

1 CORINTHIANS

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INTRODUCTION

The Paul apostle came to Corinth (Acts 18:1-18) on his second missionary journey (probably in the spring of A.D. 51 as the proconsulship of Gallio likely began later that year, in July). There Paul met Aquila and Priscilla who had left Rome in A.D. 49, when Claudius issued an edict ordering the expulsion of Jews from that city. The couple ran a tent-making business, a trade also practiced by Paul. Since no mention is made of their conversions, they were probably Christians when Paul met them. With a kinship along spiritual, ethnic, and vocational lines, Paul was naturally attracted to them.

According to his custom Paul attended the synagogue and took part in its services, seeking to persuade his hearers that Jesus is the Messiah. When the synagogue was closed to Paul, he went next door to the house of a synagogue listener who heard and believed, a Gentile named Titius Justus (Acts 18:7). He was one of many people in Corinth who belonged to the Lord.

From a human point of view Paul probably had reason to wonder if many saints would be found in Corinth. The ancient city had a reputation for vulgar materialism. In the earliest Greek literature it was linked with wealth (Homer *Iliad* 2. 569-70) and immorality. When Plato referred to a prostitute, he used the expression “Corinthian girl” (*Republic* 404d). The playwright Philetaerus (*Athenaeus* 13. 559a) titled a burlesque play *Ho Korinthiastēs*, which may be translated “The Lecher.” And Aristophanes coined the verb *korinthiazomai* to refer to fornication (*Fragment* 354). According to Strabo (*Geography* 8. 6-20) much of the wealth and vice in Corinth centered around the temple of Aphrodite and its thousand temple prostitutes. For this reason a proverb warned, “Not for every man is the voyage to Corinth.”

For a hundred years after 146 B.C. no one cared to make the voyage to Corinth. The city was destroyed because of its revolt against Rome. Only a few columns in the temple of Apollo survived the razing. All its citizenry was killed or sold into slavery.

But this favorable location did not go unused for long, as Julius Caesar refounded the city as a Roman colony in 46 B.C. In 27 B.C. it became the governmental seat for Achaia, from which seat Gallio as proconsul would allow Paul’s proclamation of the

A 5-Part Sermon Series on 1 Corinthians 13

gospel. It was onto this new stage, which nonetheless preserved the vices of the old that Paul stepped in A.D. 51.

Purpose and Nature of the Letter.

If Ephesians is a letter concerned with the universal church, 1 Corinthians is pointedly concerned with the local church. If anyone thinks his church has more than its share of ruffraff and woe, he need only turn to this letter (and its companion, 2 Cor.) to put his problems in perspective. First Corinthians provides a glimpse of life inside one first-century church, and far from saintly it was. Yet that is the reason Paul wrote this letter—to make positional sanctification practical. The spirit of the world seemed more influential in the Corinthian church than the Spirit of God, despite the splendidly evident gifts given by the Spirit. Paul wanted to change that. He directed his message along three lines:

1. The first six chapters were an attempt to correct the contentions in the church brought to his attention by Chloe’s servants (1:11) and to bring about unity in perspective and practice.
2. Beginning in chapter 7, Paul addressed himself to certain questions (introduced by the phrase *peri de*, “now concerning”) about marital issues (7:1, 25), liberty and responsibility (8:1), spiritual gifts and church order (12:1), money for impoverished saints in Jerusalem (16:1), and the availability of Apollos (16:12).
3. In chapter 15 he reaffirmed and defended the doctrine of the Resurrection, which some denied. It is possible that Paul saw this as a fundamental ill affecting all the preceding discussion, so he placed it at the climax of his letter. Standing above all the issues with which this letter deals is the very existence of a church in Corinth, a testimony to the power of God and the gospel.

