

Galatians 5.13-26 Sermon Notes | Sunday 24th February 2019

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Serve one another through love

I think that there's three key points that Paul's trying to get across in this passage. The first is to serve one another through love. It can be quite easy to skip over the first few verses because they don't maybe stand out as much as the last part of the passage. However, I think they're actually some of the most significant.

Paul sets the tone of love from the very beginning when he addresses the Galatians as 'my brothers and sisters'. The phrase "children of God" is used quite a lot in church but I think that often we focus so much on the idea of God as our Father that we forget that this is also an instruction for how to treat each other. And actually when you unpack it, the idea of treating everyone as your brother or sister. It's revolutionary.

So what does it mean to do that? I believe that through this God is saying that he wants us to know each other, love each other, and support each other. He wants us to know our communities and spend time with the people in them. Making conversations and extending the first hand of friendship.

He also wants us to see all people as our equals. We know that when Jesus was here he ate with the sinners, he washed the feet of his disciples and went places speaking to people that nobody would have expected him to. Because where we see things that divide us,

God sees a family. He sees brothers and sisters. Nobody above or below. Equals.

In the next section Paul warns about the dangers that these 'factions' can bring, because when we start to close ourselves off because of differences we forget that we are all made by God, and we are all made to 'serve [each other]

And to serve each other humbly and though love', So much so that In the next verse the Bible says that 'the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: Love your neighbour as yourself'. Above all else we are told to love. Above every other law in existence, we are told to show love.

Now that may seem easy when your neighbour is your literal neighbour or someone who you know and like. It may be fine when the act of loving another as yourself is easy. However at the point it involves stepping outside of our comfort zones... suddenly it becomes a whole lot more difficult. Which leads me onto the next point.

Strive to Live in the Spirit

This next section is a warning about the consequences of destructive behaviour, behaviours that stop us loving others as ourselves, and stop us experiencing true freedom in the Spirit of God.

And it's an interesting section because in a way it works on two levels. It warns us that these things are contrary to the spirit and they make it harder for us to live in the way God wants us to. But it also warns us because these things can cause us to run from God.

Right from the beginning of the Bible we see that when we sin... we hide. In Genesis in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve hide because they are ashamed. And like them, we do this. We ignore God, and we run away and trying to live our lives alone.

All because we feel that we aren't worthy of God's love. But the point that Paul is making all through Galatians is that we aren't worthy of God's love. Worthiness has never been the point, because of course, we all fall short. God's message... is that he wants a relationship with us anyway. He doesn't want us to hide from him because we feel embarrassed or inadequate.

The message of the Bible is that God loves us anyway. No matter what we do, what we believe, or how far we run. Despite everything.

We are not worthy. Yet we are loved anyway. Without conditions or expectations, God is present with us in whichever choices we make. And he never gives up on us.

As Paul says this isn't just a free pass to live your life in whichever 'indulgences' the flesh wants. But a calling to walk with God continually. And we'll find that the more we walk in the Spirit the less these behaviours will tempt us.

Now I'm not going to talk about all the negative behaviours in this passage because a lot of them are pretty self-explanatory. It's easy to see clear lines of where they stop and start. The one that I'd like to focus on however is hatred.

I don't know about you but I was always brought up not to hate things, not to hate people. And by and large I manage to get through life without doing that. But I think the reason is because we have come to define hatred the wrong way.

The dictionary defines hatred as 'an intense dislike'. However I believe that we need to change the way we view hatred in our world. Because if we see it that way to me it suggests that just to withdraw strong negative emotions is enough. That to just not explode with anger is enough. But I believe that God wants us to do more than just removing the negative. He wants us to do one better.

In science we're taught that there's no such thing as cold, only an absence of heat. What would happen if instead of hatred, we saw an absence of love.

If we followed this, just think how the world would change. It would challenge us, surely, But imagine instead of removing ourselves from difficult situations, or ignoring people,

If instead of ambivalence, we added love. If we showed others the love that we have been shown to us by God.

Les Miserables said it best, "To Love Another Person is to see the face of God"

Walk in the Spirit Continually

So the last point is to walk in the Spirit continually in the good in the bad. We can't just hold God as an idea in our heads or a sentiment in our hearts. But we must work out the implications of belief in him into all the actions we make.

God doesn't leave us in the pain or the suffering. He walks with us and he carries us.

A few weeks ago I went to Hillsong Church in Newcastle where I heard a new song called highlands and I'm just going to read you some of the lyrics because I think they illustrate this quite well.

So I will praise you on the mountain,
And I will praise you when the mountains in my way
You're the summit where my feet are
So I will praise you in the valleys all the same.
No less God within the shadows
No less faithful when the night leads me astray
You're the heaven where my heart is
In the highlands and the heartache all the same

God wants us to walk with his Spirit in the highs and the lows and in whatever we encounter, to turn to him. And if we do this we'll see the gifts that in this chapter he promises to us. Love, Joy, Peace, Kindness, Patience, Goodness, Faithfulness and Self control. We all face choices and difficult decisions but where we act with these gifts, we are walking in the spirit, for as Paul says "no ill may come of these".

This is also an idea that I find really comforting. I don't know about you but I find it very hard to see tangible things that the Spirit has done in my life. However, I know that if I act with the fruits of the spirit that I'm on the right path.

However, fruits are seasonal. There are times when they grow riper and sweeter, there are times when fruits fall to the ground or are simply expectant buds. Like this there are times when we walk away from God. Now I can't promise you that you'll be able to execute these constantly, I'd be foolish to try. But I can promise that where there is winter, there will be spring again. God will help us to use these gifts because he walks with us.

And though the mountains we face may be great.

He is greater.