

# Unsullied in a world of sin: Battling conflict in the Church

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[ 0 : 00 ] Turn now to our reading this morning, which is in 1 Peter, chapter 4. You have one of the church Bibles, it's page 1016, and we're continuing our studies in this first letter of Peter, and reading once again chapter 4, verses 1 to 11.

We're concentrating this morning on the second half of this section, but we'll read verses 1 to 11. So Peter says, since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking.

For whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased, has done with sin, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh, no longer for human passions, but for the will of God.

For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles, the pagan world, wants to do, living in sensuality and passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, lawless idolatry.

With respect to this, they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you. But they will give an account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

[ 1 : 16 ] But this is why the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, that though judged in the flesh according to man, they may live by the Spirit according to God.

The end of all things is at hand. Therefore, be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.

It's your hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace.

Whoever speaks is one who speaks oracles of God. Whoever serves is 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. Amen. Amen.

[ 2 : 25 ] Well, if you turn with me to 1 Peter chapter 4, and we're going to be looking at that together this morning. We've seen in this letter that Peter's message about real Christianity for the real church in the real world is at the same time both a glorious vision and a great challenge.

He tells us that we are a people with a divine calling. Chapter 2 verse 9 says we're a chosen race, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that we might proclaim the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness and into his marvelous light.

A glorious calling to an eternal glory in Jesus our Lord. And yet, at the same time, a deeply challenging calling.

Because in this world, our calling is fulfilled as we follow inescapably in the path of our Lord Jesus Christ in this world.

And his road to glory that he trod was, of course, the road to Calvary. So chapter 2 verse 21, For to this you have been called, says Peter, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an exact pattern that you might follow in his steps.

[ 3 : 50 ] We too, he means, will always be strangers and aliens on this earth. We'll be outsiders to the culture around us. And therefore, the pressure to conform and to compromise will be very, very great.

The pressure to silence our message about the Lord Jesus. But no, says Peter, we are to go on speaking for Jesus. We are to go on shining for Jesus.

Even though it might mean suffering unjustly for doing good. We're not, he says, to shrink back into silence. However hostile the response of the world might be.

And nor, as we saw last time, are we to slip back into sin. That's so easy to do. When the whole culture around us wants us to do what it does. Wants us to think what it thinks.

We saw last time in chapter 4, verses 1 to 6, that the pressure to conform is very great. Verse 4, people can't understand us when we think differently.

[ 4 : 53 ] And so, they will malign us. And that's hard, isn't it? That hurts. Because Christians are human too. And it's very hard to be considered oddities in this world.

Even dangerous oddities. And Peter says the only way not to slip back is to be armed. Chapter 4, verse 1. Armed with the saving pattern of Christ.

Resolved to suffer if need be rather than to sin. And armed also with the strengthening perspective of Christian faith. That reminds us that it is not man who has the last word.

Not ever. It's God himself. Verse 5. He will judge all people, the living and the dead. So, don't sink. We're to be unsullied in this world of sin.

But, of course, sin is not just the problem that pressurizes us from the outside, from the world around about us. Sadly, since we Christians are also sinners by nature, it's a problem that very often threatens us from inside the church itself.

[ 6 : 05 ] And you'll see that verses 7 to 11, Peter's focus moves from the sins of the flesh, you might say, to the sins of the fellowship. And these also we are to be armed against.

Just as we're to arm our minds with right thinking, says verse 1, the mind of Christ. So also, we are to arm ourselves, verse 7, with right minds. Armed against compromise with the world, yes.

But self-controlled, sober minds to arm us against conflict in the church. And that's the focus in these verses we're looking at today.

Verses 1 to 6 was about not slipping back into sensuality in our personal life in the midst of a sinful culture. And verses 7 to 11 here are about not slipping back into selfishness in our corporate life amid the sinful church.

And Peter is very realistic, isn't he, about the reality, about the problem of sin within congregations. Look at verse 8. He says we're going to have to deal in the church with a multitude of sin in amongst one another.

