

The More Excellent Way, Part 2

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Editor's Note: Part one of this article can be found in the March 2023 edition of The Gospel Message.

Jeremiah's godly service was in stark contrast to Balaam's. Jeremiah is known as "the weeping prophet" not only because of his own problems (which were real and great) but also:

- Because of the wickedness of his people
- Because of their refusal to turn to the LORD
- And because of the coming punishment from God that Jeremiah had to prophesy to his people about.

As a true patriot and in the character of our LORD and Savior Jesus when he wept over Jerusalem (see **Luke 19:41-44**), Jeremiah likewise wept over his people. Very early in his work, Jeremiah cried out,

*My joy is gone; grief is upon me; my heart is sick within me. For the wound of the daughter of my people is my heart wounded; I mourn, and dismay has taken hold on me. Oh that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people! (**Jeremiah 8:18, 21; 9:1**).*

Jeremiah was a prophet with a broken heart, a loving heart, and a spiritual heart. I strongly identify with Jeremiah.

Regarding knowledge, what can any degree of spiritual or intellectual knowledge amount to? Nothing without love! Without love, these things are worse than mere ignorance! The greatest of our intellectual accomplishments, including biblical and theological knowledge and insights, are nothing when compared to that which God possesses! Without the demonstrated love of God being shown with these things, they are worth less than nothing! When love is missing, the result is spiritual snobbery, pride, and arrogance. In such a manner, even God's truth becomes Pharisaic and ugly! Spiritual knowledge is good, beautiful, and fruitful in the LORD'S work when it is held in humility and ministered in love. But it is ugly and counterproductive when love is not there. Mere knowledge "makes arrogant;" love is the absolutely essential ingredient for edification (**1 Corinthians 8:1**).

Paul, of course, did not depreciate knowledge, especially knowledge of God's word. To the Philippians, he wrote, "*And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment*" (**Philippians 1:9**). We cannot be edified by or obey what we do not know. We can, however, know but not obey and, therefore, not be strengthened. Only love brings "real knowledge and discernment." We can know and not be edified. Love is the divine edifier.

God makes the impossible possible: "*faith so as to remove mountains*" (**1 Corinthians 13:2**). From the very first verse of this chapter, when Paul says "If I," he has been making use of hyperbole. He does that here also. He speaks here not of saving faith but of the confidence and expectancy that one can have of the LORD. He is addressing believers who already have saving faith. Here he means trusting God to do mighty things on behalf of his children. Yet still, Paul says, a Christian is nothing without love.

It is not simply a coincidence that the apostle uses the same figure used on at least one occasion by our Lord Jesus. After his disciples had failed to heal the demon-possessed boy, Jesus told them, "*Because of your little faith. For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you*" (**Matthew 17:20**). Jesus was speaking in hyperbole just as Paul does in **1 Corinthians 13:1-3**. The Lord's point to his disciples was that by trusting him completely, nothing they would endeavor to do as they served him would be impossible.

Paul's point is that even if a person has that great degree of prayerful trust in the Lord but was unloving, he would be nothing.

Consider the prophet Jonah: everything Jonah acknowledged God to be Jonah was not. And he did not even want to be. A more loveless man of God than that is pretty hard to even imagine. Jonah's faith told him that great success would come in Nineveh. And that success indeed came. As a man, however, the prophet himself was a failure. His preaching wrought a miracle as he knew it would, but the preacher was nothing.

In these two articles, we have considered three different prophets.

- One that conspired with God's enemies to bring down God's people.
- One whose heart was so filled with hate for the enemies of God's people, that he did not want them to have the opportunity of receiving a warning from His loving God because they just might repent.
- One true patriot who loved his people – God's people – so much that he cried and cried and continued to plead with them to repent so that they would not be condemned.

God used all three of these men to accomplish great things. When it comes to having love in my heart or not, which of these three men do I want to emulate?

So, "What's love got to do with it?"

Everything, my brethren, everything!