

LOVE IS THE ANSWER

Last week, we completed our series of studies about the character traits that Peter tells us to add to our faith (**2 Peter 1:5-11**). The last trait was the most important one. **1 Corinthians 13** says that love is greater than spiritual gifts; love is greater than giving; love is even greater than faith and hope (**1 Cor. 13:13**).

Love is described in **1 Cor. 13:4-7**, so the Corinthians would understand how they were supposed to be acting. Most of the description actually says what love does *not* do. By looking at Paul's letter, it is evident that the Corinthians were practicing many of the things that God says love does not do.

A survey of **1 Corinthians** reveals many problems which the Corinthians suffered because of their own behavior. Their serious problems were produced by pride, selfishness, and ignorance. In **James 3:16-17**, James said, *"For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there."*

First, they had the problem of divisions. Jesus prayed that all who believe in Him would be one in the Father and the Son and be one as the Father and the Son are one (**John 17:20-21**). Jesus understood that a house divided against itself cannot stand (**Matthew 12:25**). Paul said that the problem of division is caused by the Corinthians' pride that prompted their allegiance to various human teachers (**4:6**).

Of course, the solution to this problem is love, which *"is not puffed up."* (**13:4**) The absence of love creates an environment in which pride will spread. This is well illustrated by the statement Paul made in **1 Cor. 8:1**, *"Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up."* This theme is further repeated in **13:2**, where Paul says that if a person has the gift of prophecy so that he understands all mysteries and knowledge, but without love, he is nothing.

In fact, pride was the root of other problems besides the exaltation of human teachers for their human wisdom naturally resulting in divisions. **1 Cor. 8:1** is in the context of confronting those Corinthians who had knowledge that an idol is nothing and believing that eating meat sacrificed to an idol has no significance, either. Paul also rebuked the Corinthians for being *"puffed up"* about the brother who was committing fornication with his father's wife (**5:2**).

It is evident that if pride was the root of these other problems mentioned in **1 Corinthians**, then love, which is not puffed up or prideful, is the answer to these problems as well. However, there are more aspects of love that demonstrates how love solves the Corinthians' problems.

The other phrases that describe love also show how love is the answer. Regarding the toleration of sin, Paul also said that love *"does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth."* (**1 Cor. 13:6**) Love does not turn a blind eye to sin, just as God is love (**1 John 4:8**) but does not tolerate sin. So if love is present in Corinth, then there are several reasons why they would not have enjoyed fellowship with an unrepentant sinning brother.

Love is the opposite of selfishness, so a brother insisting on his own rights with his own knowledge is not showing love for his brother, regardless of what he claims. Love is not selfishly motivated. By its very nature, love seeks and even sacrifices for the good of others. So love is the answer to the problem of not considering the conscience of a weak brother. Similarly, in the same section of **1 Corinthians (8:1-11:34)**, Paul rebukes the Corinthians' failure to apply his principle of becoming all things to all men in order to save some (**9:22**).

In **chapter 11**, Paul deals with women who thought they could disregard the custom of women veiled when they were in public. They believed the equal spiritual gifts made them equals with the men in every way, especially if a woman had a spiritual gift that her husband did not. Paul said that custom must still be respected. Love does not behave itself unseemly. Christians are not the trendsetters or seek to draw attention to themselves. Particularly, women are told to dress modestly for this reason (**1 Timothy 2:9**).

Their selfish abuse of the Lord's Supper was so bad that Paul said the Corinthians were not really having the Lord's Supper but their own supper (**11:20-21**). It was an expression of the divisions that already existed (**v.18-19**). They were so selfish that they humiliated other brethren by eating their own supper in front of those who had nothing! (**v.21-22**) Such behavior would never have entered their minds if they would have had love.

Another manifestation of the Corinthians' lack of love was their envy of those who had the gift of tongues. Of course, it didn't help that those who had the gift were all too eager to show it off in the assembly even though no one else could understand what they were saying. Paul had to correct their carnal view of spiritual gifts. He told those who envied the tongue-speakers that they are an important part of the body, even if they don't have the gift that attracted the most attention (for all the wrong reasons). He also told those had the envied gift not to think they were better than the other members or that they were independent of them. With love, the Corinthians should look at any brother with a gift as someone who could help them, and that is a similar attitude Paul told

them to have for those who would teach them (**3:21-22**). A spiritually-minded person would not be resentful or envious. Rather, he would rejoice with him who rejoices.

The goal of this article to help us realize that any spiritual problem we have can be solved. The Corinthians were afflicted with many spiritual problems, but Paul gave them the more excellent way that would alleviate their problems. The solution to the problem is genuine love for God first, and then genuine love for brethren that will regulate our behavior and speech.