

Sunday School Lesson October 25, 2020

Good morning, I hope you are well and feel blessed.

Lesson for October 25, 2020, "Love Divine"

Background Scripture from 1 Corinthians 12:27-14:1.

Corinth was the perfect location for Paul to discuss in great detail the important task of exploring the church as the body of Christ. The letter to Corinth was written from Ephesus. The letter reveals a profound understanding of God's love in the church, for Corinth, for Jesus, and the gifts employed to empower the Corinthian church. Like all sinful people, the church at Corinth struggled with destructive issues like arrogance, pride, power, and a desire to possess the power overseeing a church hierarchy. There were some who valued spiritual arrogance so strongly they even wanted to undermine Paul's authority.

We are gifted. God takes ordinary, average people and puts His Spirit in them to do extraordinary things. Acts 4:13 says: "When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus". The word for ordinary is where we get the word "idiot." We may not be much on our own, but as a child of God we are gifted. "All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines. (1 Corinthians 12:11).

At the beginning of 1 Corinthians 12, Paul says, "Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant." God wants all His children to discover their purpose. He put us on this earth and in the local church to make a difference. People should serve where they are gifted and love what they do. Spiritual gifts, acts of service, and other godly activities come in a wide variety. What they have in common is that each one comes from the same Holy Spirit. Each one is given to be used in service to the same Lord Jesus. Each one is possible only through the power of the same God the Father. These spiritual gifts are not about the people who use them; they are ultimately about God and His purposes.

In addition, spiritual gifts are given to every Christian, and they are given for the purpose of serving other Christians. They are given for the common good and not to bring status and respect to one believer and not another. A spiritual gift is the supernatural ability to serve the church in a way that someone could not do in mere human strength (1 Corinthians 12:4-7).

Paul begins by listing nine of the gifts, emphasizing that one is given to one believer while another is given to a different person. Nobody receives every single gift, but everyone receives at least one of them. These first nine gifts are often called the sign gifts or confirmation gifts. Many Christian groups and teachers believe these gifts were commonly given by the spirit during the time of the apostles and before the New Testament was established. Their purpose was to confirm that God's power was behind the message of the gospel. Other Christian groups and teachers understand these gifts to continue to be given to Christians by the Spirit in large numbers even today.

These gifts include the word of wisdom and word of knowledge, along with faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discerning between spirits, speaking in tongues, and the interpretation of tongues. These gifts were likely on display in Corinth. Paul emphasizes that the Spirit decides who to give each gift to. This means the gifts are not earned or acquired by the effort of those who receive them (1 Corinthians 12:8–11).

That means, that having one spiritual gift or another should not cause anyone to be thought of as more spiritual or important than another. Paul urged the Corinthians to think of their church, and the worldwide church in general, as a kind of body. A human body is just one thing, one organism, but it is made up of many different parts, all with different functions. In the same way, the church is made up of many believers, all connected by the Holy Spirit in them, and it is just one thing: Christ's body on earth (1 Corinthians 12:12–13).

It would be ridiculous for body parts to declare they were quitting the body because they can't be another part. It would be equally silly for any body part to say it doesn't need the other parts. Christians, too, should discover how essential their role in Christ's body really is, as well as learning to value how needed every other function is. Even those parts thought of as "less honorable" are given special care and honor, because we instinctively know how important they are. The same ought to apply to how Christians treat each other as we use and encourage spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:14–27).

Paul concludes, though, by saying that, at least in Corinth, the first, second, and third most essential gifted positions were apostle, prophet, and teacher. This seems to suggest that those are the roles most impactful, or at least the most potent, in fulfilling the church's role. As Paul has stated in chapter, 12, those gifts cannot be effective unless the other members of the body are being honored, and being active (1 Corinthians 12:28–31).

Paul ends this section with an intent to show a more excellent way. This

leads into one of the most famous passages in all of Scripture, a depiction of Christian love as God intended it to be.

The Corinthians held eloquence in especially high esteem and were somewhat preoccupied with the gift of tongues. Spiritual gifts are nothing without love; they can even be destructive when not practiced in love. Love is what enriches the gifts and gives them value. Love should be the motivating factor and pleasing God our objective. Paul gives a beautifully elaborate and poetic description of love that can be summed up in 13:6-7, "Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres." Paul highlights the character of love as Christians should express it. His descriptions of love are active, indicating that love is something one does, not merely an emotion. As Christians, we have received the love of God. Therefore, we are to love others. Paul explains that love results in characteristics that can be seen and heard. Love surpasses all the other spiritual gifts because they will pass away, while love endures forever. Love is eternal and is superior to the other spiritual gifts. Not only is love superior to spiritual gifts, but it is also superior to faith and hope. Just as in heaven we will no longer need prophecy or tongues, we will also no longer need faith when we finally see God. At that point, all hope will be fulfilled. Since love outlasts all of these, love is the greatest gift of all.

Closing: For the love that casts out fear, the faith that sustains and the hope that never perishes, be with us now and forever more. Amen. God watch over us and take care of us.

Next week's lesson November 1, 2020, "Loving By Serving"

Background Scripture John 13:1-35.

Sources for this lesson: The Bible, International Sunday School Lesson and Commentary, Dr. Craig Rikard, lesson on Love Divine, from South Georgia Advocate, Halley's Bible Handbook and The Present Word Adult Bible Lessons.