

GOD'S CALL

Major themes in the Scriptures

Quality of being

Quality of being and true service

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The Lord willing, today we will consider the subject “Quality of being”, the third message, as we seek to appreciate major themes in the Scriptures.

A short summary of today's message:

Moral quality of being is the basis upon which what is good and meaningful can be accomplished. It is from such a context that true spiritual service can be expressed. We will seek the Lord to appreciate more of what this means.

We know that God is a God of moral perfection and when He created man, He had a very good purpose: to give to us the very best that He can in His wisdom, in His love.

On His part, God was prepared to do everything necessary to make it possible for us to benefit from His love and His grace. It was a very painful process by which He made provision for us. When God created us, He knew that we will go our own way, we will sin, we will grieve His heart, and He knew that the only way was for Him to suffer in our place, to make it possible for us to find forgiveness, to come to Him to receive life and meaning.

God did His part and the Lord Jesus came into this world.

All of us, as we become Christians, as we appreciate what God has done for us, as we recognize the need of mankind, if there is love in our hearts, we care for others, we want others to benefit, so we want to serve, we want to contribute to the lives of other people. This is right and this is good. It is in line with the heart of God – For God so loved the world, that He gave...

But in order to appreciate how we can effectively fulfil this desire in our hearts to really help others, contribute to others, we need to understand how God helped us.

How did God help us? The greatest means by which God has helped us is through the cross. What happened at the cross? Who was the person who died on the cross?

The Scriptures are very clear and the Scriptures tell us it is God Himself, the morally perfect being who came into this world and He became a man and died in our place. The Scriptures tell us the Lord Jesus was without sin.

What if the Lord Jesus had sinned? Would He have been able to become the Saviour of the world? The answer is: "Certainly not". It was because the Lord Jesus was sinless that He could become the Saviour of the world. He died in our place, He suffered for us; He saved us.

The underlying principle is very important. To the degree that our lives are not what it ought to be, to that degree we will fail to contribute to the lives of other people.

The Lord Jesus could do so much because He was pure, because He was sinless. The Lord Jesus said, "I am the Light of the world".

At the heart of it, what is that Light? The Light came to this world to dispel the darkness. What is that darkness? In the Scriptures, light and darkness often refer to holiness and wickedness, the moral perfection of God and the evil that is seen especially in the evil one.

When the Lord Jesus came as Light into this world, the primary aspect of it was to bring into our presence and consciousness the holiness of God, to help us understand what true holiness, moral goodness is - and not only to see and to understand, but to be able to receive, to partake of it and to become like God.

The apostle John tells us in **John 1: 4**:

John 1: 4

In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men.

The Lord Jesus said, "I am the Light of the world". Why is He the Light of the world? In what sense? We must appreciate that that Light came from life. In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The life in Him was the Light of men.

The Lord Jesus told His disciples: “You are the light of the world.” Why did He say that? What does it mean to us? What does He want us to do? Let us read **Matthew 5: 13-16**.

Matthew 5: 13-16

- 13 “You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty *again*? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men.
- 14 “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden;
- 15 nor does *anyone* light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.
- 16 Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

You are the light of the world; You are the salt of the earth. Light and salt – as we function in this way, this is meant for us to contribute to the lives of others. Let your light shine before men – we are to contribute to the lives of other people by the light shining forth from our lives.

The light must come forth from God. He is the Light of the world; the Lord Jesus is the Light of the world. We derive our light from Him. We have no life in ourselves, so we must first come to Him to partake of His life. To the degree that we have life from Him, to that degree then, there will be a light that can shine forth.

God is not just talking about light in the sense of helping people just to recognize things. God is talking about light that brings life that people can see, recognize, respond and be transformed.

You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world. How can we function as salt and light unless in the first place, it is present in our lives?

If there is no salt in our lives, if there is no light in our lives, how are we to be salt and light in this world?

One of the great concerns in Christian service is that much can be done without salt and light, and it may appear to be effective.

