



August 23 – Freedom that Bears Fruit

Weekly Reading – Galatians 1-5

This Week's Passage – Galatians 5:13-26

Main Point

Christ has set us free, not to live for ourselves, but to serve others in love and walk by the Spirit.

Key Verse

Galatians 5:13 – “For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only don’t use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but serve one another through love.”

Life Group – The Flow

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 15 minutes - Conversation and relationship-building• 5 minutes - Looking back• 5 minutes - Introduction, Background, and Christ Connection• 30 minutes - Study and apply the Bible• 5 minutes - Application exercise• 10 minutes - Pray Through the Passage & Prayer Requests• 5 minutes - Conclusion	<p>If Time is Limited...</p> <p>Focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Main Point & Key Verse• Read Galatians 5:13–18• Passage 1 questions 1 and 4• Read Galatians 5:19–26• Passage 2 questions 2 and 4• Application Exercise• Pray Through the Passage• Final Takeaway and This Week's Challenge
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Looking Back (5 min)



Use this time to celebrate obedience and encourage growth. Invite members to share how they sought to apply last week's challenge and what God taught them along the way. Focus on God's faithfulness and the progress He is making in our lives, not on perfect execution. Scan or click the QR code for last week's challenge.

Last week, Paul taught us that Christ's grace is sufficient and that His power is displayed through our weakness.

Discuss one or more prompts:

- Where did you recognize your need for Christ's strength this week?
- Did you take the faithful next step you identified during the application exercise?
- Was there a situation you wanted God to remove, but instead needed His grace to endure?
- How did another believer encourage or support you in an area of weakness?

Transition to Introduction:

"Last week, we learned that depending upon Christ is not a sign of defeat. It is where His strength becomes visible. Today, Paul shows us another area where dependence is essential: learning to live in the freedom Christ has given us."

Introduction (5 min)

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Ask

- What did freedom mean to you when you were eighteen? What does it mean to you now, and what changed your understanding?

Allow members to share examples involving driving, leaving home, earning money, making personal decisions, or taking responsibility for a family.

Follow-Up

- What is something you were excited to have the freedom to do—but later discovered required more responsibility than you expected?

Say

“We sometimes imagine freedom as the ability to do whatever we want without anyone telling us otherwise. But freedom can be used wisely or selfishly.

Paul wrote Galatians to defend the freedom believers have received through Christ. Yet he also warned that Christian freedom is not permission to return to the very patterns from which Christ rescued us.

Christ does not merely free us from condemnation. He frees us to love, serve, and live under the leadership of the Holy Spirit.”

Transition to Background:

“To understand Paul’s warning, we need to remember the particular kind of slavery threatening the churches in Galatia.”

Background

The Background and Christ Connection sections are designed to provide context and a gospel lens for the lesson. Feel free to summarize these sections rather than reading them word-for-word.

The churches in Galatia were being influenced by false teachers commonly called Judaizers. These teachers claimed that faith in Jesus was not enough. Gentile believers also needed to be circumcised and observe the Mosaic law in order to be fully accepted by God.

Paul strongly rejected that message. Throughout Galatians, he emphasized that sinners are justified through faith in Jesus Christ, not by works of the law. Christ bore the law’s curse and secured freedom for everyone who trusts in Him.

By chapter 5, however, Paul addresses a different misunderstanding. Freedom from the law does not mean freedom from obedience. The Galatians faced two opposite dangers:

- Legalism: attempting to earn acceptance through religious performance.
- License: using freedom as permission to satisfy sinful desires.

Neither produces genuine righteousness. Legalism cannot change the heart, and self-indulgence only returns people to another form of slavery. The Christian life must be lived through dependence upon the Holy Spirit.

Transition to Christ Connection:

“Paul’s instructions are not a new set of requirements for earning salvation. Before he tells believers how to live freely, he reminds them that their freedom has already been purchased by Christ.”

