

▶ GLENSTONE CHAPEL ◀
Community Group Bible Study Guide

Passage: Galatians 5:1-15

For use May 25-31, 2008

**QUESTIONS TO USE IN GROUP
OR INDIVIDUAL STUDY**

LAUNCHING ¹ [5-10 minutes]

1. What hassles did you face with your parents when you had obtained your driver's license and could legally drive on your own? How were **freedom issues** worked out when you wanted to use the family car? Or wanted to get a car for your own use?
2. "You notice a friend doing something self-destructive . . . but without any self-awareness. Do you point it out? What happened the last time you did?"²
3. Have you ever thought of **God as a "heavenly policeman** just waiting to catch someone out of line"³ **Check (✓) one; please share with the group:**
 - ___ A. "The father who raised me was a strict disciplinarian, not very affirming; so I have thought of God as a policeman."
 - ___ B. "Occasionally I veer away from a view of God as One of Love and Grace; then I cower in fear."
 - ___ C. "A fearsome God? Usually not. He's a 'warm fuzzy' for me."
 - ___ D. "I've never have had such an idea."
 - ___ E. "I don't know what this question is about."
 - ___ F. Another option? _____

UNDERSTANDING ⁴ [15-25 minutes]

1. Read the passage aloud. Possibly use a version other than *NIV*. "What's at stake here? What does Paul mean by 'yoke of slavery'?"⁵
2. What supporting evidence in this passage shows that verse 6 is Paul's central thought?⁶
3. As a group list the **imperatives and/or commands** Paul enunciates for his straying friends, in verses 1-2, 13-15.

¹Choose a question or two to steer thinking into the passage.; **note**, this is NOT an "ice-breaker."

²*1 John/Galatians*, Serendipity House, page 56.

³*Word in Life Bible*, page 1838.

⁴Possible questions to discover the meaning of Galatians 5:1-15.

⁵*1 John/Galatians*, Serendipity House, page 6.

⁶*For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.*" (

4. What **interpersonal tensions** can you identify:
 - (a) between Paul and the unnamed⁷ rabbinical outside agitators? How intensely does Paul dislike them?
 - (b) between Paul and the Galatian believers? How intense are Paul's concerns?
5. If someone in the group has ever competed in track events, ask him/her to explain Paul's meaning in verse 7.
6. What *either-or* choices did the Apostle Paul set before the Galatian believers?
7. "Since rule-keeping isn't the way to God, what is (vv. 5-6)? How are we to show our dependency on Christ?"⁸

REFLECTING ⁹ [10-15 minutes]

1. Some people believe a **myth** that goes like this: "**Christianity stifles personal freedom.**" They may ". . . resent Christianity and think of it as an obstacle to freedom, not a friend to it."¹⁰ **To what extent do you agree? Disagree?**
2. "How have you seen Christian freedom abused? How is verse 6 an antidote to those who think their freedom in Christ gives them license to do anything they wish?"¹¹
3. How might you increase the intensity of the love that you show to your "neighbors" (from next-door to around the globe) as you serve them?

FURTHER REFLECTION (on your own)

Who's YOUR "neighbor"? A family member? Next-door? Subdivision residents? Town/county/state voters? "The Poor"? Needy peoples around the world?

Feedback? E-mail Dan at NananDrDan@aol.com

FOR PERSONAL PREPARATION

Passage: Galatians 5:1-15

⁷". . . **whoever he may be.**" Gal. 5:10

⁸*1 John/Galatians*, Serendipity House, page 56.

⁹Choose one or two questions to make use of truths from Galatians 5:1-15 in daily life.

¹⁰*Word in Life Bible*, page 1838.

¹¹*1 John/Galatians*, Serendipity House, page 56.

1. To think about: "What does the freedom [of the believer] mean in practice? How far does Christian liberty extend? What are its limits, if any?"¹²

2. Possible outline:

- The Effect of Liberty¹³

- A. Introductory Statement, vs. 1

- B. The Consequences of Legalism, vss. 2-12

- C. The Definition of Freedom, vss. 13-15

3. Who's who? A familiar scenario in this letter. It can be viewed as a triangle, with Paul appealing to the Galatians on the one hand, and rebuking the Jewish outside agitators on the other. Likewise, the believers were torn between listening to Paul whom they revered, and the false teachers whom they feared.

- **Paul.** Unafraid to stand up against false doctrine; utterly enraged at the heretical teachings of the unnamed agitators (vss. 10, 12); lovingly urges the believers to live together peaceably.

- **Galatians.** Gentile believers were being pressured to be circumcised to be "truly Christian"; all the believers were in theological (vss. 2-11) and ethical (vss. 13-15) danger.

- **Visiting Jewish rabbis.** Persuasive; destructive to the new Christians. Paul either doesn't know who they are, or chooses not to mention them by name.

