



Week Five:  
GRACE THAT BEARS FRUIT  
*Bible Study*

MAY 20-26, 2019

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## KEY VERSES

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*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against things like this. — Galatians 5:22-23 (CEB)*

## BIBLE STUDY

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*Galatians Chapter 5*

## GATHERING PRAYER

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Consider using one of the Opening Prayers, the Prayer for Illumination, and/or the Statement of Faith from the Week 5 Worship Helps for this series.

## OVERVIEW

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This chapter is critical in the overall message of Galatians. It reaches back to what has been said up to this point and it pushes forward to inescapable implications of what the gospel accomplishes for us and in us.

In this first section, *Galatians 5:1-12*, Paul restates his appeal and pushes forward. What was God's intended goal for a gospel stressing Christ's actions for us, specifically his death aimed at our sins? What was the point of a plan to save us apart from our efforts to keep the law or our wearing of special badges of achievement like circumcision, specific dietary regulations, and a strict Sabbath? Why the repeated emphasis on our faith in Christ plus nothing else as the way to the God-kind of righteousness? Why the long argument to explain how Christians are Abraham's children, specifically like Sarah's son—the promised one, rather than the son produced by Abraham and Hagar? Verse 1 answers these questions for us: "For freedom Christ has set us free." What God intended was that in Christ, in fulfillment of His promise, and by the Spirit's work, we would live in freedom. To submit to pressure and receive circumcision, the Gentile believers in Galatia would be slaves to the law and the condemnation it produces. *Verse 11* suggests that such a move would eclipse the cross of Jesus Christ!

In the second section, *Galatians 5:13-15*, we should designate the liberty Paul is talking about as, "Christian freedom," because it is freedom won by Christ and made available to those who trust him. This brand of liberty is not the same as other conceptions of freedom. Perhaps the importance of the exhortation is ramped up in the reminder that they were "called" to freedom, *verse 13*. Then come some qualifications of what Christian freedom is and is not.

- Christian freedom is not freedom for self-indulgence (*v. 13*). More literal translations: do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh. This will be taken up in *v. 19-21*.

- Christian freedom is not freedom to take advantage of my neighbor (*v. 15*). The things described in this verse (bite, devour, consume) are the result of divisions incited by the Judaizers. Their pressure toward circumcision and any who were moving toward the acceptance of the strict Jewish guidelines would create frustration and anger tearing at the fabric of Christian community.

In contrast to these descriptions of what Christian freedom is not, the succeeding verses in the third section, *Galatians 5:16-26*, clarify what our liberty is meant to be and how it is to be lived out. It is interesting—perhaps even surprising that the law is not thrown aside. In fact, it is to be “fulfilled,” (in the more literal translations, ESV, NASB) rather than summed up. This is done in the attitudes, actions, and expressions of Christian love. This is no doubt what the phrase, “law of Christ” is describing in *verse 2*. No wonder we are urged to “walk in the Spirit” in *verse 16* and again in *verse 25*. The life in the Spirit gives freedom and empowerment to love the way God intends.

The flesh, as Paul uses it here refers, not to our physical body but to fallen human nature that is bent toward self-centeredness, and therefore, prone to sin. The flesh twists good human desires and produces others that are unholy and unhealthy (*vs. 17*). The desires of the flesh are in conflict with the wholesome and holy desires of the Spirit. Before telling us what the “works of the flesh” are, Paul tells us how to escape the trap of fleshly desires that would control our living: “Live by the Spirit,” be “led by the Spirit,” then toward the end of our chapter, “live by the Spirit”... also “be guided by the Spirit” (*vs. 16-17, 25*).

The “works of the flesh,” are set over against the “fruit of the Spirit.” John Stott (*The Message of Galatians*, 1969, pp. 147-148) suggests that the 15 acts described as works of the flesh fit into 4 different categories of life. It is clear that the list is not complete, since Paul adds the words, “and things like these.” There are other vice-lists in the New Testament: *Mark 7.21-23*; *1 Corinthians 6.9-11*; *Colossians 3.5, 8* are a few that might be consulted. There is typically an overlap in the vices named in these lists, as well as some that are unique in comparison. This may suggest that any list would show broad agreement about basic Christian virtues, but a particular list may be tailored to address more specific local sins. Stott’s categories are: the realm of sex (fornication, impurity, licentiousness); the realm of religion (idolatry, sorcery); the realm of society (enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy); the realm of drink (drunkenness, carousing). It should not be overlooked that a solemn warning is added: “those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

We should not think this list of vices and the stern warning to escape them sounds too much like life under the law that Paul is dismissing. This exhortation is a vital part of a great letter that expounds the gospel of grace alone, in Christ alone, by faith alone. Our freedom is not a license to live any way we please but freedom by the Spirit to be what God has created us to be and redeemed us to be. The above list is no doubt relevant to matters of sexual identity and practice, as well as angry divisions that tear away at our unity. Paul says the way to overcome is by giving ourselves to life in the Spirit. This is the way not only to avoiding the negative works of the flesh but the way to positively bear “the fruit of the Spirit.” Many interpreters suggest that the (one) fruit of the Spirit is love. Previous references to love in the chapter are: faith working through love, *vs. 6*; through love become slaves to (or serve) one another, *vs. 13*; love your neighbor (as a summation of the law), *vs. 14*. This prominence given to love would lend support to the idea of one fruit, with the various expressions of it: joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Some have suggested that these expressions are like the beautiful petals that surround a flower’s center, thus showing the full-flowering of Christian love. The contrast between the two ways of living (by the desires of the flesh or by the life-giving Spirit) is stressed one more time with a statement about a Christian act already completed and an exhortation to a way of life. “Those who belong to Christ have already crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (*vs. 24*) speaks to the fact that it is unfitting—even illogical for believers to carry out the works of the flesh. Instead, given the fruit that the Spirit produces in our lives, one last exhortation comes: “let us ... be guided by the Spirit.”

The contrasts in *chapter 5* are clear: freedom versus slavery, The Spirit versus the flesh, love versus self-indulgence. There is the freedom in Christ, through the Spirit, lived out in biblical love for others. Or there is slavery to the flesh that leads to self-indulgent acts. In Christ, there is freedom from condemnation, slavery to the law, slavery to the flesh and its distorted desires; and there is freedom to trust in Christ, live in the Spirit, and love generously.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

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1. How might the contrasting imagery of standing firm versus being yoked (*vs. 1*) help us understand how Paul sees the two lives—one of freedom and the other of slavery?
2. In a letter that opposes works of law, what do you think Paul is saying when he talks about “faith working through love?”
3. In *verse 5*, waiting for the hope of righteousness looks to the future. Does this mean Christians put off all righteousness till Jesus comes? Explain from the chapter.
4. Twice toward the end of the letter, Paul says “neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything.” See *verses 5:6 and 6:15*. What do these verses say does really matter?
5. Read *vs. 13-14* again and think about the details: Does not the height of Christian love, “become slaves to one another” and “love your neighbor as yourself,” that is called for help us see the great demands put on this positive quality? How do these words guide your life?
6. Plenty is said in this chapter about positive Christian acts. *Verses 13 and 16* tell us that our freedom is not to lead to what kinds of things? Why do you think these things are listed?
7. The Spirit’s desires are radically different from the desires of the flesh. So what Christian responses are called for in our daily lives?
8. There are 5 uses of the term, “one another” in *chapter 5*. What do these 5 uses tell us about Christian relationships with other believers?

## SENDING FORTH

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Close with prayer.

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