

Galatians 5

Sustaining Freedom in an Enslaved World

Paul opens chapter 5 by urging the Galatians (and us) to remember that it was for freedom that Christ set us free. Freedom from thousands of years of trying to earn favor with God through works but never measuring up. Freedom from believing the enemy and his lies that we aren't good enough, qualified enough, worthy enough, *loved* enough. Freedom from even needing to glance at the fire (past sins) again because we have a perfect and Holy Father that became us and took on the flames for Himself in order to redeem us. This freedom in Christ, however, should not be used as a license to sin. Paul argues that going back to believing the lie that God's grace is dependent on us, completely annuls the work Christ did on the cross. We will soon see, at the end of this chapter, how this dangerous belief can manifest in our daily lives if we let it.

Standing Firm and Loving Others (Galatians 5:1-15)

“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.” (Galatians 5:1 NIV)

1. What do you think it means to “stand firm” in this passage? What might “standing firm” look like to you?

2. When someone is rescued but chooses to go right back to the very thing in which they've been rescued from, what might this say about them and their rescuer?

3. In the same way, what happens to our relationship with Christ when we substitute His free gift of grace for trying to earn it through what we can (or most the time, *can't*) do? Use Galatians 5:3-4 for reference.

4. How does the latter behavior reflect God to the world? Or does it? Explain.

5. Does Paul's statement in Galatians 5:5 make you think differently about your response to the first question?
6. The New King James version uses "stand fast" in Galatians 5:1 and "eagerly wait" in Galatians 5:5. What is Paul telling us to stand fast in and eagerly wait for?
7. How are these two "actions" similar?

Read Isaiah 53:6, Romans 6:19, and Phillipians 2:21

8. These verses speak to something that is, unfortunately, a common trait of our sinful human nature: Serving self. Explain the consistencies you see in these verses with the characteristics you see exemplified by the Galatians and our society as well.
9. In what ways is serving self completely contradictory to everything Jesus taught and demonstrated?

In the space below, record what you know about the way Jesus lived during His earthly ministry:

Read Matthew 16:24 and write it here:

10. According to Jesus, what must we give up to be His follower?
11. Is this a hard thing for you to hear and act on in today's society? What are some of the issues that may make it hard for you?

12. What do you interpret “denying yourself” and “taking up your cross” to mean?

13. If you took a step back and looked at the majority of people around you - people in your community, workplace, schools, etc. - would you say the majority are following the crowd and doing what culture and society dictates rather than living out these words spoken by Jesus? Explain and give specific examples.

If you were being honest, you'd likely have said “yes” to the question above, and unfortunately, you'd be right. Jesus even warned us that this would happen shortly before He gave the command to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him (Matthew 16:24). A few chapters earlier in Matthew 7:13-14, Jesus says that the gate is wide that leads to destruction, and many will enter through that gate; but narrow is the gate that leads to life, and few will find it. If this isn't a sobering message, I'm not sure what is. And sadly, this is what's happening. The majority of people, *Christians*, in this world are being swept away by deceit. They're being lured by the riches of the world and tempted to believe in what's socially acceptable and culturally palpable rather than contend for the truth. Instead of being different - the kind of different Christ calls us to be - many Christians today are conforming to the world and its patterns. Many *churches* are conforming to the world and its patterns. This didn't just end with the churches in Galatia. And instead of making Jesus the Lord of our hearts, we are making ourselves. We say we love God; we say we want to follow Him, but do we really? Are we willing to trade our possessions, our lifestyles, our safety, our reputations, our identity, our positions...if that's what's required?

14. Reflect on areas of yourself that you haven't fully denied in your pursuit of following Jesus. Jot down some ways you can obey this command out of a sincere posture of obedience from the heart. (maybe things you need to give up, things you need to pick up, habits that need to cease/start, relationships that need to end/begin, material possessions/tendencies, etc.) Ask the Holy Spirit to help bring things to mind.

15. When we deny ourselves, what are we freed up to do? (refer to Galatians 5:13 for reference).

16. How is this behavior congruent with how Jesus lived and what Paul says in Galatians 5:14?

Fill in the box below. Label one side “serving self” and the other side “serving others”. Brainstorm what each might look like in your own life and write it below.

