

Series: Living to Be a Witness

Lesson #2: “Living with an Understanding of True Love”

***Announcements, encouragement to invite people and opening prayer.**



Connect: an opportunity for people to immediately interact and connect with each other; icebreaker/attention getters. **Icebreaker:** What is the most obnoxious noise you have ever heard? Did you ever think that there are times when our actions as Christians sound like that in the ears of our God? It's true. So, let's discover what it that could be so our lives are not an irritating noise, but rather a sweet melody in the ears of our God.

Bottom Line: We need a deeper understanding of the power of AGAPE (pronounced: ah-gaw-pay) love in order to live a life that brings a witness to our faith in Christ. The greatest definition in the world of this love born of God is described in great detail in Paul's letter to the Christians at Corinth.

LESSON PLAN

Read 1 Corinthians 12:31

Background: God has used Paul to teach us how unique and vital every Christian's gift is to the health of the Church. No one is unimportant. Every person is equally valuable to the kingdom work. Then he mentions some of the miraculous gifts which were seen as super holy by some of the Christians in the Corinthian Church. With that background we can better understand why he finishes his teaching by telling them to desire the greater gifts. Then he says, “I will show you a **most** excellent way.” In other words, a far greater way of building up the church than they were thinking. All the seminars and new ideas in the world for growing a church are pale compared to this one little discipline that we have to choose to apply, just like God chose to apply to you and me!

Read 1 Corinthians 13:1

1. Obviously, the Christians at Corinth were thinking that speaking in tongues was the greatest act of faith. It was a sign of holiness. Even if they did, what did Paul say was the key to their actions meaning anything? (*Love. There seemed to be a feeling in the church that those with the gifts of tongues were truly super Christians. It is likely that this ego problem was part of the division Paul mentions twice in the first letter! They are fighting like cats and dogs and think they are the holiest of God's churches.*)

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It's important to note here that Paul uses the word **AGAPE**. That is the unselfish, sacrificial love that gives even when there is no reason for giving. It is an undeserved love. The choice to give unselfishly is made to meet a need, not because it was earned, but because it needs fixed.

2. According to Paul, ministry performed that is not coming from the pure love of God sounds like what? (*Resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. What happens when a little child gets hold of a drum stick and starts smashing on a cymbal? Do you hope mommy or daddy stops it quickly? In fact, do you not start looking around the room demanding someone stops this quickly? Do you think God may have selected a very vivid illustration so we wouldn't miss the point?*)

Question: What are some of the things we do in the name of Christianity or ministry that may very well be done without AGAPE love?

Read 1 Corinthians 13:2-3

3. What does he say about the scholar of scholars? (*Without love they are nothing. Their insight into the Scripture and the mind of God is useless. Paul begins by addressing the gift they were parading before people. Tongues were one of the major problems creating conflict in the church and are therefore addressed first.*)
4. Next he mentions people who never quit trusting God. What does he say about the person with so much faith they believe God can do anything?
5. What about the Christian who is willing to sell everything to feed the poor and even sacrifice their life as a martyr?

Questions: Now let's take those three areas apart to better understand God's truth.

- How can a brilliant Bible scholar, a great teacher or preacher, be found unloving while teaching truth accurately?
- How could a Christian have this bold faith, always trusting God and yet be found without love?

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- How could you take a vow of poverty, risk your life for the church and yet be found without love?

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-12

6. Now we discover the definitive definition of true love as delivered by the Holy Spirit through Paul. Notice that even when there are 15 verbs used to describe the act of loving others. AGAPE love is:
 - Patient** – (*This links perfectly to the second one. The King James Version translated this word, long-suffering, which is very accurate. Just like God is slow in keeping His promise to judge the world. His patience is because He loves us and wants to miss no one who hungers for Him. We are passively waiting, in no hurry to act because our love has to be patient if we want to love like God.*)
 - Kind** – (*Kindness is active idea. While we are being patient, we are also expressing kindness just as God expressed kindness by leaving heaven for the sake of all of us who are unworthy. Praise God that His love is actively kind! So, Paul begins describing true love with this description of God's active quality. Now he moves to 7 verbs that point out how NOT to behave if we have the love of God in us.*)
 - Without envy** – (*This emphasized the divisive competition that was taking place in the Corinthian Church. People were trying to be more holy than others and point it out. They wanted to be better than other godly people around them and let it be known.*)
 - Without boasting** – (*This was a rare word used when someone was a braggart or a windbag. It is a self-centered person who is focused mainly on what they do. It's the “Look at me!” mentality.*)
 - Not proud** – (*To be arrogant. Arrogance has no place in the kingdom of God. He alone is worthy of glory and honor.*)
 - Not rude** – (*The word means to behave shamefully or disgracefully. In the context of the letter it refers to the women in the church that were dressing to disregard the differences between sexes. It also refers to the actions of the wealthy at the Lord's Table who were taking advantage of the poor. Love doesn't play the wealth and power card over others.*)
 - Not self-seeking** – (*This seems to be aimed at the person who will use his freedom in Christ to do something no matter what anyone thinks. He doesn't care if it could*)

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cause someone needing their faith strengthened to stumble and fall. It's all about their rights.) How does that creep into churches?)

- h. **Not easily angered** – (The verb means to arouse or provoke someone to anger. Do you easily anger people because you haven't thought through what you are going to say or do? It also means that your love keeps you from being the person whose temper quickly flares up at something said or done to or about you. That is a failure to possess of your AGAPE love.)*
- i. **Keeping no record of wrongs** – (A literal translation of this means you do not devise evil against someone. Do not think about how to get even, to react to some wrong done to you by another. Love gets over it. Love cares too much about all God's creation to harbor a grudge. Love seeks unity.)*
- j. **Never delighting in evil but rejoices in truth** – (Love does join in the gossip, the revenge, that someone got caught. Love focusing on rejoicing when the truth of God claims another victory. Is that the focus of most Christians? Do we spend our lives looking for all the great victories God is working in the lives of people around us? Why or why not?)*

11-15) Always protecting; Always trusting; Always hoping; Always persevering; Never failing - *(The last string of verbs is like God's wrap up, or the measuring stick of how we are doing. Do you always protect God's creation, trust God's plan for love and unity based on truth, have hope that expresses itself in outreach; never gives up on anyone, and never allows God's instructions to love like Christ to fail in their lives.)*

Read 1 Corinthians 13:13

7. What do you think Paul meant when he said, “These three remain?”

Question: Why do you think love is greater than faith or hope?



Interactive Teaching Ideas: ideas for learner-focused teaching. *(Assign each table this Scripture to read and discuss how it relates to our text today. Read Matthew 6:1-18. You will want to point out that Jesus clearly teaches us that what we do is never done to draw attention to ourselves.)*



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Final Question: What is the one idea that stands out to you most from this lesson?