

Adult Teaching Resources

June 26, 2016



Getting On in Galatia: Paul's Angriest Letter (May 29-July 3)

Saul's Call Makes Paul — Galatians 1:11-24

Do You Feel "Justified"? — Galatians 2:15-21

No More Lines — Really? — Galatians 3:19-29

What Will Prevail? — Galatians 5:1, 13-25

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What Will Prevail?

Galatians 5:1, 13-25

FIT Teaching Guide

by Rick Jordan

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Baptists Today*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Baptists Today* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Baptists Today* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Fellowship Question

Use *one* of the following to break the ice, to begin discussion, and lead into the study:

To me, July 4th means ... [cookouts, freedom, fireworks, vacation, etc.]

Of the five highlighted in the US Bill of Rights, which is your most cherished freedom? (These are in the US Bill of Rights: Freedom of religion; speech; press; assembly; petition)

Information

Of course, we Americans love our freedom! We have freedom to move from state to state, from job to job, from church to church, whenever we please. Those in Baptist and other congregational churches enjoy the freedoms to worship in whatever style we wish and to choose whatever we leaders we wish.

Paul was very concerned for the young church in Galatia, because they seemed willing to reject the spiritual and religious freedom they enjoyed in Christ for the bondage of keeping the old Jewish laws. “Concerned” is actually too casual a word — Paul was furious.

[Have a class member read Galatians 5:1-12.]

Strong words! The Bible Lesson writer notes, “Paul’s strong words reveal how firmly he believed that putting one’s faith in Christ and putting one’s faith in works were mutually exclusive.”

Paul was angry that some of the men were choosing to be circumcised. He was not angry about the “what” (the act of circumcision) but about the “why” of circumcision. In hopes to earn salvation, these men were adding an act of personal sacrifice unnecessarily. They were rejecting the truth that no act we do can earn God’s love for us. God loves us with a grace-filled, unconditional love. The men found it hard to believe that God would accept them unless they first “did” something — in this case something painful, to prove they were really serious about this.

Do we have that same temptation? Do we place “Jesus and...” conditions on potential converts? Do we put that burden on others who might want to follow Christ and/or join our congregation?

Information *continued*

“Set free” implies that they were under constraint or bondage. What is a Christian set free from? [Note to teacher: probably a vague answer of “sin” will be given.]

A little bit later in his letter, Paul will itemize some sins. These are not every sin, but a sampler platter of spiritual poisons.

[Have a class member read Galatians 5:19-21a.]

Let’s choose a sin and explore together, how does that particular sin create bondage? Let’s take “envy.” How does the sin of envy put us in bondage?

[Have a class member read Galatians 5:13-15.]

There is another real risk of the spiritual life. A person might decide, “Now that I have (said that I believe in Jesus; been baptized; been confirmed; joined the church, etc.), I can live however I want.” How does this attitude of license put us into bondage?

“Liberty may be lost, in the first place, by legalism...But liberty may also be lost by licence. [*sic*] The man who sets out to express his freedom by following nothing but his own pleasure will find himself bound to himself, the slave of his own lusts and passions. He too has lost his freedom.” [C.K. Barrett. *Freedom and Obligation: A Study of the Epistle to the Galatians*. Philadelphia: Westminster. p. 56.]

In verse 6, Paul states, “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.” Legalistic customs and religious rites “don’t count.” But if we are to experience real freedom in Christ, it comes through an active expression of faith through love. So, there is freedom. But there is also an obligation.

What if we replaced “circumcision/uncircumcision” in verse 6 with some religious rites of the Church — baptism, church membership, denominational affiliation, speaking in tongues, etc.? Are we tempted to put these above “faith expressing itself through love”?

[Have a class member read Galatians 5:16-18.]

“In general, we might say that ‘being free’ is the liberation of a person’s spirit from everything that shackles it to sin and ugliness; ‘being free’ is the liberation of a person’s spirit to do what God wants, to be what God wants, and to enjoy the life God gives us on this earth.” [Scot McKnight. *Galatians*, The NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan. 1995. p. 245.]

So we are set free FROM, but we are also set free TO. We are set free *from* living “in the flesh.” We are set free *to* “live in love.”

