

One Another, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 5: Serve One Another in Love

Galatians 5:13–15

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This lesson sits at a hinge point in Galatians, and what is doctrinally at stake is the very meaning of Christian freedom. Paul has labored through the whole letter to defend the truth that we are justified through faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law. Your students must not miss that the freedom in verse 13 is gospel freedom, freedom from sin, from condemnation, and from the failed attempt to earn God's favor by law-keeping. But Paul immediately guards that freedom from two opposite distortions. On one side lies license, using grace as a license to indulge the flesh. On the other side lies a return to bondage. Help your students see that the gospel answers both by handing the free person a towel: "serve one another humbly in love."

A second doctrinal point deserves your attention. Paul says the whole Law is fulfilled in the command to love your neighbor as yourself (v. 14). This does not mean the Old Law is still binding on Christians, for Paul has plainly taught that we are no longer under the Law as a covenant (Galatians 3:23–25). It means that love is what the Law was always pointing toward, and that the Christian who walks in love by the Spirit accomplishes the righteous heart of God's intention. Keep the congregational shape in view. This is love within the body, where freedom either builds up or, when it curdles into biting and devouring, tears the family apart.

At the same time, aim past information toward formation. The Galatians did not need a lecture on liberty; they needed to stop devouring one another and start serving. Your students do not merely need to define Christian freedom correctly. They need to walk out of the room and take the lower place with a specific brother or sister. Hold the doctrine and the heart together. The same grace that sets us free is the grace that, received deeply, makes us glad to kneel.

Question 1

Student Question:

Paul says, "You were called to be free" (v. 13), yet the whole letter has insisted we are not saved by keeping the Law. From what has the gospel set us free, and how did we come to share in that freedom in Christ?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin by letting students name the slavery from which the gospel frees us. Galatians is, from start to finish, a battle for freedom. Paul has described our former condition as bondage: enslaved under the elemental things of the world (4:3), held captive under the Law as a guardian (3:23), unable to be justified by works of the Law (2:16). Christ has set us free from the

curse of the Law (3:13), from sin's dominion, and from the crushing project of trying to earn what only grace can give.

Press into how we came to share in this freedom, because this is where the gospel becomes concrete. Paul has just said, "For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ" (3:26–27). We did not free ourselves. We heard the gospel, believed that Jesus is Lord and Christ, turned from sin, confessed him, and were baptized into Christ, and in that union we passed from slavery into the freedom of the children of God.

Guard against two errors here. Some hear "freedom" and imagine a freedom with no master at all. But Paul never offers that. We are freed from sin in order to belong to Christ. Others hear the gospel of grace and quietly slide back toward earning, adding their own law-keeping as the real basis of acceptance. Paul calls that falling from grace (5:4). Help students rest in a freedom that is wholly the gift of God in Christ.

Close by lifting their eyes to the wonder of it. The Galatians were not freed because they were impressive but because God called them by grace (1:6). The same is true of every Christian in the room. We stand in a freedom we could never have purchased, secured by the blood of Christ and entered through obedient faith. That sense of marvel is the soil in which the rest of the lesson grows.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Justification through faith in Christ, not by works of the Law (Galatians 2:16; 3:11)
- Christ's redeeming us from the curse of the Law by becoming a curse for us (Galatians 3:13)
- Entry into Christ and into the freedom of God's children through baptism into Christ (Galatians 3:26–27; Romans 6:3–4)
- Freedom from sin's dominion as freedom for a new Master, not freedom from all masters (Romans 6:17–18)
- The danger of falling from grace by seeking to be justified through law-keeping (Galatians 5:4)

Discussion Prompts

- What are the specific things the gospel has set you free from?
- How did you personally come to share in the freedom Christ offers?
- Why is it dangerous to imagine a Christian freedom with no Master at all?

Question 2

Student Question:

Paul warns against using freedom “to indulge the flesh.” Where have you quietly used your liberty in Christ as an excuse to please yourself rather than to serve others? Name one concrete area.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the first self-examining question, and the goal is honest light rather than condemnation. The temptation Paul names is universal. The moment we hear “you are free,” the flesh whispers that freedom means doing as we please. Help students see how subtle this is in church life. We can dress up self-indulgence in spiritual language: “I am free in Christ, so I do not have to serve in that ministry, sit with that person, or give up that comfort.”

