



**Title: Sacrificial Service**

**Theme: Influential Church Membership**

**Series: Essentials for Church Growth**

“...And now I will show you the most excellent way. If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 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 have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. 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.” (1 Corinthians 12:31b-13:7)

## **Display of true love**

*It is imperative that you remember that today's keys text precedes chapter 12, which records some of the endowments of the Holy Spirit given gifts. (Thru the Bible) In chapter 12 the Holy Spirit moves the Apostle Paul to write about edification for the Body of Christ through Spiritual gifts. He used the illustration of the human body to show the necessity of the gifts working with one another in a Biblically healthy way. Today's key text records the display of true love, especially on how to exercise Spiritual gifts in a way that is pleasing to God, through Christ as Head of the church, under the anointing of the Holy Spirit.*

*I would propose to you that the child of God may possess any one of the Holy Spirit endowed gifts, but if he or she is not surrendered to the Holy Spirit's influence of love, he becomes useless in edifying the Body of Christ, in reaching out to lost souls, and worse yet, unable to minister to Christ. The foundation of ministering under the anointing of the Holy Spirit is understanding how to exercise our Spiritual gifts through sacrificial love. Christians who are going to be led of the Holy Spirit of Christ for the edifying of the Body of Christ and receive direction in the governing affairs of the church are those who have a Biblical understanding of sacrificial service.*

*Just how do Christians prepare to exercise their Spiritual gifts? Just who are the ones who are going to catch Biblical revelation for making key decisions for the church of Christ? Who should be the influential members of the Body of Christ in a local church?*

**No such thing as the perfect church**

*In bringing truth to determining who the influential church members are, there must be a Biblical understanding that in this dispensation there is no such thing as the perfect church. 1 Corinthians 11:17-19 says, "In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval."*

The Apostle Paul is not advocating factions and divisions, he is simply stating that in this sinful world and because of the sinful nature there will be conflict. Just as there were factions in the Corinthian Church there are going to be factions today. (Dr. Paul Hamar)

It is inevitable even among Christians there are going to be problems. The reason God allows it is so those who are living the Holy Spirit filled life will be made evident for all to see. Those who are living according the flesh and under the influence of the world will be exposed for who they are and those who are submitted to the Lordship of Christ will be made manifested for all to see. (The Expositors Bible Commentary)

Holy Spirit illuminated Christians will stand out because they will be loyal to the whole counsel of God's Word. They exhibit a trust not in their own strength but in the Lord's strength, and they will be seen as a people who constantly seek counsel through examination of God's Word, prayer, and Godly leadership.

Dr Jay Vernon McGee writes, "To tell you the truth, churches throughout America [have many members who just attend church] and they [do not know Christ]." (Thru the Bible) Matthew Henry writes, "It is not until divisions arise that those who have God's approval, [those] who are genuine, those who passed the test, can be made known. Divisions separate those faithful to God's Word from the rest [who do not seek the counsel of God's Word]." This key truth found in 1 Corinthians 11:17-19 takes us from second grade, immature Christianity, to mature Christian truth. As long as there are public meetings and as the numbers grow there will always be that conflict between those who live according the influence of the flesh, the world and the lies of the devil and those who seek the counsel of God's Word.

### **Seek the truth about real love**

*Mature Christianity understands that there is going to be conflict in the church on this earth.* Influential Church Members have accepted Christ as personal Savior and Lord and they seek the truth about real love.

Our key text says, "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 have not love, I am nothing." (1 Corinthians 13:2-3)

“Love” (*agape*) here in its application is the love of God involving the Lord doing what is best for man and not necessarily what man desires. The greatest example is John 3:16, “For God so loved the world He gave...” Without Christ mankind wants to please self and does not want to be made aware of the fact that in his fallen condition he is on the road to hell and unable to have fellowship with God. This gift of God, His one and only Son, purchased a way of forgiveness and salvation for mankind so sinners may be aware of their need of Christ in their lives. (The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the Bible)

The application given by God is not only a love toward God but also toward others, a real concern for his neighbor which is commanded by Christ. This particular love is given to Christians by the Holy Spirit and is prompted by walking in fellowship with the Lord. (The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the Bible; Concise Greek-English Dictionary; Vincent Word Studies in the New Testament) Agape love is a selfless love of the mind, of the reason, of the will that goes so far that it will love a person even if he does not deserve to be loved. This love actually loves a person who is utterly unworthy of being loved. This love enables Christians to take the gospel of Christ to adulterers, murders, and child molesters.

