

October 3, 2021
Serve one another in love
Galatians 5, 1 Peter 4

This Fall we are looking at some of the “one another” passages in the New Testament. As Jesus’ followers establish and build the church, they are called to “love one another” (a phrase used 19 times in the New Testament (Sept 12)), forgive one another (Sept 19), share one another’s burdens (Sept 26), and serve one another (today) – and more to come.

If you recall, Jesus said, *“I am giving you a new commandment: **Love one another**. Just as I have loved you, you should **love one another**. Your **love for one another** will prove to the world that you are my disciples”* (John 13:34-35). Do you think He meant it? He gave us that great new commandment just after He had washed His disciples’ grubby, calloused, smelly feet. He served each of them in a most humbling, lowly – and practical – way. Then, immediately, He said, *“Since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other’s feet. I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you. I tell you the truth, slaves are not greater than their master ...”* (John 13:14-16). Loving one another and serving one another in practical ways are inextricable bound together ...

Context matters

Fred wanted wisdom from God. So, he figured, he’d open his Bible and let God speak to Him through it. He randomly opened it, put his finger on a verse, and read Matthew 27:5, *“Judas went out and hanged himself.”* Not knowing how that applied to his life, he opened his Bible again – Luke 10:37, *“Go and do likewise.”* **When we read the Bible, context matters.**

The phrase “serve one another” occurs twice in the New Testament ... context matters.

Galatians 5:13

In Galatians, Paul is talking about some of those who are teaching that to be a Christian, you first have to become Jewish. Men would need to be circumcised. And then you would need to observe all the Jewish feasts and follow all the Jewish laws. You are not actually saved by faith in Jesus at all, you are saved by faithfully following the Law. Jesus is just an add-on. In reality, you remain a slave to all the dictates of the Old Testament Law. However, none of us one can keep the Law perfectly, So, unfortunately, none of us can actually be saved. Oops.

In truth, we are saved by **Jesus’ death for us on the cross**. His blood shed for us pays the price for our sin. We no longer need to slavishly follow the Law. We are free in Christ.

Paul says this, *“Christ has truly set us free. Now make sure that you stay free, and don’t get tied up again in slavery to the law. I tell you this: If you are counting on circumcision to make you right with God, then Christ will be of no benefit to you. I’ll say it again. If you are trying to find favor with God by being circumcised, you must obey every regulation in the whole law of Moses. For if you are trying to make yourselves right with God by keeping the*

*law, you have been cut off from Christ! You have fallen away from God's grace. But we who live by the Spirit eagerly wait to receive **by faith** the righteousness God has promised to us. For when we place our **faith in Christ Jesus**, there is no benefit in being circumcised or uncircumcised. What is important is **faith expressing itself in love**" (Galatians 5:1-6).*

Through our faith in Jesus, we are free in Christ. That's good news. However, some people interpret that as a free pass to then do whatever they want. To indulge all their wildest passions. After all, they can sin like crazy, then ask for forgiveness, and because Jesus' death has dealt with all their sin (past, present, and future), they can be forgiven, right?

Paul goes on, "*You have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don't use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. **Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love.** For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (5:13-14).*

"So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives ..." Paul says. "*When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these ... But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!*

"Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there. Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives" (5:16, 19-25).

Context matters. Yes, we can read Galatians 5:13 on its own, out of context: "serve one another in love." It's nice. But in context it means much more. It is because we are loved by Jesus – because Jesus served us by giving His life on the cross for us – because our sins are forgiven by Jesus – because we are saved by Jesus – because we are set free from all the Old Testament rules by Jesus – we should do what? **SERVE ONE ANOTHER IN LOVE.**

We **serve one another in love** BECAUSE of the love of Jesus, the example of Jesus, the sacrifice of Jesus, the command of Jesus ... Because this is how Jesus demonstrated love for us, and now He says, "*I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you.*"

1 Peter 4:10

The other occurrence of "serve one another" is in Peter's first letter: "*God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. **Use them well to serve one another.** Do you have the gift of speaking? Then speak as though God himself were speaking through you. Do you have the gift of helping others? Do it with all the strength and energy that God supplies. Then everything you do will bring glory to God through Jesus Christ. All glory and power to him forever and ever! Amen" (1 Peter 4:10-11).*

It's a nice passage. If we were doing a workshop on spiritual gifts, for instance, we would

use these verses along with verses in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4.

