

Galatians Chapter 5 – John Karmelich

1. As I read this studies this chapter, I was torn between two titles: "Emancipation Proclamation" or "Volunteer Slavery". I ended up picking both. Let me explain both of those titles quickly: The first one is associated with Abraham Lincoln. That was his proclamation when he freed all slaves that lived in the United States roughly 150 years ago. The second is describing someone that chooses to live in slavery. The key to understanding this chapter is to realize both are necessary in order to live the type of life God has called us to live. As I have been preaching throughout this study of Galatians, Christians are free to sin all that we want to. The key is how much do we want to. In fact the key to living the Christian life is to realize that as totally free people, we should then chose to live like slaves under bondage to how God wants us to live. I call it volunteer slavery.
 - a) But John, isn't that a contradiction? To be freed from slavery and then choose to become a slave again? The difference is to realize what is it that God wants us to be freed from and at the same time understanding what God wants us to be in bondage too. My job over the course of this lesson is to help us understand how both of those terms apply to us.
 - b) The freedom I am describing here is the main thing Paul has been preaching throughout Galatians. As believers in Jesus we trust that He is God, He became human and that His death paid the price for all our sins, past present and future. Because we do trust in His sin payment, we can sin all we want and still not lose our salvation.
 - c) The classic question of course, is what do we choose to do with that freedom? The key to living the Christian life is then to say to God in effect, "I am free to go do whatever I want. However, I want to use that freedom to live my life to make a difference for You". That is the volunteer slavery that I am describing in the title of this lesson.
 - d) If we understand how both of those concepts apply to our lives as Christians, then we can understand what Galatians Chapter 5 is all about.
 - e) My simple job in this chapter is to explain what it is we are free from and what it is that God wants us to volunteer to be under as slaves. While this does not seem appealing to anybody, I am convinced this is the most "freeing" way to live and the only way to give our lives meaning no matter what is the length our lives on earth have.
2. Normally at this point, I explain the "sections" of a chapter and summarize what it is the text is saying as we go through it. However, the double title in effect explains the whole thing and it is best if I just start going through the text and end my introduction here. With that said, let me end my introduction with a movie line reference that I believe describes this chapter well.
 - a) As I read through this chapter and Verse 1 in particular, I kept thinking of a fairly trivial line from an equal trivial movie. The movie was about the life of Joseph, the leader of one of the 12 tribes of Israel. He went from being a free man to slavery to becoming the second most powerful man in Egypt when that region suffered from a terrible plague. My point is to remember that while Joseph was living as a slave in Egypt, his owner described Joseph as being "The freest man he had ever met". While that is a strange way to describe a slave, if one understands Joseph, one realized it was true. If we can understand how Joseph was both a slave and a free man at the same time, in effect we can understand what it is Paul is trying to teach us in this chapter.
 - b) With that picture in our mind, I am now ready for Verse 1.
3. Galatians Chapter 5, Verse 1: 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.
 - a) To understand this verse, let us understand what Christ (a Greek word that refers to the idea of the Promised Messiah that will rule the world) has set us free from. To say it even another way, Paul is saying that before we became Christians, we were slaves whether we realizes it or not, and no matter what was our background before becoming Christians.

- b) The second part of the verse then says in effect since you are no longer slaves, don't then become slaves again. Considering my lesson title is about the concept of becoming free from the bondage of slavery and then desiring to become slaves again, I would say that this does require an explanation. So let me begin:
- i) It is probably best to describe what Paul is not describing: He is not talking about dealing with some sort of heavy burden such as living with cancer or say confined to a wheel chair. While our death would eventually free us from those particular problems, that is not what Paul is talking about here.
 - ii) To understand, we need to know what freedom really means. We tend to think of freedom as the idea of "doing what we want when we want to do it". However, if one is truly living as a slave, or even living with cancer or living in a wheel chair, it is tough to think of one's self as having that type of freedom. However, it is that concept of total freedom that Paul is preaching to us in this verse.
 - iii) To explain what it we are or were in bondage to, think about our lives before we did trust in Jesus for our salvation. We may have tried to be a good person, or we may have followed a bunch of rituals throughout the year or throughout our lives in order to prove our value to God. In other words we were slaves to the concept of trying to work hard to please others and please God. That is what Jesus frees us from. My simple point here is that Jesus frees us from trying to prove our worth to God the Father based on how we live our lives.
 - iv) What if we are in bondage in effect to another person? Let's say we are living in a type of situation where we are really struggling. It may be taking care of someone who is ungrateful or living with a difficult person. How does Jesus set us free if we are in a situation like that? First, pray for God to give you the strength for today to deal with whatever it is one has to deal with. May we learn what lessons He wants us from that situation and pray that if it is His will, change us from that situation.
