

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

1 CORINTHIANS LESSON 7 (Chapters 13-14)

Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Ben Bailey.

“But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way” (1 Cor. 12:31). Welcome to our study of 1 Corinthians 13 and 14 as we look at God’s teaching about miracles. We live in a day and age when there is mass confusion about miracles. So many people have put emotional appeal and the idea of miracles above all other doctrinal teachings. Paul begins his discussion on miracles by showing that there is a more excellent way. Rather than desiring miracles, we as Christians ought to try to obtain real, God-like love in our lives. Notice that in 1 Corinthians 13:21 Paul refers to “a more excellent way.” In 1 Corinthians 13 we learn that that way is love, which is the greatest gift of all. Think about what God gave as a result of His love. “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son” (Jn. 3:16). To show our respect for God’s love, we also ought to have real love for Him. Jesus said, “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (Jn. 14:15). The Bible teaches that love is the bond that holds Christians together. “Let brotherly love continue,” we are told in Hebrews 13:1. Jesus taught in John 13:34-35 that the whole world will know that we are Christ’s disciples by the love that we have for one another. On one occasion when a lawyer came to Jesus, he asked the Lord a question: “Good Teacher, what is the greatest of all commandments?” Jesus responded in Mark 12:30 by saying, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. This is the first commandment.” True love is what we ought to be actively pursuing, rather than miraculous knowledge or things of that nature.

What is true love? First let’s note what true love is **not**. It is not just having certain talents or abilities. That is not what love is. In fact, in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 Paul shows us that even if we possess certain gifts, yet do not have love, those gifts are worthless. For example, in 1 Corinthians 13:1 Paul says that have eloquence of speech without love is worthless. He said, “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.” Paul’s point was that if he could speak with the tongues of angels, and give the greatest sermon anyone ever heard, yet love was not the motivating factor, it would be like banging two pieces of metal together. It would be worthless. We must have love as the motivation for everything we do. In Ephesians 4:15 Paul said that we must “speak the truth in love.” In 1 Corinthians 13:2 Paul says that having miracles without love is also worthless. “And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.” If a person could prophesy, if he had miraculous gifts of healing, and if he had miraculous knowledge, but he did not have love, that would be worthless. Love, at its very core, is being obedient to God. In 1 Corinthians 13:3 Paul said, “And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.” Here we learn that self-sacrifice without love is worthless. Suppose you gave everything you owned to the poor, but you did not love God. That would be worthless. Suppose you even died for Christ, but you did not have real love in your heart. All of that would be worthless. Regardless of whether

we are eloquent, or whether we possess miraculous powers, or whether we have an ability to give all that we have for God, if we do not have love, none of that amounts to anything.

Someone might ask, "What is real love?" Paul identifies love in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 when he says,

"Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

Love is not about its own interests; it is about the interests of others. Love does not get angry quickly. It does not rejoice in evil. Rather, love rejoices in the truth. It "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things." That is what real love is. It is not a "better-felt-than-told" type of idea. Real love is based on our actions and how we serve God.

In the midst of this section about love, Paul shows us that the Scriptures clearly teach that all miracles ended in the first century. That might come across as somewhat strange because there are so many people today who think that we are still living in the age of the miraculous. Some think that there are people today who, just like those in the first century, can perform miracles. Please understand that when we say that "there are no Bible miracles occurring today," we are not saying that God is dead. God is alive and well. He is reigning from Heaven as He always has. He is not dead. He is still alive. We are not saying that prayer is useless. There is power in prayer. We believe that the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man overcomes much. We are not saying that God is no longer working providentially through natural means. We know that God is still working to accomplish His will.

Someone might ask, "Well, then, what are you saying when you say that there no miracles today?" What is a Bible miracle? In John 11 we see that Jesus' friend Lazarus had died. Jesus goes to where Lazarus was buried, and proclaimed, "Lazarus, come forth!" Then, a dead man (who had been dead long enough that he had begun to stink) arose and was alive again. That is a Bible miracle. A man had been dead for many days, and everyone knew it. Even Christ's critics could not deny it. But that dead man arose. Or, consider the lame man in Acts 3 who sat at the Beautiful Gate. He had been there all of his life. Everyone knew him and saw him. He asked Peter and John for alms, and Peter said, "Silver and gold we do not have, but what we do have, we give you. In the name of Jesus, arise and walk." That was such a powerful miracle that even the critics said in Acts 4 and 5 that a notable miracle had been done. They could not deny it. A real Bible miracle is something that is visible to all, and is something that even critics cannot deny. In John 9 Jesus caused a blind man to see. Everyone knew the blind man. He had been blind from birth. Jesus said the words, and the blind man saw again.

