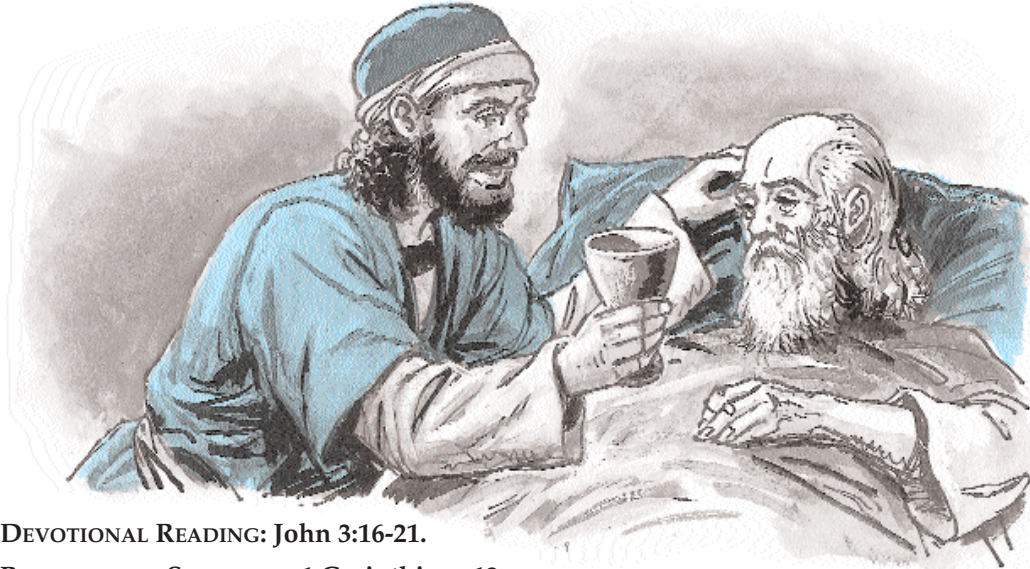


Called to Love

July 30
Lesson 9



DEVOTIONAL READING: John 3:16-21.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 13.

PRINTED TEXT: 1 Corinthians 13.

1 Corinthians 13

1 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.

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.

3 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.

4 Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,

5 Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;

6 Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;

7 Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

8 Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.

9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.

10 But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

11 When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

12 For now we see through a glass, darkly, but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

13 And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

Jul
30

GOLDEN TEXT: And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.—1 Corinthians 13:13.

Called to Be a Christian Community

Unit 2: Called to Obedience

(Lessons 5-9)

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:

1. List the features that characterize Christian love.
2. Contrast the nature of Christian love with the worldly idea of love.
3. Identify a unique, personal way to demonstrate Christian love.

Lesson Outline

INTRODUCTION

- A. Action Love
- B. Lesson Background

I. MATHEMATICS OF LOVE (1 Corinthians 13:1-3)

- A. Spiritual Gifts Minus Love (vv. 1, 2)
- B. Self-Sacrifice Minus Love (v. 3)
Cheap Talk, Rotten Walk

II. CHARACTERISTICS OF LOVE (1 Corinthians 13:4-7)

- A. What Love Is, Part 1 (v. 4a)
What Love Does
- B. What Love Isn't (vv. 4b, 5)
- C. What Love Is, Part 2 (vv. 6, 7)

III. GREATNESS OF LOVE (1 Corinthians 13:8-13)

- A. Things That Will End (v. 8)
- B. Why They Will End (vv. 9-12)
- C. What Remains (v. 13)

CONCLUSION

- A. Know Yourself
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Action Love

"I just don't know," Jane said, "whether we can learn to love each other again." She was speaking to a counselor while Craig, her husband, sat next to her in silence. Several months earlier, Jane had discovered that Craig was having an affair with a woman he had met on a business trip.

Jane responded by forcing Craig to leave their home until he made up his mind. After three weeks in a hotel, he renounced his sinful behav-

ior and begged for forgiveness. She was willing to try but was skeptical about the future. "Could it really ever feel the same?" she asked. "We've been through so much together, but I just don't know if I even love him anymore."

In response the counselor pointed out that love is primarily a sense of commitment rather than an emotion, although we do often have loving feelings. Loving commitment to another manifests itself in a way of living. Love, in other words, is a set of behaviors, a way that we act toward others. Despite her anger, Jane was clearly acting in a loving way by attempting to forgive Craig. The counselor was, therefore, hopeful that the relationship could be healed.