But the Lord tells us that unless there is salt, then it will not be effective. If the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty *again*? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. If the salt has lost its taste – the taste comes from the contents, the ingredients in the salt which are helpful for the body – if we do not have that, then how can we contribute?

If there is no light in us, how are we to shine in this world? Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven. Good works here refers to moral goodness, works that arise from genuine moral quality of heart.

We see that true spiritual service must come from quality of being.

We have seen that the greatest example is that of the Lord Jesus. He lived a perfect life, His ministry was perfect. He died on the cross as a sinless sacrifice to save the world.

We are not sinless but we can contribute our part. God wants us to do our part – we are ambassadors for Christ, we are to represent Him. Do we bring honour to Him or do we bring disgrace to His name?

We notice that these words that the Lord Jesus spoke came after the beatitudes, where the Lord Jesus told the people how and when they would be blessed.

If they were to concentrate on developing quality in their inner being and in the way they lived their lives, if they were to receive from God life and meaning, then they would become salt of the earth and light of the world.

We need to develop these qualities within us – the inner man has to be transformed by the Lord. To the degree that this is true, to that degree salt and light can then become part of our being. Otherwise, what we do will not be of value and we can be thrown out and trampled under foot.

When the apostle John wrote the **book of Revelation**, he tells us of his encounter with the risen Lord Jesus and he tells us that he saw this person – and from the context we can see that it is the Lord Jesus – He was full of glory, shining forth from His being and He was standing in the midst of seven golden lampstands. And the Lord Jesus explained to John: “These seven golden lampstands are the seven churches and I want you to speak to them. Send a message to each of the seven churches.”

Why lampstands? Lampstands are for the transmission of light. The churches are meant to be the light of the world. We are to shine forth for God as a witness in this world, to dispel the darkness that the evil one wants to bring about.

Are we functioning properly as a lampstand? Are we shining forth according to the light that comes from God?

In the last message, we saw the Lord Jesus speaking to the church in Ephesus and He told them, “You have lost your first love. You must repent. Otherwise, I will come to you and I will remove the lampstand out of its place. The lampstand will be removed, your witness will go out; the light will no longer shine – unless you repent.”

In all these messages to the seven churches, we see again and again the Lord Jesus emphasized quality of being: quality for the church as a whole and quality for individuals.

At the end of each of the messages to the seven churches, the Lord Jesus ended with something along these lines: he who overcomes shall inherit, shall receive, shall benefit. "He who overcomes" refers to those where there is quality in the being.

So whether it be at the whole group level or at the individual level, quality of being is primary.

If the church in Ephesus did not repent and come before the Lord to nurture, to nourish, to rejuvenate their first love, then their witness would go out.

So we see that true spiritual service can only come from true quality of being.

I want to consider with you this aspect to some degree because it is very, very important if we are to do our part as God intends for us. And the Scriptures are very clear about this.

The apostle Paul was very conscious of this in his own life, and we can see the way he went about in his life. All of us respect the apostle Paul as a great servant of God, an apostle who was faithful to God, who was prepared to suffer in order to minister to others. How did he live out his life?

2 Corinthians 12: 7-10

- 7 Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself!
- 8 Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me.
- 9 And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.
- 10 Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

We see the apostle Paul was faithful to God. He loved God, he loved people, he sought to serve, he was effective. Was he not a great servant of God?

Then why is it God chose to let Paul suffer in this way? It must have been a difficult time, a thorn in the flesh. For him to implore the Lord three times in this way, it must have been something very difficult and in his understanding, it could hinder him from his spiritual service.

He implored that the Lord would remove it but the Lord did not. And the reason given for the thorn in the flesh was mentioned twice in this passage. He said, "Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself!" This phrase, "to keep me from exalting myself", is mentioned twice in this one verse. Why? It is because it is so very, very important.