Here is how these things are different from the "miracles" we see today. Often when people today refer to a miracle of healing, it is something that happens over a long period of time and people do not feel better right away. That is not a Bible miracle. A Bible miracle was immediate. Jesus spoke the word, and Jairus' daughter got well (Mark 5 and 6). A Bible miracle was undeniable. Even the critics were forced to admit that a miracle had occurred, and they were unable to deny it. True miracles in the Bible were not for physical gratification. They were not just to make people feel better. In 2 Timothy 4:20 Paul said, "Trophimus I have left sick in Miletus." Did Paul have the power to work miracles? Absolutely! The Bible says that Paul worked unusual miracles. If Paul had the power to work miracles, why

would he leave Trophimus sick in Miletus? It was because if he had performed a miracle, it would not have promoted the **purpose** of biblical miracles. Why were miracles performed in the Bible? What was the purpose of a miracle? Was it merely to cause someone to get well? Was it to make someone feel better? Not at all! In Mark 16:20 we see the purpose of miracles. "And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs." God gave them the ability to do miracles so that people would know that they represented God. When someone performed a miracle (such as healing a lame man), what was that supposed to point to? It was saying, "This person is a spokesman from God!" Miracles in the Bible were intended to confirm the spoken word.

How do we know that miracles do not exist today? The text of 1 Corinthians 13:8-10 teaches us that all miracles have ended.

"Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away."

The Bible clearly teaches, then, that a time would come when prophecy, tongue speaking, and miraculous knowledge would cease. When was that time? In verses 9 and 10 we are told that it will be "when that which is perfect has come." Jesus had already come and died by the time Paul wrote those words. The promise is that Christ will one day come again, but Paul does not say here, "come again." He says, "...when that which is perfect has come...." What is "that which is perfect"? The word "perfect" means "complete." We see that same Greek word (*teleos*) used in James 1:25 to describe the Scriptures. We have "the perfect law of liberty." If the purpose of miracles was to confirm the Word, and if God's Word is spoken of toward the end of the New Testament as being complete, then we can know that when God's full and complete will (the New Testament) was given to mankind, miracles were no longer needed. We now can confirm the Word by checking it according to Scripture.

Here is another way that we can know that miracles no longer are available. In Acts 8:18 we learn that Simon "saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given." If miracles were given by the laying on of the apostles' hands, then what happened to that ability when the last apostle died? We can clearly see that by the end of the first century, when the last apostle died, the ability to pass on miracles died with him. We are not living in the age of the miraculous today. People are not raising the dead. People are not healing the lame in an undeniable fashion. Yes, there are false claims and hoaxsters. Most of them will say, "Now that we have performed this miracle, won't you send us a love offering?" But you will never see such a thing in the Bible. When people performed miracles, they never asked for money. In fact, the one time that someone tried to offer money to buy the gifts of the Holy Spirit, that man was told that he was going to go to Hell for doing such a thing (Acts 8:20-22). Miracles have ceased. We no longer live in the age of the miraculous. Rather, we live in the age when love ought to be exalted above all else.

In chapter 14 Paul deals with the idea of tongue speaking and how prophesying or preaching the Word of God ought to be desired over tongue speaking. In 1 Corinthians 14:1 Paul wrote, "Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy." The word "prophesy" means "to utter forth." It is the idea of proclaiming a message from God. Today we preach, which is similar to prophesying (in the sense that it tells God's message). That ought to be valued over tongue speaking. Why? Romans 1:16 says that it is the Gospel that is God's power to save. Hebrews 4:12 teaches us that the Word of God is living and powerful. Jesus said that Heaven and Earth will pass away, but that His words

will never pass away (Mt. 24:34-36). It is the Word of God that causes us to be born again, and it is the Word that we receive with meekness, and by which we are saved. Tongue speaking cannot save anyone. It is not for building up in knowledge, but is instead for self-education (in the context of 1 Corinthians 14).

There is so much confusion over what tongue speaking really was in the New Testament. Here is how tongue speaking is viewed today. Someone supposedly receives a miraculous gift from God that causes him to begin speaking in gibberish—what is referred to as “Holy Spirit language” (which only that person and God can understand). The problem with that is that in every case in the Bible, tongue speaking was actually speaking in a known language that people somewhere knew, yet that the speaker had never studied. How do we know that to be the case? Look at 1 Corinthians 14:10-11, where it actually points out that tongue speaking is actually speaking a language.