- c) Let's assume we grasp that Jesus wants to free us from whatever form of bondage we are struggling with at the moment. Why then, do we want to be slaves again as you indicated in the start of this lesson: To answer, consider the following:
- i) Paul called himself in effect a volunteer slave (also known as a "bondservant") in most of his letters and encourages us to do the same.
 - ii) James calls himself the same thing in his epistle.
 - iii) So does Peter, John and even Jude in their epistles.
 - iv) So whatever that term "bondservants" means, the New Testament writers thought of themselves as one's who choose volunteer slavery to Jesus.
 - v) The concept is actually very simple. It is the idea of saying to Jesus something like, I accept the idea that you are in charge of my life. I want to do what You want me to do at this moment. I am in effect, Your slave. Then go do what one wants and what one believes God is guiding us to do (assuming it is biblical) and go make a difference for Jesus just as the other apostles did.
- d) Hopefully I've beaten to death by now what it is we are free from and what it is that God wants to volunteer as slaves to become. Meanwhile, I got all the way up to Verse 2.
4. Verse 2: Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. ³ Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law.
- a) To understand this verse, let me explain what Paul means by "circumcised". It is not just the physical act of a man cutting off the foreskin of one's penis, it is the commitment to go live under the Old Testament laws and trust in fully obeying those laws to be saved.
 - b) Before I go any further, I do believe in circumcision for medical reasons, but like Paul, I do not believe it is necessary for salvation. I believe salvation is only about our faith in what Jesus did for us, and not baptism, circumcision or any other ritual one can think of.

- c) Not that any of these rituals are bad things if one understands them in context. My only point here is that one is not saved or "more saved" by performing any of these rituals.
 - d) That leads me back to Paul. He was concerned about the believers that lived in Galatia (part of Turkey today). They did trust in Jesus, and now they were changing their belief to want to trust in obeying all the Jewish laws in order to be saved. The ritual that Jews perform to show that one trusts in obeying all of those laws to be saved is circumcision.
 - i) Paul's response to this concept is in effect, "If one wants to live by trusting in God's laws for one salvation, then realize one is not allowed to mess up even once." The idea is in effect that a God that is perfect does not grade on a curve".
 - ii) As I stated in another lesson recently, there are two ways to get into heaven: The first is to never sin once and tell Jesus to move over and the other is to trust in His perfect payment for our sins. Personally, I have never understood why a person would want to prove himself or herself to God, but it's hard to compete with egos.
 - e) I assume for most of us reading this, this is old news. Most of us already do trust in Jesus as having made the complete payment for our sins. If that is true, why should I read on?
 - i) The issue for us is not about the ritual of circumcision, but about realizing that we can easily be caught up in doing things to try in effect to prove our worth to God. The next time one is doing a good deed, ask if we are trying to prove our worth to God, or are we just doing it out of gratitude for what He has already done for us? That is, the next time one is bragging about one's life, ask why are we doing that?
 - ii) My point is simply that our egos constantly get in the way of God accomplishing what He wants to accomplish in our lives. When we do catch ourselves in such a situation, it is a simple matter of confessing it as sin and moving on.
 - iii) But don't we have enough problems to deal with than to spend time worrying if our ego's getting in the way of our lives? This comes back to "volunteer slavery". It is to consider, is God in charge of my life at this moment or not? That is why we constantly have to work in getting ourselves out of the way, so God can work in us and through us. That in effect is what these verses are teaching us.
 - iv) What we actually do and don't do as such slaves is coming up later in the chapter.
 - f) But aren't these verses talking about keeping the Old Testament laws perfectly? Yes they are and Paul is saying to them and us, "If we want to prove one's value to God, stop and consider how impossible that is to do". In terms of the Law itself, we would have to keep all of them perfectly and to be honest it can't be done. That is why we always have to deal with our egos and be aware of how they can get in the way of God working through us in our lives. OK, enough of all of that. Verse 4.
5. Verse 4: You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.
- a) Is Paul saying the Galatians have lost their salvation by them trying to prove their worth to God by being obedient to His laws? No. Paul is just saying that one is wasting one's time when one tries to prove one's worth to God. It is like when we sin. We haven't lost our salvation, but we are at that moment wasting the greatest asset God has given us: our time, when we do use it for some sort of sinful purpose.
 - b) I can just hear someone say, "I know some religious Jewish folks. They are good people." I know some too and I agree. The issue is not whether or not one is a good person or if one is trying to live a good life. The real issue is one perfect in God's eyes or not? None of us would argue that we are perfect people, which is why we preach about being perfectly forgiven of our sins.
 - c) To put it simply, when we are trying to prove what a good person we are by trying to be obedient to God's laws we are at that moment, not trusting in His grace alone.
