

Chapter 1 – Stir Up the Gift of God (Love)

God tells us, and the Apostle Paul tells his young spiritual son in the ministry, Timothy, to stir up the gift of God (2 Tim 1:6). What is this precious gift that we are admonished to stir up: It is the gift of love. The gift of love is the greatest gift of all. It is the root gift that all other Spiritual Gifts spring forth from. God would not have us ignorant concerning this gift.

God concludes His instructions to us on Spiritual Gifts in the last verse in the twelfth chapter of 1 Corinthians by saying, But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way. This more excellent way is the way of love.

IT'S ALL ABOUT LOVE

What follows is the well-known 13th chapter of 1 Corinthians, often referred to as the “love chapter.” However, contrary to popular casual thinking, the context of the chapter is unrelated to romance. Rather, the chapter declares that you may have all the other gifts, but if you do not have the gift of love you really don't have anything. The all work by love. Faith works by love. Furthermore, when all the other gifts have failed or passed away, only the gift of love will be left standing. The gift of love is preeminent, therefore-stir it up.

To bring clarity to this point, Paul first emphasizes the importance of love by comparing it to other gifts, namely, speaking in tongues, prophecy, volunteer poverty and martyrdom. These were highly regarded gifts of the era. Paul gives three verses directed at their minds, emotions and their wills. Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. (1 Cor. 13:3). Imagine having a digital clock keeping score of our effective use of Spiritual Gifts. Every time we operate without love the clock ticks back to zero. Many pastors may have the gift of preaching (prophecy), but if they don't demonstrate love for the congregation they are preaching to the heavenly scoreboards records a zero.

Secondly, Paul defines love by emphasizing and engulfing the positive qualities of love by telling us what love does and does not do. Notice that there are seven characteristics that are positive and eight that are negative. In Hebrew, the number seven is a complete or perfect number. However, all fifteen characteristics are expressed in the Greek as present tense action verbs. God always defines love as an action. Our God is a “show me” God. In addition, all fifteen of these characteristics either describe the love of Jesus, or love that is definitely not of Jesus. These expressions of love should not only serve as evaluative criteria for properly utilizing our Spiritual Gifts, but also as guidelines for our daily lives. The love of Jesus is expressed in these verses in a positive sense by saying that: (1) love is patient, (2) love is expressed in kindness, (3) love rejoices in truth, (4) love protects and endures, (5) love trusts, (6) love hopes and (7) love perseveres. Often, we learn more from “don'ts” than we do from “do's.” The “don't” list tells us that: (1) love is not envious or jealous, (2) love is not boastful, (3) love is not proud, (4) love does not act rude, (5) love is not self-seeking, (6) love does not easily get mad, (7) love does not keep score of wrongs and (8) love does not rejoice in evil or weakness. The point is that, what love is not, Jesus is not and we are not to be what love is not. Again, it's all about love.

Finally, in verses 8-13, Paul drives the point home by speaking of the permanent nature of love. Charity never faileth; but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away...But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away (1 Cor 13:8-10).

Any discussion of Spiritual Gifts begins and ends with the love of God. The love of God is the source of the gifts and the love of God will be what remains when Spiritual Gifts have vanished. When other Spiritual Gifts are contrasted with love, love remains a champion gift. While all gifts have their important functions, the time will come when they will pass away and only love will remain standing.

We are to desire Spiritual Gifts, but they are only a means to an end. That end is to be like Him, in love and glory. Therefore, it behooves us to stir up the gift of love. Paul also tells us that we are not yet perfect, but as we grow in Christlikeness, Spiritual Gifts will decline until one-day perfect agape love will replace all Spiritual Gifts. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity (1 Cor. 13:10-13). This day of total perfection refers to when we see Him "face to face."

A few single scriptural truth or work repeating. Artist love. Love is God. Faith works by love. Perfect love cast see. Love covers a multitude of sins. It has not yet been revealed what God has prepared for those who love him. They will know we are Christians by our love. We are to love God first to you we ought to love one another. Nothing can separate God's love from us. We must, therefore, diligently follow love.

