

Good Stewards of God's Grace

4 Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh,^[a] 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^[b] 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.^[c]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;^[d] 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.

Please listen to the sermon from Sunday 6th February 2022 and perhaps make some notes before your branch discussions. The general flow of the sermon and its detail may aid a fuller understanding of the ideas explored, giving greater depth to the questions and reflections below.

1. We must not doubt or diminish the seriousness of someone suffering. Christ suffered in the flesh. Therefore, recognising Christ's suffering upon the cross, we cannot doubt the seriousness of sin. Consider 1 John 1:8 and Romans 6:1 alongside the above passage.
2. Sin exists. Peter acknowledges sinful behaviours in verses 3 and 4. Consider and reflect upon 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. When we consider the problematic behaviours presented by Peter, who is perhaps capturing some of the challenges of his time, we may also bring to mind the equally challenging list of behaviours presented in the 1 Corinthians 6: 9-11 passage. Remember the significant context of the 1 Peter 4:1-11 passage: Peter urges those who have turned away from sin to remain steadfast in Christ despite harassment and maltreatment from those who remain in their sin. Reflect upon how this might relate to and instruct Christians and the Church today.
3. Note the past tense used in 1 Peter 4:3-4 and 1 Corinthians 6:11. What might we draw from this, and how does this relate to the hope we have in Christ?
4. We can all receive God's transforming grace in our lives. Indeed, we can leave the past behind (1 Peter 4:2). We can receive forgiveness for our sins and receive life in all its fullness and freedom because of the cross. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God." (Ephesians 2:8)

Therefore, to be good stewards of God's grace, we must recognise and understand it as a precious gift received and then afford it to others. In this understanding, equipped if you like with this understanding of God's love for us (and His grace afforded to us), we then live for God and, by doing so, serve others. How do we do that? We seek to live for God, obedient to His Word, not judging

others but recognising the transformative power of God's love in our lives and in the lives of those we seek to serve, disciple, support, encourage, protect, stand up for, and love.

Like Jesus, John, and Paul, Peter commands us to love others *deeply*. Peter not only tells us to have "agape" love for each other, which in the Bible is that love flavoured with an unconditional quality, he also tells us to do so "deeply". I believe that if we are to love others deeply, we must be grace-givers as well as grace-receivers.

Jesus Christ met many people during his ministry. He met people who were royalty. He met religious leaders. He met drunks. He met the physically ill. He met the spiritually ill. Jesus once even met a woman brought to him who had been caught in the act of adultery. The woman is brought before Jesus to trap Him. He could be handed over to the Roman authorities for illegally levelling out a judgment if he said to stone the woman. However, on the other hand, if he said not to stone the woman, the religious leaders would say he did not uphold the Law of Moses.

5. Finally, read and reflect upon John8: 6-11. Then, either before or immediately after, consider the final thoughts below.

The kind of deep love we are to have for the people around us is the kind of love that is unexpected, undeserved, and constant. You and I need to understand that the kind of love Peter is talking about here and the kind that Jesus Christ commands us to have (and all the other Apostles talk about) is love that the other person does not deserve. They have not earned it. They have not asked for it. However, we love them nonetheless.

We can command this kind of love because "agape" love is not a feeling; it is a choice we make to act and *be* love.

Blessings,

Dan.