Many of us live in a culture where the word *love* is used so often and so casually that it has become virtually meaningless. We say that we love God, but we also say that we love our family members, chocolate ice cream, and the sales at Wal-Mart®. Paul clarifies that love is not a feeling but rather a mode of living. He stresses that nothing we do can possibly bring glory to God if we do not exhibit a loving spirit.

B. Lesson Background

First Corinthians 13 is a key part of Paul's solution to the problems of a divided church. Up to this point in the letter, he has discussed several serious issues that were points of conflict for the Corinthian church. These ranged from sectarianism, to sexual sin, to lawsuits among believers, to divorce, to Christian liberties, to propriety in worship.

Chapter 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 into chapter 14, but Paul pauses to give the short answer to all the questions thus far: love. Love for one another, properly understood, will put everything into perspective. Love will unify the church and empower believers to glorify Christ together.

I. Mathematics of Love (1 Corinthians 13:1-3)

A. Spiritual Gifts Minus Love (vv. 1, 2)

1. 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.

The first three verses of today's text establish the importance of love as a guidepost for the exercise of spiritual gifts. Paul frames his argument with a series of statements based on a formula: "If I do X, even if I do X to the highest possible

degree, but do not have love, then I am nothing.” In mathematical terms, this formula may be restated as, “X minus love equals zero,” where X is any one of the spiritual gifts under discussion. Without love, nothing we do makes any difference in God’s sight. (In the antique language of the *King James Version*, the word *charity* refers to “love” rather than the modern idea of “benevolence.”) [See question #1, page 414.]

Paul’s first example is that of speaking in *tongues*. The miraculous, Spirit-given ability to speak foreign languages is a great thing to the Corinthians. But suppose someone could *speak* not only tongues that other human beings use but also could speak the language used by the *angels* in Heaven (whatever that language may be). This surely would represent the highest form of speaking in tongues!

Yet a person who spoke that angelic language out of selfish motives—to draw attention to self or to demonstrate personal spirituality—would be of no use to anyone. As far as God is concerned, without love even the most elegant speech is like *sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal*—in other words, just loud noise. Therefore, a tongue that is empowered by the Spirit must also be guided by genuine love.

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.

Paul gives more examples. Suppose that someone has *the gift of prophecy*, the ability to speak on God’s behalf and perhaps even to predict the future. Also imagine a person who is so endowed with prophetic insight as to have *all knowledge* and to understand *all mysteries*, with a profound awareness of the mind of God. Even such gifts, Paul says, are worthless if not exercised in love.

Faith here is not “saving faith.” Rather, it refers to a supernatural gift of especially effective faith (see comment on 1 Corinthians 12:9 from last week’s lesson). Jesus once spoke of a kind of faith that was great enough to move a mountain into the sea (Matthew 17:20). Such faith would indeed be impressive to other people! Yet God will be impressed only if the prayer is offered in a spirit of love.

B. Self-Sacrifice Minus Love (v. 3)

3. 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.

Generosity is not listed as a manifestation of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12, but Paul does in-

clude it in the list of gifts in Romans 12:6-8. All Christians are obligated to *give*, but some are specially gifted to give more freely to those in need.

Ultimate giving is found in the phrase *though I give my body to be burned*. This probably refers to some act of Christian martyrdom. It’s one thing to give your money *to feed the poor* but much more to sacrifice even your very life for the faith! But even the most extreme self-sacrifice is worth *nothing* in God’s sight if it is done without love. [See question #2, page 414.]

CHEAP TALK, ROTTEN WALK

The young man, trying to impress his girlfriend, told her, “I would climb the highest mountain to be with you. I’d walk through a snake-infested jungle to be with you. I would swim the widest river just to be able to be with you.” Then, after he kissed her, he said, “I’ll see you at church Sunday if it’s not raining.” There is no limit to the promises some people are willing to make! We call that *cheap talk*.

At other times there is indeed the fulfillment of a noble task but from wrong motives. At a hospital near a town where I once ministered, there was a man who would go into patients’ rooms to pray with them. He seemed to be such a loving and kind individual. But it was discovered that he would slip rings from their fingers as he held their hands. On other occasions he would see jewelry or other articles on a surface and pocket them. Love was not the motivation by which he served. What a *rotten walk*!