“Flesh is a positive force for evil, and it will take advantage of Cristian freedom if it can... You are not to use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh; but, on the contrary, through love serve one another... The opposite of flesh is love; and love means serving one another... Flesh, defined by its opposite, means self-centered existence, egocentric existence; not specifically

Information *continued*

a proclivity to carnal sins (as we call them), but a concern focused upon oneself... [F]or Paul 'flesh' can express itself in non-material, indeed in religious ways." [Barrett, 72f.]

Some of the sins that Paul describes are sexual sins. These are the sins our secular culture religious cultures seems to be obsessed over. However, most of the sins in Paul's list are not sexual sins. All of these can also be found in contemporary culture — and many of them in the Church itself.

Let's listen again to this list, and as we do let us consider how these are "self-centered existence" and "egocentric existence":

[Have a class member read Galatians 5:19-21.]

Paul gives a warning that those who claim to live by faith but actually live by the flesh will not inherit the kingdom of God. They have rejected God's command to love. They have crowned themselves "god" of their own kingdoms. Either God is God or God is not, practically speaking, God. What do you think of this theology?

Paul called that list (and, again, these are not the only self-centered sins there are!) "works of the flesh." Now he offers a different list.

[Have a class member read Galatians 5: 22-25.]

Paul calls the first list "works," but the second list "fruit." What is the difference? Why not call them both "works"?

"Paul's use of 'works' suggests works that men do, and these [fruit] are not human products but the result of God's dwelling within men... All [of the fruit of the Spirit] are the consequences of the self-forgetfulness that looks away from itself to God." [Barrett, 77.]

Paradoxically, true freedom comes to us as we submit to God. Indeed, when Paul begins most of his letters, he refers to himself as "Paul, a slave of Christ."

[Have a class member read Matthew 6:24.]

We are going to serve somebody or something. Our Master may be fame, lust, pride, or wealth. Our Master may be our self-interest. But those masters lead only to spiritual bondage. Or, we can be slaves of Christ, which leads to full freedom and a final fulfillment of who we were created to become.

Transformational Exercise

With freedom comes responsibility. We use our freedom in Christ to work for the emancipation of other souls. Paul does not want the Galatians to retreat into spiritual slavery. Once free, they are to remain free, but this is not freedom for the sake of freedom. Rather, since I am free, I will invite others to experience this freedom also.

[Read or summarize the following illustration.]

Transformational Exercise *continued*

Harriet Tubman has been in the news recently, as her image will next grace the front of the US twenty dollar bill. According to the PBS series, “Africans in America”:

“Harriet Tubman is perhaps the most well-known of all the Underground Railroad’s ‘conductors.’ During a ten-year span she made 19 trips into the South and escorted over 300 slaves to freedom...Tubman was born a slave in Maryland’s Dorchester County around 1820. At age five or six, she began to work as a house servant. Seven years later she was sent to work in the fields...In 1849, in fear that she, along with the other slaves on the plantation, was to be sold, Tubman resolved to run away. She set out one night on foot. With some assistance from a friendly white woman, Tubman was on her way. She followed the North Star by night, making her way to Pennsylvania and soon after to Philadelphia, where she found work and saved her money. The following year she returned to Maryland and escorted her sister and her sister’s two children to freedom. She made the dangerous trip back to the South soon after to rescue her brother and two other men. On her third return, she went after her husband, only to find he had taken another wife. Undeterred, she found other slaves seeking freedom and escorted them to the North. ...Tubman carried a gun which she used to threaten the fugitives if they became too tired or decided to turn back, telling them, ‘You’ll be free or die.’” [<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4p1535.html>]

How could we relate Harriet Tubman’s experience to our spiritual experience? (“You’ll be free or die!” is close to what Paul is saying to the Galatians, in a spiritual sense. We are set free so that we may love those who remain enslaved and to invite them to experience freedom in Christ. Etc.)

In his last writing, the book of Romans, Paul confessed that he struggled to be completely free of sins that enslaved him.

[Have a class member read Romans 7:21-25.]

What can this passage tell us about our spiritual life? [We will struggle with the lure of sin all our life; Christ will set us free, ultimately; etc.]

