

## Mt. Freedom Baptist Church – Loving One Another

### Slide – Welcome & Message Title

When Pastor Brian asked me to fill in for him this morning, I began thinking and praying about what God would have me share. I had several ideas, but as I began to study those topics, God led me in an entirely different direction. It's kinda sorta like God in His sovereignty has His own message to share with us, and my own ideas are pretty much irrelevant. Go figya.

### Slide – Mt. Freedom Mission Statement

***Mt Freedom Baptist Church exists to glorify God as a fellowship of believers, introduce people to Jesus inside and outside the church, and enjoy abundant life empowered by the Holy Spirit.***

As you may recall, at the beginning of this year we began taking a closer look at our church mission statement and examining ourselves to see if our hearts really match up with who we say we are. Here's a reminder of what our mission statement says...

As part of our refocus on our stated mission, we have also agreed to place a renewed emphasis on prayer. We began meeting on Tuesday mornings at 10AM and Wednesday evenings at 6:30PM to pray together, lifting our praises, thanks, and supplications to our LORD. As an aid to keeping our prayers focused, we have also put our prayer wall up where the church can share praises, thanks, and requests for prayer. In the middle of the crown of thorns on the prayer wall, I wrote a verse – John 13:34. Does anyone remember what that verse says?

### Slide – John 13:34

***A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.*** John 13:34 (ESV)

Jesus gave this commandment to His disciples in the upper room on the night He was betrayed to be crucified. He also added the reason that He was making this command.

### Slide – John 13:35

***By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*** John 13:35 (ESV)

Of course, we need to also love others outside our little fellowship, but this particular commandment is for Jesus' disciples to emphasize love for one another so that outsiders can recognize through the love we show each other that we belong to Him. Obviously, if we just say we love one another, outsiders won't be able to recognize that, and thus know we are disciples of Jesus. Somehow, we must demonstrate our love for one another in tangible ways. And *that* is what God wanted me to share with you from His Word this morning.

Turn with me if you will to Ephesians chapter 4 verse 31. The verses will be up on the screen as well. While you're finding it, let's just take a minute to set up the context of the passage. Paul, Silas, and Timothy had established and nurtured the church at Ephesus during Paul's third missionary journey around 53-55 AD. Paul ministered at Ephesus for over two years, so he knew their faith was firmly founded on the true Gospel. As he returned from this missionary journey, Paul bid a final farewell to the Ephesian elders at the seaport at Miletus on his way to Jerusalem where he was arrested and eventually sent to Rome after appealing his case to Caesar. While under house arrest in Rome in about 60-61 AD, Paul wrote letters to some of the churches he had established during his missionary journeys, including the church at Ephesus. Praise God that his letter to the Ephesians survived to

## Mt. Freedom Baptist Church – Loving One Another

become part of the canon of God's Word. This letter is full of practical teaching regarding the nature of salvation in Christ and living out the Christian life.

### Slide – Ephesians 4:31-32

***<sup>31</sup>Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. <sup>32</sup>Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.***

Ephesians 4:31-32 (ESV)

Pastor Brian once said, "We are family. The problem is, sometimes we treat each other like family." Let's face facts. Folks is folks. Most of us do things and say things that make us pretty unlovable time and again. But the love Jesus commanded us to show isn't performance-based. He calls us to love each other, not because of the things we do or say or don't do or say, but simply because we are brothers and sisters in Christ. Jesus' commandment isn't for us to love the ones we like. He commanded us to love one another without exception. He called us to love one another on our good days and on our bad days – when we're being nice to each other and when we aren't. We need to offer each other the fullest measure of grace we possibly can by the power of God's Spirit guiding us and teaching us every step along the way. We mustn't allow our hearts to become embittered. We mustn't hold onto grudges. Take a look at what Paul told the Corinthians about the nature of love...