It is the scoundrel who makes the headline news, but the compassionate ones make the heart new. They are the ones who have answered the call to minister to the poor and downcast

Home Daily Bible Readings

Monday, July 24—God So Loved the World (John 3:16-21)

Tuesday, July 25—Conquering Love (Romans 8:31-39)

Wednesday, July 26—Love One Another (John 13:31-35)

Thursday, July 27—Loving One Another Fulfills the Law (Romans 13:8-14)

Friday, July 28—Let Us Love (1 John 3:11-18)

Saturday, July 29—Love Defined (1 Corinthians 13:1-7)

Sunday, July 30—The Greatest Gift Is Love (1 Corinthians 13:8-13)

through the years. No cheap talk, no rotten walk, just giving themselves day after day to caring for the needs of others. This pleases God. —A. E. A.

II. Characteristics of Love (1 Corinthians 13:4-7)

A. What Love Is, Part 1 (v. 4a)

4a. Charity suffereth long, and is kind.

After stating that no act of service is valuable in God's sight without love, Paul moves on to specify just what love is. *Suffereth long* does not mean that loving always entails suffering (although it often does include that) but rather emphasizes that love is patient. This means that love does not express itself through vengeance, retaliation, or by giving up on people quickly. Instead, love actively extends kindness to others, even those who do not "deserve" our grace.

WHAT LOVE DOES

A man visits his wife in a nursing home. She has Alzheimer's disease. Daily he stops by to see her. He reads to her from the Bible. He tells her how nice the weather is and how the children and grandchildren are doing. He holds her hand and sings some of her favorite hymns to her. After two or three hours he leaves, only to return the next day for the same routine. Only this is not a routine. This is love.

Another man has a wife in the same nursing facility. She too has Alzheimer's. For the first few weeks he visits daily. Then the visits become every other day, then weekly. Then he comes only at Christmas and on his wife's birthday. His thought is, "This is not fair. I've got a life to live."

Both couples had stood before the same minister years ago. They recited vows to each other that said they would love, honor, and cherish each other in sickness and in health until death would separate them. One's man's love suffered long, the other refused to "suffer" for long. One man sought "his own" while the other man served his wife and His Lord. Which choice would you make? —A. E. A.

B. What Love Isn't (vv. 4b, 5)

4b. Charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up.

Paul now emphasizes some things that love is not or does not do. Envy is a desire to obtain what other people have, often accompanied by feelings of bitterness or hatred. Envy and covetousness are never motivated by genuine love.

At the same time, a person who loves does not try to make other people envious by making a

display of the things that he or she has. Paul may be thinking here of the pride the Corinthians are taking in their spiritual gifts. All gifts are given by the same Spirit and are of equal importance in God's plan (1 Corinthians 12:4-7, 14-26). Thus it is senseless to boast about them or to envy what someone else has received.

5. Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil.

Neither does love *behave itself unseemly*. That means that love does not lead us to do anything that we would be ashamed of later. In this context Paul probably is thinking especially of envious or prideful things that we may say. Pride and envy are eliminated categorically by the fact that love is not selfish: love always leads us to act in the best interests of the other person (compare Philippians 2:4).

Neither is love compatible with anger toward another person (being *provoked*). Of course we may be angry at the sins that people commit and we may be frustrated by their poor choices. But these feelings should be motivated by genuine concern that the person is doing something harmful to self, others, or the cause of Christ. *Thinketh no evil* means that we should not continue to harbor ill feelings toward those who make us angry. Instead, we should forgive and forget.

C. What Love Is, Part 2 (vv. 6, 7)

6. Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth.

As we have seen, many of the Corinthian Christians seem to be prideful and arrogant about their spiritual gifts. Others may be angry and resentful toward those individuals. When they feel this way they may delight to see the arrogant ones fall into some sinful behavior (*iniquity*). But the person who harbors such sentiments is no more loving than the person who constantly boasts about personal abilities.

How to Say It

APOLLO. Uh-*pah*-low.

ATHENS. *Ath*-unz.

CORINTHIANS. Ko-*rin*-thee-unz (*th* as in *thin*).

DELPHI. *Del*-fi.

MOSES. *Mo*-zes or *Mo*-zez.

PHILIPPIANS. Fih-*lip*-ee-unz.

THESSALONIANS. *Thess*-uh-*lo*-nee-unz (strong accent on *lo*; *th* as in *thin*).

Love always rejoices *in the truth* in the sense that it makes us happy to see other people succeed and do the right thing.

7. Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

These four qualities summarize the way that love responds to other people. The repetition of *all things* emphasizes that we are to act this way despite anything that anyone may do to us.

These qualities do not suggest that love must be naïve but rather that love always remains positive towards others. As such, love does not break under pressure but instead always bears up. The Greek verb for *beareth* can refer to the idea of something remaining watertight, so that no harm comes from the outside. Love always continues to expect and hope for the best from people even when we must wait a long time to see it. [See question #3, page 414.]

III. Greatness of Love (1 Corinthians 13:8-13)

A. Things That Will End (v. 8)

8. Charity never faileth; but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.

The Corinthians apparently take great pride in certain spiritual gifts. But a time is coming when they won't need *prophecies, tongues, and knowledge*. Even when that time comes, however, love will continue to be the guide. We will always need love, both in this life and the next. For this very reason, Paul opened the discussion in 1 Corinthians 12:31 by calling love "a more excellent way" than the selfish pursuit of spiritual gifts. [See question #4, page 414.]

B. Why They Will End (vv. 9-12)

9. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.

Through a special gift of knowledge (v. 8), some of the Corinthians have supernatural insight into spiritual matters. This insight can guide their counsel and teachings. Other Corinthians are empowered to *prophecy*. But the Corinthians' knowledge and prophecies of God are only partial (*in part*). Any person who takes pride in these gifts should realize that he or she doesn't know everything!

10. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

This verse is not a prediction in the original Greek but rather is a proverb. Paul is, in other words, making a general statement about how

things normally work. The word being translated *perfect* can also be understood to mean "mature" or "complete," depending on context (compare Matthew 5:48; 19:21; 1 Corinthians 2:6).

As a rule, something that is partial or incomplete is discarded when the complete thing comes onto the scene. If someone gives me a photocopy of an article from a magazine, I do not need to keep those photocopied pages after I have gone out and bought my own copy of the whole edition. Why this principle is important is the subject of the next verse.

11. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

Paul now gives an example of the principle he stated in verse 10. A *child* thinks and talks about things according to his or her limited physical and mental capabilities. For this very reason, the *things* that children say and do often amuse us by their simplicity.

But as we grow older, these simplistic ways of thinking are replaced by a more mature perspective. The new perspective is based on a better, more adult understanding of the world around us.

12. For now we see through a glass, darkly, but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

Paul now applies the principle of maturity to the use of spiritual gifts. As he noted in verse 9, the revelatory gifts of knowledge, prophecy, and the like are partial and incomplete. They reveal many important things about God and His will, but they don't reveal everything.

Paul compares the knowledge of God that the Corinthians receive through these gifts with a reflection in a mirror. Fine mirrors are manufactured in Corinth at the time, but ancient mirrors are not made of *glass* like ours today. Instead, they are made of polished metal and therefore cannot give a sharp image; the picture they offer is dark, a pale reflection of one's actual features. The gifts, similarly, give us a partial knowledge of God but not the complete picture. This is not due to any lack on the part of the Spirit but rather simply to our inability to comprehend Him fully.

Yet the time will come, Paul says, when the Corinthians' partial knowledge is to be replaced. Scholars are divided on the specific experience to which this verse refers. Some say that Paul is thinking of the second coming of Jesus, a moment when the glorified Christ will reveal himself to the world and all will "see him as he is"

(1 John 3:2). Others believe that Paul is referring more generally to our life in Heaven, where we will dwell in God's direct presence and behold His perfect glory. [See question #5, page 414.]

Still others think that this refers to the more complete knowledge that comes to the church as a whole when the New Testament is finished by the end of the first century A.D. Those who hold this theory point to Exodus 33:11 where Moses' "face to face" conversations with God refer to clear communication (since literally seeing God's face meant death; Exodus 33:20).

Whichever theory is true, the point not to be missed is that of all the things that are temporary, love is not one of them! Paul brings this thought home in the next verse.

C. What Remains (v. 13)

13. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

Above all, our thoughts are to be guided by *charity*, or love. Indeed, God is love, and anyone who truly knows anything about God will show godly love to others (1 John 4:7, 8). We have not seen God in this world, and we do not know everything about Him. As such, we must exhibit *faith*, trusting that He knows best because we do not understand all His ways and plans. *Hope* is not wishful thinking but rather the confident assurance that we eventually will be in His eternal presence if we live a faithful life (compare 1 Thessalonians 1:3).

