

GOD'S CALL

Major themes in the Scriptures

The Holy Spirit (22)

The Holy Spirit working in church life

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The Lord willing, today we will consider the subject, “The Holy Spirit”, the twenty-second message, in seeking to appreciate major themes in the Scriptures. A short summary of today’s message:

The Holy Spirit leads us to repentance and brings about the new birth when we respond positively. He then baptizes us into the body of Christ, the church, and He helps each member of the body of Christ to do his part to build up the body. How does the Holy Spirit bring about the highest quality in church life?

We will seek the Lord to appreciate more of what this means.

We know that God created the universe and He has specific purposes in the way He created us. We know that God is sovereign, He is wise and all that He does is very good and meaningful.

He came into this world as the Lord Jesus Christ to live amongst us, shows us how men should live and He suffered greatly in the whole process in order to make it possible for us to benefit from His kind intentions.

Now that the Lord Jesus has died on the cross and His life is offered to us, it is the Holy Spirit who helps us to understand, to appreciate and to respond to what God offers to us. It is the Holy Spirit who helps us to draw near to God and to find our riches in Christ and for Christ to be formed in us.

Church life is a primary aspect in terms of God's way of working to achieve His purposes. The Old Testament prepares for this, the New Testament manifests it and throughout the ages, God is seeking to build the Church such that at the end of time, there will be a Bride for Christ, holy and blameless.

And in the midst of all this, there are many important moral and spiritual principles that will be manifested, that illustrate the glory of God and the meaningfulness of life.

So then, as we seek to ponder how the Holy Spirit works to fulfil what God wants to accomplish, how does this come about?

We know He has to work at the individual level to bring each one of us to repentance. He has to show to us our need and bring about the new birth. And when we are born again, He brings us together in union in the body of Christ, so that we are no longer to live our lives as isolated individuals, but we are meant to live together in fellowship: each with personal responsibility, yet also with corporate responsibility.

How does the Holy Spirit bring about the highest quality in church life?

One passage we may think about as to how this can come about is found in **1 Corinthians 12: 4-11**.

1 Corinthians 12: 4-11

- 4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit.
- 5 And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord.
- 6 There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all *persons*.
- 7 But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.
- 8 For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit;
- 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit,
- 10 and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another *various* kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues.
- 11 But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.

This passage tells us God is one: He is united in all that He seeks to do. While there are varieties of gifts, it is the same Spirit. While there are varieties of ministries, it is the same Lord. While there are varieties of effects or operations, it is the same God. So there is a direction set, there is a purpose to be accomplished.

Then this passage goes on to describe various gifts of the Spirit: But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. And then the apostle Paul goes on to describe how different people are given different gifts.

So if we look at this passage, it may seem that if all of us who are members of the body of Christ, who have different spiritual gifts; if we were all to exercise these gifts together, church life will become of quality.

This may seem to be the case. Different ones are given different different gifts and all these gifts are for the common good: there is a direction, there is purpose; if we exercise the gifts that we have, then would there not come about something very good and meaningful?

Let us turn to **1 Corinthians 1: 4-8**.

1 Corinthians 1: 4-8

- 4 I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus,
- 5 that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge,
- 6 even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you,
- 7 so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ,
- 8 who will also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The apostle Paul in writing to the Corinthians made this statement: "...you are not lacking in any gift". This means that they were very well equipped in terms of spiritual gifts. The Holy Spirit had given gifts to the church in Corinth; they were not lacking.

So, if they were to exercise all these gifts, would it not result in very meaningful church life, church life of high quality?

However, as we go down two chapters, we see that the picture is very different.

1 Corinthians 3: 1-4

- 1 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ.
- 2 I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able *to receive it*. Indeed, even now you are not yet able,
- 3 for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?
- 4 For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not *mere men*?

This is the same epistle. The apostle Paul had just written in **chapter 1** that the Corinthians were enriched in the Lord Jesus Christ in all speech and all knowledge and they were not lacking in any gift. And yet in **1 Corinthians 3**, he was lamenting the state of their lives. He was very sad, he was very concerned and he wanted to help them to change. He said, "I... could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ."

