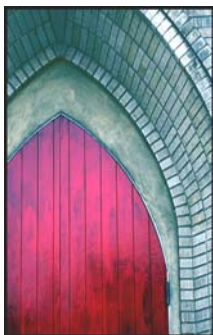


# SURRENDERING OUR RIGHT TO OURSELVES

SCRIPTURE TEXT:

1 PETER 4:8-11 (ESV)



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## Examining Yourself:

Before communion, we often say that if you are at odds with another person in the church, go and be reconciled to them before coming to the Table. Why? Have you ever thought about what we identify ourselves with through communion? Its a graphic moment where we publically say that it was for our life that He died—that we're sinners with a multitude of sins that need covering— that He alone can do it. But we're not just identifying with Jesus' death. We also identify with His life—which is why forgiveness is so central to this Table. This is the focus of our text.

## 1 Peter 4:8-11

<sup>8</sup>Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. <sup>9</sup>Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. <sup>10</sup>As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: <sup>11</sup>whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

## On Being a Stupid Punk Kid:

I was 13 years old at the county 4-H Fair. On tap was an evening of lemon shake-ups, Scrambler rides and tractor pulls. I was supposed to check in with my folks at the dining tent, which always used to be adjacent to front of the main entrance to the fairgrounds—the area with the circle drive where the more elderly patrons of the fair would often be dropped off.

I was cruising through the circle drive on my skateboard when a large sedan pulled up. A man in his 50's got out and went to the rear door of the passenger side, and began to help his elderly mother out of the car. Just as she stood up, my skateboard snagged on a pebble. I leaned back trying to keep my balance, and I sent the skateboard shooting out from under me full speed into her ankle. Her face went to pain as she began to fall. Her son caught her, and holding her in his arms, he looked over his should at me and said, "Stupid punk kid."

I got out of there as fast as I could—feeling so ashamed. How could I have done something so awful? Did I break her ankle? Did my carelessness lead to her being placed in a nursing home because I took away her ability to care for herself? I don't know. But what I do know is that as far as I was concerned, her son's assessment of me was fair. Who else would hobble an elderly woman with his skateboard than a stupid punk kid?

I don't want to get too introspective here, but I was in my mid-20's before I recognized that I believed, in some ways, that I was still a punk kid. It didn't come through flashbacks to the fair, but rather by a prevailing sense that I was more or less a careless and irresponsible person—a liability to have around. I believed that man's assessment of me for over a decade. I never got angry at what that man said, but I did get angry with how long I believed it—and how absolutely I believed it.

In our most shameful moments, our views of ourselves get formed. Some assessments are more true than false. Others are more false than true. Some are true and later become no longer true, while others were not true, but became self-fulfilling prophecies. Any way you slice it though, we all fall short. What hope is there for us when we grasp that we are guilty of a multitude of sin? It is, as Peter tells us, that love covers a multitude of sins. These words have been used countless times to comfort the hurting or failed sinner. But Peter's words here go beyond mere encouragement. I would submit that when Peter says love covers a multitude of sin, it is a mandate for how we are to love others in this life.

## Keep On Loving Earnestly: (vs. 8)

What is the thrust of this entire text? It is that we should love one another in such a way that our love covers a multitude of sins. Does this mean we love with our eyes closed—never confronting, correcting or repenting to one another? Certainly not. Peter says we are to "**keep on loving** one another **earnestly.**" This is an explosively active expression. Earnest love does not cover sins in the sense that it sweeps them under the rug. It covers them in the sense of being a refuge—an umbrella of grace where our sins are brought in, known and we are loved regardless. The effect of this kind of love is that it enables fellowship in spite of sin. This is the mandate.

So then ask yourself, when you set out to love another person, what do you expect from them? From yourself? Do you expect that when you love someone, it negates the fact that both of you are sinners? Do you expect that your messy life will not be a bother to the other person? Peter doesn't tell us to seek to love **easily**. He says to love **earnestly**, so that our love will cover a multitude of sins. Or to word it another way, in order for love to cover a multitude of sin, we must keep on loving earnestly. Active, pursuing love forgives. Self-protective ambivalence allows you to hang on to every sin ever committed against you indefinitely. But it comes at a dear cost.

## Our Right to Ourselves: (vs. 9-11a)

More than a nugget of wisdom, Peter places this call to love in the context of what such love looks like. How do we love earnestly? By surrendering our right to ourselves—a huge part of the call to take up our cross and follow Jesus. Oswald Chambers, of the classic *My Utmost for His Highest*, said, "Our cross is that we have given away forever our right to ourselves to Jesus Christ." Peter gives at least 4 examples of what this looks like—the fruit of loving earnestly for the sake of others.

**HOSPITALITY WITHOUT GRUMBLING:** Peter warns us against grumbling as we show hospitality. Grumbling about what? Is Peter talking about grumbling against the work involved in cleaning up the house or preparing a meal or making a bed, or is he talking about people and their neediness? Hospitality is driven by a desire to bless people, not place them in our debt.

**USING GIFTS TO SERVE:** We're stewards, not owners, of God's varied grace. God doesn't give gifts just so that we might know how special He thinks we are, but rather that, through us, others might know how precious they are to Him. We get so self-important and protective with our gifts, believing they give us our identity. But loving earnestly with our gifts means we use them for God's glory—which means we use them to serve.

