

International Bible Lessons Commentary
1 Corinthians 13:1-13

New Revised Standard Version

International Bible Lessons
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L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.

The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, May 31, 2015**, is from **1 Corinthians 13:1-13**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** discusses *Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further* to help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the [International Bible Lessons Commentary](#) website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. A podcast for this commentary is also available at the [International Bible Lesson Forum](#).

International Bible Lesson Commentary

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

(1 Corinthians 13:1) If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

The Apostle Paul wrote “The Love Chapter” (1 Corinthians 13) in his letter to the Corinthians. Paul addressed the issues of speaking in tongues and interpreting tongues (languages others probably could not understand, unless they were speaking a foreign language for people who would understand that foreign language, as on the Day of Pentecost). Paul said some accused him of being a poor speaker. Paul began chapter thirteen by saying that someone can speak with eloquence and sophisticated spiritual languages; but, if they do not have love for those they speak to; then, they will eventually sound like an endlessly repeated noise that can give people a headache.

(1 Corinthians 13:2) And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

Some Christians claimed to be able to foretell the future. They could proclaim the gospel message with power and sound reasoning. Some claimed to understand the spiritual realities that most cannot comprehend. Others claimed to be able to know things that others could not know. Some claimed to have enough faith to work astounding miracles. Even if these claims were true, if they did not love God and others, they were nothing.

(1 Corinthians 13:3) If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Paul argued that we can make any sacrifice, even sacrifice our own body by giving it over to torture, imprisonment, burning, or martyrdom as an expression of our faith, but if we do not have love, we will gain nothing. “Having love” means more than doing a “loving or caring” action from time to time. “Having love” is having something we possess. “Having love” means love for God and others is the mainspring or supreme motive or ultimate intention for all of our actions.

(1 Corinthians 13:4) Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant

Paul defined love and listed the attributes of love to make clear the kind of love he meant. When love is my motive in the way I treat others, I will choose to be patient with others. If I fail to treat others with patience, I will repent and strive to be patient because I have love for all people. Love will motivate me to treat people (and even animals) with kindness. Love will lead me to rejoice in the good others receive, rather than resent them for the good that comes to them. Love will motivate me to spend less time thinking and speaking about myself and my accomplishments and “patting myself on the back.” Love toward God and others will motivate me to give more time to thinking and speaking about Jesus Christ and His grace. Love will motivate me to be Christ-centered instead of self-centered.

(1 Corinthians 13:5) or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;

No matter what the situation, love will restrain me from being rude towards someone – even when provoked by them to treat them rudely in return. Love will motivate me to seek what is best for all concerned, to listen to other points of view to learn from them and show them consideration. Love will restrain me from expressing irritability or resentment and move me to pray and seek ways to develop healthy personality traits and relationships.

(1 Corinthians 13:6) it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth.

Some people rejoice when they see someone doing wrong; especially if that wrongdoing is done against someone they disagree with or hate. Some people will rejoice when they see someone doing wrong, because they too want to enjoy doing that wrong; if others are doing that wrong, they think it is “less wrong” and they can enjoy doing it too. Love helps us restrain ourselves whenever we see any wrong being done. Love rejoices in the truth, even when it may prove that our beliefs or someone else’s beliefs and loyalties are wrong. We rejoice when the light overcomes darkness.

(1 Corinthians 13:7) It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love bears or keeps on loving when things go wrong, when suffering, or when under attack. Love bears all things, knowing that all things work for the good of those

who love God and who are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28). Love believes all things that are according to and consistent with the truth (see verse 6 above) as revealed in the Holy Scriptures and reality. Of course, love will not choose to believe falsehoods or the idea that by doing wrong we will not hurt others or ourselves. Love continues to hope for the best, because love for God moves us to trust God. Because we love and trust God, we can endure suffering and persecution.

(1 Corinthians 13:8) Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end.

God is love. God loves us, enough for Jesus to die on our behalf to forgive us and free us from slavery to sin; therefore, for these reasons and more love never ends. Prophecies will end after they are fulfilled. Speaking in tongues will cease, because someday we will all understand what others speak. Knowledge (claiming to know special or hidden truths unavailable to others) will cease. Paul did not mean that believers will not grow in the knowledge of God forever as they continue to understand more about the infinite God throughout eternity.

(1 Corinthians 13:9) For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part;

Our true knowledge is not exhaustive knowledge. Truths that we know to be unchanging truths can be found exclusively in the Bible as infallible truths. Sometimes we learn infallible truths from observing what God has created. Still, our knowledge is not complete. Only the infinite and personal God knows all things. Some prophecies are not fulfilled yet; and these prophecies will not be fully understood by us, even if they are fulfilled in our lifetime.

(1 Corinthians 13:10) but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end.

When Jesus Christ comes a second time into our world to fulfill the partially fulfilled prophecies about Him, then the complete has come. When we remember and learn more about the prophecies that Jesus fulfilled the first time He came, we love God and Jesus our Savior even more. When we see how all of the prophecies about Jesus fit together as a whole, we will love the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit even more.

(1 Corinthians 13:11) When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways.

Paul reminded his readers to think about themselves when they were children. Children think, act, and speak according to their nature and age level. Unhappily, some old enough to be adults remain childish. Paul wanted

adults to act like adults. New believers need to grow into spiritual maturity, and their actions will demonstrate their level of maturity.

(1 Corinthians 13:12) For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.

Even though we may be spiritually mature, we need to remain humble. Eventually, we will know ourselves as we really are. God the Father and Jesus Christ know us fully as we are today, and they still love us. Someday we will know ourselves fully as they know us. Love motivates God to love us even after knowing us as we are. God knows what we will become through faith in Him and love for Him by His grace and the work of His Spirit in our life.

(1 Corinthians 13:13) And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

These three attributes or qualities of the Christian life continue among all true believers in Jesus Christ. They may all continue throughout eternity. We will see the reality of what God has promised, and what we have hoped for when God fulfills our hopes – these experiences will increase our love for God and thanksgiving for what God has done and does in our lives. Throughout eternity, God may say and do things

that further develop and increase our faith, hope, and love. Love motivates us to trust in and obey God; love is the greatest of the three attributes of Christian living. Without love, especially the love of God in Christ for us, we would have no faith and no hope.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. Why do some eloquent speakers make little impact on their listeners?
2. What can understanding all mysteries lead to, if a person does not have love?
3. What qualities of love listed in 1 Corinthians 13 do you like to see the most in others?
4. What are some of the childish ways in adults that can cause problems?
5. Give one reason you are grateful that love will never end. Give thanks to God for love.

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.

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