

Leader's Guide

Session 5: Galatians 5

What is something you've always wanted to do (start a business, travel to a foreign country, write a book, etc.)? Why haven't you done it? What's holding you back?

What if every barrier that's holding you back disappeared? Would you do it? Why or why not?

Jesus has set us free. He broke down every barrier between us and God. That means we can do whatever we want, right? We're about to see how Galatians shifts to talking about what it means for us to practically live out our freedom in Christ.

read

Read Galatians 5.

watch

Show Session 5: *Galatians 5* (11:20 minutes)

discuss

Chapter 5 represents another turning point in Paul's letter to the Galatians. Having established the credibility of his apostolic authority (1:11–2:14) and demonstrated the superiority of justification by faith to that of justification by the law (2:15–4:31), Paul now turns to the practical. In these final two chapters, he explains in a pastoral tone what it looks like to live a fruitful life rooted in the truth of justification by faith in Christ. Someone read 5:1–15.

What does Paul identify as the purpose for Christ setting us free? (Freedom)

There are many competing definitions in our world when it comes to the idea of freedom. **How would you define "freedom"? How would you say the world defines it?**

In what ways is your definition similar? In what ways is it different?

In this section, Paul is going to help us with understanding the true meaning of freedom as well as what freedom is not. Let's start by looking at the latter. Picking up where he left off in 4:30–31, Paul continues to urge the Galatians to refuse to submit to the Law as a means for salvation.

What does Paul describe as the consequence of accept circumcision? (Being severed from Christ and falling away from grace)

Bear in mind, his attitude toward circumcision had less to do with the act itself than what it represented. **What would the act of accepting circumcision within the Galatian community represent (5:3–4)? (An attempt to seek justification through the Law)**

As you think back on what we've studied in Galatians up to this point, why does seeking justification through obedience to the Law lead to slavery? (Because the Law was given to show us our inability to earn righteousness so that we would turn to and believe in Jesus Christ; 3:22)

How should that shape the way we think about “running well” (v. 7)?

PEEK AT THE GREEK

In verse 7, Paul uses the phrase *etrechete kalos* meaning, “You were running well.” It’s the same term he used earlier in 2:2 to describe his own advancement in the faith. He likens the Christian walk with Christ to an athletic event, which invites us to consider a few application points. First of all, it’s clear from the context that he considers our spiritual walk a long event, much more like a marathon than a sprint. It is something we are called to finish well whatever obstacles come our way. Secondly, his language again shows his confidence that the Galatians could be won back. Their opponents “cut in” on them, but they had not lost their way entirely, which should inform the way we approach wayward believers. And finally, our ability to “run a good race” includes not simply belief, but “obeying the truth.” When our lives lose an active commitment to living out what we claim to believe, we will drift into sin and doubt. The gospel empowers us to run well the race set before us.

If it is for freedom that Christ has set us free, then we can be sure that freedom is not found through obedience to the Law. Judging by Paul’s comment in verse 11, part of the deception among the Galatian community including the rumor that Paul himself advocated circumcision. In response, Paul understandably questions why he continues to suffer persecution from Jews as a result of his preaching. Clearly, this rumor was a false one. That said, verses 6 and 13 unpack what Christian freedom should look like in life.

What does Paul identify as the true work of Christian freedom? (“Faith working through love”)

Notice he does not say that faith working through love is the foundation of salvation. Rather, true faith expresses itself in love for others, a fruit of salvation. **How does Paul counsel the Galatians to use their freedom in Christ? (Not as an opportunity for the flesh, but a freedom to serve one another through love.)**

PEEK AT THE GREEK

Freedom is a common theme throughout Galatians, but in verse 13 Paul begins to explain what freedom looks like for the Christian life. To do so, he uses the verb, *douleuete*, which means “to serve” or “to obey.” Its noun form is used commonly throughout the New Testament to describe a “servant” or “slave.” Ironically, Paul describes our freedom from slavery to the flesh as something that should lead us to become slaves to one another through humble love. In other words, the biblical picture of freedom is not that of autonomy. Rather, freedom and servanthood go hand in hand. True freedom is found in humbly submitting ourselves in loving service to one another, like Christ did for us (Mark 10:45).

We often think of freedom in terms of autonomy—that being free means being under no authority but our own. That is not the biblical picture of freedom. Rather, true freedom means devoting one’s life in service to others.

What does Paul say fulfills “the whole law”? (Obedience to the command, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”)

Go Deeper

Learn more about the Great Commandment from the following passages: Matt. 22:36–40; Gal. 5:14

What does Jesus point to as encompassing “all the Law and the Prophets”?

What does Paul say fulfills “the whole law”?

What are the differences between their two statements? Do they contradict one another?