Christ Connection

Jesus fulfilled the law that we could not keep and bore the curse our sin deserved. Through His death and resurrection, those who trust in Him are forgiven, declared righteous, and released from sin’s rightful condemnation.

Christ does more than cancel our guilt. He gives believers the Holy Spirit, who brings new life and begins transforming us into the likeness of Jesus.

The Spirit does not help us earn freedom. He lives within those whom Christ has already set free.

Christian obedience therefore flows from grace rather than fear. We do not love and serve others to persuade God to accept us. Because God has accepted us through Christ, the Spirit enables us to reject self-centered living and increasingly reflect the character of Jesus.

Transition to Passage 1:

“Christ has freed believers from both condemnation and the impossible task of changing themselves through human effort. Paul now explains how that freedom should shape our relationships and our daily battle with sin.”

Study and Apply (30 min)

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says and how we can apply it in our lives this week.

Passage 1 – Galatians 5:13–18

READ THE PASSAGE – Have a volunteer read Galatians 5:13–18.

[13] For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

[14] For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

[15] But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.

Keep in Step with the Spirit

[16] But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

[17] For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.

[18] But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. (ESV)

Commentary

Use the following commentary to prepare ahead of time. As you lead, feel free to summarize key insights rather than reading it word-for-word.

Verse 13

Paul reminds the Galatians that they were **called to freedom**. Christian freedom is not something believers achieve through discipline or religious effort. God calls sinners out of bondage and grants freedom through Christ.

However, freedom can be misused. The word translated **opportunity** carried the idea of a starting point or base of operations. Paul warned believers not to allow freedom to become a base from which the flesh could operate.

In this context, **flesh** refers to fallen human nature with its self-centered desires. Paul does not contrast physical life with spiritual life, as though the body itself were evil. He contrasts living under the influence of sinful desire with living under the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

Rather than using freedom to serve themselves, believers are to **serve one another through love**. The word translated *serve* is connected with slavery. Paul intentionally uses a striking contrast: believers have been released from slavery to sin and the law so they can willingly become servants of one another.

Verse 14

Paul summarizes the law with the command:

“Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Paul is not returning believers to the law as a means of justification. Instead, he explains that Spirit-empowered love accomplishes what the law intended in human relationships.

Love seeks another person’s good rather than merely asking what is permissible. Christian freedom is therefore not primarily expressed by insisting upon personal rights. It is expressed by willingly using those rights and resources for the good of others.

Verse 15

The Galatian churches were apparently experiencing serious conflict. Paul describes them as **biting and devouring one another**, using language that pictures wild animals attacking each other.

Legalism often produces comparison, suspicion, and pride. Self-indulgence also damages relationships because each person pursues personal desires without considering others. If the Galatians continued treating one another this way, their fellowship could be consumed from within.

Freedom that does not produce love eventually produces destruction.

Verse 16

Paul gives both a command and a promise:

“Walk by the Spirit, and you will certainly not carry out the desire of the flesh.”

To **walk** describes a person’s continuing conduct or way of life. Paul is not describing an occasional spiritual experience. Believers are to order their daily decisions, attitudes, relationships, and habits under the Spirit’s leadership.

Walking by the Spirit involves active dependence. Believers listen to the truth He inspired in Scripture, respond to His conviction, obey His direction, and rely upon His power.

The promise does not mean believers will reach sinless perfection in this life. It means the Spirit provides genuine power to resist desires that human rules alone could never overcome.

Verse 17

Believers continue to experience an internal conflict. The flesh desires what opposes the Spirit, while the Spirit leads believers toward what pleases God.

This struggle does not prove that the Holy Spirit is absent. In many cases, the struggle itself reveals His presence. Before conversion, a person may follow sinful desires without meaningful resistance. The Spirit creates new desires and exposes patterns that once seemed normal.

Paul does not present the conflict as an excuse for sin. He presents the Spirit as the only sufficient power for resisting it.

Verse 18

Those who are led by the Spirit are **not under the law**. They are no longer under its condemnation or attempting to use it as the means of earning righteousness.

