



Bible Study

October 14, 2020 (Lesson 3)

Free in Christ

Galatians 5:1-26

Unit Theme: The Gospel in Galatians

Central Truth: We live in love and freedom by Christ's Spirit in us.

Focus: Investigate characteristics of our freedom in Christ, and govern our freedom by love for Christ and others.

Context: The apostle Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians around AD 52.

Golden Text: "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage" (Gal. 5:1).

Study Outline:

I. Guard Your Freedom (Gal. 5:1-12)

II. Free to Serve in Love (Gal. 5:13-21)

III. Live in the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-26)

INTRODUCTION

In Galatians 5, Paul gives a triumphant yet practical call to Christian freedom. He challenges the Galatian believers to stop relying on the works and rituals of the Law for salvation. Instead, they should have faith in Christ alone.

As Paul applies his instruction and doctrine to Christian living, the overall theme is walking in the Spirit. Paul demonstrates the impact of freedom in Christ on Christian character and life within the body of Christ.

The message of Christian freedom from bondage to the Law includes Christian responsibility. Freedom does not mean to do nothing. Rather, it is a strong call to Biblical living. Too often, the message of Christian freedom has been interpreted as a license to sin. Christian freedom is not a license to sin; rather, it is a birth into a lifestyle guided by the Spirit.

As Christians, we are to live responsibly. Our calling is not to the Law. Nevertheless, we are called to obedient living. We are not guided by written tablets of stone, but the

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Spirit has written a higher law on our heart. The nature of this new walk of freedom and responsibility in the Spirit is the focus of today's lesson.

I. GUARD YOUR FREEDOM (Gal. 5:1-12) A. The Liberty of Grace (vv. 1-6)

1 Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. 2 Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. 3 For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. 4 Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace. 5 For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. 6 For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.

This passage presents both a comforting promise and a disturbing warning to believers. Paul begins by declaring that Christ has made or set us free by liberating us from sin's horrific bondage. However, he cautions us to "stand fast" so we can persevere in the freedom or liberty that comes only through the vicarious death of Jesus on the cross (v. 1). The Greek noun for "liberty" is *eleutheria*, and the Greek verb for "made us free" is *eleutheroo*. The apostle's use of two words from the same root emphasizes the freedom believers have in Christ, while providing a stark contrast with "the yoke of bondage" Christ destroyed when He saved us from sin.

Paul warns the Galatians that it is possible for them to become "entangled again" in the bondage that once separated them from the liberating power of Christ. And it is impossible for anyone to free himself from such entanglement. The only hope is in Christ Jesus. He has the power to set us free and to keep us free from sin when we obey Him and stand firmly on His promises.

The Galatians were being tempted to forsake their freedom in Christ by adopting the legalism of the Old Testament laws (vv. 2-3). Certain Jewish Christians (called Judaizers) were demanding that the Galatians adopt the Mosaic laws to truly be saved. If they were to do this, they would be abandoning their freedom in Christ to adopt a religion based on works, which cannot save anyone (v. 4). It would render the work of Christ ineffective for their redemption if they rejected His liberty to adopt a salvation contingent on personal works. They must beware, lest they fall from grace and lose their relationship with Christ.

Verses 4 and 5 reveal the basis of our salvation and the key for standing firm in our liberty. Our hope of righteousness and redemption comes by faith in Jesus Christ, and

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we can endure in this faith only through the work of the Holy Spirit. The Lord not only has set us free; He also sent the Holy Spirit to ensure that we can preserve faithfully until we realize the hope of His coming (John 14:1-4, 16, 26).

Whether one is circumcised does not really matter (Gal. 5:6). What does matter is “faith expressing itself through love” (NIV). This is the ultimate calling for faithful service to Christ and others. It is the fulfillment of the two greatest commandments: (1) loving God with all of our being, and (2) loving others as ourselves (Matt. 22:34-40).

1. How must Christians “stand fast,” and why (v. 1)?
2. Why can't a person be “justified by the law” (v. 4)?
3. Name two things faith does in the believer (vv. 5-6).