Why did God give Paul such revelations - the surpassing greatness of the revelations? We can say it would help Paul in his own personal development, but more than that, it was meant to help him to be more effective in his service. Because of the abundance of the revelations, he could minister to other people; he could help others appreciate the kingdom of God, what it means to be a child of God and what God has in store for us and what He requires of us. God gave Paul abundance of revelations so that he could be more effective in service.

But what was the danger? The danger was that he could exalt himself. With the abundance of revelations, he could regard himself as superior to other people - he knew so much, he had so much; he received so much. The passage does not tell us that Paul was exalting himself. It only tells us it was to keep him from exalting himself.

This tells us the importance of quality of being.

If Paul began to exalt himself, his ministry would go downhill, the power of his witness would degenerate – the life would diminish, the light would go out. God was very concerned about Paul: that he must remain humble – he must continue to recognize his need of God and to walk with Him faithfully and carefully.

And so the Lord said to him, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” God wanted Paul to continue to remember his weakness.

At one stage, Paul thought that he was quite capable, he could boast in the flesh. There was much that he could talk about: his abilities, his heritage, his faithfulness in keeping the Law; there was much he could boast in the flesh. But now, he had come to see that the flesh profits nothing. Now, he had chosen to know nothing except the Lord Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

As God revealed Himself to Paul and as he grew in his faith, in his knowledge, in his walk with God, he might forget his weakness and God wanted to remind him.

The thorn in the flesh would constantly remind him he was weak, he needed God, he needed help, he needed God’s grace always in his life. And therefore, he said, “Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.”

Many people are afraid to be weak. They want to be strong; they want to be confident, to be able to do things in this world. They want to be able to stand up before people and be respected. They are afraid to be weak.

But here, Paul says, “when I am weak, then I am strong.”

When we recognize our own need, our own weakness, we will know the strength of the Lord: We come to Him, we depend on Him, and we then know His power, His life. If we think that we are able, we are sufficient in ourselves, we are confident in ourselves, then that is confidence in the flesh. And that would profit us nothing. There will be no life; there will be no power behind that.

However much we have grown, we always must depend on the Lord, we must be conscious that we have no life apart from Him, we must identify with Him, we must live for Him; we must trust Him and walk with Him.

This is something that must be present throughout our lives because without this quality of being, there will be no real spiritual service.

So the apostle Paul, even though he was very successful, he was very conscious of this; and he tells us in **1 Corinthians 9: 23-27** what this meant in his own personal development.

1 Corinthians 9: 23-27

- 23 I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.
- 24 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but *only* one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win.
- 25 Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then *do it* to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.
- 26 Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air;
- 27 but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

Are these not very weighty words that come from the heart of the apostle Paul? He who was so effective, so well-respected through all these generations, what did he say about himself?

“I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.”

He knew that he could become disqualified from the race – he could fail God if he did not maintain quality in his being. If he allowed himself to live as he pleased at the natural realm, according to natural inclinations of the body, then he would have failed and he could become disqualified.

He said, “I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.” Notice, the apostle Paul says, “a fellow partaker”. He did not regard himself as separate from the ministry of the gospel. The apostle Paul was not just ministering to other people – “Other people need the gospel”. No, he recognized that he himself needed the gospel all the time: “I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.”

Even as he preached, he was responding to the gospel. Even as he told people to love the Lord, he was learning to love the Lord. Even as he told others to be what they ought to be, he was learning to be what he ought to be.

He says, “Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but *only* one receives the prize?” There can be many people who run but in a race in this world, *only* one receives the prize. So many run but *only* one receives the first prize.

But he says, “Run in such a way that you may win.” In this spiritual race, there are many prizes, it is not just one. It is a question of the way you run. Run in such a way that you may win. All of us can win. There is no quota to the prize. There are as many prizes as there are overcomers.

God is prepared to give a prize to everyone who qualifies. If you run in such a way that is right and good, you will receive a prize.

Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things – “the games” here likely refers to the Olympic games of those days, originating in Greece. They took part in those games which have continued over the centuries.

