

1 Corinthians 13a – Chapter Study

Emphasis: Holy Spirit

INTRODUCTION

Outline

III. Main Body 1:18-16:18

F. The Conduct of Public Worship 11:2- Ch. 14

1. Head-Coverings 11:2-16

2. The Lord's Table 11:17-34

3. Spirituals Ch. 12

Paul's instructions on the use of the gifts in their gatherings stretches over 2 chapters; 12 & 14.

Sandwiched between them is ch. 13, the famous "Love Chapter."

It's quoted at weddings, funerals, & in endless other settings.

Believers & non-believers alike recognize what the Apostle Paul has to say about love here as among the loftiest thoughts in all history.

The *literary eloquence* of these verses is nothing less than awesome!

Some regard 1 Corinthians 13 as the *ultimate expression* of language employed to articulate the greatest of all thoughts.

But remember that the chapter & verse divisions weren't written by Paul; they were added hundreds of years later.

The apostle puts his eloquent treatise on love in the middle of his instructions on the gifts of the Holy Spirit to correct a glaring problem in the church at Corinth – *disunity*.

The church at Corinth was divided into factions that were hostile toward each others.

Their public meetings were *expressions* of this disunity.

Their gatherings were somewhat chaotic as everyone used their spiritual gifts but without regard to any sense of order.

Though the manifestations of the Spirit were given *to each one* for the *profit of all*, as Paul says in 12:7, they were being used with a motive of *self*-promotion rather than *Christ*-promotion.

The picture we get of the church at Corinth was that it was a highly charismatic church.

They believed in & used the gifts of the Spirit → A LOT!

But it was chaos!

And the gifts of the Spirit, instead of bringing about great *fruit* of the Spirit, as they ought, were being *abused* & were *grieving* the Spirit.

Jesus had made it clear that the Holy Spirit came to make His followers more like Him.

The gifts ought to have been used in such a way that they were making the Corinthians look & sound more like Jesus.

Instead, they were being mis-used with selfish motives to reinforce their pride & disunity.

It was charismatic chaos at Corinth & Paul wrote chs. 12-14 to correct it.

In the very center of it, is his words on love – which has to be the motive in the use of the gifts.

4. Love's Primacy Ch. 13

a. love; the motive vs. 1-3

¹ Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.

As we'll see in the next chapter, some of the Corinthians were highly-enamored by the gift of tongues.

They thought this was the *premier gift* so used it liberally & loudly when the church meet.

But if tongues aren't motivated by love – they're no different than a bothersome noise-maker.

The Corinthians well-understood this reference to brass & cymbals.

These were used in the shrines of Dionysus & Cybele to call their devotees to worship.

They were so obnoxious no one could mistake what they were.

Loveless tongues are naught but noise.

Paul's mention of the tongues of men & angels here has caused some to say there are 2 kinds of tongues.

They use this then as the basis for saying one is a private prayer language & the other is for use in public meetings.

There's just no warrant for this here.

That's a distinction that cannot be supported by this passage.

The word translated "tongues" means languages.

The context is clearly the unknown tongues referred to in ch. 12.

They may be a human language or the language angels speak; it doesn't matter.

Whatever their origin, they're *unknown* to the speaker.

Tongues is a marvelous gift and not to be neglected if one has it.

But if it's not used in love, it's no better than the empty noise of pagan worship.

Some groups believe tongues are **THE** sign, not just of being filled with the Spirit, but of being saved.

So they *demand* their members speak in tongues.

They take new converts, lock them in a room, keep them there for hours, badgering & cajoling them to receive the gift of tongues.

They will even suggest a line of sounds to say, trying to prime the pump.

If a person doesn't speak out in an unknown tongue, they're told they aren't saved yet.

I wonder what Paul would say to such a group?

² And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

It's possible to speak for God and still misrepresent Him.

It's possible to understand the deep things of God, and still miss His heart.

It's possible to do mighty deeds of great faith, and still miss the mission of God.

In 1 John 4 we read that God IS love.

If love is not our motive-core, then no matter *what* we accomplish, it's worthless.

I've read books & listened to sermons that were doctrinally right on – straight as an arrow.

They were eloquent & accurate → but they did *nothing* to stir my heart with a greater love for God or others.

I've read *other* books & listened to *other* sermons not so eloquent & with ideas I couldn't wholly go along with, that nevertheless touched my heart & filled me with a longing for God & yearning to love others.

Whereas the former *filled & satisfied my mind* with *facts*, the later *filled & stirred my heart* with *truth & love*.

Don't get me wrong! It's not good to be doctrinally sloppy.

Love can't be used as an excuse for error.

But Paul is clear: Without love, even supernatural gifts are empty.

³ And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.

He turns from spiritual gifts to *good deeds*.

It's possible to give all one has to help others, even one's self in martyrdom, but to do it **FOR THE WRONG REASON!**

n. history is filled with people who gave much simply so that others would look at them with admiration and envy

j. Jesus tells the story of rich men who came to the temple to give a gift

- before them they sent trumpeters to announce their coming and their gift

- they gave to be seen as givers

- but there was one little widow who came and gave in secret a little tiny coin called a mite

- worth about a ½ penny

- but she gave out of a desire to really help

- Jesus said that she gave more than all the rest

- why? because she gave out of love for God and for others

7. Certainly these words of Paul would have stung the Corinthians

8. Just as they sting us today

1. These words would have been a stinging rebuke to the Corinthians

2. In the midst of all their debates and fighting over spiritual gifts, they had lost the sense of the primacy of love

3. You see, there is one issue of the Christian faith that is beyond dispute and has been well known by believers since the beginning of the church

4. That one thing is the centrality of love

a. love is the mark and the measure of true Christianity

b. and they knew this

c. but — they had forgotten it!

d. just as many Christians today have forgotten it

5. The Corinthians prided themselves on their abundance of spiritual knowledge

a. their abundance of spiritual gifts

b. their familiarity with the supernatural

c. but they had forgotten the weightier issue of loving one another

6. So, Paul puts them in their place by saying . . .

b. love described vs. 4-7

⁴ Love suffers long *and* is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; ⁵ does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; ⁶ does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; ⁷ bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

c. love endures vs. 8-13

⁸ Love never fails. But whether *there are* prophecies, they will fail; whether *there are* tongues, they will cease; whether *there is* knowledge, it will vanish away. ⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part. ¹⁰ But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away. ¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. ¹² For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I

shall know just as I also am known. ¹³ And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these *is* love.