

Pursuing Spiritual Gifts: Faith that Works by Love (1 Cor. 13)

I. GOD CALLS US TO EARNESTLY DESIRE TO OPERATE IN THE POWER OF GOD

- A. The “love chapter” (1 Cor. 13) is set in the context of two exhortations to desire to the gifts.
³¹ *But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way. (1 Cor. 12:31)*
¹ *Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy. (1 Cor. 14:1)*
- B. The Christian life is a cooperation with God’s grace. God will not do our part and we cannot do His part. If we do not do our part then God withholds some of the help and blessing He would have given us. Our part includes being faithful to be watchful in the Spirit as one essential way of cultivating the spirit of prophecy. God’s part is to give us prophetic impressions and then to release supernatural power when we walk out those impressions with faith and obedience.
- C. Some “trust” the sovereignty of God in a non-biblical way by “trusting” God to do the role that He has assigned to us. This is not trusting God, but is negligence and presumption. God has chosen to give us a dynamic role in determining some of the measure of the “quality of life” that we experience in the natural and in the Spirit. There are blessings that God has chosen to give, but only if His people rise up to ask for them (Isa 30:18-19; Ezek. 22:30; Mt. 17:21; Jas 4:2).
- D. God’s way of releasing prophecy in us is most often by giving us faint impressions of the Spirit.
1. Ask the question: “Holy Spirit, what are you saying or doing?” (Take time to ask this).
 2. Verbalize the impression: We must give expression to the faint impressions of the Spirit. (Most prophesying will be in context to a few people rather than in the congregation).
 3. Value small demonstrations: Be faithful in little things (we do not despise smallness).
- E. Why do believers neglect to prophesy? It takes love and spiritual vigor to prophesy. This includes sustaining attentiveness that is necessary to receive the small impressions of the Spirit. It requires energy to act on the impressions and it demands the risk of being unappreciated by those we minister to. It is easy to draw back from this spiritual vigor. To be attentive implies refusing the indulgence of anxiety and self pity that cause so much emotional traffic. There is an intensity involved in being continually available to the Holy Spirit.
- F. I compare functioning in the prophetic to putting up the sail in a boat on a lake during a calm day. When it seems there is no breeze, the sail catches even the most gentle breeze that just barely moves the boat. However, it does move! A similar dynamic occurs when we ask the Lord what He is doing. We may not see a great move of the “boat,” but it will often slightly move.

II. THE SUPREMACY OF LOVE TO POWER (1 COR. 13:1-3)

¹ Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. ² Though I have the gift 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. ³ 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. (1 Cor. 13:1-3)

- A. The value and supremacy of love can only be understood when it is set in context to the eternal realm of the Judgment Seat of Christ (Rom. 14:10-12; 1 Cor. 3:10-15; 2 Cor. 5:10).
- B. Paul has just declared the great value of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in 1 Cor. 12 (esp. v. 7-11). If we speak in the tongues of men (Acts 2:3-11) or angels people will give you great honor. However, it will be evaluated at the Judgment Seat of Christ as a clanging cymbal. If we move mountains by faith, give all our money to help the poor or embrace a martyr's death without love, it leaves us without any reward or profit at the Judgment Seat of Christ.
- C. Understanding the 3-fold love of God:
 - 1. Love from God: how God feels about us (revelation of God's heart (Father/Bridegroom). This is foundational to God's invitation for us to walk in intimacy with Him.
 - 2. Love for God: we love God in response to understanding His love for us.
³⁷ You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." ³⁸ This is the first and great commandment. ³⁹ The second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Mt. 22:37-39)
 - 3. Love for others: as we love God we overflow in love for others (believers/unbelievers)

III. THE CHARACTER OF LOVE (13:4-7): THE ETERNAL NATURE OF GOD (HOLINESS)

⁴ 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; 6 does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (1 Cor. 13:4-7)

- A. It takes love to sustain the process necessary to operate in the gifts and it requires love to operate in them in a godly way. We can put Jesus' name every time love is mentioned. We can put our own name in the place of the word love. Love must be expressed first and most in our families to be mature love. It is not enough to have the reputation of being loving in social settings.
- B. Paul first gives us the essence of love (v. 4a) then defines how love does NOT act in using eight negatives (v. 4b-6b) and then how love DOES act by using five positives (v. 6c-7).