Christ showed this love to Saul, the persecutor of the church. As matter of fact Jesus asked Saul on the road to Damascus “Why do you persecute Me?” (Acts 9:4) Yet the Lord sends a man of prayer, Ananias, who prays for Saul so he can get his sight back and receive the Holy Spirit.

There is a movie made by the Billy Graham association titled “The Climb.” In this powerful evangelistic film, there is a scene where a young man goes to the home of a woman he has gotten pregnant outside of marriage. Through life changing circumstances Derrick Williams finds himself speaking to the young woman’s father. Derrick struggles to ask for forgiveness and has convinced himself that God cannot forgive him. The scene is awesome. The father does not want to share the good news, yet he overcomes his anger and bitterness, and chooses to let Christ love through him. The father tells Derrick of the forgiveness of Christ. Instead of being rejected, Derrick finds forgiveness promised in Christ, forgiveness from the girl’s parents and both the young woman and Derrick begin a walk with the Lord.

There are several brief truths to grasp in “agape” love. This selfless love only comes from God and was demonstrated when Christ died on the Cross for all the world’s sins, even before sinners came to repentance. Romans 5:6-8 says, “You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ...But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” While sinners were powerless to overcome the flesh, the lures of the world, and snares of the devil, Jesus got victory over death so man can have fellowship with God and live victoriously in Christ.

This selfless love comes as Christians live in fellowship with Christ and walk in step with the Holy Spirit. Romans 5:5 says, "God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us." It is by the power of the Holy Spirit Christians can exercise their Spiritual gifts for the purpose of presenting the gospel to those they feel unworthy of hearing it.

Once the child of God grasps the truths of agape love he is able to obey the teachings of Christ who said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:30-31)

The Greek word for love here is "agapao" meaning "to esteem", indicating a direction of the will and finding pleasure or joy in... someone achieving their potential." (The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the NT) The application of our text today is; there is great joy when we see the children of God grasp their Holy Spirit given gifts, see those gifts mature and exercised in a way that is edifying to the Body of Christ as they serve Jesus Christ.

We are so thankful to the Lord who has enabled and allowed us here at CrossRoads Church to help several men accomplish what the Lord wanted them to do in ministry. It is so exciting to watch the Lord use the different gifts in this Body of Christ to achieve His will.

### **Be obedient to the Word of God**

*Christians who are influential members in the church grasp what agape love is and they die to self in order to be obedient to the Word of God. The Holy Spirit moved the writer of Hebrews to write, "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching." (Hebrews 10:24-25)*

Why is it, Christians are drawn to avoid that which is good for them? What is so hard about gathering together for instruction in God's Word so Christians can know and enjoy a life of obedience to the Lord?

The Book of Hebrews has Scriptures that provide the means for preventing apostasy and promoting fidelity and perseverance in the work of the Lord. Instead of Christians becoming overcritical of each other, they learn to use their Spiritual gifts and spoken words for mutual edification.

Hebrews 10:24-25 express a truth for a people of God who desire to die to the flesh, say no to this world's system and avoid the lies of the devil. The Book of Luke chapter 2 presents the value of the exhortation given by the writer of Hebrews. Luke 2 records that time in history when Jesus was presented in the temple of God. We read about God-fearing parents walking in obedience to the Law of God. Luke 2:21-24 says, "When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took [Jesus] to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord, as it is written in the Law of the Lord, 'Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord' and to offer sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord..."

The sacrifice Christians offer today is their mind, heart, and life so they can walk in a joyful obedience to God's Word, thus enabling them to become influential church members.

Think of this. Just as Joseph and Mary took Jesus with them to the house of worship, born again Christians have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit of Christ, thus when they congregate great things happen. Those in the congregation can enjoy all the gifts of the Holy Spirit in public worship and in Christian living.

Simeon was one man of God who really got to enjoy the Lord's presence in corporate worship because God-fearing parents obeyed the Word of the Lord and because he knew the joy of walking in step with the Holy Spirit. Luke 2:25-27 says, "Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts..." Influential church members are led of the Holy Spirit of Christ. (Romans 8:14)

They also get to embrace the Lord's presence and they get to publicly proclaim praise to God. Luke 2:27-32 says, "When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for Him what the custom of the Law required. Simeon took Him in his arms and praised God, saying: 'Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.'" "

Simeon was so influential that the Bible says both Joseph and Mary marveled at what was said about Jesus. (Luke 2:33) I have often marveled as I listen to Christians who have sacrificed time to prayerfully study the Word of God and shared truths that were life directing and very insightful for the direction God was taking them.

