

Galatians: Freedom through Christ – Part 9

Life in the Spirit – Galatians 5:1-26

Crosspoint – Dave Spooner – November 16, 2025

Introduction

- I sure do love the apostle Paul. Every time I read his letters, inspired by the Holy Spirit, I hear his pastoral heart come through. His great love and honor for Jesus is reflected in his love and care for the church.
- Paul writes and lives with passion. He practices what he preaches and stands behind these things with his very life. I trust a person like Paul, whose teaching and life line up with humility, honesty, and consistency. This is how he lived, and this is how he died. I love him for it. His letters to the church continue to speak as they were ordained and directed by the Holy Spirit; they are illuminated and inspired, they are authoritative and authentic, they are not just his words, but the Word of God to us.
- This letter to the church in Galatia follows the same pattern as most of Paul's letters to the churches. The first sections are primarily theological in nature, clarifying and shaping doctrines that we are to understand and stand upon, things that we are to believe and treasure in the storehouses of our hearts and minds.
- Then, the last sections of his letters are primarily instructions as to how we are to turn these beliefs into behaviors. The letter of Galatians is no exception, as today and next week we take a look at these chapters that are full of applications.
- There is no way that I can cover all that is in these chapters thoroughly in one message, and even in a series of messages. However, I trust the power and the leading of the Holy Spirit to give to us what He would like us to focus on today. And I encourage you to dive deeply into these chapters to mine them for the glorious truths that are held within. They will benefit and enrich your life more than any physical gold mine that you can find in this world. What is contained in these pages is of eternal wealth and value.
- So may your heart and mind be inclined to hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches, what His Spirit is saying to you, a member of this church, in this place, at this time.
- If you have your Bible with you, please open to Galatians chapter 5, and if you don't have one with you, turn in the pew Bible to page 1004. The purpose of this message today is to help you apply and live out the truth from this letter that will protect you from the pitfalls and sorrows of sin, and produce in your life the "good stuff" that matters most in our relationship with God and each other. It is to help us live in and from the grace, love, and security of being in the family of God in a way that best reflects the kingdom of God and the heart of God. These are the best things that we can do, and you will reap those benefits from living in this way, here and now, and enjoy their benefits throughout eternity.

Do What Counts

Galatians 5:1-6 NIV

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.

2 Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. 3 Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. 4 You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. 5 For through the Spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope. 6

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

- It is for freedom that Christ has set you free. This is freedom from having to earn your way to God. You don't have to do this! This is also freedom from sin and death; you don't have to be bound to that either. Christ has set you free from these cages. He is your liberator, He is your redeemer, He is the hero of your story. He is incredible.
- Jesus set you free from these things; don't go back there and into those cages. Cages like the inner voice that tells you that you have to "do more," that you are not good enough for God or anyone. Don't let anyone or anything lock you back in those things again. Stand firm in the freedom that Christ gave to you.
- If you try to earn your place in the family of God, you are obligated to obey all of the law. If you are trying to be right with God on your own effort and merit, then you have separated yourself from Christ, and have "fallen away from grace," refusing God's grace for you and saying "no" to the invitation of the Spirit and His work in you.
- But if you have the Spirit, you know by faith in the promise of God that someday we will be completely remade and renewed in righteousness. What a glorious day that will be, and it is done in and through the grace and goodness of God. We can never do this in our own power, because we do not have what it takes to do so. So dive in headfirst and headlong into the grace and love of God in Christ Jesus.
- So if you get circumcised for religious reasons, to try to conform to the Law (Torah), it does not matter, nor does it count for anything, it does not earn you anything. It does not matter if you are circumcised or not.
- You know what is the only thing that matters? The only thing that counts? It is your heart, expressing your faith through love. If you do all this religious stuff for any other reason than love of God and neighbor, it counts for nothing. Paul says the same thing in 1 Corinthians 13, the "love chapter." It is the whole point of what he says there. If you speak in the tongues of men and angels, if you have prophetic powers, or understand all mysteries and knowledge, if you have faith strong enough to move mountains, or if you give away everything you have, or give up your body to be burned as a martyr, if you do all these grand religious acts without doing so motivated by love, then you gain nothing, and you are nothing.
- God help us to be people of faith who live our lives out of love for God and others; that is what counts. So focus on doing what counts, and ask God to lead you and help you live in this love and live in this way.