Draw out what Paul means by “the flesh.” He is not speaking merely of bodily appetites but of the whole self-centered nature that turns even good gifts toward its own service. Freedom used to indulge the flesh is freedom curved inward. The very next verses list the works of the flesh, and many of them are relational: enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions (5:19–21). Self-indulgence does not stay private; it poisons the body.

Move the conversation toward concreteness and hope. The point is not to manufacture guilt but to let an honest look push us back toward grace and out toward a real person. Encourage students to name one actual area, a comfort they protect, a duty they dodge, a person they avoid, where they have used Christian liberty as a cover for pleasing themselves, and to imagine what serving instead would cost.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The flesh as the self-centered nature opposed to the Spirit (Galatians 5:16–17)
- The works of the flesh as largely relational and destructive to the body (Galatians 5:19–21)
- Christian liberty as freedom for love, never as a cover-up for self-indulgence (1 Peter 2:16)
- Self-examination as a healthy part of walking by the Spirit (2 Corinthians 13:5)

Discussion Prompts

- How does the flesh disguise self-indulgence as spiritual freedom?
- What is one comfort or duty you have justified avoiding in the name of liberty?
- What would it cost you to turn that freedom outward toward serving someone?

Question 3

Student Question:

Paul commands us to “serve one another humbly in love,” using a word that means the work of a slave. Why would the gospel that frees us from slavery then call us to become servants of one another, and how is this glad slavery different from the bondage we were rescued from?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Let students feel the paradox before you resolve it. Paul has fought for four chapters to free these believers from slavery, and now he tells them to serve one another with the very word used for a slave's labor. This is not Paul taking back with one hand what he gave with the other. It is the gospel revealing the true shape of freedom. We are freed from slavery to sin and law in order to give ourselves freely in love.

Distinguish the two slaveries clearly. The bondage we were rescued from was a slavery of compulsion and fear: enslaved to sin, under the curse, trying and failing to earn acceptance. The slavery Paul now commends is a slavery of love, freely chosen, flowing from a heart already accepted in Christ. One is a chain we could not break; the other is a towel we gladly take up. The difference is the difference between a galley slave and a son who serves his father's house out of love.

Point students to Jesus as the model. The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). On the last night he wrapped a towel around his waist and washed his disciples' feet, the work of the lowest servant (John 13). The freest person who ever lived chose the form of a servant (Philippians 2:7). Christian freedom does not lift us above service; it frees us for it.

Apply this to the body. "Humbly" is the key. Service that is really self-display is just the flesh in disguise. Paul calls for service that takes the lower place and seeks the other's good, not the servant's reputation. Ask students where their service is genuinely humble and where it secretly wants to be noticed. The gospel frees us even from the need to be admired for our serving.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christian freedom expressed in the glad servanthood of love (Galatians 5:13)
- Christ as the servant who came not to be served but to serve (Mark 10:42–45; John 13:1–17)
- Christ's self-emptying, taking the form of a servant, as the pattern for the church (Philippians 2:5–8)
- The difference between bondage to sin and the freely chosen service of love
- Humility as essential to true service, guarding it from being self-display

Discussion Prompts

- How is serving one another in love different from the slavery Christ rescued us from?
- Where do you see Jesus modeling the servanthood Paul commands?
- When is your serving genuinely humble, and when does it quietly seek to be noticed?

Question 4

Student Question:

Think about the people in your congregation you find it easiest to overlook. What would it look like this week to actually take the lower place and serve one of them, expecting nothing in return?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question moves the command into specific faces. Every congregation has people who are easy to overlook: the quiet, the awkward, the elderly, the new, the ones who cannot return the favor. Help students see that serving the impressive and the well-connected often feeds the flesh, while serving the overlooked is closer to the heart of what Paul commands.

