

A Call to Rise Above 1-30-05

Galatians 5:13-26 (MSG)

Churches that blend have certain hurdles that other churches do not face. There is always the identification with the way it was back when... This Sunday we will have our third annual meeting since the Lord called me here to pastor. I think we may have a tendency to miss what has taken place. We are no longer the congregations we once were. Some do not even know that we were once two separate congregations. In these three short years, there have been many changes in those who attend and in the facility. Some have gone on to be with the Lord, or attend other churches, and at the same time God has brought in new folks that were seeking a place of fellowship and found that this was where God was placing them. I want to demonstrate something to you. Who was a member of Wayside Chapel three years ago? Who was attending Fellowship of Christ? Who has become a part of this fellowship in the last three years? I do that to point out that we are a blend of brothers and sisters in Christ that the Lord has sovereignly joined together. We are no longer this or that group. We are not even the same group we were last year. We are the people that the Lord has joined in fellowship at Wayside Chapel today. We are a family in the Lord. We are a united part of the Church in Sedona.

This morning I feel led of the Holy Spirit to challenge us to make two commitments as we look forward to serving the Lord together. I believe the Lord is asking us to let go of what was and to recognize that we are a family, a special part of the body of Christ in Sedona. There is no "us" and "them". It is "we". God has sovereignly joined us together for His purposes. In the letter to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul addressed the same problem. He tells the Corinthians to stop identifying themselves with this preacher or that leader, and reminded them that we are followers of Christ. (1 Corinthians 3:21-23) That is what makes us one. Red, and yellow, black and white, we are under the blood in His sight!

We **will** have differing preferences or even differing theology on the minor issues, but we have to recognize God has called us together. The Greek word for "church" literally means, "those called out to assemble". That does not leave any room for lone ranger Christians. Life in Christ means that we will be joined with others who have been redeemed by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (Hebrews 10:25) We are a part of His body. (1 Corinthians 12:27) We are together because we need each other. We learn patience, among other things, from our walk together. We learn to encourage. We round out one another's gifts. Most of all, we learn to really love one another as the Lord commanded.

He knew we would not listen unless He made it a command. Just in case we refused to obey His instruction of how it should be He said, "This is my command, love each other." (John 15:17)

This call to rise above the ordinary worldliness that dominates mankind comes from Galatians 5:13-26. I am going to read it to you from the Message translation. I encourage you to go back and read it in a more literal word for word translation and

Commented [notes1]: ²¹ So then, no more boasting about men! All things are yours, ²² whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future--all are yours, ²³ and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.
1 Corinthians 3:21-23 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: ²⁵ Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.
Hebrews 10:25 (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: ²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.
1 Corinthians 12:27 (NIV)

Commented [notes4]: ¹⁷ This is my command: Love each other.
John 15:17 (NIV)

meditate on it in the weeks to come, even through this year. The Message expands some, and adds the translators own ideas as to what is implied. I think it will help us get a fuller picture of what was being said and how it applies to us.

So this is the first challenge. As we begin this new church year, let us purposefully see that God has called us together to serve one another in love as one body. We find that expression in the first verse of our passage for today.

¹³ *It is absolutely clear that God has called you to a free life. Just make sure that you don't use this freedom as an excuse to do whatever you want to do and destroy your freedom. Rather, use your freedom to serve one another in love; that's how freedom grows.* ¹⁴ *For everything we know about God's Word is summed up in a single sentence: Love others as you love yourself. That's an act of true freedom.* ¹⁵ *If you bite and ravage each other, watch out— in no time at all you will be annihilating each other, and where will your precious freedom be then?*

That is a big challenge! I believe that by the grace of God we are up to it. It is not natural to love others as you love yourself; it is supernatural. It is Jesus in us. I see it already when there is a desperate need, but I believe we need a deeper commitment to serve one another in love. In serving one another, we serve Christ. I can never forget the time I was on a retreat with some of my brothers in ministry. We were taking some prayer time, and I was asking the Lord how I could show Him my love. His Spirit said I could wash my brothers' feet. I wondered if I was hearing right, and then I understood that as I did it to them, I did it to Him. (Matthew 25:40) As I found each person alone in prayer, I washed their feet while I explained to them that their feet were the feet of Jesus to me. As you can imagine, the tears flowed freely. Will you commit to serve one another in love even as you expect nothing from them in return? Any expectation of reciprocation is not agape.

