

WORSHIP

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Good Stewards of Love

The Reverend Robert Galloway

1 Peter 4:1-11

Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same intention (for whoever has suffered in the flesh has finished with sin), 2 so as to live for the rest of your earthly life no longer by human desires but by the will of God. 3 You have already spent enough time in doing what the Gentiles like to do, living in licentiousness, passions, drunkenness, revels, carousing, and lawless idolatry. 4 They are surprised that you no longer join them in the same excesses of dissipation, and so they blaspheme. 5 But they will have to give an accounting to him who stands ready to judge the living and the dead. 6 For this is the reason the gospel was proclaimed even to the dead, so that, though they had been judged in the flesh as everyone is judged, they might live in the spirit as God does. 7 The end of all things is near; therefore be serious and discipline yourselves for the sake of your prayers. 8 Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. 9 Be hospitable to one another without complaining. 10 Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one



another with whatever gift each of you has received. ¹¹ Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

Let us Pray...

Pour out your holy spirit upon us. Give us wisdom and understanding so that when we hear your word and your calling to us this day, our hearts and minds will be open. That we will receive your word and your instruction. Let us be open to all that leads us to life, great love, and knowing the way to follow your Son Jesus Christ. Amen

Tell me if you have heard this one, there was a small country church where most of the people in the town were involved in farming industry. Each year during the right season there would be an influx of migrant workers who would come for the temporary work helping on the farms. One year when the workers had arrived in the area, the session of this church was having their regular meeting and began to discuss ways they could support this migrant community. One elder wanted to share how the church had already helped this community. The elder said that a week before, one of the workers had come to the church and asked for a bible. The man said that his had gotten lost in one of their many moves. The elder said, of course we have a bible. So the elder went back to look for a bible. It took him a while because he was looking for the right bible. He was looking for one that



was properly worn. He told the session he didn't want to hand out a clean or new Bible in case the man got it dirty. When the elder returned and gave the man the Bible, the man was extremely grateful. But just as the man began to walk away the elder called out to him, "Don't forget to return it."

How many times as Christians have we made the mistake of this elder. We see someone in need or someone comes asks us for help, and we respond yes. Christ has called us to serve and we will help this person. We know that is what Jesus has asked us to do, to help those around us. But in our own misunderstanding, bias, or judgement. And let's call it what it is, in our own sin, we fail to truly help, to truly be like Christ. We end up asking a man who may not ever come back to our town, to return the worn Bible we just gave him. When we help we make mistakes because we limit our effort. When we give, we give with strings attached. We cause ourselves to stumble.

We know that is not how it should be, but often we need reminders on how we should behave as Christians. The author of our scripture today the letter 1st Peter thought the recipients of his letter needed a reminder or instruction on how they were to behave as Christians. Can you guess how the author told them to live as good level headed Christians? You probably can guess the answer based on our sermon series, or my sermon title, or hopefully the way you know God, because the short answer is love. How are we to behave as Christians it is to be loving.

The scripture describes the world that surrounded this Church this group of people who professed Jesus Christ as their savior. The author follows an old



tradition and calls those who were outside the church The Gentiles, those who do not believe in God. These Gentiles live by their own will, partaking in licentiousness, passions, drunkenness, revels, carousing, and lawless idolatry. The hearers of this letter had rejected that life of flesh but it surrounded them. Their neighbors were sinning and from the sounds of it having a wild time of it This is everything that the Christians have rejected now that they are part of the body of Christ. Their neighbors slander them for their rejection of the ways of the flesh that surround them. With just a few words, this letter gives a bold image the others are doing wrong. But this was not to chastise the Gentiles but to illuminate the real situation people were living in. The writer is to say I am telling you this because I understand your situation. This list of sins is not to condemn but for instruction. I say this because in the next part the writer doesn't keep going on about the sin of the Gentiles or begin to discuss how they will be punished but he makes a switch and begins to talk about the greatest thing, love. The author now outlines how we should act in the midst of all this hedonism.

First and foremost, we are told, "Above all else, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins."

Love will allow us overlook other people's sins so that we can love like God and extend ourselves beyond a warm feeling to experience that divine love for those who may sin against us.

