

I CORINTHIANS 13

THE EXCELLENCY OF LOVE

STUDENT GUIDE

DAILY BIBLE READING

DAY 1	I CORINTHIANS 13: 1-3
DAY 2	I CORINTHIANS 13: 4-7
DAY 3	I CORINTHIANS 13: 8-13
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Paul spoke of spiritual gifts in general in chapter 12. We learned how gifts are to be defined and implemented in the local church body. Next week (chapter 14), we will explore what happens when one spiritual gift is not only implemented, but implemented wrongly and exclusively above all other gifts.

Sandwiched between spiritual gifts and their improper use is Paul's great exposition of love. He identifies love as the more excellent way (12:31). Without it, Christians only send out a most uncertain sound (v. 1).

OUTLINE

1. The Priority of Love (vv. 1-3)

We must acknowledge that Paul's words on love are often taken out of context. 1 Corinthians 13 is too many times taken as applicable only to marital vows during weddings. Nothing is further from Paul's mind than weddings! The Corinthians had become obsessed with spiritual gifts. They seemed to believe spiritual gifts were the ones the Corinthians admired. The circumstances became the occasion for the most beautiful prose on love ever penned by a human being.

Paul begins by focusing on the absence of love; that is, he begins by suggesting what it would be like if love was not present.

A.) *Without love, spiritual gifts are noise (v. 1).* In Greek religion, the worship of Dionysus and Dybele were noted for the clanging cymbals during worship. Paul likens such noise to speaking gifts which offer no sure meaning.

B.) *Without love we are nothing (vv. 2-3).* Clearly, without love Paul reduces a Christian's life to a flat zero.—“I am nothing.” Realize Paul is not referring to human knowledge in these verses. Instead he is referring to the spiritual gift of knowledge (cp. 12:8). The same is true with faith. The gift of faith is able to move mountains (cp. Matt. 12:21). However, the gift of faith apart from love may still move mountains but mountains are moot apart from love. Moved mountains count zero if love does not motivate their removal.

2. The Personality of Love (vv. 4-7)

Love may be the hardest thing in the world to define. Paul focuses on a description rather than a definition. He wants us to see what love is rather than just grasp a definition. If you want to know what love is, the best way is to see what love does. Since love is so bound up with human action, we cannot avoid concluding love has a personal dimension as it is expressed.

A.) *Love expresses itself in the mastery of one's personality.* Paul says that love does not envy. It is not jealous. Love does not wish for another's gifts; instead love not only prays one's own gift may be used for God's glory, but also prays for another's gift to be used mightily for the Lord. Love does not parade itself. Love does it because it is right not because it looks right to others. Love is "not puffed up." Pride is the hardest kind of attitude to check. Love avoids pride of every stripe. Love does not "behave itself unseemly." By this Paul means love always displays good manners. It is not self-righteously ugly. Love "is not easily provoked." It possesses no sharp spirit. Instead, love "rejoices in the truth" rather than in iniquity." Love avoids all juicy pieces of gossip.

B.) *Love expresses itself in the ministry of one's personality.* One must be mastered by love before one can minister in love. Love "suffers" long. Love is "kind." Love both "bears" all things as well as "believes" all things. In other words, love protects. Love is not suspicious. It believes the best about people.

C.) *Love expresses itself in hope.* Therefore love endures. It never fails. Love is the greatest measure to detect the Spirit-filled life.

3. The Permanency of Love (vv. 8-13)

J.B. Phillips wrote, "Love is the only thing that still stands when all else has fallen." Love — genuine love — offers no sign of decay. As Paul bluntly says, "love never fails." Consequently, at least two outcomes result from love's permanency.

A.) *Since love never fails, love outlasts all the gifts (vv. 8-11).* Paul does not make such a statement concerning the other gifts. He flatly affirms prophecies, tongues, and knowledge all pass away (vv. 8-9).

B.) *Since love never fails, love outranks all the other graces (vv. 12-13).* Faith, hope, and love often go together in the New Testament (1 Thess. 1:3). In fact, these three graces appear to top the list in the life of believers. Faith cares for the past; hope cares for the future; and love cares for the present. All three will endure, Paul affirms. But by far, the greatest of the three is love.

Wrap Up

Love is the undeniable, non-negotiable mark of every Christian believer. Paul insists without love, our lives are empty and vain. Since he places so much emphasis on love, should we not practice love with much more intensity? Love is the one thing you and I can do which will never fail.çv/