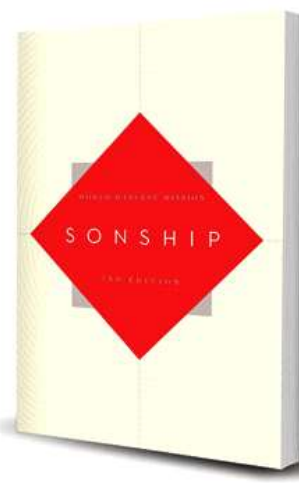
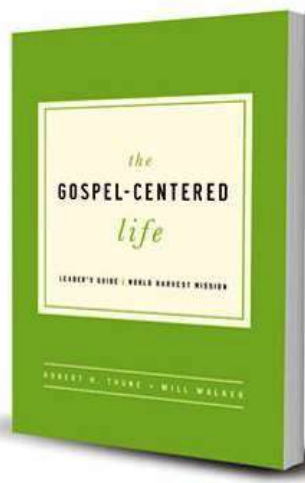


# Sermon

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Gospel-Centered Living & Outreach



Based on *Sonship*, chapter 12, and  
*The Gospel-Centered Life*, chapter 7

## Galatians 5:13-15

**13 ...as for you brothers, y'all were called into liberty (ἐλευθερία); just don't let your liberty become a launching-point (ἀφορμὴν) in fleshliness. Instead, serve (δουλεύετε) one another through love (ἀγάπης). 14 because all of the law is fulfilled by one thing, by this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," (Lev. 19:18) 15. but since y'all are biting and devouring one another, watch out that y'all don't get consumed by each other!**

•“Gospel liberty consists in three things, freedom from the Mosaic yoke, from sin, and from slavish fear.” (JFB)  
These chains are “loosed;” you are “released” from them.

•Freedom is exhilarating, isn't it? Remember that first drive in the car all by yourself? But at the same time, freedom is a fragile thing because when you can do anything without anybody stopping you, that means you can also get into a huge car wreck without anybody protecting you from all the damage you can do.

•Don't use your freedom as a launching-point for self-indulgence, as an Opportunity(NKJ)/ Occasion(KJV)/ spring-board(ATR) to crawl out of the armor of God and act under the control of the flesh.

•The Greek word I translated “launching point” *aformen*, paints a picture of moving “away from a point of origin.” When I ran track, the short-distance runners on my team would put metal contraptions into sockets at the starting line of the race, and they would adjust these metal contraptions to hold their feet at just the right angle so that when the starting gun fired, they could push off against those starting blocks and take their first stride onto the running lane without slipping like a car does when it peels off and lose precious seconds off their race time. Paul is saying that our liberation from bondage to the law of God should NOT be like starting blocks for us to run away from obeying God, as it were.

•Even in this state of freedom, we are to be bound like slaves, and that is a bondage of love and service toward one another.

•Where do we get that love from? From the Holy Spirit. That's why in v.16, he says to “walk in the Spirit,” and if you look at the end of the chapter to the fruit of the Spirit, the word “fruit” is singular, and “Love” is the first word in the list. Love is the fruit of the Spirit; He is where we get the ability to love.

•This self-sacrificing *agape* love for your neighbor, which we have when we are yielded to the control of the Holy Spirit, expresses itself in acts of service to other people rather than selfishly focusing on getting things for yourself. When you focus just on getting what you want, verse 15 describes the terrible result; we “use up” other people and make it practically impossible for them to do anything good for us anymore. At the same time, when we are fleshly and selfish, we force other people to compete with us for what they need, so we ourselves stand in danger of getting bitten and devoured in the dogfight, as it were, by other selfish people who are smarter or more powerful than we are. The only alternative to loving servanthood is the Darwinian nightmare of “survival of the fittest.”

•Our salvation is not for the purpose of indulging ourselves selfishly. Our freedom from the law of sin and death was intended by God to become a launching-point for loving and serving other people!

•It comes back round full circle to actually being a fulfillment of God's law as He summarized it in Leviticus 19:18.

## Religion is not a private matter

### “Serve one another through love”

- “[T]he gospel is not just the answer to your internal sins, struggles, and heart idols. It is also the answer to your failure to love others, engage the culture, and live missionally. If the gospel is renewing you internally, it will also be propelling you externally.” ~ *The Gospel-Centered Life*, p.46
- Jesus’ agenda: “to seek & save the lost” (Luke 19:10)
- Gospel is the “good news of the kingdom” (Mt. 9:35)
- That kingdom is intended to spread (Mt. 6:10 – “on earth as in heaven”).