 - i) To put it another way, we aren't any good to God when our ego's are in the way.
 - ii) OK, I would say that is enough conviction there. Verse 5.

6. Verse 5: But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope. ⁶For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.
- a) Verse 5 effectively asks the question, "If we don't have to do anything to prove ourselves to God, then what do we do?" The answer is we let God's spirit guide us as how to live out our lives in order to make a difference for Him.
 - i) Suppose we do pray, "Dear God, I am in effect your bond slave. How do I use my life to make a difference for You today? " Then what? Aren't any good things we do after that for the sake of our ego's? Not if our attitude is right at that moment.
 - ii) The main thing Paul is focusing on here is our attitude. One can live like a devout Jewish person and be a good person. One can do all sorts of good deeds and feel good about one's life. Paul is saying that our motivation to do those things in the first place should be based out of love for God and not to try to prove our worth to Him in the first place.
 - iii) In other words, we can't say to God, "Let me in heaven, because I have done a, b and c in my life". All we can say is "May I come into heaven because I do trust in Jesus' payment for my sins and nothing else".
 - b) It may help to keep in mind that the Jewish people who lived in Galatia were worried that if Gentile Christians just believed in Jesus and did nothing else, their lifestyles would give Judaism a bad name. That is why they pushed "works". Paul is arguing against them by saying that there is nothing wrong with doing good things. The issue is our motivation. Wanting to be good to earn one's way into heaven doesn't work. Doing good things just because we are responding to His love is way He wants us to live. That is why we should volunteer to be His slave. It is about gratitude to God and nothing else.
7. Verse 7: You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth?
- a) One way I relate to Paul is that he liked to use sports illustrations to make his point. It was common then and now for men to use sports illustrations to describe a situation. It shows me how human nature doesn't change over time. Now let me explain what Paul is saying in this illustration: It would be like running in race on a track with marked lanes. All of a sudden another run cuts into our line right in front of us and causes us to fall.
 - i) The idea is that the Christians living in Galatia were at one time living their lives by trusting that Jesus died for their sins and had faith that because of what He did, they didn't have to prove themselves to God. Now that they were trusting in their own ability to please God again. It is kind of like the illustration of another runner in a race causing them to stumble from what they were trying to accomplish.
 - ii) The interesting thing is that as I was writing this section, I was thinking about how I have been putting these lessons together for years. I was wondering if I was still doing God's will by writing these. Then I remembered that doing His will is about just trusting in Him and not trying to prove myself to Him.
 - iii) My point is like this running illustration that Paul gives, it is very easy to get our own focus off of God and onto whatever we are doing for the moment. The secret to living the Christian life is to keep on trusting God to move forward and not try to do any or all works to prove our value to Him based on how we live.
 - iv) So if we have been doing the same thing for many years, and we are wondering if we are still doing His will, what do we do to keep it interesting? Again it comes back to praying for His guidance. The amazing thing I have learned is that living the Christian life rarely gets boring. If we are willing to submit to Him and trust that He is guiding us, I have found that God puts situations into our life that says in effect, "Are you trusting Me now, even through this? Do you still trust Me, even if what one is doing is getting routine?" The point is that God wants us focus on the "running the long distance race" that He has called us to run.

8. Verse 8: That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you.
- a) What kind of persuasion is Paul talking about in this verse? In context, he is talking about when we felt lead to try to prove one's self to God. To continue to use my example about spending year after year writing these lessons, how do I know whether or not I am trying to prove my worth to God by all of this writing? My best answer is I can't stand not doing it, even after all of these years. There is a loose translation of Second Timothy 4:2 that I've always loved: "Preach the Gospel whether you feel like it or not". My point is while God calls us to as our "volunteer slavery" can have its moments of boredom, for the most part, God gives us a desire to do something and He expects us to follow through with it. I have discovered that whatever He has called us to do, He always keeps it interesting for us.
 - b) My point here is the difference between doing works "because we have to" versus doing works "because we want to" is based on living by biblical principals and then doing what we can't stand not doing. It is about choosing to live a life to be obedient to God because we want to and not because we have to. What Paul is preaching here is about people who want to do good works against their will because they have to in order to earn God's love.
 - c) The way to tell if persuasion comes from God or not is simply based on whether or not we do believe He is guiding us to do a certain thing versus other people "cutting us off" from what He wants us to do in order to do their will versus His will. That's the point here.
9. Verse 9: "A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough.
- a) Some people don't like sports illustrations. Therefore, Paul uses a cooking illustration in order to further make his point. ☺ If one has ever made bread from scratch, one mixes in a little bit of yeast (or "leaven" in some translations, same word) to make bread rise.
