



DESERT VIEW BIBLE CHURCH

SERIES: FOLLOWING CHRIST THROUGH CHAOS 8.14.22 •

1 CORINTHIANS 13 •

MAIN POINT

Love is the defining mark of the Christian.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Name three ways you have heard the word love used in the past week.

What do those uses of the word reveal about the way people typically view love?

How might our culture define love differently than God?

We are a world in love with being in love. We use the word about food, sports, entertainment, and people. But where our culture sees mere affection, God sees

something different. Love is the defining mark of the Christian. In the context of 1 Corinthians 13, Paul helps us see the nature of true love and shows us that no matter how gifted people are, their impact is minimal without love.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

First Corinthians 13 is typically called the “love chapter” in the Bible. Why do you think Paul chose to talk about love to this church?

Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 12 about different spiritual gifts that God had given to the church. Paul was aware that one of the reasons for division in the Corinthian church was pride and jealousy regarding spiritual gifts. To help the Corinthians use their spiritual gifts well, Paul taught that love should permeate all that a believer in Christ does.

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-3.

What metaphors did Paul give for using spiritual gifts without love? Which stands out to you the most? Why?

Why did all the gifts and power that Paul listed “gain nothing”? What does that tell you about the power of love?

No matter how impressive a spiritual gift may appear, no matter how dedicated a religious act may be, the absence of genuine love renders these actions meaningless. The Corinthians may have felt like Paul was going too far. Paul, however, wanted the

church to know that everything they did should come out of love. Greatness without love is at best annoying like a clanging cymbal and at worst completely meaningless.

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-7.

What attributes of love did Paul list in these verses? Which one stands out to you the most? Why?

Which of these qualities of love is the easiest for you to apply in relationships with others at church? Which is the most difficult?

Read Ephesians 5:2. How did Paul define and understand love in this passage? Why must a person know the work of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection to love?

Paul is not talking about an emotional love. The kind of love he described here is above emotion; it's self-sacrificing for the sake of another. These 15 characteristics describe loving others even when doing so is difficult. Of course, that is when love is most needed. If we love only those who measure up to our standards or who never pose any challenge, then is that really love? This is the kind of love that you can only truly see in Christ. It's only through experiencing the self-sacrificial love of Jesus that we can truly love others. In the final set of verses in this chapter (vv. 8-13), Paul contrasted love's permanence and eternal presence with the temporal things of this world.

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 13:8-13.

How is love different from spiritual gifts? What point was Paul trying to make?

In what ways do you see the difference between the eternal and the temporary in this passage? How do you see the difference between the eternal and the temporary in your life?

Why is love greater than faith and hope? What will happen to our faith and hope when Christ returns? What will happen to love?

Love will never end as we love God and love others. This type of love can play out practically in our relationships. Loving God and loving others is far more than head knowledge. No real transformation in our church occurs without love being at the center of it. Paul's words are clear that anything we do apart from love will pass away. When we embrace the truth that love is permanent, then we will show it consistently to others, and it will be a defining aspect of our character.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What is something you can do this week to show love and respect to someone in your family?

What are some other ways you can show your love by giving/serving this week?

In what ways have you seen people interrupt their normal routine to take action on behalf of another person? Which people or groups do you find it difficult to love? Why?

How can you use the way God has spiritually gifted you to love others in the church?

PRAYER

Thank God for showing us the nature of true love in Jesus. Ask Him to help your group remember the central place of love in your lives, and to never allow a focus on spiritual giftedness to take the place of genuine love.

COMMENTARY

1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-13

13:1. In this section, Paul focused on some of the spiritual gifts the Corinthians especially valued. In each case he demonstrated that without love these spiritual gifts were meaningless. His first example was human or angelic languages or tongues. Steeped as they were in Greco-Roman culture, the Corinthian church members valued highly the art of rhetoric. Apparently they judged their preachers at least in part on how well they could speak publicly (see 2 Cor. 10:10). However, Paul pointed out that excellent speech without love was nothing more than empty noise.

13:2. Four other spiritual gifts come under scrutiny in this verse. We know from 14:1-5 that Paul highly valued the gift of prophecy and urged the Corinthian Christians to desire this gift above all others. This gift consisted of the clear proclamation of the gospel and may also have included at times the element of foretelling God's ways. Without being motivated by and directed by Christlike love, exercising spiritual gifts comes up empty!