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## **Why don't we fulfill God's calling to love and serve others?**

- **Playing it safe**
- **Laziness**
- **Busy-ness**
- **Don't feel loving/compassionate**
- **Worry that your weakness/incompetency will be exposed**
- **Fear of failure,**
- **Anxiety over other's responses that you can't control**
- **People do things to upset us.**
- **Different beliefs/values/ behavior/ vocabulary**

**Acts 1:8 "you will receive power..."**



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•This chart provides a 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> dimension to the 2-dimensional angle chart that I showed you a few weeks ago. Imagine that I turned that angle chart about spiritual growth around 90 degrees so that the forward motion now goes into the screen. Now, the steps of how to move forward are outlined in these two circles.

•In the last few sermons, we studied the cycle on the left that drives personal growth. The cycle on the right, is the fourth dimension that we are looking at today. The outward motion of God's grace through you into the lives of other people is just as much a part of Christian maturity, and it happens at the same time as personal growth cycle on the left.

•As we look out with Spirit-empowered love at other people around us, we see that they have needs and sins and difficult life circumstances too, and we want them to be comforted with the comfort we have in Christ.

•But, just as we know that we cannot make ourselves right by our own effort, so we know that we cannot make our neighbor right by our effort, all we can do is sacrifice self and trust God to make things right for our neighbor, and as we “do the work of God,” which is to “believe” in Jesus, we see God's blessing come to our neighbor.

•And because we know that it came from God, not us, we are drawn to worship and trust God at a deeper level than before.

•The book of 2 Corinthians has a lot to say about this outward movement of Grace:

## 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

**Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 4. who comforts (παρακαλῶν) us in all our affliction so that we will be able (δυνασθαι) to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.**



- God comforts us for a specific purpose: It is so that we can take that comfort He has comforted us with and share it with others! It is not meant to be kept to ourselves!

- The word for “comfort” in Greek “parakalwn” implies speaking words, calling another person aside and saying truth that frames the issues in such a way that trusting God and rejoicing in God’s work brings comfort to that person’s mind. Sometimes that means confronting lies (that steal their comfort) with truth, so this is not just what they call “creature comforts,” these are God’s truths which bring enduring comfort.

- Now, you might say, “O.K. I think I could comfort someone who tripped and stubbed their toe or maybe even someone who lost their girlfriend or boyfriend, but I wouldn’t know how to comfort someone who is facing death or someone whose spouse has been unfaithful or someone who is being persecuted for their faith.” But what does God’s word say? “any affliction” Not just certain afflictions, God intends to give you the power and ability to comfort those in ANY affliction! The Greek word translated “to be able” “dunasthai” is the same root that we get the word “dynamite” from. The power which God wants to make available to us is more than sufficient to enable us to say the right words and provide comfort to ANYbody! Do you believe God’s word?

- Move on to chapter 2...

## 2 Corinthians 2

4 For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears, not that you should be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you... 6 This punishment which *was inflicted* by the majority *is* sufficient for such a man, 7 so that, on the contrary, you *ought* rather to forgive and comfort *him*, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. 8 Therefore I urge you to reaffirm *your* love to him... 14 Now thanks *be* to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. 15 For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. 16 To the one *we* are the aroma of death *leading* to death, and to the other the aroma of life *leading* to life...

- In chapter 2, Paul addresses a church discipline case. Here's a case where somebody has been excommunicated and both the church and that person need to be comforted.
  - What is the motivation which drives Paul through his involvement in this terribly uncomfortable issue? V.4 "in order that you might know how much I love you" He is modelling "serving through love."
  - And what does he say should be the motivating force behind the people in the church? Verse 8 "Reaffirm your love for him" Service and comfort motivated by love!
- Do you see how the Gospel is something that not only flows to us, but also flows through us? In verse 14, the blessings of the good news of Jesus are pictured as a fragrance – perfume – that not only leads us in triumph, but diffuses through us.
  - Into what? "Some places"? No, into "EVERY place"
  - He acknowledges in verses 15-16 that it won't result in saving everybody, but at least everybody is supposed to get a whiff of us.
  - God intends the Gospel message to be spread to others even while He leads us personally in triumph.
- Let's look at one more passage in 2 Corinthians, skipping on to chapter 5



## 2 Corinthians 5

10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body according to what he has done, whether good or bad. 11 Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men... 14 For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; 15 and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again... 17 Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things *are* of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors (πρεσβευομεν) for Christ, as though God were pleading (παρακαλουντος) through us: we implore *you* on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

•In chapter 5, Paul talks about judgment day, the second coming of Christ, and the realization that it will be a “holy terror” to sinful men, and that the only hope of salvation is for Jesus to have died and taken on Himself the wrath of God due us and made us a righteous, new creation so that we will not be condemned before the judgment seat of Christ.

•This is the love of Christ – this is how God loved the world: He gave his only-begotten son to die on behalf of sinners (John 3:16).

•Now, what happens when we “know” love like that? It compels us to “persuade” other people to enjoy this love themselves!

•This is very different from the compulsion that motivates Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses to go door-to-door.

