

## Thoughts From Other Minds:

5:13. For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

Again, Paul addresses the Galatians with affection, as '**brothers**' (cf. 1:11; 3:15; 4:12, 28, 31; 5:11, 13; 6:1, 18). We are free to be each other's loving slaves! Freedom to indulge the flesh is a form of bondage. To clarify his positive teaching, Paul has also to mention the negative - freedom is not selfishly serving the flesh, but lovingly serving one another.

The word for '**flesh**', *sarx*, can be a neutral synonym for 'body' (e.g. 2:20; 4:13-14; see also Rom. 1:3) or for 'human effort' (3:3; 6:12-13), but here it obviously refers to sin. Freedom to gain access to pornography is not liberating but enslaving. So too is the freedom to drink too much or to win the lottery. The result is slavery to alcohol or to the love of money and ease. Jesus said that to sin is to be in bondage (John 8:34). All through the New Testament there are warnings that grace does not lead to licentiousness or lawlessness (e.g. Rom. 6:1-2; 1 Peter 2:16). There are those who promise freedom, but who usher in slavery to depravity (2 Peter 2:19; Jude 4). In the 1530s Martin Luther lamented that indolence and listlessness reigned not just in the Roman churches but also in the evangelical churches. It is easy to mouth 'grace' and yet not grow in grace. 'Grace' is not a magic word which solves all problems.

It is a paradox, but as Martin Luther so famously put it, 'A Christian man is the most free lord of all, and subject to none; a Christian man is the most dutiful servant of all, and subject to everyone.' Christians are free to enslave themselves to one another! Look at Paul - he is free in Christ, yet a servant of Christ (1:10); and a servant of those converted through his ministry (2 Cor. 4:5). 'Brother, let me be your servant,' is the song of a free man, or, more correctly, a freed man. Grace and freedom do not mean that we can pander to the flesh, and call it Christian. Chrysostom declared that 'The mother of heresies is desire for power.' Freedom is not to be turned into what J. L. Martyn calls - stretching the meaning of '**opportunity**' (*aphormēn*) a little - 'a military base of operations for the Flesh'. Christians are to '**serve one another**' continually—hence '**serve**' (*douleuētē*) is in the present tense.

Some ... consider that Paul contradicts himself regarding the law. Yet the views of the great apostle seem to be clear enough, in principle at least. Augustine put it like this: 'The law was therefore given, in order that grace might be sought; grace was given, in order that the law might be fulfilled.' This is not the Christian way of salvation, but the Christian way of life. Love fulfils the law (NASB, ESV, NKJV) rather than sums it up (NEB, NIV, NRSV). Love is not simply the gist of what the law is about. The law is not abolished ... but fulfilled—in love (cf. Matt 5:17; Rom 8:4).

Peter Barnes, *Galatians*, pp. 239-241.

## Camperdown Noorat Terang Presbyterian Charge

28 August 2016

**Sermon:** "Life in the body #2 – not being served, but serving"

**Scripture:** Galatians 5:1-26

### Sermon Notes

**Introduction:** This is the second in our new series of studies following on from our August Communion study from John 14:12 'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you' with some of the other 'one another' texts of the New Testament.

We remembered that faith in the Lord Jesus Christ unites us to him as our head and to each other as members of his body (Rom 12:4-5) and that within 'the body' we are to love one another as he has loved us. But how does love become visible? How do we know we know, how do outsiders know, that we love one another?

Last Lord's Day we saw from Romans 12 and 15 and Philippians 2 that we are to think towards each other in a way that leads to humility rather than pride; that we are to be of the same mind towards one another, not thinking high thoughts of ourselves, but associating with the humble.

We considered that this 'right thinking' towards each other will make us startlingly different from the wider community; the differences that mean much there between classes, between rich and poor, between educated and uneducated, between people of different skin colours and cultures, will mean nothing 'in the body'.

And we saw that this 'being like minded towards one another' is a gift from God (Rom 15:5-6), and that he gives it by the use of the means he has given us. He transforms our minds by the scriptures, as we read and meditate and pray over the scriptures, and by prayer for help, and by the example of Christ.

So there is a direct connection between our first 'one another' and this 'one another': 'but through love serve one another' (Gal 5:13), for the mind we are to have among ourselves is the mind that was in Christ Jesus, the way of thinking that let to self-humbling and service of others, even to death on a cross (Phil 5:5-8).

### 1. Freedom from slavery

Service of others is a distinctively Christian virtue thoroughly grounded in the teaching and example of our Lord, who in the face of the worldly desire of his disciples to be the greatest and to be served, said that he came 'not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many' (Mk 10:42-45).

The gospel of grace, that God freely forgives sinners through faith in Jesus Christ is often said to be dangerous because (so it is said) it encourages sinning; to counteract this danger many want to add rules for right standing with God that must be kept so we will 'be good'.

Paul had established churches in Galatia by proclaiming the gospel of God's free grace in Christ Jesus; later, others came teaching that faith in Jesus is not enough; to grace and faith in him must (they said) be added their own works of obedience to God's law—but this would be a return to a slavery which doesn't work (Gal 5:1-2).

Also, such a way of trying to be justified by God is hostile to harmony and unity 'in the body'; it proceeds from sin within, and opens the way for the works of the flesh (sin within) and pride, as we compare ourselves and suppose ourselves to be better than others. So we are not to abuse our freedom, but serve (Gal 5:13-15).

In our culture, greatly influenced by Christian virtues, 'through love serve one another' sounds good. Outsiders see no need for any change in us before we can serve one another; the scriptures teach that God must call us to freedom from establishing our own righteousness by our own good works before we can serve.

The scriptures command us to examine ourselves to see whether we are 'in the faith' (2 Cor 13:5). It is good as we come to this 'one another' to be sure that our hope of heaven rests on Christ alone, not partly on him and something else. If we are trusting in him plus something else, then he will be of no advantage to us.

## 2. Freedom to serve

If God has called us to freedom through faith in the Lord Jesus, then we are not to use that freedom as an opportunity for the flesh; we are not to say 'because I am justified by grace not works I can give reign to evil desires.' Rather, we are through love to serve one another, and so truly fulfil God's law (Gal 5:6, 14).

Serving one another means working for one another (cf. the 'ministry' of Jesus, Lk 22:27; Mk 10:45; Acts 10:38). We can serve one another by praying for each other, as Epaphras did (Col 4:12). We are never without opportunity to serve each other, for we all need God's presence and power—and God gives in answer to prayer.

We serve one another by 'word service'. Firstly, in 'everyday' speaking the truth, in wholesome, encouraging, helpful words (Eph 4:25, 29). Secondly, as we speak God's word to each other (1 Pet 4:10-11a); some are specially gifted for this service—but it is a 'body ministry'; we are all to do it (cf. 1 Thess 4:18).

We serve one another in hands on helping service (cf. 1 Pet 4:11b); 1 Tim 6:17-19; 2 Thess 3:13); the writer to the Hebrews reminds them that they had compassion on those in prison, and joyfully accepted the plundering of their property (10:34)—and urges them to remember to continue to do so (13:3) and assures them that such sacrifices are well pleasing to God (13:6).

We can serve at cost to ourselves by loving one another; we are 'through love to serve one another'; love makes sacrifice easy. For love of us Jesus sacrificed himself; our love must reflect his love (1 Jn 3:16-18); We can serve in spite of the cost by walking in the Spirit, allowing him to direct us by the scriptures and empower us and bear his fruit in us; then the world will see that we are Jesus' disciples.

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## My Notes:

### Questions for Reflection:

1. How is Jesus' attitude to greatness at odds with the values of this world? (Cf Lk 22:24-27; Mk 10:35-45). How might his own relationship to God have shaped his values in this matter? (cf. Isa 41:1-9; 49:1-6, 52:13, 53:11).
2. Read and reflect upon Galatians 5:1-15. What is the 'yoke of slavery' (v. 1)? What is the freedom for which Christ has set believers free? Why is it that if a man accepts circumcision Christ would be of no advantage or value to him?
3. What would be a modern equivalent of circumcision in this context, and of what practical use is this to us in assessing whether we are able through love to serve one another?
4. What does it mean to 'serve' one another, and how do we see this illustrated in Jesus? (cf. Acts 1:38).
5. Read and reflect on the following passages of scripture as they bear on our God-given responsibility as believers in the Lord Jesus to serve one another: Col 4:12-13; Eph 4:25, 29; 1 Pet 4:10-11a; 1 Thess 4:18; 1 Pet 4:11b; 1 Tim 6:17-19; Heb 10:34, 13:3, 10:6; 1 Jn 3:16-18; Gal 5:16ff.