

STEADFAST LOVE Sunday School- September 30, 2012

Unifying Topic: FAITH REQUIRES MUTUAL LOVE

Lesson Text

I. The Ministry Of Hospitality (Hebrews 13:1-3)

II. The Greatest Gift (1 Corinthians 13)

The Main Thought: And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity. (1 Corinthians 13:13, KJV).

Unifying Principle: People search for a workable and reliable definition of love. Is there one? The writers of Hebrews and 1 Corinthians define love and tell us that love is greater than faith and hope.

Lesson Aim: To learn showing hospitality to strangers is an act of the sacrificial love described in 1 Corinthians 13.

Life Aim: To teach Christians the importance of serving and loving others with the perfect love of Christ.

13:1 Let brotherly love continue.

13:2 Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

13:3 Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body.

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.

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.

13:3 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.

13:4 Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,

13:5 Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;

13:6 Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;

13:7 Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

13:8 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.

13:9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.

13:10 But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

13:11 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.

13:12 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.

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

HISTORY:

This is the last section of the Book of Hebrews. ¹A unique feature of the epistle to the Hebrews, are the warnings throughout the book.

- The warning against drifting – Heb.2:1-4.
- The warning against departing – Heb.3:12-15.
- The warning against disobedience – Heb.4:11-13.
- The warning against dullness – Heb.5:11-6:6.
- The warning against despising – Heb.10:26-39.
- The warning against defying – Heb.12:25-29.

Hebrews 11 and 12 provided examples and encouragements of faith, however, with such warnings in the Book of Hebrews, chapter 13 is indeed a "*word of exhortation*" (13:22)! Hebrews 13 is filled with evidences and the ethics of faith. It does not tell us how to live to get saved, but it addresses how the saved will live in response to their Savior, Jesus, whom 12:24 describes as the "*Mediator of the New Covenant.*"

LESSON:

Hebrews 13:1-3 The Ministry Of Hospitality

13:1 Let brotherly love continue. The continuance evidence of our faith would be brotherly love. The Hebrew

¹ http://executableoutlines.com/he_sg/he_sg_00.htm
<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>

Christians were going to lose their brotherly love for one another. Why?

- Because some had backslidden and were slipping away from Christ (Heb.10:25).
- Because false teaching had seeped in among them and was influencing some (Heb.13:9).

The first mark for fellow believers is that of love. Note the marks of personal behavior:

1. **Mark 1:** brotherly love.

People who have brotherly love have come from the same womb, that is, from the same source. They have been born again by the Spirit of God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And when they receive this new birth, God gives them a new spirit—a spirit that melts and binds their hearts and lives in love for all the family of God.

These ethics (vv.1-3) help portray the true gospel to the world, encourage others to believe Christ, and bring glory to God. This is the reason for the exhortation. The believers needed to continue in love enough to forget self. They needed to love enough to sacrifice themselves and to tackle the problems and continue to proclaim and teach the truth of Christ! "*Brotherly love*" is ²composed of two root words - "*phileo*", which means: "*tender affection*", and "*adelphos*", which means: "*brother, or near kinsman.*" It literally means: "*from the same womb*". It is the great need of the hour—a love that will love so much that it will not give up, no matter the problem or opposition.

13:2 Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: The virtue of hosting and caring for visitors was especially valued in these times since travel was difficult and inns could be dangerous. Hospitality is to be shared with strangers and angels.

2. **Mark 2:** hospitality.

Don't forget or neglect or refuse to extend hospitality to strangers (in the brotherhood)—being friendly, cordial and gracious, sharing the comforts of your home and doing your part generously. Some people say they cannot be hospitable because their homes are not large enough or nice enough. But even if you have no more than a table and two chairs in a rented room, there are people who would be grateful to spend time in your home. This was hardest to do when experiencing a time of persecution. Are there visitors to your church who would like to share a meal with you? Do you know single people who would enjoy an evening of tea and talk? Hospitality simply means making other people feel comfortable and at home.

13:2b ...for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. The Hebrews would not know whether a guest would prove to be a spy or a fellow believer being pursued. The word "*angel*" may refer to "*superhuman beings*" or it may refer to "*human beings who are messengers from God*". Abraham (Gen.18:1-3) and his nephew Lot (Gen.19:1-2) were unaware that their guests were angels at the time they received them. One never knows how far-reaching an act of kindness might be. This also happened to Gideon (Jdgs.6:11-24) and Manoah (Jdgs.13:6-20). We sing this song: "*all day and all night, angels keep watching over me*", well we might have entertained angels unaware.

