

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, May 2, 2018 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

freedom
THE GRACE OF CHRIST IN GALATIANS

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF GALATIANS
Limiting Liberty with Love
Galatians 5:13-15

¹³ For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. ¹⁴ For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” ¹⁵ But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another! – Galatians 5:13-15 (NKJV)

“The acid test of mature Christianity is not how much liberty one exercises, but rather how much love one exhibits.” – Charles Swindoll

The acid test of mature Christianity is not how much liberty one exercises, but rather how much love one exhibits. Before you think that sounds too pious, better stop and read the following passage:

PURPLE (1) 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 – *“¹⁹ For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; ²⁰ and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; ²¹ to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; ²² to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. ²³ Now this I do for the gospel’s sake, that I may be partaker of it with you.”*

Questions:

1. **What is the contrast Paul makes in verse 19 and what do you think he means by this contrast? What reason does he give in verse 19 for it? The contrast is between freedom and servitude. He is free but, in his freedom he chooses to make himself a servant to others... “to all.” In other words he is going to use his freedom**

to reach others. I think that he is saying that even though Christ has made us free, we can either use that freedom selfishly or selflessly. He didn't want to use his freedom to in any way impede others from coming to Christ. The reason he give at the end of verse 19 is "...that I might win the more." In other words, that I might reach other for Christ, and my freedom might not stand in the way of that.

2. **In verses 20 to 22 Paul give us an example of what it looks like for him to do what he talks about in verse 19** (*"For though I am free from all me, I have made myself a servant of all, that I might win the more."*). **Which of these examples (Jew, under the law, weak) most speaks to you and why? What do you think Paul might be suggesting to believers today?** *I think that the example that most resonate with me is the first one, "... to the Jews, I became as a Jew." As a Baptist minister, I have pastored churches and church members who I didn't agree with Biblically. Some times those churches were practicing things that to me were unbiblical (i.e. Alien Immersion, Closed Communion, etc.) Many of these things are based more on tradition than they are on Scripture. We sometimes even had sharp difference over these thing, yet they still called me to be their pastor and I accepted the call because I felt that is where God called me, and I felt that I could best make a difference and preach the truth and sometimes those who hold most closely to the "law" or these types of "works oriented" practices have never really experienced Christ personally. And by becoming one of them I could preach truth and allow the Holy Spirit to speak to their life and possible bring radical change... even salvation in some cases. I think there can be lots of things like this in our churches today... dress codes (that is the only reason I wear a suit and tie on Sunday, I hate ties, and hot suits, and stuffy clothes), we make a big deal out of someone who comes into our churches that is tattooed up, or has piercings. Another example is music... styles of music, genres of music, hymns, chorus, progress, contemporary, piano, guitar, organ, drums, praise band, choir, etc. we make this like it is the most important thing... it's not! Music, styles of music does not make the Christian. A person can come to know the Lord listening to contemporary music, just like he can through a hymn. I chose early in my ministry not to allow music to become a litmus test for me, I will go where God sends me because people need to the Lord in both places and I will become all things to all men in order that I might win some.*
3. **What do you think Paul means in verse 23 when he says, "²³ Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you"?** *I think Paul is saying the gospel is the good news that sets men free, and I will not allow my freedom in Christ to hinder you from hearing the gospel. I am free to not wear a suit and tie on Sundays, but if that is what it takes for some to hear the gospel I'll put on a suit and tie. If I am preaching on the streets and a suit and tie shuts the door to some from hearing gospel because I look to "uppity" and "starch"... too rich and unrelatable, then I will get rid of the suit and wear shorts and a t-shirt.*

GREEN (2) Romans 14:13-21 – *¹³ Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way. ¹⁴ I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. ¹⁵ Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with*

your food the one for whom Christ died. ¹⁶ Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil; ¹⁷ for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸ For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men. ¹⁹ Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another. ²⁰ Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense. ²¹ It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak.”

Questions:

