

**Galatians 5**  
**August 7, 2022**

**Open with Prayer**

**HOOK:**

Q: How do you know, on any given day, whether you are you living in the Spirit vs living in the flesh? [Let people engage]

**Transition:** Paul is going to give his readers a major reminder that once we've become believers, we have not only been set free in Christ, but we also receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit who guides and directs us. The flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, so believers need to make a decision as to whether we yield to the power of the Spirit or yield to the desires of the flesh. If we are willing to walk with the Spirit, we will see the fruit of the Spirit develop within us. Let's read the text and listen to what Paul has to say.

**BOOK:**

**Freedom in Christ**

**5** 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.

<sup>2</sup> Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. <sup>3</sup> Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. <sup>4</sup> You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. <sup>5</sup> But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope. <sup>6</sup> For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

<sup>7</sup> You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth? <sup>8</sup> That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you. <sup>9</sup> "A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough." <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> Brothers, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished. <sup>12</sup> As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!

<sup>13</sup> You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature (flesh); rather, serve one another in love. <sup>14</sup> The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." (Lev 19:18) <sup>15</sup> If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

*Life by the Spirit*

<sup>16</sup> So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.

<sup>19</sup> The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; <sup>20</sup> idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions,

factions<sup>21</sup> 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.

<sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. <sup>24</sup> Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup> Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. <sup>26</sup> Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

### **Process Observations/Questions:**

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

### **LOOK:**

Fruit grows in a climate blessed with an abundance of the Spirit and the Word. “Walk in the Spirit” (Gal. 5:25) means “keep in step with the Spirit”—not to run ahead and not to lag behind. This involves the Word, prayer, worship, praise, and fellowship with God’s people. It also means “pulling out the weeds” so that the seed of the Word can take root and bear fruit. We must remember that this fruit is produced *to be eaten*, not to be admired and put on display. People around us are starving for love, joy, peace, and all the other graces of the Spirit. When they find them in our lives, they know that we have something they lack. We do not bear fruit for our own consumption; we bear fruit that others might be fed and helped, and that Christ might be glorified. The flesh may manufacture “results” that bring praise to us, but the flesh cannot bear fruit that brings glory to God. It takes patience, an atmosphere of the Spirit, walking in the light, the seed of the Word of God, and a sincere desire to honor Christ.

### **Close in Prayer**

## **Commentaries for Today's Lesson:**

**Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 1, pp. 712–721)*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.**

### **Galatians 5:1–12**

Paul's doctrine of grace is dangerous!" cried the Judaizers. "It replaces Law with license. Why, if we do away with our rules and abandon our high standards, the churches will fall apart."

First-century Judaizers are not the only ones afraid to depend on God's grace. Legalists in our churches today warn that we dare not teach people about the liberty we have in Christ lest it result in religious anarchy. These people misunderstand Paul's teaching about grace, and it is to correct such misunderstanding that Paul wrote the final section of his letter (Gal. 5–6).

Paul turns now from argument to application, from the doctrinal to the practical. The Christian who lives by faith is not going to become a rebel. Quite the contrary, he is going to experience the *inner discipline* of God that is far better than the outer discipline of man-made rules. No man could become a rebel who depends on God's grace, yields to God's Spirit, lives for others, and seeks to glorify God. The *legalist* is the one who eventually rebels, because he is living in bondage, depending on the flesh, living for self, and seeking the praise of men and not the glory of God.

No, Paul's doctrine of Christian liberty through grace is not the dangerous doctrine. It is *legalism* that is the dangerous doctrine, because *legalism* attempts to do the impossible: change the old nature and make it obey the Laws of God. Legalism succeeds for a short time, and then the flesh begins to rebel. The surrendered Christian who depends on the power of the Spirit is not *denying* the Law of God, or rebelling against it. Rather, that Law is *being fulfilled in him* through the Spirit (Rom. 8:1–4). It is easy to see the sequence of thought in these closing chapters:

1. I have been set free by Christ. I am no longer under bondage to the Law (Gal. 5:1–12).
2. But I need something—Someone—to control my life from within. That Someone is the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:13–26).
3. Through the Spirit's love, I have a desire to live for others, not for self (Gal. 6:1–10).
4. This life of liberty is so wonderful, I want to live it to the glory of God; for He is the One making it possible (Gal. 6:11–18).

Now, contrast this with the experience of the person who chooses to live under Law, under the discipline of some religious leader.

1. If I obey these rules, I will become a more spiritual person. I am a great admirer of this religious leader, so I now submit myself to his system.
2. I believe I have the strength to obey and improve myself. I do what I am told, and measure up to the standards set for me.
3. I'm making progress. I don't do some of the things I used to do. Other people compliment me on my obedience and discipline. I can see that I am better than others in my fellowship. How wonderful to be so spiritual.
4. If only others were like me! God is certainly fortunate that I am His. I have a desire to share this with others so they can be as I am. Our group is growing and we have a fine reputation. Too bad other groups are not as spiritual as we are.

No matter how you look at it, legalism is an insidious, dangerous enemy. *When you abandon grace for Law, you always lose.* In this first section (Gal. 5:1–12), Paul explains what the believer loses when he turns from God's grace to man-made rules and regulations.

## **The Slave-You Lose Your Liberty (Gal. 5:1)**

Paul has used two comparisons to show his readers what the Law is really like: a schoolmaster or guardian (Gal. 3:24; 4:2), and a bondwoman (Gal. 4:22ff). Now he compares it to a yoke of slavery. You will recall that Peter used this same image at the famous Conference in Jerusalem (see Acts 15:10).

The image of the yoke is not difficult to understand. It usually represents slavery, service, and control by someone else over your life; it may also represent willing service and submission to someone else. When God delivered Israel from Egyptian servitude, it was the breaking of a yoke (Lev. 26:13). The farmer uses the yoke to control and guide his oxen, because they would not willingly serve if they were free.

When the believers in Galatia trusted Christ, they lost the yoke of servitude to sin and put on the yoke of Christ (Matt. 11:28–30). The yoke of religion is hard, and the burdens heavy; Christ's yoke is "easy" and His burden is "light." That word *easy* in the Greek means "kind, gracious." The yoke of Christ *frees* us to fulfill His will, while the yoke of the Law *enslaves* us. The unsaved person wears a yoke of sin (Lam. 1:14); the religious legalist wears the yoke of bondage (Gal. 5:1); but the Christian who depends on God's grace wears the liberating yoke of Christ.

It is Christ who has made us free from the bondage of the Law. He freed us from the curse of the Law by dying for us on the tree (Gal. 3:13). The believer is no longer under Law; he is under grace (Rom. 6:14). This does not mean that we are outlaws and rebels. It simply means that we no longer need the *external* force of Law to keep us in God's will, because we have the *internal* leading of the Holy Spirit of God (Rom. 8:1–4). Christ died to set us free, not to make us slaves. To go back to Law is to become entangled in a maze of "do's and don'ts" and to abandon spiritual adulthood for a "second childhood."