•I had a JW come to my door a few years ago and tell me that my church must not be as good as his “kingdom hall” because I didn’t get out and witness door-to-door as often as he did. He believed that he had to go door-to-door, converting Christians and atheists to his cult in order to earn his status in heaven. It was essentially a selfish motivation.

•On the other hand, the only Biblical motivation for a believer to go door-to-door is when he is so blown away by God’s love for him that he wants to share that love with his neighbors, and he is so filled with love for his neighbors that he will humble himself to plead with them over this.

•“The Love of Christ compels us.” What Jesus has done for you personally flows out from you to influence the lives of others. Our role as “ambassadors” (or literally “Presbyters”) for Christ, “pleading” others to “be reconciled to God,” is rooted, not in saving ourselves or making ourselves more favorable to God, but rather in “knowing” the love of Christ toward us, the transformation God has already done in us to make “all things... new” in us, and the love that God directs through us into other people’s lives, as God pleads through us.

•The word “pleading,” by the way, is the same Greek word “parakalew” which was translated “comfort” back in chapter 1. Which brings us full circle to the point that God’s good news which confronted and comforted us flows through us to confront and comfort other people.

## 1 John 3

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! ... 5 And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin... 10 In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor *is* he who does not love his brother. For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another...

13 Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love *his* brother abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren...

22 And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments... And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another...

•As it also says in 1 John 3:16 “**By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren...**”

•So the point is clear, but how do we actually **DO** this? Here are some ways God has instructed us to reach out...

## Ways to “Serve through Love”

- **Pray**
  - (Rom. 15:30) Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ ... strive together with me in your prayers to God...

## Ways to “Serve through Love”

- Pray (Rom. 15:30)
- Give
  - (Phil. 4:14-18) ...in Thessalonica you sent *a gift* more than once for my needs. Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account. But I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God.

## Ways to “Serve through Love”

- Pray (Rom. 15:30)
- Give (Phil. 4:14-18)
- See/Welcome
  - (John 4:35-38) "Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, and *then* comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest. Already he who reaps is receiving wages and is gathering fruit for life eternal; so that he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. For in this *case* the saying is true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored and you have entered into their labor."

## Ways to “Serve through Love”

- Pray (Rom. 15:30)
- Give (Phil. 4:14-18)
- See/Welcome (John 4:35-38)
- Send
  - (John 17:18) "As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world."

## Ways to “Serve through Love”

- Pray (Rom. 15:30)
- Give (Phil. 4:14-18)
- See (John 4:35-38)
- Send (John 17:18)
- GO
  - (Matt. 28:18-20) And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

## The Gospel Process

- You have a situation where it's hard to reach out
- Your fleshly response is either:
  - Legalism (force yourself to be nice even though you don't want to)
  - Licentiousness (don't try to love them because you don't want to)
- The response of repentance is to confess to God that you do not love this person and are standing in violation of God's law.
- You remember the good news of Jesus.  
God's "love toward us that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom. 5:8)





## Practical Application

What can you repent of as the sin that keeps you from:

- Practicing hospitality (1 Pet. 4:9),
- Praying for those who mistreat you (Mat. 5:44),
- Witnessing (Mark 16:15),
- Helping a needy person (Gal 2:10),
- Giving generously (1 Tim. 6:18),
- Speaking up for the truth (2Tim. 2:25),
- Leading spiritually (Eph. 5:25ff & 6:4)

What promises do you need to believe?

(Acts 1:8, 2 Cor. 1:4, 2:14, 5:17, 1 John 3:22, Matt. 28:20)



•Perhaps pride that your home is too nice to be soiled by those kind of guests... or the poor kind of pride which says, "My house isn't nice enough to invite anybody over to."

•Of course, not everybody has ALL of these spiritual gifts at once, so it is valid to say, "I am already doing some of these things on the list, and it isn't God's calling at this time on my life to do some of the other things on this list." I don't want to put anybody on a guilt trip for not doing everything, but I do think that all of us can probably see something on this list that we know sin is causing us to fall short of God's will for us in that area. Just work on that area for now.

•The way forward is to identify and repent of the sin that "so easily entangles" us:

- Is it just laziness, devotion to an idol that takes your resources away from obeying God?
- Or meaningless busy-ness brought on by coveting, selfishness?
- Fear of something besides God?
- A lack of love, which is really Hatred?
- Unbelief that God can really bring the transformation that is needed?

Let us confess these things to God and trust Jesus to make us right...

and let us remember God's promises, some of which we looked at today:

- But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses..." (Acts 1:8)
- "God... comforts us in ALL our affliction so that we will have the POWER to comfort those who are in ANY affliction" (2 Cor. 1:4)
- "thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place" (2 Cor. 2:14)
- "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Cor. 5:17)
- "whatever we ask we receive from Him" (1 John 3:22)
- "lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matt 28:20)