

LESSON 10 • AUGUST 6, 2023

INHERITING THE KINGDOM

Lesson Scripture: Galatians 5:13-26

Focus Scripture: Galatians 5:13-26

Key Verse: 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. Galatians 5:13 (NRSV)

GALATIANS 5:13-26 (NRSV)

13 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.

14 For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

15 If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.

16 Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh.

17 For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want.

18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law.

19 Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness,

20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions,

21 envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

22 By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness,

23 gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.

24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.

26 Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another.

GALATIANS 5:13-26 (KJV)

13 For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.

14 For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

15 But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.

16 This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.

17 For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.

18 But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law.

19 Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness,

20 Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies,

21 Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,

23 Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

24 And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.

25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

26 Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another.

KEY TERMS

- **Flesh** – As used in this context, refers to human weaknesses (frailties) and mortality; the source of carnal-mindedness.
- **Fruit** – Metaphorically refers to habits of goodness, righteousness, and truth that the Holy Spirit produces in Christians.
- **Judaizers** – Jewish Christians who did not accept the completeness of justification by faith in Jesus Christ.
- **Justification** – Refers to an event or process whereby the holy God declares sinners to be just or righteous, based upon faith in Jesus Christ and the forgiveness that derives from his atoning sacrifices.
- **Legalism** – Beliefs and teachings that salvation is dependent upon moral law versus faith in Jesus Christ alone.

INTRODUCTION

This is the first of four lessons in Unit III, the final unit for this quarter. The main focus today is on the book of Galatians, which originated as a letter from the Apostle Paul to the churches in Galatia. The original recipients of Paul's letter were a diverse group of fledgling disciples – a mixture of Jews and Gentiles. The letter was prompted by reports of ongoing

disputes and conflicts that stemmed from Judaizers' efforts to undermine Paul's teachings. They waged an aggressive campaign against beliefs that justification is dependent upon faith in Jesus Christ, alone. Instead, the Judaizers insisted that certain Jewish laws and rites, including circumcision, were also necessary and should be enforced by the church.

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

Obviously, misinformation is not unique to 21st century phenomena. Paul's letter conveys strong warnings against corrupted views of the gospel. To strengthen their arguments against Paul's teaching, the Judaizers accused Paul of having omitted the Jewish laws and rites from his teaching in order to increase the numbers of Gentile converts. Paul's letter is, therefore, a two-pronged defense. He defended his authority as an apostle and the truth of the gospel that he taught, and he reemphasized the fact that justification is contingent upon faith in Jesus Christ only. Earlier in this same letter, Paul warned that turning back from the gospel would actually result in aborting the path to salvation (Galatians 5:1-12).

Fulfilling the Law, Galatians 5:13-18

Freedom in Jesus Christ predominates Paul's arguments. He strongly urged the converts to neither listen to nor be persuaded by the Judaizer's contradictory teachings. Their teachings, according to Paul, would lead to enslavement to legalistic religious practices. Paul warned that legalism is oppositional to the law of love that Jesus introduced. The former is based on externally motivated human behavior or action, without considering God's commandments to love one

another. The latter is based on internal motivation, grounded in love that emanates from “circumcised hearts” and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Love differentiates those who are committed to legalism from those who are led by the Holy Spirit. “If you are led by the Holy Spirit, you are not under the law” (v. 18) Yet, Paul presumes and addresses the inevitability of humankind’s struggles between obedience to the flesh and obedience to the Holy Spirit. He also addresses a principle of reciprocity for behaving with others in ways that disregard Jesus’ command to love.

The Flesh Versus the Holy Spirit, Galatians 5:19-26

In addition to addressing the oppositional forces of the flesh and the Holy Spirit, Paul listed several easily recognized sinful acts that embody “works of the flesh” (vs. 18-20). Such behavior between disciples is destructive rather than constructive in the pursuit of God’s kingdom. Fortunately, he also listed visible attributes that embody the fruit of the Spirit (vs. 22-23). Paul also noted that “those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (v. 24). Crucifying the flesh refers to the process wherein we deny ourselves and our fleshly desires, commit to faithfully obeying Jesus Christ and living in ways that glorify God. Paul gave assurances that we can choose to walk in the Spirit or to walk in the flesh.

SANKOFA

Questions regarding whether Gentile converts should adhere to Jewish laws and rites were not unique to the Galatians. The book of Acts, chapter 15, records a similar dispute in Antioch. The issue was resolved when Peter, in support of Paul and

Barnabas' teachings, successfully appealed to the Jerusalem Council to decide which belief should prevail. The Council was urged to base their decision on the visible manifestations of the Holy Spirit's equal treatment of Gentiles and Jews. The Council was persuaded and freed Gentiles from the legalistic burdens the Judaizers tried to place on them.