But 1 Peter is a letter, written by Peter from Rome during intense persecution of followers of Jesus by Roman authorities. Look at the context of these verses on spiritual gifts. Right BEFORE this, Peter writes, *"Since Christ suffered physical pain, you must arm yourselves with the same attitude he had, and be ready to suffer, too ... You won't spend the rest of your lives chasing your own desires, but you will be anxious to do the will of God. You have had enough in the past of the evil things that godless people enjoy – their immorality and lust, their feasting and drunkenness and wild parties, and their terrible worship of idols.*

"Of course, your former friends are surprised when you no longer plunge into the flood of wild and destructive things they do. So they slander you. But remember that they will have to face God, who stands ready to judge everyone, both the living and the dead ...

*"The end of the world is coming soon. Therefore, be earnest and disciplined in your prayers. Most important of all, continue to **show deep love for each other**, for love covers a multitude of sins ..." (4:1-9).*

Then Peter puts in his insights into spiritual gifts. *"God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. **Use them well to serve one another ...**"*

Right afterwards, Peter continues, *"Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you. Instead, be very glad – for these trials make you partners with Christ in his suffering, so that you will have the wonderful joy of seeing his glory when it is revealed to all the world.*

"If you are insulted because you bear the name of Christ, you will be blessed, for the glorious Spirit of God rests upon you. If you suffer, however, it must not be for murder, stealing, making trouble, or prying into other people's affairs. But it is no shame to suffer for being a Christian. Praise God for the privilege of being called by his name! ... So if you are suffering in a manner that pleases God, keep on doing what is right, and trust your lives to the God who created you, for he will never fail you" (4:12-19).

NOTE: this is about REAL persecution for believing in Jesus and following Jesus. It is NOT about the inconvenience of public health orders to wear a mask indoors, or to provide proof of vaccination or a recent Covid test to go to a Hurricanes game, fly to Tampa, or even to work in a hospital. This is about persecution for our conviction that Jesus is the Messiah, the living God. And this is REAL persecution – torture, life, and death persecution. People are literally dying horrible deaths for their faith in Jesus.

In the midst of this intense pressure-cooker-of-a-world where your life – literally – was on the line if you follow Jesus, Peter says, *"God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. **Use them well to serve one another.** Do you have the gift of speaking? Then speak as though God himself were speaking through you. Do you have the gift of helping others? Do it with all the strength and energy that God supplies. Then everything you do will bring glory to God through Jesus Christ. All glory and power to him forever and*

ever! Amen"(1 Peter 4:10-11). Does that seem odd to you? Out of place? Irrelevant?

Or is it MOST relevant? In tough, turbulent times, what the world needs to see from the followers of Jesus – from the church – from us – is **deep love for each other**, a community that **serves one another**, forgives one another, shares one another's burdens ... They need to see a radical alternative to the hate, hype, outrage, and hysteria around them.

Is that what the world does see in us? An August survey of unchurched people in the U.S., revealed that most non-church people have negative views of the church, thinking that local churches are judgmental, hypocritical, irrelevant, disconnected from real issues in the community, and known more for what they are against. Not exactly deep love for each other, serving one another, or love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. If that perception is true, why would anyone go to church?

What Paul (in Galatians) and Peter (in 1 Peter) are saying is we need to get back to the core of our faith: Jesus. We need to be a **radical alternative of love and servanthood** in a world of hate and my-rights-manship. Paul and Peter both point us to the example of Jesus.

Paul wants us to see that Jesus loved us so much He not only washed His disciples' stinky feet, He died on the cross so our sins might be forgiven. So when Jesus says, "*Love one another ... I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you,*" He actually means it. We are to love one another, to serve one another, with the same selfless love Jesus showed us. "*Use your freedom to serve one another in love. For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'*" (Galatians 5:13-14).

Peter wants us to realize that Jesus suffered (in ways we cannot begin to imagine). We may suffer for **our faith** as well. But rather than protesting and pontificating, or allowing that to make us bitter and angry, rather than Peter says, "*Be earnest and disciplined in your prayers. Most important of all, continue to **show deep love for each other**, for love covers a multitude of sins ... God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. **Use them well to serve one another.** Do you have the gift of speaking? Then speak as though God himself were speaking through you. Do you have the gift of helping others? Do it with all the strength and energy that God supplies. Then everything you do will bring glory to God through Jesus Christ. All glory and power to him forever and ever! Amen.*"

Live as Jesus would live if He were here, in this place in these times ... Love as Jesus would live if He were here, in this place in these times ... Forgive as Jesus would forgive if He were here, in this place in these times ... Share one another's burdens as Jesus would if He were here, in this place in these times ... Serve as Jesus would serve if He were here, in this place in these times ... Live with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Be different. Be Jesus' church. Be Jesus' body. Be Jesus' good news.

Copyright ©2021 by Bruce Martin
First Baptist Church
1614 – 5th Avenue South, Lethbridge, AB T1J 0W3
(403) 327-2082
bruce@firstb.net