Here is our Lord's second challenge from the remaining verses:

¹⁶ *My counsel is this: Live freely, animated and motivated by God's Spirit. Then you will not feed the compulsions of selfishness.* ¹⁷ *For there is a root of sinful self-interest in us that is at odds with a free spirit, just as the free spirit is incompatible with selfishness. These two ways of life are antithetical, so that you cannot live at times one way and at times another way according to how you feel on any given day.* ¹⁸ *Why don't you choose to be led by the Spirit and so escape the erratic compulsions of a law-dominated existence?* ¹⁹ *It is obvious what kind of life develops out of trying to get your own way all the time: repetitive, loveless, cheap sex; a stinking accumulation of mental and emotional garbage; frenzied and joyless grabs for happiness;* ²⁰ *trinket gods; magic-show religion; paranoid loneliness; cutthroat competition; all-consuming-yet-never-satisfied wants; a brutal temper; an impotence to love or be loved; divided homes and divided lives; small-minded and lopsided pursuits;* ²¹ *the vicious habit of depersonalizing everyone into a rival; uncontrolled and uncontrollable addictions; ugly parodies of community. I could go on. This isn't the first time I have warned you, you know. If you use your freedom this way, you will not inherit God's kingdom.*

²² *But what happens when we live God's way? He brings gifts into our lives, much the same way that fruit appears in an orchard— things like affection for others, exuberance about life, serenity. We develop a willingness to stick with things, a sense*

Commented [notes5]: ⁴⁰ And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. Matthew 25:40 (KJV)

of compassion in the heart, and a conviction that a basic holiness permeates things and people. We find ourselves involved in loyal commitments,
²³ *not needing to force our way in life, able to marshal and direct our energies wisely. Legalism is helpless in bringing this about; it only gets in the way.*
²⁴ *Among those who belong to Christ, everything connected with getting our own way and mindlessly responding to what everyone else calls necessities is killed off for good— crucified.* ²⁵ *Since this is the kind of life we have chosen, the life of the Spirit, let us make sure that we do not just hold it as an idea in our heads or a sentiment in our hearts, but work out its implications in every detail of our lives.* ²⁶ *That means we will not compare ourselves with each other as if one of us were better and another worse. We have far more interesting things to do with our lives. Each of us is an original.* Galatians 5:13-26 (MSG)

What a description of life in the Holy Spirit! We can sum it up by saying that we are to “choose to be led by the Spirit”. We are to, as the NIV puts it, “live by the Spirit” and “keep in step with the Spirit”. It is the only way we can truly serve one another in love. We cannot live out the first challenge without accepting the second. We need the life of the Spirit to truly serve one another in love. (Philippians 2:13)

I believe some of Peterson’s translations here are inspired by the Holy Spirit. Listen to how he puts verse 16.

¹⁶ *My counsel is this: Live freely, animated and motivated by God's Spirit. Then you won't feed the compulsions of selfishness.*

What an expression! Brothers and sisters in Christ, are you animated and motivated by God’s Spirit, or feeding the compulsions of selfishness? To live animated and motivated by the Spirit is to be truly free. It is the compulsions of selfishness that enslaves us. Let us commit to choose to be animated and motivated by God’s Spirit and to humbly, but honestly, encourage those who are not to join us in this pursuit. (Hebrews 3:13)

Paul describes the battle we face in verse 17.

