

The Most Excellent Way

The gifts of the Holy Spirit are often emphasised in isolation whereas we have seen that they in the context of the working of the body of Christ with its many parts. The purpose of the gifts is for the common good – fulfilling God's purposes in the body and in the community. However, it is a dangerous thing to emphasise the gifts in isolation. And if the gifts are not meant to be used in isolation to the body of Christ then we need to understand that it is not only the gift that is important but also the character/attitude in which the gift is used. After all if we receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit when we are filled with the Holy Spirit then surely the fruit of the Holy Spirit ought to be manifest in our lives as well as the gifts.

1 Corinthians 13: 1 – 13

1) The gifts without love (vs. 1 – 3)

- Story of a Pentecostal woman who started speaking to me one day about being baptised in the Holy Spirit and operating in the gifts of the Spirit. As she spoke she started judging men like Billy Graham who she believed isn't filled with the Holy Spirit because he doesn't speak in tongues. As the conversation progressed I realised that she had a strong emphasis on the Baptism of the Holy Spirit and operating in the gifts of the Holy Spirit but in her zeal she showed very little fruit of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5: 22 – 23).
- The same Holy Spirit who gives us the gifts – or rather manifests Himself through us in the various gifts (12: 7) – manifests the fruit of the Spirit in our lives.
- If we have the gifts but do not use them in love then we are not truly filled – controlled – by the Spirit of God.
- When God gives gifts he does not retract them. Thus if God has given us spiritual gift we can continue using them even if we stop walking with the Lord.
- There are preachers who are living in sin yet are still being effective in ministry.
- Some use the gifts as a show. Some years back a preacher had a big healing meeting televised to demonstrate the power of God. He was embarrassed when no one got healed.
- **GOD DOES NOT GIVE GIFTS TO PUT ON A SHOW BUT TO MINISTER TO THE BODY OF CHRIST AND THE COMMUNITY.**
- When Jesus healed the sick he did it out of compassion – an aspect of love.
- He also often took people to a quiet place to minister to them in private. Or, after healing them, he would command them not to tell anyone.
- He used his gifts for the benefit of others and not merely to attract attention to himself. If he did attract attention to himself it was as his role as the Messiah and not out of pride.

2) The qualities of love (vs. 4 – 7)

- I am patient, enduring, tolerant, unwearied, uncomplaining, long suffering, serene with others
 - Love never gives up (The Message)
- I am kind to others
 - Love cares more for others than for self (The Message)
- I am not envious, jealous, resentful, spiteful of others
 - Love doesn't want what it doesn't have (The Message)
- I do not boast, brag, show off about my own achievements making others feel inferior
 - Love doesn't strut (The Message)
- I am not proud, arrogant, self-righteous, over-confident and am willing to receive correction from others
 - Doesn't have a swelled head (The Message)
- I am not rude, impolite, discourteous, bad-mannered, offensive, foul, vulgar to others
 - Doesn't force itself on others (The Message)
- I am not self-seeking but rather I always put others ahead of me
 - Isn't always “me first” (The Message)

- I do not easily get angry, infuriated, irritated, annoyed, enraged, exasperated, frustrated with others
 - Doesn't fly off the handle (The Message)
- I do not keep a written or mental record of wrongs that others have done.
 - Doesn't keep score of the sins of others (The Message)
- I do not delight in any evil that has come on others in any way including gossip and slander but I rejoice in the truth about them
 - Doesn't revel when others grovel (The Message)
 - Takes pleasure in the flowering of truth (The Message)
- I always protect others
 - Puts up with anything (The Message)
- I always trust others
 - Trusts God always (The Message)
- I always have hope in our relationship
 - Always looks for the best (The Message)
- I always persevere in our relationship regardless of what it seems to be.
 - Never looks back (The Message)
- I will never fail others and will always be there for them
 - But keeps going to the end (The Message)

3) The assurance of love (vs. 8 – 13)

- God is love and so love is eternal (1 John 4: 16)
- The gifts won't be necessary in eternity as we will not need them. We won't need to minister to people in eternity.
- We need the gifts now because we don't know all things and God has revealed some things to some people and others to other people and we are interdependent to gain what God has revealed to His body. However when the perfect comes the imperfect passes away.
- By perfect Paul isn't referring to quality as much as totality i.e. the full knowledge of God.
- By imperfect Paul is referring to that which is characteristic of our present experience.
- Maturity moves us on to love and so we put away childish thinking i.e. overstressing the gifts and undervaluing love.
- We should not argue our points too much because we all only “know in part” and will only know all things fully in eternity as God, who knows all things, already knows us.
- Three things that we have now will remain for eternity: faith, hope and love of which love is the greatest.