### Slide – 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 (CSB)

***<sup>4</sup>Love is patient, love is kind. Love does not envy, is not boastful, is not arrogant, <sup>5</sup>is not rude, is not self-seeking, is not irritable, and does not keep a record of wrongs. <sup>6</sup>Love finds no joy in unrighteousness but rejoices in the truth. <sup>7</sup>It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. <sup>8</sup>Love never ends...*** 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a (CSB)

This is a very tall order. But none of these characteristics of the way we are to love one another is optional – they are all commanded by Jesus Himself. In our own nature and power, it would be quite impossible for us to exhibit this kind of love. Only by the power of God's Spirit dwelling within our hearts can we hope to show the level of love for one another that Jesus demands.

Take another look at the end of Ephesians 4:32.

### Slide – Ephesians 4:32

***<sup>32</sup>Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*** Ephesians 4:31-32 (ESV)

If we truly reflect on what Jesus has done for us by taking all our own failings upon Himself at the Cross, we will find it much easier to offer the grace He requires toward our brothers and sisters in His Gospel.

### Slide – Ephesians 5:1-2

***<sup>1</sup>Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. <sup>2</sup>And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*** Ephesians 5:1-2 (ESV)

## Mt. Freedom Baptist Church – Loving One Another

Truly loving someone is much, much more than simply saying so or offering them support and encouragement. Real love involves self-sacrifice for the benefit of others. Jesus Himself gave us the true definition of the degree He expects us to love one another.

### Slide – John 15:12-13

***<sup>12</sup>“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup>Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.”*** John 15:12-13 (ESV)

Certainly, our LORD may one day require us to literally lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters just as He laid down His own life on the cross for us. We must soberly recognize that difficult truth and make our hearts ready now for that eventuality. In the meantime, we must practice daily laying down our lives for our friends – foregoing some of our own aspirations and plans and devoting our time and energy instead to those Jesus has placed into our lives for the very purpose of showing them His love in and through us.

---

### Slide – Ephesians 5:3-5

***<sup>3</sup>But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. <sup>4</sup>Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. <sup>5</sup>For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.*** Ephesians 5:3-5 (ESV)

In the middle of all this talk about loving one another, Paul launches into a diatribe about immoral behaviors. Why? What’s the connection? Paul is giving brothers and sisters in Christ a warning about what we’re getting into when we commit ourselves to truly loving one another. Make no mistake. This whole business of loving one another isn’t all rainbows, lollipops, and unicorns. Sometimes, loving our brothers and sisters means wading into a cesspool of unspeakable filth in order to pull our loved ones out from it.

Nor is loving our fellow travelers a one-and-done. It requires continual hard labor in prayer, in fellowship, and in devotion of our God-given time and energy – sometimes for years on end. Every one of us is a despicable sinner by our daily choices and in the very core of our inborn nature. We are deserving of death – utterly unworthy of fellowship with God apart from the salvation Jesus purchased for us with His shed blood on the cross. Remembering this, we can truly empathize with our brothers and sisters who seem to continually go astray, just as they can with us. Together in deepest humility and by the power of God’s Spirit within us, we can forge ahead together trusting that He will be faithful to eventually perfect us into the very image of Jesus – God the Son.

Before we move on, look at what Paul says in verse 5 comparing covetousness to idolatry. When we lust after the things of this world, we set our devotion to the eternal God at least partially aside in favor of the temporary trappings of this dying world. Thus, Paul rightly calls such covetousness idolatry. There is a dire warning inside the parentheses of this verse. God commands our total devotion. He will not share our hearts with anyone or anything.

**Slide – Ephesians 5:6-10**

***<sup>6</sup>Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. <sup>7</sup>Therefore do not become partners with them; <sup>8</sup>for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light <sup>9</sup>(for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), <sup>10</sup>and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.*** Ephesians 5:6-10 (ESV)

The modern trend in society is to be tolerant and inclusive of all manner of behaviors that were not tolerated or even mentioned (much less encouraged) in polite society not so long ago. Perhaps this is to be expected in the world at large. After all the world is ruled temporarily by our great enemy Satan who seeks to debase and destroy all things in God's creation. My pastor in California was fond of saying that you can't expect unsaved people to act like saved people. But today even professed Christians and Church leaders are embracing, encouraging, and partaking in sinful behaviors that God's Word still calls abominations. Ostensibly "christian" fellowships around the world are supporting homosexuality and transgenderism in all their perverse forms and patting themselves on the back for their "loving," inviting, and inclusive policies.