“There are, it may be, so many kinds of languages in the world, and none of them is without significance. Therefore, if I do not know the meaning of the language, I shall be a foreigner to him who speaks, and he who speaks will be a foreigner to me.”

Paul is talking about how tongue speaking is a language—a language that someone somewhere knows. If you are speaking in an unknown language in the assembly, and no one knows that, what good will that do? Paul teaches us that in the context where tongue speaking was occurring, there always had to be an interpreter. This is another distinction we can see between what happened in the New Testament and what so many hoaxsters are doing today. Oftentimes you will watch and you will see that a person is supposedly speaking in tongue, but no one has a clue what the person is saying. That is contradictory to Bible teaching. The Bible says that there always has to be an interpreter. In 1 Corinthians 14:27-28 we are told, “If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret. But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God.” It is clear from this that if someone had the ability to speak in tongues, but no interpreter was present, the person doing the speaking was forbidden to speak because he could control himself. Yet so many times today people act like they cannot control themselves, and act like they simply “have” to speak out—regardless of whether or not an interpreter is present. We must not do something that is contradictory to the Bible.

Here is another important principle. Oftentimes when you watch supposed miracle workers on television, some of them will act as if they are being controlled by the Holy Spirit, or that they are having an “out-of-body” experience that they cannot control because it simply happens to them. It appears as if something has simply taken over their bodies. But that is not what happened in the first century. You can know today that such things are a trick or a hoax because in the first century, even when people received legitimate gifts from the Holy Spirit, they had the ability to control those gifts. How do we know that? In 1 Corinthians 14:32 we read: “The spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.” When someone received information in a miraculous manner, that person could control himself. If someone else was already speaking, then he was not supposed to get up and begin speaking. He was not to create confusion. Rather, everything was to be done decently and in order (vs. 40). The idea that a person enters into some kind of “Holy Spirit trance” that causes the person to lose control of himself is not found in the New Testament. That is someone trying to trick us or get us on an emotional high. But that is not what we read about in the Bible. “The spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.” What does that mean? It means that when a person received a revelation from God through the Holy Spirit in a miraculous fashion, that person could control himself. We need to know that God is not the Author of confusion. He is not out trying to confuse people today by suggesting that we

should have to compare what we see today with what we saw in the first century. We must go to the Bible and realize that God is not trying to confuse people. The devil is. And many people today who promote the use of miracles are confusing people. But notice 1 Corinthians 14:33—"God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints." From the beginning, God has clearly taught us what He wants us to know about the miraculous, how He wants us to live our lives, and what we need to do to be pleasing to Him.

Mixed in with tongue speaking, prophesying, and doing things decently and in order, we find a very important teaching about the role of women. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, "Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church." Suppose that a woman was in the assembly and she received a revelation from God. Was she to stand up in the middle of the assembly and reveal that information? No, not at all. In fact, the Bible says that she is to keep silent. And if she wants to learn something in the assembly (perhaps regarding something that was said, but that she does not understand), she should go home and ask her husband. She should not raise her hand in the middle of the sermon and say, "I don't quite understand that." We must do things "decently and in order." Furthermore, in accordance with 1 Timothy 2:11-12, a woman is not to teach or be in authority over a man, but must remain in silence. Someone might say, "All of these are good ideas and good teachings. They are things we need to know, but are these the words of God that are binding on us today?" In 1 Corinthians 14:37 Paul wrote, "If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord." The material is not "just good advice." It is not Paul's opinion. The words that we find in the Bible today were God's commandments for people back then, and they are just as much God's commandments for us today. Paul was an inspired man of God, and when we see people doing things that are in direct conflict with what Paul said about miracles, then we can know (since Paul was inspired) that those people are teaching error and are not holding to God's doctrine. Thus, they are leading people astray.

To clear up all of this confusion, what should we do? We should go to the Bible and see what God has said on the matter. We must not permit ourselves to be led by emotions. "There is a way that seems right to a man, but the end thereof is the way of death" (Prov. 16:15). We must not "just do what our family has always done," no matter how good that might make us feel. Rather, we must do what the Bible says so that we can do "all things decently and in order" (vs. 40).

When you watch supposed miracles workers who put on a big show and cause people to fall down on the stage so that everyone is in a frenzy while the camera pans the audience as people are flopping around, does that look like something that is "decently and in order"? I think that all of us would say that it is not, but instead looks like chaos and confusion. God is not the Author of confusion (vs. 33). And, we are commanded to do all things "decently and in order." If someone had a miraculous gift in a church assembly in the first century, they waited their turn. They did things decently and in order so that they did not engender confusion. And they held to a proper, structured order that was edifying for everyone (1 Cor. 12:7). It would have been vastly differently that what we see today.

