

## Cultivating a vibrant community of faith, hope and love

A MESSAGE FROM PASTOR PETER

JANUARY 13, 2022

I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, to elevate your ecclesiology by prioritizing your relationships.

We must not allow the social, cultural and ideological upheaval in which we live to cause us to stumble from the sure ground upon which we stand in Jesus Christ. Therefore, I am appealing not to your convictions about public health policy or Constitutional rights, but to your love for your brothers and sisters. Because of the rootedness we share in Christ, we must love one another as Jesus Christ loves us – looking *“not to your own interests, but to the interests of others”* (Philippians 2:4).

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Roman Christians who were in the midst of the greatest cultural shift the church has ever experienced – the immediate aftermath of the arrival of the promised Messiah!

*“If your brother or sister is being injured by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. Do not let what you eat cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died”* (Romans 14:15).

Allow me to draw a bit of a parallel for us today. The issue at hand was how the Christians enter into the new freedom they had in Christ – specifically, the freedom to eat foods that had been prohibited under the old covenant. Paul does not appeal to the old covenant, which would prohibit eating certain foods, nor does he appeal to the new covenant, which would allow eating anything. Rather, Paul appeals to the law of love. They were to ask themselves what brotherly/neighborly love would compel them to do.

Paul writes similarly to the Corinthian church – apparently the intersection of freedom and love was a widespread concern for the early Church:

*“But you must be careful so that your freedom does not cause others with a weaker conscience to stumble”* (1 Corinthians 8:9).

Again, Paul writes to the conglomerate of churches in Galatia:

*“You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’”* (Galatians 5:13-14).

Regardless of your personal convictions about the issues at hand (voting rights, immigration and border security, systemic racism, taxation, public health policy, kosher food laws, etc.), Christ compels us to adopt a humble and generous posture of love. This means we do not reject, attack or shun people whose convictions differ from our own. In fact, it may mean we attempt to enter into the perspective of others and curtail our own rights if they might *“cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died.”*

As one who has been given the charge to shepherd Christ Pacific for such a time as this, I urge you, brothers and sisters, to *“pursue what makes for peace and for mutual edification”* (Romans 14:19). This is how we elevate our ecclesiology and prioritize our relationships.

As for the world? *“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another”* (John 13:35).

In love,



Pastor Peter