



151st Church of Christ
Small Group Study Guide – 1 CORINTHIANS
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AN IMPERFECT LOCAL CHURCH
A Study in 1 Corinthians
CLASS – Lesson 19

GENERAL OUTLINE

1 Corinthians 12:1-14:40, Unity and spiritual gifts

OUTLINE: Lesson 19

1 Corinthians 13:1-13, The greatest gift

13:1-3, The imperative of love

13:4-7, The description of love

13:8-13, The endurance of love

Whenever the subject of miraculous gifts is the issue, we invariably run into passages that are difficult to understand and which produce much debate. To some extent, that is the case at the beginning and the end of 1 Corinthians 13. However, the heart of this chapter is the description of love in the middle section where understanding the meaning is not the problem. It probably is not accidental that the most important passage of the letter is the clearest, and the clearest is the hardest to live by.

Paul's purpose in this chapter is not to explain the exact nature of any or all the spiritual gifts that are mentioned, nor to give a precise prophecy of when such gifts will cease on the earth. His intent is to impress on the reader the absolute need to infuse all aspects of a person's life with the peculiar kind of love that was demonstrated by Christ and imitated by his followers. Every problem discussed in the letter required *agape* love (from the Greek word for love preferred by New Testament writers) to find improved church life. Whatever our discussions on secondary details of the chapter, we must not lose sight of Paul's primary message.

DISCUSSION

1 Corinthians 13:1-3, The imperative of love

- 1. Paul presents a series of gifts or actions in the first three verses.**
 - a. What are they?**

 - b. Which ones are miraculous?**

c. Which, if any, of these qualities does not describe Paul (as far as we know from Scripture)?

2. How would the Corinthians have viewed or valued a person who possessed these gifts and qualities? Note that the use of the word “and” rather than “or” to link the items suggests that Paul is describing someone who had all the qualities mentioned.

3. What connection do you see between this idea (question # 2) and problems addressed in 1:12; 3:5-7; 11:21-22, 29?

4. How or why would someone have given generously and sacrificially to the poor other than because of a big, loving heart?

5. Would the use of these gifts, or the practice of these praise-worthy actions, have brought benefit to the church or to individual members of the church if the gifted person lacked love? What does this tell us about Paul’s main concern?

6. Do we have any clear cases in the Bible where angels spoke in their own special languages? Are there cases where a human is said to have spoken in the “tongues of angels?”

1 Corinthians 13:4-7, The description of love

7. Paul describes love in both positive and negative terms. Identify each.

a. Positive _____

b. Negative _____

8. Which qualities of love do we know the Corinthians violated?
9. Assuming that Paul doesn't contradict himself, how does the thought of 5:11 help understand what "thinks no evil" means (NIV: "keeps no record of wrongs"; ESV: "is not resentful")?
10. How does Paul's teaching about love relate to the problems of 8:9-13 and 11:17-34?

1 Corinthians 13:8-13, The endurance of love

11. The idea in verses 8-10 goes beyond the question of which items will last the longest. What point that is fundamental to the entire chapter is Paul driving home when he states that love will never fail, but these other things will cease, vanish or be put away?
12. There is great debate over the meaning of "that which is perfect" in verse 10. What different options and timing for "perfection" are suggested in the New Testament? (The Greek word translated "perfect" is *teleion*). *Teleion* is used in the following verses:
By Jesus: Matthew 5:48; 19:21
By Paul: Romans 12:2; 1 Corinthians 2:6; 13:10; 14:20; Ephesians 4:13; Philippians 3:15; Colossians 1:28; 4:12
Others: Hebrew 5:14; 9:11; James 1:4, 17, 25; 3:2; 1 John 4:18
13. How long do faith, hope and love abide in relation to the miraculous gifts of prophecies, tongues and (miraculous) knowledge in verse 8?

- 14. Discuss and share ideas about how important and useful miraculous gifts, including multiple languages (for teaching the lost), prophecy (i.e., inspired teaching), and inspired knowledge and understanding, would have been in the early church before the New Testament was written and circulated, and when the church was populated entirely by recent converts.**
- 15. The opening verses (1-3) and closing verses (8-13) of the chapter have the same main message. This chapter is something of a sandwich with the meat in the middle (vv. 4-7), and the bread on either side. What is that main message?**