“If you feel that you can follow a few little rules or some clever gimmicks to make you a mature Christian, then you have fallen into a subtle trap of legalism.” —J. Vernon McGee

B. The Offense of the Cross (vv. 7-12) (Galatians 5:8-10, 12 is not included in the printed text.)

7 Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth? 11 And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? then is the offence of the cross ceased.

In this section we read some disturbing news. After the Galatians accepted Christ, at first they had “run well” (v. 7), which is a metaphor for the athletic races of the ancient Greek world. Apparently, pressure from the Judaizers had a negative impact on the Galatian believers, and they had not been faithful in following the “plain truth of the Gospel, whether they know it or not” (Alan Cole, *The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians*).

The Galatians had neglected their calling from God (v. 8) due to the “leaven,” or heretical doctrine, of the false teachers (v. 9). God does not take such behavior and teachings lightly, and a warning concerning judgment is declared (v. 10). Some of the Judaizers even accused Paul of teaching the need for circumcision to be saved. But Paul refuted this by pointing out the persecution he experienced from preaching salvation only through faith in the grace of the Lord, which he calls “the offence of the cross” (v. 11).

Still today, secular people are often offended at the thought that Jesus' death on the cross is humanity's only hope for redemption. Thankfully for the Galatians, Paul's words

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indicate he had hope that they would respond to his letter and change so they could “stand fast” once again in the liberating grace of God (v. 1).

1. How are false teachers like a runner (vv. 7-8)?
2. How are false teachers like “yeast” (v. 9)?
3. What warning is given in verse 10?

“All God’s plans have the mark of the cross on them, and all His plans have death to self in them. . . . But men’s plans ignore the offence of the cross or despise it.”—E. M. Bounds

II. FREE TO SERVE IN LOVE (Gal. 5:13-21) A. Love Does Not Bite (vv. 13-15)

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.

Evidently, one of the end results of the controversy between the believers and the Judaizers was a lack of love in relationships. The Judaizers and their converts had become elitists, claiming moral and spiritual superiority to others. However, the believers in Christ were not immune to the same temptation. No doubt on both sides, the temptation may have been to be critical of others in order to demonstrate morality or spirituality.

Faith must be guided by love. Faith may bring salvation to the individual, but love brings harmony to the body of Christ. Love fulfilled and summarized all of the Law. Christ died not only to fulfill the debt of sin but also to fulfill the obligation to love. Whereas sin was to be put to death, love was to come alive—both because of Jesus Christ.

1. Describe the freedom God gives to believers (vv. 13-14).
2. Explain the warning in verse 15.

“Why is love greater than faith? Because the end is greater than the means. And why is it greater than charity? Because the whole is greater than the part.”—Henry Drummond

B. The Flesh Fights the Spirit (vv. 16-18)

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.

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“Walking in the Spirit” is not optional. Such a walk is necessary for our spiritual survival. Walk comes from a Greek term meaning not so much a literal walking as our manner of life. It refers to both our practice and character. Our personal makeup as an individual as well as our relationships with others is implied.

With this in mind, the concept of walking in the Spirit comes into focus. Such a walk means we are molded by the power of the Spirit. Our character and personality come under the guidance and influence of the third person of the Godhead. It means we rely on the Spirit for the motivation and resources with which to conduct ourselves in this present world.

Standing opposite the walk in the Spirit is the “lust of the flesh.” Lust comes from a Greek term which means “passionate, driving desire.” Here, it emphasizes behavior motivated by sensual desires. Lust leads to sin, ungodliness, and disobedience. Against indicates a conflict. Contrary indicates opposition, as an opponent ready to attack.

The walk in the Spirit and the lust of the flesh are not alternate options for us as believers. They are opposing lifestyles and cannot coexist in our life. Compromise of the Christian’s spiritual walk ultimately destroys that walk, while walking in the Spirit brings victory over the flesh.

Describe the battle between the flesh and the Spirit. “To live ‘to and for yourself’ is to ‘walk after the flesh.