But they *do it* to receive a perishable wreath. The “wreath”, the laurel wreath that they received when they were crowned, was just a perishable wreath made from laurel leaves. In order to obtain that, they had to exercise self-control in all things. It is not easy to win the games, it requires a lot of discipline. They must forgo many things which they may naturally be inclined towards. They have to discipline themselves in order to overcome, in order to win.

How much more in the spiritual realm? We have a very powerful enemy, a very vicious enemy, a very destructive one. Can we overcome him? If we are not disciplined, we will be an easy victim. He can overcome us very easily. If we give in to the desires of the flesh, the evil one can provide all these for us very easily and overcome us.

And therefore, the apostle Paul says, “Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air”.

“I run in such a way, as not without aim” – it was not aimless, just run in any direction, anywhere. There was a direction, there was a goal, he knew where he was going. He was definite in the way he ran. There was an aim, there was a goal. “I box in such a way, as not beating the air” – beating the air will not defeat the enemy. You have to hit the enemy, you have to overcome him. So the evil one is powerful, we need to overcome him. If we beat the air, it is of no use.

And so, the apostle Paul tells us something that is very helpful in this battle: If we want to run the race well, if we want to overcome, he says this is very important: "I discipline my body and make it my slave".

This is a very central aspect in terms of developing quality of being. God has placed us in a body that has many inclinations that can draw us away from God, away from the path of righteousness. It is a body of sin, a body of death that easily brings about sin and death in us. If we give in to the desires of this body, we become a slave of sin.

We need to discipline our bodies, we need to make our body our slave so that it will function the way that God intends it to be, so that it will do the things that are in accordance with the path of righteousness.

It is not that all the desires of the body are bad. There are those things that are in order. When we are hungry, it tells us we need to eat so that our body can be nourished.

But there are many desires within us that are not good for us and if we do it just because we like it, then that can destroy our lives. We must make it our slave so that the body obeys us to do the things that are pleasing to God, what God desires.

"Otherwise," he said, "after I have preached to others, I myself might become disqualified." And this can happen to any one of us if we do not maintain that walk with God, if we do not discipline our lives in accordance with what is right and good.

Sometimes, as Christians in the early stage of our lives, while we are still young, we can be very enthusiastic, we can be very disciplined, we can do many things out of love for God and for what is good.

But as time passes by, we slacken. The things of the world become more attractive, we just slip into this.

We carry on with our spiritual routines and we think that that will be enough. But it is not enough. We must nurture our love for the Lord; it must be fresh and alive. We must maintain that discipline, it must continue. Throughout our time on earth, we must maintain that walk with the Lord.

For the apostle Paul to continue to serve and to be effective, he had to maintain that kind of discipline and quality in his being, so that he could obey the Lord at all times, he could do the things that God commanded him, he would be faithful.

Then we see that the apostle Paul, as he understood this for his own life, he also knew he must transmit this to others. If others are to learn to serve God, they too must learn to take care.

1 Timothy 4: 16

Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.

The apostle Paul appreciated Timothy. He was one whom he regarded as of kindred spirit, one whom he could relate as a father with a son in close fellowship, one to whom he could entrust responsibilities. He called upon him to appoint elders in various cities. The apostle Paul appreciated him and he taught Timothy what he had learnt for himself.

The apostle Paul paid close attention to himself so that he would not be disqualified. He was very concerned for Timothy likewise, and so he said, "Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things". This is something critical. If Timothy were to concentrate on just

trying to help others and to teach others without paying enough attention to himself, he could also be disqualified.

So the apostle Paul told him, “Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things”.

It is not just for the moment; it is for life. We must continue in this path: “For as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you”; “for yourself” – we must ensure salvation for ourselves, we must make sure that our hearts are right, that we will be pleasing to God, that our walk with God is fresh and alive all the time; and then “for those who hear you”.

