

## How to Serve God I Corinthians 12:37 - 13:4

You have in the bulletin this morning an insert listing some of the opportunities for serving our church. Today, I don't want to talk about why we should serve in the Church. I want us to think about what are we about. What do we want to accomplish? Why should anyone give up her time for kids club, youth ministry or College and Career? Why should we worship together? Why have pot lucks and home groups? Why be involved with Lent services, Ride for Refuge, Bethlehem Live, Joseph Technicolor Dream Coat or counseling?

Stanley J. Grenz, passed away a few years ago. He was a professor at Carey Theological Seminary, our seminary in Vancouver. He observed that the more high technology we have around us, the greater is the need for human touch. And he suggested many come to the church expecting not technology but the touch of another human being and the touch of God. Unfortunately, he says the church has often bought into a secular view of ministry. In the secular world bigger is always better. You evaluate success on the basis of the bottom line, are we making more money, is the business growing. If we operate on the business model we will lose our impact. He warns, programming can usurp the place of love in the body of Christ. I think, on the other hand, programs can be a demonstration of love, but we must think carefully about how we are serving.

The devotional booklet, Our Daily Bread, gave this analogy. The South Pole could be called the healthiest place on the earth. There is no pollution, no dust and very few people. The air is fresh and clean. It is one of the few locations where man is not bombarded by germs. And since winds start at the South Pole and move northward, they tend to keep away any contaminants from that region. You would think people would be eager to live in such a germ-free environment. But they are not. Why? It is simply too cold. Some churches bear a striking resemblance to that kind of atmosphere. Although the truth of God is preached and error has no chance to survive, there is no corresponding obedience or love. The spiritual temperature is sub-zero. Unloved and untouched, many people leave the church.

A survey was conducted several years ago among four denominations discovered the main reason people left the church was cold and impersonal. I am not suggesting that this is our problem. I don't think it is. But you need to know that this

situation is not unique to our day. The church of Corinth in the first century was like a high-tech church. Its members emphasized programs. Look at how much we are doing. I am of Paul or I am of Apollos or I am of Cephas. They were comparing their ministries against each other. More than that, they emphasized "evidences" of the presence of the Holy Spirit, things like speaking in tongues and the miraculous. These believers sought diligently to discover and to display their spiritual gifts. But they lacked the most essential ingredient necessary for effective ministry. If we don't have this ingredient nothing we do matters.

Listen to what Paul writes: If I could speak in any language in heaven or on earth but didn't love others, I would only be making meaningless noise like a loud gong or a clanging cymbal. If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I knew all the mysteries of the future and knew everything about everything, but didn't love others, what good would I be? And if I had the gift of faith so that I could speak to a mountain and make it move, without love I would be no good to anybody. If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn't love others, I would be of no value whatsoever. Love is patient and kind.

Paul describes an imaginary person. Look at the abilities the Apostle Paul says this person has. Let's suppose that such a gifted person came to Moosomin Baptist Church. Let's imagine that this person has an ability to speak in different languages. My grandfather could speak 7 different languages. That is quite an accomplishment. I heard of one person who could read and speak in over 30 different languages. Let's presume that this man can do better than that. Let's assume that he can do more than any person has ever been able to do. Let's assume that he can speak in all the languages of the earth. There are between 3 & 4000 of them. Of these, about 1000 have never been reduced to writing. That means that these people have never had a portion of the Bible translated into their own language. What a magnificent addition to the church a man like that would be. Think of the missionary work he could do. All of the toil the translators have put into putting the Bible into different languages of the earth would not be needed.

This gifted person can also speak in the language of men and of angels. I am not exactly sure what Paul is getting. Most of the Jews believed angels can understand human languages. Maybe Paul believed there are angelic languages in addition to human languages. And this exceptionally gifted person knows their languages too. Or, maybe he is talking about speaking in

tongues. I don't know. At any rate, this person in our congregation has an overwhelming skill in languages.

Let's say this gifted individual has even more going for him. He has the gift of prophecy. I suppose prophecy corresponds most closely to preaching today. Prophecy involves speaking under special inspiration of God. It may include foretelling the future. This man is able to do that. What is more, he knows all mysteries. In other words he has special spiritual insight. He has insight into the teaching of God's Word and in understanding God's will. Not only does he have spiritual insight, he has the broadest of human knowledge as well. He has all knowledge. What a magnificent teacher this fellow is. Many people have a wealth of knowledge but they cannot communicate it to others. Not only does this person have impressive knowledge but he has an ability with languages, he has understanding and is able to get the biblical message clearly across to others.

This is a hypothetical person. No such person could ever exist. Yet, to get across an important truth, Paul asks us to imagine a man who lives up to this magnificent description. I can't imagine how sought after this kind of a person might be. Even with this ability to speak in all the languages of the world, without love this person is merely a sounding brass or clanging symbol. Without love, we are just making a loud noise, nothing more. Without love we fail to accomplish anything for God. It is not talent that makes a difference for God in our world. Our ability does not prove we have a personal relationship with God. Love alone is proof of a Spiritual life.

Unfortunately, all of us have known men and women who are able to dream great dreams and tackle great tasks for God. Yet, those close to them felt they were drained of love, they did not have love. If my analysis is accurate although they accomplished great things, but they themselves are nothing. If we have all faith, if we have an ability to make plans and to pray, to depend on God to help us carry out our plans, but do not have love, we are nothing. We may be competent and gifted but without love I produce nothing for which I will be rewarded by God who examines hearts. Love is not a minor matter with God. Love is the virtue in Christian living that gives everything else value. What Paul writes we dare not ignore. Without love the greatest talent and most marvellous ability is valueless to the person who has them. Love that gives them meaning.