’ To live ‘to and for Christ’ is to ‘walk after the Spirit.’” —Major Ian Thomas

C. Fleshly Works Are Deadly (vv. 19-21) 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.

Paul listed “works of the flesh” in verses 19-21. This list carefully outlines the pattern of passion embedded in the lustful walk of the flesh.

Adultery means marital unfaithfulness, especially of a sexual nature. Fornication indicates premarital sexual relations and overall sexual distortion. Uncleanness literally means “without cleansing.” Lasciviousness means unbridled and unrestrained passion and lust.

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Idolatry, from a term which emphasized appeal to the eyes, means the worship of an object. Witchcraft indicates the desire to manipulate the supernatural. Hatred is open hostility. Variance indicates strife and contention. Emulations (from the Greek, *zelos*) in the context of verse 20 means to allow something to boil over into wrongful acts.

Wrath is a passion to cause harm to others. Strife is a self-centered, political action that creates factions. Seditious are desires to create divisions. Heresies are sects that capture and overthrow other groups. Envyings are persistent desires to corrupt and destroy others. Murders indicates the slaying of others.

Drunkenness means to come under the control of alcohol or other substances. Revellings describes open, drunken parades, many times held in honor of a deity. The term emphasizes a group, not just an individual, that is openly displaying its intoxication.

Paul emphatically says these are acts born out of the flesh and lust. They have no part in the life of the person who lives in the Spirit. Those who practice these deeds will not inherit the kingdom of God.

- How are “the works of the flesh” exhibited both inwardly and outwardly?

“The vigor and power and comfort of our spiritual life depends on our mortification of deeds of the flesh.”—John Owen

III. LIVE IN THE SPIRIT (Gal. 5:22-26) A. Fruit of the Spirit (vv. 22-23) ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, ²³ Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

In contrast to the works of the flesh, Paul now presents the fruit of the Spirit. This fruit is the result of a reaction to a stimulus. In this case the source of the fruit is the Spirit. The very phrase “of the Spirit” indicates the origin of this fruit is not us but God. The qualities listed are not human attributes but come from the Spirit, who empowers us to attain them.

It is difficult to maintain these virtues in the face of sin and the corruption of the world. To remain at peace and to return a gentle and loving response to the hatred and cruelty of the world is difficult indeed. To consistently return love for evil and give back sympathy for anger tries the fiber of a believer’s faith and is an impossible task without the power of the Spirit.

Paul lists nine aspects of the fruit of the Spirit, beginning with love (from the Greek *agape*), which is a divine kind of love. This love is not a conditional love, but loves

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individuals even as they are. It reaches out to others with the purpose of accomplishing God's purpose. It is God's love working through the Christian.

Joy is not mere emotion, but is based rather on the believer's relationship with Christ. This joy is not dependent on outward circumstances. Christ within is its foundation.

Peace is not necessarily the absence of conflict but the ability to remain constant despite the circumstances. It is a sense of security regardless of the threat. Pressure to give in and fail is gone because of the Rock—Christ Jesus. He has established rest, even in the midst of the storm. Longsuffering indicates an ability to endure, for extended periods of time if necessary, unfair treatment and anguish inflicted by others.

Gentleness means reacting in a kind manner toward others. Goodness is the ability to maintain a good attitude and to do good on a consistent basis.

Faith is an abiding conviction and trust in the truth. Meekness is to be dominated by gentleness and mildness. Temperance is self-control—the mastery of one's passions and desires.

The listing of the fruit of the Spirit strategically matched the meanings and order of the pairs of inner lusts and works of the flesh. Love overcomes fornication and adultery. Joy overcomes lasciviousness and uncleanness. Peace overcomes witchcraft and idolatry. Longsuffering overcomes variance and hatred. Gentleness overcomes emulations. Goodness overcomes wrath and strife. Faith overcomes seditions and heresies. Meekness overcomes envy and murders. Temperance overcomes drunkenness and reveling.

- Name ways "the fruit of the Spirit" was seen in Jesus' life on earth.