If we are going to benefit those who hear us, then we must make sure that there is something in us for them to listen to – there is something meaningful and worthwhile – that there is life and there is light.

So therefore, we must first ensure salvation for ourselves. Our response to God must be deep enough, our love for Him must be profound and lasting and reliable.

It is in that context that we will experience salvation for our being increasingly and in that state, we can bring salvation to other people, we can transmit that life and meaning to them.

So the apostle Paul urged Timothy to pay attention to himself and to his teaching. He must be diligent, he must study, he must learn, he must think through, he must know what he believes, and he must be accurate; he must understand what is in the heart of God. All this will be very important for his own development and for him to transmit to other people.

The apostle James warns the believers not to be so eager to be teachers.

If you teach the wrong things because of your neglect, because of your irresponsible attitude, because of your unfaithfulness to God, if you teach the wrong things, then you will receive punishment because you are leading people astray and you are also going astray yourself.

If you teach the right thing, you may receive reward. But the principle is that when you influence other people, there are two aspects: one is your own life and then the lives of other people. If you do good, it is good for you, it is good for others. If you do bad, it is bad for you and it is bad for others.

So we need to be careful. Service is important. We must love, we must care, we must serve. But to serve well, we need to ensure that we know what are our objectives, what are we seeking to accomplish. What is it that God is looking for, what are we bringing about by the way we live and by the way we seek to serve?

So let us consider how the apostle Paul approached his service with regard to people.

Galatians 4: 8-11

- 8 However at that time, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods.
- 9 But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again?
- 10 You observe days and months and seasons and years.
- 11 I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain.

Many of us, when we help somebody to become a Christian, we regard that as significant service and we say, yes, the angels in heaven rejoice over every sinner who repents. It is true. When a sinner repents, heaven rejoices.

But this passage should help us to understand that that is not the end of it. That is only the beginning.

We have to learn to contribute so that they do not turn back, they do not go back to their old ways. He said, "you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods ... how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again?" Going back to the old ways – A DOG returning TO ITS ... VOMIT; a sow, having been washed, returning to ... the mire.

"You observe days and months and seasons and years. I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain." The apostle Paul says his labour could be in vain. Even though these Galatians were already Christians, and yet he was very concerned his labour could be in vain.

Why? Because if they turned back to their old ways and they were enslaved all over again, then the grace of God would not be beneficial to them; they would have received the grace of God in vain. The **book of Galatians** emphasizes this. The apostle Paul was very concerned that they would not receive the grace of God in vain.

There needs to be quality of being. We must not be satisfied just to say someone has come to know the Lord, has sins forgiven. That is good, we should be very glad for that, we should work towards that. But let us recognize that if we do not seek to help them to go further than that, to develop real stability, substance in their being, then if they turn back, if they go back to their old ways, then all may be lost.

And even if they do not go back all the way, if they become fleshly Christians like the Corinthians, even if they are saved, it may be as through fire. The things that they did may all be burnt up. The quality of being may not be very meaningful before God.

The Galatians were seeking to be perfected by the flesh rather than to walk by the Spirit.

They began in the Spirit; they understood, they received, they participated, they learnt from God. But they were concentrating on the outward forms of things; they were seeking to observe days and months and seasons and years, the outward observance of things rather than the quality of their being.

Satan can give us many alternatives to purity of heart. You can do many, many things as a substitute, whether it be attendance at meetings, giving of money, going elsewhere, in whatever form. As long as your heart is not really with God, Satan would have won. Whatever we do, it must come from the quality of being for there to be true value in the things we do.

And so, **Galatians 4: 19**, the apostle Paul says,

My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you—

What was his objective? He was not just seeking to bring the gospel to them so that they would say, “Yes, I repent, I receive the Lord Jesus as my Saviour, I will follow Him.” No, he says, “My children”, who are already Christians, “with whom I am again in labor” ... It is to bring forth again – what? One who is formed in Christ – where “Christ is formed in you”. The character of Christ is formed in them – that was what the apostle Paul was labouring over.

