

Powerful Christian Living

Chapter Fifteen

The Love of God

Before we explore the great subject of the love of God I would like to review the teaching from the first part of 1 Corinthians 12. The gift of the holy Spirit is God's empowering presence in your life. It is His life, power and nature born within you when you come to faith in Jesus Christ. And this gift of the Spirit gives us the ability to transform our lives to live righteously. Plus in the gift of the Spirit we are gifted in a personal and unique way to bless and serve others.

There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.
(1 Corinthians 12:4)

Every Christian believer can manifest the Spirit in the nine ways listed in 1 Corinthians 12:7-10 for both personal profit and the blessing of the whole church. But each believer is also uniquely gifted in some way to serve in the church, the body of Christ.¹ The word translated "gifts" in the verse above is the Greek word *charismata*. This is a gift of God's grace. It is unearned. And this gift is our divinely enabled ability to serve in the church. There are five gifts of leadership in the church. These are listed for us in Ephesians 4.

And He Himself [Jesus Christ] gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers,
(Ephesians 4:11)

The leadership gifts in the church are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. And their responsibility is to teach, preach, lead and serve "for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ (v. 12)." In other words, the leaders and ministers in the church are to help other believers learn how to serve in the church. Some one may serve in the capacity of a counselor, some one else may offer encouragement, another believer may be gifted in the area of administration, another may be gifted to work with children, or to help in various capacities or to witness for Christ to those who are not yet saved. This is why 1 Corinthians 12:5 says,

There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord.

Our ministry is the way each and every one of us serves in the church and where we serve. For example two believers may have the gift of teaching, but one person's ministry is to

¹ See also Romans 12:3-8; 1 Peter 4:10, 11; Ephesians 4:7-16

teach as a pastor, while another believer's gift is to teach children or in Sunday School. Then verse 6 declares,

And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all.

All of us are uniquely gifted to serve in same way in the church and our ministries will produce different effects. Someone's gift of being merciful will affect another differently than someone who is gifted to lead. But God is at work, through His Spirit, in every believer who serves. Also a believer may be gifted in one of the nine ways in which the Spirit can be manifested as listed in verses 7 through 11.

But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit *of all*: 8 for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same[b] Spirit, 10 to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another *different* kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. 11 But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He will.
(1 Corinthians 12:7-11)

We must remember that "for to one" does not mean that one believer can only manifest tongues, while another believer can only manifest gifts of healings. Every believer is able to manifest the Spirit in the nine ways listed for the profit of all. But some believers because of God's grace and their own unique personalities may be more adept at one manifestation than another.

It is like a baseball team where every player can run, hit the ball and throw it and catch it. But someone will be designated the pitcher and someone else the catcher. But all of us should desire to manifest the Spirit and to serve in love. This is what 1 Corinthians 13 is all about.

The chapter is perhaps the most profound teaching on the love of God shared in the church. But it has so often been taken out of its context which deals with the operation of the gift of the Spirit within the church All of our God given abilities must be exercised and shared with the love of God in our hearts. The manifestations of the Spirit and our own unique spiritual gift are not ends in themselves. They are a means to an end which is the encouragement, comfort and growth of the whole church.

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.
(1 Corinthians 13:1)

The Greek word translated “love” is *agape*. It is one of four Greek words that can mean love. There is *eros* which refers to sexual love. There is *storge* meaning family love. And then there is *phileo* referring to friendship. *Agape* was seldom used until it found its wonderful place in the New Testament. The word *agape* refers to a deep and constant love that is given by the determined decision of our will. It is a love that is not dependant upon any other circumstance. This is the love that God has for us. God does not love us because of who we are, but because of who He is. Therefore, no matter how fluent I may be at speaking in tongues or how empowered I am in any other spiritual matter, if I do not serve with love then I am nothing.

And though I have *the gift*² of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.
(1 Corinthians 13:2)

So very often we judge one another by fleshly standards: he is more handsome than another, she is more beautiful, he understand more of the Bible, and so on; but God looks at a person’s heart. No one is more important in the church than anyone else because all of our abilities come from God. What makes us valuable and important is when we serve from the motivation of love. Serving others with out a regard for yourself is the kind of love we are talking about here.

A group of seven year old children were asked how they would define love. One child said “When my grandmother got arthritis she couldn’t bend over and paint her nails anymore. So my grandfather does it for her all the time even though his hands hurt too.” Another said “When someone loves you they way they say your name is different. You just know that your name is safe in their mouth.” And “Love is when you share your food even if no one else shares theirs with you.” This is the kind of love 1 Corinthians 13 is talking about: love that freely serves others.

And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.
(v. 3)

Even giving at great cost and sacrifice means nothing if it is not done in the love of God for others. What authenticates us and proves that we are following Christ is our love.³ Service without love does not profit us.

Love suffers long *and* is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; 5 does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil;

² Omit the words “the gift” which is in italics showing that it is not in the Greek text.

³ John 13:34, 35

6 does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; 7
bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures
all things.
(vv. 4-7)

The love of God “suffers long” giving us the ability to endure trials and hardships with other people. It is “kind” in that it is quick to bless others even in the small things in life. The love of God “does not envy.” It does not wish to deprive others of what they have. You rejoice in the material and spiritual prosperity of others. Love “does not parade itself” and “is not puffed up.” A believer who lives a life of love doesn’t seek to be noticed as much as they seek to notice others. Believers who love with the love of God do not “behave rudely.”

The love of God does not “seek its own” it looks out for the needs and concerns of others. It is “not provoked” and “thinks no evil.” In other words a believer is not easily angered and keeps no record of the wrongs that others do to them; they are forgiving and humble. The love of God “bears all things” standing strong in times of trouble, and “believes all things” commanded and promised in Scripture. The love of God never fails; it is the greatest power in the church for good.

Love never fails. But whether *there are* prophecies, they will fail;
whether *there are* tongues, they will cease; whether *there is*
knowledge, it will vanish away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy
in part. 10 But when that which is perfect has come, then that which
is in part will be done away.
11 When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child,
I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish
things. 12 For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face.
Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.
13 And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of
these is love.
(vv. 8-13)

Now we see and understand life as if in a dim mirror. When the apostle Paul wrote this chapter mirrors were mostly made of polished brass which gave a poor reflection. The point is that we don’t always understand what happens in life or other people the way that God does. But when Christ returns we will know all things even as we are know of God. But now we are to live our lives full of faith, hope and the great Christian virtue of love.