

October 25, 2020

“Love Never Fails”
Lesson 4 of Unit

I Corinthians 13:1-13

Intro

This famous passage about love is Paul’s answer to the Corinthian church’s issues and problems. Through chapter 11, Paul has called out this church he helped found in multiple areas. The bottom line is that each of these problems were caused by a sense of superiority over others. (Larry’s message last Sunday hit on this very theme—thank you God for inspiring Larry’s thoughts which coincide so well with these lessons.)

Some Corinthians thought they were superior to others because of who they identified with as a leader (chapters 1-4). Some thought they were so superior that they were exempt from moral expectations (chapters 5-7). Some thought they were superior because of what they ate or didn’t eat (chapters 8-10). Some thought they were so superior that they could neglect the needs of others (chapter 11).

Chapters 12-14 are a discussion about pride and arrogance. In the middle of these thoughts, Paul reminds his Christian family of what is most important: loving each other. Our text uses this summation thought: “Love, properly understood, will put everything else into perspective, unifying the church and empowering believers to glorify Christ together.” I would add to that the idea that after understanding love correctly, we need to practice it.

Read I Corinthians 13:1-13

1. How is Paul’s first example in vs. 1 an example of using a good thing in a bad way? How do people generally respond to a loud sound like a “clanging symbol”? Why? What is that saying to us about potentially misusing God’s gifts for personal benefit?
2. From vs. 2, what value is there in having great knowledge? Of what benefit is having a faith that could move a mountain? If these two things are so good, why does Paul say that having love is better than these two spiritual gifts?
3. In vs. 3, what is wrong from Paul’s perspective in giving charitably and suffering bodily hardship? What are the people who are doing this wrongly seeking to gain from these actions?

4. Verses 4-8 define what love does and doesn't do. In vs. 4a, what does Paul say love does? How does describing what love **does** move its definition away from emotions and toward lifestyle?

5. From vs. 4b through vs. 7, list the 13 things that Paul says love **doesn't** do.

- | | |
|----------|-----------|
| 1) _____ | 8) _____ |
| 2) _____ | 9) _____ |
| 3) _____ | 10) _____ |
| 4) _____ | 11) _____ |
| 5) _____ | 12) _____ |
| 6) _____ | 13) _____ |
| 7) _____ | |

6. Of the 13 things listed above, what are two that you feel you are doing well at, and two that you need to improve at? What is one concrete, specific thing you can do this week to start improving at those two?

7. In vs. 8, what contrast is developed between love and spiritual gifts? What is the importance of that distinction?

8. Perhaps an obvious questions, but in vs. 9, **why** do we only “know in part and prophesy in part”? Why is the answer an important one, especially to those who take pride in what they know?

9. When will “completeness” come, vs. 10? Why and how will completeness remove the “partial”? How does vs. 11 serve as a concrete example of the principle expressed in vs. 10?

10. In general terms, what does the expression “face to face” suggest about interactions (vs. 12)? There are several possible interpretations of what Paul might have meant by this phrase as he uses it in vs. 12. Using the rest of the verse as well, what do you think Paul means by the contrast he develops?

11. Why does Paul use the word “now” in vs. 13? Define what is meant and suggested by the terms “faith” and “hope”. Read vs. 9-12 again, and your answers to questions 8-10. In light of what you see there, why is love greater than faith and hope?

Application: For those who live their lives apart from God, the concepts being developed in this lesson might seem unnecessary. After all, a person can give a large amount of money which will help the needy, even if it was only given as a tax write-off. A teacher can teach a fantastic lesson which profoundly impacts the lives of students, even if it was presented primarily to draw attention to the teacher.

To God, however, doing something for the right reason but with the wrong heart attitude about it nullifies the value of the doing. I John 4:8 reminds us that “God is love”; love is an essential (the essential?) characteristic of God. As our goal is to become consistently more like Him, we want to become as loving as He is. Since love is the guiding force in everything God does, it must also become the guiding force in everything we do.

Prayer: Father God, please help us to recognize our tendency toward pride and any sense of superiority we might feel toward others. Help us to be truly loving and forgiving people, as You are, and as Jesus showed His disciples how to be. Help us use the gifts You’ve given us humbly and gratefully. In Jesus’ name, Amen.