- C. The essence of love (v. 4a) is to suffer long with and to show kindness to friends and enemies.
- ⁴ ***Do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? (Rom. 2:4)***
- ³⁵ ***Love your enemies, do good...and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. (Lk. 6:35)***
1. ***Love suffers long*** (passive): does not give the judgment that is deserved. God suffers long with those who resist, grieve or quench the Spirit (Gen. 6:3; Eph. 4:30; 1 Thes. 5:19). We have confidence to flow in the gifts in our weakness knowing that God suffers long with our resistance to Him. We do not use the honor that comes by operating in the gifts to get a place of influence to pay back those who mistreated us.
 2. ***Love is kind*** (active): gives the kindness that is not deserved. We flow in the gifts because of God's kindness to us in our weakness. We operate in the gifts to bless those who have mistreated us.

IV. THE SUPERIORITY OF LOVE: ITS PERMANENCE AND SUCCESS (13:8-12)

⁸ ***Love never fails...9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part...12 For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part...13 Now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love. (1 Cor. 13:8-13)***

- A. In 1 Cor. 13:8-13, Paul's primary point is to establish the permanence and thus, superiority of love to even the goodness of operating in God's power by faith. Paul establishes other principles.
- B. First, love that never fails is what defines our success before God (v. 8). Every movement of our heart in love is remembered and rewarded by God at the Judgment Seat of Christ, whether it is received by people or not. No investment of love is forgotten, wasted or lost in God's sight.
- ¹⁰ ***God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister. (Heb. 6:10)***
- C. Second, it takes love to prophesy because we only prophesy in part or by dim (faint) impressions (v. 9-12). The mirror in the ancient world was a dim reflection not a clear reflection. When operating in the gifts of the Spirit, we usually only receive a "part" or a fragment of knowledge from the Spirit. This process of pursuing to operate in power by faith (impressions) humbles us.
- D. Third, love is the greatest of the three great realities in our relationship with Jesus (faith, hope and love). They define what it means to be filled with the Spirit or to walk in the Spirit.
- ¹³ ***Now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love. (1 Cor. 13:13)***

- E. **Faith**: is the required response (agreement with God’s Word and Spirit) in our partnership with God that results in His power being released into the natural realm. It includes the living expectation of the supernatural that calls the future into the present. Our faith grows as we understand who we are in Christ and the authority we have in Christ. It results in the breakthrough of God’s power for our heart, body, ministry and the release of His favor on circumstances (finances, open doors for harvest/personal) and removal of Satan’s resistance.
- F. **Hope**: is confident agreement with God’s future plans and our ultimate victory. This is the message of eternity (establishing heaven on earth) and the End-Time drama (that prepares for it).
- G. **Love**: is intimacy with God and being like God (character: Sermon on the Mount lifestyles). Love is the greatest of these three because it continues and expresses God’s eternal character. He who loves most, wins and succeeds most before God. At the Judgment Seat of Christ, the primary question that the Lord will ask us is, “Did you learn to love?”
- H. Faith is the way to release the gifts of the Spirit. Love is the purpose of them. Faith is how the gifts function. Love is why they function. The hope message stabilizes us (keeps us focused and in peace without fear). We need to be strong in faith, anchored in hope and walk in love.

V. **THE HIGHEST GOAL OF OUR FAITH IS TO WALK IN LOVE: SUCCESS IN GOD’S SIGHT**

⁵ ***The purpose (goal, NIV) of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith, 6 from which some, having strayed, have turned to idle talk, 7 desiring to be teachers...understanding neither what they say nor the things they affirm. (1 Tim. 1:5-7)***

- A. **Pure heart**: motive to enrich others without guaranteeing by the natural processes that blessing will return to us. It is the open handedness that we see in King David’s life.
- B. **Good conscience**: free from guilt. Because of what Jesus did we walk in confidence with God.
¹ ***There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. (Rom. 8:1)***
- C. **Sincere faith**: faith that functions under the pressure of the attack of the enemy and difficult circumstances. Faith causes prophecy to operate and moves mountains (1 Cor. 13:2).
- D. Love and faith work best together. Faith to operate in the gifts of the Holy Spirit comes by growing in love. It is love that embraces the rigors of attentiveness to the Spirit and love that only uses the power of God to establish God’s will and not our own. It takes love to sustain the rigors of the attentiveness to the Holy Spirit that is foundational to operating in faith.
⁶ ***For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love. 7 You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? (Gal. 5:6-7)***