



Free in Christ • Free to live • galatians 5:13-26 • 07/15/2018

Main Point

We are to live out the desires of the Spirit under the leadership of the Spirit with the evidence of the Spirit.

Introduction

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

Recall a time when you felt “imprisoned” by an unfulfilling job, a bad habit, an illness, or financial debt. How did you become free from that situation? How would you describe the sense of freedom you experienced at that time?

Some people mistakenly believe Christians are free to do whatever they want to do—and only what they want to do. Yet they need to understand Christian freedom is the freedom to obey Christ and reflect His character. Others assume they must perform good works to solidify their relationship with God. In his Letter to the Galatians, Paul emphasized that God had called them to freedom, not to legalism. They were free to follow the Holy Spirit’s leadership. When we follow God closely, we live by faith through hope and love.

Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

What dangerous opportunities does freedom provide (vv. 13-15)? What was Paul afraid that freedom would give the Galatians an opportunity to do?

Why do you think Paul emphasized service to one another through love? How does service protect from the dangers of freedom?

Up to this point in his Letter to the Galatians, Paul had referred to the Mosaic law in negative terms. In this verse, however, he referred to it positively. Even the Mosaic law encouraged the Galatians to serve others rather than to serve themselves. Its true spirit was summarized in the single command that we love our neighbor as we love ourselves.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ GALATIANS 5:16-21.

How would you define the term “sinful nature” in your own words (v. 16)? In contrast, what does walking (or living) by the Spirit mean?

What characterizes a life guided by the sinful nature? By the Spirit?

We are to live out the desires of the Spirit under the leadership of the Spirit with the evidence of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit leads us to do what God wants, not what our sinful nature wants. The imperative “walk” is a Hebrew expression for “live,” with the idea of conduct or lifestyle. Its tense conveys continuous action. The phrase “by the Spirit” can be rendered “in the Spirit”—in the sphere the Spirit governs. To keep on living in the Spirit is to continually live by His power—to go where He goes.

If we are made alive by the Spirit, why do we still struggle with sin?

At the moment we place our trust in Christ, our sinful nature no longer has control over us. Control now belongs to God and His Spirit. However, we live in a fallen world and remain in a battle against sin even after we become Christians. As long as we live, we will continue in this battle. Yet because we are in Christ, sin no longer dominates us, meaning, we are not compelled to sin. Instead, we have the Holy Spirit inside of us who changes our desires and helps us resist sin. In Galatians 5:19-21, Paul presented a catalog of “the works of the flesh” (v. 19) so these believers could be forewarned. The sins listed in these verses are the result of twisting God’s gifts into ungodly behaviors and not following the Spirit.

Why do you think Paul mentioned these specific sins? Do you see any commonalities among the sins?

What makes these sins “obvious” (v. 19)? How are they “contrary to the Spirit” (v. 17)?

How would our world be different if Christians let the Spirit lead in all their actions?

What is the significance of Paul’s warning in verse 21?

People with lifestyles characterized by the works of the flesh will not inherit God’s kingdom. Inherit means “to share in.” The kingdom of God is His rule, the sphere of His grace. People who consistently perform the

works of the flesh are not following the Spirit and indeed are not Christians. Conversely, the Spirit's activity in Christians produces a cluster of virtues that gives evidence believers belong to Christ (see vv. 22-26). Good works don't create Christians; Christians create good works.

| HAVE ANOTHER VOLUNTEER READ GALATIANS 5:22-26.

How does the fruit of the Spirit in verses 22-26 compare to the works of the flesh mentioned in verses 19-21?

What do each of the fruits of the Spirit have in common with each other? Where do you see the Holy Spirit bringing out these characteristics in your life?

If verse 26 describes the attitude of someone not in tune with the Spirit, what's the attitude of someone who is?

Paul called for the Galatian believers to follow the Spirit's leadership and to avoid destructive attitudes and behavior (see 5:25-26). The Spirit's presence in our lives gives us the power we need to live out our faith. He replaces those sinful works with His fruit, and as a result we're able to love and serve others rather than ourselves.

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Is there an area in your life where you are following the flesh instead of the Spirit? What step can you take today to follow the direction of the Holy Spirit?

In what ways have you recently been reminded of the Spirit's presence and power in your life? How can you be more aware of and sensitive to the Spirit's presence and power?

When have you experienced a fellow believer encouraging you to live by the Spirit and not the flesh? How did that change your approach toward sin? Is there someone you can encourage this week?

Pray

Thank God for sending the Holy Spirit so that we can have a guide and an advocate to help us live lives that glorify God. Pray that God would encourage people in your group and at our church to listen and heed the instruction of the Spirit in their lives.

Commentary

| galatians 5:13-26

5:13-14. In verse 1, Paul states that Christian freedom is the right and privilege of every believer. Then he points out six negative consequences of falling back into slavery. Now he warns them not to use this freedom as a license to sin. Rather than liberty being used for selfishness, the true objective of their newfound freedom is love. Quoting Leviticus 19:18, Paul summarizes the law as “love your neighbor as yourself.” Always remember that we are slaves commissioned to love one another (Matt. 22:39).

5:15. As a result of the legalists, this church was divided. They were biting and devouring each other. Their church and community of faith were on the verge of destruction. Legalism treats people harshly and often leads to divisions.

