

"Using Your Spiritual Gifts In Love"

by Pastor Jeffrey Miskus

Preached on the 5th Sunday after the Epiphany

Text: 1 Corinthians 13

DATE: February 7, 2010

IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST, OUR CRUCIFIED, RISEN AND ASCENDED LORD, WHO IS NOT DEAD BUT ALIVE, WHO IS NOT IN THE TOMB, BUT IS WITH US HERE, NOW WITH HIS LOVE AND HIS POWER AS HE LIVES AND REIGNS AT THE GLORIOUS RIGHT HAND OF GOD OUR HEAVENLY FATHER. DEARLY BELOVED CHILDREN OF GOD...

For the past two weeks we have been hearing about spiritual gifts. Just a quick review to begin.

God has given each of us spiritual gifts. These gifts are to be used by us to serve the church. Just as the body needs all its parts to function properly, we need each other to function properly as a church.

Last week we learned that we are to desire the greater gifts – gifts that build up the church – that edify and encourage the church – these are the greater gifts. We also learned that we are to practice our gifts in love. We heard that the greatest gifts and the grandest deeds together with all their splendor and wonder MAKE US NOTHING AND PROFIT US NOTHING IF LOVE IS ABSENT.

Finally we learned that not only has Jesus freely given us our spiritual gifts but he has also set us free to love. His death and resurrection set us free to use our gifts – not because we need to in order to save ourselves – but completely out of love. God graciously equips us to serve and frees us to serve. But what does that love look like? What does it look like to use our spiritual gifts in love?

Paul continues with the following description in 1 Cor.13:4-6..."Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy. It does not boast. It is not proud. It is not rude. It is not self seeking. It is not easily angered. It keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails." This is how we are to use our spiritual gifts to serve the church. "Love is patient" (1 Cor 13:4) is the first exhortation.

The word for used for patience is more literally - 'long suffering'. If you serve the church I personally guarantee you that you will be hurt and offended by others in the church. People will criticize you, they will at times work against you and you will be taken for granted. Love suffers long – love continues to serve the church despite the suffering. It's all for Jesus – for him who loved us and gave himself for us.

Love is kind (1 Cor 13:4)– it meets the needs it sees around it. If you're wondering where God wants you to serve in this congregation there is a very easy way to know... When you see a need in the church - that is God's call, God's invitation to us to serve and use our gifts in kindness. Next, Paul lists off attitudes we are to avoid if we are to serve the church in love... envy, boasting, pride, rudeness... Paul brings up these things because the Corinthian church was being divided over its gifts. Some in the church felt they had superior gifts and wouldn't work with others who had what they felt were lesser gifts. Paul said, "The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you." And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you." (1 Cor 12:21) God reveals that these attitudes have nothing to do with love. They will be cancerous to your service to the church. They must be identified and repented of.

Let's talk about the first one – envy. When envy sees another person prospering in some way the reaction is one of bitterness and resentment. Envy feels a building dissatisfaction with what it has in comparison to another that has more. If envy is behind your service to the church – you are not serving in love. Instead of being envious, love is satisfied with its own gifts and rejoices at the gifts of others.

Love does not boast and is not proud. (1 Cor 13:4) Pride and boastfulness go together and they are very divisive in the church when it comes to gifts. Pride is an overestimation of one's own importance, abilities, and achievements. Pride causes us to become puffed up in our own minds – seeing ourselves as more important or better than we really are, seeing one's service as more important than it really is. Pride causes us to not want to work with others in the church if we think our gifts are greater or theirs are lesser. We need to repent of any attitudes that cause us to feel our gifts and service are superior to others.

Love "is not rude" . (1 Cor 13:5) When pride puffs up the heart, rude conduct naturally follows. One considers oneself more gifted than another and so treats the other rudely, "because their gifts are lower than mine." When we

fail to accord to others their proper dues of respect, honour, or consideration rudeness is a natural fruit.

Love is not self seeking. (I Cor 13:5) Love seeks not its own pleasure, seeks not its own profit, and seeks not its own honour. Love seeks the good of the whole church, the whole body. It moves us to see our spiritual gifts as given by God to be used to serve others first – not our selves.

