

**"Freed to Love & Serve"**

**Scripture Passages:** 1) Psalm 44:1-8  
2) Luke 9:51-62  
3) Galatians 5:2-15

**Reptilian Response:**

“When it came close to the time for his Ascension, Jesus gathered up his courage and steeled himself for the journey to Jerusalem. [52] He sent messengers on ahead. They came to a Samaritan village to make arrangements for his hospitality. [53] But when the Samaritans learned that his destination was Jerusalem, they refused hospitality. [54] When the disciples James and John learned of it, they said, "Master, do you want us to call a bolt of lightning down out of the sky and incinerate them?"

Don't you just love James and John? They felt slighted. They felt disrespected. They felt put out. So how were they going to respond? “Master, do you want us to call a bolt of lightning down out of the sky and incinerate them?” What the heck, when you have the Son of God on your side you might as well just incinerate them, if they are going to be so rude.

How often is that us? How often is that our first reaction? When we feel hurt, disrespected, slighted our first reaction is probably similar to that of James and John. In our own ways, using our own wording we too want to call down lightning from heaven to incinerate the person who hurt us in some way. I think this is a typical kind of response for humans. We are wired to respond in this reptilian, knee jerk way, because it helps us survive in the heat of the moment. But as followers of Jesus do we want to respond in this instinctual way or in some other way?

**Excuses:** Jesus responded to their request to call down lightning by saying, “Of course not!” Then as they continued to travel on their way, Jesus interacted with three people seemingly interested in following the Jesus way. In each case, however, the person made some excuse for why they could not follow at that moment. Eventually Jesus said, “No procrastination. No backward looks. You can't put God's kingdom off till tomorrow. Seize the day.”

Paul is at a similar place with the Galatians. Paul is trying to help the Galatians understand that they can't be people of the law on some days and people of grace on other days. Paul too is saying, “No procrastination. No backward looks. You can't put God's kingdom off till tomorrow. Seize the day.” Listen as Paul continues to express his concern over the situation in the churches of Galatia. Listen as Paul encourages the Galatians and us to seize the day. **Read Galatians 5:2-15.**

**Yeast:** Paul borrows Jesus' illustration of yeast to point out how easy it is for us to get distracted from the way of Jesus with just the slightest wavering, or the easiest excuses, or the minimal of distractions. When we start finding one little excuse for not showing grace to the people God brings into our lives, or not acting with love, or not forgiving we quickly go down a path where grace, love, forgiveness are the exception rather than the rule.

Just think about this with some of our religious practices, like going to worship on Sunday. It is so easy to rationalize not going to worship. Or think about this in terms of stewardship. It is so easy to rationalize giving less than ten percent. Or think about this in terms of studying Scripture. It is so easy to believe that I learn enough about Scripture when I go to church, I don't need to read myself. Or think about this in terms of prayer. It is easy to say I will take time to be

in prayer. Or it is easy to say I will pray for someone, but do we actually do it?

We have a similar struggle when it comes to living in the way Jesus calls us to live, with grace, love, and forgiveness. Responding to people with forgiveness, grace, and love does not happen in a knee-jerk, reptilian kind of way. Acts of forgiveness, grace and love take both an intentional decision and an intentional action. We are not necessarily wired to naturally respond to people and situations with forgiveness, grace and love. Grace, love and forgiveness happen in the world because people choose to use their God given freedom to respond to others in love.

We saw this with the Detroit pitcher the other day in how he responded to the umpire that robbed him of a perfect game. A few years ago we saw this in the Amish community as they responded to the man who killed their children at school. Every now and then we observe humanity using the freedom God gives us to respond to others through acts of love and grace rather than knee-jerk revenge. This is a huge challenge.

**Freedom:** Paul writes, “It is absolutely clear that God has called you to a free life.”

God has created us to be free, but what is freedom from a Biblical perspective? Paul writes, “Just make sure that you don’t use this freedom as an excuse to do whatever you want to do and destroy your freedom.” How Paul described freedom in that sentence vastly differs from how the word freedom gets used in our culture. How often do we use freedom as an excuse to do whatever we want? How often does freedom become an excuse similar in vane to “My dog ate it? My alarm didn’t go off? My friend made me do it?” How often do we use our God created freedom to reject the very ways of God? I find that an interesting question to ponder.

**Free to Love:** Paul goes on and says, “Rather, use your freedom to serve one another in love; that’s how freedom grows. For everything we know about God’s Word is summed up in a single sentence: Love others as you love yourself. That’s an act of true freedom.”

Do we use our freedom as an excuse for how we live our lives or do we use our freedom to love? Loving others, even and especially our enemies is the ultimate use of our freedom. Loving others is the very reason God has given us freedom.

Love, however, is not a reptilian response. Love is not a knee-jerk reaction. Love is a very conscious decision, particularly when we choose to love someone we rather incinerate with God’s divine lightning bolt. When that is our situation we truly use our freedom in a divinely ordained way.

**Examples:** When I was about ten years old my sister quite intentionally kicked me in the shin with her ice skate. In that moment I did not use my God given freedom to respond in love, instead I used the reptilian part of my brain, seething with anger and hatred. Using our freedom to respond to people in love is a huge challenge.

It is a challenge when someone cuts us off. It is a challenge when we feel hurt. It is a challenge when someone questions our integrity. It is a challenge to love when our worship is interrupted by noise, or by patterns we are not used to, or music we don’t particularly appreciate. It is a challenge to love when people have different opinions and perspectives. It is a challenge to love when we wish a situation were different, but it isn’t.

**Conclusion:** Paul ends this section with, “If you bite and ravage each other, watch out—in no time at all you will be annihilating each other, and where will your precious freedom be then?”

Father’s Day is a good day to consider whether we use our freedom to love as God hopes or whether we use our freedom as an excuse to live, however we want. As Dad’s since this is our special day will we use the freedom of this day for self indulgence or service and love? How about tomorrow?

If we decide to be followers of the Jesus’ Way, then we will choose to use our freedom to

love, which is the only way freedom can truly grow. My dear friends, let us use our precious freedom to love one another, as God has loved us. Amen.