

Off the Shelf
Sunday School Lesson
1 Corinthians 13

Love is the Greatest Spiritual Gift (13:1-13)

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

1. Paul says that love is the foundation upon which all spiritual gifts depend. Love is what motivated Jesus to come to earth, become like us and offer himself as a sacrifice for our sins. The knowledge, life and miracles of Jesus were based on his love for those who he would redeem and bring into a glorious relationship. (Jn 3:16-18)
2. Love is what draws people to Jesus. Christians are to be known by their love for others. (Jn 13:34-35; Rom 13:8-10; Gal 5:13-14; 1 Jn 3:23-24)
3. *Why do Christians fail to love others as they are loved by Jesus? Why do we tend to think more about having spiritual gifts rather than loving others? Why do we think of love as something emotional for ourselves and not something based on serving the needs of others?*
4. Love and spiritual gifts are for serving others, bringing honor to Jesus and for the benefit of others. Pride and envy corrupt spiritual gifts.

5. In this life, we will always be like children no matter how much we learn and what influence or success we have. This is especially true of spiritual things. We will become much greater beings, with much greater knowledge in heaven. However, we still will be limited compared to God.
6. Living for Jesus, a life of consuming passion for him, is the love he commands and expects. He wants our thoughts, motivations and actions to be driven by our love relationship with him. Spiritual gifts are given by God to accomplish this. Therefore, spiritual gifts are tools used to glorify God and advance his kingdom. They are not to be sought for personal reasons. (Jos 22:5; Mt 22:36-40)