 - i) Throughout the bible, the word leaven or yeast is associated with sin. The idea is that a little sin mixed into our life "corrupts" by growing bigger.
 - b) Paul's point here is by mixing what we are told we must do in order to be saved with the idea of just trusting in Jesus for our salvation corrupts the process.
 - i) OK then, so how do we know if we are doing something that is not God's will for our life for that moment? The easy answer would just be to pray about it, or just to ask oneself if that act is biblical. Suppose it is not that easy: Suppose it is about helping someone we don't like or say having to help an ungrateful person. How does one mix doing what we enjoy with what we have to do?
 - ii) Let me answer that another way: I don't work around the clock at this ministry. I still have to support my family and take time for other things. Sometimes we have to do things we are not crazy about doing in order to accomplish what God wants to accomplish through us. My point as it relates to this verse here, is to be aware that certain things we must do or want to do can corrupt what He desires that we do for Him in our lives.
 - iii) In summary, we learn over time if what we are doing is about trying to prove our worth to God versus doing what we enjoy doing for Him. It is something that is hard to describe but easy to practice once we learn the difference. I have learned that I must constantly and regularly pray about what He desires of me and then it never ceases to amaze me what "comes out" when I just trust Him to guide my life.
10. Verse 10: I am confident in the Lord that you will take no other view. The one who is throwing you into confusion will pay the penalty, whoever he may be. ¹¹Brothers, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished. ¹²As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!
- a) Here one can see Paul getting angry. In effect he is saying, "If those Jewish people like the concept of circumcision so much, why don't they go all the way and cut off that whole part of their body?" Remember that Paul is not talking so much about the specific act of circumcision as much as he is talking about living that lifestyle that comes from that act.

- b) It might be best here to remind all of us that it is not the act itself that Paul is focusing on, as much as it is the lifestyle that comes with that particular practice. I am personally in favor of circumcision for health reasons. However, I don't believe it affects salvation.
 - c) Judaism taught that to actually go through that ritual was the first physical sign that one is committing one's life to obeying all the Old Testament laws to show that one is living differently from the rest of the world. Cutting off that foreskin was a symbolic way of saying, "I'm no longer living for my flesh, but I am now just living for God". While that symbolism seems logical in practice, it comes back to the concept that we can't please God based on how we live we our lives. A perfect God can't love us any more than He already does to begin with. Therefore, we can't prove our worth to Him by our actions.
 - i) This leads me back to my concept of "volunteer slavery". I am not saying we have to choose to be obedient to God because we have to. That is what this ritual was all about. Living by gratitude is when we realize that we don't have to prove our worth to God, but choose to let Him guide us to live, as He desires of us.
 - d) So what does it have to do with these verses? Paul is saying that he is being persecuted by devout religious Jewish men because he is preaching that one doesn't have to obey all of God's laws in order to be saved.
 - i) Here is Paul's view about how one is saved in a few brief thoughts:
 - a) He is saying that both of us can't be right on this issue.
 - b) You (all of us) have to decide who is right based on the arguments I am presenting about trying to please God based on our efforts.
 - c) I (Paul) was raised trying to obey those laws all of my life. I had to learn the hard way that it can't be done. Learn from my own mistakes here.
 - d) Finally, Paul says in frustration, if they like cutting off part of that human organ so much, they should cut the whole thing off. This is Paul's colorful way of saying he is convinced they are wrong and they should go away.
11. Verse 13: You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.
- a) Remember my whole speech about volunteer slavery? It comes into play here. Paul is saying that we are free to sin all we want. However, we should not use that freedom to go sin all we want. Instead we should use it to make a difference in each other's lives. That in effect is how we make a difference for Jesus in this world.
 - b) In effect, Paul is changing subjects in this verse. Instead of arguing why one should not be in submission to the law, he is now recommending what we should do with the freedom that we do have as Christians.
 - c) Let me explain this another way: How many of us religious Christians are well aware of the fact that even though we know sin is wrong the temptation is still there in front of us? Paul is going to teach over the next set of verses how to properly deal with temptation.
 - i) My old pastor used to joke, "Don't lead me into temptation, I can find it all by my self." That's a good summary of temptation. We don't need the help of others in order to be tempted, we just naturally want to do what we instinctively know is wrong. However, Paul is going to preach to us how to handle such times.
 - ii) The key believe it or not is to serve one another. This leads well to the next verse.
12. Verse 14: The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."
- a) For someone like Paul who says that we are not required to obey the law in order to be saved, notice how he likes to quote it a lot and claim it is right on so many issues. The point is the law itself is not a bad thing, just that without the power of the Holy Spirit to guide our lives, we can never be obedient to how God wants us to live in the first place.