But God hasn't changed the rules of behavior that He expects from people since He first laid them out to Moses thousands of years ago.

**NOTE** – There are some specific exceptions. Cry hallelujah that you and I are free to eat bacon, shrimp, lobster, and all manner of other delicacies that God originally forbid His people to eat in His law. But the specific exceptions like the one He made in Peter's vision of the great sheet that came down from Heaven (Acts 10) are few. For the most part, the provisions of the original law God laid out to Moses remain intact. Jesus Himself affirmed this...

**Slide – Matthew 5:17-19**

***<sup>17</sup>"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. <sup>18</sup>For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. <sup>19</sup>Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.*** Matthew 5:17-19 (ESV)

Now someone may be thinking – rightly so – that today we are no longer under the law, but since Jesus died on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins, we now live in the age of God's grace by which we are saved unto eternal life. That is certainly correct. Nevertheless, the law of Moses remains – not as the standard by which we **must** live in order to obtain our salvation, but as the standard by which we **aspire** to live to demonstrate our love and devotion toward the God who saves us by His grace alone.

Why am I saying this, and what does it have to do with the passage we are studying in Ephesians or with Jesus' call for His Church to love one another just as He loves us?

## Mt. Freedom Baptist Church – Loving One Another

That is exactly the point Paul makes here in Ephesians 5:6-10. Look at the passage again.

### Slide – Ephesians 5:6-10

***<sup>6</sup>Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. <sup>7</sup>Therefore do not become partners with them; <sup>8</sup>for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light <sup>9</sup>(for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), <sup>10</sup>and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.*** Ephesians 5:6-10 (ESV)

Sometimes, the love we offer to our fellow believers must be tough love. We need to cry out in warning to our brothers and sisters in Christ when we see them straying from the paths of righteousness. Perhaps even more importantly, we need to humble our own hearts to accept such warnings from our fellow believers. This is hard. But because it's hard, Jesus gave specific directions (Matthew 18:15-18) to His followers on how we are to carry out this kind of tough love.

Certainly, being tolerant of each other's idiosyncrasies is part of Jesus' call for us to love one another. But turning a blind eye to blatant sin within the church is not. In fact, giving our brothers and sisters a "pass" on such sin – or worse encouraging them in these sins as we see so many church fellowships doing today – is quite the opposite of loving our brothers and sisters. For example, how could a leader of a church fellowship in good conscience encourage a young person to pursue gender transition knowing that doing that not only violates God's law and will for us but has been shown repeatedly to be self-destructive of young people's very lives?

In 1 Corinthians, Paul wrote to the church in Corinth which he knew was Spirit-filled and founded upon solid Gospel teaching. Yet Paul had learned that this church was tolerating sin within their midst that they themselves knew ran contrary to God's law and His will. To make matters worse, the Corinthians had been congratulating each other on their "loving" open-mindedness. So, Paul found it necessary to knock them down a peg...

### Slide – 1 Corinthians 5:1-5

***<sup>1</sup>It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. <sup>2</sup>And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.***

***<sup>3</sup>For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. <sup>4</sup>When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, <sup>5</sup>you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.*** 1 Corinthians 5:1-5 (ESV)

We need to make sure we don't miss that last point in Paul's chastisement of the Corinthian church. The focus and purpose of our tough love among ourselves in the Church must **never** be judgment, ostracism, or condemnation. We must rather focus on restoration and reconciliation of our fellow Christ followers. After all, isn't this how we would hope the members of our fellowship would treat us when we ourselves find ourselves under church discipline? Paul reinforces this principle in his second letter to the Corinthians.

