

I CORINTHIANS: HANDLING BELIEVERS' PRACTICAL PROBLEMS

XVI. God's Guidance On Spiritual Gifts, 1 Corinthians 12:1-14:40

C. A More Excellent Way Than Spiritual Gifts

(1 Corinthians 13:1-13)

I. Introduction

- A. The people Paul discipled in Corinth lived in a city that was known for its immorality, alcoholism and worldly pursuits (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, "Introduction to the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians: The City of Corinth," p. 1619), so the formidable influence of the city's culture on the Corinthian believers left Paul addressing "(a)berrant beliefs and practices of an astonishing variety" in his letters to them, Ibid.
- B. However, in a vision Paul received from God as he ministered at Corinth in Acts 18:10b NIV, God told him, "I have many people in this city," so Paul was to keep on ministering regardless of the trials he faced there.
- C. In 1 Corinthians 13:1-13, Paul digressed from his discussion on spiritual gifts to reveal a more excellent way of ministry than focusing on spiritual gifts. We view the passage for our insight and application:

II. A More Excellent Way Than Spiritual Gifts, 1 Corinthians 13:1-13.

- A. After discussing the purpose and role of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:12-31a, at verse 31b, Paul announced that he was about to make known to his readers "a far better" (*hyperbole*, Arndt & Gingrich, A Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T., 1967, p. 848) way of functioning than focusing on the use of one's spiritual gift.
- B. Paul explained that "far better way," a life of godly love, in 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 (as follows):
 - 1. Any ministry with the greatest expression of spiritual gifting without godly love (*agape*, U. B. S. Grk. N. T., 1966, p. 607) that "expresses unselfish esteem of the object loved" (Ibid., Ryrie, fn. to 1 Corinthians 13:1) leaves that ministry spiritually empty and worthless, 1 Corinthians 13:1-3:
 - a. If one were to speak with the spiritual gift of human or even of angelic languages but not have godly love, though he might offer a momentary impression such as the clash of a gong or a cymbal, that impression would vanish just as quickly as such sounds do with no lasting effect, 1 Cor. 13:1; B. K. C., N. T., p. 535.
 - b. If one were to have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and knowledge and were he to have the gift of faith so as to remove mountains, but not have godly love, he would be nothing, 1 Cor. 13:2.
 - c. Were one to bestow all of his possessions to feed the poor and deliver up his body to be burned as a martyr for Christ, but not have godly love, he would gain nothing by way of lasting reward, 1 Corinthians 13:3.
 - 2. Paul then described the qualities of godly love in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 NIV; Ibid., p. 535-536:
 - a. Godly love is "patient" (NIV), better, it does not retaliate if wronged (*makrothumia*, v. 4a; Ibid., p. 535).
 - b. Godly love is kind, 1 Corinthians 13:4b NIV.
 - c. Godly love does not envy, 1 Corinthians 13:4c NIV.
 - d. Godly love does not boast, 1 Corinthians 13:4d NIV.
 - e. Godly love is not proud, 1 Corinthians 13:4e NIV.
 - f. Godly love is not rude, 1 Corinthians 13:5a NIV.
 - g. Godly love is not self-seeking, 1 Corinthians 13:5b NIV.
 - h. Godly love is not easily angered, 1 Corinthians 13:5c NIV.
 - i. Godly love keeps no record of wrongs, 1 Corinthians 13:5d NIV.
 - j. Godly love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth, 1 Corinthians 13:6 NIV.
 - k. Godly love always protects, 1 Corinthians 13:7a NIV.
 - l. Godly love always trusts, 1 Corinthians 13:7b NIV.
 - m. Godly love always hopes, 1 Corinthians 13:7c NIV.
 - n. Godly love always perseveres, 1 Corinthians 13:7d NIV.
 - 3. Paul then clarified the permanence of godly love in 1 Corinthians 13:8-13:
 - a. Godly love is eternal where the spiritual gifts will all cease in the eternal state when we believers experience the full spiritual blessings of the Lord, 1 Corinthians 13:8-12.
 - b. Prior to our glorification at the rapture, we believers experience faith, hope and godly love, -- faith since we do not yet see God, and hope since we still long for the glorified state to come (v. 13a), but godly love that we have now will be with us forever, so godly love is the greatest of these virtues (v. 13b).

Lesson: *Excelling in godly love surpasses the use of our spiritual gifts and even faith and hope in our ministries.*

Application: *While we use our spiritual gifts in faith and hope in ministry, may we make godly love our key focus.*