 - b) With that said, notice that Paul says all of the Old Testament laws (Religious Jews will argue that there are 613 of them in the first five books of the bible), the most important one is to "Love your neighbor as yourself". I would say that requires an explanation.

- i) Before I start, in effect Jesus said the same thing. Jesus was once asked, what is the most important laws in the Old Testament. Jesus responded that there are two: The first one is to love God with all of one's heart, soul, mind and strength and the second one is like it, to love your neighbor as yourself. (See Matthew 22:37-38.)
 - ii) OK John, I get the idea that Paul and Jesus both think this command is important. Tell us why: Paul's point is essentially that when we are busy being of service to other people, we are not focusing on our own desires and our lives.
 - a) Think of it this way: When two people are arguing, it is usually because both of them want their will done. The point is we can't focus on our own selfish desires if we are busy being of service to someone else.
 - b) If that is true, why did Paul argue so hard against the religious Jews and their beliefs? I am not saying one has to be a pacifist. Paul focused hard on arguing against what those religious Jews taught. Paul wanted to teach us that the best way to live is by faith in Jesus alone. Paul uses Old Testament verses and illustrations to make his case.
 - c) The issue is not arguing versus pacifism. The issue of the moment is sin and how to avoid it. I watched a cute scene play out with my daughter the other day, which is a good illustration about sin. There was a bag of candy in the kitchen. First she just wanted to look at it. Then she wanted to touch it, and finally she said she had to have one. I used that moment to teach to her about how temptation works. How it creeps up on us and causes us to do what know is wrong for that moment.
 - d) Paul is saying that when are serving one another, we can't be tempted by sin, because we are busy focusing on others and not ourselves. I will be the first to admit, I am in no way perfect at this, but I have also become aware that the best way to avoid sin is to focus on others and not myself. That is why my old pastor was right about "Don't lead me into temptation, I can find it all by myself".
13. Verse 15: If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.
- a) John's loose translation: If you keep on fighting with each other in order to get your way in life all that will happen is you will hurt someone. Anybody who has children are well aware of this principal. If you have ever watched a couple go through a messy divorce, one has also seen this principal play out.
 - b) So are you saying that in order to avoid fights, we just have to join hands with each other and sing "Kum Ba Yah". ☺ Hardly. The way to deal with temptation to sin when it does come, is then to find some way to focus on helping someone else. What if one is alone at the moment? Then think about ways of being helpful to others and not focus on what is tempting to us at the moment.
 - c) Let me explain this concept another way: Most of us have learned the hard way that we can't overcome temptation by trying hard enough. If we just stand there thinking, "I am not going to do that", we will fail, every time. The best way to deal with temptation is to get our focus on God or on others. To say it another way, get our focus off of us. That is how to deal with temptation.
 - d) Paul continues this line of reasoning in the next verse.
14. Verse 16: So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.
- a) Before I explain this verse, let me tell you why Paul is going through this argument. It comes back to the idea that some were worried that if all we have to do is believe that Jesus is God, then people would sin all day long and not care. In effect, Paul is arguing there is a better way to live then trying to keep the Old Testament laws. That way is when we trust God to guide us and use our lives to make a difference for others.

- b) In effect, that is all I mean by "volunteer slavery". To be a Christian is about telling God in effect that we are His servants. Our time and our assets now belong to Him. It is to take the freedom we have as Christians and in effect give it back to God. That is why He wants us to go serve others. It not only helps us to avoid temptation, but it is His way of getting us to make a difference in the world.
 - i) Remember that Jesus said that they way people would know we are Christians is by our love for one another? (See John 13:35.) When we are serving one another, at that moment we are not focusing on our own desires. The point is we are not sinning because we are too busy helping others at that moment.
 - ii) This leads to a few logical questions: So when do I get my stuff done, if I am to be spending all my time helping others? God is well aware of the fact that we have our own things to be done. This is about priority, not the complete use of our time.
 - iii) The next logical question is, "what if I am too sick to help others?" Then we must also be willing to let others help us. I know of a lot of wonderful Christians who do great things for others, but they struggle with letting others help them. Using our lives to make a difference for Jesus also includes the concept of letting others be helpful to us, as He has called us to be helpful to others.
 - c) By the way, I am in no way saying I am perfect at doing this. I have my weaknesses that I have to deal with, as I am sure you do as well. I just know that when I am busy being of service to others that is when I am at my best in life. Just because none of us are perfect does not mean we should not strive to do what is right. That is what Paul is teaching here.
 - d) Speaking of Paul, it is time to get back to the text itself.
15. Verse 17: For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.
- a) Meanwhile, while I was busy trying to get all of us, myself included to be a better person in life, Paul is emphasizing the fact that what is sinful is contrary to God's desire for our lives. This may seem obvious, but it is worth considering for the moment. The idea is that when the desire to sin comes, whatever that desire is, consider the fact it is contrary to what God desires of our lives.
