

THE GREATER GIFTS IN
I CORINTHIANS 12:31

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BY WILLIAM H. CRUVER

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GRACE

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PREFACE

The preparation of this monograph has resulted in a deep appreciation of this school, the faculty, and its emphasis upon the Bible as the inerrant, verbally inspired Word of God.

The writer wishes to express his gratitude to his faculty advisor, Dr. John Whitecomb, for suggesting I Cor. 12:31 as a possible monograph text. The study of this verse has led the writer to a greater love for the Word of God and a feeling of the importance of its diligent study as a minister of the gospel of Christ.

The writer wishes also to express his appreciation and deep gratitude for his wife's sweet spirit and willingness in typing this monograph. His appreciation for her patience and love during the tense hours of seminary study cannot be expressed in words.

INTRODUCTION

It is the writer's contention that a large portion of the seeming failure in Christendom today is due to a failure in fulfilling the command given by Paul in the text of this monograph, I Cor. 12: 31.

The writer believes that Satan has been very successful in sidetracking Christian leaders by getting them to focus their energies upon two opposite tangents, namely, (1) the great edifying element in the church is love; and (2) Christian leaders must continually denounce the errors seen in other Christian leaders.

Paul saw many things in the church to which he wrote the epistles of I Corinthians which gave reason for heartache. Thus, Paul, under inspired pen, wrote the command to Christians, "desire earnestly the greater gifts and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way." The writer believes that the fulfillment of this command in the individual lives of believers is the basic answer to much of the failure among Christian leaders today.

It is the writer's desire that any who may read the pages of this monograph might be led by the Spirit of God into a deep, solemn realization of the true meaning of this text, not only in relationship to the church at Corinth, but in relationship to personal, every day Christian life.

GREEK TEXT

According to The New Testament in the Original Greek,
edited by Westcott and Hort

Σηλοῦτε τὸ χάρισμα τὰ μέγαρα

There are no textual variations.

ENGLISH VERSIONS

Moffatt's Bible, revised edition 1935

But you aim hard for the choicest graces. And yet, I will show you a course that runs higher.

Revised Standard Version, 1952

But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

American Standard Version, 1901

But desire earnestly the greater gifts. And moreover a more excellent way show I unto you.

Moulton's Modern Reader's Bible, 1895

But desire earnestly the greater gifts. And a still more excellent way shew I unto you.

Amplified New Testament, 1958

But earnestly desire and zealously cultivate the greatest and best -- the higher (gifts) and the choicest (graces). And yet I will show you a still more excellent way -- one that is better by far and the highest of them all, (love).

Weymouth's New Testament, 1902

But always seek to excel in the greater gifts. And now I will point out to you a way of life which transcends all others.

King James Version, 1611

But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a
more excellent way.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

ESSENTIAL BACKGROUND

The city of Corinth was located on the famous Isthmus which connected Northern and Southern Greece. The city of Corinth became a place of great political importance. It had commercial advantages because of its unique location with two ports on the East and West. Traders preferred to cross the narrow neck of land which Pindar called "The bridge of the seas," rather than risking the dangers of doubling Cape Malea.

Because of the city's situation and importance it became the head of the Achaian League. Thus, it bore the brunt of onslaughts from conquerors. It was completely destroyed by the Roman General Mummius in 146 B.C. The city lay in waste for a hundred years. In 46 B.C. Julius Ceasar sent a colony there to rebuild the city. Rapidly the city regained some of its former beauty, all its former wealth, and grew larger more apparently than its original size. Their way of life, though, was also revived. In Paul's day their living was one of luxury and licentiousness. A mixed population developed from the travel of sailors, merchants, refugees, and various other adventurers and foreigners. This type of mixing brought with it numerous foreign customs and moral standards. Immorality was its greatest claim to notoriety. The word corinthianize meant to live an immoral life. Corinthian virgin was their use of naming

a prostitute. Paul speaks of the pagan worship of the Corinthians in writing from Corinth (Romans 1:18-32). The Corinthians were also famous for their great interest in intellectualism. They prided themselves in intellectual things.

There were some elements resultant from the Isthmian and gladiatorial contests which gave cause for concern to Paul. Paul also noticed that the fire of the Roman army had left its devastation through the city.

Paul founded the church of Corinth on his second missionary journey (Acts 18). He began his preaching in the Jewish synagogues. Paul picked the house of Justus, next door to the synagogue as the location for the establishment of the church at Corinth. The chief of the synagogue was saved in that house.

In view of the low moral ebb to which the people of Corinth had sunk, along with their great pride of intellectualism, we may conclude that the church which Paul founded in the city of Corinth faced him with many causes for concern. The reputation which Corinth developed was something that could not be changed over night. The preaching of the gospel and the demands it places on a life of morality and righteous living brought many questions to the hearts and minds of those in the church at Corinth. Paul was confronted with the great task of answering these questions. Paul faced many problems with which he had to deal in this new growing work for the Lord.

Paul, in the early chapters of the first epistle to the Corinthians, has been dealing with some of the problems which existed in this church. In coming to the twelfth chapter, Paul deals with the problem of spiritual gifts. The Corinthian Christians were priding themselves in their accomplishments and gifts, forgetting the fact that all is of God. Paul instructs the Christians at Corinth that there are diversities of gifts, but that there is only one Spirit. The Spirit gives to an individual, not the same ability, but an ability which is profitable to the church.

Paul, in this twelfth chapter, pictures the Church as a body. He thus shows that each member has a particular function which is to be exercised so that the body is normal. Every member does not have the same function. This type of thing would make a monstrosity. Each member, though variable in function and ability, operates for the good health of the whole body.

Paul, in his instruction in this chapter, I believe, is very desirous that the members of the church of Corinth who are members of the body of Christ shall grow spiritually. Thus, Paul gives them a command in verse thirty-one of this twelfth chapter of his first epistle to the Corinthians which, if fulfilled, will bring about in the individual lives great spiritual growth and love for the Lord Jesus Christ. This command given by Paul is as rendered by the A.S.V., "desire earnestly the greater gifts." This command, if fulfilled by Christians today, will have the same effect as it

did in those early days. Paul is giving an exhortation in this verse, which, if heeded, will produce the greatest spiritual growth possible in the life of a Christian.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEMS

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Major Problem: What are the "greater gifts"
in I Cor. 12:31?

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In my evaluations of the various views that have been proposed by different men it is not my purpose to give my thought as to what the "greater gifts" refer. The intent of my discussion of the various views is merely to refute the particular false views under consideration. The support of my view of the "greater gifts" will be found later on in this paper.

Love View

This view sets forth the "greater gifts" as the gift of love. Those that hold this view refer to the fact that the Corinthians were seeking after gifts and were allowing those gifts to puff them up, but they were not seeking after the greatest gift of all, namely, the gift of love. Several commentators support love as the greatest gift. They express it in various ways as follows:

Desire the gifts which edify, the gift of exhortation or, as it was called prophecy. And yet there is a more excellent way to edify the church than even to exercise apostolic gifts: this is the way of love.¹

¹Marcus Dods, An Exposition of the Bible, "The First Epistle to the Corinthians" vol. V (Hartford Conn: The S.S. Scranton Co., 1908), pp. 690, 691.

