



NG Study Guide: Galatians 5:13-21 :: “Freedom to Serve” [5.17.26]

Love God + know the Bible better:

1. Read the passage cited above, and try to answer the questions below before your group meets.
2. Regularly review the notes at the bottom.

The Study

Thesis: The way to be right with God is through faith in Christ. Followers of Christ will not abuse their Christian liberty as license to sin. Jesus’ followers know God’s love, love God and love and serve others. Today, we’ll discover the value of serving God by serving others.

Subject: Christian liberty and service

Object: Serve God by serving others

A. The motive to serve: The Love (13-15)

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. ¹⁴For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” ¹⁵But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another.

1. Freedom from sin not freedom to sin. Paul is addressing *brethren* (13) or followers of Christ. Jesus’ followers are *called to liberty* (13). As a follower of Jesus, you’ve been set free from the penalty and power of sin, and are no longer dominated by a world system opposed to God. We are *not to use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh* (13). *The flesh* refers to sinful human nature with its weakness and passions opposed to the spirit. The gospel message that we are saved by grace through faith is not a license to sin, but freedom to love as Jesus loves.

2. Freedom to serve others through Christ’s love. *Through love serve one another* (13), is literally “through the love.” It is the love of Jesus that motivates our service. Jesus is our example. Jesus declared the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and give His life to pay the price for our sin (Mark 10:45). In the Upper Room, Jesus washed the disciples feet and told them they should do likewise to one another (John 13:14-15). He then told them He was giving them a new commandment to love one another as He loved them. This type of love would distinguish them as disciples of Jesus (John 13:34-35). So, how does Jesus love? Jesus’ love is sacrificial, committed, and unmerited. His love shown to us motivates us to serve God by serving others.

3. Freedom to fulfill the law. *For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself”* (14). The Mosaic Law reveals God’s standard of moral perfection, and since no one can fully perform all the commandments it reveals our need for a savior. Nevertheless, Christ’s selfless sacrificial love shown to humanity fulfills the moral requirement between people. The *one word* (14) is love.

When Jesus was asked, “Which is the greatest commandment?” He replied quoting from Deuteronomy 6:5, You will love the Lord your God with all you heart, mind, soul, and strength. Then he added the second commandment which is like it, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18, Matthew 22:36-40), and Jesus noted that on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. Thus, the essence of all of

the Old Testament can be distilled to love God supremely and love your neighbor as you love yourself. These two commandments are linked together, and cannot be separated.

You cannot love others like Jesus loves without first responding to God's unconditional, unmerited, perfect love for you. And you cannot say that you truly love God without loving others. Your love for others proves your love for God and thus fulfills the law. As you appreciate and appropriate God's love for you, His love flows upon you and out of you upon others. You move from selfish to selfless.

Finally, Paul warns, *but if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!* (15). Paul is contrasting a selfless serving love that causes a community to thrive, and selfishness that is destructive to a community.

B. The Power to Serve: The Spirit (16-18)

I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. ¹⁷For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. ¹⁸But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

1. The Spirit enables us to do God's will (16)

We are to walk in the Spirit (16). To walk in the Spirit means to live life under the control of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:5-6).

It is the Spirit that gives victory over the flesh, not the law. God's will is revealed in the works and words of Jesus, but the power to *not fulfill the lust of the flesh* is supplied by God's Spirit. We will consider the works of the flesh in a moment (19-21), but they are set in contrast to Christ-like character described as fruit of the Spirit (which we'll consider next week (5:22-25)).

2. The Spirit empowers victory over the flesh (17-18)

For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish (17). As soon as you choose to live to please God, you discover how difficult it truly is.

But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law (18). Once you receive Christ, you experience a spiritual birth, and the Spirit of God battles against your flesh and its lusts that are contrary to God's will. The means to victory is not self-discipline to conform to the Mosaic Law, but spiritual transformation to conform to Jesus (Romans 7:15-8:17).

The need for the Holy Spirit's work in a believer's life cannot be overstated! At the beginning of Jesus' ministry, at His baptism, the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus to authenticate that He was the Messiah; and demonstrate our need for the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:16). Similarly, at the end of Jesus' earthly ministry, He instructed His disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they had received the empowerment of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-8). In essence, we cannot rightly live for God by man's efforts at morality, but need God's Spirit to transform and conform us to Christ-likeness.

If you have received Jesus and the Holy Spirit, *you are not under the law* (18). Inevitably, we will not do what God's Spirit is leading us to do (17). This is our struggle this side of eternity. How comforting it is to know that we are *not under the law* and thus not condemned. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1).