 - b) Remember that if we are believers, then we should desire at any given moment to choose to be "God's slave" to put it bluntly. One of the reasons that before I pray and before I do write these lessons is to ask God to guide me, is I am well aware of the fact that what is sinful is contrary to what the Spirit of God wants me to do at that moment.
 - c) I am sure all of us are painfully aware that when temptation comes, we know that it is not God's will for our lives at that moment. The big question of course, is what should we do when that temptation comes along? Do we just hope it to go away? We usually figure out pretty quickly that just hoping doesn't work when that temptation is in front of us.
 - i) The answer comes back to what Paul is teaching here, being lead by the Spirit is contrary to sinful desires. It is a matter of praying for God's help and at the same time literally running away from it. Paul also says that when we are tempted, in some way, God will provide a way of escape. (See 1st Corinthians 10:13.) It never ceases to amaze me to watch how that principal has played out in my life.
 - ii) I have found that some desires have to literally be crucified to death. In order to avoid temptation, we literally have to get away from what is causing it to happen in the first place and with God's help that desire can go away for awhile.
 - d) It might be best to end this little section with a prayer: Father, You are well aware that I have a weakness at this moment for (fill in the blank). I don't have the power to change my ways based on willpower. It is only by your power that I can overcome that desire. Help me to recognize the way to escape when that temptation comes. Guide me to live as You desire and not how I desire when it comes to this issue. In Jesus name we pray, amen.

16. Verse 19: The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery;²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.
- a) In case anyone has any questions of what Paul is specifically talking about when it comes to sinful desires, he lays out examples of sin here in these verses.
 - b) Let me say at this point what this list is not: A complete list of all possible sins. It is not a list of things where he is saying, "just avoid a, b, and c, and then God will love you". What this list is, is Paul saying when we do focus on ourselves and not on others, here are some good examples of what that leads to in life when we do just focus on ourselves.
 - c) Before I discuss the specifics of this list, it is essential to say that if any one of these items are or have been a weakness in our lives, we are still saved if we are willing to turn from these things. Remember the only way to avoid salvation is to have a life long denial that Jesus is God and that He did die for our sins. To put it another way, if we are tempted by one of these things, the fact that are conscious is bothering us about doing one or more of them, is a sign that we do care about pleasing God and not just trying to please whatever is our desire of the moment.
 - d) With that speech out of my system, let me spend a little time discussing these terms so we can understand why God wants us to turn from these things in our lives. Keep in mind as we go through this list, this is not (big emphasis on not) a list of do this and one is going to hell, period. Remember one of Paul's main points here is that we as Christians are free from having to obey any set of rules to be saved. At the same time, we should choose to be slaves of God by deciding that this is the best way for us to live. Not to earn His love, but just because it is the best way for us to live out our lives as witnesses for Him. With that convicting thought completed, it is time to talk about the list itself.
 - e) The first few terms deal with sexually immoral issues. The King James Version starts with adultery. That word is not listed in some of the oldest manuscripts we have. That is why scholars debate whether it belongs here or not. Since the first term used here in the NIV version is "sexual immorality", in effect that debate is a waste of time, as that term as used here in the NIV bible version would cover adultery as well.
 - i) Let me state quickly why God is so anti-adultery. The short version is that if we can't be trusted in our relationship with our spouses, how can anyone ever trust us when it comes to telling them about our loyalty to God Himself? This comes back to the issue of "selfish desires". When we develop a hatred of our spouses and we just want them to change and not ourselves, that is when this desire grows.
 - ii) Again, temptation comes when we are not busy serving others, and this is a prime example of such. I also can't resist adding one of my favorite expressions on this topic. It is "God will often punish adulterers by making them live with the person they cheated with." The point is the type of person willing to have an affair with a married person is not the type of person that encourages healthy relationships.
 - f) The next term is "sexual immorality" or "fornication" in the King James Version. That term describes any sort of sexual act outside the bonds of marriage. So why is God so against any form of sexual contact outside the bonds of marriage? The point is that God cares for our lives and wants what is best for us. To be honest sexual activity does lead to babies at the best and disease at the worse. No protection is fool proof. While it is advertised in our media as being fun and exciting, they don't mention the life long risks of those activities.
 - i) Coming back to Paul's main point, when we focus on our self, and not focus on what God wants us to focus upon, helping others, that is when these temptations do come into play, and that is Paul's point here in these verses.
 - ii) Practically speaking, when such temptations come, that is when we need His help to turn away from such temptation and guidance to find the way of escape.

- g) The next two are the last of the "sexual sins": impurity and debauchery. For comparison sake, the King James calls this "uncleanness and lewdness".
