**SERVE 9 1 Corinthians 13 Empty without LOVE**

This is the last in our series looking at the work of the Holy Spirit and how he empowers us to ***SERVE*** the Body of Christ – the local church.

One commentator writes – ‘more important than all the gifts is love’. Paul insists this is ‘the most excellent way’ (12:13). This implies that even if every person in the church community is using their gifts to the full, if the ways those gifts are used is not lubricated by love, then they will have no effect. This chapter is often part of a wedding service but it is primarily directed at the love that should characterise any church fellowship. Paul says we are like an instrument that jars the eardrum – that is painful.

Love expressed in a group is not a nice extra to have. It is the way we live and work. Without it we are not just ineffective but we are impotent. In the first three verses, Paul illustrates his point by listing five of the spiritual gifts we have in the New Testament. Tongues without love result in a horrible noise (v1) Even parting with all your worldly gifts or being burnt at the stake mean nothing if those things are not done for the love of the fellowship, they are meaningless.

1. What is ‘1 Corinthians love’ like?

How would it be expressed to another Christian?

How would it be seen in the church or in your group?

Traditionally the word ‘love’ is used in a romantic context. The word we use covers many situations. We love ‘Chinese food’ or we love travelling, being but two. The New Testament has several words for love. Perhaps the most significant here are ‘brotherly love’ and ‘self-sacrificial love’.

1. Brotherly love is about loving our sisters and brothers as if they were part of a precious family. Talk practically about how that can be achieved.

Self- sacrificial love quite simply means putting the needs of another person before your own needs. How have you seen that expressed in your own life?

Paul is so anxious that the Corinthian church gets this idea that he then goes into a detailed definition of love. Corinth was a ‘lively’ city in which love would be expressed in many distorted forms. If you said ‘love’ to a new convert in Corinth they would not be thinking brotherly or sacrificial love. So Paul spells it out in very simple terms

 Patience – has the idea of long-suffering (v4)

 Boasting – bragging about oneself

 Proud – more literally ‘puffed up’.

 Rude - uses the same word as ‘unpresentable’ (v5)

 Easily angered – can be seen as short tempered etc……………………..

1. Take a look at these qualities in verses 4 to 7 and talk honestly about the hardest qualities you find to live out.

What aspects of loving your brothers and sisters do you find the hardest?

Verse 8 states the clear theme of verses 8 to 13. – ‘Love never fails. Faith, hope and love endure but spiritual gifts appear to be less permanent. Paul mentions gifts that were important to believers in Corinth. There are four words which describe gifts disappearing (cease, pass away, disappear, put behind). Paul is saying they are imperfect provisions in an imperfect world. When perfection comes, they will no longer be needed. Some have thought that these gifts will cease at the end of the apostolic age (i.e. the 1st century) but there doesn’t appear to be anything in the text that suggests these gifts will cease until the Lord returns.

1. After spending several weeks looking at using our gifts for the Lord’s service, are you any more clear about your own gifts and how they might be used in the church?

Have you taken any more steps towards using your gifts?

‘Love never fails’ is a great way to finish our series. Love goes on into eternity. We will love each other in the Lord’s presence so it makes very good sense to start right here.

1. Spend some time praying for our church and for all the people with so many gifts to be used for God’s glory.

Pray that more and more people will find fulfilment in using their gifts.

Pray for one another that each person in the group may discover and use their spiritual gifts to grow our church more and more into the likeness of Christ.