"What, then, is fruit? In the New Testament we find that fruit is all the things that we may reasonably expect to follow upon our knowing Christ. The good works and godly attitudes that spring from our salvation are our fruit. And the Spirit who fills us is their author. Paul gives us a partial list in Galatians 5:22-23." —Tom Wells

B. The Spirit-Filled Walk (vv. 24-26)

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.

Verse 24 summarizes the comparison of the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. The conclusion is that the works of the flesh must be crucified if the fruit of the Spirit is

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to be manifested. This crucifixion will negate the works of the flesh and create room for the move of the Spirit. Without this crucifixion we cannot produce the fruit of the Spirit.

However, if we are “crucified with [Christ]” (Rom. 6:6), we become alive in Christ and live in the Spirit. To live by the Spirit is to derive our life from Him. To walk by the Spirit means to order our lives by His rule and control.

Verse 26 of the text reminds us that life in the Spirit is not exempt from temptation. The apostle named three ways we must be on our guard: (1) hold to humility; (2) avoid a combatant attitude; and (3) refrain from being jealous.

1. Is crucifying the flesh a onetime act or an ongoing action?
2. If a church does not follow the commands in verse 25, what will happen?

“The pampering of the flesh is the quenching of God’s Spirit.” —Thomas Watson

CONCLUSION

Walking in the Spirit is to be the natural outgrowth of living in the Spirit. Consequently, if our daily walk is not consistent with the level of our professed spirituality, we should immediately implore the Holy Spirit to discern the reason for the discrepancy and take corrective action.

While living in the realm of the Spirit often transports us into the presence of Christ himself, it is equally true that Christian living involves regular contact with the unregenerate world.

As Moses came down from the spiritual ecstasy of Sinai only to behold Israel’s idolatrous orgy before the golden calf, so we must be prepared to face and withstand the indifference and carnality of a culture devoid of respect for God and all things sacred.

We must never forget that the world in which we live as Christians in no way diminishes God’s call on us to live exemplary lives. We must learn to depend on our life in the Spirit to equip and empower us to consistently bear the fruit of the Spirit. Fruitful lives lived out consistently in spite of hostile environment are a powerful witness for Jesus Christ.

GOLDEN TEXT CHALLENGE

“STAND FAST THEREFORE IN THE LIBERTY WHEREWITH CHRIST HATH MADE US FREE, AND BE NOT ENTANGLED AGAIN WITH THE YOKE OF BONDAGE” (Gal. 5:1).

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Stand was a military term in ancient times. The soldier held ground that had been won. In the spiritual realm, Christ has defeated the territory of the Enemy, and the believer is to occupy the reclaimed domain. Standing is part of the warfare. The Enemy's attacks still have to be thwarted.

The ground of victory is called liberty, which is the ability to be faithful to the heavenly Father. It is the empowering of the individual spiritually to become mighty in God.

Opposite the liberty of the believer is the bondage of the Law. The Law places a person in a "seesaw" going back and forth, trying to achieve moral victory through human obedience. Rather than obedience flowing from faith in Christ's work, bondage practices morality based first on human allegiance. The bondage is the deception of a temporary high created through successful obedience, then a resulting low when disobedience and imperfection set in. In the end, the Law produces a lethal sense of depravity, imperfection, and sinfulness.

Paul described the bondage as being entangled, emphasizing personal stress, agony, and anxiety. Character is questioned, identity is marred, confidence is eroded.

The liberty and stand of the believer are mightier than the bondage of sin and the Law. The character of the believer is patterned after the image of Christ. The identity of the believer is as a child of God. The confidence of the believer is based on the work of Christ.

Daily Devotions:

M. Free to Walk in Righteousness • Psalm 1:1-6

T. Messiah Frees From Sin's Bondage • Isaiah 42:1-7

W. Freedom Proclaimed • Isaiah 61:1-3

T. Know the Truth in Christ • John 8:31-37

F. The Spirit Brings Life • Romans 8:1-11

S. The Spirit Teaches Us • 1 Corinthians 2:6-16



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