Discrimination has many faces! Race and gender-based discrimination tend to claim our attention much more than religious discrimination. Many scriptures are reflective of race-based discrimination. Slavery has always been one of the most insidious forms of race-based discrimination. Nevertheless, history is replete with examples of enslaved people who did not accept ideas that they were inferior or "less than."

Personal belief systems determine what we accept as *truth*. Elizabeth Freeman, an enslaved black woman who was born around 1744, could neither read nor write, but she listened, with discernment. Elizabeth (known then as Mum Bett) listened to her slave master and his colleagues plan legal arguments that led to the end of England's rule in Massachusetts. Later, when a new Massachusetts State Constitution was read, Mum Bett listened closely again. She saw strong parallels between the conversations she had overheard and certain verbiage in the new constitution. Subsequently, Mum Bett questioned why she should not also be a benefactor of the constitution, particularly the tenets regarding equality, freedom to pursue happiness, inalienable rights, and so forth. Mum Bett decided to test the legality of her enslavement! She won her freedom in a court case more than 80 years before the

Emancipation Proclamation.

Gender-based discrimination was also a barrier for Mum Betts. Because women had no status, her attorneys joined her case with that of a black male, and it became known as Brom and Bett v. Ashley. The case tested the new Massachusetts Constitution and the existence of slavery in the state. The jury agreed with the attorneys who represented Brom and Bett. They were both freed from slavery on August 21, 1781. Their case was a catalyst for the eventual abolishment of slavery in Massachusetts. Upon gaining freedom, Bett changed her name to Elizabeth. She was believed to be about 85 years old when she died in 1829. To preserve her memory and contributions to actualize promises of justice, freedom, and equality, the town of Sheffield, Massachusetts honored Elizabeth as they unveiled a bronze statue of her in 2022 (Nearly 200 years after her death).

CASE STUDY

In addition to Mum Bett's case, justice attained through our legal systems has led to the gradual crumbling of many discriminatory laws and practices. The Honorable Thurgood Marshall (1908-1993), a champion of equality and civil rights, was a jurist whose contributions to individual freedoms continue to help shape the destinies of people in "underserved" communities. Mr. Marshall is credited with having won several break-through legal cases that advanced basic human and civil rights for people of color as well as constitutional protections of individual rights.

He is remembered as a civil rights activist with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)

and the first African American Supreme Court justice. He was appointed to serve on the Supreme Court on August 30, 1967. As a lawyer, he won 29 of 32 cases that he argued before the Supreme Court.

Certainly, one of his most highly valued and impactful cases was *Brown vs. the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*. The ruling in this case paved the way for integration, and it was a major civil rights victory as well as a model for similar future cases. This ruling led to a major turning point in educational opportunities for all. Segregation in public schools was determined to be unconstitutional. Unfortunately, illegal segregation and discrimination still occur. Yet, cases such as *Brom and Bett vs. Ashley* as well as *Brown vs. the Board of Education* remind us to be discriminate about who and what influences our life decisions.

LIFE APPLICATION

There is a common belief that we cannot control what happens to us, but we can control how we respond. We cannot lose sight of Paul's meticulous efforts to help us differentiate between the fruit of the spirit and the works of the flesh. For a refresher, refer to Galatians 5:19-23. With no need for group discussion, please examine your own habits and attitudes for one week and respond to the following questions daily. The purpose is to identify or strengthen reasons to praise God as well as reasons to pray for Holy Spirit guidance as we continue our journeys toward transformed minds and Christlikeness.

QUESTIONS

1. How would you describe the fruit that dominated your

behavior today?

2. Which fruit did you find lacking in today's habits and interpersonal communications?
3. What evidence of "works of the flesh" did you observe in yourself today?

CLOSING DEVOTIONS

Closing Prayer: Lord, we know the trials of the Galatian church are presented as examples for us. Please bless us to move beyond "spectator modes" to applying this lesson in our own lives. Micah 6:8 explains your requirements to us: "To do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with [our] God." Please strengthen our walk and bless us with perseverance as we want to be welcomed into your kingdom and glorify you in all that we do. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

August 7-August 13

Monday Proverbs 2:1-11 (God Guards the Paths of Justice)

Tuesday Matthew 5:3-12 (Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness)

Wednesday Matthew 5:13-20 (Righteousness in God's Kingdom)

Thursday Isaiah 26:1-11 (God Keeps the Steadfast in Peace)

Friday Nehemiah 7:73-8:3, 5-6, 9-12 (Rejoice in God's Word)

Saturday Romans 12:9-21 (Rejoice in Hope)

Sunday Romans 14:10-23 (Righteousness, Peace, and Joy)