The law can identify sin, but it cannot transform the human heart. The Holy Spirit changes believers from within and begins producing the righteous character that external regulations could never create.

Guide Discussion

You do not need to cover every question. Use the questions that best help your group engage with the passage. I do encourage you to use the Reflective question to provide more engagement from your Life Group.

1. **Good for Students:** What two possible uses of freedom does Paul contrast in verse 13?
2. **Discuss:** Where do you see the difference between using freedom to serve yourself and using freedom to serve another person through love?
3. **Deeper Dive:** How do verses 13–18 protect believers from both legalism and the idea that freedom means doing whatever we desire?
4. ★ **Reflective — Index Card:** Where are you most tempted to use your freedom, time, resources, or choices primarily for yourself? What might serving through love look like in that area?

Teaching Insight

The Teaching Insight is intended to help you identify and emphasize the main truth of the passage. Consider using it as a brief summary after discussion or a way to clarify the lesson's central message if your group gets off track.

Say:

“Christian freedom is not the removal of every boundary or responsibility. Christ frees us from condemnation, slavery to sin, and the need to earn God’s acceptance. The Spirit then enables us to use that freedom for its intended purpose: loving God and serving others.”

Transition to Passage 2:

“Paul has explained how freedom should be guided by love and the Spirit. He now shows us the visible difference between a life directed by the flesh and one increasingly shaped by the Holy Spirit.”

Passage 2 – Galatians 5:19–26

READ THE PASSAGE – Have volunteers read Galatians 5:19–26.

[19] Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality,

[20] idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions,
[21] envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before,
that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.
[22] But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,
[23] gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.
[24] And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and
desires.
[25] If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. [26] Let us not become
conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. (ESV)

Commentary

Verses 19–21

Paul says the **works of the flesh are obvious**. He then lists examples that touch nearly every area of life.

The first group involves sexual sin: sexual immorality, moral impurity, and promiscuity. These sins take God's good gift of sexuality and use it outside His design.

The second group involves false worship: idolatry and sorcery. Idolatry places something created in the position that belongs to God. Sorcery was associated with occult practices and attempts to access spiritual power apart from God.

The largest group concerns damaged relationships: hatred, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions, and envy. Paul places destructive attitudes alongside outward actions because sinful desires often become most visible in how people treat one another.

Drunkenness and carousing describe lives marked by uncontrolled indulgence. Paul adds **“and anything similar,”** showing that his list is representative rather than exhaustive.

Paul's warning is serious: those who **practice** such things will not inherit God's kingdom. He is describing an ongoing, unrepentant pattern ruled by the flesh—not teaching that one failure automatically proves a person is unsaved.

Christians can fall into serious sin, but they cannot make peace with it. The Spirit produces conviction, repentance, and a continuing desire to turn toward Christ. A life habitually dominated by the flesh gives no evidence of His transforming presence.

Verses 22–23

Paul contrasts the **works** of the flesh with the **fruit** of the Spirit.

The singular word *fruit* suggests a unified work of Christlike character rather than unrelated qualities from which believers may select their favorites. The Spirit gradually produces:

- **Love:** seeking the genuine good of others.
- **Joy:** deep gladness rooted in God rather than circumstances.
- **Peace:** settled confidence in God that shapes relationships with others.
- **Patience:** endurance and restraint when circumstances or people are difficult.
- **Kindness:** gracious concern expressed through action.
- **Goodness:** moral integrity and a desire to do what honors God.
- **Faithfulness:** reliability, loyalty, and steadfastness.
- **Gentleness:** strength governed by humility and care.
- **Self-control:** Spirit-enabled restraint over sinful desires and impulses.

These qualities are called fruit because they grow from the Spirit's life within believers. People may imitate certain behaviors temporarily, but lasting spiritual fruit cannot be manufactured through willpower, image management, or religious performance.

Against such things there is no law because the Spirit produces the kind of character the law was intended to encourage.