**SPEAKING AS ONE WHO SPEAKS ORACLES OF GOD:** It is one thing to use our words to be clever, it is another to use them to encourage. Intellect and rhetorical skill are no substitute loving words. This is the business of praying that in every conversation we might be God's mouthpiece—that we would treat our words as though they were both numbered and valuable.

**SERVING BY THE STRENGTH THAT GOD SUPPLIES:** Who among us is not tired? Who among us does not have to get up early? Yet who among us has not used an excuse like this to politely turn down a request for help, when the truth is that inconvenience was a bigger motivator than our energy level? Loving earnestly says, "Lord, I'm weary but my brother needs me. Be my strength and my song. May I be a tool in your hand."

Do you see the common thread in these things? They cannot be done unless we surrender our right to ourselves to Jesus. They all require that we give ourselves away for the sake of others. They are all the fruit of placing others above ourselves. And they require the clear conscience of forgiveness.

## Getting Up Off the Mat: (vs. 11b)

If we follow Peter's train of thought to the end of this passage, we come to the second half of vs. 11 which tells us why we should "keep on loving earnestly." It is so that "in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ," because, Peter tells us, "to Him belongs glory and dominion forever." To paraphrase Peter, "Love actively, letting your love cover a multitude of sins, and give yourself away for the sake of others so that God may be glorified through Jesus Christ because God alone is deserving of all glory."

What I want to say as we prepare to come to the Lord's Table today is, I believe, one of the most difficult and dangerous applications of Scripture I can remember offering. I run the risk of sounding cold, harsh, uncaring... maybe even a bit simplistic or naïve. So please hear me when I say that I unreservedly acknowledge that many of us, through the sins of others, have been thrown to the ground and our hearts are broken. Where we were supposed to be loved, we were taken advantage of. Where we were supposed to be cared for, we were neglected. Where we were supposed to be protected, we were fed to the wolves. Our wounds are real and they hurt. We didn't ask for them, yet here they are. I don't want to minimize that at all.

And yet, as I stand before God, with a banner behind me which says we are a church longing "to know and make known the astonishing grace of God," I believe one of the most gracious things some of us could hear from God's word today is that it is time for us to get up off the mat. Is there any possible way this can be the message of grace? Is there any possible way I can say this without it sounding like I am saying, "Suck it up. Move on?"

It isn't my intent to minimize anyone's struggle. I pray the Lord would **maximize** our understanding of our struggles, because for some, what we struggle with now is not so much how we were hurt as it is how we have held on to our right to hurt, letting it paralyze us so that we cannot love earnestly or forgive freely. We cling for dear life to what we can grab hold of. But for many of us, what we've taken hold of is our right to hurt.

Wives, has your husband failed to be the leader or man of God you hoped he'd be or provide the level of comfort you both dreamed you'd have one day? Do you in any way punish him for this? How long? Is it time to get up off the mat? Can love cover a multitude of sin? Is there grace in what Peter is saying?

Husbands, has your wife ever failed to respect or support you through job changes, financial struggles or child-raising. Did she let you down when you needed her most? Do you still let her know it? How long? Is it time to get up off the mat? Can love cover a multitude of sin? Is there grace in what Peter is saying?

Sons and daughters, has the harsh treatment from a parent driven you to the singular purpose of proving you are not a disappointment? Is your life spent reacting to how you've been hurt? How long? Is it time to get up off the mat? Can love cover a multitude of sin? Is there grace in what Peter is saying?

Christian, has the church failed or wounded you in some way? Are you now critical of everyone and everything in the church? Do you take pride in feeling you are not like "other Christians?" How long? Is it time to get up off the mat? Can love cover a multitude of sin? Is there grace in what Peter is saying?

Son of Adam, daughter of Eve, are you ashamed of who you've become? Do you spend yourself trying to convince others what you struggle to believe—that you really are loveable? How long? Is it time to get up off the mat? Can love cover a multitude of sin? Is there grace in what Peter is saying?

## Love Covers a Multitude of Sin:

Is there grace here? Paul writes in Galatians 5, "For **freedom** Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery." Asking if there is grace in Peter saying we need to let love cover a multitude of sin is like asking if there is grace in Paul exhorting us to not be enslaved when it was for the sake of our freedom that Christ has set us free. There is a life God means for His people to live. Rather than living in bitterness, we are free to taste and love the sweetness of being alive. Rather than living in perpetual fear that our identity will be defined by how we've disappointed others, we are free to accept that we are the beloved of the Lord. Rather than striving in vain for our own glory, we are free to live the best life possible—life lived enjoying God and glorifying Him forever.

The grace in Peter's exhortation to let love cover a multitude of sin is that it is an exhortation to love life with a clear conscience before God—according to the pattern Jesus set for us, Whose love covered the multitude of your sin and mine when He died in our place, surrendering His right to Himself. This is what we proclaim in communion. We're slaves to sin without Him! We're liberated to love this life with Him! Life is rich and life is short. So when you come to this Table—taking these elements which represent His body and blood poured out for the forgiveness of your sin—does it not make sense that we would examine ourselves and pursue forgiveness with a passion as a part of our celebration of this meal? We come **because** love covers a multitude of sin. And that, in a word, **IS** grace.