FOLLOW LOVE

Paul immediately follows the famous "love chapter" (1 Cor. 13) by saying: Follow after charity, and desire Spiritual Gifts, but rather than that ye may prophesy (1 Cor. 14:1). We are to follow the way of the love. Love gives direction to all of the Spiritual Gifts. Spiritual Gifts absolutely cannot function properly outside the path of love. Much like a track and field participant in one of the dash events, like the 440-yard dash is required to run in his or her designated lane or be eliminated. So it is with Spiritual Gifts. We must function in the way (lane) of love; otherwise our Spiritual Gifts are nothing. The purpose of Spiritual Gifts is to serve and the motivation for serving is love. "No love" equals "no motivation." And "no motivation" results in "no service." Therefore, as we desire to discover, develop and utilize our Spiritual Gifts we must pursue love. Noteworthy is the fact that God did say, desire Spiritual Gifts, not abandon spiritual gifts due to fear, misunderstanding and confusion. Remember that love is the key that unlocks the door of understanding and boldness and love is the glue that cements the various gifts together. Notice, God says to stir up the gift (singular). Yet, there are many gifts. Like God speaks of the fruit (singular) of the Spirit and there are many fruits. Why? Because love is both the gift and the fruit from which all gifts and fruits spring forth.

GOD LOVES ME

One of my favorite hymns is, "Yes, Jesus Loves Me." The hymn gives the reasons we know Jesus loves us. The refrain repeatedly declares, "Because the Bible tells me so." A study of Spiritual Gifts tells us that Jesus not only loves us, but He loves us equally. He loves me as much as He loves anyone else. How do we know Jesus loves us equally? Because He gave us all a Spiritual Gift. Not one of His children is left out. Not a single one is denied because He loves us equally, He gifted each and every one of us with various Spiritual Gifts. Let us unwrap our gifts and dig in our gift bags and follow the way of love.

A BASIC ASSUMPTION AND THE POWER OF LOVE

Since the gift of love is the primary, preeminent, root gift of God, if you stir up the gift of love you will stir up all the Spiritual Gifts of God. This is due to the nature of the gift and the nature of the gift giver. The nature of the gift of love is powerful. For I have not given you a spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind (2 Tim. 1:7).

The power of this love was demonstrated by the genuine faith of our parents. When I call to remember the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also. Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift... (2 Tim. 1:5-6). In other words, remember that power of faith and love that your

parents possessed and stir it up. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth our fear (1 John 4:18). When we fail to stir up the gift of love, fear controls our lives. Bondage is a product of fear, but freedom is the child of love. If we stir up the gift of love we will not live in the fear of judgement, fear of man, or fear of anything. If we stir up the gift of love we will not live in the fear of criticism. The spirit of love teaches us the power of love.

The powerful nature of the gift of love was demonstrated by the acts of Mother Teresa and Mahatma Gandhi. Both were born into lives of relative comfort, but they chose to forsake themselves to serve others. Mother Teresa's love of God led her to serve the poor, the sick and the homeless on the streets in Calcutta, India until her death. Gandhi chose to give up his law practice to lead his fellow Indians to free India from British rule through peaceful civil disobedience. His was a love for freedom for his fellow countrymen. The power of the gift of love became evident during the non-violent civil rights demonstrations that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. led in the 60's when people laid down their lives for the sake of peace and freedom. Mother Teresa can sum up the nature of this love in these words.

We must grow in love and to do this we must go on loving and loving and giving and giving until it hurts – the way Jesus did. Do ordinary things with extraordinary love; little things like caring for the sick and the homeless, the lonely and the unwanted, washing and cleaning from them. You must give not just what will cost you something. This, then, is giving not just what you can live without but what you can't live without or don't want to live without, something you really like. Then your gift becomes a sacrifice, which will have value before God. Any sacrifice is useful if it is done out of love. This giving until it hurts-this sacrifice-is also what I call love in action. (Mother Teresa, A Simple Path, Ballantine Books, 1995, Page 99.)

Ultimately, the power of the gift of love is best seen in the nature of the gift giver, Christ, who because of love would not come down from the cross. He bled and died for the lives of all! That's love! That's power! That's the gift we want to stir up. And if we stir up the power of that gift, we can stir up the manifold gifts of God enabling believers to become overcomers and congregations to become empowered.

STIR UP THE GIFT – THE FIREPLACE ANALOGY

The Apostle Paul, writing his last will and testament to his young spiritual son in the ministry, Timothy, who is now the pastor of the Church in Ephesus, gives an analogy of a fire that has nearly gone out. Evidently, Paul had ordained Timothy because he refers to the once genuine faith he had seen in him when he laid hands on him. Paul reminds Timothy of what a strong faith he once had. But now the spark is gone. The picture is one of a fireplace that was once ablaze, but is now flickering amidst a few warm coals. The fire needs to be rekindled. It needs to be stirred up (stoked). It needs the coal or logs moved around so it can be brought back again to a flame.