13:3 Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body. "*Remember*" implies an active response to needs. These Jewish believers had gone through severe persecution (10:32-34) and had possessed a friendship whereby they rallied to the needs of others (10:33).

3. **Mark 3:** helping the prisoners and the mistreated.

As long as the earth is standing people are going to suffer all kinds of problems.

- Some people are lawless, and other people are falsely accused, even believers. The end result is the suffering of imprisonment.
- All people at one time or another suffer adversity of some sort. The result of such experiences is pain, emptiness, questioning, insecurity, loss, hunger, homelessness, poverty, disability, helplessness, and sometimes even hopelessness.

"*...in the body*" means as if you were suffering the physical pain and hardship in your body. The bodily hardships now being experienced by some of their fellow believers could equally well, and perhaps will, be experienced by them too. Believers are to minister to the needs of prisoners and those who suffer such adversity. The point our author is making is that his readers need to be concerned about those who are suffering; for since they possess the same physical body as others, it could happen just as easily to them. Christians should not separate themselves from

² http://www.bereanbiblechurch.org/transcripts/hebrews/13_1-3.htm
<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>

the needs that are all around them.

1 Corinthians 13 The Greatest Gift

This chapter is a corrective to people who thought that their particular miraculous gift was everything and that they were the greatest because they had it. The writer is Paul; the receivers are the 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.** Paul is writing to the Corinthians who were so distracted with contentions, divided by parties, and envious of each other's gifts, that unity was nearly destroyed. Therefore, gifts are explained to them. The phrase "*the tongues of men and angels*" may be the equivalent of saying he is able to speak in all languages, both human and divine. This person can speak to anyone anywhere about the gospel of Jesus Christ. There is no language barrier to him. Yet with that ability this man is able to produce nothing of value for God without love. If he is not careful, it says he becomes something else; he becomes useless in his life and ministry for Christ. All his language abilities are just noise; "*a tinkling cymbal*" apart from love. ³He is just "*as a sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.*" Unless it is done in love, ministering the gift of languages, or speaking in any other human or angelic way, amounts to no more than those pagan rituals. It is only meaningless gibberish in a Christian guise (*disguise*). Charity or love; that is "*agape*" love is the gift missing that goes with the other gifts. This love is not natural. It is possible only if God supernaturally helps us set aside our own desires and instincts, so we can give love while expecting nothing in return.

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.** Paul speaks of three gifts here: 1) the gift of prophecy 2) the gift of understand all mysteries and all knowledge 3) the gift of faith. But we are nothing without love!

1. "*Prophecy*", in this instance, has to do with predictions; speaking under the inspiration of God's Spirit, both predicting the future and proclaiming the truth of God's Word.
2. "*Understanding all mysteries*" means that Scriptures that have been hidden to you are revealed, "*and all knowledge.*" Note the word "*all*." Imagine a person possessing "*all*", but the key to "*all*" will include Love. He may possess all the charisma, stature, eloquence, and descriptive language in the world, but if he does not have love, he nor his gift is nothing. One can always steer in the danger of feeling and acting superior because of one's prophetic gifting and eloquence; understanding all mysteries, and all knowledge. That danger is looking down upon others, feeling that one is more knowledgeable or better equipped than others. And lastly...
3. This "*faith*" is speaking of faith to do miraculous things; the supernatural ability to trust God to do great things. We must place our faith in God's ability and not in our own ability. All things we might do are no use at all, unless we are full of love for God and man.

13:3a **And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor,** — We're talking about the "*gift of giving here.*" Two acts of giving are mention. Both of these we would consider the supreme act of love. The first illustration of giving is giving everything that a person has— bestowing all my goods to feed the poor. There are several dangers here:

- Giving out of duty.
- Giving with contempt because one is forced to give.
- Giving with an air of superiority because one has and the needy do not have.
- Giving with a rebuke because one feels the needy are just irresponsible and ought to make their own way in life.
- Giving unsacrificially.

We are to give from a free heart, expecting nothing in return. If he did not give it from a loving heart, he should have kept it. It will do him no good.

13:3b **...and though I give my body to be burned,** — The second illustration of giving is of martyrdom—of being burned alive at the stake. The danger is if done as a thing of glory and of pride. If a believer is ever called upon to die as a martyr, he is to die only out of love for Christ and for his fellow man.