Keep Running a Good Race

Galatians 5:7-12 NIV

You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth? 8 That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you. 9 "A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough." 10 I am confident in the Lord that you will take no other view. The one who is throwing you into confusion, whoever that may be, will have to pay the penalty. 11 Brothers and sisters, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished. 12 As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!

- Keep running a good race! Keep following and obeying the truth of the gospel. Those voices that are trying to persuade you that you must earn your place in the family of God are not from God. Don't listen to them! If you follow them even a little bit, that thought pattern will work its way into all of you, like yeast in bread dough. Don't give in even a little bit.
- The people who are trying to persuade you into performance religion will have to pay the price of this sick and sinister teaching. Paul is saying that he got out of all of that, and because he preaches the true gospel of grace, he is being persecuted for this.
- The deal is that if we can earn our way to heaven, if we can earn our place in the family of God, then the "offense of the cross has been abolished." So what is the "offense of the cross"? The offense of the cross is that we are not good enough to be adopted into the family of God or to earn our way into heaven. That is why we need the cross. The cross tells us that we do not measure up, so we need someone to open the door for us, someone to extend to us righteousness, to extend an invitation so that we can enter in. The one who has done that is Jesus the Christ, the very Son of God, who gives us the Spirit of God, by the grace of God, for the Glory of God, to the joy of all people, to the nations, and to the generations.
- This is the reality of truth that has eternal significance with the direst of consequences and the greatest of all rewards. That is why Paul is so very strong and passionate about walking in grace, even to the point of wishing that those who teach "Jesus plus" will never reproduce anyone or anything from their false and deceptive teaching.
- Once you are free from the bondage of performance religion and sin, keep running, keep moving forward in the grace of God. Keep true to the teaching of Scripture. Don't let anyone or anything hold you down or hold you back. I hope you can see from this letter why it sparked the Reformation 500 years ago that broke people free from the performance righteousness of the Roman Catholic Church, and why the Catholic church fights this message even to this day. People can be born again and still attend the RC church, but that is the rare exception, and it is despite the official teachings of the RC church.
- The message from God contained in the book of Galatians can keep us from being enslaved to anyone who teaches that we need anything more than Jesus and His grace. There is no "Jesus Plus"; it is only Jesus. Scripture alone, Christ alone, grace alone, faith alone, to the glory of God alone.

Serve One Another Humbly in Love

Galatians 5:13-15 NIV

You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. 14 For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." 15 If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

- We are called to be free; however, this freedom does not give us a license to do whatever we want. We are free to follow the Spirit's leading, which is to love our neighbors as ourselves. We are now to "serve one another humbly in love." This is the new "rule" that we are to live by. Because if we do not live by this rule or walk this path, we will harm and destroy each other.
- This means that as born-again Christians, we have a way in which God wants us to relate to each other. This is the way of the Spirit, and if we serve one another humbly in love, things will go well with us and between us. But if we don't do this, things will not go well between us in the church, and we will end up destroying each other, ourselves, and the church.

- We still have to choose to do what is right according to the way and the Word of God. And just because we are now born again, this does not mean that everything will be relationally or situationally perfect. Our choices still matter, for good or for evil.
- Let this new way of following the way of the Spirit be the ethic in which we live and treat one another. We are to ask ourselves the question continually, “Are these words or is this action humbly serving in love, or am I serving myself, or doing so out of pride or any other motivation?” We must stop and examine ourselves, not just what we do and say, but why we do and say what we do.
- When we fall short, we need to make things right in our hearts through repentance and then go to the other and make amends through forgiveness and reconciliation. The church will have very few relational issues between people if we all do this. So let’s all work on this. Let’s work to serve one another in humility motivated by love. In doing so we will all be better for it, God will be honored and pleased to work and walk among us, and others will desire to be in this community and in the family of God. This is what we all want and desire. May we follow Christ in obedience and walk according to the Spirit.

Walk by the Spirit

Galatians 5:16-26 NIV

So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

19 The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21 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.

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

- We are to “walk by the Spirit,” which means that we are to walk in the way of the Spirit, living as our Father directs us to live. If we follow the way of the Spirit in serving one another in love, if we are focusing on that by default, we will not gratify the desires of the flesh.
- As Christians, we still have a battle raging inside of us, between the new nature given to us by the Spirit, and the old nature, which is our sin nature that we were born with. These two natures conflict with each other. The new nature wants and desires to do what is right and wants to follow the way of Christ, whereas the old nature wants to go in the other direction.
- Again, our freedom from the law does not mean we are free to do whatever we want, because what the old nature wants is not serving others in humility out of love, or loving your neighbor as yourself. The old nature desires to serve itself and do whatever it wants, which, in the long run, does not serve us at all, but ultimately kills us. We are to be killing the old nature, not letting it live in us.

