

1 Cor. 13:1-7 "The More Excellent Way"

For the Children: Have you ever heard little children pretending to play toy musical instruments. What a noise, often without any actual music! It can also be very unpleasant to listen to! The apostle Paul says that no matter how gifted or talented we are, if we try to use our gifts without showing the love of God, it is like that loud and unpleasant noise! Our love of others comes out of God's love for us. That love changes the way we treat others and use our gifts for their benefit. **Questions:** What is God's love to us like? How does Paul show that love must be behind the use of all gifts? What kind of things happen in the church when people are not using their gifts out of love?

Introduction:

First Point: Love and Gifts

- 1) Argument by "Exaggeration": Sometimes it is legitimate to over-state the case to make a point – by "poetic exaggeration" (hyperbole). The apostle uses the word "all" 4 times in vs. 1-3. He also refers to the "tongues of men and of angels." His point is that even if one has the maximum gifting imaginable, even beyond what is actually experienced by believers, if you haven't got love you have a big problem.
- 2) This Applies to All Gifts: The above point applies to any and all gifts. The apostle mentions the following: speaking in tongues; prophecy; knowledge of all mysteries; faith to remove mountains; generosity to give all possessions to the poor; and willingness for martyrdom. This is a sample of both extraordinary gifts, Word-gifts and practical gifts.
- 3) Three Problems: The one who appears to have all these gifts to the maximum, but lacks love, has 3 problems. First, they are a "noisy gong or clanging cymbal" – a great deal of noise and spectacle, but spiritually empty, meaningless and unedifying. Second, the *person* who so badly wants to be a "somebody" is actually "nothing," a "nobody." Third, that person is *profited* nothing: it brings no spiritual benefit or gracious reward to the gift-user in this life or the next.

Second Point: Love and Relationships

- 1) Why Love Is Described: The apostle describes Biblical love to show what is needed even more than gifts – and what is often lacking in the church, as it was with many in Corinth.
- 2) The "Negative" Characteristics: Love is NOT jealous, not upset when recognition or advantage comes to others. It is not arrogant or boastful. It does not act unbecomingly – rude, thoughtless and ungracious. It does not place the believer ahead of others. It is not easily provoked to bitterness or anger. It does not hang on to a list of grievances. It does not rejoice in unrighteousness.
- 3) The "Positive" Characteristics: Positively, love rejoices with the truth – that which is right and good. It is patient: long-suffering, setting ungodly anger aside. It is kind, mild and good. It covers over insult and injury. It does not jump to bring out the faults of others. It carries the burdens of others, where possible. It believes the best of others and hopes for the best for them. It endures, stands its ground when under fire.
- 4) A Reflection of God's Nature: All of these characteristics are expected of every believer, because they reflect God's character, especially His love for us in Christ. Whatever gifts we have or lack, love is not an option. This is also why this description of love is not about our emotions, as such – the world's idea of love; these are attitudes that result in action, springing from Christ's Person and His work for and in us. The kind of love that we often highlight at Christian marriages should therefore characterize all our relationships within the church. It should also govern our use of our gifts in the church. This is even more important – the more excellent way – than making sure we put Word-gifts first and that we are using them for the benefit of the Body of Christ (ch. 12).

Conclusion:

