

# *Discovering God's Wisdom*

## STUDIES IN FIRST CORINTHIANS

### Lesson 16 1 Corinthians 13

#### *Searching the Scriptures for hidden treasure*

*"I rejoice at Your word as one who finds great treasure." Psalm 119:162*

1 Corinthians 13 has become known as the *love* chapter of the Bible! In chapter 13, Paul shows us the *more excellent way* he spoke of at the end of chapter 12! In the midst of 3 chapters on the gifts of the Spirit, Paul lifts up the greatest gift—really not a gift but a grace—and pronounces love to be the highest attainment. Although set in the midst of much rebuke and needful instruction, Alan Redpath says of this chapter, *everything in (it) is fragrant!*

#### **First Day: Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-3**

Paul began chapter 12 with the words, *"Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant."* Paul had been asked a question about the gifts of the Spirit and he wanted the believers in Corinth to have a greater understanding of their purpose and value. It is clear from all of Paul's words on the subject that the Corinthians put particular importance on some of the more spectacular gifts—especially the gift of tongues.

1. In order to highlight the priority of love, Paul gives several examples of the extraordinary use of specific spiritual gifts. Make a list the each gift or achievement from these verses, then tell what that gift is without love.

*verse 1*

- *What is my extraordinary gift?*
- *What am I if I exercise this gift without love?*

*verse 2*

- *What are my extraordinary gifts?*
- *What am I if I do them without love?*

*verse 3*

- *What are my extraordinary gifts/achievements?*
- *What value is there to me if I do them without love?*

- a. All in all, what do these 3 verses tell you?
2. In 1 Corinthians 3:12-15 Paul tells us something of the same nature. How would the *gold*, *silver*, and *precious stones* be like the *love* in chapter 13?
  3. In Revelation 2:2-4, Jesus Christ Himself writes to the church at Ephesus of a similar problem to that of the Corinthians. List the good things they were doing:
    - *verse 2*
    - *verse 3*
    - a. With all of these *good deeds* on record, what does Jesus say in verse 4?
    - b. What is His exhortation to remedy this situation? v. 5
    - c. What will happen if they don't repent?

***“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches”***

Revelation 2:7a

### *Making It Personal...*

4. As much as we talk about the importance of the gifts, the priority, Paul says, is *love*. It may be a very good time to consider why you do what you do, as you seek to serve the body of Christ.
  - ✓ Do you use your gifts out of duty?
  - ✓ Do you serve to earn something from God?
  - ✓ Do you serve to feel that you are significant?
 or...
  - ✓ Do you serve the body out of love for God and others?

### *Digging Deeper*

- ❖ Do your best to summarize today's passage in a couple of sentences.

### *Pearl of Great Price*

**“God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.”**

1 John 4:16b This is your memory verse—begin memorizing it today!

**Second Day: Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7**

We remember early on that Paul made the statement that the Corinthians *came behind in no gift*. They were a *very* gifted church, but in chapter 8, Paul had to exhort them to concentrate on *love*—“*We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies*”—it *is* the more excellent way! In verses 4-7, Paul takes a snapshot of *love*—and gives us a photograph of *Jesus*.

1. From these verses, make a list of the 14 characteristics of love.
  - a. What might you say about love, in general, from these verses?
2. What basic truth does 1 John 4:8b and 16b teach us?
  - a. How does 1 John 4:9-10 reveal the great way this love has been exemplified to us?
  - b. How does John 3:16 put this?
3. In 1 Corinthians 10:31, Paul gave us our motive for everything we do as a Christian—what does it say?
  - a. Matthew 22:37-39 gives us the greatest commandments of the law. In a nutshell, what are they?
  - b. Considering the way God has loved us, how does it glorify God when we love others above ourselves?

*Making It Personal...*

4. Galatians 5:22-23 lists the fruit of the Spirit of God. If we were trees, these are the kinds of things we could expect to see growing on us! The first fruit mentioned is love! In fact, these assets of the Christian are really personifications of love! Make a list of the fruit of the Spirit.
  - ❖ How are the fruit obtained (see if you can come up with your own Scriptures for this)?
  - ❖ Are there any that are not evident in your life? From the way you answered the last question, what should you do?

*Digging Deeper*

- ❖ Do your best to summarize today's passage in a couple of sentences.

### ***Third Day: Read 1 Corinthians 13:8-13***

What a foundation Paul has laid in these verses so far! When we consider verses 1-7, in light of his teaching on the gifts of the Spirit, we realize that expressing God's love should be the ultimate purpose of every gift! *It is* the more excellent way!

Paul finishes his thoughts in verse 7 and begins his thoughts in verse 8 with the words, *love never fails...*

1. What will fail, according to verse 8?

It's possible that the 3 gifts Paul mentions here were the *cherished* gifts of the Corinthians. Paul names only 3 gifts, but all the gifts would be included.

- a. Why will these gifts eventually be done away with? v. 9-10
- b. See if you can explain what this means.
2. Paul uses 2 illustrations to describe the process of the *partial* being overtaken by the *perfect*: that of a child growing into a man, and that of a mirror which only dimly reflects the reality of the one who looks into it.
  - a. What changes when a child becomes a man? Apply this to the gifts.

Obviously the Holy Spirit knows all—John 16:13:14 tells us that He will take of the things of Jesus and share them with us. But God's ways are still a mystery to us—His ways are higher, they are infinite—and we only receive what He chooses to give. The secret things belong to God! But, when Jesus comes again, we will see Him face to face!