We can't miss what Paul is saying. I may have exceptional

abilities but if I do not have love v1 I produce nothing of value. I may have exceptional faith to take risks for God, but if I do not have love v2 I have nothing of value to offer God. Verse 3, I might be the most generous person but if I do not have love I gain nothing of value. No matter how intelligent and talented we might be, if love is absent, God says our lives don't have value.

Does that mean that we don't need to work at developing our abilities? Does that mean gifts don't matter at all? Paul is not saying gifts don't matter at all. He is urging people to use their gifts to build one another up. Students appreciate a teacher who is not only knowledgeable, but has a gift to teach. We all appreciate those who have the ability to take complex things and explain them in a simple, easily understood manner. Choir directors need people who can sing on tune. A congregation values an effective preacher. Every church needs certain gifts. We need faith, we need understanding. We need the strength of prophecy, the proclamation of God's Word. I believe every church has certain strengths. Yet, apart from love, all of our gifts, sacrifices and services accomplish nothing, they amount to nothing. "Love is something that if you have it, you don't need a whole lot of it. If you don't have it, nothing else matters."

What are we about? Our desire at Moosomin Baptist Church is to make a difference in the lives of others. That is why we run kids clubs, Sunday School, tweeners, youth, C&C, fellowship enhancement, we work with other churches and are involved in the community. In the New Testament we read of people serving in official capacities like deacons and elders. We need folks to serve in positions to give oversight or guidance to the ministry of the church. But everyone used their gifts to serve the body whether in official capacity or not. You didn't have to be a deacon to carry out the ministry of a deacon. Everyone of you have a contribution to make for well being of this body of believers.

Just yesterday I was listening to a former NBA basketball coach talking about what it take to be successful as a coach. Sports is a roller coaster ride. You win a game and your on a high, you lose a game to can fall into the depths of despair. He said the results are always immediate, there is nothing quite like it in any other field. You have to ask the question, how do you help players get the most out of individual talent and to help the team flourish? In that environment you must focus on process not results. Even if you lose 10 games straight, your job as coach maybe in jeopardy but you still must focus on process. You have

to encourage players toward a goal and challenge them. Your goal, he said, is to reach into the lives of others and help them be successful. Further he said you have to adopt the motto united we stand, divided we fall. The whole team has a real problem if players are only looking at themselves and not thinking about how to help others succeed. Players must always look out for one another and seek to make it easier for a fellow team mate. He said when a team does that good things will typically happen almost all the time. If we come to church and continually analyze how did I like the service, was I ministered to this morning, we're in trouble. Our goal is to minister by God's grace to everyone, but some Sundays will be more meaningful to you than others. Our professor used to tell us as preachers all you can do is work on a batting average. You won't hit a home run every Sunday. That is true for our worship teams as well. Will you every Sunday ask this question, what can I do so others will feel cared for, will love coming to church? What can I do to help others succeed? When we have that attitude, God will bless.

That is what Paul is saying here. Let me ask you a question, who has made the biggest impact on your life? When I answer that question and I am honest about it, I realize they were not necessarily the most gifted people. No, they were people who loved me. People who make an impact on others are the people who genuinely care. Love gives meaning to all of our deeds.

On one program, Radio Bible Class, the story was related of how sixty years ago a professor at John Hopkins University gave a group of graduates a final exam. For it, they were to go into the slums of Baltimore and they were to study 200 boys between the ages of 12 and 13. They were to study their background and environment. Then as a result of that study they were to predict the chances those boys had for the future. The graduate students went and talked with the boys, they looked at the statistics and they compiled all the data they could. They concluded that about 90% of those young men would spend time in jail.

Twenty five years later, another group of graduates was given the task of testing the results of the original groups predictions. They went back to the same neighborhood and tried to find the boys. By this time, they were all grown men. Some were still in the neighbourhood, some had died, and some had moved away. They were able to find 180 of the original 200. Of those 180 men, only four had spent some time in jail. The predictions of the original research group was not very good. The researchers tried to find

out why these men who lived in a breeding place of crime had such low prison records. They were told continually--there was this teacher. In 75% of the cases the men in the research group referred to the same woman. The researchers dug further and located this teacher who was now retired and living in a nursing home. They asked her how she had exerted such a remarkable influence over these people in the slum. She said: I can't explain the coincidence. I don't know why they turned out so well. But as she thought back she said longingly, "I really loved those boys." That comment was the answer to the question what had kept them from going wrong. They had come across a teacher who loved them. Love gives meaning to all our deeds.

Paul concludes this chapter by saying love never fails. What we do out of love, care, compassion for others has value for all eternity. Our world is fixated on personal success, how do I get the most attention for myself or the most money for myself. That ought not be our chief goal. In fact as a church our goal is not to build MBC in numerical numbers. Our desire is to make a difference in the lives of others for good and for God. If that is our focus God will meet our needs. If that is what you desire join our team. God needs people serving in teaching ministries. God needs people serving in caring ministries. We need prayer warriors. We need people contributing financially. It is all for the benefit of others. We are a body of believers and together we serve far more effectively than we ever could as isolated individuals.