Sad to say, there are some people who feel very insecure with liberty. They would rather be under the tyranny of some leader than to make their own decisions freely. There are some believers who are frightened by the liberty they have in God's grace; so they seek out a fellowship that is legalistic and dictatorial, where they can let others make their decisions for them. This is comparable to an adult climbing back into the crib. The way of Christian liberty is the way of fulfillment in Christ. No wonder Paul issues that ultimatum: "Do not be entangled again in the yoke of bondage. Take your stand for liberty."

## **The Debtor-You Lose Your Wealth (Gal. 5:2–6)**

Paul uses three phrases to describe the losses the Christian incurs when he turns from grace to Law: "Christ shall profit you nothing" (Gal. 5:2); "a debtor to do the whole Law" (Gal. 5:3); "Christ is become of no effect unto you" (Gal. 5:4). This leads to the sad conclusion in Galatians 5:4: "Ye are fallen from grace." It is bad enough that legalism robs the believer of his liberty, but it also robs him of his spiritual wealth in Christ. The believer living under Law becomes a bankrupt slave.

God's Word teaches that when we were unsaved, we owed God a debt we could not pay. Jesus makes this clear in His Parable of the Two Debtors (Luke 7:36–50). Two men owed money to a creditor, the one owing ten times as much as the other. But neither was able to pay, so the creditor "graciously forgave them both" (literal translation). No matter how much morality a man may have, he still comes short of the glory of God. Even if his sin debt is one tenth that of others,

he stands unable to pay, bankrupt at the judgment bar of God. God in His grace, because of the work of Christ on the cross, is able to forgive sinners, no matter how large their debt may be.

Thus when we trust Christ, *we become spiritually rich*. We now share in the riches of God's grace (Eph. 1:7), the riches of His glory (Eph. 1:18; Phil. 4:19), the riches of His wisdom (Rom. 11:33), and the "unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph. 3:8). In Christ we have "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3), and we are "complete in Him" (Col. 2:10). Once a person is "in Christ," he has all that he needs to live the kind of Christian life God wants him to live.

The Judaizers, however, want us to believe that we are "missing something," that we would be more "spiritual" if we practiced the Law with its demands and disciplines. But Paul makes it clear that *the Law adds nothing—because nothing can be added!* Instead, the Law comes in as a thief and robs the believer of the spiritual riches he has in Christ. It puts him back into bankruptcy, responsible for a debt he is unable to pay.

To live by grace means to depend on God's abundant supply of every need. To live by Law means to depend on my own strength—the flesh—and be left to get by without God's supply. Paul warns the Galatians that to submit to circumcision in these circumstances would rob them of all the benefits they have in Christ (though circumcision itself is an indifferent matter—Gal. 5:6; 6:15). Furthermore, to submit would put them under obligation to obey *the whole Law*.

It is at this point that legalists reveal their hypocrisy, for they fail to keep the *whole* Law. They look on the Old Testament Law the way a customer surveys the food in a cafeteria: they choose what they want and leave the rest. But this is not honest. To teach that a Christian today should, for example, keep the Sabbath but not the Passover, is to dismember God's Law. The same Lawgiver who gave the one commandment also gave the other (James 2:9–11). Earlier, Paul had quoted Moses to prove that the curse of the Law is on everyone who fails to keep *all* the Law (Gal. 3:10; see Deut. 27:26).

Imagine a motorist driving down a city street and deliberately driving through a red light. He is pulled over by a policeman who asks to see his driver's license. Immediately the driver begins to defend himself. "Officer, I know I ran that red light—but I have never robbed anybody. I've never committed adultery. I've never cheated on my income tax."

The policeman smiles as he writes out the ticket, because he knows that *no amount of obedience can make up for one act of disobedience*. It is one Law, and the same Law that protects the obedient man punishes the offender. To boast about keeping part of the Law while at the same time breaking another part is to confess that I am worthy of punishment.

Now we can better understand what Paul means by "fallen from grace" (Gal. 5:4). Certainly he is not suggesting that the Galatians had "lost their salvation," because throughout this letter he deals with them *as believers*. At least nine times he calls them *brethren*, and he also uses the pronoun *we* (Gal. 4:28, 31). This Paul would never do if his readers were lost. He boldly states, "And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, 'Abba, Father'" (Gal. 4:6). If his readers were unsaved, Paul could never write those words.

No, to be "fallen from grace" does not mean to lose salvation. Rather, it means "fallen out of the sphere of God's grace." You cannot mix grace and Law. If you decide to live in the sphere of Law, then you cannot live in the sphere of grace. The believers in Galatia had been *bewitched* by the false teachers (Gal. 3:1) and thus were *disobeying* the truth. They had *removed* toward another gospel (Gal. 1:6–9) and had *turned back* to the elementary things of the old religion (Gal. 4:9). As a result, they had become *entangled* with the yoke of bondage, and this led to their present position: "fallen from grace." And the tragedy of this fall is that they had robbed themselves of all the good things Jesus Christ could do for them.

Paul next presents the life of the believer in the sphere of grace (Gal. 5:5–6). This enables us to contrast the two ways of life. When you live by grace, you depend on the power of the Spirit; but under Law, you must depend on yourself and your own efforts. Faith is not dead; faith *works* (see James 2:14–26). But the efforts of the flesh can never accomplish what faith can accomplish through the Spirit. And faith works *through love*—love for God and love for others. Unfortunately, flesh does not manufacture love; too often it produces selfishness and rivalry (see Gal. 5:15). No wonder Paul pictures the life of legalism as a fall!

When the believer walks by faith, depending on the Spirit of God, he lives in the sphere of God’s grace; and all his needs are provided. He experiences the riches of God’s grace. And, he always has something to look forward to (Gal. 5:5): one day Jesus shall return to make us like Himself in perfect righteousness. The Law gives no promise for perfect righteousness in the future. The Law prepared the way for the first coming of Christ (Gal. 3:23–4:7), but it cannot prepare the way for the second coming of Christ.

So, the believer who chooses legalism robs himself of spiritual liberty and spiritual wealth. He deliberately puts himself into bondage and bankruptcy.

### **The Runner-You Lose Your Direction (Gal. 5:7–12)**

Paul was fond of athletic illustrations and used them often in his letters. His readers were familiar with the Olympic games as well as other Greek athletic contests that always included foot races. It is important to note that Paul never uses the image of the race to tell people how to be saved. He is always talking to Christians about how to live the Christian life. *A contestant in the Greek games had to be a citizen before he could compete.* We become citizens of heaven through faith in Christ; then the Lord puts us on our course, and we run to win the prize (see Phil. 3:12–21). We do not run to be saved; we run because we are already saved and want to fulfill God’s will in our lives (Acts 20:24).

“You did run well.” When Paul first came to them, they received him “as an angel of God” (Gal. 4:14). They accepted the Word, trusted the Lord Jesus Christ, and received the Holy Spirit. They had a deep joy that was evident to all and were willing to make any sacrifice to accommodate Paul (Gal. 4:15). But now, Paul was their enemy. What had happened?

