the gifts that you might esteem so highly. They are transitory and will soon pass away! God did/does not give everyone the same gift (Ephesians 4:11-12). God gives spiritual gifts (and talents) for us to build each other up and “to grow up” the church.

X. Application for Activation

True love comes from God and is the very nature of God. When we show our love for one another, we demonstrate our love for God! Continue to pray and ask God to show you what your gifts are and how you might use them to His Glory. Also ask God to reveal to you where you have failed to demonstrate love to a co-laborer, family member, neighbor or stranger, and how you can remedy the situation. More intentionally, ask God to show you how to love those who do not show you love...even if you have to apologize or forgive someone. **The greatest of these is love!**

Questions for Reflection

1. Love is Superior - If works without love are useless, should we stop making an effort to give of ourselves through an “other-centered” life.
2. Characteristics of Love - How have you seen these aspects of love shown in Christians you know/admire?
3. Love Endures - How are we to “put away childish things” but still retain child-like faith?

Words to Know:

Agape _____
Charismata _____
Chesed _____
Korinthiazesthai _____

Notes: _____

