

Teaching Plan
EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Date: April 22, 2018
Lesson Title: "Understanding Love"
Lesson Passage: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

ABOUT THIS LESSON

The theme of love runs through the New Testament like a golden thread. When a man asked Jesus, "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?" Jesus answered, "Love." "Love God with all your heart and soul and mind ...And love your neighbor as much as you love yourself." Then he said, "On these two commandments (love God, and love your neighbor) depend all the law and the prophets." Peter wrote: "Above all hold unfailingly your love for one another" (1 Pet. 4:8). John goes even further: "Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God: for God is love" (1 Jn. 4:7-8). Shortly before his death on the cross, Jesus said to his disciples, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another." And he went on to say: "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." But what is love, that concept that holds such an important place in the Christian faith? As the lesson title suggests, Paul's discussion in 1 Cor. 13 offers answers to that question.

TEACHING/LEARNING GOALS

- (1) Formulate a brief definition of *agape*, Christian love.
- (2) List at least five attributes of Christian *love*.

BEGINNING THE LESSON

Introduce the lesson with these comments: The great 19th-century preacher Henry Drummond entitled a famous sermon on the theme of love, "The Greatest Thing in the World." Was he right? Is love the "greatest thing in the world?" Apparently, the Apostle Paul thought so, for in 1 Cor. 13, he writes, "So faith, hope, love abide; these three, but the greatest of these is love." This "great love chapter," as it is sometimes called, is often read as though it were a lovely jewel sparkling in the sunlight. But it gets downright uncomfortable when we raise questions like: "Are my family relations characterized by this kind of love? Do I treat my husband or wife, my children, and my parents with patience and kindness? Or do I sometimes grant myself the privilege of being impatient, angry and rude?"

TEACHING PROCEDURES

1. *Comment on 1 Corinthians 13:1-3:* "If love isn't the underlying motivation in a Christian's life, nothing else means much, from a spiritual perspective. Paul makes the point like this" (read vv. 1-3).
2. To introduce Paul's analysis of the nature of love in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, suggest that love is like a rope composed of many different strands. One does not cultivate the virtue of love by being patient, engaging in acts of kindness, striving not to be jealous, envious or arrogant, etc. Rather, specific acts of love grow out of the cultivation of the attitude that Paul recommended in his letter to the believers in Philippi: "Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves" (Phil. 2:3).

3. Observe that as Paul continues his effort to heal the fractures in the Christian community in Corinth, he *presents a penetrating analysis of the meaning of love in everyday life in 1 Cor. 13: 4-7*: (1) Love is patient and kind (v. 4). John Chrysostom, the great 4th-century preacher, defined patience as "the spirit that could take revenge if it likes, but utterly refuses to do so." This reflects the classic definition of Christian love (*agape*) as "seeking the good of others, even at cost to one's self." And kindness, the companion of patience, is "a fruit of the Spirit" according to Gal. 5:22. (2) Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful (v. 5). The determination of individuals to have their own way is the dynamic that fuels many family quarrels and church fights; and this, in turn, produces the irritability and resentment that makes quarrels turn nasty. (3) Love does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right (v. 6). This means that love does not gloat over the misfortunes of others; it does not take pleasure in saying, "Well, good enough for him; I guess he learned his lesson." (4) Love bears all things (v. 7). That is to say, love endures insults and mistreatment at the hands of others without retaliation. (5) Love believes all things: (v. 7). This means that love always believes the best about other people, rather than automatically assuming the worst. (6) Love hopes all things (v. 7). Countless children today grow up in homes where they are told repeatedly, "You'll never amount to anything," rather than being blessed by the hopefulness of love. (7) Love endures all things (v. 7). Love has staying power. It doesn't melt in the heat of criticism, embarrassment or opposition. For those who are connected with God's love through Jesus Christ, love is a permanent condition of the soul.

4. Suggest that the meaning of 1 Cor. 13:9-13 rests on the simple but profound biblical truth found in 1 John 4:8, "He who does not love does not know God; for God is love." Love never ends because it will last as long as God lasts, forever. This reality has been revealed through prophecy, tongues and knowledge (v. 8). But when we come to know God's love perfectly, we will no longer be dependent upon these means of revelation, for then we will see Him as he is ("For now we see as in a mirror dimly, but then face to face," v. 12). In this lifetime, faith and hope are vitally important means by which God communicates Himself. But when we see Him, the very essence of love, face to face, these will no longer be needed (v. 13).

CLOSING THE LESSON

Closing remarks: Agape doesn't always take the form of great deeds and dramatic sacrifices. Sometimes the gift of love is an hour of time given to an elderly shut-in; sometimes it means giving up the privilege of nursing a grudge or championing a cherished opinion. But, always, it means being aware that Christ demonstrated the meaning of love when He gave himself on the cross, so that we might have the spiritual power to walk in what Paul calls "the more excellent way" (1 Cor. 12:31).

Lucien Coleman P.O. Box 2951 Weatherford TX 76086 682-262-1312