Both faith and hope are critical to our lives now. But both of these will, to some extent, become obsolete later on. In Heaven we will have what we now hope for; "hope that is seen is not



Visual for Lesson 9. Ask students to fill in this blank: "Love is greater than _____." Use this image to set the tone for the responses.

hope" (Romans 8:24). Our faith will be replaced by complete confidence as we see the reality of God's eternal promises. But love will never be obsolete: it will continue to characterize our relationship with God and other redeemed saints forever.

Love is therefore the greatest of the three in the sense that it never ends. When we exercise our spiritual gifts with love, we are acting with eternity in view.

Conclusion

A. Know Yourself

In Paul's day the great Oracle at Delphi was a major tourist attraction. Legend had it that Delphi, a little over 100 miles northwest of Athens, was the center of the earth. A famous temple to the god Apollo housed a sacred stone marking the spot. Worshipers of Apollo could come to this temple to ask the idol for advice, similar to modern fortune-telling.

Answers came cryptically through a prophetess, who went into a trance and spoke in nonsensical gibberish. These ravings were "interpreted" by priests at the temple to provide the answer to the supplicants' questions. Despite the obvious flaws of these practices, the oracle at Delphi remained a significant aspect of Greek religion for hundreds of years.

The best advice that pilgrims to Delphi received did not, however, come from a raving prophetess or priest of Apollo. Rather, the best advice came from the famous inscription over the doorway to the temple: *Know Thyself*. Worshipers were, in other words, to reflect on their own motives, weaknesses, and limitations before approaching.

The Corinthians were obsessed with spiritual gifts that offered special insights. As a result, they knew marvelous things about God and His ways, but they obviously did not know their own hearts. For this reason they failed to see that their actions were not truly driven by love or a desire to please God. Without love their greatest efforts could never truly glorify Him.

B. Prayer

Father, we love You and we know that You have called us to love others. Take away our pride and envy, and help us to be truly loving and forgiving people. Give us the wisdom to use the gifts You have given us in humility and for Your glory and honor. In Jesus' name, amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Love lasts forever; implement it now!

Learning by Doing

This page contains an alternative lesson plan emphasizing learning activities. Classes desiring such student involvement will find these suggestions helpful.

Learning Goals

After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:

1. List the features that characterize Christian love.
2. Contrast the nature of Christian love with the worldly idea of love.
3. Identify a unique, personal way to demonstrate Christian love.

Into the Lesson

Decorate the classroom with 20 to 24 large hearts affixed to the walls. Using several different colors of hearts will look attractive, but be sure they are light colored so that writing will show.

Open the lesson by dividing the class into small groups of four or five. Within groups students should relate demonstrations of great love that they have experienced. These examples could be from family experiences, church relationships, etc. To get the groups started, give a personal illustration from your life.

After a few minutes of sharing, make the transition to the Bible study by reminding the class that, "Love is manifested in many ways in our everyday lives. The need to be loved never ends. Today's study is a classic text that encourages the deepest love we can ever give or experience. While this passage is often read at weddings, its applications reach every relationship, especially relationships within the church."

Into the Word

Tell the class that they will remain in their small groups throughout today's lesson. Begin the Bible study by reading 1 Corinthians 13 to the class. Then distribute the materials and four small-group assignments listed below.

Group #1: Materials needed: several dark crayons (don't use markers as they may bleed through the paper hearts). Handout narrative: "First Corinthians 13:4-8a is often read at weddings. As time goes on, we discover ways that the characteristics of love found in these verses can be applied to our marriage experiences. Write on the hearts taped to the wall the characteristics from these verses. Be prepared to share an illustration of how each of these characteristics can be demonstrated in a marriage."

Group #2: Materials needed: poster board and a marker. Handout narrative: "Your task is to list the characteristics of love mentioned in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a. While these characteristics of love are often applied to marriage today, Paul is directing them to personal relationships within the Corinthian church. Beside each of the characteristics listed on your poster board, note a practical way this characteristic can be illustrated in church life today."

Group #3: Handout narrative: "Your task is to read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 and select two of the characteristics of love to mime for the class. Class members will try to guess the characteristic. Have fun!"

Group #4: Handout narrative: "Your task is to read 1 Corinthians 13 and answer the following questions: (1) Given the quest for power and spiritual gifts in the Corinthian church, what is Paul's point in verses 1-3? What does this say to today's church? (2) In verses 8-12 Paul stresses to the Corinthians that a time would come when spiritual gifts would cease to be relevant but that love endures. Why is that important to know today? (3) Verse 13 is often quoted. Why is love greater than faith and hope?"