Grant expresses his viewpoint in these words:

All had not the same gifts. Even in the apostle's days all had not miracles. This is what the apostle recognizes as what is normal, not abnormal. All had not gifts of healing, nor spoke with tongues, nor interpreted. After all, the eyes of men were too apt to be upon that which was prominent, forgetting that which was spiritual and moral, and that which had greater value before God. The apostle, therefore, turns now to speak of this which indeed is the spirit of all ministry, the thing which underlies all these gifts if there is to be anything in them, and which exalts in God's sight many an unknown worker, many a man ungifted, - as men might think, - into a blessed place such as may be far above the greatest of gifts. As the apostle says, greater than all gifts was that of which he was going to speak... The body edifieth itself in love. We come now to this love, which is the practical test of all that is truly edification to God. Love in the spirit of service, as is plain. It is that which prompts not simply to work, but to serve in working. It seeketh not its own, but the things of others; and thus it is that upon which the apostle sets a higher value than upon any gift.²

Butler's discussion of the greater gifts is seen as follows:

Every accomplishment, every intellectual faculty that can adorn and grace human nature, should be cultivated and polished to its highest capability. Yet these are not the things that bring us nearer God. 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.' 'If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.' You may have strong, eagle-eyed faith; well, you will probably be enabled to do great things in life, to work wonders, to trample on impossibilities. You may have sanguine hope; well, your life will pass brightly, not gloomily. But the vision of God as he is, to see the King in his beauty, is vouchsafed not to science nor to talent, but only to purity and love.³

²F.W. Grant, The Numerical Bible, "Acts to II Corinthians" (New York: Loizeaux Brothers, Bible Truth Depot., n. d.), pp. 512, 513.

³Glentworth J. Butler, The Bible Reader's Commentary, vol. II (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1879), p. 323.

Phillips, in his work, The New Testament in Modern English, entitles the first section of Chapter 13 of I Cor., "Christian Love - the highest and best gift."

Also, The Expositor's Bible includes I Cor. 12:31 in its discussion with Chapter 13 and entitles the chapter of discussion which is Chapter 13 as, "No gift like love."⁴

Marcus Dods, in his discussion in The Expositor's Bible, says:

Desire the gifts which edify, the gift of exhortation, or, as it was called, prophecy. And yet there is a more excellent way to edify the Church than even to exercise apostolic gifts; this is the way of love. Love is the ligament which binds together the several members of the body of Christ, The cement which keeps the stones of the temple together. Without love there can be no body, no temple, only isolated stones or disconnected, and, therefore useless, members. The extraordinary gifts of which the Corinthians were so proud cannot compete with love. They may profit the Church, but without love they are no evidence of the ripe Christian manhood of their possessor.⁵

Philip E. Hughes, in his discussion of the problem of being puffed up in the Corinthian church, states:

They had neglected the best and most vital gift of all, the hidden, inward, unspectacular gift of Love, by which all other gifts must be animated and informed, if they are to be of any worth at all.⁶

In evaluating this view of the "greater gifts", referring to love, we shall look at two definitions given by Webster. Webster

⁴Marcus Dods, The Expositor's Bible, "The First Epistle to the Corinthians" (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1900), p. 298.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Philip E. Hughes, The Biblical Expositor edited by Carl F.H. Henry (Philadelphia: A.J. Holman Co., vol. III, nd), p. 274.

defines "love" as: "A feeling of strong personal attachment induced by that which delights or commands admiration, by sympathetic understanding, or by ties of kinship." Webster then defines "gift" as: "Some quality or endowment given to man by God, or a deity; now, a pre-eminent and special talent or aptitude." Webster gives some examples of gifts such as the "gift of wit", and a "gift of faith." But nowhere in his defining of the word gift does Webster refer to love as a gift. Rather in defining the word "love", Webster refers to feeling. Love is a feeling of some type of personal interest.

Paul, in his listings of gifts, mentions gifts of apostles, prophets, teachers, miracles, healings, helps, governments and divers kinds of tongues, but does not list love as a gift. Certainly if love was a gift and was divinely considered to be the greatest of gifts, God would have listed it through the inspired pen of the various Bible writers as a gift. But since it is not a gift, still less the greatest of gifts, it is not referred to as a gift.

Paul does list love in the scriptures, not as a gift, but as a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). A gift is a special endowment or talent to accomplish a particular work. A fruit is the consequence or outgrowth of a relationship. This relationship may be one of union, respect, or interest.

⁷John Short, *The Interpreter's Bible*, vol. II (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, n. d.), p. 205.

⁸Thomas Scott, *The Holy Bible*, vol. VI (Boston: Samuel Armstrong, and Crocker and Brewster, n. d.), pp. 177, 178.

Another point that should be made here is that the word "gifts" is in the plural. Therefore, the "greater gifts" cannot refer merely to one particular gift as the gift of love or any other specific gift in itself.

Individual Gift View

This view contends that the "greater gifts" refer to any talents or abilities which an individual may possess. These talents may be different among different individuals. Any one person may possess one or more of these talents.

John Short expresses his view of the "greater gifts" in these words:

It is as legitimate in Paul's view to desire and to develop a gift for prophecy, or for healing, or for the interpretation of Christian truth and experience as to develop one's gift for music or art or science. One might add that it is a Christian duty to develop any power or capacity with which we have been endowed, if as a consequence the life and witness of the church are enriched.⁷

Thomas Scott states the same idea in other words:

The apostle was about to show them a more excellent way, even that of love; which would influence them to be content with the gifts already conferred, and to be principally zealous in making a useful improvement of them.⁸

In considering the view that the "greater gifts" refer to any gift which the individual might possess we shall look more

⁷John Short, The Interpreter's Bible, vol. X (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, n. d.), p. 165.

⁸Thomas Scott, The Holy Bible, vol. VI (Boston: Samuel T. Armstrong, and Crocker and Brewster, n. d.), pp. 177, 178.

closely at Short's statement of it. Short mentions that "it is as legitimate in Paul's view to desire and to develop a gift for prophecy, or for healing, or for the interpretation of Christian truth and experience as to develop one's gift for music or art or science." It may be just as legitimate but it certainly is not just as important. While science is an important matter of study and discussion in our day, it definitely is not a final, complete authority of fact and truth. The study of science may be thrilling but it is not edifying to the Christian. Science may bring one to understand some of the greatnesses of God in discovering the vast incomprehensible realms of the created universe, but this in itself is not the great source of edification that Paul was referring to in his exhortation to pursue the "greater gifts". This is also true in connection with art or music and all the fine arts. A pursuit of the fine arts and a display of having a knowledge of them may reveal a man that is educated in the arts, but it does not manifest a man that is seeking after the "greater gifts". I concur with the statement of Short that "it is a Christian duty to develop any power or capacity with which we have been endowed, if as a consequence the life and witness of the church are enriched", but the development of an individual capacity is not fulfilling the command to seek after the "greater gifts". It is the responsibility of the Christian to use any talent which God has given him to bring glory to our Saviour. It is also

true that the exercise of that talent should be in support of the most important edifying instrument (the Word of God) both in the individual's use of that instrument and also in support of others' use of it.

