

Introduction:

- A. *Illus.*: Some of you will remember this 40-year-old commercial? The esteemed actor John Houseman in a posh restaurant, looking up from his boiled egg to tell us how hard the investment firm, Smith-Barney works to research their strategies. Then he says in his proper British accent, “*Smith-Barney. They make money the old fashioned way. They earn it.*”

That was how the Jews in Jesus’ day approached their faith. They satisfied God the old fashioned way. They *earned* it. Then Jesus died and rose again and God’s New Covenant was established. Put simply, “*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.*” “Well, yes,” said some of the early Jewish believers, “*That’s true, but of course, you have to be Jewish. And if you’re not, you have to earn that. You must be circumcised and live according to the customs God established through Moses.*”

- B. That was what the young believers in Galatia were hearing so Paul wrote his scathing letter to them, reminding them, (as our old hymn put it), “*Nothing in my hand I bring. Simply to thy cross I cling.*” **Turn to Gal. 5.**
- C. OK, but then the rules kick in, right? When I was young, churches were very concerned about worldliness. The Bible says, “*Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world,*” and our churches took that seriously; much more seriously than churches seem to today. So we had rules to fence the world out: no card playing lest it lead to gambling. No dancing lest it take us to dance halls where Christians had no business being. No drinking or smoking because our bodies are temples of God. No movies because they portray and encourage ungodly ways of life.

We smile somewhat indulgently at such thing now but the fact is that we have often swung in the other direction. We're so confident of our Christian freedom we don't give much thought to the boundaries of holy living.

- D. **Gal 5:1** says, "*It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.*" In other words, don't try to *earn* your Christian freedom. That leads to **v.6**, "*For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. **The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.***" Read that last line with me... And that will bring us to our text today. Listen to **Gal 5:13-15...**

I. OUR FREEDOM IN CHRIST CALLS US TO SERVE ONE ANOTHER IN LOVE

- A. "*You, my brothers and sisters, were **called** to be free.*" His critics sniffed at that: "*We'll tell you where that will get them, Paul. A bunch of lawbreakers, that's what they'll turn into. Give 'em an inch and they'll take a mile.*" **But Paul wants to make very clear that this freedom isn't a license to do wrong. **V.13**, "*But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh,*" meaning the sinful, self-gratifying nature we were born with. So don't think that because you're saved and your sins are forgiven you can do whatever you feel like doing.**
- B. There's sort of a question between the lines here: *So what should I use my freedom for?* And the answer: "*rather, serve one another humbly in love.*" The literal translation is "*in love serve as slaves to one another.*" To us the word *slave* has the connotation of something dehumanizing. But the point here is that we willingly take on the low status of an unpaid servant with the goal of loving one another.

C. *Wait a minute! Where's the freedom in that?! I'm **free** to become a **slave**?? I don't want to be anyone's slave or servant. I don't like being a servant. Here's one of the great secrets of God's Kingdom: nothing is more profoundly satisfying and fulfilling, nothing is more divine, than serving others in love. Jesus said, "*The Son of Man came to seek and serve...*" He said, "*I am among you as one who serves.*" Do you suppose that when Jesus ascended to heaven, back to his throne, he breathed a big sigh of relief and said to the Father, "*Wow! Am I glad that serving stuff is over. That was really unpleasant!*" No, Christ remains our servant, because that is what love does.*

The deepest expression of love is not a sonnet or a song or sex. It is serving. That's how God made human beings. We are at our best and we are most fulfilled, most fully human, when we are serving someone else in love. To be commanded to love one another is like commanding a woman in love that she must be married. Have you had the experience of serving someone and when they say 'thank you,' you can't help but say, "*No. Thank you.*"

We must believe the kingdom secret that nothing will make our lives so meaningful and rewarding, nothing we do will matter so much or endure so long, as *loving one another*. It was the greatest joy of the King of Glory!

D. Yes, but how does, "I'd do anything for you," so easily devolve into, "Get it yourself." The Bible says that we are all corrupted with a kind of mutant spiritual gene that makes pride and selfishness our default responses. We simply cannot escape thinking, "*What's in it for me?*" "*I don't feel like it.*" "*How could she treat me like that?*" "*Not after what he said.*"

E. To rein in that sinful nature and to school his people in love God gave them the Law, spelling out the basic boundaries of what it meant for Israel to be a nation of people who loved God and who loved one another. Turn to **Lev. 19:9-18**. Recently a lady told me that her grandson, who is Jewish, was memorizing this chapter in Hebrew for his bar mitzvah. It is fundamental.

⁹When you reap the harvest of your land, **do not** reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest.

¹⁰**Do not** go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the foreigner. **I am the LORD your God.**

¹¹**Do not** steal. **Do not** lie. **Do not** deceive one another.

¹²**Do not** swear falsely by my name and so profane the name of your God. I am the LORD.

¹³**Do not** defraud or rob your neighbor. **Do not** hold back the wages of a hired worker overnight.

