

GALATIANS

THE FREEDOM OF THE GOSPEL

The Gospel Enables us to Serve - Galatians 5:13-26

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

*(Leaders, please use these questions **as a guide for discussion**. Please don't feel like you have to go through every one!)*

Warm-Up

1. When someone says, "You're free to do whatever you want," what would you naturally want to do? What does that reveal about how we normally think about freedom?

Read Galatians 5:13-15

2. Read Galatians 5:13–15. What does Paul affirm about the Galatians in verse 13? What warning does he immediately add?
3. What does Paul mean by the "flesh" in this passage? How might our sinful nature try to take advantage of the freedom Christ gives us?
4. Paul tells us not to use our freedom for the flesh, but instead to "through love serve one another." What is surprising about being freed from slavery only to become servants of one another?
5. How does Paul's command to "love your neighbour as yourself" help us understand what Christian freedom is actually for?
6. Verse 15 warns about "biting and devouring one another." What might this look like within a church community today?
7. In what ways can busyness, family life or our personal schedules cause other people to become interruptions rather than people to love and serve?
8. What makes it difficult for us to honestly receive service from other Christians? How can allowing someone else to help us actually be an important part of Christian community?
9. The sermon gave the practical challenge: "Ask one person, 'How can I serve you this week?' and do it." Who could you ask that question this week?

Read Galatians 5:16-26

10. What do you think it practically means to "walk by the Spirit" or to follow the Spirit's lead?
11. What stands out to you about Paul's list of the works of the flesh? Why do you think so many of them concern our relationships with other people?
12. Now read verses 22–23. Why is it significant that Paul calls these qualities the fruit of the Spirit rather than the works of the Spirit? What difference does that make to how we pursue love, joy, peace, patience and the other qualities?
13. Which aspect of the fruit of the Spirit would make the greatest difference in your relationships at the moment? Rather than simply "trying harder" to develop it, what would it look like to depend upon the Spirit to grow it in you?
14. What practical habits could help you become more attentive to God's presence and keep in step with the Spirit this week? How might doing that make you more ready to love and serve others?

PRAY: Heavenly Father, whose service is perfect freedom, thank you for freeing us from sin and slavery to religious works and giving us your Spirit to transform us. Please grow your fruit within us and keep us walking in-step with what you are doing in our lives. In Jesus' name, Amen.

TITLE: The Gospel enables us to Serve

PASSAGE: Galatians 5:13-26

LOCATION: St John's Wishart 9AM

BI: We are free in order to love and serve one another by the power of the Holy Spirit

STRUCTURE:

- Free to Serve [13-15]
- Through the Holy Spirit [16-26]

- And after last week's passage where Paul made it abundantly clear that we are completely free from slavery to the law, free from religiosity, free from mundane, monotonous, man-made mandates...
- We might be left with the question...well...now what?
- What are we actually free to do now?
- Can we just do whatever we want now? Can we just go nuts?
- Well - no.

- And this was hinted at last week - Paul said that circumcision counts for nothing but only faith working through love.
- That is - faith that is active...faith that is alive and busy loving one another.
- And what Paul means by this is explained and fleshed out in today's passage.
- And today we'll see that We are free in order to love and serve one another by the power of the Holy Spirit
 - Free to Serve... [13-15]
 - ...Through the Holy Spirit [16-26]

- **Free to Serve**
- *Now some of you may know this about me, but when it comes to confectionary or sweet snacks, I have absolutely NO impulse control.*
- *When I was at clergy conference a couple of weeks ago, every table had some nice mints on it, laid out for people to enjoy throughout the session.*
- *Well - my mints were completely gone in the first 10min!*
- *I was kind of embarrassed, so I seized my opportunities to indulge when no one was looking!*
- Well - Paul writes to the Galatians, urging them to not let this new found freedom from the Law that they have in Christ as an opportunity for their sinful nature to take advantage of it...and grab a foothold!
- V13 "For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another."
- So he firstly affirms what he has already told them - YES, they were called to freedom.
- Yes, all in Christ are completely free from the Law...and free from sin...
- But not free to do anything..
 - Paul talks about our flesh here.
 - And the word for flesh "Sarks" can be used in different ways...
 - But here it means our fleshly, sinful nature, or our disposition against God.
- You see, given the new found freedom that we have...sometimes our sinful nature or *our flesh* or can jump on that. It can take advantage of that.
- Our stubborn wills and hearts can say
 - "aha! Since we don't have to follow that boring old Law anymore...live it up!"
 - Or even "well since Jesus has already forgiven us, it doesn't really matter what we do"
 - Or even "Since God is Love..God just has to forgive whatever we do"

- But Paul commands - don't let this happen BUT through love serve one another. Or probably more accurately:
 - Through love...become slaves to one another in love.