- How do we do this? If we focus on doing what is right, by default, we will not focus on the bad things. We need to feed ourselves with what helps us focus on what God wants us to do, not with what feeds our sinful nature. Doing so will help you be focused on what the Spirit wants you to do. We can also define and examine the fruit of our lives and actions to be able to measure if we are walking in accordance with the Spirit and producing its fruit, or if we are walking in accordance with the flesh, the old nature, and producing its fruit.
- Paul gives us specifics so we will know what is of God's Spirit and the new nature and what is of our spirit and the old nature.

The Acts of the Flesh vs. The Fruit of the Spirit

| Acts of the Flesh | Definition & Description | Fruit of the Spirit | Definition & Description |
|--------------------------|---|-------------------------------|--|
| Sexual immorality | Seeking physical pleasure outside of God's design for marriage, using others for gratification rather than love. | Love | Self-giving affection that seeks the good of others, mirroring God's sacrificial heart. |
| Impurity | Moral corruption or unclean thoughts and behaviors; indulging in what defiles rather than what sanctifies. | Joy | Deep gladness rooted in God's presence, not dependent on circumstances but on relationship with Him. |
| Debauchery | Excessive indulgence without restraint, living for pleasure with no sense of holiness or purpose. | Peace | Inner harmony and wholeness that flows from being reconciled to God through Christ. |
| Idolatry | Placing anything—career, comfort, control, or another person—above God in our affection or allegiance. | Forbearance (Patience) | Enduring hardship and delay with a quiet trust that God's timing and purposes are perfect. |
| Witchcraft | Attempting to manipulate spiritual powers for personal gain; seeking control rather than surrender to God. | Kindness | A disposition of grace and compassion that reflects the mercy of God toward others. |
| Hatred | Deep hostility toward others; viewing people as enemies instead of image-bearers of God. | Goodness | Moral integrity and generosity of heart that chooses righteousness over revenge. |
| Discord | Stirring conflict, division, or strife through words, tone, or attitude; being more interested in being right than in being reconciled. | Faithfulness | Steadfast loyalty and dependability that mirrors God's unwavering covenant love. |
| Jealousy | Resenting others for what they have or who they are; a failure to rest in God's provision and calling. | Gentleness | Strength under control; a spirit of humility that values restoration over domination. |

| Acts of the Flesh | Definition & Description | Fruit of the Spirit | Definition & Description |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|--|
| Fits of Rage | Explosive anger or loss of control; using emotion as a weapon rather than a window into the heart. | Self-control | Spirit-empowered restraint that keeps our desires and impulses submitted to Christ. |
| Selfish Ambition | Living to advance oneself, grasping for position, power, or praise without regard for others. | <i>(See Love & Faithfulness)</i> | The Spirit redirects ambition toward service, stewardship, and the glory of God. |
| Dissensions & Factions | Drawing lines to exclude and divide rather than to unite under Christ; elevating preference over principle. | <i>(See Peace & Kindness)</i> | The Spirit unites believers in humility and shared mission rather than personal agendas. |
| Envy | Grieving when others succeed; a failure to rejoice in another's blessing or to trust God's goodness to us. | <i>(See Joy & Love)</i> | The Spirit cultivates contentment and gratitude that celebrate other's flourishing. |
| Drunkenness & Orgies | Escaping reality through indulgence in substances or sex, abandoning self-restraint for a temporary thrill. | <i>(See Self-control & Joy)</i> | The Spirit leads us to true fulfillment and freedom through disciplined delight in God. |
| And the like | Paul's phrase reminds us that the list isn't exhaustive; the flesh finds endless ways to distort good gifts. | Against such things there is no law | The Spirit's fruit is boundless; there are no limits to living in love, joy, and holiness. |

Galatians 5:19–25 NIV

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

- The contrast Paul draws isn't merely about behaviors; it's about **sources of life**. The acts of the flesh flow from self-centered desires that pull us away from God and others. The Fruit of the Spirit grows when Christ's life takes root within us. Flesh must be *crucified*; fruit must be *cultivated*.
- Living by the Spirit means **daily surrender**, keeping in step with His rhythm of grace. The Spirit does not produce fruit overnight, but over time. As we abide in Christ and walk in humility, the harvest becomes unmistakable: love replacing lust, peace replacing pride, joy replacing jealousy, and faithfulness overcoming fear.