A literal translation of Galatians 5:7 gives us the answer: “You were running well. Who cut in on you so that you stopped obeying the truth?” In the races, each runner was to stay in his assigned lane, but some runners would cut in on their competitors to try to get them off course. This is what the Judaizers had done to the Galatian believers: they cut in on them and forced them to change direction and go on a “spiritual detour.” It was not God who did this, because He had called them to run faithfully in the lane marked “Grace.”

His explanation changes the figure of speech from athletics to cooking, for Paul introduces the idea of yeast (leaven). In the Old Testament, leaven is generally pictured as a symbol of evil. During Passover, for example, no yeast was allowed in the house (Ex. 12:15–19; 13:7). Worshipers were not permitted to mingle leaven with sacrifices (Ex. 34:25), though there were some exceptions to this rule. Jesus used leaven as a picture of sin when He warned against the “leaven of the Pharisees” (Matt. 16:6–12); and Paul used leaven as a symbol of sin in the church at Corinth (1 Cor. 5).

Yeast is really a good illustration of sin: it is small, but if left alone it grows and permeates the whole. The false doctrine of the Judaizers was introduced to the Galatian churches in a small way, but, before long, the “yeast” grew and eventually took over.

The spirit of legalism does not suddenly overpower a church. Like leaven, it is introduced secretly, it grows, and before long poisons the whole assembly. In most cases, the *motives* that encourage legalism are good (“We want to have a more spiritual church”), but the *methods* are not scriptural.

It is not wrong to have standards in a church, but we should never think that the standards will make anybody spiritual, or that the keeping of the standards is an evidence of spirituality. How easy it is for the yeast to grow. Before long, we become proud of our spirituality (“puffed up” is the way Paul puts it, 1 Cor. 5:2, and that is exactly what yeast does: it puffs up), and then critical of everybody else’s lack of spirituality. This, of course, only feeds the flesh and grieves the Spirit, but we go on our way thinking we are glorifying God.

Every Christian has the responsibility to watch for the *beginnings* of legalism, that first bit of yeast that infects the fellowship and eventually grows into a serious problem. No wonder Paul is so vehement as he denounces the false teachers: “I am suffering persecution because I preach the Cross, but these false teachers are popular celebrities because they preach a religion that pampers the flesh and feeds the ego. Do they want to circumcise you? I wish that they themselves were *cut off!*” (Gal. 5:11–12, literal translation)

Since the death and resurrection of Christ, there is no spiritual value to circumcision; it is only a physical operation. Paul wished that the false teachers would *operate on themselves* — “castrate themselves”—so that they could not produce any more “children of slavery.”

The believer who lives in the sphere of God’s grace is free, rich, and running in the lane that leads to reward and fulfillment. The believer who abandons grace for Law is a slave, a pauper, and a runner on a detour. In short, he is a loser. And the only way to become a winner is to “purge out the leaven,” the false doctrine that mixes Law and grace, and yield to the Spirit of God.

God’s grace is sufficient for every demand of life. We are saved by grace (Eph. 2:8–10), and we serve by grace (1 Cor. 15:9–10). Grace enables us to endure suffering (2 Cor. 12:9). It is grace that strengthens us (2 Tim. 2:1), so that we can be victorious soldiers. Our God is the God of *all* grace (1 Peter 5:10). We can come to the throne of grace and find grace to help in every need (Heb. 4:16). As we read the Bible, which is “the Word of His grace” (Acts 20:32), the Spirit of grace (Heb. 10:29) reveals to us how rich we are in Christ.

“And of His fullness have all we received, and grace for grace” (John 1:16).

How rich we are!

## **THE FIFTH FREEDOM**

### **Galatians 5:13–26**

At the close of an important speech to Congress on January 6, 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt shared his vision of the kind of world he wanted to see after the war was over. He envisioned four basic freedoms enjoyed by all people: freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear. To some degree, these freedoms have been achieved on a wider scale than in 1941, but our world still needs another freedom, a fifth freedom. Man needs to be free from himself and the tyranny of his sinful nature.

The legalists thought they had the answer to the problem in laws and threats, but Paul has explained that no amount of legislation can change man’s basic sinful nature. It is not law on the *outside*, but love on the *inside* that makes the difference. We need another power within, and that power comes from the Holy Spirit of God.

There are at least fourteen references to the Holy Spirit in Galatians. When we believe on Christ, the Spirit comes to dwell within us (Gal. 3:2). We are “born after the Spirit” as was Isaac (Gal. 4:29). It is the Holy Spirit in the heart who gives assurance of salvation (Gal. 4:6); and it is the Holy Spirit who enables us to live for Christ and glorify Him. The Holy Spirit is not simply a “divine influence”; He is a divine Person, just as are the Father and the Son. What God the Father *planned* for you, and God the Son *purchased* for you on the cross, God the Spirit *personalizes* for you and applies to your life as you yield to Him.

This paragraph is perhaps the most crucial in the entire closing section of Galatians; for in it Paul explains three ministries of the Holy Spirit that enable the believer to enjoy liberty in Christ.

### **The Spirit Enables Us to Fulfill the Law of Love (Gal. 5:13–15)**

We are prone to go to extremes. One believer interprets *liberty* as *license* and thinks he can do whatever he wants to do. Another believer, seeing this error, goes to an opposite extreme and imposes Law on everybody. Somewhere between *license* on the one hand and *legalism* on the other hand is true Christian liberty.

So, Paul begins by explaining *our calling*: we are called to liberty. The Christian is a free man. He is free from the *guilt* of sin because he has experienced God’s forgiveness. He is free from the *penalty* of sin because Christ died for him on the cross. And he is, through the Spirit, free from the *power* of sin in his daily life. He is also free from the *Law* with its demands and threats. Christ bore the curse of the Law and ended its tyranny once and for all. We are “called unto liberty” because we are “called into the grace of Christ” (Gal. 1:6). *Grace* and *liberty* go together.

Having explained our calling, Paul then issues *a caution*: “Don’t allow your liberty to degenerate into license!”

This, of course, is the fear of all people who do not understand the true meaning of the grace of God. “If you do away with rules and regulations,” they say, “you will create chaos and anarchy.”

Of course, that danger is real, not because God’s grace fails, but because men fail of the grace of God (Heb. 12:15). If there is a “true grace of God” (1 Peter 5:12), then there is also a *false* grace of God; and there are false teachers who “change the grace of our God into a license for immorality” (Jude 4, NIV). So, Paul’s caution is a valid one. Christian liberty is not a license to sin but an opportunity to serve.

This leads to *a commandment*: “By love serve one another” (Gal. 5:13). The key word, of course, is *love*. The formula looks something like this:

liberty + love = service to others

liberty – love = license (slavery to sin)

“I have an extra day off this week,” Carl told his wife as he walked into the kitchen. “I think I’ll use it to fix Donna’s bike and then take Larry on that museum trip he’s been talking about.”

“Fixing a bike and visiting a museum hardly sound like exciting ways to spend a day off,” his wife replied.

