

Session 4

May 17, 2020

SERVE

Galatians 5:13-15; 6:1-5, 10

Galatians is all about being freed from the law no one could keep (Gal. 2:16). But being free from the law places us in bondage to Christ (1:10), and under His law (6:2). Our lesson this week points out one aspect of what that means.

Service with compassion (vv. 13-15). At first glance, Christian liberty sounds a lot like permission to do whatever we want. But freedom in Christ is not doing what we *want* but doing what we *ought*. Paul suggested that the enthusiasm believers feel at being released from a legalistic system of petty “do’s” and “don’ts” should be turned from *selfishness* into *service*. And as Christ-followers, the motivation for serving one another is not obligation (something required), but rather love (something freely given) (v. 13). In verse 14, the apostle directly echoes the words of Jesus in Matthew 22. When asked which commandment was greatest, Jesus replied, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important command. The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself.” So central is the command to love, that Jesus added, “All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commands” (Matt. 22:37-40). The lesson? *Christian liberty frees us to serve one another with the purest of motives: because we love one another.*

Service with humility (6:1-5). Even in service, there lurks the pitfall of pride. Paul mentions two areas where our attempts to help others might trip us up. First, we must guard against pride in our *judgement of others* (v. 1). How easy it is to point fingers and condemn those who stumble into sin! But rather than condemnation, Paul urges compassion. It’s interesting that he defines spiritual maturity as gently restoring others while carefully protecting one’s self. Second, we must guard against pride when *examining ourselves*. Service to others is a demonstration of love (see 5:14). But if we somehow think we are “too good” to serve (v. 3), we are deceiving ourselves (see 1 John 1:8) and violating the example that Jesus Himself left for us (see Mark 10:45). The remedy for such pride is harsh self-examination that judges our own works as God sees them rather than comparing what we do with the works of others. Verses 2 and 5 are not contradictory, but complimentary. As compassionate believers, we must sympathize and assist in ministry to others; but as humble followers of Christ, we know that we alone are responsible for our own deeds (see Rom. 14:12). The lesson? *We are called to serve others with compassion while critiquing ourselves.*

Service with enthusiasm (6:10). The “therefore” of verse 10 refers back to Paul’s final exhortation to serve one another in verse 9: “So we must not get tired of doing good, for we will reap at the proper time if we don’t give up.” There is the promise of reward for those who continue to give even in the midst of weariness. The “must” in the main portion of verse 10—“we *must* work for the good of all”—is not a command, but rather a strong urging. To serve because we are obligated would place us back into the legalism Paul has so adamantly argued against. Instead, we *should* serve others, out of love, thus fulfilling the *law of Christ* (v. 2). The heart of the verse is preceded by a condition: as opportunities to serve become apparent, we are to take advantage of them; and is followed by an emphasis: “especially for those who belong to

the household of faith.” While the Bible is clear that Christian love, charity, and service are to be directed to all, the primary responsibility is caring for the family of God. This peculiar term “household of faith” properly refers to those of the church, but in common usage included the *sphere of influence*. Hence, while service should be rendered to all, the church family and those within its influence should come first. The lesson? *Believers should serve with enthusiasm and look for opportunities to do so.*