¹⁷ *For there is a root of sinful self-interest in us that is at odds with a free spirit, just as the free spirit is incompatible with selfishness. These two ways of life are antithetical, so that you cannot live at times one way and at times another way according to how you feel on any given day.*

We cannot live in both worlds. We have to let go of one or the other. These two ways of life, free to be led of the Spirit or by sinful self-interest, are antithetical. As individual members of the body of Christ at Wayside, will you choose today to say that by the grace of God you are done yielding to sinful self-interest, to selfish living, and choose to live in the freedom of the Spirit? That kind of living will cause you to stand out as different. Sometimes it will bring you praise from men, and other times it will bring down their wrath. When you help someone, expecting nothing in return, they may consider you a special person. When you tell them it is the love of Christ that motivates you, they may curse you for being a narrow-minded religious radical. (John 15:20) Either way, people will know we are different.

¹⁸ *Why don't you choose to be led by the Spirit and so escape the erratic compulsions of a law-dominated existence?*

When you make that choice to be led by the Spirit, you will find your life more

Commented [notes6]: ¹³ For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. Philippians 2:13 (KJV)

Commented [notes7]: ¹³ But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. Hebrews 3:13 (NIV)

Commented [notes8]: ²⁰ Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. John 15:20 (NIV)

surrendered than when you were merely trying to be good. You see, the Spirit will lead you to do things the law does not require. The Law tells you not to commit adultery. The Spirit sees your heart and asks you not to look on the opposite sex as an object that can gratify you but as an eternal soul that Jesus died for. (Matthew 5:32) The law may require you to do your work to a certain standard, but the Spirit asks you to go above and beyond that at your own loss for the sake of God's kingdom. It sounds like erratic compulsion to obey the Spirit, but it is the demands of the rules that are erratic, because they do not take into account the unique situation you and others are in. The eternal work of the Spirit is where stability truly lies, for the Spirit's direction is always consistent with love, whereas rules are not. (Romans 13:8) *Why don't you choose to be led of the Spirit?* This is God's question to us through the Apostle in this passage.

Verses 19-21 describe what the selfish life of bondage to sin looks like. I only want to focus on a few that relate to our life as a body of believers. Please take the time to look at the list of what "develops out of trying to get our own way all the time." The two I want to draw your attention to are near the end of the list, *small-minded and lopsided pursuits*; ²¹ *the vicious habit of depersonalizing everyone into a rival...* We are in desperate need of realizing our call as believers. It is not to be important, or have our way, or make sure things are done in the way we think is right. Our call is to glorify God! (1 Corinthians 6:20) That may mean letting others have their way. It may mean being silent when we know we are right. It is definitely putting the kingdom of God above our personal feelings and preferences. (1 Peter 2:12)

When we see issues as between "them" and "us", we divide up the body of Christ. (1 Corinthians 12:12-13) It is in essence saying that we are superior. The only superior One is Jesus. Refuse to allow yourself to think in those terms of "them" and "us". Issues will always arise in which there are differences of opinion. Those who choose to be led by the spirit refuse to see those with a different view as rivals. (Romans 14:2-3) The only issue worth dividing over is who Jesus is and what He did for us. (1 John 4:2-3) That is where we get our unity.

Now let's look at the characteristics of those led by the Spirit.
²² *But what happens when we live God's way? He brings gifts into our lives, much the same way that fruit appears in an orchard— things like affection for others, exuberance about life, serenity.*
 Fruit develops slowly, but steadily. Did you know that sweetness in apples is partially the result of nice cold nights and sunny days? We need the warmth and coldness fellowship brings to develop the full potential of our gifts. (Romans 5:3-5) Without the trials, we do not develop as we should. The first fruit mentioned is "affection for others" or "love". Jesus said it was first. It is His great command, "Love one another." (John 15:12) It goes right along with our first challenge, to serve one another in love.

