

MEMORY VERSE: “And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.” 1 Corinthians 13:13, NKJV

LESSON STUDY INTRO

“Last week, we saw that without love, all things, even spiritual gifts, are worthless. This week, we will look more deeply into 1 Corinthians 13 and its marvelous portrait of love.” Q^{tly}, Sab, par 3

1. Love is eternal (Thu)

- 1 Cor. 13 is sandwiched right between 1 Cor. 12 and 1 Cor. 14—central to Paul’s instruction about spiritual gifts.
 - Verses 1-3 moves the conversation beyond temporal spiritual gifts to the eternal principle of love.
 - This context is important because the misuse of spiritual gifts was one of the main troubles in the Corinth church. The love here described is the antithesis from what they were living.
- Verses 8-12 reminds us that even spiritual gifts will someday cease at the return of Jesus, yet “love never fails” (1 Cor. 13:8).
 - And of the righteous qualities that do endure eternally, love is supreme: “And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor. 13:13, NIV).
 - “This triad is representative of the fullness of Christian life through the Spirit. That is why it was often referred to among Christians (Rom. 5:1–5; Gal. 5:5, 6; Eph. 1:15, 18; 4:1–5). Love, however, is the greatest; after all, it is the only virtue used to describe the very nature of God Himself (1 John 4:8).” Q^{tly}, Thu, par 4

2. Love is a verb (Sab, Mon, Tue)

- “Love is not so much an emotion as an attitude, an attitude that must be expressed in life, in deeds, and in words.” Q^{tly}, Sab, par 4
 - This attitude of love is described in 1 Cor. 13:4-7 in two parallel action lists: what love does not do and what love does.
 - **What love does not do:** “love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity” (verses 4-6).

- **What love does:** suffers long and is kind (verse 4); rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things (verses 6, 7).
- This concept of love as an active virtue is what John meant when he exhorted us to “not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:18).
- Not surprisingly, the list of things love does not do parallels the very concerns Paul has already addressed with the attitude and behavior of the Corinthian believers. He’s not so subtly saying that their actions betray their lack of character.

3. Jesus is love (Sun, Wed)

- Paul held himself out as an example for the believers, and the example he followed was Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 4:14-16; 11:1).
 - “Likely, Paul had the person of Jesus in mind when writing 1 Corinthians 13. Indeed, only Christ perfectly revealed all those characteristics of love. Thus, ultimately, Paul’s portrayal of love is a portrait of Jesus.” Qtly, Wed, par 1
 - It’s a simple formula: God is love (1 John 4:8); Jesus is God (John 10:30; 14:7-9), therefore Jesus is love.
- To develop this divine character of love is to be the primary object of our entire lives (Jn. 13:34, 35; 15:9, 10, 12; 1 Jn. 4:7-12; 2 Cor. 3:18).

We have an abundance of sermonizing. What is most needed . . . is love for perishing souls, that love which comes in rich currents from the throne of God... The burning, consuming love of Christ for perishing souls is the life of the whole system of Christianity. LHU 134 (Qtly, Fri, par 2)

CONCLUSION

Supreme love for God and unselfish love for one another—this is the best gift that our heavenly Father can bestow. This love is not an impulse, but a divine principle, a permanent power. The unconsecrated heart cannot originate or produce it. Only in the heart where Jesus reigns is it found. “We love Him, because He first loved us.” In the heart renewed by divine grace, love is the ruling principle of action. It modifies the character, governs the impulses, controls the passions, and ennobles the affections. This love, cherished in the soul, sweetens the life and sheds a refining influence on all around. AA 551