

GOD IS LOVE

**“God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him”
— 1 John 4:16**

The simplest description of God, and furthermore God’s own description of Himself, is found in 1 John 4:16a, “God is Love.”

Love is the most blessed manifestation of the character of God. Therefore, the most profound description that should characterize a Christian is love.

God is Love — It is His greatest attribute. Love is the manifestation of His character. Therefore the main ingredient in a Christian’s character ought to portray love. Love was missing in the Corinthian church. They had many spiritual gifts. They had some degree of right doctrine. They had many things but they were missing the most important ingredient that defined who they were — Love.

The Corinthian church is not alone in its struggle in this area. Through out history the Church has found it difficult to be loving, to demonstrate love sacrificially as Christ would. One Historian wrote,



“A disquieting unrest and discouragement plagues many biblically based churches. It is not discussed publicly. As with most embarrassing family secrets there seems to be a conspiracy of silence. But then most families rarely discuss the real issues publicly.

Most biblically based churches are doctrinally sound, but its members display a lot of unChrist-like attitudes while loudly defending the Bible, precious few seem to practice what it says and fewer seem to know what it says.”

The supreme characteristic that God demands of His people is love. The thirteenth chapter is literally one of the great chapters ever written on

love. It is called the hymn of love. It was penned in the middle of a rebuke to the Corinthian church for mishandling spiritual gifts. This great passage begins with 1 Corinthians 12:31 “But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.”

May we learn to balance truth with grace and love as Christ has instructed us.

1. Read verses 1 Corinthians 12:31 & 13:2. What does Paul say love is better than? How can love be better than our gifts of service?

ANSWER:

1 Corinthians 12:31-13:2 — “But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.” Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. 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, and have not charity, I am nothing.

What is better than possessing all the spiritual gifts? . . . LOVE. We may desire the greater gifts of God, but Paul says the gifts were designed to be applied with love. Without love, they are useless and can be destructive.

Certainly, exercising our God given gifts with genuine love is more excellent than feeling better about ourselves. Think about how foolish people can be. They abuse the practice of a spiritual gift in order to feel superior over others. They are given spiritual gifts to build up the body of believers. Instead, they either bury it, or use it to bring glory to themselves. Is this not called arrogance and pride? Doesn't this attitude foster resentment, bitterness, and envy?

It is better to display genuine love toward others than to be puffed up with foolish pride over a gift. It wasn't ours in the first place. It was a gift. It was given with the expressed purpose of helping others. We should not arrogantly strut around as if we are something special. When we do this, we act like foolish, selfish children.

2. Read the passage on the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) and discuss how those nine aspects of fruit should function in conjunction with the list of spiritual gifts given in Romans 12:6-9. How should this translate into our homes or work place?

The fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23)

1. Love
2. Joy
3. Peace
4. Long-suffering
5. Gentleness
6. Goodness
7. Faith
8. Meekness
9. Temperance

Spiritual Gifts (Romans 12:6-9)

1. Prophecy
2. Ministry (Service/helps)
3. Teaching
4. Exhortation
5. Giving
6. Ruler (GovernmentAdministration)
7. Mercy

ANSWER:

Have the class imagine what prophecy would be like if it were administered without love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness or temperance. Do the same with the other gifts. Then have them imagine what it would be like for them to exercise their God given roles at home and work without the fruit of the Spirit tempering their conduct.

There are at least 19 spiritual gifts mentioned in the New Testament (1 Corinthians 12:8-10, 28-30, Romans 12:3-8; Ephesians 4:11). There are twenty gifts, if you count craftsmanship as a spiritual gift. Note, the gift of craftsmanship was given to Bezaleel the son of Uri, Aholiab, the son of Ahisamach, and was placed “in the hearts of all that are wise hearted” (Exodus 31:1-6). Though twenty gifts are mentioned, it must be remembered that not all the gifts are active in our day. Some were designed to establish the church and have since stopped in themselves (1 Corinthians 13:8). This subject will be discussed at length when we examine the operation of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12-14.