He agonized over their lives; he wanted to make sure that their lives were good and meaningful before the Lord. Although they were already believers, the apostle Paul was very burdened for them. He could labour in vain if they did not continue to develop, respond further and grow.

The primary objective of the apostle Paul's labour was the development of the moral character of the Lord Jesus in the hearts of all believers and not just that they profess faith in the Lord.

I want to conclude today's message looking at a passage that contrasts moral quality of being and expressions of spiritual service. The contrast is so great and emphasized so strongly that it is important for us to pay close heed to this. If we really love God and we love others and we want to contribute effectively to others, we must take heed to this.

1 Corinthians 13: 1-8

- 1 If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.
- 2 If I have *the gift of prophecy*, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.
- 3 And if I give all my possessions to feed *the poor*, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.
- 4 Love is patient, love is kind *and* is not jealous; love does not brag *and* is not arrogant,
- 5 does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong *suffered*,
- 6 does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth;
- 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.
- 8 Love never fails; but if *there are gifts of prophecy*, they will be done away; if *there are tongues*, they will cease; if *there is knowledge*, it will be done away.

The contrast is so great and so very obvious and so strongly emphasized. He contrasts the presence of love with that of the other areas, which are primarily gifts and activities associated with spiritual service.

If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels – and very often, it is in the context when they exercise the gift of tongues to minister, to speak, as we see in the people in Corinth when they came together. Many of them spoke in tongues, it was meant to contribute to service, but they exercised it wrongly.

He says, “If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal”. It profits ... nothing. We have to exercise these gifts with love; otherwise, it is of no value.

“If I have *the gift of* prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.” These are gifts meant to contribute to service. Whether it be prophecy or knowing of mysteries and knowledge and faith, in this context, they are a reference to gifts that can contribute to service.

Here, the “faith” is not a reference to a personal faith or belief in the Lord and commitment to Him. That faith is a moral quality.

This “faith” is a gift, where God can give a person a gift of faith so that he can recognize what God is going to do and as he prays in faith, God can answer that; so he can remove mountains, he can perform miracles.

But the faith that is of true and lasting, enduring meaning and value is a faith where we trust God, we believe in Him, we are committed to Him, we are prepared to follow Him. That kind of faith is moral quality.

Here, the apostle Paul is talking about areas that have to do with gifts and activities that are associated with spiritual service. God does give gifts to people and **1 Corinthians chapter 12** tells us of various different kinds of gifts that God may give through the Holy Spirit for the purpose of benefiting the body of Christ. But he says, “if I do not have love, I am nothing.” True faith will always have love, but this kind of faith can exist without love because it is not essentially a moral quality.

Even a person like Balaam can prophesy, God can tell him to prophesy, but that is different from one who prophesies out of oneness with God, out of love for Him – it is a different issue.

And if I give all my possessions to feed *the poor*, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing; “give all the possessions to feed *the poor*”, “surrendering the body to be burned”, these are also expressions of spiritual service that may take place in certain situations. But if we do this without true divine and pure love, then it profits ... nothing. The apostle Paul is so concerned about this that he emphasizes it so strongly.

And then he goes on to talk about what really matters: Love is patient, love is kind *and* is not jealous; love does not brag *and* is not arrogant.

These are moral qualities. It is the quality of being that is primary. This is the way: that we must first make sure that it is in this kind of spirit that we do the things that God wants us to do, that we can properly contribute to the lives of others.

It does not seek its own – it is a self-giving love. We are not selfish, we are not thinking about ourselves – what we want, what we like, what we can attain – but it is a seeking of the well-being of others.

It is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong *suffered* – we are prepared to forgive. We are prepared to give to others, but that does not mean that we ignore what is wrong. We can recognize what is wrong. God is a God of holiness – while God forgives, He also is angry with sin.