In commenting on Scott's words, I believe the Christian should be content with the individual gifts already conferred and should be zealous in improving the gifts which are the great edifying source that Paul refers to by the expression the "greater gifts". The Christian should by no means be content with any gift which he possesses. Rather he should be desirous of the gifts which edify the saints.

Gifts Combined with Love View

This view sets forth the "greater gifts" as those gifts of the individual which may be varied but those which are combined with love. Joseph Exell expresses his idea in support of this view as follows:

All God's blessings are valuable. Amongst all His gifts there is nothing worthless. A breath of air, a drop of water, a beam of light, a crust of bread are incalculably valuable. Circumstances often occur in men's history when they feel their priceless worth. Some of these blessings are more valuable than others; Intellectual than material; Moral than intellectual. Paul says without charity- love- we are nothing. The most valuable of these blessings is a sin. But we are justified in coveting these best things because there is no monopoly of them. Material good is limited. The more one has of it the less remains for others. But spiritual gifts are as free as air, as vast

as immensity, as infinite as God. The more one has of them the more generous He becomes. When a man gets into him this love, it burns up his selfishness and melts him into sympathy with the universe. The more one has of them the more he reflects God, the more light and happiness he pours forth on the creation.

What are some of the Best Gifts?

1. Negatively (1) They are not those which are external to the soul's nature, such as money, power, or reputation. (2) Nor are they all the gifts that touch our inward nature. Intellectual ability, taste, and culture are very precious, and Paul was far from despising them, yet he would be far from describing them as "the best".
2. Positively. He points us to those gifts with which love is connected. (1) In regard to God, reverence, humility, and trustfulness. (2) In regard to man, candid and generous judgment and sympathy. (3) As regards to ourselves, patience, contentment, courage, and fortitude. (4) As to things around, temperance of chastened desire.
3. That we may be convinced of their superiority, let us see how these differ from others. They (1) Enter deepest into our nature. (2) Are most lasting. (3) Are most God-like.⁹

Excell gives a thorough discussion in support of his view of the "greater gifts" as referring to those which are combined with love. Much could be said in refutation of the various aspects of his argument. In order to conserve space and time, my discussion of his view will not deal with every aspect. A gift, because it is connected with love, does not fulfill the requirement that places a gift into the classification of great gifts. A gift is not great if it does not bring edification to the church. Merely because a gift

⁹Joseph S. Exell, The Biblical Illustrator, "I Corinthians" (Fleming H. Revell Co., vol. II, n. d.).

is connected with love does not guarantee its greatness. To illustrate my point, I shall refer to something to which we are all familiar. For example, my ability to talk and convince and influence a girl whom I love very deeply to marry me does not fall into the realm of great gifts simply because love is connected with it. Love in this illustration is the supreme motive, but it does not make the ability a great gift. This ability certainly does not bring edification to the church in this instance, even though the union resulting in marriage may in years to come be a blessing to the church. The blessing would not be a result of the union but a result of the efforts of the members of this union to exercise the "greater gifts."

Internal Graces of the Spirit View

This view presents the "greater gifts" as the internal graces of the Holy Spirit. John Gill says by the "greater gifts" are meant:

The internal graces of the Spirit, as faith, hope, and love, which are all of them gifts of God's graces; all useful and valuable and better than all external extraordinary gifts whatever, which a man might have, and be nothing, be lost and damned; whereas he that believes in Christ, has a good hope through grace, and love in his soul to God, Christ, and his people, though he is destitute of the other gifts, shall certainly be saved; wherefore these are the gifts which men should be solicitous for and covet after and be greatly concerned to know that they have them, and to be content without the other.¹⁰

¹⁰John Gill, An Exposition of the New Testament, vol. 2, (Ireland: Industrial Printing School, n. d.), p. 237.

In his discussion of the first verse of the next chapter of the book of Corinthians, Gill states, "if by the best gifts are designed the above graces of the Spirit.....". He clearly states in exact words this view of the "greater gifts" as being the internal graces of the Spirit.

This view is also stated by the Berkeley Version of the Holy Bible in the following words:

But you aim hard for the choicest graces. And yet, I will show you a course that runs higher.¹¹

Gill mentions in his argument that the internal graces of the Spirit are more important than all "external extraordinary gifts whatever, which a man might have, and be nothing, be lost and damned". Well, I believe that the "greater gifts" which Paul is commanding to seek after are gifts which can not possibly be the possession of the unsaved. A pre-requisite for the possessing of the greater gifts is the New Birth. One cannot exercise the "greater gifts" if he is unsaved because he is not indwelt by the Spirit of God and therefore has no insight into the truths of the Word of God.

Much of what John Gill sets forth in his argument is very true. But I believe Paul is here giving a command to Christians. The "greater gifts" do not refer to something that is internal or within the individual. The internal aspect of the Christian is

¹¹Gerrit Verkuyl (ed.), The Berkeley Version (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1959), p. 184.

very important in respect to his usefulness and service to God. However, it is not the internal aspect of an individual that edifies the church. Edification to the church must come as a direct result of an external effort. One is only edified by a positive, active, external exercising of the "greater gifts".

Once again it is not my purpose here to explain what the "greater gifts" are. It is my purpose simply to refute this view of the internal graces of the Spirit.

Grace Preferred Before Gifts View

This view contends that Graces are more important than Gifts and the Graces are what is meant by the "greater gifts."

Thomas Scott best presents this view:

Grace is therefore to be preferred before gifts; and of gifts, those are to be preferred, which are of greatest use; and true charity is greatly to be preferred to the most glorious gifts. To have the heart glow with mutual love, is vastly better than to glare with the most pompous titles, offices, or powers.¹²

Also, Marcus Dods sets forth this view in the words:

Our test reminds us how much more important for us are the graces of Christian character than the gifts of Christian ability. By a "gift" we understand something which enables us to do; by a "grace" something which enables us to be. A gift is something, as it were, put into hands, that can be used by us; a grace is some change effected in our very natures, which makes us unquestionably better men and women. We observe the distinction more clearly in the similar words,

¹²Thomas Scott, The Comprehensive Commentary on the Holy Bible (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott and Co., n. d.), p. 300.

"talent" and "character". Our text suggests that graces are better than gifts - they are "the more excellent way;" and even gifts are worth very little save as they are united with graces. It is very remarkable that St. Paul should be the one to set graces above gifts; since in personal endowments he surpassed all other apostles. Graces and gifts have a common purpose to effect. Both are for the use of "edifying."¹³

To have the heart glow with mutual love is important. However, a heart filled with love is not sufficient. It takes more than love to edify the saints. An expression of love fountaining from the heart may be a great source of encouragement to others, but it is not the thing which will bring edification to others. Love in the heart is a result of a change brought about by edification. Edification is not a result of a glow of love in the heart. Love and edification have a close relationship to one another, but one is more basic. Edification is more basic than love and more basic than any of the graces in the human heart in the sense that these graces stem from the edification.