This is the mirror reflection of the many pastors, church leaders, believers and the Body of Christ. We were once on fire. When God first touched our lives, we were ablaze with His light. When we first experienced grace. When we felt hands laid on us. When we first received His love. But now something has happened to us. Our smoldering embers glow without a flame. Our fire is burning low. Our excitement and enthusiasm are simmering. Our joy has been stolen and the thrill is gone. Saints, we need to stir up the all powerful Gift of Love that was shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

Stir up the Gift of Love and we will bring the dormant Spiritual Gifts possessed by believers in the Church to a flame. Don't let your fire go out. Stir it up. Don't be ignorant. Know that you have been given a precious gift. Discover the gift. Use your gift. Stir up your gift. Stir it up. Stir up the gift.

STIR UP THE GIFT – THE BODY ANALOGY

There are several analogies in Pauline literature used to describe the Church. Often the Church is described as a bride, building or temple and at other times as a soldier or army. But the most predominant description is the human body. It is the Body of Christ here on earth. Christ is the head of the body. As a biology major in college, the awesome collaborative functions of the cells, tissue, organs, and systems of the human body always fascinated me. To understand the physiology of the human body is to say, “Look at God!” In three scriptures: Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4:15, 16, a body analogy is used to explain how Spiritual Gifts function.

In Romans 12:1, God tells us through Paul, that we should present our bodies as living sacrifices which is our reasonable service or worship. In other words, based on what God has already done, we should utilize all that God has given us, including our Spiritual Gifts to edify the Body of Christ. We are to use our gifts to build up the Body.

In 1 Corinthians 12, beginning at the twelfth verse, Paul gives an elaborate, detailed explanation of one body with many parts working together for one purpose—one for all and all for one is the rally chant. For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ (1 Cor 12:12). The major point of Paul’s detailed analysis of the body is that every member is expected to function in its own place of service and for this place of service, every member is gifted. The emphasis is on participation and not on being entertained. The Church is neither a spectacle or spectator sport. The Body of Christ is weakened when we expect the paid staff to do the work, while the rest of the body sits on the bench or in the stands as fans either cheering or booing.

In Ephesians 4:16 we are told once again, motivated by love, that we should find our place so we can use our spiritual gifts for the increase of the body. From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself and love (Eph 4:16). A track and field team would not likely have a field participant like the shot-putter, discus and javelin thrower trying to run the 100, 220 and 240 dash. Also, there are runners who specialize in short distances and some who are best at long distances. Those who specialize in short or long distances are not expected to run in all events. It is a team effort. The team score determines the winner. Likewise, the believer should not be expected to operate outside of how they are best made to function on God’s Kingdom building “construction team.” God’s ministry is a collaborative team effort. Spiritual Gifts are congregational Spiritual Gifts and were never intended to run solo. Spiritual Gifts are not given to create spiritual Lone Rangers.

The question for you is, “Where do you fit in the Body of Christ?” where are you joined together for the effectual working of the body? These are questions this book will help you answer. What is your spiritual job description? Where do I fit (join) in? Stirring up the gift of love will bring illumination to this question.

Checkpoint

1. What is the greatest gift of all gifts? The one that sparks all other gifts?
2. What is the main point of 1 Corinthians 13 (the love chapter)?
3. List the seven things that love will do.
4. List the eight things that love will not do.

Fill In the Blank

1. Faith works by _____.
2. God is _____.
3. Love _____ a multitude of _____.
4. It has not yet been revealed _____.
5. We must therefore diligently follow _____.
6. Love is both the _____ and the _____ from which all others spring forth.
7. Bondage is a product of _____.
8. Freedom is a child of _____.

Helpful Dialogue

1. If you have all the gifts of God but you don't walk in love, your gifts will be ineffective. So if you covet the best other gifts, there is a more excellent way and that is the way of love. How much of the love of God do you covet earnestly? Have you asked God to fill you to overflowing with His love? The Bible says, "The love of God is shared abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit." We need to stir up the gift of love in our lives.
2. Do you know anyone who comes close to the type of love described in 1 Cor. 13? Love that suffers long and is kind? This love requires personal, physical and emotional sacrifice. Are you willing to sacrifice in order to walk in love as God has commanded?
3. If faith works by love and perfect love cast out fear, if you are full of fear in any area of your life, you are not walking in love. What areas in your life need to be liberated from fear through love?

What If I Don't Believe

- If I don't believe that love is the preeminent Gift of all Gifts and that other Gifts would not be effective without it, I will never be able to revive my Gifts and my Gifts will remain dry and lifeless in the Church. I will be as a sounding brass and that tinkling cymbal.
- If I don't believe, I will battle constantly with the Spirit of Fear, Jealousy, Envy and the like. The Spirit of Love (God) will not be there to overcome these vicious spirits.
- I will produce little or no fruit in the Kingdom of God.

A Challenge

1 Corinthians 13
2 Timothy 1:7
1 John 4:18
Ephesians 4:16
Matthew 22:37-38