

## Abide Groups Notes on 1 Cor. 13:1-3

### Background

Paul wrote 1 & 2 Corinthians to the church at Corinth, a Roman colony located on a land bridge between two oceans - two elements that gave the city great economic standing in the Roman world. Ships from all over the world docked in Corinth, and it became extremely prosperous from sea trade, especially from the trade of its world-famous Corinthian brass.

Because it was a seaport, Corinth was a cultural melting pot of nationalities. And the church at Corinth was a true reflection of its city, comprised of both Jews & Gentiles, rich and poor.

But the city's reputation also included a dark side. Its residents were known for their ostentatious display of riches and loose morals. High above Corinth, a temple of Aphrodite was carved into the rock. It boasted over 1,000 temple prostitutes which made it a popular destination in the Roman world.<sup>1</sup>

### Purpose

Sadly, the sin of its community found its way into the church at Corinth. Paul received disturbing reports about terrible disorder in the church (doctrinal and moral) and wrote 1 Corinthians to address the issues.

In his letter, Paul addresses the following problems:

- Incest, adultery, and other sexual sins (1 Cor. 5)
- Christians taking each other to court (1 Cor. 6)
- Abuse of Christian liberty (1 Cor. 8 and 10)
- Disorderly observance of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:17-34)
- Disorderly conduct in the worship service (1 Cor. 14)
- False views of the resurrection (1 Cor. 15).<sup>2</sup>

As a modern church, we need 1 Corinthians now more than ever. Scholar Harold Mare calls the letter a true "source book of answers to church problems in the past and today."<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Mare, W. Harold, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 10 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 175.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

## Talking Points on 1 Cor. 13:1-3

- 1 Corinthians isn't about romantic love.
- Paul wrote 1 Corinthians to a church entrenched in sin. He was calling them back to agape love.
- Look up 1 John 4:9 and John 15:10. What do these verses say about God, us, and how we are to relate Him and to each other?
- Chapter 13 falls in a section of the letter dealing with orderly worship in the church (1 Cor. 11:2-14:40) – particularly how the church had misused their spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:31b-13:13).
- **THE PROBLEM: Some in the church were using their gifts for personal gain** instead of building up the entire body (1 Cor. 12:12-31). They had left out a crucial element in their service – love – and were causing dissension.
- **THE ANSWER: It doesn't matter what spiritual gift you possess, but the way you use it.** Is our service characterized, motivated, and performed in love? The heart of service is just as important as the actual act of service. Why? Because if love does not inform our actions, then we become nothing but a "sounding gong." (vs. 1)
- Paul notes different types of people we often make a big deal of in the church:
  - people who are **gifted communicators** (vs. 1),
  - people **who appear to have a lot of knowledge** or spiritual authority (vs. 2),
  - people **who appear super-spiritual** (vs. 2),
  - people who **do good deeds** or **deny their own needs** (vs. 3).
- Good deeds aren't enough. Many good deeds accomplished without agape love.
- **God's LOVE is key.** Good deeds and spiritual activity only account for something in God's eyes when they are performed in light of and through His love.
- **His love is the motivator. His love is the equipper. His love is the generator. His love is the reward.**

**1 Cor. 13:1-3**

**Discussion Questions:**

1. When do you need the biggest reminder of God's love? When you're at home with your family? When you're serving at church? When you're laboring in your community?
2. In your life, when are you the most likely to leave love out and depend on yourself? What is the result? (Share a story if applicable).
3. What does God's love look like in your life right now?
4. Assess the different areas of your service to God. Think about where you spend your time and energies. How are you depending on God's love to fulfill your responsibilities? Are you leaving God's love out in any area?
5. How do you remind yourself to replace God's love as your heart's primary motivator?