Loving Spirit in Others View

This view sets forth the "greater gifts" as those desirable qualities of a loving spirit which other individuals possess.

Joseph Exell expresses this view in the following manner:

Covet if you will, but let it be the gifts of charity and self-denial. Here the word ceases to have any sin in it. If we covet our neighbors' material possessions, we shall desire to dispossess him. If we covet his intellectual gifts, there will be envy. But if we covet his loving spirit, we are yielding to him our deepest affection and reverence.¹⁴

¹³Marcus Dods, The Pulpit Commentary, "I Corinthians" (Edited by Canon Spence and Joseph Exell, n. d.).

¹⁴Joseph S. Exell, The Biblical Illustrator, "I Corinthians" (Fleming H. Revell Co., vol. II, n. d.), p. 209.

In looking at any merit in this view, a great problem arises. Since this is a command to all Christians, how is everyone going to find someone else in which to discover a spirit worthy of coveting. The person who displays a loving spirit which is coveted by others is rare. Should he covet the spirit of those who are coveting his spirit of love? Naturally, the answer is no because this may lead to a growth backward and not forward. Rather, the coveting in this passage has to be one in which all will benefit. The object of that coveting has to be supreme. There must be a supreme standard to which all can go to receive edification.

Edification of Saints View

This view explains the "greater gifts" as those which bring edification to the Saints.

Lange, in his discussion of the "greater gifts" says,

Next follows an exhortation, But though all gifts have their value and are conferred by God, yet some are more valuable than others, - be zealous for - such can only be the meaning of the verb SHADOTS - the better gifts - or according to another reading - "the greater gifts" - By these he means those best suited to the attainment of the object of all gifts (ver. 7).¹⁵

The International Critical Commentary states its view in these words:

The Corinthians coveted the greater gifts, but they had formed a wrong estimate as to which were the greater. The

¹⁵John P. Lange, Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, "Corinthians" (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1868), p. 258.

Hymn of love, which follows, is to guide them to a better decision: not those which make most show, but those which do most good, are the better. As members of one and the same body they must exhibit self - sacrificing love, and they must use their gifts for the benefit of the whole body.¹⁶

Calvin expresses his idea of the "greater gifts" as follows:

Seek after the more excellent gifts. It might also be rendered value highly; and it would not suit ill with the passage, though it makes little difference as to the meaning; for Paul exhorts the Corinthians to esteem and desire those gifts especially, which are most conducive to edification.¹⁷

The Cambridge Bible sets forth the "greatest gifts" as "those which were most calculated to promote the edification of the Church."

This view comes closer to the meaning of the "greater gifts" than the previous views, but does not specifically state what they are. It is true that the "greater gifts" are those which edify the church. This view explains the function of the "greater gifts" but does not answer fully the question, what are the "greater gifts"?

The purpose of the "greater gifts" is to edify the church. The edification view in itself is not sufficient because it doesn't explain what the gifts are which bring the edification. Matthew Pool explains the greater gifts as those which will make you useful and

¹⁶Robertson, Archibald and Plummer, The International Critical Commentary, "A Critical and Exegetical Commentary of the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians", Edited by Charles A. Briggs, Samuel R. Driver, and Alfred Plumer (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916), p. 282.

¹⁷John Calvin, Commentary of the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians, Trans., John Pringle, vol. I (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., reprinted 1948), p. 417.

profitable to the church. Pool also says that gifts are not the best things and that there is some more better way to edify the church than by exercising gifts.

I would have you be covetous to excel in the best gifts, that is those which will make you most useful and profitable to the church of God. "And yet show I unto you a more excellent way;" but yet (saith he) gifts are not the best things, the habits of saving grace are much more valuable than gifts; love to God and your neighbor ought to be by you preferred before gifts.¹⁸

Prophecy and Teaching View

This view explains the "greater gifts" as those of prophecy and teaching.

Charles Erdman states:

Probably Paul is referring to those "greater gifts" of prophecy and teaching of which he is to write later, Ch. 14. He first pauses, however, to speak, in an immortal passage, of the "most excellent way" for the attainment and exercise of all gifts, the way of love, Ch. 13.¹⁹

The Catholic Commentary on The Holy Scriptures in its discussion of this passage says:

'Better': or 'best, greatest.' He puts the gifts of languages last but one in both lists here, and it is clear from 14:5 that the higher gifts were those that 'built up,' i.e. had a greater social value (e.g. prophecy, teaching).²⁰

¹⁸Matthew Pool, Annotations Upon the Holy Bible, vol. III (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, n. d.), p. 585.

¹⁹Charles R. Erdman, The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, n. d.), pp. 114, 115.

²⁰A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scriptures (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, n. d.), p. 1094.

This view is close to the meaning of the "greater gifts" as Paul would have it set forth. But I believe the meaning extends further than just prophecy and teaching in view of the fact that the command is to be carried out by Christians who live in a day when the prophetic gift is inoperative.

Grammatically these two words may be correctly translated in different ways. The verb ζητεῖτε can be understood as being in the present tense. Then, it would render the translation, "you are seeking." However, ζητεῖτε can be also taken as being in the imperative tense.

Such an understanding would render the translation of the verb as "you seek" or "seek you". This rendering of the verb suggests a command.

The correct translation can only be determined by the context. I believe Paul expressed a command in his writing of the verb. In the previous words, Paul asks seven questions. These questions were not questions to which Paul did not know the answer. Also, these questions were not questions to which the answers were not known by the readers of the questions. Rather, the answers to these questions were indicated both by Paul and those to whom Paul directed the questions. The answer to all the questions was obviously negative. Scripture often employs the use of rhetorical questions to emphasize a truth. Paul is emphasizing the fact that not all possess the same gift. This

Minor Problem: In what sense is the seeking
after the "greater gifts" to be accomplished
in I Cor. 12:31?

The various views suggested by different commentators in answer to this problem come under two main divisions. These two divisions arise from the Greek translations of the phrase ζητοῦτε ἐε. Gramatically these two words may be correctly translated in two different ways. The verb ζητοῦτε can be understood as being in the present tense. Thus, it would render the translation, "you are seeking." However, ζητοῦτε can be also taken as being in the imperative tense.

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Then Paul states something that all can possess. He not merely mentions the gift that all may possess, but commands that it be so. It is a little awkward to understand the verb ἔστωτε as being in the present tense. To ask a question which obviously has a negative answer and then to proceed with a positive statement of what is true of the recipients of the question in this context is an awkward rendering. Also, the more excellent way which follows makes a present tense rendering of the verb vague as to the meaning Paul would have us understand.

An imperative understanding of the verb allows a rational flow of words. Also, in light of what the true meaning of the "greater gifts" are, it can be asserted that the Corinthians were not zealous of them, but rather zealous of gifts they knew to be a source of pride. I believe the Corinthians knew nothing or very little of what the seeking involved. In broadening that statement, I believe very few Christians today know the import of the seeking involved here in this passage.

Paul makes not only a suggestion of what Christians ought to do, but gives a command to Christians. The accomplishing of the seeking commanded by Paul constitutes my minor problem.