In eight days, we will celebrate our freedoms, nationally. As we approach that, let us recall the spiritual emancipation that God offers us through Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

[Close in a prayer something like this: *“For freedom you have set us free. Help us overcome any temptation to return to sin’s tyranny. Live through us as we love others and serve them. Amen.”*]

Comments or Questions for Rick Jordan? You may send comments to the lesson plan author at rjordan@cbfnc.org. Rick is also available to lead workshops and conferences on Christian Education, with particular emphasis on how best to use the FIT Faith model.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartlege

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Baptists Today*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Baptists Today* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Baptists Today* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Filling in the gaps — The Revised Common Lectionary text for the day is Gal. 5:1, 13-26. We have chosen to include some brief comments on vv. 2-12, as well, so we can better appreciate Paul’s entire argument.

Free bird — Here’s a longer version of Loren Eisley’s story about the sparrow hawk mentioned in the lesson: Eisley was a well-known American naturalist with a literary gift that enabled him to share concepts learned from science with a broad audience. His writing communicates far more than science.

Eisley died in 1977, just after putting together a collection of essays and poems that were published as *The Star Thrower*. One of the essays is a biographical account of an early experience that says something important about freedom.

As a young naturalist, Eisley spent much time in the wilderness doing primary research on living creatures in the wild. Museums, zoos, and similar institutions funded much of his work. On one occasion, as a way of providing some return on their investment, Eisley set out to capture some interesting specimens of birds for a museum’s aviary display.

Deep in the dry mountains of the Big Sky Country, Eisley knew of an abandoned cabin in a high draw of that desolate terrain. He knew that birds of the region often flew in through the tattered roof and roosted there. So, Eisley gathered his equipment, made his way to the cabin, and crouched beneath an old mantle piece. He covered himself with a blanket and waited for darkness to arrive, hoping birds would soon follow.

As dusk fell, he heard the flutter of wings and the scratching of two birds settling on the rugged mantle. Carefully he reached up, trying to grab both of the birds, but he only caught one. The other bird screamed and attacked his hand, pecking and clawing until he turned the first bird loose, but by then he had captured the one who was chewing up his finger. Finally, Eisley was able to pinion its wings and hold it from behind, so that he could control it.

The bird was a fine specimen of a male sparrow hawk, who had sacrificed himself so that his mate could be free. Wishing that he could have captured both and kept the pair together, Eisley carefully put the bird in a small box designed to hold the bird so tightly that it could not hurt itself. Then he bandaged his hand, rolled out his sleeping bag, and turned in for the night.

The next morning, Eisley took his gear outside and checked on the hawk, carefully removing it from the box. Apparently sensing that the cause was lost, the bird remained limp in his hand, with listless eyes. Moved by a sudden impulse, Eisley stroked the hawk, then gently laid it on the grass. For a moment, the bird did not move, not realizing that it was free. Then, in a flurry of feathers, the hawk launched itself straight into the sky. Eisley recalled that his most remarkable memory of that moment was the sharp cry of joy that came, not from the male, but from the mate, who had been circling overhead. Rushing together in a joyful

reunion, the two hawks began an acrobatic dance with all the sky for their ballroom.

What a special moment it must have been to see that brave hawk set free to become what it was meant to be — a creature of the wild, an inhabitant of the sky.

Christians are likewise called, in freedom, to become what God has created us to be.

Strong words — Paul was so disturbed what had happened in the Galatian churches that he used shocking language. Concerning those who sought to persuade the new believers to adopt circumcision — removing the foreskin from the male penis — that he said “I wish those who unsettle you would castrate themselves!” (v. 12). The verb he used is may be stronger than the translation: it could be translated as “cut themselves off,” or “emasculate themselves.” Some commentators argue that Paul only meant that he wanted them to cut themselves off from the Galatian churches, but his intention seems clear. Even though it’s an obvious hyperbole, the expression is starkly forceful.

Flesh and Spirit — When Paul spoke of “the flesh,” it was not in the metaphysical sense of separating the “evil” body from the “good” spirit, as in some Greek thought, but as a euphemism for self-directed human desires.