“It’s exciting *if you love your kids!*”

The amazing thing about love is that it takes the place of all the laws God ever gave. “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” solves every problem in human relations (see Rom. 13:8–14). If you love people (because you love Christ), you will not steal from them, lie about them, envy them, or try in any way to hurt them. Love in the heart is God’s substitute for laws and threats.



When our children were small, we lived next to a busy highway, and the children knew they would be spanked if they went near the road. As they grew older, they discovered that obedience brought rewards. They learned to obey not only to escape pain but to gain pleasure. Today they live in different metropolitan areas and all of them drive. But we neither threaten nor bribe them in order to keep them safe. They have a built-in discipline of love that regulates their lives, and they would not deliberately hurt themselves, their parents, or other people. Love has replaced law.

On a much higher level, the Holy Spirit within gives us the love that we need (Rom. 5:5; Gal. 5:6, 22). Apparently, the Galatian believers were lacking in this kind of love because they were “biting and devouring one another” and were in danger of destroying one another (Gal. 5:15). The picture here is of wild animals attacking each other. This in itself is proof that law cannot force people to get along with each other. No matter how many rules or standards a church may adopt, they are no guarantee of spirituality. Unless the Holy Spirit of God is permitted to fill hearts with His love, selfishness and competition will reign. Both extremes in the Galatian churches—the legalists and the libertines—were actually destroying the fellowship.

The Holy Spirit does not work in a vacuum. He uses the Word of God, prayer, worship, and the fellowship of believers to build us up in Christ. The believer who spends time daily in the Word and prayer, and who yields to the Spirit’s working, is going to enjoy liberty and will help build up the church. Read 2 Corinthians 3 for Paul’s explanation of the difference between a spiritual ministry of grace and a carnal ministry of Law.

### **The Spirit Enables Us to Overcome the Flesh (Gal. 5:16–21, 24)**

**The conflict (vv. 16–17).** Just as Isaac and Ishmael were unable to get along, so the Spirit and the flesh (the old nature) are at war with each other. By “the flesh,” of course, Paul does not mean “the body.” The human body is not sinful; it is neutral. If the Holy Spirit controls the body, then we walk in the Spirit; but if the flesh controls the body, then we walk in the lusts (desires) of the flesh. The Spirit and the flesh have different appetites, and this is what creates the conflict.

These opposite appetites are illustrated in the Bible in different ways. For example, the sheep is a clean animal and avoids garbage, while the pig is an unclean animal and enjoys wallowing in filth (2 Peter 2:19–22). After the rain ceased and the ark settled, Noah released a raven which never came back (Gen. 8:6–7). The raven is a carrion-eating bird and found plenty to feed on. But when Noah released the dove (a clean bird), it came back (Gen. 8:8–12). The last time he released the dove, and it did not return, he knew that it had found a clean place to settle down; therefore the waters had receded.

Our old nature is like the pig and the raven, always looking for something unclean on which to feed. Our new nature is like the sheep and the dove, yearning for that which is clean and holy. No wonder a struggle goes on within the life of the believer! The unsaved man knows nothing of this battle because he does not have the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9).

Note that the Christian cannot simply *will* to overcome the flesh: “These two are opposed to each other, so that you cannot do anything you please” (Gal. 5:17, WMS). It is this very problem that Paul discusses in Romans: “I do not know what I am doing. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do . . . For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing” (Rom. 7:15, 19, NIV). Paul is not denying that there is victory. He is simply pointing out that we cannot win this victory in our own strength and by our own will.

**The conquest (v. 18).** The solution is not to pit our will against the flesh, but to surrender our will to the Holy Spirit. This verse literally means, “But if you are *willingly led* by the Spirit, then you are not under the Law.” The Holy Spirit writes God’s Law on our hearts (Heb. 10:14–17; see

2 Cor. 3) so that we *desire* to obey Him in love. “I delight to do Thy will, O my God: yea, Thy Law is within my heart” (Ps. 40:8). Being “led of the Spirit” and “walking in the Spirit” are the opposites of yielding to the desires of the flesh.

**The crucifixion (vv. 19–21, 24).** Paul now lists some of the ugly “works of the flesh.” (You will find similar lists in Mark 7:20–23; Rom. 1:29–32; 1 Tim. 1:9–10; 2 Tim. 3:2–5.) The flesh is able to manufacture sin but it can never produce the righteousness of God. “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jer. 17:9). This list in Galatians can be divided into three major categories:

*The sensual sins (vv. 19, 21b).* *Adultery* is illicit sex between married people, while *fornication* generally refers to the same sin among unmarried people. *Uncleanness* means just that: a filthiness of heart and mind that makes the person defiled. The unclean person sees dirt in everything (see Titus 1:15). *Lasciviousness* is close to our word debauchery. It speaks of a wanton appetite that knows no shame. It goes without saying that all of these sins were rampant in the Roman Empire. *Drunkenness* and *revellings* (orgies) need no explanation.

*The superstitious sins (v. 20a).* *Idolatry*, like the sins named above, is with us today. Idolatry is simply putting things ahead of God and people. We are to worship God, love people, and use things, but too often we use people, love self, and worship things, leaving God out of the picture completely. Jesus tells us that whatever we worship, we serve (Matt. 4:10). The Christian who devotes more of himself to his car, house, or boat than he does to serving Christ may be in danger of idolatry (Col. 3:5).

The word *witchcraft* is from the Greek word *pharmakeia*, which means “the use of drugs.” Our English word *pharmacy* is derived from this word. Magicians in Paul’s day often used drugs to bring about their evil effects. Of course, sorcery is forbidden in the Bible as are all activities of the occult (Deut. 18:9–22).

*The social sins (vv. 20b–21a).* *Hatred* means “enmity,” the attitude of mind that defies and challenges others. This attitude leads to variance, which is strife, the outworking of enmity. *Emulations* means jealousies or rivalries. How tragic when Christians compete with one another and try to make one another look bad in the eyes of others. *Wrath* means outbursts of anger, and *strife* carries with it the idea of “self-seeking, selfish ambition,” that creates divisions in the church.

*Seditions* and *heresies* are kindred terms. The first suggests division, and the second cliques caused by a party spirit. *Divisions and factions* would be a fair translation. These are the result of church leaders promoting themselves and insisting that the people follow them, not the Lord. (The word *heresy* in the Greek means “to make a choice.”) *Envyings* suggests the carrying of grudges, the deep desire for what another has (see Prov. 14:30). *Murders* and *drunkenness* need no elucidation.

The person who *practices* these sins shall not inherit the kingdom of God. Paul is not talking about an *act* of sin, but a *habit* of sin. There is a false assurance of salvation that is not based on the Word of God. The fact that the believer is not under Law, but under grace, is no excuse for sin (Rom. 6:15). If anything, it is an encouragement to live in obedience to the Lord.

But how does the believer handle the old nature when it is capable of producing such horrible sins? The Law cannot *change* or *control* the old nature.

*The old nature must be crucified (v. 24).* Paul explains that the believer is identified with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection (Rom. 6). Christ not only died *for* me, but *I died with Christ*. Christ died for me to remove the *penalty* of my sin, but I died with Christ to break sin’s *power*.