- Here's what Paul is saying - we are free from slavery in order to become slaves of one [another...](#)
- We are Free in order to serve one another
- We aren't free to do whatever we want...we are free to go and love and serve others.
- This is the great paradox - we are totally free! But freed in order to serve.
- Martin Luther in his treatise to Pope Leo "the Freedom of a Christian" in his introduction writes this:
 - "The Christian individual is a completely free lord of all, subject to none. The Christian individual is a completely dutiful servant of all, subject to all."
- So, we are free in order to put one another's needs above our own...we are free in order to seek out the needs of others...free to listen to each others troubles and pray for one another...free to help provide for the physical and practical needs of one another...
- For V14 "For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself. But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another."
- The heart of the Law - is love. The service of one another.
- This fulfills the essence and message of the Old Testament Law!
- So we no longer have to DO the law in order to be saved (which isn't possible) but since we are saved through the death and resurrection of Jesus, we are free to FULFIL the heart of the law, enabled by the Holy Spirit.
- But if we don't love one another as God's people - then we'll cannibalise one another.
- That's what Paul means in V15.
- It seems that in the churches of Galatia - there was infighting. There was competition with one another, a preoccupation with spiritual achievement, one-upmanship!
 - You can imagine the turmoil that the church may have been thrown into when the judaisers came with their message that was different to Paul's.
 - You can imagine someone saying "we'll we've got it right and you don't! Nananana"
 - In fact - that's why this whole section has such a great focus on relationships!
- So Paul says, there is to be none of that. We're free in order to serve one another.
- I think one of the dangers that we can fall into in modern Australian Christianity is that we recognise our salvation in Christ, we know that we are free from the works of the Law in order to be saved - but we do this individually.
- We can turn our faith into an individualistic faith. Private.
- And even here at church, we can become so busy with life-stuff, that we forget about one another...we can forget about loving one another and serving one another...
- We can become so busy with our personal or family schedule that we schedule out room for others.
 - And people become an interruption to our lives instead of people to serve!
- And instead of serving one another in love - we serve one another almost out of guilt...or embarrassment...or obligation...
- Now - I'm so thankful that this isn't a common thing here at St John's. But we must be on our guard!
- So - here's my challenge to you: this morning at morning tea - ask one person "How can I serve you this week" and do it!
- The flip side of that is being open and honest to share really how things are when asked.
- We can become so individualistic that we refuse help. We put on a brave face, a calm demeanor, not letting anyone else in...or not letting each other know about what's really going on...
 - Well that's not serving our brothers and sisters in love - that's lying to them in pride!
 - Now of course - we don't have to lay our soul bare to everyone! But make sure that there's someone who knows what's happening in your life!
- And the way to be able to achieve this level of love and service and vulnerability and security in community - is through walking by the Spirit. OR walking in-step with the Spirit. Follow the leading of God's presence within us. Follow the one who constantly points us back to Christ.

- **Through the Holy Spirit [VV16-26]**

- Now - this is a great piece of Christianese and christian Jargon. "Walk by the Spirit".
- We might throw it around here and there - but what does it actually mean?
- Well let me use an example.
 - *When I had a bit more time on my hands as a single lad at bible college, I used to go to the Gym a bit.*
 - *I really enjoyed the classes that they had, and I had a particular love/hate relationship with a spin class that went for about 30minutes but it was all high-intensity.*
 - *But the thing about the classes is that all you had to do was follow the leader and the leaders instructions and obey them - and you'd get the best out of it!*
 - *So we'd be in the class with the instructor all on stationary bikes...they'd have a set routine...*
 - *And when the leader said GO HARD - all I had to do was GO HARD! Ramp up the resistance and Go nuts.*
 - *And when the leader said "take it easy" - well after coughing up my guts for a bit, then I took it easy.*
 - *I was following the lead of the leader. I was following them. I was walking in their footsteps. Obeying them!*
- And so - similarly to "walk by the Spirit" means living a life that's in step with the Spirit. A life that is in obedience to the Spirit.
- And if one of the main roles of the Spirit is to point us to Jesus, then - we could say, follow the leading of Jesus!
- So V16 "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh."
- If you want to live a life in loving service to others, submit to the Holy Spirit.
- If you want to live a life that's not submissive to the desires of our sinful nature - submit to the Holy Spirit.
- The Second half of V16 acts like a promise! Walk by the Spirit and you will certainly not gratify the sinful nature of your flesh.
- Sometimes when we're wrestling with a particular sin, sometimes we try and tackle it head on. We focus on it, try and wrestle it out of us. We become so hyper-aware of it, sometimes fixated on it so much that we go back to it!
- Well, Craig Keener in his commentary on Galatians writes this:
- "The way to overcome undisciplined fleshly passion is not to focus on the passion in hopes of mastering or suppressing it, but rather to live a life dominated by trusting in God, recognising one's new master in place of one's old one. Knowledge of the law does not automatically transform one's desires, but the Spirit can do so"
- The Spirit does what the law can't do. It helps us to obey.
- It's the new covenant promise as we heard from Ezekiel - of a new heart of flesh, not of stone. Of the Spirit. We can know God and actually fulfil the law! Because God himself is with us!
- The same Spirit that is the sign and seal of our justification, enables us to serve the one who saved us!
- The Spirit triumphs over the will of our sinful nature, over the flesh...the Spirit keeps us from doing those disobedient things that we want to do [as Paul writes in V17]
 - Now - of course we still wrestle with sin and obedience. But that wrestle is a good sign that the Spirit is doing his work.
 - Producing fruit in us.
- Because the works of the flesh lead to death; but walking instep with the Spirit leads to lively, Godly, fruit.
- Paul gives us a list of vices and a list of virtues.

