

Accurately Handling
The Word of Truth

By Gary Gilbertson

1 Cor. 12:31-13:3



V. 31 “But covet earnestly the best gifts...”

This is a contradiction to:

v. 11 “...dividing to every man severally as He wills.

v. 18 “...God has set the members...as it hath pleased Him.

v. 24 “...but God hath tempered (joined) the body together...”

v. 28 “And God has set some in the church...”

There is no cause for ‘coveting’ grace-expressions that one has not been given (Ex. 20:17) because it is God who gives grace-expressions as He chooses.

“Covet” is *zelou*. It is translated as:

“envieth” 13:4

“desire” 14:1

“zealous” 14:12

“covet” 14:39

Two ‘rail-switch’ decisions about “covet” must be made.

1. *Zelou* = favorable, to zealously long for II Cor. 11:2 Godly jealousy
unfavorable, to jealousy strive after James 3:16 evil work

Gal. 4:17-18

“...they zealously (*zelou*) affect you, but not well... (unfavorable sense)

“...but it is good to be zealously (*zelou*) affected in a good thing.”

(favorable sense)

2 Tim. 2:15 - ...accurately
dividing (dissecting)
the word of truth.

UNDERSTANDING

CONTRADICTION



Rail Switch

2. 'Covet ~~earnestly~~' as an imperative = you must covet
indicative = you are coveting
1. favorable/ imperative = you must zealously long for
 2. unfavorable/indicative = you are jealously striving after
 3. favorable/indicative = you are zealously longing for
 4. unfavorable/imperative = you must jealously strive after

Which one does the rest of the letter support?

1:10 “I beseech you...that there be no divisions among you.”

1:11 “there are contentions among you”

3:3 “there is among you envying (*zelou*)and strife and divisions”

4:6 “you are puffed up, for one against another”

6:7 “there is utterly a fault among you, because you go to law one with another”

8:12 “you sin against the brethren and wound their weak consciences”

9:3 “My answer to those that criticize me is this.”

11:16 “if any man seem to be contentious”

14:38 “if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant”

They were jealously striving after the “best” gifts. Paul is simply stating the fact that even though God distributes gifts as He wills, they are still jealously striving for what they do not have.

“...the best gifts...”

- Contradicts v.7 “profit withal” (necessary to the particular circumstance)

- If “best” meant ‘surpassing all the others’ Paul would have written *meizon* meaning, ‘greater; superior’ but he wrote kreisson which means “advantageous and useful”. There is nothing that is always the ‘best’.

“Best” is always situation specific.

- God has not given believers the option of deciding which grace-expressions are ‘best’ nor has He directed them to strive to get them when He has not given them.

“But covet earnestly the best gifts” more accurately means:

“You are jealously striving after what you think are the superior gifts.”

“...and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.”

‘shew I unto you’ = *deiknuo* “to present oneself before another”

Paul was going to present himself to them as an example.

Put himself on display for them.

‘more excellent’ = *kata hyperbolen*

kata = “after the manner of”

hyperbolen = “to throw beyond the limits”

- A.T. Robertson, Greek Grammar “*hyperbolen*, a species of exaggeration that is understood but not to be taken literally”

English = hyperbole “exaggeration for effect; not to be taken literally”

Paul is going to present himself to them as an example ‘after the manner of’ exaggeration for effect; not to be taken literally.

*This is exactly what Paul does in I Cor. 13:1-3.

“...way.” *hodos* = “the means by which a goal is attained.

- The goal is the edification of the church.
- The means to edify the church is all the grace-expressions.
- The way of thinking which makes the grace-expressions edifying is charity. (the way Christ thinks)

“way” is not methods. “way” is way of thinking (attitude)

Summary:

I am presenting myself to you as an example of another way of thinking, by means of exaggeration (hyperbole) to make my point.

Chapter 13 is a “digression” (a temporary departure from the main subject)
The main subject is the grace-expressions, but Paul must pause to explain the way of thinking that will make them edifying to the church.

- Love is not a grace-expression.
- Love does not replace the grace-expressions.
- 1st person singular because Paul is using himself as an example of the way of thinking that makes the grace-expressions edifying.
- Each item is stretched beyond credibility – exaggeration. (*hyperbolen*)
- Each item is from a list of the grace-expressions.

13:1 “Though...”= ‘even if...’ 5 times.

Proves that this is an exaggerated and hypothetical situation.

“...I speak with the tongues of men and of angels...”

- The Corinthians expected apostles to speak with the eloquence of the best orators of their day. (II Cor. 10:10-18)
- Speaking with tongues is not always the languages of men or angels.

“...and have not charity...” *agape* = An attitude that makes the welfare of others the guiding principle of our conduct.

- Love is behavior not feelings.
- To “have charity” means to be toward others the way Christ is toward you.
- Plato called the stylistic orators “clanging cymbals”

v. 2 “...prophecy, all mysteries ...all knowledge..., all faith

- If you have these things, you would be “someone” (in the sight of man)

Paul did have these grace-expressions to a certain extent.

“...I am nothing.” no one

- If you have these things without Christ’s attitude, you are “no one” (in the sight of God)

v. 3 “...bestow all my goods to feed the poor...” The poor will benefit.

“...I give my body to be burned...” extreme hyperbole (exaggeration for effect; to throw beyond the limits)

“...it profiteth me nothing.” Others my benefit and may even praise you in this life, but, there will be no benefit to you in the next life.

I Cor. 3: 11-15 reward or loss depends on *agape* love.