Paul has mentioned this already in Galatians (see 2:19–20), and he will mention it again (6:14). He does not tell *us* to crucify ourselves, because this is impossible. (Crucifixion is one death a man cannot inflict on himself.) He tells us that the flesh has already been crucified. It is our responsibility to *believe* this and *act on it*. (Paul calls this “reckoning” in Rom. 6; you have the same truth presented in Col. 3:5ff).

You and I are not debtors to the flesh, but to the Spirit (Rom. 8:12–14). We must accept what God says about the old nature and not try to make it something that it is not. We must not make “provision for the flesh” (Rom. 13:14) by feeding it the things that it enjoys. In the flesh dwells no good thing (Rom. 7:18), so we should put no confidence in the flesh (Phil. 3:3). The flesh is not subject to God’s Law (Rom. 8:7) and it cannot please God (Rom. 8:8). Only through the Holy Spirit can we “put to death” the deeds that the flesh would do through our body (Rom. 8:13). The Holy Spirit is not only the Spirit of life (Rom. 8:2; Gal. 5:25), but He is also the Spirit of death: He helps us to reckon ourselves dead to sin.

We have seen two ministries of the Spirit of God: He enables us to fulfill the Law, and He enables us to overcome the flesh. He has a third ministry as well.

### **The Spirit Enables Us to Produce Fruit (Gal. 5:22–23, 25–26)**

It is one thing to overcome the flesh and *not do* evil things, but quite something else *to do* good things. The legalist might be able to boast that he is not guilty of adultery or murder (but see Matt. 5:21–32), but can anyone see the beautiful graces of the Spirit in his life? Negative goodness is not enough in a life; there must be positive qualities as well.

The contrast between *works* and *fruit* is important. A machine in a factory *works*, and turns out a product, but it could never manufacture fruit. Fruit must grow out of life, and, in the case of the believer, it is the life of the Spirit (Gal. 5:25). When you think of “works” you think of effort, labor, strain, and toil; when you think of “fruit” you think of beauty, quietness, the unfolding of life. The flesh produces “dead works” (Heb. 9:14), but the Spirit produces living fruit. And this fruit has in it the seed for still more fruit (Gen. 1:11). Love begets more love! Joy helps to produce more joy! Jesus is concerned that we produce “fruit ... more fruit ... much fruit” (John 15:2, 5), because this is the way we glorify Him. The old nature cannot produce fruit; only the new nature can do that.

The New Testament speaks of several different kinds of “fruit”: people won to Christ (Rom. 1:13), holy living (Rom. 6:22), gifts brought to God (Rom. 15:26–28), good works (Col. 1:10), and praise (Heb. 13:15). The “fruit of the Spirit” listed in our passage has to do with *character* (Gal. 5:22–23). It is important that we distinguish the *gift* of the Spirit, which is salvation (Acts 2:38; 11:17), and the *gifts* of the Spirit, which have to do with service (1 Cor. 12), from the *graces* of the Spirit, which relate to Christian character. It is unfortunate that an overemphasis on gifts has led some Christians to neglect the graces of the Spirit. Building Christian character must take precedence over displaying special abilities.

*The characteristics* that God wants in our lives are seen in the ninefold fruit of the Spirit. Paul begins with *love* because all of the other fruit is really an outgrowth of love. Compare these eight qualities with the characteristics of love given to the Corinthians (see 1 Cor. 13:4–8). This word for love is *agape*, which means divine love. (The Greek word *eros*, meaning “sensual love,” is never used in the New Testament.) This divine love is God’s gift to us (Rom. 5:5), and we must cultivate it and pray that it will increase (Phil. 1:9).

When a person lives in the sphere of love, then he experiences *joy*—that inward peace and sufficiency that is not affected by outward circumstances. (A case in point is Paul’s experience

recorded in Phil. 4:10–20.) This “holy optimism” keeps him going in spite of difficulties. Love and joy together produce *peace*, “the peace of God, which passes all understanding” (Phil. 4:7). These first three qualities express the *Godward* aspect of the Christian life.

The next three express the *manward* aspect of the Christian life: *long-suffering* (courageous endurance without quitting), *gentleness* (kindness), and *goodness* (love in action). The Christian, who is long-suffering, will not avenge himself or wish difficulties on those who oppose him. He will be kind and gentle, even with the most offensive, and will sow goodness where others sow evil. Human nature can never do this on its own; only the Holy Spirit can.

The final three qualities are *selfward*: *faith* (faithfulness, dependability); *meekness* (the right use of power and authority, power under control); and *temperance* (self-control). Meekness is not weakness. Jesus said, “I am meek and lowly in heart” (Matt. 11:29), and Moses was “very meek” (Num. 12:3); yet no one could accuse either of them of being weak. The meek Christian does not throw his weight around or assert himself. Just as wisdom is the right use of knowledge, so meekness is the right use of authority and power.

It is possible for the old nature to *counterfeit* some of the fruit of the Spirit, but the flesh can never *produce* the fruit of the Spirit. One difference is this: when the Spirit produces fruit, God gets the glory and the Christian is not conscious of his spirituality; but when the flesh is at work, the person is inwardly proud of himself and is pleased when others compliment him. The work of the Spirit is to make us more like Christ for His glory, not for the praise of men.

*The cultivation* of the fruit is important. Paul warns that there must be a right atmosphere before the fruit will grow (Gal. 5:25–26). Just as fruit cannot grow in every climate, so the fruit of the Spirit cannot grow in every individual’s life or in every church.

Fruit grows in a climate blessed with an abundance of the Spirit and the Word. “Walk in the Spirit” (Gal. 5:25) means “keep in step with the Spirit”—not to run ahead and not to lag behind. This involves the Word, prayer, worship, praise, and fellowship with God’s people. It also means “pulling out the weeds” so that the seed of the Word can take root and bear fruit. The Judaizers were anxious for praise and “vainglory,” and this led to competition and division. Fruit can never grow in that kind of an atmosphere.

We must remember that this fruit is produced *to be eaten*, not to be admired and put on display. People around us are starving for love, joy, peace, and all the other graces of the Spirit. When they find them in our lives, they know that we have something they lack. We do not bear fruit for our own consumption; we bear fruit that others might be fed and helped, and that Christ might be glorified. The flesh may manufacture “results” that bring praise to us, but the flesh cannot bear fruit that brings glory to God. It takes patience, an atmosphere of the Spirit, walking in the light, the seed of the Word of God, and a sincere desire to honor Christ.

In short, the secret is the Holy Spirit. He alone can give us that “fifth freedom”—freedom from sin and self. He enables us to fulfill the law of love, to overcome the flesh, and to bear fruit.

Will you yield to Him and let Him work?