- These lists aren't comprehensive or all encompassing! There are other lists in other letters which contain different items and different focusses - so in view of this, we aren't going to go into great detail into them..
- But let's look from V19 "Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, 21 envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."
- Paul firstly lists 15 different things that he calls works of the flesh.
- These are sinful works. Disobedient works.
- And they fall into 4 broad categories:
 - Sexuality
 - Spirituality
 - Social
 - Self-Control
- Sexuality: Paul front-loads this because sex is so important and a great gift from God! It's meant to be enjoyed and cherished but within the proper context that it was designed for - and that is consensual intimacy between a husband and wife. Anything outside of that is sexual immorality, or impure.
- Spirituality: Idolatry - worshipping any other gods or sorcery - the practise of witchcraft or consulting with mediums
- Social: Notice that out of the 15 vices - over half of them fall into the social or relationship category?
 - We're so quick to go straight to the biggies like sexual sin and maybe treat the rest as secondary?
 - But this is where Paul majors!
 - Enmity - hatred between people; strife, jealousy, anger, one-upmanship, party factions, fits of rage - all of these things bring disharmony and disunity to God's people!
- Self control - drunkenness - the abuse and overconsumption of alcohol and orgies - probably a reference to the wild parties of the day
- And Paul concludes that all who live according to these ways, who live according to the flesh, who don't walk in step with the Spirit V21C "will not inherit the Kingdom of God"
- That is - they won't get a place in it. They aren't living in reference to God. They aren't paying attention to him. So they'll be excluded.
- But V22 "The Fruit of the Spirit is"...but let's just take note of something here:
 - Notice that it's not *the works of the Spirit* is....? He used the phrase before "the works of the flesh - but here he calls this next list "The fruit of the Spirit"
 - Paul's is telling us that this isn't a list of stuff for people to do, but this is a list of characteristics and qualities that the Spirit **produces** in the person who walks in the Spirit.
 - You don't "DO" fruit - but Fruit is something that is grown. It's grown in those who submit to Christ!
 - So the way to fulfil this list isn't to try really hard to be peaceful, or gentle...it's to be more aware of God's presence and love with us, by his Spirit. THEN this fruit will grow in us:
- V22 "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law."
- We could do a whole sermon series on this list, but in short, this is a list of qualities that we see in God himself and in his son Jesus.
- And again - this is a list focussed on relationships with one another! Imagine a community where all of these were in people's lives and character?! Sign me up!
- So how can we be more aware of the Holy Spirit and God's presence with us? How can we walk in-step with the Spirit? How can we serve one another in love through the Holy Spirit?

- How can we be people who produce the Fruits of the Spirit?
 - Well, by listening to God through his Word. Having that in our mind and hearts and souls.
 - By realising how great a salvation that we have in Jesus and his death and resurrection and the freedom that we have in him!
 - Also, by having room in our lives to actually pay attention to God and have quiet time with him.
 - This might look different for different seasons...
 - It could look like literally time at home contemplating what God has done for you and giving thanks...
 - It could be a walk through nature, and looking at God's good creation and praising him!
 - It could be listening to worship music on the commute into work..
 - OR maybe something as simple as just a couple of deep breaths in the car before you move onto the next thing in your day...OR if you have young kids, maybe its a couple of deep breaths outside the car once they are safely strapped in!
- And the more and more we are in-sync with God's presence in us, the more our fleshly desires will shrink away
- V24-25 "And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit."
- Friends, Christ has set us free by his death and resurrection. Free from sin, free from the Law, free in his grace. So repent and turn to him. AND NOW be free TO serve one another in love.