"Men of flesh": They were immature; they were preoccupied with their own natural abilities of what they had. They were preoccupied with their own lives. And while they were not able to receive solid food at the early stage, the apostle Paul said, "...you are still fleshly". They had not made much progress. But what was the progress that he was looking for? Was it the exercise of the spiritual gifts?

They exercised their gifts: they spoke in tongues; they had various of these gifts. But the apostle Paul says, "For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? Are you not behaving like people of the world? For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not *mere* men?"

Here the apostle Paul was not emphasizing the importance of exercising spiritual gifts. He was emphasizing the importance of the moral quality of their heart. If the moral quality of the heart is wrong, all the spiritual gifts that we have will not be exercised properly and they will have a fleshly direction. Although the gift can be from God, the exercise of the gift can be fleshly and this will cause hindrance to the work of God.

It is important to recognize the difference between spiritual gifts and spiritual life.

In **1 Corinthians 12**, the apostle Paul was referring to spiritual gifts: the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

Does it mean that spiritual gifts are of no value? No, certainly they are valuable; otherwise, God would not have given them. Spiritual gifts are valuable in the body of Christ and they should be exercised. But spiritual gifts have to be exercised with the right spirit. Without the right spirit, all the gifts that we have can cause more problems than good.

Notice that the Holy Spirit gives different gifts to different people.

This is not the same when it comes to spiritual life. When it comes to spiritual life, the Holy Spirit gives the same life to everyone.

So when we have different spiritual gifts, it is very easy for us if we are self-centred, to compare and to say, "My gift is more important than yours. I have done more things than you have and I am capable of doing better things than you are. God has bestowed on me more important gifts."

The apostle Paul says here, "But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills." This tells us that the way the Holy Spirit distributes gifts is according to His sovereign wisdom.

The way that God imparts spiritual life to us is based on clear spiritual principles. If we respond well, God will always give us spiritual life. If we respond well, God may not give us any special spiritual gift. Yes, He will give us gifts that are suitable for us but they can be very different from the gifts that He gives to others.

And many a time, we may long for those gifts that others may have.

So then if we want to understand how the Holy Spirit brings about the highest quality in church life, we must first seek to appreciate what is God's objective.

What is the Lord Jesus Christ seeking for in the church? Is the Lord Jesus seeking for all of us to exercise our gifts in a way that can bring about very spectacular results?

Ephesians 5: 25-27

- 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her,
- 26 so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,
- 27 that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.

There is no mention at all of spiritual gifts. But spiritual gifts can contribute in that direction when exercised properly. We see here the whole emphasis with regard to what the Lord Jesus Christ is seeking to do for the church, to bring about in the church, is that she should be holy and blameless.

The Lord Jesus loved the church and in His love for the church, He gave Himself up for her. And this we know is something very, very costly, very painful for Him.

Why did He give Himself up for her? What was the direction? What was the purpose?

It was so that He might sanctify her, He might help her to become holy, pleasing to God: that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory.

And what was that glory? That glory has to do with having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing in the moral and spiritual realm; that she would be holy and blameless.

This is an aspect we must set our heart on. If we do not appreciate this, we will not understand what the Holy Spirit is seeking to do; we will emphasize the wrong things.

It is very easy for Christians to be very attracted to spiritual gifts, especially the more spectacular ones. It is enjoyable to exercise such gifts: it draws attention, you can be recognized and it may seem to produce great effects.

Sometimes miracles that are performed may result in many people turning to the Lord Jesus Christ and it may seem to be very effective.

But then if we look at the Scriptures, we know that the Lord Jesus performed so many miracles, healed so many people, but at the end of it, how many truly loved Him, how many gave themselves fully to God? Very few: so many in the crowd who watched Him perform miracles were amongst the people who shouted, "Crucify Him!"

Where was the moral and spiritual transformation of a heart identified with God, loving what is good?