4. "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery." (vs. 1)

- "Paul first takes up what must have been the central threat to the spiritual stability of the Galatians -- the tendency to refuse to exercise and enjoy the freedom we have in Christ."¹⁴

- "True Christian freedom is Christlike freedom. There is no hint of legalism about it. It accepts absolute moral standards that are well known and well proven, and it takes its inspiration from the most liberated human being who ever lived, Jesus of Nazareth. There is nothing oppressive about that."¹⁵

- "... a freedom ... from the dominion, guilt, and damning power of it [sin]; from the captivity and tyranny of Satan ... from the Law ... from the moral law as a covenant of works, and as administered by Moses; and from the curse ... [of] its bondage ... and from all expectation of life and righteousness by the deeds of it; but not from obedience to it. ..."¹⁶

- *[Yoke]* "Common word for ensnare by trap. The Judaizers were trying to lasso the Galatians for the old yoke of Judaism."¹⁷

- "Once they had been under bondage to a heathen yoke (cf. Gal. 4:8); to accept the Jewish yoke would be a second bondage."¹⁸

5. "... you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all." (vs. 2)

- "They were tempted to compromise the gospel by accepting circumcision as a religious rite. This may have appeared to the Galatians to be a relatively innocent adherence to a cultural

custom, but to Paul it was a serious compromise of the freedom of the gospel."¹⁹

- Circumcision was the initiatory rite for Jewish children and Gentile converts, allowing them entrance into the Jewish faith. But it is no longer needed, says Paul. Many Christians today consider water baptism as corresponding "... with circumcision in spiritual meaning."²⁰

- Their circumcision, under the circumstances, would be the sign of their submission to the law of Moses. They, Gentile Christians, could not thus become Jews and remain Christians. It would be proof of trust in Moses rather than Christ, in the law rather than in the gospel."²¹

- Circumcision is attractive as a "quick fix" as the alternative of a commitment "... to the slow, humanly difficult way of faith."²²

- "... with terrible consequences ... will make circumcision a condition of salvation. In that case Christ will help them not at all."²³

- Paul ... is not, of course, speaking of occasional sins, but he has in mind a far more serious matter, that of substituting law for Christ as the agent in salvation."²⁴

- "... justification of works, and justification of faith cannot stand together, because no man can be justified by the Law, but he that does fully and perfectly fulfill it. ... circumcision ... was chiefly urged by the false apostles. ... Paul reasons according to the opinion that his enemies had of it, which made circumcision a essential to their salvation."²⁵

6. "... obligated to obey the whole law." (vs. 3)

- Keeping the whole of the law is an "unbearable burden ... there is no way to win in this kind of approach."²⁶

7. "You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace." (vs. 4)

- "In Paul's mind, this probably does not refer to the loss of salvation. ... As long as we depend on works, we cannot be resting on the work of Christ. ..."²⁷

- "A person can seek right standing before God either by legal works or by grace -- not by both. Grace is not *grace* (a freely given gift) if there is any requirement at all for receiving it."²⁸

- Being "justified by law" is set as a direct opposite of "being declared righteous" [justified]. Paul clearly teaches that it's an either/or situation. You cannot have both! Why? Because "... the demands of the Law as a condition of life are fully satisfied with regard to a person."²⁹ "The pardon granted in justification applies to **all sins, past, present,**

¹⁹Galatians, by David K. Huttar, page 135.

²⁰Systematic Theology, by L. Berkhof, page 634.

²¹People's New Testament Commentary

²²Galatians, by David K. Huttar, page 137.

²³Word Pictures in the New Testament, by A. T. Robertson.

²⁴Word Pictures in the New Testament, by A. T. Robertson.

²⁵Geneva Bible

²⁶Galatians, by David K. Huttar, page 136.

²⁷Galatians, by David K. Huttar, page 135.

²⁸John/Galatians, Serendipity House, page 57.

²⁹Systematic Theology, by L. Berkhof, page 510.

¹²Galatians: The Gospel According to Paul, by David K. Huttar, pg. 134.

¹³The New Testament, by Merrill C. Tenney, page 285.

¹⁴Galatians, by David K. Huttar, page 135.

¹⁵Word in Life Bible, page 1838.

¹⁶An Exposition of the Old and New Testament, by John Gill.

¹⁷Word Pictures in the New Testament, by A. T. Robertson.

¹⁸People's New Testament Commentary.

and future, and thus involved the removal of **all guilt and of every penalty**.³⁰ (*emphases added*)

8. "... the righteousness for which we hope." (vs. 5)

- "This righteousness we receive of God through faith; and by faith we shall obtain the reward."

