

## The Passion of Your Pursuit

You can always identify a person who lacks drive & motivation. The intensity with which we pursue something is defined by the amount of passion we hold for it. In today's Templates of Truth, we identify the real passion behind our efforts, or the one vital ingredient our efforts lack.

Paul's discussion in this section of his letter to the Corinthians focused on spiritual gifts. He told them to *desire earnestly spiritual gifts* (14:1), but earlier told them to *earnestly desire the greater gifts* (12:31). The nature of spiritual gifts is that all believers have them, not all have the same ones, not all gifts function in ministry the same way, and the roles in which spiritual gifts operate involve both highly-visible and behind-the-scenes profiles. This doesn't mean that one gift is more valuable or significant to God than others. All believers and all gifts are important and vital to the work of God's kingdom through the church.

What then are the *greater gifts* to which Paul referred? Paul begins to discuss one such gift when he says, *I show you a still more excellent way* (12:31). What is more excellent than all the spiritual gifts God endows His people with to serve Him? It is the way of love – *pursue love* (14:1). Now, this is by no means the introduction of a new twist in Paul's teaching. He has already mentioned this obvious missing element among the Corinthians. He told them, *love edifies* (8:1). When genuine, sincere, steadfast, unselfish, sacrificial and unconditional love is the purifier through which all we do is filtered, all the things that plagued the Corinthians (and many churches today) are removed – division, strife, jealousy, and competition. Not only that, when you truly love other people, you won't offend them through your liberties, you won't commit acts of immorality with or against them, you won't be negligent in your commitments to them, and you will treat them with respect, dignity, encouragement and care. You will support them in their efforts to serve and honor God, and you will always stand for what is holy and righteous.

One sure way to make a spiritual gift unspiritual is to possess and administer it without love. Paul declared, *(if I) do not have love....I am nothing* (13:2). Whatever I am doing, no matter how good, noble or divinely proper it might be, if I *do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal* (13:1). Without love, nothing I seek to accomplish in serving God through the church will *profit* & benefit me or anyone else (13:3). As the old hymn writer so insightfully expressed, "love is the theme; love is supreme." It is the ultimate, intimate thread that holds the fellowship of God's people together and keeps us focused on the divine task for which He has called & equipped us.

Paul's reference to love as a gift should not be confused in its application to the other spiritual gifts. Paul more specifically defines love as one of the *fruits* of the Holy Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23. There, it is listed among a prestigious group of divine produce – joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Take note that love is at the top of the list! When we are born-again in Christ, the Holy Spirit indwells our body (I Corinthians

6:19). With His presence comes all of the fruit just listed. We do not all have the same spiritual gifts, but we do all have the same spiritual fruits. Our spiritual gift should always be maintained & expressed not only through love, but also through joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control as well. Can you imagine how much more harmony and effectiveness would flow through the body of Christ, if this was the case?

Spiritual gifts can be developed and enriched through a better understanding of their nature & characteristics, as well as through general use of them in ministry. Spiritual fruit is somewhat different. Paul said of the spiritual fruit of faith, *faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ* (Romans 10:17). Faith is increased in our life proportionately with the amount of time and effort we invest into a personal study of God's Word. If that is true of faith, then is it not logical to assume it is also true of all the other fruits of the Spirit, including love? You will love only as much as you love God's Word and time with Him in it.

Show me a church where strife & division dominates, and I will show you a congregation where love is significantly missing. Show me a church where jealousy & competition rule, where personal agendas are promoted, where criticism & confusion reign, and I will show you a people whose love for each other has grown cold. Show me a believer who refuses to use his spiritual gifts to honor and serve God's kingdom through ministry, and I will show you a believer who really doesn't love God the way he claims. Love is a more excellent way. It is the passion of our pursuit as we follow the will, plan & purpose of God as co-laborers together in the body of faith. Are you part of the passion, or part of the problem?

That's today's Templates of Truth. This is your Bible teacher, Rick Smith, reminding you to attend church this Sunday for Bible study and worship, pray for one another, and always strive to abide in Christ. Until next time, have a blessed and glorious day in the Lord Jesus.