The Holy Spirit came to glorify Christ.

The Holy Spirit came to bring about what the Lord Jesus wants to accomplish. And if this is what He wants to accomplish then we must expect that the Holy Spirit will concentrate on this.

So in life, we may go through all kinds of situations that may seem very unhelpful to us because they are not pleasant, they are difficult; they do not seem to produce the results that we think of or look for.

But underlying all this, the Holy Spirit may be seeking to do a very deep work in our heart so that we may become holy and blameless.

Are we eager for that? Are we eager for the Holy Spirit to work in us to bring about such an effect?

If we are not, then we will not be able to work together with Him to build church life.

1 Corinthians 12 tells us the spiritual gifts in the body of Christ. **1 Corinthians 14** talks about how these gifts may be exercised in the context of church life. But between **1 Corinthians 12** and **1 Corinthians 14** is **1 Corinthians 13**, the most famous chapter on love. Why?

It is clear that the apostle Paul wants us to recognize that while we should appreciate and exercise spiritual gifts that God gives to us, we must never forget what is the primary objective and the direction that we should concentrate on.

After having mentioned various spiritual gifts in **1 Corinthians 12** and how different members are related to one another, and we should take care of one another; at the end of it, he says, "And I show you a still more excellent way."

It is a way of life; it is a path that all of us must take.

If we want to exercise spiritual gifts correctly then we need to appreciate this way: a still more excellent way.

And so **1 Corinthians 13: 1-8**, the apostle Paul says,

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.

Notice the **first two verses** of **1 Corinthians 13**, the apostle Paul refers to gifts: being able to speak with tongues of men and of angels, having *the gift of prophecy*, being able to know mysteries and knowledge, having faith to remove mountains. These are gifts that the Holy Spirit may give to different people to exercise.

But the apostle Paul says: "If I have all these gifts or any one of these gifts but I do not have love, then it is useless, it profits me nothing. There is no value and I am nothing."

He wants to contrast the difference between what we are and what we can do with spiritual gifts so that we understand the correct emphasis and approach.

Then in **verse 3**, he goes on to another area which is not basically in the area of spiritual gifts but our natural abilities and our fleshly choice: "...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".

We can do many things for God: We can give all our possessions to feed the poor (something that appears very good and spiritual); we surrender our bodies to be burned (we offer to God). But if there is not within our hearts true divine love, then it is of no value.

So then he goes on to describe what true love is: it is patient, it is kind, it is not jealous, does not brag, is not arrogant... There are many qualities that he mentions here which help us to understand what kind of love he is talking about. He is not referring to just emotions, where we love people; we are attached to certain people. He is referring to attitudes, values, moral qualities, direction of life.

And he then says, "Love never fails". Love never fails means it will carry on forever. It is not something passing; it is not meant to be for a temporary purpose. Many spiritual gifts are meant to be exercised for a period of time and they may no longer be continued. But love is not a spiritual gift. Love is a quality of being that lasts forever. It is in the heart of God, the basic aspect of the character of God. It is because God loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son to save us.

"...if *there are gifts of prophecy*, they will be done away" – gifts of prophecy are meant to be exercised for a period of time; they will be done away. "...if *there are tongues*, they will cease" – in the future, there is no need for these tongues. "...if *there is knowledge*, it will be done away" – here, the reference to knowledge is the kind of knowledge that the Holy Spirit may impart for certain occasions, for certain situations, to help us understand certain things. It is not a reference to spiritual knowledge of the being of God, the relationship with God, our knowledge of spiritual reality as a result of the transformation in our lives.

So it is important for us to understand what kind of love we are to develop.

The qualities described in **1 Corinthians 13** tell us the very positive aspects of love which include expressions such as: bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

But these statements, expressions must be qualified. The apostle Paul expresses in these forms to emphasize how important love is, how extensive it is, how far it is prepared to go.

But if we are to exercise love in the right way, we must appreciate what he wrote to the Philippian Christians.