## Mt. Freedom Baptist Church – Loving One Another

### Slide – 2 Corinthians 2:5-8

*<sup>5</sup>Now if anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but in some measure—not to put it too severely—to all of you. <sup>6</sup>For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough, <sup>7</sup>so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. <sup>8</sup>So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him.* 2 Corinthians 2:5-8 (ESV)

---

### Slide – Ephesians 5:11-14

*<sup>11</sup>Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. <sup>12</sup>For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. <sup>13</sup>But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, <sup>14</sup>for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”* Ephesians 5:11-14 (ESV)

Make no mistake. Jesus said that everything which is done in secret will one day be revealed.

### Slide – Luke 12:2-3

*<sup>2</sup>Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. <sup>3</sup>Therefore whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the housetops.* Luke 12:2-3 (ESV)

My pastor in Aiken said that when we are considering whether to partake in some sort of immorality, we should ask ourselves whether we would do it if Jesus Himself were in the room with us, and then remind ourselves that indeed Jesus is **always** with us. One day, everyone will stand before God’s great white judgment throne – Revelation 20:11-15. Praise God that those of us who have placed our trust in Jesus and had our names written in the Lamb’s Book of Life will not face eternal condemnation for the things we have done and said in the dark. Instead, we have been given the righteousness of Christ that covers all of those sins for all eternity. Nevertheless at the Great White Throne, everything will be revealed.

NOTE – Ephesians 5:14 does not quote any Bible passage. Paul may be paraphrasing Isaiah 60...

### Slide – Isaiah 60:1-3

*<sup>1</sup>Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. <sup>2</sup>For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. <sup>3</sup>And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.* Isaiah 60:1-3 (ESV)

**Slide – Ephesians 5:15-17**

***<sup>15</sup>Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, <sup>16</sup>making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. <sup>17</sup>Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.*** Ephesians 5:15-17 (ESV)

As we look around our world and around the Church, seeing the precipitous decline of morality and common decency both outside and inside the Church, it is easy to become discouraged. Yet we know that God has placed us here to accomplish His will in and through us. As Mordecai said to Esther – “...*who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?*” (Esther 4:14b). We must always be about our Father’s business, knowing that yet a little while longer and Jesus Himself will return to gather His followers to Himself, establish His kingdom on earth, and judge the living and the dead. Paul gives us great encouragement for this in his letter to the Galatians...

**Slide – Galatians 6:9-10**

***<sup>9</sup>And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. <sup>10</sup>So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.*** Galatians 6:9-10 (ESV)

**Slide – Ephesians 5:18-21**

***<sup>18</sup>And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, <sup>19</sup>addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, <sup>20</sup>giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>21</sup>submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.*** Ephesians 5:18-21 (ESV)

In conclusion, here in Ephesians 5:18, God clearly instructs us not to drink wine, but to drink whiskey instead, right? Of course not. If we look carefully, this verse neither forbids nor encourages drinking anything at all, but rather instructs us not to become drunk. The Greek wording is clear on this point, but we’ll defer that discussion for another time. The key point in this passage is the importance of allowing God’s Spirit to govern and lead our church activities – particularly our worship.

One important aspect of the love Jesus calls us to share with each other is the celebration of our salvation in Christ together with joy and thanksgiving in worship, in prayer, and in all the things we do together as a Christian fellowship. By this we not only uplift and encourage each other as we await the return of our LORD, but when visitors witness our Spirit-filled joy they will be able to clearly discern that we are indeed Jesus’ disciples just as He told His disciples in the upper room on the night He was betrayed.

## **Mt. Freedom Baptist Church – Loving One Another**

Take care not to miss Paul's admonition in verse 21. An important aspect of the love we are to show each other is to not insist on having our own way or taking the best of God's blessings to our fellowship for ourselves, but rather deferring to our brothers and sisters in all things. Jesus demonstrated this humility before His disciples when He washed their feet just before He gave them His commandment to love one another (John 13:1-20). Through this simple demonstration of humility, Jesus showed us how we are to submit to one another in reverence to Jesus our LORD.

---

Because I'm a lily-livered coward by nature, I'm going to leave exposition of the passage in Ephesians 5 following this about wives submitting to their husbands to someone else. But before we go...

**Slide – Logo**

**Conclusion & Invitation**