“Love is not easily angered.” (I Cor 13:5) The literal translation is “Love is not provoked”. When we are using our gifts and we are filled with pride there is a tendency to become easily angered if someone gets in our way. CAN'T YOU SEE I'M SERVING JESUS!!! GET OUT OF MY WAY I'M DOING GOD'S WORK!!! If you think you have a great gift and you've become proud and conceited – you'll likely explode with angry outbursts if someone gets in your way when you're serving. That's not serving in love. There is a reason why love is not easily angered – “It keeps no records of wrongs.” (I Cor 13:5) I tell people that join the church that they will be hurt by other people in the church. We are all sinners and sinners sometimes hurt each other. Unless you forgive and resist keeping record of the wrongs done to you by others in the church you will find it very difficult to serve the church in love. That resentment will colour your service. The next verses of 1Cor 13:6-7 describe love with the following words...

“Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.” The literal rendering of this verse reads, “love rejoices not over unrighteousness.” There are times when pride and envy give birth to some very ungodly behaviour in the church which in turn causes division. This is evil. And love does not delight in evil. Love rejoices with the truth – the gospel truth that the church is Christ's body and needs to work as one. Listen to the emphasis of the next section,

“Love... always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.” (I Cor 13:7) The first of these reads... “Love always protects”. (I Cor 13:7) This word usually means 'to cover or fend off'. In a body the different parts protect each other. When you hear someone trashing someone else's service in the church – your first instinct should be to protect. Out of envy or pride people can become critical of others service in order to make them feel better about their own service or gifts. This is not love. Love always trusts(I Cor 13:7) or as the King James puts it, “believes all things.” Oh how eager we are to hear about a peer's failings and believe

the worst. NOT SO WITH LOVE! Love stands ready to believe the best in a brother – defend him – speak well of him – explain everything in the kindest way. Love always hopes. (I Cor 13:7) This refers to the hope directed toward our brothers and fellow human beings. This is the hope which expects what is best from him or her. HOPE KNOWS NO PESSIMISM. Yet the basis for this hope of love is not mere natural optimism but the effective grace of Jesus Christ. LOVE ALWAYS EXPECTS GOD'S GRACE TO CONQUER AND TO WIN ITS WAY – the way Jesus conquered our enemies of sin, death, and hell through the cross. Love always expects God's work to change men's hearts and make them what He intended them to be. Love always perseveres. (I Cor 13:7) Literally, “love endures all things”... it is the opposite of fleeing away and giving up in defeat. Love never gives up but instead displays brave perseverance in the midst of evil! Bravely use your gifts and never give up serving no matter you face.

And finally for today, “Love never fails” (I Cor 13:8) As I read and meditate on this great revelation of God – It makes me think of Debra McCracken's ministry in Tanzania. Debra runs an orphanage for children infected with AIDS. They have either had it from birth from their mother or were infected by rape. These children come to her mostly dead. They have an incurable disease – their families are all dead from the disease – they haven't been able to eat or care for themselves and so they are weak and sickly.

The world looks at these kids and says... They have an incurable disease... they have no family...they live in an impoverished land and get little or no medical attention. They have no future – no hope - they are as good as dead.

Then love steps in... “love always protects – always trusts - always hopes – always perseveres – love never fails.” And God's love takes a person like Deb McCracken and her simple gifts, and God uses her to feed and care for the children – simple things. With patience and kindness she gives them shelter and protection, and a place to call home. She creates a family environment and begins to teach them and educate them. Then medical specialists and doctors come and test her children and are surprised to find they have normal levels of health despite the disease. And this is how she speaks to me on the phone as she describes her youngest, a 3 year old brought to her with weeks left to live. “We fed and nursed this child back to health. She is now learning 3 different languages and is at the perfect age to do so. She speaks in full sentences and is growing like a weed.” “She will be the next prime minister of Tanzania.”

"Jeff", she says... "I'm raising the future leaders of this country." And I believe her because she loves those kids. And love always protects – always trusts – always hopes – always perseveres – and love never fails.