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¹Walvoord, John F.; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:505

OUTLINE

Key theme: God's wisdom

Key verses: 1 Corinthians 2:6–8

I. GREETING—1:1–3

II. REPROOF: THE REPORT OF SIN IN THE CHURCH—1:4–6:20

- A. Divisions in the church—1:4–4:21
- B. Discipline in the church—5
- C. Disputes in the courts—6:1–8
- D. Defilement in the world—6:9–20

III. INSTRUCTION: THE REPLY TO THEIR QUESTIONS—7:1–16:12

- A. Marriage—7
- B. Food offered to idols—8–10
- C. Church ordinances—11
- D. Spiritual gifts—12:1–14:40
- E. The Resurrection—15
- F. The offering—16:1–12

IV. CONCLUSION—16:13–24

What Makes Gifts and Sacrifices Useless

1 Corinthians 13:1-3

1. **Check your context:** Read 1 Corinthians 12. He focuses on speaks to the church about their spiritual gifts. What does verse 4 tell us about the variety of gifts and its Source? What other gifts are cited from vv.4-11; 27-30?

Do all believers have spiritual gifts? What is the "greater gift" that believers should desire (vv.30)?

Do you know your Spiritual Gift? If not, you may attend a Discovering your Spiritual Gifts class or you may do this in your GG.

2. **Check verses 1 -3.** Identify and share. What is a common phrase that Paul used? How can it happen that one "loses love" in the exercise of the spiritual gifts God has given him?

3. Paul uses a hyperbole¹ in describing the exalted eloquence of the "speak in tongues of angels." What does the image of the gong or cymbal depict? On the other hand, what does love effect when the "speaking gift" is used in love?

Application: How can we make sure that we express love in our speech? As we teach? As we relate to our family members? House help? to the people in our workplace?

¹***Hyperbole** is the use of exaggeration as a rhetorical device or figure of speech. It may be used to evoke strong feelings or to create a strong impression, but is not meant to be taken literally.*

4. How can one's knowledge of God's mysteries and even faith be considered nothing in the light of exercising my spiritual gifts? How can the sin of pride affect a believer in this area?

5. **Check our serve.** Verse 3 describes one's ability to give and extend his service. How can one's service be full of one's self? What did Jesus teach us about this kind of giving and service? Check Luke 19:8, Luke 21:1-4.

What are the symptoms of this kind of service? What can we do to ensure that our service to God is done in love and out of love?

6. After your discussion, why do you think Paul asked the Corinthians to desire the "greater gift" in 1 Cor.12:30?

Prayer Points:

Teach us to love like You, dear Lord.

Teach us to serve like You!

What True Love Is
1 Corinthians 13: 4

The Greek mind understands the word love in four ways namely; *philos* as the love of friendship, *storge* as familial love *eros* as signifying sexual love, and *agape* as love whose concern is giving to the object of its affection. Paul uses the word *agapao* (verb) to describe love. The way he described love is in the matter of action – that love is something you do!¹

1. Check out the 15 descriptions of love from 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. How does Paul describe what love is?
2. Check the following verses. How does the bible describe patience and kindness?
 - a. Ephesians 4:2
 - b. 1 Timothy 1:16
 - c. Psalm 106:7
 - d. 1Thessalonians 5:14
 - e. 2Peter 3:9
 - f. 2 Corinthians 6:6
 - g. Galatians 5:22
 - h. Micah 6:8
 - i. Colossians 3:12
 - j. 1Peter 2:1
 - k. Romans 11:22

2. What is the difference between patience and kindness? Can one be patient but not kind (or vice versa)?

Application: Is patience and kindness a challenge area of your life? Identify instances wherein these two fruit of the Spirit becomes a point of struggle. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal these times and ask for His intervention. **Remember, the Lord will not create the patience and kindness – He will give you opportunities to be patience and kind!**

3. Check the following verses. How does the bible describe envy, boasting and pride?
 - a. Proverbs 23:17
 - b. Deut 8:10-14
 - c. Proverbs 21:24
 - d. Proverbs 15:25
 - e. Proverbs 3:34
 - f. 1 Peter 2:1
 - g. 1Tim 6:4
 - h. Galatians 5:19

Application: Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to us the times when we unknowingly exhibit these traits. What would require of us to get rid of our boasting, envy and pride?

Be accountable! We encourage you to group in pairs. In the spirit of confidentiality and trust, tell your partner your challenge areas and resolve to be accountable by updating each other and praying for one another.

