

## Through Love Serve One Another

✦ **Don't launch freedom into sin. (vv.1, 13-21)**

✦ **Walk in step with the Spirit. (vv.1, 13-14, 16-18, 22-26)**

In the name of God's Son our Savior, dearly loved of God:

This text and sermon theme will always be precious to me because on May 31, 1981, the pastor used this theme to encourage my bride and me in our wedding. The whole miraculous Christian concept of Christ's self sacrificing, unconditional love is treasured here to produce Christ-like love of a husband for his bride, plus respect of Christ's bride, the Church, for her husband Jesus. In the Lord, this kind of loving service makes husbands and wives happy to literally "slave" for each other. Keeping the cross of Christ at the center of our lives makes marriage the joy God designed it to be. When we fail in love, we run back to the cross of Christ for forgiving grace to rise again and live new life in Jesus.

**Through Love Serve One Another** was meant for all congregations in Galatia and beyond. We are so richly blessed to consider these words today in memory of our brother Ralph who passed from grace to glory in the early morning hours of July 3<sup>rd</sup>. Since most of his friends and family have gone before Ralph, we're remembering God's grace to him in our service today. Most of you knew Ralph only as the man in the wheelchair brought by a medical attendant. Today we thank God for His grace on Ralph's life and gain valuable insights in divine kindness for our own. Why do we need to hear this?

✦ **Don't launch freedom into sin. (vv.1, 13-21)**

In warmer parts of the country you see signs that say, "No skateboarding." Google that and note how some Americans respond. A few guys on "Will it skate?" attached some wheels to make a "No Skateboarding" sign into a skateboard. After a few falls and bending the sign they concluded, "It skates!" Another wheeled artist turned a "No Skateboarding" sign into a "Go Skateboarding" obstacle course.

Isn't that a great illustration of how our sinful nature responds to God's Law? Wherever God says, "Don't!" the Old Adam says, "Do it!" Where God says, "Do it!" man says, "No way!" One command to not eat from just one tree in the Garden of Eden, coupled with a curse of death for disobedience, is still criticized today. They just can't believe such a tiny "sin" would be "such a big deal" to God. But give the same critics a glass of water with just a drop of raw sewage in it, and see if that's "no big deal."

God is infinite in His holiness and His hatred of sin and sinners. But not one of us could stand that thought if we didn't know how God's infinite love triumphs over His judgment. Since every sin must be removed and "*without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness*" (Hebrews 9:22 NIV84), it's great Good News to hear Jesus say, "*It is finished,*" just before He offered up His life for us on the cross.

And then you all know what happens. It's been going on from the start. Paul had to answer these critics in his letter to the Romans. "Shall we sin all the more to make grace increase?" they ask. Again and again God's spokesmen have to warn, "Don't do it." "*If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.*" (Hebrews 10:26f NIV84)

Some of the most religious people in the world think they can command perfection from others and achieve a higher level of holiness for themselves. Some seriously think they can earn enough merits to share them or sell them to others. But it always backfires. "*It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not allow anyone to put the yoke of slavery on you again....<sup>15</sup> But if you*

*keep on biting and devouring one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another....*<sup>19</sup>*Now the works of the sinful flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, complete lack of restraint,*<sup>20</sup>*idolatry, sorcery, hatred, discord, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissensions, heresies,*<sup>21</sup>*envy, murders, drunkenness, orgies, and things similar to these. I warn you, just as I also warned you before, that those who continue to do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”*<sup>1</sup> Since all of us have a sinful nature, every last one of us is included in that list somewhere. The warning is not to “*continue to do such things*” lest we lose our inheritance of heaven.

A tender conscience may only hear one word from that. Whether the mental illness came first or from his youth, what terrorized Ralph’s soul was “*drunkenness.*” Not his own – he was heartbroken when members of Alcoholics Anonymous told him not to come because he was not an alcoholic. But his father had been – until grace called his father back to Christ and a healthy, respected life in his home town. Out of respect for Christ we don’t **Launch freedom into sin.** He not only put up the signs (“Don’t do this!”), but Christ is the greatest sign of God’s love (“Salvation won and done!”). Gratitude wants to...

### ✦ **Walk in step with the Spirit.** (vv.1, 13-14, 16-18, 22-26)

Have you noticed something about this cruel world in that regard? First, they belittle you if you even care about these things. Then they trash everything you want to share about how God’s grace helped you beat that sin. The flesh never wants to admit sin or how you triumph in Christ alone. Sinful flesh wars against the Spirit. When God’s dear Holy Spirit is working, the world hates you as it hated Jesus. “*But take heart,*” Jesus says, “*I have overcome the world.*” (John 16:33) How? By dying and rising again.

All of you who knew Ralph knew how tenderhearted sister Ruth was too. She helped me minister to him from the start. Patience was needed because his fear of alcohol kept him from Holy Communion even if we used grape juice. Fear could cause a meltdown after church. Ruth helped minister to other sisters who needed to hear a woman’s voice, but sometimes Ralph needed the firm voice of a brother, not so much motherly love. It calmed him to be patiently pointed to Christ. Ralph matured, walking **in step with the Spirit** because he was not “*under the control of the law,*” but empowered by the Gospel.

How God reached Ralph was another reminder that “*the kingdom is the LORD’s.*” (Psalm 22:28 NASB) A guest preacher was here, Pastor Ken Gast, proclaiming God’s grace in Holy Communion. As related to me later, Ralph was so moved by that sermon that he came up for the first time on his own. Fortunately, Elder Bill Bunde was helping that Sunday and could alert Pastor Gast to use non-alcoholic grape juice. Wine would have terrified Ralph as he was learning to **Walk in step with the Spirit.**

Great changes continued because “*the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.*” It became Ralph’s personal habit to take Lord’s Supper as often as it was offered. He could receive the wine after a time too, here and in private Communion. Conversations were peaceful, joyful. He’d get that gleam in his eye where you knew he was about to hit you with a zinger, one of those outfield puns that always caught me off guard.

But where the peace of God was most evident was after Ruth went home to glory nearly two years ago (8/11/17). Everyone caring for Ralph wondered how he’d get along without her. Surely he missed her, but always in the hope of seeing her again soon. As his last hours on this side of glory passed, the Holy Spirit’s peace was evident in hearing God’s Word spoken and in song. The Holy Spirit made sure that Holy Communion could reach Ralph just in time for him to mature in *peace, patience...self-control.* God gave Ralph another caring sister in “Flash.” Thanks to all who gave their prayers and their love for Ralph. Most of all, thanks be to God, for His tender love to sinners like us, saved by grace and guarded by peace to **Walk in step with the Spirit.** Bride of Christ, **Through Love Serve One Another.** Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> EHV ~ *Evangelical Heritage Version* (<http://wartburgproject.org>) © 2017. NPH: 800-662-6022; also Amazon-Kindle. For *The Preacher’s Apprentice (TPA)* sermon study or copies: [m.cordes@comast.net](mailto:m.cordes@comast.net) . New Life Evangelical Lutheran Church You can also call: 651-484-1169. Hear the sermon at [www.wels.us/newlife](http://www.wels.us/newlife) . 180 County Rd F - Shoreview, MN 55126