

I Corinthians 13
A Paraphrase

"If I speak with the tongue of a national, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

If I wear the national dress and understand the culture and all forms of etiquette, and if I copy all mannerisms so that I could pass for a national, but have not love, I am nothing.

If I give all I possess to the poor, and if I spend my energy without reserve, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Love endures long hours of language study, and is kind to those who mock his accent; love does not envy those who stayed home; love does not exalt his home culture, is not proud of his national superiority.

Does not boast about the way we do it back home, does not seek his own ways, is not easily provoked into telling about the beauty of his home country, does not think evil about this culture:

Love bears all criticism about his home culture, believes all good things about this new culture, confidently anticipates being at home in this place, endures all inconveniences.

Love never fails: but where there is cultural anthropology, it will fail; where there is contextualization it will lead to syncretism; where there is linguistics, it will change. For we know only part of the culture and we minister to only part.

But when Christ is reproduced in this culture, then our inadequacies will be insignificant.

When I was in North America, I spoke as a North American, I understood as a North American, I thought as a North American; but when I left North America, I put away North American things.

Now we adapt to this culture awkwardly; but He will live in it intimately: now I speak with a strange accent, but He will speak to the heart.

And now these three remain: cultural adaptation, language study, and love. But the greatest of these is love."

C H A O S A T C O R I N T H

In the church to which Paul wrote at Corinth, we pick out three elements:

1. **APOLLO'S PARTY.** Apollos himself, a learned and thoroughly Jewish Jew, from the great expatriate Jewish center of learning at Alexandria (Acts 18:24 - 19:1). A valuable person for one stage of the development of the church (1 Cor. 3:6). Also a local Jewish leader, Crispus, a synagogue-leader, who had been willing to transfer to a house-church next door to the synagogue when Christians were evicted (Acts 18:6--8). Apollo's Party thought and felt as Jews, valued the Jewish traditions as their basic national identity - especially in a highly cosmopolitan city. But the Christian message had appealed to them, and they had taken the costly step of becoming Christian. Jesus for them was the fulfillment of the promises and the perfection of the law. They would recognize Paul's rabbinic style and theological method (e.g. 1 Cor. 10:1-11). What would they make of the demand that, as Christians, they had to associate with people of totally pagan backgrounds - who would not understand the sacrifice or the significance for a Jew to become a Christian? Apollos would be a safer guide than Paul for such people (1 Cor. 1:12).

2. **CHLOE'S CROWD** Probably the largest group; a bunch of recent converts from paganism, male and female slaves from the posh households, the markets and docks, from dozens of national backgrounds and languages, all non-citizens, pushed around by forces of employment, and by the effects of the colonial system gravitating into the big city. They complained about the insensitive behavior of church members who were wealthier and had more control of their time; they were last to arrive at gatherings - 'never there on time' - because of their hours of work; sometimes found that there was no supper left for them (1 Cor. 11:20-21). Intellectual arguments would make little sense to them - even if they could understand the languages of the learned; ecstasy, song and dance made more sense. They worshipped with the whole body rather than just with the tip of mind and lip (1 Cor. 14). But in the Christian meeting, they had the unique experience of being treated as real people, with a voice and responsibility of their own (1 Cor. 12:13). More than the other groups, they had everything to gain from a proper and practical unity with other Christians, so they were the first to complain about divisions and cliques (1 Cor. 1:11).

3. **GAIUS'S GROUP** Another group of respectable persons, but Gentile. Some were people like Gaius himself, property-owners and responsible citizens- Erastus, the City Treasurer or Director of Public Works, and Titius Justus, owner of a substantial property who had been a Gentile associate of the Jewish synagogue (1 Cor. 1:14; Rom 16:23; Acts 18:7). The group also included literate slaves, like Terius, Paul's secretary in the Corinthian Church (Rom 16:22), educated Gentiles working as clerks and in junior

management, in banking and docks. In spite of their skills, such people were still slaves. For such Gentiles, there would be no point in trying to become Jews or in taking much interest in the finer points of Jewish tradition. As Gentiles, they would be familiar with myths and symbols about the need to eat the holy, in some way. Their natural social friends would be people of pagan background who went to the Temples of pagan deities to get their meat (1 Cor. 10:25-31). The non-slaves among this group might also be the sort of peoples who, in the great city, made both a trade and a kind of game out of law-suites (1 Cor. 6:1-8).

FIRST SET OF QUESTIONS

In this group, party or faction:

- what sort of people are you?
- what attracted you into becoming Christians?
- what is most difficult for you about being Christian?

SECOND SET OF QUESTIONS

After hearing Paul's comments - 1 Cor. 10:14-21; 11:17-34:

- Why is Paul giving you this description of the Last Supper of Jesus?
- What, for you, is the main point he is trying to get across?
- What is important to you in what he has to say?
- Whom is Paul criticizing - you or someone else?

THIRD SET OF QUESTIONS

Debriefing together:

- Do you think your church, in its present form, has any future?
- Do you want to stay together with the other groups, or form some sort of new organization?