Support Gifts	Service Gifts	Sign Gifts
Word of Wisdom	Faith	Healing
Word of Knowledge	Discerning of Spirits	Working of Miracles
Prophets	Helps	Tongues
Apostleship	Government/Administration	Interpretation of Tongues
Teachers	Exhortation	
Pastor-teachers	Giving	
Evangelists	Showing Mercy	
	Hospitality	
	Craftmanship	

The Greek term use for love in 1 Corinthians 13 is *Agape*. It is one of the rarest words found in Greek literature, yet it is the most common word used for love in the New Testament. The Greek word for sexual or sensual love is *Eros* or erotic. It never appears in the Bible. The other Greek term found in the Bible is *Phileo*. It refers to close friendships and the pleasant or sentimental feelings you may have for another. Yet the type of love we are to have for one another; for our spouses and our children and for the world, is *Agape* love.

3. Examine the following passages and discuss how we are to express our love.

- a. John 3:16
- b. 1 John 4:9, 10
- c. Matthew 5:44-45
- d. Matthew 22:36-40

d. John 13:34-35

e. John 15:9

4. Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 and discuss what Paul meant when he wrote

- a. Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.
- b. 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, and have not charity, I am nothing.
- c. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

ANSWER:

Without love all our good deeds are worthless (1 Cor. 13:1). Paul uses a hyperbole to make his point. (He exaggerates the extent of someone's spiritual gift). The idea is if we were to reach the extreme perfection in every spiritual gift God gave, but we did not have love, we would have nothing.

“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become *as* sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.”

Even if we were to become the most gifted orator in the entire world, but did not exercise this gift with love, we would be like a noisy gong. Any gift of God is useless without love. We would be unable to minister to the community because we would lack its most important ingredient.

In the pagan temples of Bacchus they had the pagan rite of ecstatic utterances. They used gongs and cymbals and trumpets in their pagan rituals. Paul's message was simple. If we lack *agape* love we would be no better than a pagan ritual – we would be meaningless gibberish.

Furthermore, prophecy, knowledge and faith are useless without love (1 Corinthians 13:2).

“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, and have not charity, I am nothing.”

Truth without love is like a cold sword. It removes the power of the Word. Knowledge without love does not edify and it leads to arrogance. Faith without love is not faith at all. Jonah had faith in God's word, yet he had not love. It was not failure that He was afraid of . . . it was success.

Martyrdom profits nothing if we do it for self-recognition. Loveless people produce few things of eternal value.

5. Read the true story about Miss. Thompson and discuss practical ways God may be leading you to exercise His love, combined with your spiritual gifts or present responsibilities.

Miss Thompson taught Teddy Stallard in the fourth grade. He was a slow, unkempt student, a loner shunned by his classmates. The previous year his mother died, and what little motivation he may have had for school was now gone.

Miss Thompson didn't particularly care for Teddy either, but at Christmas time he brought her a small present. Her desk was covered with well-wrapped presents from the other children, but Teddy's came in a brown sack. When she opened it there was a gaudy rhinestone bracelet with half the stones missing and a bottle of cheap perfume.

The children began to snicker but Miss Thompson saw the importance of the moment. She quickly splashed on some perfume and put on the bracelet, pretending Teddy had given her something special. At the end of the day Teddy worked up enough courage to softly say, "Miss Thompson, you smell just like my mother . . . and her bracelet looks real pretty on you too. I'm glad you like my presents."

After Teddy left, Miss Thompson got down on her knees and prayed for God's forgiveness. She prayed for God to use her as she sought to not only teach these children but to love them as well. She became a new teacher. She lovingly helped students like Teddy, and by the end of the year he had caught up with most of the students.

Miss Thompson didn't hear from Teddy for a long time. Then one day she received this note: "Dear Miss Thompson, I wanted you to be the first to know. I will be graduating second in my class. Love, Teddy Stallard."

Four years later she got another note: "Dear Miss Thompson, They just told me I will be graduating first in my class. I wanted you to be the first to know. The university has not been easy, but I liked it. Love, Teddy Stallard."

Four years later: "Dear Miss Thompson, As of today, I am Theodore Stallard, M.D. How about that? I wanted you to be the first to know. I am getting married next month. I want you to come and sit where my mother would sit if she were alive. You are the only family I have now; Dad died last year. Love, Teddy Stallard."

Miss Thompson went to the wedding and sat where Teddy's mother would have sat, because she let God use her as an instrument of encouragement.