

1 CORINTHIANS 13

GREAT CHAPTERS OF THE BIBLE

A study at Faith Lutheran, Sharpsburg, Georgia, 2009AD



What did Luther think about the Christian conduct at Corinth?

“In short, things got so wild and disorderly that everyone wanted to be the expert and do the teaching and make what he pleased of the Gospel, the sacrament, and faith. Meanwhile they let the main thing drop – namely, that Christ is our salvation, righteousness, and redemption – as if they had long since outgrown it. This truth can never remain intact when people begin to imagine they are wise and know it all.”

THE BOOK

Author

Paul

Purpose

Address spiritual issues in Corinthian church
Explain proper understanding of resurrection
Instruct concerning Jerusalem offering

Recipients

Commerce center in Corinth
Influenced by many pagan religions
“corinthianize” = practice sexual immorality

Church’s Founding

Rough start in synagogue
Paul’s ministered for 18 months
Paul was true spiritual father

Paul’s Writings

Romans, 1&2 Corinthians, Galatians,
Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1&2
Thessalonians, 1&2 Timothy, Titus, and
Philemon

THE TIMES

Paul wrote 1st Corinthians in Ephesus in the spring of 57 A.D. He had heard about the problems at Corinth while he was at Ephesus during his 3rd missionary journey, and now he takes steps to address these issues.

It seems that the Corinthian church had written him requesting his pastoral guidance on a few issues – marriage, Christian freedom, spiritual gifts, and the Jerusalem offering. Paul also wrote concerning the confidence Christians have in the resurrection.

THE BACKGROUND

We see in 1st Corinthians a splintered church, with separate factions following separate leaders. Paul first breaks up these divisions by showing believers hold to Christ, and his Word. Paul then deals with issues in the church, from sexual immorality to lawsuits to marriage to food sacrificed to idols.

Paul then shows the Corinthian Christians, who eagerly desired different spiritual gifts, what they should desire. Chapter 13 focuses them, and us, on love.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The Corinthians eagerly desired spiritual gifts such as prophecy and speaking in tongues. What are some spiritual gifts that people today might desire?
2. How does Matthew 7:22-23 illustrate the faith of 1 Corinthians 13:2?
3. Verse 3 details some outward signs of showing love. Interestingly enough, Paul says that doing these actions, without love, *gains Paul nothing*. Can you explain Paul's line of thought?
4. We often hear verse 4 at weddings. Can you think of some ways that these words are especially appropriate for a Christian couple as they begin their life together?
5. Verse 5 details that love is not rude or self-seeking. How was Corinthian worship rude, and also self-seeking?
6. After reading John 14:6, who is the truth that love rejoices with (verse 7)? Why is this a fitting title?
7. Have prophecies and tongues (verse 8) ceased in the current time? Why or why not?
8. In verse 11, Paul talks about the difference between childhood and adulthood. How does this difference illustrate the truth of verse 10?

CONCLUSION

1 Corinthians 13 has Paul laying forth the highlight of the Christian life. For a Corinthian church filled with sinful squabbles and selfish desires, Paul points them to the most excellent way.

This most excellent love is not a friendship love, or erotic love, but a self-sacrificing love. This agape love, shown to us on the cross, now motivates us to love others. This love is patient and kind (verse 4). It rejoices in the truth (verse 6). This love never fails (verse 8), but is the greatest (13).

Having laid the groundwork of love, Paul now focuses on the proper use of spiritual gifts of prophecy and tongues in Chapter 14. He shows that these gifts are to be used for the edification of others and to build up the church.

Chapter 15 details the reality (1-11), the necessity (12-34), the body (35-50), and the comfort (51-58) of the resurrection for believers. Paul points the Corinthians to trust in the completeness and blessings of the resurrection.

Chapter 16 concludes with an appeal for the Jerusalem offering. This offering was gathered so that the Corinthian church (and others) could be a blessing to their fellow, poverty-stricken, believers.

In this passage (1 Corinthians 13:13), however, Paul is speaking strictly about love for the neighbor, and he indicates that love is the greatest because it bears the most fruits. Faith and hope deal only with God whereas love has an infinite number of outward responsibilities toward others.