Verse 24

Those who belong to Christ have **crucified the flesh with its passions and desires**.

Paul describes a decisive break that takes place through union with Christ. Sin is no longer the believer's rightful master, and the flesh no longer possesses an uncontested claim over the person's life.

This does not mean temptation disappears. Verse 17 has already acknowledged the continuing conflict. It means that believers no longer owe obedience to the flesh. Through Christ and the Spirit's power, they can resist desires that once ruled them.

Verse 25

Paul writes:

“If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.”

The word **if** does not express uncertainty. Paul's meaning is closer to: *Since the Spirit has given us life, we should also order our lives according to His direction.*

To **keep in step** pictures people walking in line or following an established direction. The Spirit gives spiritual life, but believers must continually respond to His leadership through faith and obedience.

Keeping in step is not passive. It involves surrendering desires, receiving correction, obeying Scripture, practicing spiritual disciplines, and making choices consistent with the character He is producing.

Verse 26

Paul concludes with three relational warnings:

- conceit
- provoking one another
- envying one another

Conceit causes people to measure their worth against others. Those who believe themselves superior provoke others. Those who believe themselves inferior envy others.

Both attitudes place self at the center. Spirit-produced fruit becomes especially visible in relationships where comparison, irritation, pride, and jealousy would otherwise dominate.

Consider This -

Optional illustration to reinforce the passage.

Imagine tying polished artificial apples to the branches of a dead tree. From a distance, it might briefly appear healthy—but the fruit did not grow from life within the tree.

In the same way, people can temporarily attach respectable behavior to their lives through pressure, fear, or image management. The fruit Paul describes is different. It grows because the Holy Spirit is alive and at work within the believer.

Spiritual fruit is not behavior we attach to ourselves; it is character the Spirit grows within us.

Guide Discussion

1. **Good for Students:** What differences do you notice between the “works” of the flesh and the “fruit” of the Spirit?
2. **Discuss:** Why do you think so many of the works of the flesh involve conflict, comparison, and damaged relationships?

3. **Deeper Dive:** How can we distinguish Spirit-produced fruit from temporarily improving our behavior to avoid consequences or impress others?
4. ★ **Reflective — Index Card:** Which aspect of the fruit of the Spirit is most strained in your present circumstances? What would keeping in step with the Spirit look like in one specific situation this week?

Teaching Insight

Say:

“The fruit of the Spirit is not a checklist for earning God’s approval. It is evidence that the Spirit is transforming those who already belong to Christ. Our responsibility is not to manufacture fruit through human effort, but to reject the flesh, depend upon the Spirit, and follow where He leads.”

Transition into Application Exercise:

“Paul’s words invite us to move beyond merely recognizing the difference between the flesh and the Spirit. Let’s identify one situation in which we can intentionally reject a fleshly response and keep in step with the Spirit this week.”

Application Exercise (5–7 min)

Stop, Yield, and Step

Supplies: Index cards and pens

Ask members to divide their card into three sections.

1. Stop

What reaction, attitude, or behavior of the flesh are you most tempted to follow in a current situation?

Examples might include:

- anger
- jealousy
- selfishness
- avoidance
- impurity
- resentment
- pride

- uncontrolled speech
- the need to win

2. Yield

What do you need to surrender to the Holy Spirit in that situation?

This may include:

- your desire for control
- your right to retaliate
- your need for approval
- a hidden habit
- an excuse
- fear of obeying
- unwillingness to forgive

3. Step

What is one specific action consistent with the fruit of the Spirit that you can take?

Examples might include:

- speaking gently
- apologizing
- delaying an angry response
- showing kindness
- telling the truth
- asking for accountability
- serving someone
- refusing a tempting situation
- patiently continuing a difficult responsibility

Say

“Keeping in step with the Spirit does not mean waiting until obedience feels natural. It means depending upon His power, responding to His leadership, and taking the next faithful step.”

