

# ***FPFWC Christian Development***



## **Inclusive Love**

October 2020

Fall Quarter

**October 24, 2020**

**Lesson #4 – Love Never Fails**

SCRIPTURE TEXT – 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

**Key Verse - Now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.—1 Corinthians 13:13**

**ICE BREAKERS**

1. What qualities does love have?
2. What is difficult about loving?

**LESSON BACKGROUND**

Corinth was a major city in ancient Greece. Paul spent 18 months in the city on his second missionary journey, despite much opposition there (Acts 18:1–17). Writing 1 Corinthians from Ephesus in about AD 56 while on his third missionary journey, Paul addressed a variety of issues and problems that had arisen in the Corinthian church in his absence.

That church's many problems seemed to have been rooted in pride, which went hand in hand with airs of spiritual superiority. Some thought themselves to be superior because they identified with a particular leader (1 Corinthians 1–4). Some thought themselves to be exempt from moral expectations (chapters 5–7). Some thought themselves to be superior because of the foods they ate or refused to eat (chapters 8–10). Some thought that they were so superior to other Christians that they could neglect the needs of others (chapter 11). The issue of spiritual gifts was also a problem at Corinth in this context.

Many individuals in the first-century church were empowered by the Spirit to accomplish important tasks, including miraculous manifestations such as prophecy (example: Acts 21:8–9) and speaking in tongues (example: 10:44–46). First Corinthians 12 begins a long section on the pride and arrogance that had entered the church through, ironically, the use of spiritual gifts. That discussion continues in chapter 14, but in the midst of it Paul pauses to offer a single, simple, concise answer to all the Corinthians' questions: love each other.

Love, properly understood, will put everything else into perspective, unifying the church and empowering believers to glorify Christ together.

**LESSON COMMENTARY –**

**13:1–3.** In vv. 1–3, Paul shows the necessity of love to make the employment of spiritual gifts constructive. **Tongues of ... angels** is sometimes cited in support of tongues being a "heavenly language," but whenever angels are recorded as speaking, they use an earthly foreign language. **Love** is "a spontaneous inward affection of one person for another that manifests itself in an outgoing concern for the other and impels one to self-giving" (Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians: A*

*New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AYB, vol. 32 [New Haven: Yale, 2008], 489).

**13:4–7.** Paul presented the characteristics of love in this paragraph. See the major commentaries for word studies on these characteristics.

**13:8–12.** Here Paul taught the permanence of love compared to spiritual gifts. For a discussion of **prophecy** and **tongues** (v. 8), see the comments on 14:1–3. **Knowledge** is the “word of knowledge” (12:8). **Will be done away** means “to be brought to an end,” “to cease,” “to be abolished,” and is found in vv. 10 and 11 as well. **In part** (v. 9) indicates the incompleteness of the content or the comprehension of the gifts. **The perfect** (v. 10) could be the believer’s death, the completion of the canon, or conditions following the second coming. A preferable view is “a relative state of maturity” for the Church. **The perfect** (*to teleion*) is used neither for death nor perfection following the second coming, and the Corinthians would not have understood it as a reference to the canon. Paul often used the word for relative maturity in contexts where it is contrasted with childishness or immaturity (1Co 2:6 with 3:1; 13:10 [perhaps]; 14:20; see especially Eph 4:13–14 in a context of spiritual gifts and the Church’s maturity; cf. Heb 5:13–14) (Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts*, 123–32; F. David Farnell, “When Will the Gift of Prophecy Cease?” *BibSac* 150 (April–June 1993): 191–95). When the Church reached a point of relative maturity, **tongues**, **prophecy**, and **knowledge** ceased. Paul did not say precisely when this would happen, but Chrysostom (d. AD 407) and Augustine (d. AD 430) said the miraculous spiritual gifts had ceased, and around their time several important councils settled some critical issues for the Church. This may be the arrival of “relative maturity” for the Church, but this is purely conjectural. In v. 11 Paul compared the Church’s maturation with his own. His childhood parallels the time when **the partial** exists (i.e., when **tongues**, **prophecy** and **knowledge** are present in the Church). **I did away with** is the same verb as in both vv. 8 and 10. **For** (v. 12) explains why the “childhood” things (the three gifts) are done away with. **Dimly** probably means “indistinctly, unclearly,” and is synonymous with **the partial** (see v. 10). After the Church reaches its relative state of maturity, Paul anticipated that the understanding of the content of these gifts would be clearer. A **mirror** was made of highly polished brass and at best provided an imperfect reflection. **Face to face** is almost universally interpreted as “seeing God face to face” (Gn 32:30; Ex 33:11; Dt 5:4; 24:10; Jdg 6:22; Ezk 20:35). But God is not mentioned in v. 12, and Paul is continuing the metaphor of v. 12a into v. 12b, c, d. When one looks into a mirror he sees himself, not God, and in Paul’s day one’s reflection was blurred. Paul is saying that someday the image will be as clear as if one were actually looking at himself without a bad mirror. **Just as I also have been fully known** refers to knowing how one looks with the same accuracy that others know him, i.e., without a flawed reflection from an imperfect mirror, but it does not speak of God’s knowledge of the believer. Exodus 33:11, a “face-to-face with God” passage, also speaks of friends speaking “face-to-face,” and that is the sense of v. 12c, d. Some accuse this position of trivializing v. 12, but this is question-begging. It only trivializes it if one assumes that v. 12 is about “perfection,” seeing God face-to-face, and the state following the *parousia*.

**13:13. But** introduces a contrast between the permanence of **faith, hope, and love** in v. 13, and the temporary nature of **tongues, prophecy, and knowledge** in v. 8. **But now** (*nuni de*) usually carries a temporal sense in Paul's letters (see the phrase in Rm 3:21; 6:22; 7:6, 17; 15:23, 25; 1Co 15:20; 2Co 8:22; Eph 2:13; Col 1:22; 3:8; Phm 9; 11; though 1Co 12:18 and 15:20 may be exceptions), **now** signifying the current Church Age (for a similar use of **now**, cf. Rm 11:30–31). **Faith, hope, and love abide** (they “remain,” “stay”) throughout the entire age in contrast to **tongues, prophecy, and knowledge**, which cease at some time during the Church Age. See the chart at the top of the following page for a graphic depiction of 13:10–13. **Love** is the greatest of the three virtues both from the standpoint that it is the most important for driving the use of gifts and from the standpoint that love for one another and for God lasts into eternity, while faith and hope are realized and will not.

**LESSON NUGGET – “God hates the great things in which love is not the motive power; but He delights in the little things that are prompted by a feeling of love”. D.L. Moody**

**Sources: Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, and The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary**