

SESSION 4
Serve



QUESTION 1:

When have you received stellar service?

THE POINT

Seize the opportunity to serve.

THE PASSAGES

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

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

We've all had experiences with customer service we'd like to forget. But I tend to remember the ones that make me smile rather than frown.

For example, a man booked a last-minute trip on a well-known airline to see his dying grandson one last time. Traffic and long lines at the Los Angeles airport caused him to arrive at the gate 12 minutes after the plane's scheduled departure, but the airline had been informed of this man's tragic situation. Imagine the man's surprise when the pilot himself was standing there waiting for him. The pilot said, "They can't go anywhere without me, and I wasn't going anywhere without you. Now relax. We'll get you there. And again, I'm so sorry."

Good customer service is not about making a sale or even keeping a customer. It's about doing what's right and helping the other person.

But we're not talking about customers and business; we're talking about relationships. The principle still applies, though: we strengthen our relationships when we help and serve the other person. Serving is a tangible way to love others.

Galatians 5:13-15

13 For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.

14 For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

15 But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.

KEY WORDS: The flesh (5:13)—This term can refer to the human body, but most often in Paul's writings it denotes the sin nature. The person who lives according to the flesh is living a life that is contrary to and opposed to God.

Freedom is a natural human hunger. We all want to feel free, but sin so easily entangles us (Heb. 12:1) and holds our feet to the ground. In Galatians 5, however, Paul reminded us that a revolution has come through Jesus Christ. Because of Jesus' perfect sacrifice, the power of sin has been broken, and we can be free from the downward spiral of sin.

We are called to be free. In Christ, the Emancipation Proclamation has been issued. We are free ... but free to do what?

Let's look first at what this freedom is *not*. Our freedom in Christ is not a license to go back to our old lifestyles—to live like we did before we were saved. Notice the word *flesh* in verse 13. This refers to our sinful nature, the "old person" that continues to live inside us, even after salvation. "The flesh" is the self-absorbed side of us that can grow like a cancer when let off its leash. It no longer owns us, but it likes to think it does. Paul knew firsthand about the continual pull of the old sin nature (Rom. 7:14-24).

The inward focus of the sin nature not only harms us; it affects our relationships. If I am focused on myself, and you are focused

on yourself, how can we ever have a strong relationship? When we focus inwardly, on ourselves, sins like selfishness, greed, and uncaring attitudes quickly follow and will sour our relationship. As Paul warned: “But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.”

Paul also knew that we would find the only remedy for the flesh in an ongoing relationship with Christ (v. 25). So as we focus on Christ, we also are to focus on those He has brought into our lives. We should maximize our liberty in Christ by loving people through service. As Paul admonished, “By love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”

Jesus blazed a trail back to the beauty of community. While the ultimate result of Christ’s death and resurrection is the forgiveness of sin and a relationship with God, it also alters the way we feel about ourselves (no more guilt) ... and revolutionizes the way we feel about others. We can now love people, and we express that love through serving them.

Think of the ways you naturally serve yourself.

- ▶ When your body needs food, you make haste to the fridge.
- ▶ When your body calls out for sleep, you go in search of a pillow and blanket.
- ▶ When your body feels the need for exercise, you take the dog for a walk.

This type of “self-service” is not necessarily bad, but Paul challenged us to serve others just as faithfully as we serve ourselves. We “serve” our needs. Likewise, we can serve others when they have needs. Make everyday investments in others until it becomes a habit, the natural way of doing your life.

QUESTION 2:

What is the connection between freedom in Christ and the command to serve?

DIGGING DEEPER

FLESH: A PAULINE UNDERSTANDING

One group of references is unique to Paul's use of "flesh" in an ethical sense. This group includes Galatians 5:13,16,17,19,24. In fallen man, "flesh" has taken on a bent or an inclination toward sin that was not present in Adam prior to the fall. This "flesh" opposes the Spirit, is sinful, and on its own cannot please God. Romans 8 illustrates this point

clearly—those who are "in the flesh" cannot please God (Rom. 8:8-9).

Receiving the Spirit in conversion never rids a Christian of the "flesh," that is, his fallen human nature. Instead he finds the "flesh" continually wars against the Spirit to frustrate his desire to do what God wants (v. 17). Victory can come only as believers keep in step with the Spirit (v. 25; see v. 16). The believer must learn to let the Spirit direct and control his life.

Cecil Ray Taylor, "Flesh: A Pauline Understanding," *Biblical Illustrator*, Fall, 2010, 68-71.

Galatians 6:1-5

1 Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.

2 Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.

3 For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.

4 But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another.

5 For every man shall bear his own burden.

KEY WORDS: **The law of Christ (6:2)**—This phrase is shorthand for Jesus' teaching that the whole law could be summed up in the commandments to love God and love your neighbor as yourself.

Dale was a driven guy, an achiever, and a self-starter. In his career in pharmaceutical sales, he continually ranked among the top five in his company. When quarterly scores came out, Dale often raised his hands in victory as he saw his name sitting at the top. Unfortunately, as Dale built his reputation in the marketplace, he destroyed his reputation with family and friends. Dale didn't realize how badly he was treating others. Most days, he simply pushed others out of his head as he pursued his path to success.