13:3c **...and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.** Neither volunteering for giving up all your possessions or being burned would produce any spiritual benefit if not done out of love for the body of Christ.

³ http://www.bereanbiblechurch.org/transcripts/1corinthians/loves_priority.htm

⁴ <http://www.lovetheLord.com/books/1corinthians/21.html>

<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>

All we do is done for someone else, and if there is no love for others; if we miss out on that small detail, we have done it for naught in God's eyes. Love is greater than any spiritual gift. That's what Paul was saying at the end of Chapter 12—*"I'll show you a more excellent way."* In this next verse, the acts of love are given—the very behavior of a person—the very way a person is to live among and with others.

13:4a Charity suffereth long, — Love suffers a long long time; not easily aroused to resentment, anger, or seeking revenge. Love controls itself in order to win the person and to help him to live, work, and serve as he should.

- No matter the evil and injury done by a person.
- No matter the neglect or ignoring by a loved one.

13:4b ...and is kind; — Love is kind; courteous, good, helpful, useful, giving, showing and showering favors. Love is inclined to be of good service to others. Love does not resent evil; it does not revel in the hurt and neglect.

- Love reaches out in kindness: in helpfulness, in giving, and in showering favors upon the person who neglects or hurts oneself.

13:4c ...charity envieth not; — Love does not envy; does not want that which belongs to others.

- Love is not jealous; does not have feelings against others because of what they have, such as gifts, position, friends, recognition, possessions, popularity, or abilities.
- Love does not begrudge or attack or downplay the abilities and success of others, but loves and enjoys the experiences and good of others.

13:4d ...charity vaunteth not itself, — It does not sound its own praises; a braggart; or boastful.

- On the contrary, love seeks to give: to recognize, to honor, to applaud the other person.

13:4e ...is not puffed up, — It is not swelled with pride; arrogant; or conceited.

- Love does not think nor act as though oneself is better or above others.
- Love is modest and humble and recognizes and honors others.

⁵Whenever there is a division between a husband and wife, between a parent and child, between one believer and another believer, there is always a root cause, which is pride. And where there is pride, there is no love. Love is not proud.

13:5a Doth not behave itself unseemly — Love does not behave rude; improper; or disgraceful.

- Love does nothing to shame others.
- Love is orderly and controlled, treating all persons with respect.

13:5b ...seeketh not her own, — Love does not insist upon its own rights.

- Love is not focused upon who one is nor upon what one has done.
- Love seeks to serve, not have others serving oneself.
- Love is acknowledging others, not insisting that others acknowledge oneself; it is giving to others, not insisting that others give to oneself.

13:5c ...is not easily provoked, — Love is not easily provoked; not aroused to anger; not ready to take offense; not quick-tempered; or touchy.

- Love controls the emotions and never becomes angry without a cause.

13:5d ...thinketh no evil; — does not keep track of offenses committed against oneself; does not hold the evil done to oneself.

- Love suffers the evil done to it and forgets it.

⁶Do you know people who are keeping a record of everything that someone has done to hurt them? Why do they keep a record of wrongs done to them? So they won't forget the wrongs, so they will be sure that person gets the justice that is due them.

13:6a Rejoiceth not in iniquity, — Love does not take delight in iniquity; unrighteousness, evil, wrong-doing; that which is involved in sin.

- Love does not take pleasure in the unrighteousness and sin of others; it does not feed upon sin and wrong, nor does it pass along the stories of sin and wrong. Man's nature is too often fed the tragedy of evil,

⁵ http://www.bereanbiblechurch.org/transcripts/1corinthians/loves_priority.htm

⁶ http://www.bereanbiblechurch.org/transcripts/1corinthians/loves_priority.htm

whether personal sin or natural disaster.

13:6b ...but rejoiceth in the truth; — rejoices when the truth is known and when it prevails; rejoices when others are recognized and promoted for whom they are and for what they have contributed.

- Love rejoices when the truth is rooted and grounded in a person and among the people of the world.
- Love never covers nor hides the truth; loves faces the truth.
- Love stands up under the weight and onslaught of things.

⁷What brings joy to your heart; the bad or the good? If you hear something bad about someone who is your enemy or whom you do not like, do you rejoice? Or does it make you sad to see your enemy in exposing the wrong and weaknesses of others. When you learn something unpleasant about another, you don't run and scatter it all over the church or neighborhood. Love does not take delight in some of the misdeeds of others. Love covers it over, keeps it silent. Have you ever noticed how easily you dismiss the faults of those you love? But how do you respond when someone you don't particularly like does something wrong? Do you cover it or expose it?