The second is exuberance about life. That is joy. It is not happiness, for you can have exuberance for life when sadness has touched you. You can weep with those that weep and yet know that God is on the throne and all things are working together for good, even the painful experiences of life. (Romans 8:28)

Commented [notes9]: ³² But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery. Matthew 5:32 (NIV)

Commented [notes10]: ⁸ Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. Romans 13:8 (NIV)

Commented [notes11]: ²⁰ For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's. 1 Corinthians 6:20 (KJV)

Commented [notes12]: ¹² Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. 1 Peter 2:12 (NIV)

Commented [notes13]: ¹² The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. ¹³ For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free--and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. 1 Corinthians 12:12-13 (NIV)

Commented [notes14]: ² One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. ³ The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. Romans 14:2-3 (NIV)

Commented [notes15]: ² This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³ but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world. 1 John 4:2-3 (NIV)

Commented [notes16]: ³ Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. Romans 5:3-5 (NIV)

Commented [notes17]: ¹² My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. John 15:12 (NIV)

Commented [notes18]: ²⁸ And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. Romans 8:28 (NIV)

The third is serenity. Walking in the Spirit brings a peace that is visible to others. (Isaiah 32:17) You know you are at peace with God as you serve the Lord of the universe who is Love. (1 John 4:8) You know that nothing can take you away from your loving Master, and that He is greater than all. (John 10:29) You know He will see you through every conflict, every attack, every trial and that you will come out on the other side like silver refined in the furnace. (Psalm 66:10)

I am going to skip to just one more, "recognizing we don't need to force our way in life". As we walk in the Spirit, we realize we do not need to make things happen. We just obey and He does the rest. It is not all up to us. Whew! That, too, is a part of our serenity. These qualities are reflected in the lives of those who have chosen to be led by the Spirit. Do they describe you? (Proverbs 3:5-6)

If they do not, perhaps it is because you have been trying to walk that impossible path of living for self and living for God at the same time. You cannot do it. You cannot let the Spirit of God lead you and lead yourself at the same time. (Romans 8:6-9) One will win out and the other will take a back seat. (Titus 2:11-12) Are you on the front or back seat? You say, "I'm in back but I'm still trying to be a backseat driver." Well, as long as you are in the backseat, you are ok. You will learn from the decisions the Spirit makes that your backseat driving just teaches you how limited you are. As long as Jesus' hands are on the wheel, you will see these fruits we read about develop in you. They do not just pop into your life sweet and ready to pick; they develop as the Spirit directs your life.

Two challenges have been set before us as a congregation. If you are a guest, you might want to take these back to your church to live out personally, because accepting the challenge is not dependent on whether others do or not. It is up to you personally. The Apostle said it is a choice. The Spirit is willing. Are you?

Challenge number one is to be willing to serve one another in love. (1 John 3:23-24) Challenge number two is to be led by the Spirit. It is to set aside self-interest and let the Spirit of God direct your life into the freedom of being led by Him. I encourage you to accept this challenge in a memorable and tangible way this morning. I'm going to ask you that if you are willing, by the grace of God, to sign the commitment on the back of your bulletin that you can cut it off later and leave in your Bible as a marker for Galatians 5. I do not want you to do it because I am asking. I ask you only to do it if you believe the Spirit of God is asking you to make this commitment. Maybe you have already made it. Then it will not hurt to sign it and leave it there as a reminder. Maybe you need to take some time to look into your heart to honestly make this commitment. I am sure the Lord would much rather you do that than to sign it and not mean it.

Every time we celebrate communion we make a similar commitment. In conjunction with this commitment, let us remember the sacrifice of Christ. It is an encouragement to us to make this commitment. He served the Father and us in love by laying down His life so that we might live.

Commented [notes19]: ¹⁷ The fruit of righteousness will be peace; the effect of righteousness will be quietness and confidence forever. Isaiah 32:17 (NIV)

Commented [notes20]: ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. 1 John 4:8 (NIV)

Commented [notes21]: ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. John 10:29 (NIV)

Commented [notes22]: ¹⁰ For you, O God, tested us; you refined us like silver. Psalms 66:10 (NIV)

Commented [notes23]: ⁵ Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; ⁶ in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. Proverbs 3:5-6 (NIV)

Commented [notes24]: The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; ⁷ the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. ⁸ Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. ⁹ You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. Romans 8:6-9 (NIV)

Commented [notes25]: ¹¹ For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. ¹² It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, Titus 2:11-12 (NIV)

Commented [notes26]: ²³ And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. ²⁴ Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us. 1 John 3:23-24 (NIV)