

## A More Excellent Way

*"But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way"* (1 Corinthians 12:31).

Paul devotes 1 Corinthians 12 to the identifying of the spiritual gifts. His main purpose is to show the Corinthians, who were evidently arguing over which gift was better, that there is something far more important than the usage of spiritual gifts. Paul illustrates in chapter 13 that love is the more excellent way. We will now examine chapter 13 which is commonly referred to as the "love chapter."

First Paul explains how useless spiritual gifts, and any other good work for that matter, are unless they are done with love. Vss. 1-2 says, *"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. 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."* Paul mentions four of the nine spiritual gifts. First he mentions tongue speaking. Tongue speaking is just like sounding brass or a clanging cymbal; in other words, all it becomes is a noise if it is done without love. Then he mentions the gift of prophecy, the gift of knowledge, and the gift of faith. This faith, like all the other gift was a miraculous faith, and was given so that one could believe without a doubt that he could perform a miracle. In this case it is faith in moving a mountain. But even if this is the case and one is able to have this kind of faith, prophesy, and have all knowledge, if he has no love it is profitless. Paul then switches from spiritual gifts to regular good works. He says in vs. 3, *"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."* Both good works mentioned are great sacrifices especially the last one. The worst way to die would definitely be by burning to death. But even if one died this way, if it was not done with love, it profits one nothing. This shows us that God cannot be pleased with any action if it is not done with love.

Next, Paul expresses the qualities of love. Vss. 4-7 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."* As we observe this we find that love simply is not selfish. It is patient. It seeks the better of others and is willing to endure whatever it takes to do this. It is true and always will be, standing for the truth even in the worst of times.

This shows us that no matter how much false teachers appear to have love, they are to be avoided because love speaks the truth and not false doctrine. Paul says in Ephesians 4:13-15, *"till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head -- Christ."*

Finally, Paul explains the main reason why love is a more excellent way than spiritual gifts. They were to eventually be done away with and replaced by something else. Vss. 8-10 says, *"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 reason why love is greater than spiritual gifts, is that love never fails but spiritual gifts would because they were in part or imperfect. There would be something to come that was perfect. Paul illustrates this with the gift of knowledge. He says we know in part or imperfectly. Therefore the perfect which will come has to be perfect knowledge and there is only one thing that can fit this description: the Bible. The Bible, since it is perfect, can make one complete (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Paul goes on in chapter 13 by making it even clearer that he is referring to the Bible. Vss. 11-12 says, *"When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known."* Paul first uses the idea of the child as one with spiritual gifts. When mankind became as a man or received the completed Holy Scriptures, there would be no need for the gifts. Therefore the gifts would be done away with. He also uses the idea of seeing in a mirror dimly to refer to spiritual gifts. When the Bible was completed, then man could clearly see face to face as he puts it. Paul concludes in vs. 13 and says, *"And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love."* Why is love the greatest? Because out of the three Paul mentions, love is the only one that abides forever. There will be no need for hope because all of our hopes will have been fulfilled. And there will be no need for faith because faith is the evidence of things not seen (Hebrews 11:1), and in eternity, all that is now invisible will be seen. But love will truly abide forever as God bestows eternal life in Heaven on all who chose to obey Him (Hebrews 5:9).

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