13:7a Beareth all things, — Love bears all things; the word "*bears*" means both to cover all things and to bear up under all things. Love does both.

- Love stands up under the weight and onslaught of all things, and it
- Love covers up the faults of others. It has no pleasure in exposing the wrong and weaknesses of others. It does not feed upon sin and wrong, nor does it pass along the stories of sin and wrong.
- Love bears up under any neglect, abuse, ridicule—anything that is thrown against it.

13:7b ...believeth all things, — Love believe well of others unless convinced otherwise; completely trusting.

- Love sees and understands the circumstances and accepts and forgives and believes the very best about a person.

⁸If somebody wants another chance, love grants it. Love is not suspicious; it does not read between the lines and come out with the worst.

13:7c ...hopeth all things, — Love hopes all things; it never ceases to hope. Rather than having a negative and critical spirit, it should always be positive and hopeful.

- Love expects the good to eventually triumph and to gain the victory.
- Love refuses to accept failure; it always hopes for the best and for the ultimate triumph of the good—no matter how fallen or how tragic the fall or how difficult gaining the victory may seem.

13:7d ...endureth all things. Love endures all things; the word "*endures*" is a military word meaning to stand against the attack of an enemy. Love sustains the assaults of an enemy.

- Love actively fights and endures all attacks.
- Love is strong, full of fortitude, and fight, and it struggles against any and every assault. No matter what attacks love, named or unnamed, it endures the attack and continues to love.
- Love never quits; it never gives up on anyone. It cares too much to give up because it endures all things and continues to love.

These verses show that these are all the qualities that can be produced in a Christian life. We are to practice them.

13:8 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. This verse talks about three spiritual gifts of the Spirit called ⁹the manifestation gifts which serve to reveal the power of God. These gifts are supernatural or spiritual in nature. They can be further subdivided into three groups: Utterance, Power, and Revelation Gifts:

UTTERANCE - These gifts say something:

⁷ http://www.bereanbiblechurch.org/transcripts/1corinthians/loves_priority.htm

⁸ http://www.bereanbiblechurch.org/transcripts/1corinthians/loves_priority.htm

⁹ <http://christianity.about.com/od/holyspirittopicalstudy/a/spiritualgifts.htm>

- **Prophecy** - This is the "*forth telling*" of the inspired Word of God primarily to the church, for the purpose of confirming the written Word and building up the entire body. The message is usually one of edification, exhortation or consolation; although it can declare God's will in a particular circumstance, and in rare cases, predict future events.
- **Speaking in Tongues** - This is a supernatural utterance in an unlearned language which is interpreted so that the entire body will be edified. Tongues may also be a sign to unbelievers. Most believe they are uttering a heavenly tongue.

REVELATION - These gifts reveal something:

- **Word of Knowledge** - This is supernatural knowledge of facts and information that can only be revealed by God for the purpose of applying doctrinal truth.

"Prophecies" (the gift of prophecy) will fail; "tongues" (the gift of tongues) will cease; and "knowledge" (Word of knowledge) will vanish away, but "Love" never fades and will never fail. Spiritual gifts are not the same as Love, They are not permanent; therefore, they are far inferior to love. Note how believers become guilty of the very things they accuse the world of doing: focusing upon the temporary instead of the eternal. Too many believers glory in their earthly gifts and abilities instead of serving and ministering in love. When we stand in eternity before God, spiritual gifts will not be what God is looking for, but how did we reach and minister to a lost and needy world, did we minister in love? Love is far superior to the spiritual gifts.

13:9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. Knowledge and prophecy as we now know it are suited only to an imperfect state of existence. No person knows all the truth. We can proclaim and predict the truth only with partial certainty; only what God wants us to know. We prophesy in part; we speak in tongues in part; we give Word of knowledge in part. "That which is in part" refers to the gifts (vs. 8-9). Something better (the perfect) will replace them. All of our understanding and ability to minister here on the earth is limited. We are in flesh, and flesh has weaknesses.

13:10 But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. We know nothing perfectly, and we can proclaim and predict the truth only with partial certainty. "Perfect" means complete and mature. So, that which is complete will come, and then what is not complete will disappear "That which is in part shall be done away" refers to spiritual gifts. These are the things spoken of in the above verses which are in part and shall be done away with. But it's here until the perfect comes. A day of perfection is coming, and when it comes, only that which is perfect will stand and endure; that which is in part disappears; it only pointed to the perfect to come. Love is the only lasting eternal gift. It is love through Jesus Christ that is perfect and that will bring the day of perfection to reality for man. Once the perfect has been achieved, there will be no need for that which is in part. A day is coming when we shall know God even as He knows us—perfectly.

