

# **We are Learning: to Use our Freedom Well**

## **September 27, 2020**

**Overarching theme:** In 2020, FUMC will be a **GO** church!

**Instructions:** When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. *The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.*

**Core Point:** The past is the past. There is nothing that can be done about it. The past can only be used to gain wisdom for the future. What can change is the future. When we, as God's people, are willing to follow God in our daily lives, God will make a good way in the future. The way may be bumpy at times and have curves, but the process will be filled with God's love and grace.

### **Galatians:**

Paul's letter to the Galatians has had an immense impact on the Christian understanding of the role of faith in our being made right before God. Responding to a severe challenge to his gospel and apostleship, Paul defends "the truth of the gospel" (Gal 2:5, 14): a person is made right before God on the basis of what God has done in the saving death and resurrection of Jesus Christ rather than on the basis of doing the works of Moses' Law.

The letter was occasioned by the appearance of Jewish-Christian missionaries who came to Galatia and questioned Paul's apostolic authority and the gospel he preached. Paul's gospel didn't require the Galatians, who were Gentiles, to be circumcised or to adopt Moses' Law. These missionaries, however, insisted that if the Galatians were to become Abraham's children and enjoy the benefits of the Jewish Messiah, they must be circumcised and do what the Law required. Paul maintained that the Galatians were already in right relation with God because of their faith in what God had done in Christ; but these missionaries were adamant that the Galatians must be circumcised and adopt a Jewish way of life in addition to believing in Christ. Here's the question Paul addresses: is faith in what God has done in Christ sufficient for salvation, or is something else required?

Paul responds to the crisis at Galatia in three ways: First, he reviews the events of his past to show the Galatians he received his gospel and apostleship from God and Jesus Christ rather than from humans (Gal 1:10-2.21). Therefore, the Galatians can rely on the gospel he preached to them. Second, he explains that the Galatians are Abraham's children because they've been baptized into Christ and received the gift of the Spirit (Gal 3:1-5.12). Therefore, they don't need to be circumcised. Finally, Paul argues that even though the Galatians are not under the Law's authority, they fulfill the Law by practicing the love commandment through the power of the Spirit (Gal 5:13-6.10).

--adapted from CEB Study Bible, pp353-354 NT

## **Reflect on this Scripture:**

Galatians 5:13-15 NRSV

*<sup>13</sup>For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.*

## **Commentary:**

The beginning of this text sums up a central thesis of the letter (for you were called to freedom), reminding the readers of the climactic manifesto of 5:1. It is God who has done the calling and the freedom has been won by Christ. Having summarized the gospel proclamation, however, Paul now confronts a new challenge: Does the freedom given by Christ leave us without moral guidance? That is the problem introduced and addressed by v 13bc: *Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another.*

After telling the Galatians to "stand firm and don't submit to the bondage of slavery again", this word to become slaves to one another through love comes as a shocking paradox. They are to use their freedom to become slaves! Paul does not speak of becoming slaves to God or Christ, or even of "righteousness". Instead, he says, they are to become slaves to one another through love.

Paul declares that the Law finds its central meaning in a single verse from Leviticus: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev 19.18). This, of course, is also found in Mark and Matthew as *Jesus'* summary of the meaning of the Law (Matt 22:34-40, Mark 12:28-34).... The Galatians are encouraged to participate in this fulfilling of the Law through their own loving service which corresponds to and mirrors the love of Jesus.

--adapted from the New Interpreters Bible, vol xi, pp 319-324

**This week** we're learning to **Use our Freedom Well**. We all have an idea of what freedom looks like, or at least what it *should* look like. And many times this view of freedom involves what we can do for ourselves, not what we can or should do for another.

Paul, however, gives us another view of freedom – we are freed by God to serve another. Another way of hearing that is this – we are freed by God to be slaves to one another. For 21<sup>st</sup> century ears, this is a very harsh and shocking word. Until you take into account how we are to become slaves, how we are to serve: through love.

Through love of the other we are slaves. Through love of the other we are servants. We understand that love should be guiding what we do. For some, that makes exercising our freedom a little harder because freedom, we think, is all about us and our personal rights.

We need to realize that this Scriptural understanding of freedom makes what we do all about the other, and not the self.

Last weekend, we used our freedom, through love, to serve our community by caring for others, feeding others, sharing with others, serving others. Serving others isn't something we just pull out once a year as we celebrate the church's anniversary. Serving others is something we need to do continually. As we continue to use our freedom to serve one another, we learn that we have received the greatest freedom possible – we are freed by God to live rich lives that reflect the love of Christ.

**Questions to Ponder for accountability in the group:**

As you think about this passage, how can you respond to this Scripture:

1. Are you using your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence? *OR*
2. Are you using your freedom to serve one another, to be a slave to another? How?
3. When you serve, are you exhibiting an attitude of love?
4. Do you show the same love to a stranger that you show yourself?
5. Who is your neighbor?

**Activity for the life of a disciple:**

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMC.
2. Ponder and pray on this Scripture this week: Galatians 5:13b  
*do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another*
3. Consider the lessons you are learning in this season, and seek to serve another through the love of Jesus Christ.