[ 7 : 18 ] That's pretty realistic, isn't it? See, this is a letter about life in the real world. Not some kind of fantasy land where everything in the garden is rosy.

Peter knows that the natural tendency in our churches is not going to be towards the selflessness that builds up the church, but towards selfishness that breeds friction in the church.

Towards grumbling, as he says in verse 9. Grabbing for ourselves, not generosity and giving to others. That's why there's no command anywhere in the New Testament, at least in my Bible, about learning how to love ourselves more.

Is that in your Bible? I heard on the radio the other day that song from the 70s that I think it was Whitney Houston had a great hit with in the 1980s, The Greatest Love of All.

Remember it? I was struck by the words. The greatest love of all is happening to me. I find the greatest love of all inside of me.

[ 8 : 25 ] The greatest love of all is easy to achieve. Learning to love yourself is the greatest love of all. Well, that really rather summed up the spirit of the 1980s.

No wonder it was a great hit. And my goodness, how absolutely right and how utterly wrong it is, both at the same time, isn't it? Because the greatest love of all is inside of ourselves.

It is for ourselves. And it certainly does seem to come easily and naturally, at least to me. But we don't have to learn it, do we? And it's certainly not something to be celebrated.

It's that natural narcissistic self-love that will stop us growing to maturity in life and maturity in the church.

It's self-love that breeds the sin that leads to conflict in the church. Not harmony. Not serving and enjoying one another.

[ 9 : 27 ] But rather, as Peter says, remember back in chapter 2, verse 1, hypocrisy and slander and envying one another. The very opposite. What we need to learn, says Peter, is to put away all that comes naturally to us in that kind of love.

Because by nature, of course, we focus on ourselves and not upon God, not upon one another. And yes, even in the church, that's true. We tend to cherish our gifts for our own gain, not for God's glory, not for serving others.

But that's upside down, back to front, totally perverse thinking. Look at verse 10 of our chapter. It's God's varied grace, says Peter, that gives us a share in his church.

Verse 11, it's God's word that gives us a share in his gospel message. It's God's strength, he says, that enables us to do anything. And it's God's glory that is the real objective of everything.

Loving ourselves, well, yes, that is easy to achieve. Far too easy. We don't have to learn that. That comes naturally. But the greatest love, according to Peter, love of God, expressed in loving one another, as verse 8 says, that is much harder.

[ 10 : 49 ] We don't find that inside of ourselves. But that is the true calling of the church. And if we're to shine for the Lord Jesus in the world, then we must learn that love.

Because it's learning that love that will battle conflict in the church. The conflict that is so destructive to the cause of Christ, under witness to Christ.

So how do we not slip back into that natural selfishness that only foments real friction? And that conflict that dishonors God in a divided church?

Such an important question, isn't it? Just this week, a pastor was telling me of a strong, formally a strong evangelical fellowship that is currently ripping itself apart with conflict just like that.

Such an important question. How are churches to avoid that? And instead strive for a real spiritual selflessness that will build real fellowship and a witness that will glorify God in a united church that shines to the world?

[ 12 : 03 ] Well, the answer, according to Peter, is really the same as we saw last time in verses 1 to 6. We are to recognize that this will always be a battle.

That it will be a war constantly against sin. And we are to arm ourselves with the right mind, with the mind of Christ himself. So in verse 1 he says, arm yourselves with Christ's way of thinking.

And here, verse 7, he says, arm yourselves with this right mind, which is a self-controlled and sober mind. That's the mind of Christ. In other words, it's a clear gospel mindset that Peter says.

And if you see in verse 7 he says, it understands that the end of all things is near. That is, the fulfillment of the purpose of the creation of this world.

That it's at hand. And that we, as God's church, that we have a part in this extraordinary purpose for time and for all eternity. And that means that we will live together consciously focused on serving that purpose that God has given us.

[ 13 : 14 ] In humble, prayerful dependence upon God and, says Peter, in humble and persistent interdependence on one another. So you see, a clear-thinking, gospel-focused church won't slip back into selfishness and conflict and division.