- i) To explain this, think of what God desires of us, to voluntarily choose to be His slaves. Now think of what God also desires of us: To be a good witness for Him in all that we do. Anything that is impure or unclean (think sin) would not cut it.
 - ii) It covers any form of sexual sin, but it also includes when we say things that are "impure" or even has a double meaning. The easy way to consider this is just to say or think, "Would God approve of what I just did or said here?" That is the type of question one needs to consider when one examining one's own behavior.
 - iii) Are you saying we have to be perfect? Of course not. I am saying that when we are being lead by God's spirit we can tell whether or not we are doing so by our actions and that actions include saying or doing things that are "impure".
 - iv) As far as "debauchery" or "lewdness" as it translated elsewhere, the idea is if we are ready to sin at any moment. The idea is of flaunting one's sins publicly. The idea is about not caring about pleasing God so much we are even flaunting our bad behavior publicly in front of others.
- h) Consider this question: If Paul says we don't have to do anything to be saved, why do we have this list of sins to consider? To ask that question another way, how can we tell when God's spirit" is guiding us? That is why this list of bad things is here: so we can tell when God is and is not guiding us. Since we can't see or sense the Holy Spirit, all we can do is watch our behavior to know whether or not we are doing His will at any given moment in our life. With that stated, time to get back to the "bad list" of things.
- i) In Verse 20, we have idolatry listed first. To put it simply, this is the worship of any deity other than God Himself. I always like to point out that I believe everyone has a god. To find out what is someone's "god", look how someone spends their time and their earnings. I could go on, but hopefully that statement is convicting us for all of us to consider.
- j) The next term is sorcery. (Some translations say "witchcraft"). The original Greek word is the word "pharmakeia" from which "pharmacy" comes from. That is used because the use of hallucinogenic drugs was common back then in the spiritual (demonic) world. I knew of someone who was into speaking to the dead. That is a form of sorcery. The point is if we are doing such things it is a sign that we are not being guided by God's spirit at that moment in time.
- k) The next few terms are more obvious: hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath are all examples of things that are displeasing to God, period. Am I saying I am perfect at never acting this way? Of course not. Remember the goal here is not to say that we are more saved if we act a certain way. The goal here is to say that if we are trusting in Jesus full payment for our sins, then we do have God's spirit to guide our lives. To trust in His spirit, is to act a certain way. If we have one or more of these attributes at the moment, then we are not being guided by God's spirit as how He wants us to live out our lives.
- i) Remember that the issue is "volunteer slavery". It is about how we choose to live at any one moment in time and not what we have to do in order to be saved.
 - ii) Let me add more thing about dealing with anger. I love the acronym "HALT". That stands for "Hungry, Angry, Lonely or Tired". I have found in my own life that when one or more of those things are present is when we are most likely to be tempted to do one of these "anger" oriented sins.
- l) Again, let us remember the secret to living the life of pleasing God: Being of service to others. If we are trying to help someone or putting their needs ahead of our own needs, we are not likely to go negative on other people.
- m) Hang in there. We are almost done with the negative list. The good news coming up is we have a separate "positive" list coming up in Verses 22 and 23. Bear with me as I go through the last of the negative ones and I promise this will get a more positive.

- n) The next few terms are selfish ambitions, dissensions, and heresies.
 - i) As to selfish ambitions and dissensions, the idea is about disagreeing with others.
 - ii) Let me explain "selfish ambitions" a little better. The idea is not about say, trying to succeed at work in order to provide for one's self or one's family. The original Greek term implies one who only cares about money and power and that person has no interest in being of any use to any other person. Think of a person who has no interest in ever helping anyone else, and you get the idea of that term.
 - iii) The word "dissensions" implies to "stand apart from everyone else". "Division" is a synonym. This is not talking about the times when one is taking a stand for what is right versus what is wrong. This is about a person who insists that the only way to get something done is their way. It is the kind of person that no one gets along with because they always want to do things their own way.
 - iv) Another synonym of dissensions is the final word "heresies". We think of heresies in the religious sense of teaching false doctrines. The point is a way to tell when one is not being lead by God's spirit is when we insist on some false teaching and there are no exceptions to how "I" view it, versus what God's word actually says.
 - o) The final few words used here are envy; drunkenness, orgies.
 - i) "Envy is to desire what we don't have."
 - ii) As to drunkenness, the bible strongly condemns getting drunk to the point where one is making bad decisions let alone "falling down drunk". While the actual act of drinking alcohol is not condemned, getting drunk is. I hold the view that when in doubt it is better to be too cautious then not cautious enough.
 - iii) Orgies are sexual activity with more than one person at a time. Such acts did exist back then as it does today. That one is pretty self-explanatory.