- When is that day coming? The day love is perfected between God and man.
- What will bring the day about? Love—God's perfect love for man.

It is love that will be perfected and will bring the day of perfection to reality for man. It is love that will bring us into a face to face relationship with God and into a perfect knowledge of truth. Therefore, love is far superior to the spiritual gifts.

13:11 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. A child's speech is undeveloped, his understanding crude, and knowledge incomplete. But when the child becomes a man, his speech becomes subject to his mind, his understanding is tempered, and his knowledge is not that of a child; it's that day of setting aside all the childhood understanding and thoughts to become a mature man. This is what Paul says the Corinthians should be striving for. Speaking as a child, understanding as a child, thinking as a child is what a child is expected to do, however, the day of maturity is when believers will become mature men, putting away childish things.

13:12 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. The Scriptures do not allow us to see "*face to face*" or have perfect knowledge as God

does. Our present relationship with the Lord is comparable to the reflection we see through a dark mirror. We can faintly see the figure, but it is not fully distinct or clear. Therefore, we only see God and the truth in part and we only know God and the truth in part. Again I ask? When is that day coming? The day love is perfected between God and man. What will bring the day about? Love—God's perfect love, His Son Jesus. Love is being face to face with God.

13:13 And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity. Both faith and hope are great qualities and gifts, but love is far superior. How? Remember, Paul is contrasting love with the spiritual gifts and dealing with the tendency of people who center attention upon their gifts and accomplishments.

1. "*Faith*" focuses upon the revelation of God, whereas "*Love*" focuses upon God Himself. "*Faith*" can exist without adoration and worship. A person can believe in someone and not love him.
2. "*Hope*" focuses upon being eternally with God in a perfect world, but again, "*Love*" is superior because it focuses upon God Himself. A person can have hope in someone without loving him, but a person who loves someone always hopes in him.
3. "*Love*"—true love (*agape love*) does not originate in the nature of man, but in the nature of God. God is Love; Love is the basic trait of His nature.
4. "*True Love*" is a gift of God. A man can know true love only as he comes to know the love of God. "*Faith*" arises from the heart of man, but Love is deposited or given to man by God. "*...the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the holy Ghost which is given unto us*" Rom.5:5b. Apart from God man loves only those who love him; he either opposes or withdraws from those who hate him. A man can only Love (*agape love*) his enemies through the love of God. "*Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another*" 1Jh.4:11.

"Faith and hope" reach and grow people, but "*Love*" reaches and grows people far more than any other gift or quality. A person can believe in God, yet feel he is above others. He can act prideful, arrogant, and superspiritual. He may hope for an eternity to be with God and with other believers, yet he can be cold and distant. But, "*Love*"—true love—has no weaknesses or dangers. "*Love*" never fails, never comes short.

SUMMARY:

¹⁰The author exhorts the Hebrews to keep on loving one another and to be hospitable to strangers. The strangers visiting may actually be angels. In other words, treat strangers as if they were angels sent from God. Angels and strangers are sent from God to His children to minister to them and to encourage them. So extend the love of God to them. God's love should also extend to those in prison and those who are mistreated (Heb.13:1-3).

The Corinthians were seeking the lesser gifts instead of the greater from God. The greater gift is Love. Therefore, Paul begins this chapter by contrasting the worth of the spiritual gifts with the worth of love. If one spoke with tongues of men and of angels, without love, the person would be like sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. Even if one had the gift of prophecy, to understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and the gift of faith sufficient to remove mountains, without love, such a person is nothing. Even if one gave all his goods to the poor...; were willing to be burned at the stake...Without love, it profits the person nothing (1 Corth.13:1-13).

APPLICATION:

⁴Love is a choice. All problems are not spiritual problems, but all problems have a spiritual solution. Your problem may be your marriage, or it could be a conflict with your children or parents, maybe it is a sin or temptation that you have not been able to gain the victory over, maybe it's someone you haven't forgiven. Wouldn't this kind of love you've just read about solve your problem? Don't give up on God; He hasn't given up on you!

¹⁰ <http://greenleycommentary.wordpress.com/2009/05/18/hebrews/>
<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>