

[IN GOD'S IMAGE 76 – THE CHURCH - SERVICE]

Our focus has shifted to the role and function of the church.

- ◆ We are looking at the role of the church through five virtues, faith, hope and love, worship and service.
- ◆ The church as the body of Christ needs to be people of faith, people of hope, people of love, people of worship, and people of service.

Last time we looked at the subject of worship, this time our focus is on the subject of service.

- ◆ The Christian church is a community, a community held together by the bond of love that flows from God.
- ◆ But as we learned on our recent session on love, the love of God is much more than just a warm sentimental feeling, it is also an expression or action which flows outwards towards others for the sake of the other.
- ◆ This is the type of love demonstrated by God when He chose to share His existence with humanity, and when He gave us the gift of His Son in order to redeem a rebellious humanity from their sinful ways.
- ◆ God's love flows outwards for the sake of the other.
- ◆ As a result of God's generosity to us, we learned in earlier sessions that the church has been chosen to represent Him as His holy people in this "between the times" period as part of His "new creation."
- ◆ This is both a privilege and a responsibility.
- ◆ It is a privilege in that we have specifically been chosen by God to represent Him at this time, but also to experience and participate now in the life and love of the Trinity in this "between the times" period.
- ◆ We get to walk in the light now while the rest of humanity still walks in darkness (Ephesians 5:8).
- ◆ But it also carries a responsibility in that we are to represent God and all that He is and stands for to the best of our ability as we participate in His ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:17-18).
- ◆ As we do this, we need to guard against the unfortunate attitude some in the Christian community have been accused of and that is of acting in some sort of superior or judgmental attitude towards non-Christians.
- ◆ We need to remember Paul's words to the saints in Corinth, "***such were some of you.***"
- ◆ ***1 Corinthians 6:10-11 nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.***
- ◆ Christians should never forget who we were before we experienced God's grace.
- ◆ Like the rest of humanity, we too were God's enemies, rejecting our Creator and hurting others by living according to our own selfish lifestyles.
- ◆ But as this scripture says, we "***were washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.***"
- ◆ The church is to be a spiritual hospital where sinners can go for healing. (Mark 2:17).
- ◆ Believers should never forget we too are recovering patients.
- ◆ ***2 Corinthians 5:14-15 For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. ¹⁵ And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.***
- ◆ A correct understanding of service stems from an appreciation of what Christ has done on our behalf.
- ◆ His was a sacrificial love for the sake of the other.
- ◆ We are to go forth humbly in Christ's name, as living examples of God's sacrificial love towards a rebellious and sinful humanity.
- ◆ Godly love is going to cost us something personally as it did God so we shouldn't be surprised if at times we will be taken advantage of.
- ◆ As the apostle Paul plainly states it, "***I die daily***" (1 Corinthians 15:31). In a certain sense, followers of Christ are to be living martyrs.
- ◆ Nevertheless, the world needs to know God is "for them" and there is an alternative to the sinful lifestyle they are held captive by, and that He can free them from it.

So with the right mindset, the church is sent forth as His representatives to redeem a fallen world.

- ◆ ***2 Corinthians 5:18-20 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf.***

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- ◆ How many people out there don't know God doesn't count their sins against them?
- ◆ God has forgiven them because Jesus has already paid the death penalty of sin for them.
- ◆ That penalty will only be reinstated in the sad event they reject the gift of His Son.
- ◆ But Jesus didn't come just to save people from their sins. He did do that, but as this verse implies, he also expected the recipients of His grace to carry on His mission of reconciliation.
- ◆ Over in Luke 4 we find Jesus outlining His earthly mission to the assembled in the synagogue.
- ◆ **Luke 4:16-21 ...He stood up to read,¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:**
- ◆ Notice now, is Jesus' mission good news or bad news for the world?
- ◆ **V.18 The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free,¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."²⁰ Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him.²¹ He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."**
- ◆ Christ through His life, death and resurrection did the hard yards and set in motion the ministry of reconciliation.
- ◆ What is important to understand now that Christ has ascended to the Father is that He has committed His mission of completing His reconciling ministry to the church.
- ◆ And in the same way Jesus lived out his life for the "sake of the other," so now the church is to live out its life for the "sake of the other."
- ◆ As Karl Barth said, "The church exists for the sake of the world."
- ◆ In a way, the church is to become God's hands and feet in this world acting like His spiritual ambulances.
But of course this is too important a mission to leave in the hands of mere mortals, so He promised He would equip the church with the divine resources it needed to complete His mission.
- ◆ As He promised the disciples on the evening before His crucifixion he promised to equip the church with the same Spirit that led Him as He completed His earthly ministry (John 14:16-18).
- ◆ **Acts 1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."**
- ◆ The Holy Spirit not only brings divine qualities to the individual as we saw in our earlier session on the role of the Holy Spirit, but He also equips the body of Christ with the divine resources it needs to fulfil its mission in carrying out Christ's reconciling ministry.
- ◆ God promises to walk beside us, accompanying us every step of the way, empowering us to do what we could never accomplish alone.
- ◆ These divine qualities of the Spirit are listed as both "fruits" and "gifts" to differentiate them from human efforts usually characterized in scripture as "works."
- ◆ There should never be a question as to the source of these gifts as this scripture explains. The power is not something we generate despite our many talents.
- ◆ Rather these gifts have a divine origin, the Holy Spirit.
- ◆ Unfortunately this was the problem with the church at Corinth. Instead of using the gifts of the Spirit for the "common good" of building up the church, instead they were grandstanding and arguing over which gift was the most important.
- ◆ Paul has to remind them of the source of the gifts and the reason for which they were given.
- ◆ **1 Corinthians 12:4-7 There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them.⁵ There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord.⁶ There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.⁷ Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.**
- ◆ It is the Holy Spirit who distributes the gifts and they are to be used for the common good of building up the church not for self-promotion or aggrandisement.
- ◆ Notice too, that no one misses out on receiving a gift, all are included in God's reconciling ministry (v.7).
Before we look at these gifts of service more closely, we need to make one other comment and that has to do with the "fruits of the Spirit" (Galatians 5:22-23) in relation to the "gifts of the Spirit."