So when we say we are prepared to forgive, it does not mean that we condone sin: “It is alright, everything is alright”. But we do not become revengeful – we just want to hit back because we are hurt. We act according to what is good, what is right.

So when we see the apostle Paul being very angry with the false teachers, it was not just because he was hurt; he was concerned for the well-being of others.

Does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth – it centres on righteousness, on what is right, what is good. It is a moral quality.

Bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Interpreted wrongly, this can be very dangerous. What does it mean to believe all things, endure all things? The apostle Paul here is talking about: In the context of true love for God and others, in accordance with the will of God, we are prepared to go on, bear all things, whatever it is; believe in God, whatever happens in our lives; continue to hope, continue to endure, however difficult the path, whatever that is required of us. True love will persevere, it will not shrink back. It will continue because of what it is committed to.

And so, **verse 8**, he tells us, “Love never fails”.

It will never end; it will carry on forever because this is the most beautiful, meaningful quality. Love is a moral quality of heart where we care for the well-being of others, where we concentrate on what is righteous and good, where we want to promote that which has true value for eternity.

If *there are gifts of prophecy*, they will be done away; if *there are tongues*, they will cease; if *there is knowledge*, it will be done away. Various of these things for service, they come, they are fulfilled, they pass away. But love will continue. What is ministered from love will endure. What you give because of love, even though it may not be very obvious to people, there will be a spiritual impact and reality and those who are receptive will benefit.

And so before the apostle Paul started on **1 Corinthians 13**, after having spoken of various spiritual gifts that come from the Holy Spirit, he says, “And yet, I will show you a way of excellence.”

There is a difference between gifts and love. Gifts are what God can give to you from time to time to do certain things, but love is a way, is a life, is your character, is your being, and God wants to develop this, upon which you are to exercise your gifts, arising from which you are to love and give and serve and contribute to the lives of other people.

So this is something that we need to appreciate: that quality of being is totally critical if we are to serve well.

Whatever we do, if we are not motivated by divine and pure love, then something is missing. We need to correct that; we need to deal with that. We must be motivated by love, just as God was motivated by love when He sent the Lord Jesus into this world.

Probably, the most famous verse in the Scriptures: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son...” It is because He loved that He gave.

So are we going to do the same? Are we going to give because we love, or are we going to give because of what we can get, because of what people may say, because of the appreciation that we can receive? Or will we give because we love, we want to benefit others, we want people to become good as they ought to be, that they will find meaning in life – is this what motivates us?

So we see that the apostle Paul contrasted the presence of love with that of the other areas because true and pure divine love is at the heart of moral quality of being.

While the other areas mentioned are gifts and activities associated with spiritual service, spiritual service without pure and divine love is of no moral value – it profits ... nothing.

It does not mean that these spiritual gifts are of no value. They are of value. But they are of value only when exercised with a spirit of love. When we exercise them in accordance with God's purposes because we care, because we love, then the gifts become very useful. God can work through that and people can benefit.

So then, if we want to fulfil God's call in our lives and serve Him faithfully, we must learn to nurture true quality in our being and give ourselves to walk with God meaningfully in deep fellowship, as we depend fully on Him for His guidance and enabling. We need not only to maintain righteousness in our lives, but we also need to nurture the freshness, the aliveness, the eagerness in our love for the Lord, in our relationship with Him, arising from which we serve with gladness, with joy, with a deep motivation of identification with Him.

Let us then, as we come before the Lord, ponder over who the Lord Jesus is, how He gave Himself for us. The apostle Paul appreciated this when he said, "He loved me and gave Himself ... for me". The Lord Jesus gave Himself for us because He loved us. Will we do the same? Will we give ourselves to Him first because we love Him and then give ourselves to care for the well-being of others?

Let us ask the Lord to help us so that if there are aspects in our lives that are not right, we will come to Him and seek His forgiveness, to be cleansed, to be helped, to be renewed, to be transformed, that Christ will be formed in us and that we will be able to contribute as members of the body of Christ, to do His will.