If it's a church with a clear priority of prayer, showing its relationship to God the Father is right. And a church with a clear persistence in love that shows that its relationship with one another is right and rightly ordered.

That's our calling as the church, says Peter, as God's holy people. Remember in chapter 1, we're to be obedient children, he says, who call God Father. And because of that, we are to be brothers who are growing in love, growing up together into maturity.

Prayer to God and love to one another. That's the focus on these two things in this passage. So let's look at them in turn. A clear-thinking, gospel church that won't slip back into selfishness, that won't slip into conflict.

It'll be marked, first of all, says Peter, with the priority of prayer. Verse 7, be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.

[ 14 : 38 ] Right relationship with God as our Heavenly Father is shown in humble, prayerful dependence on God in faith. Because that shows that we know that all the power and authority belongs to God and not to us.

And so as one writer puts it, the first resource for living out Christ's victory in the Christian community is the believer's prayer life, or better, even the church's prayer life.

Because this, like every other command in the New Testament to pray, assumes God's people are praying together as a fellowship, as a church. Prayer is to be the engine room of the church family, is how Angus MacLeod puts it in his book.

Peter is saying that a church that really understands the gospel, that all things, that the world, that history, that our lives, that all things are coming to their purpose and their fulfillment when Christ returns, and that that coming is at hand, it could happen any time.

A church that really understands that, says Peter, won't be a church that loses its mind. It'll have a clear mind, a sober mind. Won't lurch into fanaticism and fear and all sorts of end times madness, as sometimes churches do.

[ 16 : 01 ] Nor will it lapse into fatalism, that, well, the end is an eye, there's nothing we can do about it, just batten down the hatches. No. Clear, self-controlled gospel thinking results in prayer, according to Peter.

Prayerful engagement with this world, in concert with God's purposes, eternal purposes for his kingdom in this world.

It drives us to prayer because we know that God is sovereign, that he is in control of all things, that he can do all things. And crucially, because that means that we know that we are not in control, that we are not God, that we acknowledge all the things that we can't do.

And therefore, if things happen, then, well, it must be because it's God's doing. And you see, that means that there will be no danger of pride in our midst, doesn't it? Praying together as God's people humbles us.

Because we all have to acknowledge together that what happens in answer to prayer is God's doing and not our doing. And when we receive great answers to prayers, well, we're humbled together because we know it's God.

[ 17 : 18 ] See, when we're under pressure, when there's hostility against our faith, it's very easy to panic. It's easy to think that we have to sort everything, that we have to fix everything.

And sometimes God has to show us our helplessness in order to drive us to prayer, in order to humble us, to remind us that we do depend upon him, but it's not the other way around.

God is not dependent on us. That's such an important lesson, isn't it, for us to learn for every Christian, for every church, certainly for every pastor.

That the entire future of the universe and God's kingdom is not in our hands. Hallelujah! It's in God's hands. And responsibility for God's kingdom is on his shoulders, not ours.

We are not the Messiah. That's such an important thing to be reminded of, is it not? We are not God. Especially if you're in any kind of Christian ministry. We are not God.

[ 18 : 20 ] And you see, when we pray, especially when we pray together, we're reminded of that, aren't we? That we depend upon God, not he on us. And when we pray together, we're all acknowledging that to one another.

And it's so important. And it's easy also, isn't it, when we're under pressure to turn, well, to turn to the world's ways, to sinful ways, and to do what Peter tells us not to do, to return evil for evil, to dishonor the Lord.

Because so often we see that there's no other way to win out. But no, says Peter, steady, clear priority for prayer together as a church reminds us who's in control.

It's God and not us. Not even our enemies are in control. Reminds us whom we depend on. We depend upon God and not upon us. And that gives us great confidence and great comfort as together we begin to trust him.

I think we have found that ourselves in recent times, haven't we? Days of struggle have seen our prayer meeting grow so that our hall's packed on a Wednesday evening.

[ 19 : 32 ] And that's a great blessing. But we can always make room for more. Of course we can. There's many more who could still take their part. But I want to encourage us all to take this seriously because Peter makes it such a priority here for clear-thinking, gospel-minded people.