Dale is now divorced, having left his wife in the dust several years ago, and is supplying his children with a monthly check to ease his guilt. As time went on, damage also reached a critical point in other areas of his life, and Dale knew a day of reckoning would eventually come. May 23, 2014, was that day. Dale was let go after fifteen years with the company.

When it comes to relationships, many people operate like Dale. It's all about me, my goals, my success, my accomplishments. In Galatians 6 Paul gave us a better way: looking out for others. Paul began by describing a way of helping others that may surprise you: serve others by confronting them in love. "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness."

QUESTION 3:

How can we help others see blind spots in a way that strengthens relationships?

One of the most important roles you play in others' lives is to help them see their blind spots. Anyone who drives a car can grasp this idea. I have been saved at the last second by my loving wife shouting: "*Honey, there's a car beside you!*" In a panic, I yanked the wheel and returned to my lane unscathed. As my heart rate slowly returned to normal, I offered thanks to my wife because her intent really had been to help me and not to throw me into cardiac arrest. Thanks to her, I had dodged a proverbial bullet.

Paul challenged the church to gently, lovingly, and sensitively serve others by helping them see the way they wound themselves or others. This process requires much prayer, but it must be a part of healthy relationships.

Paul drove home the need for tangible forms of service: “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.” Strong relationships call for us to help carry loads. It’s a lot easier to move a heavy piece of furniture when someone is there to help you carry it. It’s still my load to carry, but by coming alongside and helping me carry it, you ease my strain. In a sense, my burden becomes your burden as we carry it together. This, of course, requires appropriate self-disclosure and soul-bearing. After all, people cannot help you lift something they don’t know about.

In verses 3-5, Paul put the mirror in my face and called me to take a long, hard look. Do I have a healthy view of myself? Do I realize that one day I will stand before Jesus and answer for the amount of heavy lifting I performed—or didn’t perform—in the lives of others? I must carry my load of service.

QUESTION 4:

What does carrying one another’s burdens look like?

Galatians 6:10

10 As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.

Paul declared in verse 7: “For whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” For this reason, Christians are challenged to sow seeds in the forever field of Christian community. In verse 10, Paul mentioned the need to demonstrate love to all, but he stressed

the importance of Christians investing in other Christians. Relationships inside the church are held at the highest level. “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.”

This certainly doesn't mean we ignore the needs of those outside the body of Christ. Sowing good seed in the lives of lost people is important as well. But just as a person cares for his immediate family before he takes care of the neighbors (1 Tim. 5:8), believers must be sure to take care of their brothers and sisters in Christ. This serves as a great witness to those outside the church. Jesus said, “Love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” (John 13:34-35).

Paul took it for granted that the Galatian Christians were interacting regularly with one another. Being with the body of believers is critical to spiritual growth. It should go without saying: one of the prerequisites for healthy relationships is your consistent presence in others' lives. What a challenge it is to serve people with whom you rarely sit and talk, those with whom you hardly ever engage in robust conversation. Indeed, for some, the first step of obedience to Galatians 6:10 is to simply to show up more frequently.

Once you insert yourself regularly into a small group environment, Paul would then challenge you to resist the urge to merely sit back and soak it up. Do not wait for the invitation to serve, but search for opportunities to work for the good in others' lives. In one case, God may call you to give money to meet a need. In another situation, He may call you to write a note of encouragement. For yet another, God may require you to take the time to become a frequent phone-caller, checking in regularly to let someone know he or she is not alone in a battle. The opportunities to serve are endless.

While Christians should stand ready to serve in any way they are needed, the wisest way to serve others is by opening up your

unique package of spiritual gifts. In his rich Letter to the Romans, Paul made it evident that serving others is a huge part of offering our lives as a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1-8). Consider how the Holy Spirit has hardwired you for ministry and use those gifts and abilities to serve and meet the needs that lie before you.

No two Christians are exactly the same. Our needs as well as our gifts and abilities to serve and minister can vary, but each of us is equally called to “do good unto all men.” All that remains for us to do is to open our hearts and eyes to see the needs and opportunities and go for it.

QUESTION 5:

What opportunities does our group have to work for the good of others?

ENGAGE

On the left side, list ways you’ve appreciated others serving you. On the right side, list ways you have served or can serve others. Place the name of someone you can serve this week next to one of the items listed.

How Others Have Served You

How You Have Served

LIVE IT OUT

Where is God leading you to serve?

- ▶ **Family.** Be intentional about blessing your family members this week. Make an extra effort to serve the people you love the most.
- ▶ **Church.** Search for a specific way you can minister to your brothers and sisters in Christ. As a group, identify individuals whom you can walk alongside and help ease their burden.
- ▶ **Community.** Think through your gifts and resources, and then find a need in your neighborhood or community that corresponds with those gifts and resources. Start a service project or engage a long-term ministry. Take action.

