We are quickly approaching the Easter season. This Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent – the 40 day period when many Christians will devote themselves to considering the events surrounding the final days of Jesus before His arrest, crucifixion, death and resurrection. Of course all of the gospels contain details of those final days, but to my mind, none is so intimate and focused as is the Gospel of John. Of the four biographic writings we have of Jesus, John is the only author who was one of the “inner circle” of the 12 disciples. Along with Peter and James, John was as close to Jesus as anyone. He wrote his gospel years after Matthew, Mark and Luke’s had been circulated, and because the first three had done such a great job of telling the whole story of Jesus, and much of the teaching, John felt at liberty to spend more time sharing the heart of Jesus, which is why so many find his gospel the most compelling.

In chapter 13, John included an event that is not contained in the other gospels, but is one of the most powerful scenes from that gripping week. It was the night of his betrayal – the last evening Jesus would spend with the twelve before his death. John tells us that they had gathered together to celebrate Passover – the highlight of the entire Jewish calendar – when they remembered how God had delivered His people from slavery in Egypt by bringing death to the firstborn of every home, but had passed over the homes of the faithful Israelites.

John tells us that while the meal was being served, Jesus got up, removed his outer clothing, wrapped a towel around His waist, poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet. One by one he went from man to man, removing their sandals, placing one foot, and then the other in the basin, washing off the dust and then drying them with the towel He had around his waist. It was a powerful scene. Peter resisted, but Jesus corrected him, and proceeded to wash the feet of all of them – including Judas, who at that very moment was involved in the plot to betray the Lord.

You are perhaps familiar with that episode from the life of Jesus. It is sometimes included in worship services during the Easter season, or in film portrayals of Jesus’ life. Let me ask you a question – Why? Why did Jesus wash the feet of His disciples? There’s more than one answer – let’s hear some of them.

[Because none of them had done it / Because He wanted to give them an example of humility and servitude / They would be blessed if they followed His example…]

Those are all valid reasons – they were the goal of Jesus’ action, but what was the motive? Verse 1 tells us that he did it to show them the full extent of His love. Jesus’ service, His demonstration of humility, was ultimately motivated by His incredible love for His disciples. He loved them – they knew that or course, but He served them to show the full extent of His love.
I thought about that as we approached Valentine’s Day yesterday. Think of all the ways people were encouraged to show their love this week. We are told to give a Valentine’s card to express our love; to purchase chocolates; to go out for a romantic dinner; to have a romantic evening at home or escape to some romantic spot in Paris or Rome.

But when Jesus wanted to show the full extent of His love – He served. He demonstrated love by sacrificial, humble service of those He loved. And He instructed those who received that love, to follow His example.

In these days we are doing a study about serving God by serving others. Every person who has trusted in Jesus Christ as their savior has been called and equipped to serve the Lord and His church. Last week we looked at a long list of Spiritual Gifts that have been given through the Holy Spirit to each believer as He determines. We also encouraged you during these days to discover what those gifts are and to be faithful in using them to serve. There are many ways to serve, and there are many ways to serve. We can serve bitterly, we can serve happily. We can serve greedily, knowing that we are now owed service from those we served, or we can serve unhealthily – feeling that we are of no value except to be used by others. Or we can serve motivated, as Jesus was, by the fullest and deepest of love for those around us.

Today I want to share just a couple of thoughts about how we use our Gifts. First, I want to share three attitudes to avoid, then one activity to adopt.

Three Attitudes to Avoid.

The first attitude to avoid is Projection. We must be careful to avoid projection of our Gift on to another person. Projection is when we say, “you should do as I do.” When we have a particular Spiritual Gift, it is easy for us to expect others to have the same abilities. We are intolerant of their unwillingness to serve as we do, and we devalue the service they do. For example:

- Those with the Gift of wisdom might expect others to have more wisdom – “How can you not see this??”
- Those with the Gift of mercy might criticize others for not being sensitive to the needs of others. “How can you just sit there and not go and help them??”

We need to be very careful to avoid projecting our Spiritual Gift on to others, expecting everyone to have the passion and abilities we have. We all have different Spiritual Gifts according to the design and grace of God. Romans 12:6 says,

> Having then Gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them…(NKJV)

We need to not only recognize our own Gifts, and be good and faithful stewards of those Gifts, but we need to recognize and appreciate the value of the Gifts and passions of the people around us who make up the body of Christ.

The Second attitude to avoid is Elevation. Elevation is when we say, “My Gift is better than yours! My Gift is more important than yours!” There is a real temptation - and it comes from the Tempter himself, Satan – to hold up our Spiritual Gift as more helpful or powerful
than some other Gifts. We want to be treated special, we want to feel important, and we want to magnify the importance of our Gift over the Gifts of others.