Remember, however, that in the midst of Paul's teaching on miracles, the point is that there is "a better way"—the way of love. Rather than focusing on miracles, we need to be focusing on the love of God and what it means for our lives. Pursuing God's love will get us a lot farther than pursuing miracles. If we love God and understand His love ("God so

loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son," Jn. 3:16), if we understand that while we were without strength, Christ died for the ungodly, and if we understand that when Jesus was nailed to the cross to bear our sins in His body, that was real love, then that will motivate us to motivate our lives on serving God.

Today, we need to be dedicated to pursuing a life that is lived every day for Jesus Christ. Paul said in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." Paul said that we are to be "living sacrifices" for Jesus (Rom. 12:1). Rather than trying to grab ahold of some sort of emotional frenzy related to miracles, we need to seek the love of God, and then respond to it in love by keeping God's commandments (Jn. 14:15) and by giving our entire life to Him.

Maybe you have never accepted God's love in your life. Maybe you have never become a child of God. What does the New Testament teach that a person has to do to become a Christian? This is a subject on which the Bible is so clear. First a person must be willing to recognize that the Bible is God's final authority. A person must hear the Word of God. Romans 10:17 says, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Once a person realizes that the Bible is God's final authority, and has understood what the Bible is teaching, then that person must be willing to believe in Jesus. In Acts 8 we see Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch traveling down the road. The chariot comes to some water, and the eunuch says, "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?" (Acts 8:36). Philip responded by saying, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." A person must believe with all his heart that Jesus is the Son of God, is the Savior, and is the only way to be saved. Having believed in Jesus, a person then must be willing to change his life. In Acts 3:19 Peter said, "Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." Repentance is a changed will that leads to a changed way. It is a 180-degree turn in a person's life from sin to God. Having repented, a person then must be willing to confess the name of Jesus. Romans 10:10 says, "With the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." Then a person must be baptized in water for the forgiveness of sins. There are so many passages that emphasize this clear point. Jesus said, "Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (Jn. 3:3). Peter said, "Baptism does now also save us" (1 Pet. 3:21). At what point did Saul have his sins washed away? Acts 22:16 says that Saul was told, "Arise, be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." Have you obeyed God's plan of salvation? Or, has someone led you down a trail involving an emotional frenzy about miracles so that you have not focused on anything else? Remember that loving God and serving Him is the greater way. Focus your life and your attentions on how to please God. If you will do that, I can guarantee you that will have the best life you could ever imagine by dedicating yourself to the service of the Lord.

Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

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STUDY QUESTIONS FOR 1 CORINTHIANS LESSON 7 (CHAPTERS 13-14)

1. In 1 Corinthians 12:31 Paul introduces chapter 13 by saying, "I show you a more excellent way." What, according to 1 Corinthians 13, is that "more excellent way"?
2. What two main topics did Paul discuss in 1 Corinthians 13 and 14?
3. What important piece of information is contained in John 3:16 that ties into Paul's discussion in 1 Corinthians 13?
4. How, according to John 14:15, do we show God that we love Him?
5. In 1 Corinthians 13:1, what did Paul say was useless if love was not present in a person's life?
6. In 1 Corinthians 13:2, what did Paul say was useless if love was not present in a person's life?
7. What does Paul discuss in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7?
8. According to Mark 16:20, what was the main purpose of miracles in the first century?
9. In 1 Corinthians 13:8-10 Paul said that something eventually would happen to miraculous gifts? What was that "something"?
10. In 1 Corinthians 13:8-10 Paul said that "when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away." To what does the phrase "that which is perfect" refer?
11. According to James 1:25, what do we now possess?
12. In 1 Corinthians 14 Paul talked about the miraculous gift of being able to speak in tongues. According to 1 Corinthians 14:10-11, what was "tongue speaking"?
13. What does 1 Corinthians 14:27-28 say concerning how the miraculous gift of tongue speaking was to be used?
14. What is the meaning of the statement in 1 Corinthians 14:32, "And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets"?
15. What, according to 1 Corinthians 14:33, was God **not**?
16. What important piece of information is contained in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 regarding women's role in the church?
17. What important piece of information is contained in 1 Corinthians 14:37 that relates to Paul's statements in the New Testament?
18. What does 1 Corinthians 14:40 tell us to do?