Philippians 1: 9-11

- 9 And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment,
- 10 so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ;
- 11 having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which *comes* through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

It is important to note that he says: "...that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment". Real knowledge accompanies true love.

The knowledge that comes from the gift of the Spirit may be temporary but this knowledge is permanent; it comes from a true quality of love in our being.

When there is pure love in our hearts, our knowledge of God, our knowledge of life, our knowledge of people, our knowledge of the spiritual realm grows. That is real knowledge: knowledge that will have quality forever.

And he says: "...and all discernment". Love must be with discernment for it to be love of quality.

If we just love – as some people may say, love without condition: no matter what you do, I will love you, I will help you, I will do what you want me to do, I will always care for you, I will always be with you – some people think that that kind of love is of very high quality; unconditional love.

But the Scriptures show to us that while God loves us with a very, very powerful love, He will reject us, He will condemn us, He will punish us, He will keep us away from His life and His provisions if we go our own way, if our hearts are rebellious, if we seek for what is evil.

It is true that God loves us and He wants us to change. He is prepared to help us if we are willing to change. And that also should be our attitude: our love, concern for others, for their well-being.

But it does not mean that no matter how people live their lives, our attitude towards them will always be kindly, gentle, pleasant, giving in to what they ask and what they want. We know that the Lord Jesus did not do that; neither did the apostle Paul.

Here he says: "...abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment". What kind of discernment is he talking about? He explains: "...so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ". If we are to be blameless and sincere until the day of Christ, we must know what is excellent, we must know what is of true value, we must be able to discern, recognize, differentiate. "...having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which *comes* through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God" – it is the fruit of righteousness that we are looking for.

It is very difficult for the Holy Spirit to teach us these things in our daily lives unless our hearts long for this direction of life.

If our hearts are preoccupied with the things of the world, if we are preoccupied with ourselves, what we want from this world then the Holy Spirit may not be able to get through to us. He wants to speak to us but we will not hear; we will not listen. And so there will not develop true quality in our being and if there is no true quality in our being, there cannot be quality in church life.

Quality of church life rests on the healthy living of each individual part doing his part in the right spirit.

Let us go on to consider the approach and what happens in the spiritual realm when the Holy Spirit works. How does He work?

John 3: 4-8

- 4 Nicodemus *said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?"
- 5 Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.
- 6 "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.
- 7 "Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'
- 8 "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

I will not go into detail in this passage but just to highlight an important thrust of what the Lord Jesus is saying, where He says: "...so is everyone who is born of the Spirit".

What is He seeking to communicate here?

Basically He says, "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going" and this is a picture of how the Holy Spirit works.

You may hear the sound of it but you may not know where it comes from and where it is going. This communicates the idea that it is not so easy to appreciate what the Holy Spirit is doing.

Many a time we may think we know and we think that if we do this, the Holy Spirit will do that. So for example, if you want a person to be born of the Spirit, what do you do? There are many people who have devised many approaches, booklets, tracts, different ways, by which if a person reads this, he agrees with it, he prays this prayer, he will be a Christian, he will be born again. So we think that if we do this, he will be born of the Spirit.

But we may not realize that many a time, the person who does that is not born of the Spirit.

Likewise we may have a large evangelistic meeting and at the end of it, there is a call for all those who want to respond to God to come forward and there are people to counsel them. So, many people come forward, they are counselled, and we assume that these are born of the Spirit.

True, there will be those who are born of the Spirit but there can also be many who are not born of the Spirit.

They may come forward, they may be counselled and they may read their Bible, they attend church, they may attend bible studies and yet not be born again.

It is quite possible because ultimately, being born again has to do with what happens in the heart; it is in the realm of the spirit: "that which is born of the Spirit is spirit".

It cannot be brought about just by an intellectual agreement, just by signing on a piece of paper, or just by moving forward, just by saying certain things.

That does not mean that all these are of no value. They can be valuable, they can be helpful if it is done prayerfully, if it is done in a context of looking to God, and the people who respond understand what it means and their hearts respond to God. Yes, these can be situations that can help people to be born of the Spirit.