We need that engine room of prayer together. Not only all together as a church, but together with others in our small groups, in our home groups, in prayer triplets and so on, to be reminded of who is in control.

And of course, don't forget, we need to make sure that there is no impediment to our prayers. We saw that in chapter 3. Husbands, if we're not loving our wives properly, our prayers will be hindered.

Peter's plain. In chapter 3, verse 12, he said that the face of the Lord is against those who do evil. His ears are open to the righteous. His ear is not open to those who are slipping back into selfishness, into sin, but to those who are acting rightly.

It's not so much what we pray, but it's what we are that God will hear. He hears our hearts when they cry out in prayer. And that ought to encourage us because there are many folks who feel they're very timid to pray along with others because they feel, well, I'm not eloquent.

[ 20 : 55 ] I haven't got the right words. But listen, God hears the humblest cry of the humble heart, and it's rightly ordered before him. Don't forget Luke chapter 18, the story of the publican and the Pharisee praying in the synagogue.

It was the humble prayer from the heart of that publican that was heard in heaven, wasn't it? Not the pious platitudes and the length and all of that from the Pharisee. So that's a warning too, isn't it?

That empty words are not heard in heaven. Because real prayer, according to the Bible, is prayer in the Spirit. And the Holy Spirit of Jesus can't carry unworthy prayer to the throne of God, only prayer that is made in Jesus' name, only prayer that comes from hearts and minds that are armed with Jesus' way of thinking.

But a clear-thinking, gospel-minded church, says Peter, will be marked by the priority of prayer, real prayer, corporate prayer, and humble prayer.

And we need God to hear us and to help us greatly if we're going to be marked also by the second thing Peter emphasizes here, the persistence of love. Despite being a church where there will be a multitude of sin, according to Peter.

[ 22 : 20 ] That's his focus, isn't it, on the rest of the passage, verses 8 to 11, the persistence of love. Right relationships with our brothers and sisters are shown, according to Peter, in humble, persistent interdependence on one another in love.

Now, no doubt, Jesus' words in the Garden of Gethsemane were etched in Peter's mind forever. Remember, he said, watch and pray so that you don't fall into temptation.

Maybe that was in his mind when he wrote verse 7. And perhaps Jesus' words in Matthew 24 were in Peter's mind when he wrote verse 8. Remember, Jesus said, you will be hated by all nations, and the love of many will grow cold.

So, Peter says here in verse 8, above all, keep loving one another earnestly, at full stretch to the very limits and more.

Now, that's a repeated command, isn't it, through this letter. Chapter 1, verse 22 says the same, love one another earnestly from a pure heart. Chapter 3, verse 8, have brotherly love.

[ 23 : 34 ] End of chapter 5, very last verse, greet one another with a kiss of love. Love is the answer, according to Peter. In a sense, love is all you need, but not the romantic sort of warm fuzz of love that the Beatles sang about in that song.

Love, according to Peter, and indeed the whole Bible, is a visible and tangible thing. It's a persistent activity. It's a spiritual activity that shows itself, well, here in a fellowship that smothers sin together, that shares its lives together, and that serves God together, because anything else than that isn't love at all.

It's just empty talk. Look at verse 8. First of all, love is real. Love is visible and tangible, according to Peter, when it's seen in real forgiveness.

In a family that smothers the gangrene of sin. Love covers a multitude of sins. And the image is of a blanket. If you like, a fire blanket, that both puts out the fire, and then prevents the noxious, poisonous fumes from spreading their effects throughout the whole household.

James uses the very same phrase in James 5, verse 20, and both he and Peter probably get it from the Proverbs. What he's speaking about, you see, is the sad reality of our lives that the embers of sin are everywhere in the church.

[ 25 : 04 ] Wherever there are people like you and me whose natural human natures are still fallen, there are the embers of sin. And when we're under pressure, perhaps due to hostility from outside, or often in the face of hurtful behavior from one another, well, it's all too easy, isn't it, for these embers of sin to burst into flames all over again.