Press the phrase “expecting nothing in return.” Much of our service is quietly transactional. We serve those who will serve us back, notice us, or owe us. Jesus said to invite those who cannot repay you (Luke 14:13–14). The love Paul calls for in Galatians is not a trade; it is a gift. Encourage students to picture an actual person they tend to pass by and to plan one concrete, hidden act of service.

Keep the tone hopeful and practical. The aim is not a vague resolve to be nicer but one doable step toward one real person. A meal, a visit, a ride, a genuine conversation, a note. Remind students that taking the lower place is not beneath them; it is the very path their Lord walked, and it is where they will meet him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Service offered freely without expectation of return (Luke 14:12–14)
- Honoring the overlooked and weaker members as worthy of special care (1 Corinthians 12:22–25)
- Love that seeks the good of the other rather than its own advantage (1 Corinthians 13:5)
- The lower place as the place where we follow and meet Christ (Matthew 25:40)

Discussion Prompts

- Who in your congregation do you tend to overlook, and why?
- What is one hidden, concrete way you could serve that person this week?
- Why is serving someone who cannot repay you closer to the heart of the gospel?

Question 5

Student Question:

Paul says, “For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: Love your neighbor as yourself” (v. 14). How can loving our neighbor be said to fulfill the whole Law, and what does that teach us about what God has wanted from his people all along?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Help students grasp what Paul is and is not saying. He is not putting Christians back under the Law of Moses; he has plainly taught that the Law was a guardian until Christ came and that we are no longer under that guardian (3:23–25). He is saying that love is the goal toward which the whole Law was aiming. When Paul says the Law is “fulfilled” in love, he means that the person who truly loves his neighbor accomplishes the righteous intention behind all those commands.

Show how love fulfills the commandments. Paul makes the same point more fully in Romans 13:8–10. The one who loves will not commit adultery, will not murder, will not steal, will not covet, because love does no wrong to a neighbor. Love is not a loophole that lets us skip God’s commands; it is the engine that drives us to honor everything those commands protect. Genuine love is costly obedience aimed at the neighbor’s good.

Lift the students’ eyes to what this reveals about God. From the beginning, God has wanted not mere external compliance but hearts that love. The Old Law itself summed up the second table in “love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18), and Jesus named it second only to loving God with all our heart (Matthew 22:37–40). What God has always sought is a people whose obedience flows from love. That is the heart of the new covenant, in which God writes his law on our hearts.

Apply this to the body and to the Galatian crisis. The Galatians were tempted to measure righteousness by external markers while tearing one another apart. Paul cuts through it: if you really want to fulfill the Law, love your brother. Ask students whether their zeal for being right is matched by love for the people right next to them. Doctrine that never produces love has missed the goal.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Love as the fulfillment, not the abolition, of God’s righteous intention (Romans 13:8–10)
- The Old Law as guardian until Christ, no longer binding as a covenant on Christians (Galatians 3:23–25)
- “Love your neighbor as yourself” as the summary of the second great commandment (Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:37–40)
- The new covenant heart, in which obedience flows from love written within (Jeremiah 31:31–34; Hebrews 8:10)
- The emptiness of zeal for being right that is not matched by love for the brethren (1 Corinthians 13:1–3)

Discussion Prompts

- How does love actually fulfill rather than cancel God’s commandments?
- What does it reveal about God that he has always wanted love and not mere compliance?
- Where is your zeal to be right outrunning your love for the people beside you?

Question 6

Student Question:

Honestly measure your love for fellow Christians by the standard “as yourself.” Where do you guard, excuse, and provide for yourself far more readily than you do for your brothers and sisters in Christ?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question turns the measure “as yourself” into a mirror. We are experts at loving ourselves. We are quick to excuse our own faults, defend our own interests, provide for our own needs, and give ourselves the benefit of the doubt. Paul says: love your neighbor like that. Help students feel how high a bar this sets, and how naturally self-love runs.

Make it concrete with examples. We forgive ourselves instantly but hold grudges against others. We explain away our own sharp words as a bad day but assume the worst of a brother’s. We notice our own needs immediately but are slow to notice a sister’s. The standard “as yourself” exposes the double standard the flesh quietly maintains.