But whether the person is born of the Spirit or not is not something so easy for us to be certain about. Ultimately we have to learn to appreciate the realm of the spirit, the realm of the heart: what is taking place within the heart of men when they respond in a certain way, when they say certain things; when people testify, what do they mean, from where do these words come, what has happened in their relationship with God.

Let us turn to **2 Corinthians 3: 5-9**.

2 Corinthians 3: 5-9

- 5 Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as *coming* from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God,
- 6 who also made us adequate *as* servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.
- 7 But if the ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones, came with glory, so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, fading *as* it was,
- 8 how will the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory?
- 9 For if the ministry of condemnation has glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory.

This is a very helpful passage to understand the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The apostle Paul tells us that “the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life”. “The letter” refers to the requirements of the Law.

God says, "You shall not covet" – that is the letter of the Law. That letter kills because when we seek to fulfil the requirement of the Law on our own without looking to God, without His life and enabling, we will be doing it in the flesh, there will be no life in us and it will still be self-centred direction of life.

And therefore the Law will condemn us; the Law will kill because we cannot fulfil the requirements of the Law by our own abilities. This we can see clearly in **Romans 7**: the good that I would, I do not. The Law is good but I fail to keep the Law.

So the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. So, we are "servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit" – so it contrasts between the ministry of death and the ministry of life or the ministry of righteousness.

He says: "...if the ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones, came with glory, so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, fading *as* it was, how will the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory?"

What is the essential difference between the Law and the Spirit? The Law kills, so it is called the ministry of death or the ministry of condemnation. The ministry of the Spirit is the ministry of life, the Spirit gives life; it is the ministry of righteousness.

Why is it that the ministry of condemnation has glory? Will we not think that the ministry of condemnation must be something very ugly, something very repulsive – it is condemnation? But the apostle Paul says the ministry of condemnation has glory.

The reason basically is that the ministry of condemnation and the ministry of righteousness, both of them come from the heart of the perfect God.

The ministry of condemnation arises from God's justice – God will condemn all that is evil and unrighteous. So there will be the ministry of condemnation for sin, condemnation for the flesh, for the self-life. So that is the ministry of condemnation.

But the ministry of condemnation is meant to help us to come to the ministry of righteousness. If we think that we can be righteous on our own, we do not need to come to God; the ministry of condemnation helps us to recognize that in ourselves, in our own efforts we will fail and we cannot become morally good in our being.

The Law is our tutor to lead us to Christ – the Law helps us to recognize our need. But many people are not prepared to recognize their need and so they think they can be righteous on their own, they do not need Christ. And so they remain under condemnation.

So notice that the primary emphasis of the Spirit is giving life. So we can say the ministry of condemnation arises from God's justice; the ministry of righteousness arises from God's grace.

We can say grace goes beyond justice. If God were to stop at justice, all of us would be condemned. God does not need to provide the way of salvation for us. That is why the cross is God's grace. God does not have to do it. God chose that path to suffer for us because He loved us; He went out of His way to make the provision for us. That is grace.

All this comes from the heart of God. So for God to condemn us out of His justice is right, is part of His moral perfection.

Grace does not violate justice. Grace fulfils justice but goes beyond justice.

That is why at the cross the Lord Jesus had to suffer: because of justice – He had to suffer, to take our place on the cross for the punishment of our sins. Justice was fulfilled because of grace and because of that we can now have life.

So if we want to work together with the Holy Spirit, it must therefore mean that we must concentrate on the ministry of life.

Yes, we exercise spiritual gifts that God gives to us prayerfully, carefully, with gratitude to God, but it must always be in the context of the ministry of life. Without that, then all the gifts that we have will be of no benefit.

2 Corinthians 4: 12

So death works in us, but life in you.

It is a very short sentence but it is very meaningful, it is very rich and it tells us the secret of true ministry.

True ministry must have this element. If it does not have this element then we may be providing something that is not of great significance in the spiritual realm.

What did the apostle Paul mean by “death works in us, but life in you”?