²¹Henry Charles, *The Larger Epistles of Paul* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1938), p. 24.

²²Thomas Scott, *The Holy Bible*, vol. VI (Boston: Samuel May, Jr., and Crocker and Brewster, n. d.), pp. 177, 178.

Shadows taken as Present Indicative

Present Coveting View

This view explains the seeking as already taking place in present action.

Henry Cowles best expresses this view as:

The verb, "covet," may, as to grammatical form, be either indicative or imperative; - either ye are very covetous of best gifts; or I exhort you to be so - covet ye all best gifts. Our auth. ver. takes the latter alternative; but manifestly the former is right - as shown by the last clause "And yet I show you a way far more excellent."²¹

Thomas Scott sets forth his argument in support of this view in these words:

The Christians at Corinth, indeed, "coveted earnestly," or were emulous of the best gifts, or such as were deemed most splendid and honorable. Our translation, indeed, renders the clause as an exhortation; but it may with equal exactness be translated, "ye do covet earnestly," and so imply a reprehension of the corrupt emulation of the Corinthians; and this certainly coincides far better with the argument of the apostle. For exhorting them to "covet the best gifts," or those that were most valued, which the Holy Spirit distributed as he saw good; would have sanctioned that ambitious temper, which he evidently aimed to repress.²²

Cowles bases his argument of support upon the word, "yet" and the more excellent way which follows. Paul did not say, "I exhort you to covet the best gifts and yet I will show you much better advice than that."

²¹Henry Cowles, The Longer Epistles of Paul (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1888), p. 254.

²²Thomas Scott, The Holy Bible, vol. VI (Boston: Samuel T. Armstrong, and Crocker and Brewster, n. d.), pp. 177, 178.

Naturally, this type of reasoning would show the exhortation idea utterly foolish. The more excellent way has not to do with the seeking, but with the exercise of the greater gifts. Paul is not saying here that you are seeking after the gifts, but he says that he will show you a more excellent way to seek. The more excellent way should be explained in the context of Chapter 13 in connection with the speaking of love.

Arguments can be given against this view in the light of the meaning of the greater gifts and in the light of my introductory remarks to the minor problem.

Interrogation View

This view sets forth the seeking by way of interrogation or a question. John Gill gives this idea as a possible rendering in the following words:

By way of interrogation, "do ye covet earnestly the best gifts?", do you zealously affect them. I have something to observe to you which exceeds them all, and which you would do well to follow after, and eagerly pursue.²³

My comments on evaluating this view are few. The text doesn't support this type of rendering. It gives way to a very free translation.

²³John Gill, An Exposition of the New Testament, vol. II (London: William Hill Collingridge, 1853), p. 237.

The imperative tense gives an easier understanding of the text than the present indicative as has already been demonstrated. There are various views, however, which come under the imperative idea, but are very distinct from each other.

Incorporate Love View

This view says that the seeking is accomplished by putting love within the individual's gifts. Ellicott presents his manner of seeking in the words, "more excellent way".

The "more excellent way" is not some gift to be desired to the exclusion of the other gifts, but a more excellent way of striving for those gifts. You are not to strive for any one gift because it is more highly esteemed, or because it is more apparently useful, or because it is more easily attained. That which will consecrate every struggle for attainment and every gift when attained is love.²⁴

The Sermon Bible expresses the idea in this way:

But if it be true that all these gifts without Christian love are nothing, and that Christian love does not come by nature, but must be sought by culture, and by seeking God's blessing on diligent practice of it; then we have a right to expect that accomplishments and acquirements shall not be accounted the first thing, nor hold the first rank, but shall be subordinated to the formation of this Christian character. Is there not something very wrong in our land and our church in this matter: We are not seeking after, we are not valuing, we are not encouraging, we are not even tolerating, the practice of large-hearted, universal, all-enduring Christian love.

²⁴John Charles Ellicott, Commentary on the Whole Bible, vol. II., "Acts - Galatians" (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, n. d.), p. 337.

Hard thoughts are our common thoughts; better words our current words. Let us dare, knowing what we do, in a bitter and gainsaying generation, to maintain that love is first and midst and last in the Christian's practice.²⁵

Short gives expression of this view also.

It is that none of the other gifts so greatly desired and treasured can be truly effective unless and until they are inspired and illuminated by the spirit of love.²⁶

In refutation of this view of seeking after the "greater gifts", an understanding of the "greater gifts" is important. Paul says the seeking is to be of the "greater gifts" not an extremely good way of desiring the "greater gifts." One may seek to incorporate love into his gifts in order to make them great gifts. This is not, however, what Paul meant. First, the incorporating of love within an individual's gift is not the thing which will make a great gift. Second, the seeking of love, no matter how strenuous and fervent the seeking becomes, will not guarantee the object of the seeking. One may seek love all his life and never obtain it. A person may seek love going to great extremes of effort, but this will not end in possession of that love.

However, in agreement with the idea expressed in this view that gifts without Christian love are nothing I would remind us of an old proverb not to put the cart before the horse. The exercise of a gift without display of love can bring harm. Christians need to have a great manifestation of love in their hearts toward others.

²⁵The Sermon Bible, "Acts VII to I Corinthians XVI" (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1900), p. 339.

²⁶John Short, The Interpreter's Bible, vol. X (New York: Abingdon - Cokesbury Press, n. d.), p. 165.

The display of love, however, does not constitute the exercise of a great gift. Many modernists today try to show forth a display of love but the gift which they exercise is not great. A gift does not become great by seeking after love and incorporating that love within the gift as it is exercised. Rather, a fulfilling of the seeking as Paul intended it results in a great expression of love.

The "more excellent way" mentioned in this context is not a way of seeking. It is a way of love which results in the fulfillment of the seeking.

At this point I make mention of the fact that it is not my purpose to explain the seeking and its manner of accomplishment, but simply to refute the view under discussion.

Develop Individual Gift View

This view suggests that the seeking is accomplished through developing the individual gifts which may be possessed by an individual. Butler expresses his thought of this view as follows:

The same apostle who so earnestly urged contentment with the gifts we have, and forbade contemptuous scorn of others with feeble gifts, bids us yet to aspire. Be content, yet aspire; that should be the faith of all, and the two are quite compatible. And there arises from such a belief the possibility of generous admiration; all the miserable shutting-up of ourselves in superciliousness is done away. Desirous of reaching something higher, we recognize love and what is above ourselves; and this is the condition of excellence, for we become that which we admire. All gifts are to be cultivated; let no Christian despise them.²⁷

²⁷Glentworth J. Butler, The Bible Reader's Commentary, vol. II (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1879), p. 323.

The Christian should cultivate and develop any gift which God has given him. It would be sad to see a musician because of lack of practice lose proficiency in his ability to play a particular instrument. The cultivating of any individual gift which a person may possess does not, however, fulfill the seeking which Paul mentions in his command. It certainly would have been much easier and understandable to the reader if Paul would have said, use the gifts with which God has endowed you. The seeking here mentioned has a stronger meaning than the mere use or development of a gift already possessed.

