

# THE LOOKOUT

APRIL 2024

## Unit: 1 Corinthians (Part 2) Theme: The Powerful Church

**Overview:** If the living church had problems (which was last month's emphasis), then the powerful church had answers. Even churches with brokenness, like the Corinthian congregation, can provide knowledge and insight. Powerful churches learn to stress the right things (i.e., the big things of the book, the Bible). Powerful churches stress God's wisdom over the foolishness of this world. Powerful churches stress spiritual gifts that edify others over pandering to the pride of the user. Powerful churches stress love over self-centeredness. Powerful churches stress the resurrection over the hopelessness of the world.

### HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.

Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.

Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

WEEK OF APRIL 21, 2024

**LESSON AIM:** **Let love always be  
your motivation for  
serving the Lord.**

**UNIT:** 1 Corinthians (Part 2)

**THEME:** The Powerful Church

**LESSON TEXT:** 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

**SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT:** John 13:34-35; 21:15-17; Romans 12:9-21;  
Colossians 1:3-8; 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3

# STUDY

## LOVE

BY MARK SCOTT

Who would deny that love is one of the largest (if not the largest) themes of Scripture? It is the most descriptive characteristic of God himself (1 John 4:8). It drove God to send Jesus (John 3:16; Romans 5:8). It caused God not to give up on his people (Hosea 11:8-9). Scripture suggests three nuances. Some passages tell of God's love for us (Jeremiah 31:3). Some passages tell of our love for God (Deuteronomy 6:4-6). Still other passages tell of our love for others (James 2:8).

The love chapter of the Bible is in the middle of Paul's argument about spiritual gifts in the Corinthian church. All the spiritual gifts of the church must be employed with love (12:1-11, 27-31). All body life in the church is expressed in love (12:12-26). Preferring prophecy over speaking in tongues for the sake of edifying the church takes love (chapter 14). The use of spiritual gifts in love is the "more excellent way" (12:31b). Love is the greatest fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). Love is the distinguishing mark of the disciple (John 13:34-35). Love is evident in taking care of God's people (John 21:15-17).

### The Importance of Love

1 Corinthians 13:1-3

Knowing of love's importance puts it in proper perspective in the Christian life. Love trumps speaking in tongues, other inspired speech (*prophecy*), and specially revealed knowledge (*mysteries*). Love trumps faith (the kind that would be responsible for miracles—the metaphor of moving mountains gets at this). Love trumps the grace of giving to the point of poverty. And finally, love trumps martyrdom (*hardship*).

Paul indicated that failing to love as we apply our spiritual gifts means our efforts amount to nothing. The verses essentially say, "I do nothing," "I am nothing," and "I gain nothing." Few things are as annoying as a *resounding gong* or a *clanging cymbal* (think of a car horn going off in the driveway of your next-door neighbor's house at 2 a.m.). That is what a Christian who does not use their spiritual gifts in love sounds like.

### The Description of Love

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Some say this paragraph defines the word *love* because it uses the word *is* (i.e., "Love is . . ."). But *is* can be

definitive or descriptive. This cannot be the definitive *is* because Paul does not describe the lexical meaning of *agape*.

Instead, *love* acts (or does not act) in these ways. Of the 15 ways that love acts (and which are described), eight of them are negative. We often know what something is or is not by how it is described. Antonyms help to define a word.

Among the positive descriptions: *love is patient* (long-suffering), and *love is kind* (willing to help). Love also *rejoices with the truth*, *always protects* (covers over things), *always trusts* (believes), *always hopes* (expects with great desire), and *always perseveres* (remains under).

And as for what love is not: *love does not envy*, *it does not boast*, and *it is not proud*. *Love does not dishonor others*, *it is not self-seeking*, *it is not easily angered*, *it keeps no record of wrongs*, and *does not delight in evil*.

### The Eternality of Love

1 Corinthians 13:8-13

*Love never fails* because love lasts forever; and God is love, and he lasts forever. Other things (speaking in tongues, prophecy, and revealed knowledge in particular) will cease or be stilled. This is an important paragraph as to the permanence or temporary nature of what, at times, are called the "sign" (miraculous) gifts.

No position on "sign" gifts is without problems, but there are basically three: (1) Sign gifts will continue until the return of Christ. Arguing for this position fits the "knowing partially now and knowing fully then." Also, if *completeness* refers to the complete person (or perfect one), would that not be Jesus? (2) Sign gifts will cease when the New Testament is complete. Arguing for this position fits the mirror metaphor (used of the Word of God in James 1:22-25) and some evidence from church history (e.g., John Chrysostom said that the sign gifts had ceased). (3) Sign gifts will cease as the church matures. Arguing for this position fits the child illustration in the text. Does the church outgrow the need for sign gifts? There is not unanimity about these positions, but everyone should be united on using whatever gifts they have in love. ■

# APPLICATION

## UNSELFIES

BY DAVID FAUST

Mother Teresa said, “People are unrealistic, illogical, and self-centered. Love them anyway.”