Simeon the influential Holy Spirit led man of God then was used to give revelation, Luke 2:34-35 says, "Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, His mother: 'This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.'"

While attending a pastor's conference in 2005 in Colorado, I shared my Biblical convictions of overseeing a church with the Lord through Biblical directions with a Bible theologian. I was so convinced that once people in the church saw how this vision was so grounded in God's Word, Christians would just love this vision. This Bible professor was so pleased to hear the Biblical plan and he was so encouraging.

Then he spoke a word that cut like a sword into the very heart of my soul. He said, "This vision is a very good Biblical plan, but only a few will grasp it and enjoy it, others will come against such a vision." It happened just as he said.

This very influential Bible teacher was led of the Holy Spirit to speak a word to me that came 100% true. Even though what he said shocked me, it prepared me for what was to come so that when it happened I was able to keep my faith in Christ. His spoken word enables me to continue to pray through to completion this long range plan.

The prophetess Anna was another influential church member in the house of God on that day Jesus was taken to the temple. She was a widow who never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. (Luke 2:36-37) "Prophetess," (*prophetis*) here is a female friend of God, one who lives in communion with God and to whom God reveals Himself by His Spirit. (The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the Bible) Anna was a woman gifted by the Holy Spirit for prophesying. (Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament) Her faithfulness to the call of fasting and prayer allowed her to be anointed to speak about Jesus Christ to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem. (Luke 2:38)

Influential church members actually become temples full of the Holy Spirit who pray continually, (1 Thessalonians 5:17) they praise God for what He is doing and they are used of God to proclaim Christ to all who are looking for the redemption of their souls.

Luke 2:39-40 gives us another truth to grasp for those who desire to joyfully walk in obedience to God's Word. After Joseph and Mary obeyed the written law they went home. Jesus grew strong, was filled with the wisdom of God and the grace of God was upon Him.

Influential church members will walk in obedience to the written Word of God, as Joseph and Mary did. They are people led of the Holy Spirit as Simeon was and they are temples of the Holy Spirit who respond steadfastly to 1 Thessalonians 5:17, “pray continually.”

Let the Holy Spirit do a work in your heart with these questions. Are you seen in public places of worship, singing, learning God’s Word and walking in obedience to the written Word? Is it your heart’s desire to find ways to spur people on to good deeds to Christ and in His work?

### **Sacrificially prepare to exercise Spiritual gifts**

*Church members who should be allowed to be influential are Christians who are very much involved in the things of God.* There is another character trait that is found in influential church members. They sacrificially prepare to exercise their Spiritual gifts for the good of others.

1 Peter 4:8-11 says, “Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. ...Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.” Influential church members grasp the truths to two key words in what Peter has written here. First, love (*agape*) here is the ability from the Holy Spirit that enables Christians to love others for the purpose of bringing praise to God in Christ’s Name. Therefore, they exercise their spiritual gifts for the purpose of bringing glory to God and Jesus Christ.

Let us say “Love” is \$1,000.00. Let’s say you have \$1,000.00 and you are going use it to start a new Christian film ministry. You have the approval of the Elders and Deacons and everything is falling into place.

Then you hear of a health need of someone in the church who is very close to you, so instead you feel led of the Lord to give the \$1,000.00 to the person who has the health need. That would be very Biblical because James 1:27 says, “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this; to look after widows and orphans in their distress.” The truth worth grasping is, it is pleasing to the Lord to meet the need of those in some kind of distress.

The way of exercising this gift of love is to approach the spiritual leaders of the church and donate the \$1,000.00 to the benevolence fund and make the need known. Thus, the person in need would get a check from the church keeping you from being glorified publicly or in your own heart. By this method of exercising “agape” love, God and Christ would be seen working through the Body of Christ. Church members who should be allowed to influence others know how to express Holy Spirit agape love in a way that brings glory to God and Christ.