Cultivate Gift View

This view suggests that the seeking is accomplished through cultivating within ourselves these powers which are not yet possessed, but which God can use for his glory. Lange supports this view with these words:

Paul is here speaking of the duty of cultivating in ourselves those powers and qualities which may be sanctified and exalted into charisms by the power of the Spirit, ("and we may notice that the greater gifts, those of prophecy and teaching, consisted in the inspired exercise of conscious faculties, in which culture and diligence would be useful accessories." Alford).²⁸

This view has great merit. The Christian should be desirous of cultivating within himself those qualities which may be sanc-

²⁸John P. Lange, Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, "Corinthians", edited by Philip Schoff (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1868), p. 258.

²⁹John Calvin, Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians, vol. I, trans., John Pringle (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., reprinted 1948), p. 117.

tified and exalted by the Spirit of God. This view comes closer to the meaning of the seeking which Paul had in mind in his writing. But this view is quite vague as to the accomplishment of the seeking.

Appreciation View

This view contends that the seeking is an appreciation of the gifts already received, thus, which are faithfully used. Therefore, because of this appreciation and faithful use, greater gifts will be endowed.

Charles Erdman expresses this view:

If gifts are divine disposals, this exhortation can only mean that by appreciating the gifts, granted and by their faithful use, Christians may be prepared for the reception of greater gifts and will be more helpful in the exercise of those they already have.²⁹

Promote Edification View

This view proposes that the "seeking" is accomplished through diligence of things most conducive to edification.

Calvin supports this view as follows:

Paul does not address individuals as though he wished that every one should aspire at prophecy, or the office of teacher; but simply recommends to them a desire to promote edification, that they may apply themselves the more diligently to those things that are most conducive to edification.³⁰

²⁹Charles R. Erdman, The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, n. d.), p. 114.

³⁰John Calvin, Commentary of the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians, vol. I, trans., John Pringle (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., reprinted 1948), p. 417.

This view sounds very good. Christians should expend their energies on those things most conducive to edification. The question arises, what things are most conducive to edification? The major problem answers this question.

This view like other views touches upon this idea of seeking, but it does not answer the problem of the full accomplishment of the seeking. Therefore, we conclude that this view is inadequate.

WRITER'S INTERPRETATION

Major Problem: What are the "greater gifts"
in 1 Cor. 12:12?

After having looked at the several interpretations of the "greater gifts" that have been set forth by various men, the writer wishes to present to his reader the interpretation he takes of the "greater gifts".

A great gift is one that fulfills the intended purpose of gifts. The more a gift accomplishes the object of gifts, the greater the gift becomes. The "greater gifts" are those which accomplish more completely the divine purpose of gifts. What is God's purpose for gifts? The purpose for gifts is that they edify the church. Therefore, we may say a gift that edifies is a great gift. Next, the more a gift edifies the higher place of importance it takes in the realm of great gifts. What are the gifts which edify?

WRITER'S INTERPRETATION

Major Problem: What are the "greater gifts" in I Cor. 12:31? Paul gave to the church the gift of prophecy in I Cor. 12:31. Paul says in I Cor. 14:5, "Now I would have you all speak with tongues, but rather that ye should prophesy: and greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying". Paul then explains that his speaking in tongues profits nothing if it is not understood. He says it would be like speaking into the air. Paul gave a greater emphasis of importance on the gift of prophecy than on the gift of tongues. The reason for this greater place of importance put on the gift of prophecy by Paul is that it accomplishes the edifying of the church.

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²¹Myer, L. James, "The Office of the Prophet in New Testament Times", *Grace Journal* (A Publication of Grace Theological Seminary, Springfield, 1960).

The gift of prophecy fulfilled better the divine object for gifts - namely, that of the edification of the church.

Dr. Boyer states:

To begin with, prophecy in the New Testament is the same as prophecy in the Old Testament; it is a continuation of the same office and function. When the New Testament period opens, the prophetic function was not entirely lost or forgotten. The prophet not only fore tells, but forth tells. He speaks for God. He voices the judgments and message of God for the people of his day. This even in the Old Testament was the primary function of the prophet, and the same is true in the New.³¹

What characterized the gift of prophecy that made it an edifying gift? Was it the element of predicting the future? This aspect of the prophetic gift was a source of edification. But the element that made predictive prophecy edifying I believe, extends deeper. Again we may ask, was the edifying element in the prophetic gift the aspect of supernatural knowledge? This was also important but not the basic element.

The basic characteristic of the gift of prophecy that caused it to be an edifying source was the "Thus saith the Lord". The prophet in the Old Testament spoke the direct revelation of God to men. He spoke the "Thus saith the Lord". The direct revelation of God's Words was the edifying source. Today we do not have prophets performing this particular aspect of the function of the Old Testament prophets. We do not have a need today for the direct

³¹Boyer, L. James, "The Office of the Prophet in New Testament Times", Grace Journal (A Publication of Grace Theological Seminary, Spring, 1960).

spoken revelation of God to men because we already have a complete revelation of God. This revelation is a written revelation, namely, the Word of God. Everything that God desires to say to men today is contained in the written revelation of the Word of God.

This is expressed clearly by the words of Dr. Boyer:

Now it is instructive to note that the function of edification of the church is precisely the function later assigned to the written Scriptures (II Tim. 3:16) and in this very passage Paul demands that any one who might consider himself to be a prophet should acknowledge that the things which he (Paul) was then writing were the commandments of the Lord (v. 37). In other words, Paul's words, since they were Scripture, took precedence over the words of the prophets.³²

Dr. Boyer also states:

The gift of prophecy is dead; it has been rendered inoperative. Today, men are shut up to the inspired written Word of God as their only source of revelation. It is God's complete and final message. No prophet today would have anything to say. So also, the gift of prophecy has been put out of operation. There are no revealers of new, divine truth today. God has said all He has to say in this book. This book is all the prophet and all the prophecy there is today. There are those who edify the church by expounding the prophecies of this book, but they are not prophets, any more than elders are healers or church votes are infallible.³³

The greatest edifying exercise is the proclaiming or setting forth of the Word of God. The proclaiming of the Word of God is the thing that edifies. It is not the dissertations of men upon good, moral ethical procedures. A discussion of our privileges and benefits as members of this great nation of the United States at Thanksgiving season may bring thankfulness to the heart, but it will not bring

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid.

edification. The unsaved portions of humanity are often thankful for the benefits of our great nation, but they are not edified spiritually because of their thankfulness. They are not even regenerate, and therefore, they have no discernment of spiritual truth and are unable to experience spiritual edification. A dramatic portrayal of the birth of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ upon the painter's canvas may bring joy to the human heart and good thoughts, but it will not bring edification. A program designed to encourage the giving of gifts to the needy at Christmas season may bring joy and happiness to the heart of the receiver and a spirit of love and thankfulness to the giver, but it will not edify. A challenge to turn over a new leaf at New Year's time, with good moral principles of decent living, may bring determinations to the heart of man, but it will not bring edification. The relating of the awfulness of Christ's death upon the tree without proclaiming man's personal responsibility of appropriation as set forth in the Word of God may bring tears to the eyes and a lump in the throat, but it will not bring edification. The setting forth of good ideals of Christian ethics may bring temporary display of love to one's neighbor, but it will never bring edification. These illustrations may be enumerated almost without limit.