Keep the tone formational and hopeful. The point is not despair at how self-centered we are but a fresh desire to extend to others the very mercy and care we lavish on ourselves. Encourage students to name one specific way they treat themselves better than they treat a fellow Christian, and to ask the Lord to close that gap this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The neighbor’s good measured by the care we naturally give ourselves (Galatians 5:14)
- Love that does not insist on its own way (1 Corinthians 13:4–5)
- Counting others more significant than ourselves (Philippians 2:3–4)
- The exposure of self-love as a tool for growth, not condemnation

Discussion Prompts

- How quickly do you excuse yourself compared to how you judge others?
- Where do you provide for your own needs but overlook a brother’s or sister’s?
- What is one way you could extend to someone the mercy you give yourself?

Question 7**Student Question:**

Paul warns, “If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other” (v. 15). What does this vivid picture of wild animals tell us about the destructive power of conflict within the body of Christ?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Let the imagery do its work. Paul switches abruptly from the language of love to the language of the jungle: biting, devouring, being consumed. He is picturing wild beasts tearing at one another until nothing is left. This is a sobering and deliberate contrast. The opposite of serving one another in love is not mere coolness; it is a slow mutual destruction.

Help students see how this happens in real congregations. Biting and devouring rarely begin with open warfare. They begin with sharp words, with gossip carried from house to house, with a critical spirit that finds fault, with old grudges nursed in silence. Little by little the body turns on itself. James warns that the same tongue that blesses God curses people made in God's image (James 3:9–10), and Paul warns the Corinthians that their quarreling threatened to ruin them.

Stress the warning Paul attaches: “watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.” Conflict in the body is not a private matter that hurts only the two people involved. It consumes the whole. A congregation devouring itself loses its joy, its witness, and sometimes its very life. The same freedom that could have built the body up becomes the weapon that tears it down.

End with hope and self-awareness. The remedy is not merely to stop fighting but to return to verse 13, to serve one another humbly in love. Where love advances, devouring retreats. Ask students to consider whether they are, even now, contributing more to the building up or the tearing down of their church family.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The mutual destruction that follows when love gives way to conflict (Galatians 5:15)
- The tongue's power to bless or to curse, to build up or to tear down (James 3:5–10)
- Quarreling, jealousy, and strife as works of the flesh that ruin the body (Galatians 5:19–21; 1 Corinthians 3:3)
- The damage of congregational conflict to the church's joy, unity, and witness (John 17:21)
- Loving service as the God-given remedy that reverses the devouring (Galatians 5:13)

Discussion Prompts

- How does “biting and devouring” usually begin in a congregation?
- Why is conflict in the body never merely a private matter between two people?
- What does it look like to replace devouring with serving in a real disagreement?

Question 8

Student Question:

Where have you participated in “biting and devouring,” whether through sharp words, gossip, a critical spirit, or quiet grudges, within your church family? What would repentance look like?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question asks students to move from the general warning to personal confession. It is easy to deplore conflict in the abstract and hard to see our own part in it. Help students name the specific forms biting and devouring take in their own lives: the cutting remark, the bit of gossip passed along, the habit of criticism, the grudge held against a brother or sister for months.

Be gentle but clear. The goal is genuine repentance, not vague regret. Repentance means more than feeling bad; it means a change of mind that turns into a change of direction. For sharp words it may mean an apology. For gossip it may mean refusing to carry the next story and going instead to the person. For a grudge it may mean forgiving and seeking reconciliation (Matthew 5:23–24).

Keep the tone hopeful. The same grace that frees us is the grace that meets us when we have wronged the body. Encourage students to name one specific instance and one specific step of repentance, trusting that the Lord who commands us to serve one another also forgives and restores those who turn back to him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Repentance as a change of mind that issues in a change of direction (Acts 26:20)
- The call to seek reconciliation with a brother before worship (Matthew 5:23–24)
- Refusing gossip and a critical spirit as part of guarding the body (Ephesians 4:29–31)
- God’s grace and forgiveness for the believer who repents and turns back (1 John 1:9)

Discussion Prompts

- In what specific form have you contributed to biting and devouring?
- What would real repentance, not just regret, look like in that case?
- Is there a brother or sister you need to go to this week, and what will you say?