Our sin is overlooked and forgiven by God because God loves each one of us.



Then through God's love we are given grace and a life with God. God's constant love demonstrates that love for one another is not limited or given with strings and benefits us just as much as those we give love to.

The writer of 1st Peter goes on with more requirements of a follower of Christ. We are to be hospitable. We are to serve each other with the gifts and the strength we are given. We are to speak truthfully. When we maintain all these things, for this is not a small list, it will glorify God through Jesus Christ. These are what will make us good Christians or as the author puts it Good Stewards of the manifold grace of God, in short Good Stewards of Love.

To be a good steward of love doesn't mean we are the ones who control God's love. Good stewards know there is not end to the supply of God's love. So it should be shared in the bounty in which it is received. Like God's grace, it is a gift and it is available to everyone. Our responsibility as good stewards to ensure that everyone knows that God's love is available to them and we can show them what that means.

If that elder, I talked about earlier, had been as good of a steward as he thought, his response to the man at the door would have been different.

The elder would have welcomed the man who came to door in to the church, let him rest given him some water. That is the hospitable thing to do.

He would have searched for the best bible in the church, because they had plenty to choose from while the stranger had none. That is serving with all that God gives us.



And a good steward would have taken a moment to think about the man's personal experience and situation and then would have given the Bible knowing the travels it would take with the man who carried it, praying for the man as he went. According to 1st Peter, this is how a good steward would give a bible. Giving without limitations or expectations as God loves us and give us grace.

When we maintain constant love for one another, we can be witnesses to divinely amazing things. Just like when we show love to others it benefits them and us. When we try to limit love and God's gifts, it hurts ourselves just as much as it hurts others. Then we are just as bad as the blaspheming Gentiles in 1st Peter.

My friend officiated a wedding a few years ago, the couple getting married wanted to have communion at their ceremony. My friend was happy to include this but the couple told him the only issue was that one of the groomsmen David was not a Christian and David had vocally said he would not be taking communion. The couple shared with my friend that David's experience with the Church had been negative. He found the Church was unwelcoming, judgmental, and at times hostile because he did not proclaim belief in Jesus Christ. So at the wedding when the invitation to the table had been extended, and the wedding party came to receive the bread and the cup, my friend was surprised to see David coming forward and then take the elements. After the ceremony, my friend asked David what made him change his mind about taking communion and David shared that he wasn't really sure but he felt called to partake that day. He went



on to share that all of his misgivings, distrust, and judgement against the Church seemed to have disappeared. He was healed of his hurt and the church was healed of its failure to live up. This was the first time he felt welcomed as himself by the body of Christ. The church embraced its responsibility of maintaining constant love for one another and ensuring that all people know that the love God is available to them. The church was a good steward of love because it opened its arms and said taste and see, you are loved. When we maintain constant love for one another we are witnesses to wonderful things.

The communion table can be the first place we check to see if we are being good stewards of God's love. When Christ feed the five thousand he did not ask, "What do you believe?" before giving out bread and fish. I am sure a few rowdy Gentiles or questioning Jews were fed that day.

So we can ask ourselves each time we look at the table, on a day when we prepare ourselves to receive communion or are just reminded about this life giving sacrament,

We can ask has this table been set out of love for one another?

Are we being hospitable when we serve?

Do we use all of our strength and gifts to show and tell that these are the gifts of God for the people of God?

If we can answer yes, then we are Good Stewards of Love, who work to glorify God in all things through Jesus Christ.



I will tell you today, we are answering yes.

Yes, this table is prepared and set with love for you and love for God, a love that washes away our sins so that we may receive these gifts.

Yes, there is place for you at this table, there is a place for all those who hunger and thirst.

Yes, we as the Church universal will show all of creation that these are gifts from God for you, we will welcome you from here extending the table to where each one of you celebrate today, we will give you bread from our driveway, we will make sure this symbol of unity with Christ and witness to extensive grace happens.

So, come to this table as good stewards of love, who want to receive the love that is offered but also who also want share it with one another as God shares all with us. To God belongs the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