Allow Group #3 to present its mimes for the class, and then have the other groups report their findings.

Into Life

Ask students to share, in their small groups, stories about people who embody the characteristics of love Paul mentioned in today's text. After a short time, ask a representative from each group to be prepared to share one of the more creative or unusual stories with the entire class.

Before allowing groups to share their stories, tell the class that you are going to extend a challenge for each person to find a unique way to demonstrate Christian love within the next week. The stories they hear may stimulate an idea.

Then ask each group's representative to share one story with the class. As the stories are being told, walk through the classroom quietly handing each student a piece of heart-shaped candy (or a heart-shaped trinket). Tell the class that the candy is a reminder to find one way to demonstrate Christian love this week.

Let's Talk It Over

The questions on this page are designed to promote discussion of the lesson by the class and to encourage application of the lesson Scriptures. The answers provided are only discussion starters. Let your class talk it over from there.

1. What are some practical results of inaccurately defining love as a feeling?

Love is often viewed as a mysterious, magical entity that controls us rather than our controlling it. As a result people speak of “falling” into or out of love. Several years ago, a Hollywood celebrity had an inappropriate relationship with his adopted adult daughter. He excused his behavior by claiming that he had fallen in love—in other words, he couldn’t help himself. On other occasions, love is treated as an ideal that exists only in fairy tales and fables.

Inaccurate definitions of love cause people to believe that they can love only a limited number of people. The truth is different: while one can experience deep friendships only with a small number of people, biblical love can be expressed to all. How good it is to know God, who demonstrates and defines true love! (See 1 John 4:7, 8.)

2. What are some ways that expressions of giving come with an unloving attitude? How do we guard against this trap?

Examples are many! Large financial gifts are sometimes given to churches with an accompanying expectation that the giver will inappropriately control the use of the gift. On other occasions similar gifts are provided in efforts to obtain greater leadership influence in the church. Benevolence gifts are offered perhaps for the sake of enhancing one’s reputation or as publicity that will advance the giver’s business interests.

With a begrudging sigh of exasperation, believers may choose to help a needy person (compare 2 Corinthians 9:5). Offers of apparent kindness can veil thinly an attitude of superiority (compare Luke 18:11, 12). We begin to move toward a solution when we take seriously Jesus’ instructions about gifts as found in Matthew 6:1-4.

3. How have you been able to develop a mind-set that sees the worth of people and anticipates their becoming more than they currently are? How can you improve in this area?

Regularly confessing our own sin to God (and, perhaps, to others) helps us to avoid thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought. This, in turn, helps us view others more graciously.

We can also reflect upon the growth we have experienced as we think of those who were gracious to us during times of spiritual immaturity. Remembering how far we have come can help us empathize with those who have the furthest to go. Rereading scriptural accounts of figures like King David reminds us of how easy it is to stumble and how mightily we can struggle. Inspiring conversations with people who have overcome great personal obstacles also help us remain optimistic regarding the potential of others.

4. What are some ways that speaking gifts are used in unloving ways? How can we stay alert to the dangers here?

Using the pulpit or lectern as a forum for attacking those who disagree is an obvious (and hopefully rare) problem. A more subtle problem is what we may call “spiritual manipulation.” Truthful, passionate preaching that moves people’s hearts to the gospel has God’s approval (example: Acts 2:37). Preaching that manipulates people’s response through false analogies, false choices, and false assumptions should raise a red flag. The preacher or teacher who slips into these falsehoods may be merely lazy regarding preparation, but people can be harmed nonetheless.

This question is key: “Is this person attempting to present truth in love?” (See Ephesians 4:15.) An answer of “yes, but the problem is a lack of skill or preparation” will require one type of approach. An answer of “no” will require another!

5. How would you respond to a believer who thinks that Bible study is not all that important since someday we will know God more fully anyway?

Passages from both Old and New Testaments affirm the value of Bible study (Psalm 119:105; 2 Timothy 3:16, 17; etc.). Honoring God’s commandments is important according to Exodus 20:6; John 14:15; 15:10; but how will we know what those commandments are unless we study?

Nothing makes a greater difference in a Christian’s daily life than a proper view of God. Though Scripture’s portrait of God is limited in certain ways, it is also accurate—it reflects what God desires us to know at present. So we must study!