**Campbell, D. K. (1985). *Galatians*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 605-609) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books**

## A. A life apart from Law (5:1–12)

### 1. TURNING TO LAW RUINS GRACE (5:1–2)

5:1. This verse summarizes chapter 4, where the theme is bondage and freedom. It also serves to introduce chapter 5. Paul declared that **Christ** was the great Liberator who **set** believers **free** from bondage. The apostle then appealed to the Galatians to **stand firm** (cf. 1 Cor. 16:13; Phil. 1:27; 4:1; 1 Thes. 3:8; 2 Thes. 2:15) in that liberty, for having been delivered from **slavery** to heathenism, they were in danger of becoming entangled in slavery to the Mosaic Law.

5:2. Taking up a prime example of such entanglement, namely circumcision, Paul issued a strong warning to the Galatians who were considering submitting to that rite. If they did, and were thereby seeking righteousness by works, Paul declared that **Christ will be of no value to you at all**. It is not that the apostle condemned circumcision in itself, for he had Timothy circumcised (in Galatia) so that the young man would have a wider ministry (Acts 16:1–3). But Paul was strongly opposed to the Judaistic theology which insisted that circumcision was necessary for salvation. Anyone who was circumcised for that reason added works to faith and demonstrated that he had not exercised saving faith in Christ.

## **2. TURNING TO LAW MAKES MAN A DEBTOR (5:3)**

5:3. In addition to the fact that turning to the Law ruins grace, it also creates an entirely new obligation: a person **is obligated to obey the whole Law**. The Law is a unit, and if a person puts himself under any part of it for justification, he is a “debtor” (KJV) to the entire code with its requirements and its curse (cf. 3:10; James 2:10).

## **3. TURNING TO LAW IS TO FALL AWAY FROM GRACE (5:4–6)**

5:4. Turning to the Law and accepting circumcision as a meritorious work has further dire implications which the Galatians were called on to consider. Anyone seeking justification **by Law** has **been alienated** (*katērgēthēte*) **from Christ**, that is, such a person would not be living in a sphere where Christ was operative. The KJV has a helpful rendering, “Christ is become of no effect unto you.” In addition, said Paul, they would **have fallen away from grace**. The issue here is not the possible loss of salvation, for “grace” is referred to not as salvation itself but as a method of salvation (cf. 2:21 where “a Law” route is mentioned as an unworkable way to come to Christ). If the Galatians accepted circumcision as necessary for salvation, they would be leaving the grace system for the Mosaic Law system. The same error is repeated today when a believer leaves a church that emphasizes salvation by grace through faith and joins one which teaches that salvation depends on repentance, confession, faith, baptism, and church membership.

5:5. In contrast with legalists, true believers **by faith** (not works) **eagerly await** (*apekdechometha*; used seven times in the NT of the return of Christ: Rom. 8:19, 23, 25; 1 Cor. 1:7; Gal. 5:5; Phil. 3:20; Heb. 9:28) the consummation of their salvation (cf. Rom. 8:18–25). Then **the righteousness for which we hope** will be fully realized (cf. 1 Peter 1:3–4, 13). At the coming of Christ believers will be completely conformed to all the requirements of God’s will. The inward and forensic righteousness which began at justification will be transformed into an outward righteousness at glorification. God will then publicly acknowledge all believers’ full acceptability with Him.

5:6. **For** those **in Christ Jesus**, the true sphere of salvation, **neither circumcision nor** the lack of it is of any significance (cf. 3:28; 6:15). What matters **is faith expressing itself through love** (cf. 5:13). Though salvation is by faith apart from works, faith that is genuine does work itself out “through love” (cf. Eph. 2:10; James 2:14–18).

#### **4. TURNING TO LAW HINDERS THE PROGRESS OF BELIEVERS (5:7–10)**

5:7. Employing a metaphor he was fond of, Paul described the Galatians' Christian experience as a **race** (cf. 1 Cor. 9:24–26; 2 Tim. 4:7). They had begun their race well, but someone had **cut in on** them, causing them to break stride and stumble. Though many false teachers were disturbing the Galatians, the singular pronoun (**who**) indicates the leader of the Judaizers was in view here. The result was that the believers were no longer **obeying the truth** but were attempting to complete the race by legalistic self-effort rather than by faith.

5:8–10. Such false teaching as the Galatians were beginning to embrace did not originate in the God who called them (cf. 1:6). He called them by and into grace. They were now being seduced by other voices into following a false gospel. And lest someone might feel that the apostle was making too much of the problem, he quoted a proverb (5:9) to the effect that false teaching, like **yeast**, spreads and permeates. Its converts may have been few, but the believers must be on guard lest the error affect the entire church. Paul's point may also have been that one apparently small deviation from the truth could destroy the entire system. If circumcision, for example, were made necessary for salvation, the whole grace system would fall. But Paul was optimistic about the outcome. He was **confident** the Galatians would share his views and that the leading false teacher, whose identity was unknown to Paul, would suffer his due judgment.

#### **5. TURNING TO LAW REMOVES THE OFFENSE OF THE CROSS (5:11–12).**

5:11. Apparently Paul was charged with **still preaching circumcision**. Certainly, before his conversion he zealously proclaimed circumcision and the Law, and it is easy to see how the apostle's attitude could be interpreted as being in favor of circumcision. Paul countered with a simple question: How is it that he was **still being persecuted** by Judaizers if he preached the same message they did? If Paul were preaching circumcision, **the offense** (*skandalon*, "stumbling block"; cf. 1 Cor. 1:23) **of the Cross** would have ceased to exist in his ministry. But it had not because people still found the gospel message, which proclaims man's total inability to contribute anything to his salvation, offensive. Thus, the Cross marked the end of the Law system and rendered circumcision and obedience to the Mosaic Law unnecessary.

5:12. Speaking out of deep concern for the gospel of the grace of God, Paul uttered a strong expression. He wished that the Judaizers, who were so enthusiastic about circumcision, **would go the whole way** and castrate **themselves**, as did the pagan priests of the cult of Cybele in Asia Minor. Perhaps the resulting physical impotence pictured Paul's desire that they also be unable to produce new converts. While circumcision had once been the sign of the covenant in Israel, it now had no more religious meaning than any other ritual of cutting and marking practiced by ancient pagans.

#### ***B. A life apart from license (5:13–15).***

5:13–14. In verse 1 Paul spoke of the Christian's freedom and warned against the danger of lapsing into slavery. Here the apostle again reminded believers of their freedom in Christ and warned against its being converted into license. Specifically, he charged the Galatians not to use their liberty as "a base of operation" for sin to gain a foothold. Rather than liberty being used for lust, the real goal should be **love**. Rather than being in bondage to the Law or to **the sinful nature**, the Galatians were to be in bondage to **one another**. ("Sinful nature" is an appropriate

translated of the Gr. *sarx*, used by Paul in that sense seven times in Gal. 5:13, 16–17 [thrice], 19, 24; 6:8.)

Having discouraged two forms of slavery as burdensome and terrible, he commended another form that was beneficial—a slavery of mutual love. In support, Paul quoted Leviticus 19:18 and stated that **the entire Law** was summarized in this **single command to love** their neighbors. Jesus affirmed the same truth (Matt. 22:39; Luke 10:25–28). But Paul also wanted to show that Christian love is the “fulfillment” or “the carrying out” of the Law. The apostle developed this point in Romans 13:8–10.