¹⁴**Do not** curse the deaf or put a stumbling block in front of the blind, but fear your God. **I am the Lord.**

¹⁵**Do not** pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly.

¹⁶**Do not** go about spreading slander among your people. **Do not** do anything that endangers your neighbor's life. I am the LORD.

¹⁷**Do not** hate a fellow Israelite in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in their guilt.

¹⁸**Do not** seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. **I am the Lord.**

What stands out in all those commands? They all begin, "Do not..." They all come under the category of "*Do no*

harm.” To love your neighbor, do no harm. These are the boundaries of love. Go outside of these and you most certainly are not loving your neighbor. **Not then and not now.** Love still has these boundaries. But **v.14** says, “*For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: Love your neighbor as yourself.*”

- F. When Pastor Paul wrote, “*serve one another humbly in love,*” who did he mean by “*one another?*” He meant their fellow believers—their congregation. Here is where Christian love starts and grows. And it isn’t always easy.

That why he brings up this unpleasantness in v.15, “*If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.*” That seems out of place here, doesn’t it? But the problem is, despite our blood-bought freedom to love and serve one another, we have a bad record of hurting each other.

- G. When it comes to loving other, “*if I can make it here, I’ll make it anywhere.*” Remember what he said, “*The only thing that matters is faith expressing itself through love.*” Remember Jesus’ primary command to us all, “*Love one another.*” Here, love *these* people. Here, where we can aggravate each other. Or where we so easily ignore each other, where we can keep our business to ourselves.

Illus.: I have this ring of keys that I always carry. Here’s the key to the church, the key to my office, the key to our front door, and then there’s this key. I can’t remember what it’s for. It’s important for *something* but I don’t know what. I should probably try it on some doors to see. You may have a spiritual key like that, a key which opens the door to humbly loving and serving fellow believers.

II. OUR FREEDOM IN CHRIST BRINGS US THE CAPACITY TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS SERVANTS.

- A. We are now free to do what we couldn't do before. I don't just mean that there's no one stopping us. I don't just mean we have *permission*. **I mean that we are *able*.** We have the *capacity* to serve one another lovingly, a capacity we didn't have before. **Not because we now know the rules, but because God has made humbly loving one another part of our very nature.** As surely as Jesus, the King of Glory, could serve others in love, so can we!
- B. Great, but how? Ah! The secret is in **v.16**: "*So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.*" **That's the key you have on your ring that you may have forgotten about.**

To walk by the Spirit is to step into all of life's challenges and relationships in the Holy Spirit. So think of a tough relationship at work or in your family. Now you have to spend time with that person and you don't know how to behave; how to love them. Well, we could give you some rules: *be nice, don't swear, don't do anything you'll regret.* But what if instead of you Jesus was going to sit down. "*Lee can't be here right now,*" he says, "*so I'm taking his place.*" I wonder how that would go? I know one thing: Jesus wouldn't really be guided by rules, though he surely wouldn't break any. He would just *know* how to handle the situation. He would just *know* how to finesse and nuance the conversation. Or maybe not to talk at all. He'd just know. **Somehow or another, he would bring grace and truth into it.** Regardless of how the other person responded, one thing for sure: Jesus would handle it exactly right.

Well, Jesus' Spirit is in you! To walk in the Spirit is to walk into a situation like that with the Spirit of Jesus in charge of you. Or to put it another way, with you embodying the Spirit of Jesus.

- C. *E.g.s.*: So here's someone from your church family who has hurt you, or someone who never fails to aggravate you; or here is someone whose need seems so great you can't imagine what to say or do to serve them. Here is someone who is poor but you're inclined to think they're poor because they've been irresponsible. What would be the loving thing to do? Let Jesus walk into that with you. Take your cues from him.

You may go into a circumstance knowing what you are to say or do but not sure you can do it in the right spirit. Tell the Lord your weakness and your desire to be a loving servant and ask for his help to shape your heart for the occasion.

- D. We need to flesh that out a little more and that's what the next verses will help us do. And we'll get to those next week.

Conclusion

What are your take-aways this morning?

- There is nothing you can do that will be so fulfilling and soul-satisfying as serving one another in love.
- Now, thanks to the Holy Spirit, we actually have the freedom—the *capacity* to serve one another lovingly. Not because we now know the rules, but because God has made that part of our very nature.
- The key that we already have is this: “Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.”

Illus.: There's a story that has been told from Civil War days before America's slaves were freed, about a northerner who went to a slave auction and purchased a young slave girl. As they walked away from the auction, the man turned to the girl and told her, "You're free."

With amazement she responded, "You mean, I'm free to **do** whatever I want?"

"Yes," he said.

"And to **say** whatever I want to say?"

"Yes, anything."

"And to **be** whatever I want to be?"

"Yep."

"And even **go** wherever I want to go?"

"Yes," he answered with a smile. "You're free to go wherever you'd like."

She looked at him intently and replied, "Then I will go with you."

[PT.com. *Tullian Tchividjian, Surprised by Grace (Crossway, 2014), page 182*]