13:3. Extravagant sacrificial acts are Paul's next two examples. Jesus' command to the rich young ruler (see Luke 18:22) was at the heart of Paul's reference to give all he possessed to the poor. To give one's body to hardship may point to a believer's being martyred for the faith. In any case, Paul was emphasizing out that even extreme acts of self-sacrifice gain nothing if those doing the acts are not driven by agape-love.

13:4. The Greek word for patient literally means “to be long (that is, slow) to anger.” Generally speaking, the term refers to the patience we need to have with people as opposed to endurance in difficult circumstances. The word for kind refers to an active quality in which we look for opportunities to act with helpful intentions toward others. This is the quality of love in which we seek to do good to others. We derive the English word zealous from the Greek term for envy. This word is sometimes used in a positive sense, for we can be appropriately passionate about many good causes. In this case, however, the term refers to a negative desire for gain or jealousy that another person received gain. To be boastful refers to a tendency to call attention to one’s accomplishments or abilities for selfish reasons. Paul saw this tendency as a particular problem among the Corinthian church members. He included the synonymous term conceited. This word literally means “to be puffed up” and serves as an apt illustration of the inflated egos of some of the Corinthians. Paul insisted that Christlike love displays neither of these tendencies.

13:5. The phrase “not dishonor others” can be literally translated as “not behave against the scheme.” The phrase refers to God’s giving His people a certain pattern of behavior to follow. Those who are guided by agape-love strive to avoid acting in ways that are inconsistent with that God-given pattern. The phrase is not self-seeking literally means “does not seek its own.” Again, Paul’s emphasis was on avoiding any behavior that constantly puts one’s own desires and preferences above the needs of others. Selfish behavior was at the root of many problems in the Corinthian church. Selfless love was the solution.

13:6-7. The Corinthians would have recognized these faults as taking place among them. Contrary to common perception, love is not marked by tolerance for error. Love endures in this age with a sure expectation of better things to come in the next.

13:8. Paul contrasted love’s permanence and eternal impact with the temporal nature of spiritual gifts. This verse serves as a kind of thematic parenthesis with the beginning section in which Paul also used the examples of prophecies ... tongues ... knowledge. By emphasizing that love never fails, Paul highlighted that loving God and loving one another are two things Christians do that extend even into eternity. Active expressions of love are the substance of the “treasures in heaven” that Jesus taught His followers to store up (see Matt. 6:20).

13:9. The Corinthians, who put great stock in their knowledge and worldly wisdom, may have been particularly stung by Paul’s assertion that they only know in part. It

can sting us today as well if we put too high a value on our human abilities. Whether it be preaching in a worship service or teaching the Scriptures in a Bible study group, we are to humbly acknowledge that we have limited knowledge and thus we prophesy in part. One day the spiritual gifts of preaching and teaching will no longer be necessary. However, this cannot be said for love. Love will always be needed, and love will endure eternally as the bond of believers' relationship with God and with one another.

13:10. Where we are going in the future should shape the way we live in the present. In the future completeness comes; Christ will return and set things right. The prayer "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10) will be a reality. At that time, God's people will know without doubt that love is the enduring quality. That certainty—when all believers will be fully cloaked in God's love—should lead us to express love today to people in our churches.

13:11. Paul included another gentle but firm rebuke of the Corinthians' immaturity by using an illustration that showed their fascination with spiritual gifts was childish. Continuing to act like a child acts once a person becomes an adult is one of the saddest and most embarrassing forms of immaturity. Refusing to express love in a church is equally childish.

13:12. The making of mirrors was a significant industry in first-century Corinth. People worldwide prized owning a Corinthian mirror. However, these ancient mirrors were not made of the materials used today. Rather, they were made of polished metal. At best, the reflections seen in these mirrors would be somewhat distorted or incomplete. Paul used the analogy of a mirror to explain that presently we cannot know everything there is to know about God and His purposes. We can understand many things; in Christ, we can know God in a saving relationship and can understand His expectations for us. Nevertheless, we yet see God as only a reflection. One day, however, Christ will return and His saving work will be complete. That we are fully known by God and yet fully loved by Him should drive us to our knees in gratitude. When we know fully, we will be able to express love as we always should have demonstrated it.

13:13. Some Bible interpreters have puzzled over Paul's selection of these three that remain without reaching a conclusion as to why he chose only three and why these three. Faith, hope, and love certainly can be viewed as three of the greatest words in the Bible. My own conclusion is that Paul was emphasizing the value of faith as the

means of relating to God and hope as the confidence we have in God. These two qualities are great and abiding, and yet love is the greatest.