5:15. That such love needed to be mutually expressed in the Galatian churches is made clear here. As a result of the inroads of the false teachers the church was divided and engaged in bitter strife. The followers of the legalists and those who remained steadfast were **biting and devouring each other**. This was far from the biblical ideal of believers dwelling together in a loving unity, and threatened the churches with destruction, that is, the loss of their individual and corporate testimonies.

### C. A life according to the Spirit (5:16–26).

#### 1. THE PROMISE TO VICTORY OVER SIN (5:16–18).

5:16. The answer to the abuses described in the previous verse is to **live by the Spirit**. The verb *peripateite* is a present imperative and is literally translated, “keep on walking.” As a believer walks through life he should depend on the indwelling Holy Spirit for guidance and power. But the Spirit does not operate automatically in a believer’s heart. He waits to be depended on. When a Christian does yield to the Spirit’s control, the promise is that he will not in anywise (the double negative *ou mē* is emphatic) **gratify** (*telesēte*, “complete, fulfill” in outward action) **the desires of the sinful nature**. Thus, while no believer will ever be entirely free in this life from the evil desires that stem from his fallen human nature, he need not capitulate to them, but may experience victory by the Spirit’s help.

5:17. Paul next explained the need for a life that is controlled and energized by **the Spirit**. The explanation is found in the fact that each Christian has two natures, a **sinful nature** received at birth, inherited from fallen Adam, and a new nature received at regeneration when said Christian became a participant in the divine nature (cf. 2 Peter 1:4). Both natures have desires, the one for evil and the other for holiness. Thus, **they are in conflict with each other**, and the result can be that they keep a believer from doing what he otherwise would. In other words, the Holy Spirit blocks, when He is allowed to do so, the evil cravings of the flesh. (Some hold the view that each believer *is* a new person, still possessing the fallen human nature, but not having a new nature. Others prefer to define “nature” as capacity, the old nature being that capacity to serve sin and self and the new nature the capacity to serve God and righteousness.)

5:18. In summary, Paul emphasized that a godly life is not lived **under** the rules of the **Law** but is a life **led by the Spirit**. It was important for the Galatians to know that just as justification is not possible by works so sanctification cannot be achieved by human effort. This of course does not mean that a Christian is totally passive in either case for the response of faith is necessary — faith in Christ to save and in the Holy Spirit to sanctify.

#### 2. THE PERIL OF VICTORY OVER SIN (5:19–21)

Since a Christian has the same sinful nature he possessed before salvation, he may fall prey to the sins that nature produces if he does not live by means of the Spirit.

5:19. The apostle declared that the sins of the flesh **are obvious**, meaning either, as some suggest, that they are public and cannot be hidden, or better, since some are private sins, that they originate with **the sinful nature** and not with the new nature indwelt by the Holy Spirit. The listed sins are commonly seen to fall into four categories. First, three sexual sins are mentioned. **Sexual immorality** (*porneia*) is often translated “fornication.” From this word comes the term “pornography.” *Porneia* refers to any and all forms of illicit sexual relationships. **Impurity** (*akatharsia*) is a broad term referring to moral uncleanness in thought, word, and deed (cf. Eph. 5:3–4). **Debauchery** (*aselgeia*) connotes an open, shameless, brazen display of these evils (cf. 2 Cor. 12:21 where the same words occur; *aselgeia* is included in Rom. 13:13).

5:20. Following the sexual sins, Paul cited two religious sins. **Idolatry** involved the worship of pagan gods by bowing to idols, and because of its mention just after the listing of sexual sins it probably includes the male and female prostitution so often a part of heathen religion.

**Witchcraft** is the translation of the Greek word *pharmakeia* from which the term “pharmacy” comes. In ancient times the worship of evil powers was accompanied by the use of drugs to create trances. This vice will also be prominent in the Tribulation period (cf. Rev. 9:21; 18:23).

Eight societal evils are then listed (the last one in Gal. 5:21). **Hatred** (*echthrai*) is in the plural form, denoting primarily a feeling of enmity between groups. **Discord** (*eris*) is the natural result of “hatred” and no doubt a problem in the Galatian church. **Jealousy** (*zēlos*) refers not to the godly form but to the sinful and self-centered type. (These two words, *eris* and *zelos*, are also listed in Rom. 13:13.) **Fits of rage** (*thymoi*) or outbursts of temper, often come as a final eruption of smoldering jealousy. **Selfish ambition** (*eritheiai*) is a self-aggrandizing attitude which shows itself in working to get ahead at other’s expense (cf. Phil. 2:3). **Dissensions** (*dichostasiai*) and **factious** (*haireseis*) describe what happens when people quarrel over issues or personalities, causing hurtful divisions.

5:21. **Envy** (*phthonoi*) is an evil feeling, a wrongful desire to possess what belongs to someone else. Thus, the sinful nature is seen to be responsible for the breakdown of interpersonal relationships in homes, churches, and in public society.

Two sins associated with alcohol fall in a fourth category of evils. **Drunkenness** (*methai*) refers to excessive use of strong drink by individuals, and **orgies** (*kōmoi*) probably refers to the drunken carousings commonly associated with such things as the worship of Bacchus, the god of wine. Finally, to show that this long list was only representative and not exhaustive, Paul added the words **and the like**.

The apostle then solemnly warned the Galatians, as he had done when he was in their midst, that **those who live like this**, who habitually indulge in these fleshly sins **will not inherit the future kingdom of God**. This does not say that a Christian loses his salvation if he lapses into a sin of the flesh, but that a person who lives continually on such a level of moral corruption gives evidence of not being a child of God.

### 3. THE POWER FOR VICTORY OVER SIN (5:22–23).

5:22–23. There is a pointed contrast here. As verse 16 indicated, there is no need for a believer to display the works of the flesh. Rather, by the Spirit’s power he can manifest the nine graces that are now listed. It is important to observe that **the fruit** here described is not produced by a believer, but by **the Holy Spirit** working through a Christian who is in vital union with Christ (cf. John 15:1–8). The word “fruit” is singular, indicating that these qualities constitute a



unity, all of which should be found in a believer who lives under the control of the Spirit. In an ultimate sense this “fruit” is simply the life of Christ lived out in a Christian. It also points to the method whereby Christ is formed in a believer (cf. 2 Cor. 3:18; Phil. 1:21).

The first three virtues are habits of mind which find their source in God. **Love** (*agapē*) is listed first because it is the foundation of the other graces. God is love and loves the world (cf. 1 John 4:8; John 3:16). Such self-sacrificing love that sent Christ to die for sinners is the kind of love that believers who are Spirit-controlled manifest. **Joy** (*chara*) is a deep and abiding inner rejoicing which was promised to those who abide in Christ (cf. John 15:11). It does not depend on circumstances because it rests in God’s sovereign control of all things (cf. Rom. 8:28). **Peace** (*eirēnē*) is again a gift of Christ (cf. John 14:27). It is an inner repose and quietness, even in the face of adverse circumstances; it defies human understanding (cf. Phil. 4:7).