9. "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love." (vs. 6)

- "Neither the most punctual observance of the law, nor . . . the most exact heathen morality . . ." brings salvation.³¹
- "He makes mention also of uncircumcision, lest the Gentiles should please themselves in it, as the Jews do in circumcision."³²
- "Circumcision is the wrong issue. Faith, hope, and love (vv. 5-6) are the issues. Faith is the root, love is the fruit."³³
- "The only thing that matters ultimately is our trust in the finished and perfect work of Christ on our behalf. That is all that counts as far as God is concerned."³⁴
- "Both [Jew and Gentile] stood on the same footing. It did make a great difference, though, if the Gentile Christian became circumcised in order to keep the law."³⁵
- ". . . the faith which uses love as its medium and method of working."³⁶

10. "... running a good race. Who cut in on you . . . ?" (vs. 7)

- "Those who would be most open to the appeals of the Judaizers would be the sincere, dedicated Galatians who wanted nothing more than to please God. But as relatively new Christians, they would not know that they were being diverted into a legalism that led away from Christ."³⁷

11. "Brothers, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished." (vs. 11)

- "Paul replies to the allegation that he is preaching circumcision, a charge that was probably used to convince the Galatians to be circumcised."³⁸
- "Paul could easily avoid persecution from the opponents by revising his theology into conformity with the circumcision party. This he refuses to do. He would rather suffer from the offense of the gospel that relies on the crucified Messiah than bask in the popularity of an easier, more inclusive gospel."³⁹

12. "... I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!" (vs. 12)

- An example of a true pastor inflamed with the zeal of God's glory, and love for his flock."⁴⁰

- "In a rich (albeit coarse) jibe at the Judaizers, Paul suggests that if they are so preoccupied with circumcision, they really ought to take their knives and make eunuchs out of themselves."⁴¹

- "Paul concludes these remarks by noting the utter seriousness of leading others astray through proclamation of a false gospel. Rarely do we find such harsh and direct words as we find here. . . ."⁴²

13. "... called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love." (vs. 13)

- "Paul acknowledges that Christian freedom can be bent in the opposite direction to justify harmful behavior."⁴³
- When God calls a Christian by the Word of God as applied by the Holy Spirit, He ". . . calls man [sic] to a certain end . . . to the fellowship of Jesus Christ . . . to liberty. . . ."⁴⁴
- "Paul delineates . . . the two extremes: the one of refusing freedom, the failure to appreciate and exercise our freedom in Christ, and the other the abuse of freedom, as if freedom in Christ did away with all other elements of the Gospel, including any authentic sense of living in accordance with the standards of God."⁴⁵
- "Serve as slaves. The only form of slavery that is compatible with freedom is self-giving to others."⁴⁶
- ". . . the apparent freedom of libertine living concealed beneath its surface an actual bondage."⁴⁷

14. "The entire law is summed up . . . 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" (vs. 14)

- Christian freedom is ". . . freedom within the Law interpreted as an expression of the standards and will of God. It is a freedom that must line up with the commandment regarding neighbor-love."⁴⁸
- The Book of James insists that faith be backed up with "the ethic of Christ." Yet James and Paul both ". . . emphasize the need of the transformation of the individual by the grace of God. . . ." Likewise, both were concerned about the ethical life. ". . . the dynamic of the Gospel which produces the ethic. . . . Like two sides of a coin, these two aspects of Christian truth must always accompany each other."⁴⁹

Information for community group leaders:

- Gal. 5:16-26, to be studied, June 1-7; sermon on June 8
- Gal. 6:1-10, to be studied, June 8-14; sermon on June 15

³⁰ *Systematic Theology*, by L. Berkhof, page 514.

³¹ *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, by John Wesley.

³² Geneva Bible.

³³ *1 John/Galatians*, Serendipity House, page 57.

³⁴ *Galatians*, by David K. Huttar, page 137.

³⁵ *People's New Testament Commentary*.

³⁶ *People's New Testament Commentary*.

³⁷ *1 John/Galatians*, Serendipity House, page 57.

³⁸ *1 John/Galatians*, Serendipity House, page 57.

³⁹ *Galatians*, by David K. Huttar, page 139.

⁴⁰ Geneva Bible.

⁴¹ *1 John/Galatians*, Serendipity House, page 57.

⁴² *Galatians*, by David K. Huttar, page 139.

⁴³ *Galatians*, by David K. Huttar, page 141.

⁴⁴ *Systematic Theology*, by L. Berkhof, page 470.

⁴⁵ *Galatians*, by David K. Huttar, page 134.

⁴⁶ *1 John/Galatians*, Serendipity House, page 57.

⁴⁷ *Galatians*, by David K. Huttar, page 143.

⁴⁸ *Galatians*, by David K. Huttar, page 141.

⁴⁹ *The New Testament*, by Merrill C. Tenney, page 286.