4. Define love according to what we have learned today? How can we show love in the context of our home, church and workplace?

What Love is and Isn't

1 Corinthians 13:5-6

Love is the key by which God's people exercises his/her spiritual gifts. The passage exhorts the Corinthian believers to relate to one another in love with a changed mindset exhibited in godly behavior.

1. What are the four descriptions of what love is not (v.5)? What is the difference of each?

2. What does it mean to "not delight in evil but rejoice with the truth" (v.6)? When does a believer exercise this?

Describe the beauty Christlikeness as believers exercise spiritual gifts? Why is hypocrisy not acceptable in the process?

3. **Cross Reference:** Read Psalm 1. What are the characteristics of the blessed man? How does He rejoice in God's truth? What is his reward? To what is the wicked likened? What is his punishment?

4. Based on last week's description and this week's lesson, what does the Apostle Paul mean by the word love (come up with your own definitions)? How does LOVE picture God, man, relationship of God to man? Relationship of all believers?

Prayer Points:

- Teach us to relate to one another in Christlikeness
- Allow us to exercise our gifts in a manner pleasing to man and to God

What True Love Is
1 Corinthians 13: 7

Paul now presents to the Corinthian believers the superlative progression of what love is as anchored in the Lord Jesus Christ!

1. **Observe the Passage.** What are the four key verbs in the passage? What difference does it make if those were nouns? What stress is given by the adjective “always”?

2. Read Psalm 23. Describe the covering or protective nature of the shepherd in the text. How does it allude to the “covering” given to us by Christ while we were still sinners?

Application: The Lord “always cover” for us! How does the truth of the constant covering of Jesus for us allow us to know Him? What hinders us from surrender to the Lord’s constant covering or protection over us?

3. Recite John 3:16. Why should we trust or believe in Christ? How does the verse allow us to experience Jesus as a trustworthy Savior? How is the trustworthiness of Christ teach us to act in love towards one another?

Life Check: How is the love of Christ superior to the kind of love we offer Him? How then can we show our love for Christ? Cite scriptural passages.

4. How is hope and perseverance related? What realities does a believer face in the light of these two words? What does the bible promise us in the light of our persevering in the Lord?

Application: Are you weary and burdened? How is Jesus encouraging you now as He is the source of love that is described as “always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres”.

5. Derive some definitions of love knowing what Scripture has taught us. How does love allow us to “rest” and not “perform” for the Lord?

Prayer Points:

Dear Lord,

Your love amazes us! Teach us to love one another in the light of who you are as our loving Savior!

What True Love Is

1 Corinthians 13: 8-13

Love is a fruit of Spirit, given to the believer at the point of salvation (Galatians 5:22). John on the other hand writes that love that is from God continually abides in us and is perfected in the lives of the believers (1John 4:7). Love, as Paul exhorts, is by which all believers should exercise as we serve the Lord and His church!

1. **Love never fails.** What does this spiritual truth teach us about the nature of God? Man? Meditate on Romans 8:37-39.

2. How did Paul describe the gifts of knowledge, tongues (v.8), prophesy (v.9)? How did he describe love? How does Paul's description of the gifts of knowledge, tongues and prophesy relate to the Lord's coming again?

3. Ephesians 4:11-16. What reasons did Paul give why God gave the church spiritual gifts? How does 1Cor 13:11-12 (maturity as a result of the exercise of the gifts in love) affirm Paul's writing in Ephesians?

Application: Serving in love matures believers. Is this spiritual truth real in your life? How does the exercise of one's gifts in the church deepen your relationship with God, with fellow believers and with those who have yet to know Christ? How does diversity among the saints teach us to mature in Christ?

If there is anyone in your group who is not part of ministry in the church, encourage him/ her to serve.

4. How does faith, hope and love work in the life of the saints? Can you identify the relationship of the three? Why is love the greatest?

5. **SHOWING LOVE TO OTHERS.** What is your greatest learning in this 6 part sermon series? How has it effected in the way you relate to God, family, workplace and the church?

Prayer:

Dear Lord,

Confront us with your unfailing love everyday that we may be changed!

Teach us to live it in our homes, place of work and the church.