- b. What will we know then? v. 12b
- c. What will be our experience when Jesus is revealed to us? 1 John 3:2b

### *Making It Personal...*

1 Corinthians 13:12 (NASB) tells us that we are fully known! God knows you intimately! You see dimly—He sees perfectly! He sees your strengths, He knows your weaknesses; but, believe it or not, 1 John 3:2 tells us that when He appears we will be *just like Him*, because we shall see Him just as He is! 1 John 3:3 says that, "*Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.*" Is there any impurity you would like to shed right now, this very day, as you consider the fact that you will one day be *like Him*?

### *Digging Deeper*

- ❖ Tie this week's memory verse (1 John 4:16b) with the heart of what Paul is saying in this chapter as a whole.

**Fourth Day:**

**Deeper Discoveries**

*This portion of the lesson will take a closer look at some of the words in the chapter. You will need to have your tools—or resources at hand: more than one Bible translation, a dictionary or Bible dictionary, concordance, atlas, and encyclopedia. (If you don't have all of these, simply use what you do have to enrich your learning.)*

Using the tools you have at hand, do some digging into the following terms. Start with your dictionary (or Bible dictionary), and then look up the references to add to your understanding. If you have additional resources, you may want to keep digging (making notes in the margins). After you've completed the investigative process, write a definition in your own words. Your investigation in today's lesson will lay the groundwork for tomorrow's study, so be as thorough as you can in your research.

**Abides** (13:13) *“And now abide faith, hope, love, these three...”*

Dictionary definition: \_\_\_\_\_

What does the Bible have to say? John 15:16; 2 Corinthians 3:11; Hebrews 10:34; 12:27

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❖ Write your own definition: \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

**Love** (13:13) *“...But the greatest of these is love.”*

Dictionary definition: \_\_\_\_\_

What does the Bible have to say? John 15:13; Romans 13:10; Hebrews 6:10; 1 John 4:7-8

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❖ Write your own definition: \_\_\_\_\_

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***Fifth Day:***

***Heartsearch***

*Are you walking worthy of your high calling? Are you applying the wisdom of God to your daily life? Get ready for some self-discovery! This portion of the lesson will give you the opportunity to examine your heart, express your mind, and experience your lesson, by applying what you are learning to everyday circumstances.*

**The Supreme Motive**

Daily growth and ultimate maturity in the Christian life, the exercise of spiritual gifts in the body of Christ, and sacrificial acts of service toward others must all have as their basis one supreme motive: *love*. Love connects personal growth with the act of serving others, and makes our gifts *useful* to God. When we ask God to reveal our spiritual gifts to us, we are also asking Him to make us more aware of those around us who need to see His love in action. Demonstrating His love to others should be the goal in exercising our spiritual gifts.

The Corinthians believed they possessed the language of the angels when they spoke in tongues; but they fell to the sin of pride, which nullified the effectiveness of their gift. Paul states that without love, the gift of speaking in another language is nothing more than a meaningless noise. In fact, without love, none of the gifts build up believers and, are therefore, useless. Love is far more important than the gifts themselves.

The word used here for love is *agape*. It speaks of God's love, and refers to a deep, abiding, self-sacrificing love that looks out for others first. It is God's *agape love* that He requires us to have for one another.

1. Can you think of a time when you saw a demonstration of a spiritual gift without that person also being loving? What was your impression of their ministry?
  
2. Do you think that the *agape love* Paul speaks about in this chapter is easy and natural, or difficult and supernatural? Please explain.
  - a. How rare or frequent do you think the demonstration of *agape love* is? Why do you think so?
  
3. Think about your current circumstances for a moment before answering the following:
  - a. Where would you say *agape love* is most needed? (In a relationship or a situation?)
  
  - b. How would exercising *agape love* potentially make a difference?

“Now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.” (verse 13)

4. Look at other examples in Scripture where *faith*, *hope*, and *love* are found together. Briefly summarize the thought of each one.
  - Galatians 5:5-6
  - Colossians 1:4-5
  - 1 Thessalonians 1:3
  - 1 Thessalonians 5:8
  - Hebrews 6:10-12
  - Hebrews 10:22-24

In eternity, the spiritual gifts will not be necessary and will pass away, but faith, hope, and love will remain. Paul emphasized the fact that while these three remain, *the greatest of these is love*. Love is the greatest because it is the one virtue of the Christian life that is fully active both now and throughout eternity. *Faith* and *hope* will be fully realized when we see God face to face; we will no longer need either one. *Love*, however, will endure, as God’s people continue to love one another in His kingdom.

5. Something to think about: is your faith and hope being fully expressed in loving others? Please share your thoughts.

***Heartsearch:*** Briefly look back over your *entire lesson* before filling in the following.

❖ *Examine your heart*

What has God put His finger on through your study and brought to light in a new way? (What did you learn about yourself?)

❖ *Express your mind*

What change has this week’s study brought about in your thought process? What difference will this make in how you view your current circumstances?

❖ *Experience your lesson*

What nugget of wisdom from your lesson do you plan to apply to your life?

*Sixth Day:*

## ***Laying Up Treasure***

*“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth...but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.  
For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” Matthew 6:19-21*

The highest calling of the believer, and the most important way to lay up treasure in heaven, is through intercessory prayer. You will want to give thoughtful consideration to what you record on this page, as it will be the basis for your prayer during group time. The format for this day of your lesson is based upon the ACTS method of prayer: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. In addition to these four, there is space provided for you to keep track of answered prayers, people and things you want to pray for in the coming week, and also a place to write out this week’s Scripture verse from memory.

Using the lesson as your focal point, write out your prayer for each of the following:

*I praise God for* (an aspect of His marvelous character) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*I confess to God that I* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*I thank God for* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*I am asking God* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*Praise for answered prayer:* \_\_\_\_\_

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*People/things I want to pray for this coming week:* \_\_\_\_\_

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*Pearl of Great Price:* \_\_\_\_\_

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## *Notes*