Influential church members grasp the truth of a second word in 1 Peter, “gift” (*charisma*) meaning an endowment given by the Holy Spirit that enables Christians to serve Christ and His church. (The Complete Word Study Dictionary; Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament; The Preacher’s Outline & Sermon Bible)

Too often in the Body of Christ there are those who long to exercise their gifts, but it is done in a way that brings attention to them with an attitude that says, “See, the Holy Spirit is upon me.”

Church members who should be allowed to have an influence on others must allow the Holy Spirit to probe their spiritual hearts with these two questions, “Am I exercising my Holy Spirit given gifts in a way that benefits others?” and “What sacrifices do I make for the preparation of exercising my Holy Spirit given gifts?”

Working with Sermon Central has been a blessing to me. Sermon Central challenges those who donate messages to them with 10 questions. One key question is, “Are you donating this message with the purpose of helping others to preach and teach God’s Word?”

The most Biblical influential Christians I know are serving someone else to help them in their need and/or to be successful in what the Lord is calling them to do.

*It is imperative that everyone, all sinners and born again Christians alike be welcome to attend worship services, Bible studies and Christian fellowship times. As matter of fact we should be broken-hearted when they do not participate with us.*

However, those who should be allowed to influence the direction of the church must be those who understand at this time on this earth there is no such thing as the perfect church. There will be conflicts. They must be Christians who express a new life in Christ surrendered to His Lordship, know what agape love really is, be obedient to the Word of God, and be very involved in the things of God. Lastly they must have Christian character that enables them to walk in step with the Holy Spirit so they exercise their Spiritual gifts under the Headship of Christ and for the good of others.

Lewis & Roth published a short book titled, “Agape Leadership.” This book is about a man named R. C. Chapman who has been referred to often as an “Epistle of Agape Love.” His Holy Spirit gifts were many, Pastor, Teacher and Evangelist being those worth mentioning today. Charles H. Spurgeon said of him, “The saintliest man I ever knew.”

Mr. Chapman was converted to Christ after attending John Street Chapel. As a new Christian he became very much involved in what the Lord was doing in John

Street Chapel. He attended the services and got involved in ministry to the poor in the slums, taking them food and sharing the gospel with them. After about 10 years of faithfulness in John Street Chapel, a church where he had seen the Lord do so much, the Lord called now Pastor Chapman to do a work in a much different setting.

God called him to do a work in the small very troubled Baptist congregation of Ebenezer Chapel in Barnstaple County in Devon England. Ebenezer was quite different from the flourishing, peaceful John Street Chapel in London.

Ebenezer Chapel had a congregation that was very divisive. In eighteen months they had gone through three different pastors. Despite the excellent training he received under the teachings of Pastor Harington Evans at John Street Chapel, shepherding the flock at Ebenezer would prove to be a challenging task for Pastor Chapman. Many predicted that in just six months he would be eaten alive by the congregation at Ebenezer.

At Ebenezer Chapel there was doctrinal tension and very little knowledge of the Word of God. Prayer meetings were poorly attended and the congregation knew very little about Spiritual gifts, or how to exercise them. Pastor Chapman knew that all the problems at Ebenezer were spiritual battles. The condition and solution was best explained by Pastor Chapman himself. He wrote, "When I was invited to leave London and go and minister the Word of God in Ebenezer Chapel, then occupied by a community of Strict Baptist, I consented to, naming one condition only – that I should be free to teach all I found written in the Scripture."

As I read through the Book titled "Agape Leadership." I noticed that to their credit the congregation at Ebenezer Chapel died to their denominationalism and the doctrines of men to let Pastor Chapman preach the entire Word of God. Instead of losing another pastor, they enjoyed a life-long work of the Lord working through this fine man of God. His work for the Lord with the Ebenezer congregation began in 1832 at the age of 29 and ran until January 1902 when he preached his last sermon at the age of ninety-eight. The congregation changed under straightforward Bible teaching. The Body of Christ became filled with influential members who enjoyed recognition from around the world as being governed by Agape love.

This is what the world needs to see today, a Body of Christ that knows how to Biblically exercise her Spiritual gifts under agape love, serving to please her Lord Jesus Christ and others for the Glory of God.

The Ebenezer congregation tried a democratic method which caused only a bad name for the church of Christ. They turned to the whole counsel of God's Word and enjoyed God's way, "Agape Leadership," which enabled them to become a flourishing growing congregation.

Influential church membership is not the signing of a membership card, it is the exercising of Holy Spirit gifts under the influence of "agape" love.

Let us pray!