Isn't that what happens? And when that sort of thing happens, Proverbs chapter 10, verse 12 says, hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses.

An attitude of hatred of anti-love fans the flames, but love covers them and puts them out through forgiveness.

So Paul says to the Corinthians, doesn't he, in chapter 13 of 1 Corinthians, that anti-love in the church is arrogant, is rude, insists on its own way, is irritable, is resentful, rejoices in wrongdoing.

We especially like, don't we, to rejoice in other people's wrongdoings and then to judge them for it. But love doesn't demand it a certain way, isn't proud or rude, doesn't rejoice at wrong, but bears all things and hopes all things and endures all things.

[ 26 : 28 ] Love smothers the gangrene of sin in the church. It quenches the fires of sin when they're stirred up and it prevents the poisonous fumes from destroying and undermining relationships within the church.

Now friends, isn't that fire blanket, the persistent forgiving love, one of the greatest needs in any church? At least in any church that has allowed sinners into its membership.

And in case you're wondering, there are no other kinds of members in any church. Because the tensions caused by interpersonal relationships are the root of all, I repeat, all conflict in churches.

Always. you'll see that magnified, don't you, in small groups or Christian communities living very closely with one another. Perhaps, for example, in a missionary situation, ask any missionary and they will tell you that interpersonal issues are always the greatest issues causing strife in a mission situation.

Isn't that true? But it's the same in any church wherever it is. Because we're sinful. And our natural tendency is to turn to selfish behavior.

[ 27 : 59 ] Just as a compass will naturally always turn its needle to the north unless there's a powerful magnetic force turning that needle to a different direction.

And the only force that can do that in our relationships with one another is the love that issues in real persistent forgiveness.

The Lord Jesus taught that very plainly, didn't he? Read Matthew chapter 18 where he's teaching his disciples about the real kingdom righteousness that must be in the church, in the community that is his people.

How often am I to forgive my brother when he sins against me? Seven times? As many as that? Yes, said Jesus, and 70 times seven.

You remember he told the parable of the unforgiving servant who had forgotten how much mercy the master had shown to him which is why he could fail to forgive and only why he could fail to forgive his fellow servant.

[ 29 : 07 ] Jesus' teaching and Peter's teaching is that real Christian love loves mercy and it's visible therefore intangible and real acts of forgiveness that smothers out sin at its source, smothers the source of resentment and pride and anger in your heart which will only fan the flames of further relational breakdown between individuals and then spreading to breed factions and then ultimately causing utterly destructive division in the church.

Now that is not easy, is it? It does not come naturally to us and that's why we need to depend upon God humbly for answers to our prayers to increase our love.

It's not easy but it is essential for not to be poisoned by sin's bitterness or for not to allow our bitterness to spread and to poison others.

It applies in our marriages doesn't it? In our families where we have such great capacity to wound one another, to hurt one another and cause rift. It applies when we've been hurt by somebody in the fellowship for whatever reason, perhaps somebody slighting us or we feel not appreciating us as much as they should have.

Or maybe among the young people, somebody treating us casually in a romance and casting you off and breaking your heart and then taking up with somebody else in the fellowship right in front of you.

[ 30 : 49 ] It's sad to say that too many young men disgrace themselves in that way. Not only young men, women do it too. That kind of callous behavior shouldn't have any part, should it, among believers.

us, but you see, we hurt one another so, so easily, don't we? So many different ways. And because of that, says Peter, love must be earnest, persistent, smothering the gangrene of sin.

Real love is visible and tangible when it's seen in that kind of real forgiveness. love. And verse 9, real persistence in love is seen in real fellowship in a family that shares the goodness of God, not grudgingly, but generously sharing lives with all our brothers and sisters, show hospitality to one another without grumbling.

It's easy to share our lives meaningfully with our friends, but it's not nearly so easy to share with all our brothers and sisters in the fellowship. But you see, here's the thing, we can't choose our families, can we?