 - p) The point for all of these terms and acts is simply to know that if we are engaged in any or all of them, then know that we are not letting God's spirit guide as at that moment in time.
 - q) OK, after two and one half pages focusing on things God does not approve of, it is time to change our focus to the positive side and ask, how do we know when God is guiding our lives at any moment? Instead of those negative traits, here comes the positive ones.
17. Verse 22: But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.
- a) Before I discuss any of these terms, notice the last sentence. There are no laws in the Old Testament or anywhere in the bible for that matter that condemn any of the actions listed in these two verses. Therefore, if one is practicing love, joy, peace, etc., then one does not have to worry whether or not they are pleasing God or not. They are, end of issue.
 - b) I am reminded of the classic joke about 1st Corinthians, Chapter 13. That chapter is called the "love chapter" as it teaches us how we are to show love to our fellow Christians. When we put Jesus name in the middle of all of those attributes, and if we know pretty well the story of how Jesus lived, we can see how easily He fulfilled what was written there.
 - i) When we put our own name in the middle of those attributes and we are honest, we can see how we fall very short of pleasing God. That's the point.
 - ii) My point is it is impossible over the long term to show any of the attributes listed in these verses here in Galatians or in 1st Corinthians (same author) unless one is being guided by God's spirit to guide our lives.
 - iii) To put it another way, would we rather have the attributes listed here in these two verses associated with our lives, or all the negative ones listed in the last 3 verses?
 - iv) Think about what one would like said about them on their tombstone. Would one like one of the terms listed in Verses 22-23, or one of the other terms that are listed in Verses 19 through 21? Me, I'll take the latter list, although I know that I fall way short of living these terms out. Again, the secret of living out the Christian life is all about letting God guide us as opposed to trying to live by willpower.

- c) I could probably spend a few pages describing each of these attributes, but I suspect that each of us already instinctively understand them, so I won't go through them like I did for all of the negative traits. I can just say that the secret to knowing when the Holy Spirit is guiding our lives is when we act like these verses are describing here. Is it possible for us to act that way all the time? Not that I've seen. Is it possible for us to strive to be a good witness for Jesus? Yes. The secret is not to try harder, but to let the Spirit guide us and use our time, talents and gifts to make a difference for others in the world. That is what living the Christian life is all about and that is what being God's slave is all about.
- d) Meanwhile, we have three more verses to go.
18. Verse 24: Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.²⁵ Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.
- a) John's loose translation: Let us not choose to sin by ignoring the Holy Spirit that is living within us. Remember that God is a "gentlemen" which means that He never forces His will upon our lives. We have to choose at any given moment to be that "volunteer slave" that I have been preaching throughout this lesson. We do that by asking the Holy Spirit to guide our lives so we can make a difference for Him. When we ignore what He desires for our lives is when the negative traits as listed in Verse 26 (and the earlier verses) start to come out again. In effect, life is a moment by moment thing where one has to be aware that God does desire to guide our lives. By regularly praying for the Holy Spirit to guide us and be a part of our lives, we remind ourselves of that desire to be volunteer slaves.
- b) This brings me back to the reference to the life of Joseph and the fact that he was called in a movie "the freest man that ever lived" even though he was a slave at that time. Did he have to do whatever his slave master required of him? Of course. However, he realized he had no control over that situation and accepted his master's will. At the same time, he was free to choose to be obedient to God and chose to do God's will for his life. That is what made him free while still being a slave at the same time. In effect, that is what this whole lesson is about, regardless of what life throws at us at any given time. That is how we can be free to live how we want, but still choose to do God's will and with God's help still deal with whatever situation we have to deal with.
19. I want to close by bringing up a point about this whole lesson. You have to admit, for someone who doesn't believe in the law, Paul has lots of them to follow. It is not a matter of "I have done a, b, and c today and have avoided x, y and z" therefore, God must love me more today because of what I have done and not done. As I have been preaching through this whole lesson, a perfect God cannot love us more than He does already. God wants us to act a certain way, not because we have to, but because we just want to. Again, it is about being free to sin all we want, and then choosing not to sin. In other words it is about making the choice to be a slave to God's desire for our lives because that is the best way for us to live. If one gets that, one gets the whole lesson.
20. Let me end this with prayer. Please join me as we ask the Spirit to guide our lives:
- a) Heavenly Father, thank You that You have freed us from having to obey any specific set of rules or rituals in order to be saved. We can't earn our salvation. Help us to remember that You love us, just because You do and we can't earn it. Help us to take that freedom that You give us and in effect give it back to You. Help us to use the most valuable assets we have, our time, possessions and our talents to make a difference for You in this world. Help us to live the way You want us to live so that we can use our lives to make that difference for You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.