Question 9

Student Question:

Hold together the two halves of this passage: the freedom we are given in Christ and the call to serve one another in love. How does our shared life in the one body, into which we were baptized, keep Christian freedom from collapsing into selfish license on one side or joyless law-keeping on the other?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal high point of the lesson, so give it room. Paul holds two truths together that the human heart constantly pulls apart. On one side is genuine freedom: we are not under the Law, not earning our salvation, truly liberated in Christ. On the other side is genuine obligation:

serve one another humbly in love. Strip away either one and the gospel is lost. Without freedom we sink back into law-keeping; without love freedom rots into license.

Show how the body of Christ holds these together. We are not free-floating individuals doing as we please. Paul has just reminded the Galatians that they were baptized into Christ and clothed with him (3:27), made one in him so that there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free (3:28). To be baptized into Christ is to be baptized into his body, joined to a family. Freedom exercised inside a body has a built-in direction: it serves the body. A hand is most free when it does what a hand is for.

Show how this rescues us from license. License says, “My freedom is mine to spend on myself.” But a member of a body cannot think that way without harming the whole. When the Galatians turned freedom into self-indulgence, they began to bite and devour one another. Belonging to the one body reminds us that our liberty is never private; it is always exercised among brothers and sisters whose good we are bound to seek.

Show how this also rescues us from joyless law-keeping. Some, fearing license, retreat into rule-keeping and lose the freedom Christ bought. But love is not a return to the Law; it is the glad overflow of grace received. We serve not to earn standing in the body but because we already belong, baptized into Christ and into one another. Help students feel the difference: not freedom without love, not love without freedom, but the free, glad, mutual service of those who are one in Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Freedom in Christ and the obligation to love held together, not played against each other (Galatians 5:13)
- Baptism into Christ as baptism into his one body, the church (Galatians 3:27–28; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Romans 6:3–4)
- The unity of believers in one body as the context of all “one another” commands (Romans 12:5)
- License as the corruption of freedom into self-indulgence (Galatians 5:13; 1 Peter 2:16)
- Loving service as the glad overflow of grace, not a return to law-keeping (Galatians 5:4–6)
- The danger of falling from grace by reverting either to license or to law (Galatians 5:1, 4)

Discussion Prompts

- How does belonging to one body give your freedom a built-in direction?
- Why does selfish license ultimately destroy the freedom it claims to enjoy?
- Where do you tend to drift: toward license, or toward joyless rule-keeping?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across Galatians 5:13–15 as a whole: called to freedom, freedom expressed in loving servanthood, the warning against devouring one another. Name one specific way you sense Jesus calling you to grow through this passage, and what you will do about it.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone question gathers the whole lesson into one concrete commitment. Resist letting it stay general. “I want to serve more” is a wish, not a step. Help students name a specific person, a specific arena, and a specific action that flows from what struck them most in the passage.

Encourage them to connect the application to the part of the text that pressed on them. For one student it may be the call to take up the towel and serve someone overlooked. For another it may be the measure “as yourself” and a resolve to extend mercy. For another it may be the warning against biting and devouring, and a phone call of repentance that needs to be made. The text itself should drive the response.

Close by lifting their eyes back to Christ. The goal of this study is not behavior modification but becoming like Jesus, the one who, being perfectly free, wrapped himself in a towel and knelt. Remind students that the same Lord who frees us supplies, by his Spirit, the love he commands. Send them out not with a heavy burden but with a clear next step and confident hope that Christ is forming them.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The goal of the Christian life as growing conformity to Christ the Servant (Romans 8:29; Philippians 2:5)
- The Holy Spirit’s work in producing love in those who walk by him (Galatians 5:22–25)
- Personal, specific obedience as the right response to God’s word (James 1:22)
- Christ as both the pattern and the power of the loving service he commands

Discussion Prompts

- What part of this passage pressed on your heart most, and why?
- What is the one specific act of loving service you will take, and when?
- How will you depend on Christ’s Spirit, rather than your own willpower, as you take it?