We're stuck with them. And we can't choose our Christian family because God has chosen who our Christian brothers and sisters are going to be. And he says we have to share our lives with them gladly.

[ 32 : 24 ] Now, the hospitality Peter is speaking about probably did include showing hospitality to traveling missionaries and so on, but also, very clearly, it's about pitching in with resources for their own fellowship life and for their own meetings.

Most of their meetings would have been in homes, especially those that had larger households and could accommodate. In other words, he's talking about sharing our material gifts from God with and for the life of our Christian fellowship.

And of course, it's easy to see why some might grumble. Peter is realistic. He knows that some people would abuse that hospitality and that generosity. He knew how irksome it could be.

Honestly, I wish that Andronicus would clean his clothes and wear deodorant because our whole house stinks after he's been to the meeting. Just imagine it, can't you? Well, that Demetrius eats us out of house and home.

What are we going to do if he keeps coming to the church? There are a hundred other things you can imagine. And no doubt as well, it could have been very socially awkward, as socially demeaning to the neighbors, to have that ragtag crowd of people, some of them slaves, being seen coming in and out of your house and associating with you.

[ 33 : 42 ] And no doubt some of the people that Peter is referring to here were just thoroughly trying people in all kinds of other ways. Probably the Christians then weren't like today because we don't have trying Christians like that in the church today, do we?

But I think they perhaps did then. But you see, it's a command of real love to share this way.

Hebrews 13 and verse 1 says just the same, let brotherly love continue. And the very next words are these, don't neglect hospitality. It's so down to earth and practical.

Because you see, he's not just talking about the material. people. What he's saying is that material hospitality goes along with a mental attitude of sharing.

People who won't open their homes to their brothers and sisters, or won't open their wallets to their brothers and sisters, are pretty unlikely to open their hearts to their brothers and sisters in real love.



[ 34 : 47 ] That's why in 1 Timothy 3 and in Titus, when Paul is talking about Christian leaders, he says that Christian leaders are not just to have the gift of teaching. That's not enough. They're to show the grace of hospitality.

Why? Well, because to share ministry in God's word, you must be able, you must be willing also to share your life too, and to share in other people's lives, both inviting them into your life, and them wanting to invite you into theirs to share with them.

But you see, Peter says, we're all called. To that ministry of sharing, shared lives, to bear one another's burdens, as Paul puts it to the Galatians. And that's costly.

To be involved in other people's troubles when you've got more than enough troubles of your own, takes effort, and cost, and investment. But that is what earnest love consists of, according to Peter.

together. It's a fellowship of sharing our lives without grumbling, generously, not grudgingly, and inviting others into our lives and into our world, not shutting others out of fellowship with us, but opening the gates of our lives to share those lives with others.

[ 36 : 12 ] And that too can be very hard, can't it? especially if we carry a lot of bruising, a lot of hurt from others. It can make us very fearful, can't it, of letting other people too close to us and into our lives.

We want to keep people at arm's length to protect ourselves. But Peter says we mustn't do that. We must be a people who because we are committed to the love that smothers sin, that we can be a people who are committed and who are confident in opening the doors of our lives to one another to show and to share the goodness of God with one another gladly.

And then thirdly, says Peter, real earnest love is seen in real fruitfulness, in a family that serves the grace of God, verse 10, that sees God's gifts to us as for service and not for our status that God gives us them in order to build others up, not to puff ourselves up, to feed others genuine spiritual needs, not to feed our own psychological neediness.

Verse 10, so as each has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's very grace. And again, no doubt, the parable that Jesus told of the wicked steward was in Peter's mind.

Remember, he ignored the fact that his master was going to return and he used his position, used his privilege, not only to serve himself, but to abuse others in the household. But Peter says it's God's very grace to be stewarded by all and for all with one another.

[ 37 : 57 ] Do you see how often that term appears? One another, one another, one another. Why? Because it's so easy and natural for us not to think of one another with our selfish hearts.

It's also easy for our service within the church to look like it's for one another, but really to be just for ourselves. Somebody might be devoted to some particular thing or some area of church life and they seem to be totally devoted.

