

items prophecy, knowledge, faith. The first concerns special revelation and the second is the proper use of that revelation. The third relates to one's action on the strength of the truth (cf. 12:9). All of these gifts are related to the mysteries of God. The three-fold use of the adjective "all" supposes each gift to be possessed in ideal perfection.

The abrupt "I am nothing" is a contrast with the long development given the preceding propositions. If there is no breath of divine love, there is only seeming and no being!

- c. Material. v. 3. The verb "bestow" means to "break down into pieces to give away." The aorist points to a summary gift. It is linked with "helps" (12:20). From the idea of acts involving material aid, Paul moves to the deliberate idea of martyrdom. The purpose clause "to be burned" is forceful. A burning human body set aflame by self is of no account without the fruit of the Spirit!

Paul has expressed this whole concept in terms of himself ("I") so as to avoid any thought of censure. He was a master, under the Spirit, in human relations. Note the rising tide in these phrases: sound nothing (v. 1), am nothing (v. 2), and finally, gain nothing (v. 3).

Conclusion. To be saved and filled with the Spirit is of more necessary value than any amount of professed possession of gifts. It is high time we put the emphasis where God does - salvation and inward rightness with God. Don't worry about gifts for they are sovereignly provided (12:11), but make certain your salvation is real and your relation with the Spirit is right. Amen.

THE BOOK OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

"Unique Love"

1 Cor. 13:1-7

Introduction

1. The presence of this chapter in the Bible is not an accident. There is meaning and significance for it in the major argument of Paul begun in the last chapter (12). To get the full swing of his answer concerning "spiritual gifts" this subject of love must be included.

2. The cogent urging of Paul to seek the best gifts (12:31) is followed by an equally important phrase that there is even a better way than the best gifts. Amidst all of the charismatic mish-mash of today, it would be well to remind all that love rising out of a saved heart through the power of the Spirit supercedes even the best of gifts!

3. The manner in which Paul develops this idea of love's centrality in this whole discussion is exciting. Get your cup full of these good things by studying the following ways:

1. THE CHARACTERIZATION OF LOVE.

The point to be made at this juncture is that there is an extended list of qualities concerning love which are positively presented. Check out the following items:

- a. Love is long suffering. v. 4. This comes from two Greek words "long" and "passion" (cf. James 5:7f). One's tendency to passionate outbursts are restricted by love. Here is victory over resentment. It conveys the idea that a man has a long waiting time during which he refuses to give way to his passion. This "long-temperedness" is a characteristic of God (Rom. 2:4f).
- b. Love is kind. v. 4. This is a hapax legomenon. Some have actually considered the word as of Paul's own making or coinage. The root idea is that of being "useful, gracious, and kind." One who has gentleness in behaviour would be a suitable acknowledgement of the idea portrayed.
- c. Love is rejoicing. v. 6. The verb "rejoice" is prefixed by a preposition meaning "with." Hence, there is a corollary to the action of the verb and it is truth. "Truth" is personified and

considered the opposite of unrighteousness. Love chooses to see truth coming to light and triumphing. When truth triumphs love gets in the act and rejoices right with it! Here is a strong testimony to the fact that love is not a sympathetic weakling oozing with schizophrenic ambivalence. It knows enough to take sides with truth and rejoice therewith. What a contrast this is to the spineless stuff bandied about by the moderns and neo-evangelicals of the day. They don't believe anything and purport to love everybody and everything because that is the Christian ideal. Nonsense!

d. Love is bearing, v. 7. The verb "bear" comes from a Greek root which means to cover, protect, keep secret, or conceal." The throwing of a cover or mantle over things is what love does. It is only used by Paul in the N.T. and often with the sense of "ward off, bear up under, or endure" (cf. 1 Cor. 9:12, 1 Thess. 3:1, 5). If one were to take this quality in isolation, there might be the tendency to feel that love is accepting everything dumped off on humanity. It must obviously be considered in conjunction with the totality of love's qualities and in this context it means that love has readiness to accept reality and acknowledge the existence of that which is inconsistent with it. There is no sense of condoning evil or acceptance of what is unrighteous.

e. Love is believing, v. 7. This does not mean that love is gullible but it is calculated trust. The idea of confidence in man as seen in the light of what an omnipotent God is able to do for him is the thought. It is an explanation of the previous item, i.e. the forbearance of love in all things.

f. Love is hoping, v. 7. Where faith leaves off, hope enters. Love views things beyond the present realm of possibility. It sees future victory. There is no despair in love for it possesses a bright horizon.

g. Love is enduring, v. 7. This quality of love is the nourishment for hope. The verb literally means to "remain under". Perseverance is at the root of it. A stout hearted soldier knows the essence of patience. Love doesn't wear down under pressure. It holds up!

NOTE: The seven qualities of love listed above are all positive ones. Taken together they score a truth which is hard to miss. Unless love is evident, no amount of charismatic contention is of any avail. Love presumes salvation by the blood of Christ (Rom. 5:5). Love presumes the presence of the Holy Spirit and is indeed a fruit of this same Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22). Hence, Paul states that the fruit of the Spirit is the most important and not the gifts of the Spirit. To be controlled by the Spirit issues in fruit and not gifts! Where then does all this charismatic upheaval arise? One answer must surely be that there is an evidence of immature understanding of the real issues of the case. It is a phenomenon parallel to the experience of the Corinthians. Theirs was an error and the present upsurge is also.

2. THE MANIFESTATION OF LOVE.

With the understanding of what qualities love possesses, it is not difficult to see that love plays an incredible role in the exercise of one's person unto God. Paul focuses on three major arenas of activity for believers. Mark them:

a. Supernatural, v. 1. The last gift provided in the earlier lists (12, 10, 20, 30) is now given priority. This is probably because of the high value given it by the Corinthians.

The mention of tongues of men and angels suggests actual languages. Ecstatic utterances is foreign to this sort of vocabulary. The Scriptural occurrences of angels speaking to men is always in languages understood by men. No special ecstatic phenomenon. Paul, therefore, is saying that there is content and not just gibberish. Hence, should one possess all the powers of terrestrial and celestial language--the tongues of millions of men and angels--and yet be devoid of the fruit of the Spirit, the situation is unthinkable.

The verb "become" is the perfect tense and conveys a settled condition. "Brass" is better taken as "bronze" and speaks of a piece of wrought metal which is struck to produce sound. The "cymbal" is a concave plate used as a musical instrument. The gift without the fruit is like a dead and hollow instrument.

b. Spiritual, v. 2. This heading includes three