The second triad reaches out to others, fortified by love, joy, and peace. **Patience** (*makrothymia*) is the quality of forbearance under provocation (cf. 2 Cor. 6:6; Col. 1:11; 3:12). It entertains no thoughts of retaliation even when wrongfully treated. **Kindness** (*chrēstotēs*) is benevolence in action such as God demonstrated toward men. Since God is kind toward sinners (cf. Rom. 2:4; Eph. 2:7) a Christian should display the same virtue (cf. 2 Cor. 6:6; Col. 3:12). **Goodness** (*agathōsynē*) may be thought of both as an uprightness of soul and as an action reaching out to others to do good even when it is not deserved.

The final three graces guide the general conduct of a believer who is led by the Spirit. **Faithfulness** (*pistis*) is the quality which renders a person trustworthy or reliable, like the faithful servant in Luke 16:10–12. **Gentleness** (*prautēs*) marks a person who is submissive to God’s Word (cf. James 1:21) and who is considerate of others when discipline is needed (cf. “gently” in Gal. 6:1; 2 Tim. 2:25; “gentle” in 1 Cor. 4:21; Eph. 4:2; “gentleness” in Col. 3:12; 1 Peter 3:16). **Self-control** (*enkrateia*; this noun is used in the NT only here and in Acts 24:25; 2 Peter 1:6) denotes self-mastery and no doubt primarily relates to curbing the fleshly impulses just described. Such a quality is impossible to attain apart from the power of God’s Spirit (cf. Gal. 5:16). As a final summary statement Paul affirmed that there are no prohibitions (lit., **there is not a law**) **against such** virtues. In a *litotes* (understatement) he asserted that obviously no one would make laws against people who practice such things.

#### 4. THE PROVISION FOR VICTORY OVER SIN (5:24–26).

5:24. Paul next explained that believers (lit., “those who are of Christ Jesus”) need not be responsive to **the sinful nature** because they **have crucified it**. This does not refer to self-crucifixion or self-mortification. Rather, it refers to the fact that by means of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, Christians were identified with Christ in His death and resurrection. Paul declared that this had been his experience (cf. 2:20) and that of all believers (cf. Rom. 6:1–6; Col. 2:11; 3:9). While co-crucifixion took place potentially at the cross, it becomes effective for believers when they are converted. This does not mean that their sin nature is then eradicated or even rendered inactive but that it has been judged, a fact believers should reckon to be true (cf. Rom. 6:11–12). So victory over the sinful nature’s **passions and desires** has been provided by Christ in His death. Faith must continually lay hold of this truth or a believer will be tempted to try to secure victory by self-effort.

5:25–26. Again Paul reminded the Galatians that in addition to a divine judgment of the sinful nature there is a divine enablement in the person of the Holy Spirit. He made the believer alive by regeneration (cf. John 3:5–6), so each believer is exhorted to **keep in step** (*stoichōmen*, translated “follow” in Gal. 6:16) **with the Spirit**. Step by step one’s Christian walk should

conform to the Spirit's direction and enablement, lest believers **become conceited, provoking and envying each other**. The latter traits would be true of a walk in the flesh (cf. 5:19–21) and may point to divisions in the Galatian churches occasioned by the Judaizing error (cf. v. 15).

***Dockery, D. S. (1998). The Pauline Letters. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), Holman Concise Bible Commentary (p. 572). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.***

Having secured the argument for freedom in Christ through justifying faith alone, Paul examined the nature of that liberty. While again rebuking the tendency to turn back to legalism, he also deplored the opposite extreme of license. Paul expertly showed that freedom in Christ is a Spirit-guided lifestyle within the limits of a new “law” given by Christ: the law of love.

Paul quickly warned against circumcision, which has no spiritual value in Christ. He reminded them that they could not keep part of the law and ignore the rest. And to attempt to be justified by keeping the law of Moses is to turn completely away from God's grace. The route of spiritual freedom in Christ is faith, faith that shows love in the short run and that waits eagerly but patiently for the Christian's eternal hope.

The apostle next laments how the false teachers had confused the Galatians, halting their forward progress in Christ. He longed for an end to the leaven of false teaching spreading among them, wishing that the agitators would do away with themselves. Still, he displayed confidence that the Galatian churches would return to a proper viewpoint.

The danger of misunderstanding freedom in Christ is a tendency toward self-indulgence, which can express itself in destructive words and actions toward other believers. True spiritual freedom manifests itself in love, both for God and for one another. Such loving behavior is against the grain of the flesh. Thus, it is necessary to live in the power of the Holy Spirit and thus be guided by the Spirit in our attitudes, decisions, and actions. To fail to follow the lead of the Spirit as a Christian is to manifest a sinful lifestyle that is unworthy of the kingdom of God. On the other hand, the believer who is controlled by the Spirit shows forth qualities that reflect supernatural godliness beyond the requirements of the law.

Such a life of Spirit-prompted love does not go on automatically, however. It is necessary to remain consciously in step with the Holy Spirit, and it is easy to do otherwise. Even though the flesh was, in a very real sense, crucified with Christ, the tendency to pride, and even to gross sin, still exists. Mature Christians must, in the power of the Spirit, restore such errant believers. Also, they must be available to support Christians overloaded with cares or responsibilities. It is right for every person to work up to their capacity, but not go beyond it. Nor is it proper for a person to boast because someone else has fallen under a load within that person's capacity.

The life of love even includes support of biblical teachers who have financial needs. These are the kinds of good works that bring about a long-term harvest of eternal worth. The opposite route of sowing to the flesh only eventuates in corrupt fruit. The difference in the two final outcomes is whether we choose to do what is right in all situations, especially toward fellow believers, here and now.

***Fields, W. C. (1972). Galatians. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), The Teacher's Bible Commentary (pp. 743–744). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.***

*The passage*—The writer once more appeals to the good sense of the readers. They are free. They are not afflicted with endless ceremonies, bothersome rituals, lengthy dietary laws, and a lot of unessentials. But they do have obligations!

Circumcision is used as a symbol of the entire ceremonial law. It has no inherent spiritual or moral worth. It does not justify man before God. It is a matter of the flesh, not the spirit. This prompts Paul to illustrate the outworkings of the gospel. He lists some typical actions of the natural man, “works of the flesh” (5:17–21), and compares them to some characteristics of the redeemed man, calling these “fruit of the Spirit” (5:22–26).

The new life in Christ sets the believer free from the unproductive works of the law and turns him to works of compassion for his fellowman (6:1–10). Christian freedom must not be confused with license. We are, in a sense, under a new law, the law of love. Believers have a moral and ethical responsibility to each other in spontaneous response to God’s love.

*Special point*—In 5:4 Paul is simply saying that there can be no salvation by the law. Those who take this route come up to the point of God’s grace, up to the point of faith in Jesus Christ, but do not accept. They turn away without entering God’s grace. “Those of you who try to be put right with God by obeying the Law have cut yourselves off from Christ. You are outside God’s grace” (TEV).

**The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (Galatians 5). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.**