Remember that it was pride that led to the fall of Satan in the first place. It is no wonder that he tries, and often succeeds in using pride to pervert the Gifts that God has given His children. We need to remember that all the Gifts are important and make a significant contribution to the ministry of the church. We need every Gift that God has placed within the body working fully and effectively in order for the church to function as it should. First Corinthians 12:18&19 reminds us, that God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. And if they were all one member, where would the body be?

The third attitude to avoid is REJECTION. Rejection is when we feel that somehow we missed out. We deny that God has given us a Gift, or we have been so brow beaten over Gifts in our past that we reject them out of hand. If we do that, then we not only deny the truth of God’s word, but we also cause the church to be less effective. It’s like a body with a limb that won’t function. God has placed each one of us in the body as he has chosen, he has given a Gift to each of his children, and he expects us to use that Gift faithfully until He comes again or calls us home to himself.

We need to avoid each of these attitudes – when we embrace projection, elevation or rejection, we are not glorifying God or edifying the body of Christ.

One Activity to Adopt

But while there are three attitudes we need to avoid, there is one Activity that we must adopt. It’s love. Some might say love is an attitude – but it’s not, it’s an action – a decision, a way of life. It is found in the chapter immediately following the most important chapter on Spiritual Gifts in the Bible. I Corinthians chapter 13 is one of the most well known portions of Scripture. It is read at weddings probably more than any other. It is commonly called “the Love Chapter.” It may in fact be the single best writing on love in all of human history. Let me read it for you.

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 And 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 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.

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.

8 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.'
A wonderful passage on Love! But Paul was not thinking about marriages and romantic relationships when he wrote it! He defines love beautifully, but this love is about far more than our attraction to the opposite sex. It’s about the church! It’s about how we behave as part of the community of believers in Jesus Christ! Do you see the lists of Gifts that are included in that chapter? It is clear that this chapter on love is connected to the discussion of Spiritual Gifts just before it in chapter 12. While 1 Corinthians chapter 12 gives us the theology of ministry, chapter 13 gives us the heart and soul of ministry. At the end of chapter 12, Paul wrote, “Now I am going to show you the most excellent way.” And this is it: to serve in love! Love is presented as the context in which we are to serve one another. Simply put, God is more concerned about the way we serve, than what we do when we serve.

Notice in the first three verses that each of the people described are actually using their Gift – their giftedness and their use of the Gifts is not questioned. I can be doing all sorts of things in the church – using my gifts all day long – but if I am not doing it with love, it means NOTHING! Spiritual Gifts that are expressed without love do not reflect who God is, and do not have a Kingdom impact.

Near our home in the US there was large National Park area. It is a nature preserve called the Horicon Marsh. It attracts thousands of people every year to look at wildlife – particularly migratory birds. There is a highway that crosses the park from east to west, and it is not unusual in the summer and autumn to see dozens of vehicles parked along the sides, with the occupants standing alongside with binoculars looking at geese, ducks, eagles, herons, and countless other birds and other wildlife.

Occasionally when driving across the park we’ve come across a group of students picking up trash. They are from the ecology club and they are smiling and laughing and excited to be doing the work. They are making a difference! They are making an impact in the environment that they care about. They love the earth; and they love the difference they can make by serving! Occasionally when driving across the park we’ve come across a group of inmates picking up trash. Just a few miles down the road there is a federal prison, and in the summer they will sometimes send a chain gang to do the same job as the ecology club. They are certainly not smiling; they are not enthusiastic. They are doing as little as possible, with no joy and no love…it’s just step, poke, rest, step, poke, rest – and complain.

In each case, is the job getting done? Yes. Both are doing the same task, but the prisoners don’t care, and are doing it “just to get the job done.” The students are doing it with passion and purpose – they are motivated and enthusiastic.

Which group would you want to be a part of? How often do we find ourselves serving in the church like the chain gang? When that happens, chances are we’ve taken our eyes off the God we serve, and put them on ourselves. We begin to think about the price we are paying to accomplish this goal; we compare our workload to the output of others, and ask, “Why aren’t they doing more?” or, “Why can’t I do what they are doing?” or, “I sure hope someone is going to serve me one day!” Doesn’t sound like the way Jesus served, does it?
But when we have our eyes on the big picture, and serve motivated by our love for God and for others - we will find our service to be a joy – even when picking up trash, or washing dusty feet! Because we know that God is using our efforts, as He designed us, to accomplish great things for His kingdom.

That’s the kind of church I want to be a part of – where service reflects the love of the one who humbled Himself and became a servant – even though He was the Lord of Lords and King of Kings. Wouldn’t you like to be part of a group like that? Then let’s work together and serve each other in an attitude of love.

Prayer

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