The primary hindrance to spiritual ministry is the self-life. In the natural plane in the world, we are preoccupied with ourselves: the things we want, the things we like, the things we are concerned about. When we become Christians, we bring this into the spiritual realm. It is still what we like, what we are concerned about, what we want to do. “I like this kind of meeting, I like to read this kind of literature” – whatever it is, it is still what we like.

It is not based on what is truly good in the eyes of God; it is not based on what God wants us to do, what is important in His heart. So when we do that, we will not be imparting life because it will be the self-life and the self-life brings death. Self-life is under the ministry of condemnation.

So “death works in us, but life in you” tells us that in order to minister life to others, we must be prepared to die.

When the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it then brings forth much fruit. The Lord Jesus gave us a perfect example when He gave up His life for us. He laid down His life so that we through His death may find life.

That principle must be true of our lives if we are to be His disciples.

The apostle Paul suffered greatly but it was not just suffering that was important, it is the meaning of the suffering that is important.

There are many people who suffer greatly because of their own ambitions, because of their own ideas, because of their own pursuits of the things of the world, and they are prepared to suffer greatly to achieve what they want. That kind of suffering does not produce life.

But the apostle Paul suffered greatly because of his love for people; he suffered because he cared for their well-being. He was prepared to be ill-treated, misunderstood, even persecuted to death because he loved.

So the ministry of the Holy Spirit is life and the motivation behind that ministry is love.

If within our hearts there is not a pure love for God and for others, then what will we minister? We will be ministering self-life.

So the Corinthians could receive life because the apostle Paul gave himself for their well-being. He learnt from the Lord Jesus because he appreciated that the Lord Jesus loved him and gave Himself up for him. So the apostle Paul did likewise in his love for others: he gave himself for their well-being.

So this path is difficult but it is the only way where we can bring about true quality in meaning.

Romans 8: 2 is a description of the kind of life that God wants us to have at the personal level and also in church life.

Romans 8: 2

For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.

It is the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus – so the Holy Spirit brings life to us if we are identified with the Lord Jesus Christ. And when we depend on the Holy Spirit rather than on our own natural abilities, we will be set free from the law of sin and of death. The law of sin and of death applies because we are preoccupied with ourselves, we depend on our own natural abilities, we seek the things of this world.

So then if we want to work together with the Holy Spirit, we must understand what motivates Him. What motivates the Holy Spirit in His working in our lives and in church life is what the Lord Jesus wants to bring about: a Bride – the church – that is holy and blameless. We must appreciate that deeply. If we see that, then we can cooperate with the Holy Spirit in our own lives as well as in what we are seeking to do in the lives of other people.

We want to help others as well as ourselves to be transformed by the working of the Holy Spirit so that life will be abundant in us. And that is what the Lord Jesus came to give to us: that we may have life and have it abundantly. And that life is eternal life, the life of God.

So if we want to live our lives well and fulfil God's call in our lives, we must appreciate the primary emphasis and the approach that the Holy Spirit takes in working out the will of God, and work with Him. In one sense we can say it is quite simple: if you want to live your life well, check yourself: Does your life concentrate on this emphasis of ministering life to others motivated by love? If these are absent or deficient then your life will be deficient, but if this is abundant and overflowing in your life then your life will be fruitful. And this is a path that we need to continue to work at to develop.

And if all of us work at it in the same way, with the same motive because we have the same God, same Lord, the same Holy Spirit at work then church life will be truly the fellowship of kindred minds like that above: fellowship within the Godhead; oneness because of moral meaning and direction. And there will not be that kind of "I am of Paul; I am of Apollos" that kind of spirit, but concern for what is truly good in the kingdom of God, in the lives of people, and we give ourselves for that purpose.

Let us as we come before the Lord, ask Him to help us ponder over these issues so that we approach church life in the way that God intends it to be. Let us ask Him to help us understand what is important to Him, what He is seeking to accomplish so that we can go through life meaningfully with Him and as a result, there can be true fellowship that will be of eternal value.