They devote ours to it and everybody seems to think that they're slaving for others. But you see, that can quite easily just be empire building. And quite easily just be satisfying our own need to be needed.

Not obvious, of course, until it's threatened, but when it is, then it all comes out, when there's a clash of priorities. So maybe that particular group or that club is asked to move its time or its place or its prominence in order to serve the outreach and mission of the church.

Perhaps a Christianity explorer group needs the space. And maybe it's a music group or a choir that's asked to have a less prominent role for the sake of the preaching of the word and the rest of the service.

[ 39 : 12 ] Or whatever other way your particular thing is challenged. And so often in a church, that's what leads to fireworks, isn't it? We know that. Or maybe it's a devoted Bible teacher, maybe in Sunday school or Bible class or with students or perhaps it's the preacher who is seen to be slaving away.

They speak wherever they can, whenever they can. They seem to be such a tireless servant of the word. But again, that also can so easily be self-serving.

Just serving a deep-seated psychological need to be needed, need to be appreciated, need to feel loved by others. See, when deep down it's that that's driving our Christian service, whatever that service is, so easy, isn't it, to harbor resentment, to feel unappreciated, to feel envy and to feel jealousy whenever anyone else is praised or appreciated and seems to be more appreciated than you are.

The tragedy is when somebody feels like that, it's impossible really for them ever to feel satisfied and fulfilled and loved as they want to be. isn't there so much of that attitude in each of us by nature?

I think there is. And what happens, you see, when we're like that is that we don't just resent and grumble against others, but deep in our hearts we're resentful and grumbling against God because He's ultimately to blame.

[ 40 : 54 ] We're looking to be fulfilled and He's not giving us what we want. We'll become grumbly people, resentful people, unloving people. You see, Peter says that attitude is absolutely upside down.

We're all stewards of God's grace, he says, verse 10, not of our own giftedness. We're serving God's household for His sake and it's our great privilege that we're called to do that.

And the honor is that we're chosen to serve Him. And the dignity comes from the dignity of our master, not from the particular sphere of service that we have. Peter divides his service here into two groups in verse 11, either speaking or serving in a whole host of other ways.

But either way, his point is that the privilege is that it's God's grace to each of us to be able to serve one another. If we speak, he says, it's God's word alone that will build up the church, not our personal wisdom.

However we serve, he says, it's God's strength that enables it all. It's not any merit, not any personal quality that we have. None of it is about ourselves.

[ 42 : 08 ] That's so very humbling, isn't it? In fact, Peter has only one command to self in this whole passage. Verse 7, it's to control ourselves, to be self-controlled.

Just as in verse 1, it's to arm ourselves with the thinking of the Lord Jesus Christ who so loved us that he suffered for us in order to serve us so that we might serve one another likewise.

That's how God was glorified in everything through Jesus Christ in his life on earth, says Peter in verse 11. And that's how God will be glorified in everything through Jesus Christ in our life as his people here on earth, in his church.

As we battle conflict in the church, refusing each one of us to slip back into that selfishness in our corporate life despite the stubbornness of that multitude of sin that we will have to deal with with one another.

But we'll do that, says Peter, only if we are a church committed to the priority of prayer, to humble prayerful dependence on God in true faith, and committed to the persistence of love, to humble persistent interdependence on one another in love.

[ 43 : 34 ] That means together smothering the gangrene of sin in one another and ourselves, and sharing the goodness of God for one another, and serving the grace of God together with one another.

So Peter asked us this morning in our church, are we doing that? Are we battling conflict that way? Well, we must, he says.

It's our calling in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, because to him belong glory and dominion forever and ever.

Amen. Let's pray together. Lord, as we come now to this table that speaks to us of the wonder of your love to us, will you drive home to us afresh the message of your wondrous cross on which the prince of glory himself died for us, so that our pride might be humbled, and that your love, love so amazing, so divine, will indeed possess our souls, our lives, and our all, so that in everything your name will be glorified among us through Jesus your son.

We ask this in his name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.