

**Gathering Question:** Is it ever permissible to be selfish? Why? Why not? Give some examples of times when it was okay for you to be selfish.

## Serve One Another

The churches in Galatia were on the brink of disaster. False teachers had persuaded them to turn back to certain tenets of Judaism – like circumcision – and convinced these new Christians that in doing so they would be more pleasing to God. They had turned from grace to works. Paul spends most of his letter to the churches of Galatia urging them to not turn aside to “another gospel,” which is in fact no gospel at all.

They are confused and they have been led astray – and Paul tells them just that! They had been running a good race but someone has cut in on them. More and more people are being roped in by the false teachers and so Paul speaks up. He wants them to realize that what began with just a few people now has spread all over the body – “A little leaven leavens the whole lump.” Paul is so upset about the false teachers and their false motives and their harmful teaching that he says that he wishes that those agitators would “go the whole way and emasculate themselves.” Wow! Powerful words! (See Gal. 5:7-12)

What is desperately needed is a circumcision -- some clear sign – on their hearts. Some ways to tell whether a person has had heart circumcision is by watching what they do – or don’t do.

The Galatians have been set free, but they are not to use their freedom to indulge the sinful nature. Instead, they are to serve one another in love. What a powerful statement filled with powerful words! The two most powerful in the whole passage are “serve” which means to be a slave, and “love” which is the powerful agape type of love that focuses on others instead of self. (Gal. 5:13) Instead of being so focused on themselves and trying to constantly please themselves, they are called to be slaves and to love.

He nails this teaching down in the very next verse. “The entire law is summed up in a single command: Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Gal 5:14) Does that seem a bit shocking? Wouldn’t you expect him to say that loving God is the summation of the entire law? Well, consider what John wrote: “No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.” (I John 4:12) “If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.” (I John 4:20)

**Read:** Galatians 5:7-15; I John 4:7-21

### Discuss:

1. What is a good definition of serve? How is your definition impacted by the idea of slavery?
2. Is it possible to serve without loving? Is it possible to love without serving?