

Today's Quick Word 1 Corinthians 1:5-7

By Bruce Christian

1 CORINTHIANS 1:5-7 For in him you have been enriched in every way - in all your speaking and in all your knowledge - because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.

One of the problems of our present English language when it comes to translating the Bible is that we don't distinguish between singular and plural in the 2nd Person personal pronoun, 'you/your'. We didn't have this problem in earlier days when had 'thee/thou/thy' (singular) and 'ye/you/your' (plural). In the original of today's verses, Paul is using the plural throughout. In other words, he is saying, "Therefore you-all-collectively do not lack any spiritual gift as you-all-collectively await for the Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed". This grammatical point was especially relevant when he got to writing Chapter 12. They needed to realise that the Lord's distribution of gifts is for SHARING, and in the Body of Christ we depend on one another for the effective exercise of our gifts. None of us has ALL the gifts. While we're on the matter of gifts, there's another equally important grammatical point in the last verse of 1 Corinthians 12. Greek grammar is such that it could be translated: "But eagerly desire the greater gifts. And now I will show you the most excellent way." (NIV); OR "You all are eagerly desiring the greater gifts. But now I will show you the most excellent way."

Both are equally accurate and valid. But it seems to me that what follows in Chapter 13, "the most excellent way" (the way, NOT of 'tongues' etc, but the way of LOVE - and NB this is agapé love, not the Valentines Day variety!), makes it clear that Paul intends the second meaning. The big problem in the Church in Corinth was that the Christians were competing for the 'greater/best' gifts, the more spectacular 'spiritual' ones (like being able to speak in tongues), but he warns them: "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing." What the Corinthians had to learn - what we all have to learn - is that the distribution of different 'gifts' among God's people, is not to put them in competition with each other, a my-gifts-are-more-significant-more-useful-'better'-than-your-gifts sort of attitude, but rather that they might ALL benefit from the mutual sharing of their different gifts. When we read 1 Corinthians 12 & 13 in this light, it makes a big difference to how we interpret the point Paul is wanting to get across. How are we going with sharing the gifts God has given us in order to benefit others? How are we going with humbly receiving the benefits from others' gifts? Are we in the habit of acknowledging this, and thanking them for it?