5:16. The phrase “so I say” alerts the Galatian readers that Paul was about to make an important point. His following instructions are designed to combat the selfish behaviors and abuses prominent in the Galatian fellowship (v. 15). The verb translated “live” literally means “walk.” It refers to journeying through life. Paul commonly used the term to designate daily conduct or lifestyle. Along the pathway of life, the Spirit’s guidance and power can help Christians avoid the self-destructive tendencies of the sinful nature. Paul followed his command with a promise: Ordering our lives according to the Spirit’s guidance will prevent believers from ever carrying out the desire of the “flesh.” In the context of Galatians 5:16, the term “flesh” refers to people’s lower nature. Coupled with the word for “flesh,” the term for “desire” conveys the sense of craving what is evil. Consistently living in the Spirit would enable believers to overcome sin’s pull, which the law could not do.

5:17. Every Christian is a walking civil war. Flesh and Spirit are in perpetual conflict; they are diametrically opposed to each other and vie for dominance in believers’ lives. What the flesh desires is antagonistic to what the Spirit desires for Christians. The language is that of unrelenting warfare for control of believers’ lives. The Spirit strives to prevent believers from giving in to evil; the flesh tries to thwart the Spirit’s work.

5:18. Paul emphasized that active cooperation with the Spirit and constant reliance on His power would enable the Galatian believers to experience freedom instead of bondage. If they consistently followed the Spirit’s leadership, they would not be under the law. Paul’s words indicate he was following up on his emphasis of not misusing Christian freedom and elaborating on how to use it properly (see vv. 13-15). The Judaizers contended that obeying the law enables people to overcome their base desires; yet Paul knew from experience that the law was powerless to suppress people’s lower nature (see Rom. 7:7-8,14-25). Paul maintained strongly that only following the Spirit’s guidance could enable people to overcome evil and experience the freedom of grace. The inner struggle between believers’ old nature and the Spirit would continue, but following the Spirit’s leading—walking behind Him—would empower them to be victorious.

5:19. Paul spelled out the results of acting on “the desires of the flesh” (v. 16). He cataloged the works of the flesh. The word “works” refers to what issues from living in the flesh—people’s lower natures. Paul stated these works are apparent. Paul used 15 Greek words and one catchall term to present characteristic activities of people who are outside God’s kingdom and devoid of the Spirit’s leadership. All the impulses or drives

Paul included are potentially good, but the base nature seeks to distort and pervert them. Paul began listing what the flesh produces by naming three sexual sins. Sexual immorality was epidemic and commonly accepted in the Galatian believers' environment. They were bombarded with temptations to revert to their former immoral lifestyles. Paul emphasized that sexual sins issue from our sinful nature's aggression in its warfare with the Spirit.

5:20a. Paul next addressed works of the flesh in the religious realm. The word "idolatry" referred primarily to worshipping pagan gods—false gods that people fashioned. Such worship often included sexual immorality. Broadly defined, idols are anything or anyone (including themselves) that people put in God's rightful place in their lives. Following the Spirit's leadership inspires life-giving, life-sustaining worship of God. Following the lower nature's impulses results in false, powerless religion.

5:20b-21. Paul's third category of the flesh's works related to people's interactions. Significantly, he listed sinful attitudes, equating them with sinful acts. In so doing, he listed hatreds first. The Greek word means "hostilities" and has the idea of personal animosities. With the phrase and "anything similar," Paul lumped other obvious works of the flesh with those he had listed. He again gave the Galatians advance warning: People with lifestyles characterized by the works of the flesh will not inherit God's kingdom. Inherit means "to share in." The kingdom of God is His rule, the sphere of His grace. The tense of the word practice conveys habitual performance. People who consistently perform the works of the flesh are not following the Spirit and indeed are not Christians.

5:22-23. Paul contrasted the fruit of the Spirit to the works of the flesh. The word "fruit" refers to virtues only the Spirit can cultivate and bring to full growth in believers' lives. Human nature apart from God can perform works; only the Spirit can produce fruit. For purposes of study, we can place the virtues in three groups: Christian, social, and personal conduct. The first three virtues in the cluster of the fruit of the Spirit show that only God can generate and maintain His desired harvest in the lives of believers. The second group of virtues in the cluster of Spirit-produced fruit pertains to believers' relationships with others—their social virtues. The third group of virtues is made up of qualities that believers exhibit in personal conduct. Where the fruit of the Spirit is present, no law is necessary. One purpose of the law was to prevent evil, but Spirit-empowered Christians not only fulfill the law in principle but go far beyond what it requires. The presence of the fruit of the Spirit removes the need for the law's restraints.

5:24. At the time of conversion, genuine believers put to death (have crucified) the old nature by the Spirit's power. Those who belong to Christ are people who have placed faith in Him. At conversion, the war with the flesh's passions and desires—evil prompting and cravings—has been won. Skirmishes between the old nature and the Spirit's leading continue, but believers' ultimate victory is assured.

5:25. The phrase "if we live by the Spirit" does not express doubt. The Greek construction expresses certainty: "Because we live by the Spirit." The Holy Spirit is the source of our new spiritual life, so we must also follow Him. The Greek word rendered "follow" means "to proceed in a row," "to go in order," thus "to

walk” in another’s steps. It has the further sense of moving toward a goal. Paul exhorted the Galatian believers to order their lives by relying daily on the Spirit’s guidance. Doing so would result in a Christian lifestyle exhibiting exemplary attitudes and actions.

5:26. Paul ended this section of his letter with an exhortation. Literally, he called on the Galatian Christians to stop some destructive attitudes. These attitudes were products of the flesh; they were not evidences of living by the Spirit.

Next Week's Reading

Galatians 6:1-10