Extending this thought to some of the gifts familiar to us which are used in God's service we shall look more specifically at this problem. Take, for example, the ability of a musician. A Christian pianist rendering a beautiful selection with all the musical

trills known to musicians in an evangelistic service may bring a show of great talent and reveal an exceptional ability upon an instrument, but it will never bring edification. A very forceful rendering of a musical number by an excellent church choir in a morning worship service may stir the emotional strings of the human heart and it will only edify as long as it conveys a message which contains the Words of God. The exercise of musical gifts may be effective in the preparation for the receptivity of the listener to the proclaiming of the Word of God, but they will never take the place of the edifying power of the proclamation of God's Word. No gift, even if exercised with excellent proficiency, can take the place of the setting forth of the teachings contained in the Word of God.

The "thus saith the Lord" or the written revelation of God's Word is the edifying source today. The more a gift edifies, the greater the gift becomes. The "greater gifts" are those which put emphasis on the "thus saith the Lord" or the proclaiming of the revelation of the written Word of God. The "greater gifts" are the prophetic-like gifts. Today we do not have the existence of prophets or the gift of prophecy. However, we do have preachers today. A preacher today is simply one who proclaims the Word of God.

The "greater gifts" are those which are exercised in the proclaiming of God's Word. This may be done by the preacher in the pulpit. It may be done by the traveling evangelist. It may be done by

the teacher in an educational institution. It may be done by the Sunday School teacher. It also may be done by the workman in a shop. It may be done by the housewife in talking to the next door neighbor. It may be done in any type of witness or words of wisdom which tell forth the words of God contained in the Word of God. We thus see that the exercise of the "greater gifts" is not limited only to the ordained preacher who has received a divine call to the ministry of God's Word. Any Christian may proclaim the instructions and teachings of the Word of God. This proclaiming though, is limited to Christians. Further discussion of this is found in the writer's discussion in the section on the minor problem.

WRITER'S INTERPRETATION

Minor Problem: Is what power is the seeking
after the "greater gifts" to be
accomplished
in 1 Cor. 12:31

The "greater gifts" are the divinely given abilities to
proclaim the Word of God. This proclaiming of God's Word may be
done through various avenues of service. The exercise of proclaim-
ing the Word of God is dependent upon a discernment of God's Word.
No man can proclaim God's Word if he has no discernment of God's
Word. Furthermore, the discernment of God's Word is dependent upon
the Holy Spirit which illuminates God's truth in the Word of God to
the human heart. The one who proclaims God's Word today must exper-
ience the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit in order to forth tell
the prophecies and truths contained in the Word of God. Therefore, we
must realize that the unregenerate man is not capable and does not possess
the ability to proclaim God's Word. The reason for this is that he is

WRITER'S INTERPRETATION

Miner Problem: In what sense is the seeking after the "greater gifts" to be accomplished in I Cor. 12:31?
The natural man is not being able to receive the things of the Spirit of God. The
natural or unaved person cannot understand or receive the things of
the Spirit of God because these things seem as foolishness to him.
It takes a spiritual man to understand spiritual truths, to proclaim
spiritual truths. This statement infers that the more spiritual a
man is, the better able he is to proclaim the spiritual truths
contained in the Word of God. Thus, it can be said that in Paul's

The "greater gifts" are the divinely given abilities to proclaim the Word of God. This proclaiming of God's Word may be done through various avenues of service. The exercise of proclaiming the Word of God is dependent upon a discernment of God's Word. One cannot proclaim God's Word if he has no discernment of God's Word. Furthermore, the discernment of God's Word is dependent upon the Holy Spirit which illuminates God's truth in the Word of God to the human heart. The one who proclaims God's Word today must experience the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit in order to forth tell the prophecies and truths contained in the Word of God. Therefore, we conclude that the unregenerate man is not capable and does not possess the ability to proclaim God's Word. The reason for this is that he is not indwelt by the Holy Spirit who illuminates the human heart and mind and gives discernment of the Word of God. This truth is set forth in I Cor. 2:14 where the Scripture pictures the natural man as not being able to receive the things of the Spirit of God. The natural or unsaved person cannot understand or receive the things of the Spirit of God because those things seem as foolishness to him. It takes a spiritual man to understand spiritual truths, to proclaim spiritual truths. This statement infers that the more spiritual a person is, the better able he is to proclaim the spiritual truths contained in the Word of God. Thus, it can be said that in Paul's

commanding Christians to seek after the "greater gifts", he is telling them to become more spiritual. Becoming more spiritual enters into the sense in which the seeking after the greater gifts is to be accomplished. However, a growth in spirituality is not a pre-requisite for seeking after the "greater gifts". Rather, a growth in an individual's spirituality is the result of seeking after the "greater gifts".

In order to gather an understanding of the sense in which the seeking after the "greater gifts" is to be accomplished, we turn our attention to the field of fine arts. One of the areas of the fine arts which is very familiar to me is that of music. Most people today have what may be termed a melodious ear. The average person is able to listen to music with a certain amount of appreciation. This appreciation is due to an understanding of what is heard although the understanding may vary among individuals. Contemporary music which may also be called modern music, may be very unappreciated by some people. This lack of appreciation is due to a lack of understanding. This same thought is shown in the area of art. A person may look at a painting on a canvas and consider it to be just blobs of paint or a mixed up nothing. The reason that he does not appreciate the work of art which he sees is that he does not understand it.

Even though most people have a melodious ear, occasionally one meets a person who discerns no relationship of sounds or pitches. This person is unable to distinguish the direction of the pitch of

one tone from another. The reason for this is that he has not the ability to hear properly and may possess a physiological hindrance along musical lines. No amount of training and learning can make him develop a musical ear. Also, there are some who have what is termed relative perfect pitch. This is a God-given ability, above the normal, to hear and distinguish pitches. My point of interest in all this is the fact that one who is average, not possessing relative perfect pitch, may develop relative perfect pitch. This may be done by developing an ear to distinguish pitches. This involves hard, diligent seeking. This seeking may result in acquiring an ability which had not been possessed before. But naturally the seeker had to possess the basic physiological requirement in order to acquire this ability. Now, my point of argument is this: in order to proclaim God's Word with special ability, one must first possess the basic requirement. The basic requirement in this case is more than physiological; it is a spiritual requirement. This is none other than the possessing of the Holy Spirit of God. Now still further, in our discussion I want to say that one who does possess the Spirit of God but does not possess this extra ability, above the normal ability to proclaim God's Word, may through a dwelling in the Word of God and seeking after discernment of the Word of God and crying out to God for a discernment of the truths of God's Word, develop an ability which he had not possessed before to proclaim God's Word.

There are some persons that have a divinely-given ability to proclaim the Word of God. Also, it is true in music that some have the

is based upon three "ifs". The writer is saying through divine inspiration that if one will do thus and thus then thus will take place. The "thus" that will take place and is promised on certain conditions is stated as: "thou shalt understand the fear of Jehovah, and find the knowledge of God."