1. **How does Paul define “a stumbling block” in verse 13? What does he say should be our “resolve”?** List some things that could be a stumbling block today. According to verse 13 a “stumbling block” is something that we put in our brother’s (or sister’s) way that might cause him or her to fall and get tripped up. Paul says our “resolve” should be to never do anything that would cause another to stumble. That list could include lot of things: gossip, slander, backbiting, anger, our language, our t.v./movie watching habits, our reading material, alcohol, tobacco, laziness, lack of commitment, etc.
2. **Think about and meditate on what Paul is saying in verse 14. What do you really think Paul is saying here?** *“¹⁴ I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.”* Paul says “I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus...” meaning this truth was not the product of his own thinking or the teaching of others but by divine revelation from Jesus, Himself. I think he is saying that if a believers is convinced a certain behavior is a sin... even if his assessment is wrong or not altogether correct... he should never do it. If he does, he will violate his own conscience, experience guilt, and perhaps be driven back into deeper legalism instead of moving toward freedom. Ex. Let me give you an example of this “Is it wrong/sinful to mow your grass on Sunday?” People have strong feeling about this one way or another and are convinced of it for different reasons. If you believe that it is wrong/sinful to mow your grass on Sunday, and yet you know that there are lots of Christians who go to church with you and you happen to know that they occasionally mow their grass on Sunday, so you go ahead and mow your grass on Sunday, what effect is that going to have on you inside. That’s what Paul is saying! If you consider it unclean, sinful, and you go ahead and do it, it is going to have a spiritual effect on you... your conscience will be bothered, guilt will invade, and you will be driven into despair over it.
3. **According to verses 19-21 what are some standards we as believers should use in relationship to others?** I find several standards for Christians to have in regard others in these verses 1) I should pursue, chase after, go after those things that promote peace not division, 2) I should also pursue, chase after go after those things that build up or edify not tear other down, 3) People are more important than my freedoms to do and practice certain things in my life, 4) The evil in my life has more to do with others and the effects my actions and behaviors have on them than the actual thing itself. In **verse 20** Paul says, *“...All things indeed are pure, but it is evil*

for the man who eats with offense.” 5) Don’t do anything that would cause another to stumble and get tripped up, and keep them from Jesus.

WHITE (3) 1 Peter 2:11-17 – *“¹¹ Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, ¹² having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.¹³ Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether to the king as supreme, ¹⁴ or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. ¹⁵ For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men— ¹⁶ As free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. ¹⁷ Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.”*

Questions:

1. **What do you think Peter’s means when he says “Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake...”?** **What does this have to do with the previous verses 11-12?** *Though a believer’s true citizenship is in heaven (v.11 we are “sojourners” and “pilgrims” here), he or she must live in such a way as to be a witness and to draw others to Christ and never distract or discourage others from coming to Him. Christians should be the best citizens in the world, even though this world is not our home, so that God is honored and glorified, and others are inextricably (intimately) drawn to Him. Rebellious conduct by a Christian brings dishonor on Christ. I think this all relates back to verses 11-12 because our “good works which they observe” are to draw others to Jesus, not put a stumbling block in front of them.*
2. **What does Peter mean when he speaks of using our liberty/freedom in Christ “as a cloak for vice” in verse 16? Name some ways we might do this?** *I think Peter is saying that believers should enjoy their freedom in Christ, but ought not to put on a veil or mask of freedom to cover what really is wickedness. Christian freedom is never to be an excuse for self-indulgence or license. I think Peter is actually addressing what some call cheap grace with this statement. He is saying the grace we have been shown and the freedom that follows is never a license to sin or just go out and live anyway you want to. I think that some “Christians” have used this as a way to excuse some things in their life that they have been convicted of and know are wrong, yet they continue to pursue that lifestyle and practice... essentially hiding it behind the veil or mask of “freedom in Christ” when their conscience and heart tells them something different. Some examples could be: alcohol, viewing habits (t.v., movies, internet, etc.), language, sexual practices, etc.*
3. **What guiding principles for the lives of believers does Peter lay out in verse 17? What is the common thread of all of these?** *“¹⁷ Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.”* *The guiding principles are quite simple here: 1) Honor all people, 2) Love the brotherhood (Christian brothers and sisters), 3) Fear, honor, reverence, worship God, and 4) Honor the king (government) All of these speak to relationships with others, both God and man. Our freedoms never,*

never, never give us a right to do what is damaging or destructive to others in anyway.

Again and again in Scripture we are exhorted to guard against two extremes: uncontrolled expressions of liberty and unbending demands of legalism. Wise is the believer who learns how to stay balanced on the tightrope of the two. The secret, of course, is holding tightly to the pole – love for others on one end and control of self on the other. These three verses in Galatians provide a timely and necessary cushion in Paul’s strong push for liberty. WE need such reminders, since it is our nature to go overboard with freedom and turn it into indulgence that exploits and offends others. Love – true love – won’t let it happen.

CLARIFICATION OF OUR CALLING (Galatians 5:13a)

¹³ *For you, brethren, have been called to liberty...*” Needless to say, Paul was (and still is) criticized for teaching unrestrained liberty. Anyone teaching grace lives with that unwarranted criticism. For Paul it was necessary to clarify the truth of liberty to reduce misunderstanding, particularly with baby and adolescent Christians. This is essential for us, as well.

3 Essentials for Believers Concerning our Freedom in Christ:

1. **The fact of our freedom** – Again, Paul says in the first part of **verse 13, “¹³ For you, brethren, have been called to liberty...**” You were called to liberty or freedom. That is the calling of believers. We are free! Fact! But what kind of freedom?