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- ◆ The “gifts” of the Spirit should always be subordinated to the “fruits” of the Spirit.
- ◆ This was the problem with the Corinthian church. They allowed their pride as to their particular gift to take precedent over the welfare of the church community.
- ◆ And this is why sandwiched between 1 Corinthians 12 and 14 both of which deal with the spiritual gift problem in Corinth is Paul’s well-known chapter on “love.”
- ◆ Here Paul reminds the Corinthian church there can be no other motive for the use of these gifts other than love, i.e. for the sake of the other.
- ◆ **1 Corinthians 13:1-3** *If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³ If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.*
- ◆ It is we humans who assign value to these gifts, not God. Some gifts may appear to be more prominent than others, but in God’s eyes, all are of equal value because they all come from and promote the love of God.
- ◆ What is of paramount importance is, we use our God-given gifts, and they be used for the building up of the body to God’s glory.

Much has been written on the subject of the spiritual gifts God gives to the church so it is not my intention to go into detail here.

- ◆ However I would like to go back to Christ’s mission spelled out earlier in Luke 4.
- ◆ **Luke 4:18-19** *“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”*
- ◆ Here we see the mission broken up into two broad categories, first, a proclamation of good news, and second, a proclamation of relief for the oppressed.
- ◆ And, coincidentally, the list of spiritual gifts made available to the church coincides with these two proclamations.
- ◆ We will just look at the list found in Romans 12, but the other lists found in 1 Corinthians 12-14, and Ephesians 4 basically fall into these two broad categories as well.
- ◆ **Romans 12:6-8** *We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; ⁷ if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; ⁸ if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.*
- ◆ We see gifts in the form of speech, such as, teaching, prophecy and encouragement to proclaim the good news, and gifts in the form of practical welfare for the relief of the oppressed.
- ◆ The important point though is the need now for the church to adopt these two aspects of Christ’s mission in order to further God’s ministry of reconciling the world to Himself.
- ◆ Like Christ, the church needs to adopt the same strategy He used in His earthly ministry by now living for the sake of the other.
- ◆ This is how God’s love works; His love flows outwards for the sake of the other.

The church then in fulfilling Christ’s mission first needs to proclaim the good news of the gospel.

- ◆ **Matthew 28:19-20** *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.*
 - ◆ The world needs to hear about the God who loves them (John 3:16), and that He has already paid the penalty for their sins (Romans 5:8), and wants all to share in His eternal life (1 Timothy 2:3-4; 2 Peter 3:9).
 - ◆ This is to done in the right way of course so as not to make people run in the opposite direction.
 - ◆ There is a lot to be said for the approach mentioned in Matthew 5:16.
 - ◆ **Matthew 5:16** *In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.*
 - ◆ It always helps to establish some credibility through our actions before dazzling them with our great arguments.
 - ◆ Proper evangelism if it is to be successful is predicated on a prior relationship.
- The second aspect of Christ’s mission is, a proclamation of relief for the oppressed.***
- ◆ This is where we become Christ’s spiritual and physical ambulances.

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- ◆ Suffering people should never have to walk alone in their affliction.
- ◆ This is where we no longer live for ourselves, but for the “sake of the other.”
- ◆ The story of the Good Samaritan is one of living for the “sake of the other.”
- ◆ Mother Teresa recorded this comment from a dying Indian street beggar picked up from a drain, half eaten with worms, and brought to the mission, “I have lived like an animal in the street, but I am going to die like an angel, loved and cared for.”
- ◆ He was made to feel like God loved him through a fellow human being.
- ◆ This is what it means to “bind up the broken-hearted” (Isaiah 61:1).
- ◆ Living a life of service is to no longer live for ourselves, but to live for the sake of the other.
- ◆ In other words we are to use these God given-gifts to express Christ’s love for the world.
- ◆ That is Christ’s mission for the church.
- ◆ ***1 Peter 4:10-11 Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms. ¹¹ If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.***

Just one final thought on these spiritual gifts.

- ◆ The exercise of these gifts by each individual member serves to draw us closer together as God’s loving community.
- ◆ They remind us we are one community, working together on a common mission, (Christ’s reconciling ministry), relying on one another as we don’t all share the same gift, and the common component holding it all together and making it work is God’s Holy Spirit.
- ◆ In an earlier session we talked about how each of us has been chosen by God to be a living stone making up God’s holy temple.
- ◆ ***1 Peter 2:4-5 As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him— ⁵ you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.***
- ◆ It is here in this spiritual house, that we as individual stones, need to recognise we are part of something much greater than ourselves, we are part of Christ’s reconciling ministry working together for the salvation of the world.
- ◆ As such, each of us as part of the body of Christ needs to reflect on whom we represent.
- ◆ ***1 Peter 2:9-10 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.***
- ◆ The best way we can declare our praises of him is when we live as people of faith, people of hope, people of love, people of worship, and people of service.