At this point I want to say that a fear of anything requires a certain amount of knowledge about what is feared. To illustrate this let us think of a child who fears the dark. A child who fears the dark possesses a certain amount of knowledge of the dark, however limited his knowledge of the dark may be. Granted, and instruction of darkness to the child and what darkness is and why it comes may lessen the fear of the dark. But a knowledge of the dark obtained by a child will not completely vanish his fear of it. One does not have a fear of something that he believes does not exist or that he does not know exists. Also, one does not fear Jehovah if he has no knowledge of Jehovah. The more one learns of Jehovah, the greater the fear becomes. The more an unsaved person learns of God and his attributes and judgments, the greater his fear becomes. Also, the more a saved person learns of God, the greater his fear becomes, although his fear is different than that of the unsaved person. Therefore, we can conclude that the fear of Jehovah results from the knowledge of God. All we may learn of God is found in the Word of God. There is no knowledge of God outside the Word of God except the personal knowledge one may obtain of God either of God's love and mercy through regeneration, or

John P. Lange, Commentary on the Whole Bible, "Proverbs"

Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, n. d.), p. 56.

God's punishments through judgment. There is also the revelation of God in creation, but basically, all we know of God or may learn about God is obtained through the Word of God. Therefore, we conclude that the learning of a knowledge of God comes through God's Word. This learning is described as a very intense searching and seeking of God's Word. The passage gives three "ifs". If thou wilt receive my words and lay up my commandments with thee and if thou cry after discernment and lift up thy voice for understanding, and if thou seek her as silver, and search for her as for hid treasures then thou shalt experience the understanding of the fear of Jehovah and the finding of the knowledge of God.

This intense searching of the knowledge of God which is done in the Word of God is climaxed in its description as the seeking after silver and the searching after hid treasure.

Lange says in his discussion on Proverbs 2:4 that:

The figure of diligent seeking is taken from the tireless exertion employed in mining, which has before been described in the Book of Job, chapter 28, with most artistic vivacity in its widest extents. The דִּבְרֵי אֲדָמָה are surely the treasures of metal concealed in the earth.³⁵

Marcus Dods in his discussion on this verse in Prov. 2:4 states:

To seek (שׁוּקֶה) in the original is properly, "to seek diligently", and is kindred to "to search" (חַקֵּק), which again is equivalent to "to dig" (חַדַּק). We trace in these verbs the idea in the mind of the teacher indicated above, which finds expression also in the object of

³⁵John P. Lange, Commentary on the Whole Bible, "Proverbs" (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, n. d.), p. 54.

the search, the silver, in its crude state and the hidden treasure (□ ~ 1 0 0 0), the treasures of gold, silver, and precious metal concealed in the earth. The comparison here made between the search for Wisdom and the search for the hidden treasures of the earth was not unfamiliar to the Hebrew mind, as it is found worked out with great beauty of detail in the twenty-eighth chapter of Job. Again the comparison of Wisdom with things most precious in the estimation of man is natural and common, and occurs in Ps. CXIX. 72; Job XXVIII. 15-19. The same ideas and comparisons here used are presented to us in the New Testament teaching, in our Lord's parable of the man who finds the hid treasure in the field, and, in the field, and, in the phraseology of St. Paul who speaks of "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge," and of "the unsearchable riches of Christ."

"Divine knowledge is an inexhaustible mine of precious ore" (Ward law).³⁶

Thus we see that the searching for precious metal concealed in the earth is a very active, diligent, involved, and intense task. This task is descriptive of the search for the knowledge of God. The search for the knowledge of God is done in the Word of God. Since all we know of God is in His Word, the seeking for knowledge of God is in God's Word.

Paul refers to the great unfathomable depths of God's Word as riches in Rom. 11:33, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"

The verb translated in different ways as, "desire earnestly", "to be zealous of", "to covet", "to seek after", "to search", "to seek

³⁶Marcus Dods, "Proverbs", The Pulpit Commentary (edited by Canon Spence and Joseph Exell, n. d.), p. 34, 35.

in order to secure", by the various commentators is the word ζηλοῦτε which is the imperative present form of the verb ζηλόω.

Thayer gives the meaning of ζηλόω as "to burn with zeal;" "to be heated or to boil (A.V. to be moved) with envy, hatred anger;" in a good sense, "to be zealous in the pursuit of good;" "to desire earnestly, pursue;" "to strive after, busy one's self about him."

ζηλόω is the Septuagint rendering for אֵי פֶּ. Brown, Driver and Briggs give the meaning of אֵי פֶּ as: "to become intensely red (or black), with dye; jealousy; ardour, zeal, jealousy (from colour produced in face by deep emotion)".

Hence, we find from looking at the meaning of ζηλόω and אֵי פֶּ that a stronger meaning is given to these words than just an earnest desire. This desire is a deep seated thing which motivates a positive action. The idea of boiling used to define ζηλόω is a strong idea. Boiling water in a pan upon the stove produces action. If the lid is upon the pan, the boiling water will cause the lid to bounce around and the water will overflow the pan. Also, a very hot substance called steam or vapor will result from the boiling water. So we see in this word ζηλόω an emotion that is so strong that it produces outward action.

The New Testament uses the word ζηλόω in its various forms to denote a strong feeling which is resultant in outward action. Examples of this may be found in:

Acts 7:9 "And the patriarchs moved with jealousy against Joseph, sold him into Egypt: and God was with him."

Acts 17:5 "But jealousy, took unto them certain vile fellows of the rabble, . . ."

In these two instances the resulting action is a bad action. However, The New Testament also uses the word ζηλόω with a resulting action that is good. Paul uses it in a good sense in his writings.

II Cor. 11:2 "For I am jealous: for I expoused you to one husband, that I might present you as a pure virgin to Christ".

Thus from these examples in Scripture, we learn that the Greek word ζηλόω means much more than just an earnest desire. Rather, it gives the idea of a strong, intense feeling or emotion which in itself may be good and which also results in an outward, positive action that is good.

The outward positive action in which the word ζηλόω results in I Cor. 12:31 is the same action so beautifully pictured and vividly described in the first five verses of the second chapter of Proverbs. The boiling emotional desire in I Cor. 12:31 overflows itself in the good outward action of the proclamation of the Word of God. This involves a systematic, disciplined study of the Word of God along with a crying for its discernment through the Holy Spirit's illumination; thus resulting in the presentation of the truths of

God's Word, which in turn edifies the church and brings salvation to the lost. This command of Paul is to be fulfilled by every born-again believer.

ENGLISH PARAPHRASE

ENGLISH PARAPHRASE

You jealously and enviously desire with an insatiable and intense longing, which boils up within you to an overflowing of an outward, positive search of the treasure of God's Word and a cultivation of the divinely given abilities which edify the saints the most, namely, those which are exercised in the telling forth of the Word of God. In this search you seek by dwelling within the Word of God and by crying out to God for discernment of the depths of the riches of God's Word.

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