Some Freedoms That Are Ours As Believers:

- (1) **Freedom from the overwhelming power of sin and Satan –**
 - (2) **Freedom to obey the Savior’s words... to follow His model –**
 - (3) **Freedom from eternal punishment and condemnation –**
 - (4) **Freedom to live without guilt... fear... accusing conscience –**
 - (5) **Freedom to come boldly into God’s presence in prayer -**
2. **The extent of our freedom** – Notice in verse 13 Paul says, **“brethren”**... **“¹³ For you, brethren, have been called to liberty...”** No exceptions... every person in the family of God. That included even those believers in Galatia who’d been sucked into legalism and were free without realizing it. No one had (or has) more freedom than another. All had (or have) an equal amount. The freedom we have in Christ is for all Christians... all believers. You are free in Christ as a believer, but a word of caution... that doesn’t mean that is always best to do what you are free to do.
 3. **The implication of our freedom** – Had Paul laid aside his pen at this point, all kinds of questions would have arisen... questions with which Christians still struggle today.

Questions Believers/Christians Should Ask Themselves Concerning Their Freedom:

- (1) **Am I free to do as I please? –**
- (2) **Am I free to let it all hang out, regardless?**
- (3) **Am I free, if I please, to run wild, then be forgiven?**

At this point it became necessary for the apostle of grace to protect this doctrine from irresponsible abuse. *These questions do not reflect freedom, but anarchy (disorder, chaos, lawlessness, mayhem, rebellion).*

LIMITATIONS ON OUR LIBERTY (Galatians 5:13b-15)

An attentive reading of these verses calls attention to three specific areas of restraint which must be applied to the believer's liberty or freedom in Christ.

3 Important Limitations Paul (under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in Scripture) put on the Believer's Freedom in Christ:

1. **Christian freedom is not ever freedom to indulge the flesh** – Notice Paul's words again in **verse 13**, paying close attention to how He qualifies our liberty or freedom in the second half of that verse, *"¹³ For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another."* He commands us *"... only do not use liberty (your freedom) as an opportunity for the flesh..."* Two words from the text should be amplified. First the word *"flesh"* in **verse 13**. The word is not a reference to skin stretched over bone and muscle. The word translated in **verse 13** as *"flesh"* is referring to *"the fallen nature of man"* or *"sinful inclinations of fallen man"*... that part of us prone to sin. The second important word there the word translated as *"opportunity."* This is from a Greek term describing a place from which an offensive is launched... a base of operations. In other words, "Don't use your liberty/freedom as a base of operation for launching fleshly indulgences, calling it "freedom in Christ" so as to gain relief from guilt." ***Qualification: Christian freedom is freedom from sin, not freedom to sin.***
2. **Christian freedom is not ever freedom to exploit others** – Notice Paul's words again in **verse 13**, and notice that He doesn't only qualify our liberty by saying we ought not to use our freedom as a license to the flesh, but pay close attention to how He further qualifies it in the last few words of that verse... notice it, *"¹³ For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another."* Freedom means that one is free to approach God without fear, not to exploit one's neighbor or fellow Christian. Freedom turns others not into things to be used, but into people with dignity to be loved. And Paul says it in **verse 15** our freedom is never a license to *"bite and devour"* one another.

"The church is the only army that shoots its wounded." – Keith Miller

3. **Christian freedom is not freedom to disregard the needs of others** – Paul says in **verse 14**, *"¹⁴ For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" Paul was not teaching a philosophy of "live and let live." Freedom didn't mean one could live totally free from anyone else without concern for them and their feelings.*

GUIDELINES FOR BALANCE

Such principles arise by way of response to a root question: "When should love restrain liberty?" Let's put this in personal terms.

3 Guidings Principles for When Love Should Restrain Liberty:

1. **When my liberty could hurt my brother or sister (Romans 14:1-3, 13-15)** – Romans 14:1-3 says, *“Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things. ² For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. ³ Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him.”* And in verses 13-15, *“¹³ Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother’s way. ¹⁴ I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. ¹⁵ Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died.”*
2. **When my liberty would hinder God’s work (Romans 14:16-20)** – Paul said in Romans 14:16-20, *“¹⁶ Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil; ¹⁷ for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸ For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men. ¹⁹ Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another. ²⁰ Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense.”*
3. **When my liberty creates unrest in my own conscience (Romans 14:21-23, 2 Corinthians 5:14-15)** - Listen to Paul again in Romans 14:21-23, *“²¹ It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak.”* ²² Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. ²³ But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.” And in 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 Paul says it like this, *“¹⁴ For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; ¹⁵ and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.”*