“In the past,” a friend pointed out recently, “when people were outside enjoying nature, they photographed the scenery and took pictures of beaches, mountains, and forests. Now, we turn the camera the other direction and take pictures of ourselves.”

Industry experts estimate that today’s average smartphone user takes more than 450 self-portrait photographs (selfies) per year—more than one per day. According to the *Guinness World Records* website, an actor from India, Akshay Kumar, set a record by taking 184 selfies in three minutes. Kumar is faster than most, but we’re all tempted to put ourselves in the center of the picture.

### Unhealthy Selfitis

Tragically, hundreds of selfie-related deaths have occurred over the last decade, mostly because individuals fell from heights or drowned while attempting to photograph themselves in precarious positions. Evidence suggests that selfies have a negative effect on emotional health.

A 2018 study in *Psychology Today* identified three categories of a disorder the researchers dubbed “selfitis” (the compulsive urge to take selfies). In *borderline* cases, phone users take selfies up to three times per day, but do not post them on social media. In *acute* cases, phone users take selfies at least three times a day and post them on social media. Phone users with *chronic* selfitis feel a steady urge to take selfies and post them on social media at least six times a day.

The Bible presents a realistic and healthy view of the human self. God created us in his image, provided moral boundaries to guide our interpersonal relationships, and gave us the capacity to love him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. We are fallen sinners, but we aren’t nothing. We become our best selves when our

minds, bodies, and emotions glorify the creator who designed us.

The biblical instruction to love your neighbor “as yourself” obviously means to love others *as much* as you love yourself and “do to others what you would have them do to you” (Matthew 7:12). Loving your neighbor “as yourself” also suggests the need to “be yourself” and put your whole “self” into the effort. You can’t love God and love your neighbor *as someone else*; you must love them *as yourself*, using your own unique God-given personality and gifts to promote the well-being of others.

What the New Testament calls *agape* (the Greek word for unselfish, committed, covenant-keeping love) requires self-sacrifice. Author/preacher Tony Evans explains, “The biblical concept of *agape* love involves giving of yourself for the benefit of another, even at your own expense. Biblical love is defined by passionately and righteously seeking the well-being of another. [It] is an act of the will and not just a fuzzy feeling in the stomach.”

### Unselfish Love

Excessive preoccupation with self poisons hearts and ruins relationships. The list of sins that characterize “terrible times in the last days” begins by saying, “people will be lovers of themselves” (2 Timothy 3:2). By contrast, the Bible’s “Love Chapter” pointedly reminds us that *agape* “is not self-seeking” (1 Corinthians 13:5).

*Agape* requires a lot of “unselfies.” Even when people are illogical and self-centered, we should love them anyway. Our marriages, families, churches, workplaces, and neighborhoods will improve if we turn the camera around and focus on the Lord and others instead of focusing on ourselves.

**Personal Challenge:** Write a prayer of confession to God listing specific marks of selfishness in your own heart and actions. Ask the Lord to fill you with *agape* love and teach you to be less “self-seeking.” ■

## DISCOVERY

### QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. When in your life have you felt most loved?

Ask two people to read aloud **1 Corinthians 13:1-13** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to summarize the passage briefly.

2. Paul introduced his teaching about love by referring to it as “the most excellent way” (1 Corinthians 13:1). Why do you think love is elevated the way it is in Scripture?
3. Lesson writer Mark Scott states, “Knowing of love’s importance puts it in proper perspective in the Christian life.” How is our life perspective affected by what we understand about love—God’s love for us and our love for him?
4. Review Paul’s description of godly love in verses 4-8. In what aspect of godly love are you most in need of growth?
  - What can you do to grow more intentionally in this aspect?
  - What is one practical way you can show this aspect of love to someone in your life this week?
5. Half of the descriptions Paul used to describe love are negatives, defining godly love by what it doesn’t do. How do the negative descriptions motivate you to pursue love positively?
6. In writing about what love does and doesn’t do, why do you think Paul chose a different term, “always,” to describe how love protects, trusts, hopes, and perseveres?
7. What does it mean to see “face to face” and to “know fully” in terms of our relationship with God?
  - How can striving to know God more fully help you grow in your understanding and practice of love?
8. Why do you think love never fails and is considered the greatest gift?
  - How can holding onto love as the greatest gift impact your daily choices and actions?
9. Take a few moments to share how you see God’s love in action in the lives of the members of your group.
10. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: “I will . . .”

**For Next Week:** Read and reflect on **1 Corinthians 15:1-4, 16-27, 50-58**. You can also read next week’s supplemental texts and the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■