Conclusion

- In this letter, Paul is not just giving us theology; he's giving us a way to live. "It is for freedom that Christ has set you free." Don't go back to the old prison cells of performance, pride, or pleasure. Don't let the enemy convince you that you're still chained when Christ has already unlocked the door. You've been set free, so live free!
- But freedom in Christ isn't doing whatever we want; it's finally being able to do what we were made for—to love God fully and to love people deeply. Freedom in the Spirit is not a license for sin; it's the power to walk away from it. The same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead now lives in you—that means you are never alone, never powerless, and never without help.

- Paul tells us to “walk by the Spirit.” That is a daily, deliberate, dependent walk. You can’t drift into holiness any more than you can drift uphill. It takes intention. It means you start your day by saying, “Holy Spirit, lead me today. Help me see what you see, love how you love, and respond how you would respond.” It means slowing down enough to listen before reacting, to pray before posting, to forgive before you get even.
- *Walking in the Spirit is not about perfection; it’s about direction.* It’s about keeping your steps aligned with His. When you stumble, confess quickly and get back up. When you’re weary, rest in His strength. When you’re tempted, call on His name. The Spirit isn’t waiting for you at the finish line; He’s walking right beside you, step by step, breath by breath.
- And here’s the beauty of it—when you walk in the Spirit, fruit begins to grow naturally. You don’t have to force it. Apple trees don’t grunt and strain to produce apples; they just stay connected to their source of life. So it is with you. Stay connected to Jesus, and His Spirit will produce in you what the flesh never could:
 - Love that serves when it’s inconvenient
 - Joy that endures when life is hard
 - Peace that calms when chaos rages
 - Patience that waits without bitterness
 - Kindness that disarms the angry
 - Goodness that stands out in a cynical world
 - Faithfulness that keeps showing up
 - Gentleness that brings healing instead of harm,
 - Self-control that says “yes” to God and “no” to sin
- So let’s walk day by day and moment by moment in the Spirit. When you’re driving to work, talk to Him. When you feel anger rise, ask Him to help you respond with grace. When you face temptation, remember that Christ has already given you the power to overcome. When someone wrongs you, let the Spirit teach you how to forgive.
- This is how growth and maturity and godliness happen—not in grand moments on a stage, but in daily moments of surrender. It happens when the people of God walk so closely with the Spirit that others see the beauty of Jesus in the ordinary stuff of life, at home, at work, in traffic, in conversations, in how we treat one another.
- Let’s not just talk about the Spirit. Let’s walk with Him. Let’s keep in step with Him. Let’s let Him shape our words, our attitudes, our relationships, our responses, everything. Because when the Spirit leads, freedom follows, fruit grows, Christ is glorified, and lives and communities change.
- So today, as you leave this place, don’t just go about your business as usual, but walk by the Spirit. Let every step, every word, and every choice bear witness that Christ lives in you and that His Spirit is alive and active. That’s what true freedom looks like. That’s what life in the Spirit is all about.

Our prayer team is available to pray with you after the service, near the “prayer” sign at the front of the sanctuary, and also in the prayer room, located next to the offices.

Also, you can send your prayer request to prayer@crosspointrockford.com

Questions for Growth Groups

1. Paul begins this chapter by saying, “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.” What does genuine spiritual freedom look like in your daily life? How is it different from the world’s version of freedom, and what are some ways we can slip back into spiritual “slavery” without even realizing it?

2. Paul says that “the only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.” What might it look like for your faith to “express itself through love” this week—in your home, your workplace, or even with someone who’s difficult to love?
3. Paul warned the Galatians that they were “running a good race,” but something or someone had “cut in” on them. What kinds of things tend to cut in on your walk with God—distractions, discouragements, or false voices—and how can you guard against them?
4. Paul reminds us that freedom isn’t the right to do whatever we want, but the ability to serve one another humbly in love. Where do you sense the Spirit inviting you to serve others with humility right now? What might that look like practically?
5. We all wrestle with the tension between the desires of the flesh and the desires of the Spirit. Where do you feel that inner conflict most strongly in your life? How can you learn to pause, listen, and respond to the Spirit in those moments?
6. When you look at the Fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control—which one do you most desire to see grow in your life right now? What practices, habits, or relationships could help cultivate that fruit?
7. Galatians 5:25 says, “Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.” What does “keeping in step with the Spirit” mean to you in practical, everyday terms? What changes might you need to make this week to walk more closely with Him?