Running into prison — Our ideas about freedom come from the ongoing idea that the people most free are the rich aristocrats who have the time and money to do whatever they want. But that idea of freedom is a fantasy. As long as we think that freedom means doing whatever we want, we are so enslaved by that fantasy that we have no idea what real freedom is. We are like Hansel and Gretel in the fairy tale, running headlong into the gingerbread house, expecting sweets but discovering a prison.

Good fruit and bad — While Paul sometimes used “fruit” in the literal sense, he most commonly spoke of it metaphorically. He spoke of people who came to Christ through his ministry as fruit in Rom. 1:13 and Col. 1:6, and as the outward signs of faithful living (Rom. 6:22; 7:4; Eph. 5:9; Phil. 1:11, 4:17; Col. 1:10) or ungodly ways (Rom. 6:21, 7:5; Eph 5:11). In Rom. 15:28, he spoke of contributions made for the suffering believers in Jerusalem as “fruit” given by the churches of Asia.

Spiritual work? — While Paul contrasts the “works of the flesh” with the “fruit of the Spirit” in Galatians 5, he does use “fruit” for both flesh and spirit in 6:7-8, and he also used “work” with reference to spiritual matters in other places (5:6, 6:4, 10, cf. 2 Cor. 9:8, Phil. 2:12, 1 Thess. 1:3).

Richard Longenecker notes that we should not emphasize the Spirit’s role to the point of suggesting that Christians are entirely passive: “For as the exhortations throughout this entire section suggest, combined with the givenness of these virtues by God is the believer’s active involvement in expressing them in his or her own lifestyle — or as Paul puts it pointedly a couple verses later: ‘Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit’ (v. 25; *Galatians*, vol. 41 of Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 259-260).

Crucifying the flesh — “For Paul, to claim identification with Christ in his crucifixion means that one cannot espouse a lifestyle that expresses either a legalistic or a libertine orientation. For in being crucified with Christ both the demands of the law and the impulses of the flesh have been crucified as well (cf. Rom 7:1–6; Col 2:13–15; Longenecker, 264).

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartlege

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How can one be free — and be a slave?

Paul's language in 5:13 appears to describe a conundrum: he speaks to the Galatians in personal, impassioned terms that sound like a rallying cry: "For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters ..."

Yet, he knows that freedom can be misunderstood and misused. Without the voluntary recognition of appropriate limits, freedom devolves into chaos, a tyranny of our baser instincts. Thus, he tells them what not to do: freedom should not be used as "an opportunity for self-indulgence."

Imagine a family in which the parents want to go out of town, and decide to leave two teenagers at home. The teens are delighted by the prospect of freedom from parental control, but left with a clear warning not to let their freedom become an opportunity for misbehavior. If the teens turn their liberty into a weekend bash for their friends, it's unlikely that any future freedoms would be severely curtailed.

Paul doesn't want believers to be motivated by fear, however, but by love, a guiding principle that he previously mentioned with respect to salvation in v. 6: "the only thing that counts is faith working through love." The experience of Christ's love becomes the primary guide for Christian living. Now Paul tells the Galatians what they *are* to do: rather than using freedom as a free pass to bad behavior, he says "through love become slaves to one another."

How can Paul say we are called to freedom and called to be slaves at the same time? He doesn't even use a milder injunction to "serve one another," but a blatant command to "become slaves to one another."

Despite the language, Paul was not suggesting that believers leave their homes and live as slaves to others. Still he *was* insisting that followers of Jesus regard others' needs above their own. To love others as Jesus loved is to do so sacrificially, being willing to do whatever is needed for others' good. In Paul's day, a slave would not question his or her master's orders, but obey. Christians, in Paul's mind, should not stop to deliberate whether to show kindness and care to others, but just do it — freely — not because the law says so, but because of love.

Parents of a newborn, in a sense, become slaves to the new life they have brought into the world. They respond to the baby's cry and rise at all hours of the day and night to provide food, comfort, and clean diapers. They don't do that because there's a law against child neglect: they do it out of love.

It may seem extreme to extrapolate a parent's love for children to the believer's love for others, but that's the image Paul is using. Christ has called us to freedom within the kingdom of God — and in that freedom we become "slaves" to one another — because we love.