Many have pointed to this verse in Galatians as evidence that Paul disagrees with the teachings of Christ, but nothing could be further from the truth. Jesus describes love for our neighbor as a command “like” that of loving the Lord your God. What He means is that love for our neighbor is proof of our love for God. We cannot have one without the other. Writing to a community of believers, Paul simply treats the command to love God as a given for his readers. Love for our neighbors is not superior to our love for God, but the evidence of it.

As Christians, we are confronted with two choices in life: on one hand, we can spend the freedom we receive in Christ on our own passions and desires (“flesh”), which will inevitably lead to consuming one another, as Paul warns (v. 15). Or we can pursue God’s true purpose for our freedom—loving service to others. But we don’t accomplish this through reliance on our own strength. Someone read verses 16–26.

How do we, as Christians, live out freedom in a way that denies “the flesh”? (Walking by the Spirit)

What does verse 17 make clear about the Christian life? (That we will always experience spiritual conflict in this life, which means walking by the Spirit requires consistent intentionality.)

Kyle compared it to a power strip. If we plug into one of our own outlets, we will never find the power we need to battle the flesh in the way we should. But God has given us His power in the Holy Spirit who lives within us. When we “plug in” to the power of the Spirit, He guides us and transforms us piece by piece as we anticipate eternity with Christ.

How do Paul’s list of the works of the flesh (vv. 19–22) and his list of the fruit of the Spirit (vv. 22–23) differ from one another?

Leader: *Answers will vary among the group and that’s fine. The main thing is to ensure that they see the difference between “works” and “fruit.” Despite the fact that English sometimes treats “fruit” as a collective noun, in this passage it is singular whereas “works” is notably plural, an important observation for this text.*

Paul ends his list of “the works of the flesh” saying, “and things like these” (v. 21b). **What does that phrase suggest?** (That his list was not exhaustive. Much more could be listed as works of the flesh.)

What is the difference between “work” and “fruit”?

Paul wants to illustrate something important here. The “works” originate in the flesh, or the self-serving passions of humanity and lead to all kinds of chaotic ends. In other words, they are creations of fallen humanity that divide, harm, and degrade what God created for His glory. “Fruit,” on the other hand originates from one source, the Holy Spirit. Fruit is not something we can create. No matter how well a farmer tends his soil or waters his plants, he cannot make the fruit grow. Rather, it is a gift. The same goes for the fruit of the Spirit. It is a gift that grows from by way of the Spirit through faith in Christ.

Many times, our impulse is to read a list like this and immediately burden ourselves with the responsibility of change. **As you read over Paul’s description of the fruit of the Spirit, do you feel that impulse to change yourself? What would it look like to follow that conviction with a reliance on the Spirit to produce fruit in your life?**

In what ways do you struggle most to rely on the Spirit? In what ways do you tend to revert to self-reliance to produce spiritual fruit?

Of the different forms of the fruit of the Spirit, which describes the area you most need to grow in? What are some practical steps you could take this week in asking the Holy Spirit to bring about growth in that area?

In verses 24–25, Paul uses two active verbs to describe Christ-followers:

1. They “have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”
2. They “keep in step with the Spirit.”

What do these active verbs suggest about the Christian life? (That we are active participants in our sanctification. We do not accomplish it, but we must be intentional about both putting to death our flesh and walking with the Spirit.)

Relying on the Holy Spirit does not mean we do nothing. This letter clearly calls believers to action. We are to actively pursue a life of holiness, but the difference lies in the source. Are we working for our holiness? Or living out of the fruitful life in accordance with the Holy Spirit?

What are some practical ways you can keep in step with the Spirit? (prayer, regular study of God’s Word, confession, repentance, etc.)

As you reflect on this session, where do you find yourself most in need of freedom?

Like Kyle said, we have been set free in Christ to live differently, which starts by relying on the Holy Spirit and serving others selflessly. **What can you do this week to live differently where God has placed you? Who can you serve out of the freedom you have received in Christ?**

last word

You have been set free to live free, but not to spend your freedom on yourself. True freedom is found in humble, loving service to others. Love fulfills the Law. It’s easy to get hung up on a to-do list of external works, but we cannot be what God wants us to be on the outside without first experiencing His transforming power on the inside.

Like Kyle said, relying on works is like plugging a power strip into itself to self-generate. True love that “fulfills the whole law” is the love that comes from plugging ourselves into the power of the Holy Spirit. When we love God above all else, we will love others the way He has commanded us to.

Live it out

Pray: Ask God to teach you what it means to keep in step with the Spirit every time you pray this week.

Memorize: Commit Galatians 5:1 to memory this week. Bring the verse to mind to remember that Jesus has set you free from sin and death.

Serve: Choose one person in your life to lovingly serve this week. Ask God to strengthen you and humble you as you meet that person's needs.

Illustrate: Draw what it looks like to live in slavery to sin versus freedom in Christ. Use Galatians to inspire your illustration.

Choose: Pick one of the expressions of the fruit of the Spirit to focus on this week. Pray that God would put you in situations where you can practice growing in that expression of spiritual fruit. Journal about your experience.