C. The obstacle to serving: The Flesh (19-21)

¹⁹Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, ²⁰idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, ²¹envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

In these three verses, Paul describes *the works of the flesh* (19) and places them in three groups (See also, Romans 1:29-32, Mark 7:20-23, 1Timothy 1:9-10, 2Timothy 3:2-5). They are *evident* [19] or seen by God and others. There are eighteen terms, but alas it is only a partial list.

1. Sexual sin (19):

Adultery is unfaithfulness in marriage.

Fornication is the Greek term “porneia” which is the root of our English pornography, and refers generally to all sexual immorality.

Uncleanness is the opposite of purity, and relates to lustful pleasures.

Lewdness refers to no sense of shame re sexual immorality which was characteristic of the Greco-Roman world (and perhaps ours too).

2. Religious sin: (20):

Idolatry relates to the worship of false gods. Whatever you look to as your ultimate source of contentment and satisfaction, other than God, is an idol. It can be wealth, possessions, recreation, career, achievements, people (spouse, friends, and family). We are to worship God, love people, and use things, but we may use people, love self, and worship things. Jesus said, whatever you worship that you will serve (Matthew 4:10).

Sorcery is the Greek *pharmakia* and concerns drugs, witchcraft, and the occult.

3. Sin in relations with others (20-21):

In verse 20, *Hatred* (20) relates to malice, *contentions* speak of quarrels, and *jealousy* is wanting what another has. *Wrath* involves *angry outbursts*, and *selfish ambitions* is the sin of self-centeredness. *Dissensions* relates to separation over disagreements.

In verse 21, *envy* is being upset about another’s blessings, *murder* is an unjustified taking of life, *drunkenness* involves intoxication. Being filled with the Holy Spirit is set in contrast to intoxication (Ephesians 5:18). *Revelries* relates to out of control partying.

Paul repeats a warning that he had apparently shared when he was with them, *I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God* (21). Those who have a lifestyle characterized by being controlled by their flesh without a desire to confess, and repent are not saved.

We are saved by grace through faith, and true saving faith results in love for God and love for others, a desire to serve God by serving others, and a transformed relationship with our flesh by God’s Spirit. The works of the flesh hinder our relationship with God and ability to love Him and others. The answer is yielding to God’s Spirit and growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus!

Study Guide Qs:

Q1. In what ways can serving one another build-up a community of faith?

Q2. In what ways can failing to love and serve one another damage a community of faith?

Q3. Share about an experience where you felt led by the Spirit to serve.

Q4. In what ways might the works of the flesh hinder love and service to others?

“Disciples Who Dig Deeper” (optional or alternative study)

1. Read Romans 7-8. What did you discover about the problem of the flesh, the inadequacy of self-discipline, and the work of the Holy Spirit? How would you like to apply those lessons to your life?
2. Read the following passages describing the works of the flesh: Rom.1:29-32, Mk.7:20-23, 1Tim.1:9-10, 2Tim.3:2-5. What did you discover, and how would you like to apply those insights to your life?

Love your neighbors (inside + outside the group) better:

1. Who would like to share how they sought to befriend or build relationship with their neighbors inside or outside the group?
2. Are there some needs that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbors inside or outside the group?

Disciples who make disciples:

1. Who would like to share how they recently sought to make disciples?
2. Here is a disciple making idea to consider for the weeks ahead:

Sample: Pray for God to open doors for you to talk about Jesus with neighbors where you live, work, school, play and worship.

Prayer [Loving God and Neighbors better]:

Close the NG meeting with a time of group prayer. Encourage each participant to pray, but don't force anyone to pray. Encourage the group to keep their prayers brief so that each person can pray.

Notes:

1. Preparation and participation: Group participants should read the teacher's notes contained in this study guide prior to your meeting and be prepared to discuss the content. Remember the purpose of preparation and participation is to accelerate growth as disciples who loves God supremely, loves neighbors like self, and make other disciples who do likewise. **Seek to involve as many group participants as possible.** A good group discussion time allows people to get to know the passage and one another better.

2. Consider what about the passage is particularly exciting, challenging, or confusing?

If a leader is uncertain about a question of doctrine or theology don't hesitate to follow-up with your coach during the week. Then revisit the issue(s) when the group gathers next time.

3. The "Disciples Who Dig Deeper" section provides some optional or alternative study and discussion activities. As a group leader, you can choose to focus on the "Disciples Who Dig Deeper" section, include part of that section in your group meeting, or not use it at all. Try to give the group sufficient notice so they can be prepared for the meeting.

4. The "Love your neighbors" section encourages participants to love neighbors inside and outside the group better. As a leader, discuss this section frequently.

5. The "Disciples who make disciples" section provides a helpful idea, and encourages participants to be disciples who make disciples. Leaders should regularly encourage the group to review and discuss this section.

**Next week's message:
Galatians 5:22-26 :: "Freedom like Jesus"**