Transition into Pray Through the Passage:

“We cannot produce spiritual fruit simply by trying harder. Having identified where we need the Spirit’s help, let’s bring those areas to God and ask Him to form the character of Christ within us.”

Pray Through the Passage (10 min)

Led by the Prayer Champion:

Read the verse/passage, then read the prayer prompt out loud. Allow a few moments between prompts for reflection and prayer. Encourage members to personalize each prayer by filling in the blank with their own response.

Prompt 1 - Adoration (have people pray this prompt out loud)

Galatians 5:25 - “If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.”

- Holy Spirit, I praise You because You are the giver of spiritual life. You do not leave us powerless to change, but live within Your people and lead us toward Christlike character.

Prompt 2 - Confession (can be silent)

Galatians 5:16 - “Walk by the Spirit, and you will certainly not carry out the desire of the flesh.”

- Confess a specific situation in which you have followed the desires of the flesh rather than responding to the Holy Spirit’s leadership.

Prompt 3 - Gratitude (have people pray this prompt out loud)

Galatians 5:24 - “Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”

- Jesus, thank You for giving me the Spirit’s presence and power to resist _____.

Prompt 4 - Response/Obedience (have people pray this prompt out loud)

Galatians 5:13 - “Serve one another through love.”

- Holy Spirit, help me to use my freedom to serve someone’s name through love this week.

End the prayer prompt time and transition to the next section:

Prayer Requests, Praises, and Follow-Up

1. Take a few minutes to ask the group for updates from the previous week's prayer requests. Encourage the group to celebrate answered prayers.
2. Next, identify specific needs that can be prayed for throughout this coming week. Encourage members to be vulnerable and open in their needs so members can better and more fully support each other in prayer and in tangible ways.
3. Record requests and praises, share them with the group during the week, and follow up on them at the next gathering.

Transition into Conclusion:

“The Spirit’s work is often gradual, but it is never pointless. As we close, let’s remember that Christ has not only called us out of slavery, He has given us His Spirit so that our freedom can increasingly bear visible fruit.”

Conclusion (5 min)



Scan or click the QR code and share the link in your Life Group's group chat (e.g. GroupMe, text or email thread, etc.) so they can see **This Week's Challenge**. Encourage your group to keep these questions in mind, review/memorize the Key Verse during the week, and engage in the Year of Prayer reading plan this week.

Final Takeaway

After discussion concludes, read the takeaway statement:

Christ frees us from condemnation and slavery to sin. The Holy Spirit then teaches us to use that freedom to love others and increasingly reflect the character of Jesus.

This Week's Challenge

Respond – *What will I do this week?*

Use your Stop, Yield, and Step card during the week. Before responding in the situation you identified:

- Stop and recognize the fleshly response.
- Yield your desires to the Holy Spirit.
- Take the specific step that reflects His fruit.

Reflect – *What is God showing me?*

Ask yourself:

- Where am I most tempted to respond according to the flesh, and what would keeping in step with the Spirit look like in that situation?

Review – *How will I keep God’s Word before me?*

Review this week’s **Key Verse** each day and ask God to use it to shape your heart and actions throughout the week.

Galatians 5:13 – “For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only don’t use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but serve one another through love.”

Ask God to show you one opportunity each day to use your freedom for another person’s good.

Read – *How will I prepare for next week?*

This week’s reading is **Galatians 6 – Ephesians 4**. You can access the Year of Prayer reading plan [here](#).

Prayer

Either pray something like the guide below, or invite someone in the group to close in prayer.

“Father, thank You for setting us free through Jesus Christ. Forgive us for using Your gifts, our choices, and our freedom selfishly. Thank You for giving us the Holy Spirit, who brings life and produces what we cannot create on our own. Help us recognize and reject the desires of the flesh. Teach us to keep in step with Your Spirit in our thoughts, relationships, words, and decisions. Produce in us the love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control that reflect the character of Jesus. Use our freedom to help us serve one another through love. In Jesus’ name, amen.”