

1 CORINTHIANS: MOVING FROM THE CARNAL TO THE SPIRITUAL STATE

Part XXX: Striving For The Most Exalted Ministry Of Love

(1 Corinthians 12:31b-13:13)

I. Introduction

- A. The Holy Spirit distributes spiritual gifts to believers as He wills so that every believer has no choice but to accept and to use the gift God assigns him, be it a more honored or a less honored gift. (1 Cor. 12:11, 28)
- B. However, there is a more excellent way of ministry than focusing on one's spiritual gift for ministry, a way that is open to every believer as clarified in 1 Corinthians 13:1-13, and we view it for insight and edification:

II. Striving For The Most Exalted Ministry of Love, 1 Corinthians 12:31b-13:13 NIV.

- A. Having handled the subject of spiritual gifts in general in 1 Corinthians 12:1-31a, at 1 Corinthians 12:31b, Paul informed his readers that there was "the most excellent way" of ministry that was greater than such gifts.
- B. In 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, Paul identified that excellent way as the path of godly Christian **love**:
 - 1. If one were to speak with the gift of human tongues or even -- were it possible -- that of angels, but to so without love, he would be a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal that achieves nothing, 1 Cor. 13:1.
 - 2. If one had the gift of prophecy to know all mysteries and all knowledge, and if he had a faith so great that it could move mountains, but he lacked love, he would be nothing in God's estimation, 1 Corinthians 13:2.
 - 3. Paul added that were he to give all of his possessions to the poor and donate even his body to boast of his gift in donating even the body, but that without love, he would be nothing in God's eyes, 1 Cor. 13:3:
 - a. The older and higher quality Greek New Testament manuscripts read *hina kauchesomai*, "that I may glory," while many lesser-quality ones read, *hina kauthesomai*, "that I should be burned," the reading many English translations have (Bruce M. Metzger, A Text. Com. on the Grk. N. T., 1971, p. 563).
 - b. In addition, the "that I should be burned" reading contains a future subjunctive verb in the Greek, a "grammatical monstrosity that cannot be attributed to Paul," Ibid., p. 563-564.
 - c. Also, the "that I may glory" reading mentions boasting in a positive sense, what Paul does elsewhere in this same epistle at 1 Corinthians 9:15, contextually arguing for our favoring this reading. (Ibid., p. 564)
 - d. Thus, in all clear conscience, I must go with the "that I may glory" reading for 1 Corinthians 13:3.
- C. Then, in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, Paul defined what this ministry of love entails in the local church (as follows):
 - 1. Negatively, love is not envious, not boastful, not proud, not rude, not self-seeking, not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs done against one's self and it does not rejoice in evil, 1 Cor. 13:4b-6a.
 - 2. Positively, love is patient and kind; it rejoices in the truth, it always protects, it always trusts one's credibility until proven otherwise, it always hopes for the best and it always perseveres, 1 Cor. 13:4a, 6b-7.
- D. This ministry of love is so great that it will last eternally though all the spiritual gifts will have vanished for their lapse of usefulness in eternity, 1 Corinthians 13:8-12:
 - 1. Paul claimed that love never fails, "it will never come to an end," 1 Cor. 13:8a; B. K. C., N. T., p. 536.
 - 2. However, the opposite is true of spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 13:8b), for gifts like prophecies, speaking in tongues and knowledge will fail, cease and vanish away when the perfect state of eternity is come, for the spiritual gifts are given to minister to people in the imperfect state for their edification. However, when the perfect state arrives, there will be no more need for such spiritual gifts, 1 Corinthians 13:9-10.
 - 3. Paul explained this truth further with several illustrations, 1 Corinthians 13:11-12:
 - a. When he was a child, Paul wrote that he spoke, understood and thought like a child, but when he became a mature man, he put away such childish things, 1 Corinthians 13:11.
 - b. Similarly, he noted that we now see through a reflective glass dimly, but in eternity it will be face to face. We now know in part, but then shall we know even as we are also known, 1 Corinthians 13:12.
- E. In fact, though we Christians experience faith in the unseen God and hope for His coming deliverance from this present world, we also have love, and love will last forever where faith and hope will terminate when our faith and hope are fulfilled in being in God's visible presence, 1 Corinthians 13:13.

Lesson: *Far surpassing the ministry of spiritual gifts that God has given for the edification of believers in the imperfect state is the ministry of love that not only makes the ministry of spiritual gifts of worth to anyone, but that follows us into the perfect state when all spiritual gifts have vanished. Any believer by relying on the Holy Spirit can achieve this ministry of love, so we ought to be motivated to make it our chief focus in ministry.*

Application: *May we minister in love while using our spiritual gifts that we might be truly effective in God's eyes.*