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The battle between flesh and Spirit (Galatians 5:16-23)

Gratifying our flesh and its desires is, at the crux, serving ourselves. Serving ourselves is the antithesis of following Jesus. It goes against everything Jesus modeled and taught us. This is why dying to the law, and “crucifying ourselves with Christ”, must happen in the life of every Christian in order for us to truly walk in the freedom that Jesus purchased for us. Paul explains that this freedom is faith working through love to serve others. In the next few verses, Paul will explain the invisible battle that’s fought between the flesh and the Spirit. There’s a discernible struggle that takes place in the life of every believer which, at its root, is led forth by temptation. The battle to gratify your flesh or stand firm in living by the Spirit is real, and because of sin, we

will be in this battle as long as we live on this side of Heaven. But before we get there, let's take a look at another example that dates all the way to the beginning of time...

We read a little bit of this story in the last chapter but flip to Genesis 2:16 and read through to Genesis 3:24.

17. What was the directive given by God to Adam?
18. What was the consequence for disobeying?
19. Shortly after God made Eve, what state were her and Adam in as they freely roamed God's garden?
20. The Bible tells us they were not ashamed. Why do you think this was?
21. Satan enters the scene in Genesis 3:1. Right away he puts the thought in Eve's mind that questions whether or not God said what He said. Has there been a time in your own life when you could relate with Eve? When was the last time you questioned, doubted, or justified a directive from God?
22. Did you act on it? Explain.
23. What does the devil say in Genesis 3:4-5 in order to get Eve thinking the tree might not be all that bad?

“So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate.” (Genesis 3:6 NKJV)

24. Notice how this verse says “when the woman saw...” - this was *after* Satan started whispering in her ear. Do you think she noticed and/or paid much attention to the tree before her encounter with Satan? Why or why not?

25. What thought(s) led up to the behavior? And what context clues are provided in the text to infer this thought was not Eve's but rather Satan's?

Read 2 Corinthians 10:5

26. Explain how Eve's "thought" was against the knowledge of God.

27. According to this passage of scripture, where must we direct our thoughts when they enter our mind?

Deciding to follow Jesus doesn't mean we are exempt from thoughts planted from the enemy. I'd suggest the opposite: We are *more* susceptible to invasive thoughts from Satan in his attempt to try and lure us away from the paths of righteousness. We must discern by the power of the Holy Spirit all thoughts by taking them to Jesus and asking *Him* to filter the good, holy, and righteous from those meant for harm. Acting on every thought that enters our mind proves dangerous and irresponsible as a child of God. There are three initiators of our thoughts if we are in Christ: ourself (free will), the enemy, and the Holy Spirit. We will usually have thoughts based on the 5 senses including what we read, watch, listen to and experience. This is normal for any functioning human being, and the ability to think, reason, etc. is a product of the highly complex brain God has given us. It's when these thoughts are distorted into lies that go against God and His precepts that we should be aware the enemy is at play. Alternatively, when thoughts enter our mind that are aligned with God and His Word, we should recognize that these are the Holy Spirit and in line with the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16). These are the thoughts we must heed and obey by acting or *not* acting on.

28. Next to each aspect of the tree Eve notices, list what lust of the flesh corresponds. The first is done as an example.

Ex: *She saw the tree was good for food - lust of the flesh (hunger)*

The fruit was pleasant to her eyes -

The tree could make her wise -

29. Flip back to chapter four where we studied Jesus' encounter with the devil in the wilderness (pg. 34). How are these temptations similar to those Eve faced?

30. List the differences in the way in which Eve responded and the way Jesus responded.

31. Did Adam and Eve experience physical death or spiritual death as a result of their disobedience? Explain.

32. Do we always experience the consequences of our disobedience to God (sin)? Why or why not?

33. Why do you think God allows for us to be tempted? Explain.

34. Can you think of anyone else in the Bible that was tempted, sinned against God and suffered the consequences? List them here (hint - one was a *King* after God's own heart).

35. How do you think temptation plays a part in serving self?

Like Jesus and Eve were both tempted to give in to their fleshly desires, so were the early believers in Galatia - and so are you and I. By believing in our own ability to earn God's grace through works, we subtly remove Christ (and His finished work of the cross) off the throne of our hearts and we place ourselves, and *our* abilities, on it. The aftermath that results from this, Paul alludes, are the works of the flesh. Galatians 5:19-21 chronicles certain behaviors that become evident in our lives when we place "self" above Christ.

Write them down here and, next to each, honestly reflect if you see that “work” being manifested in your life. If there are other things you notice manifesting as a result of the flesh, add it at the end. A theoretical example is provided for you below.

Example:

idolatry - Putting people’s thoughts/opinions of me higher than God’s and letting their opinions dictate my actions.

Contrary to the works of the flesh are the fruit of the Spirit. In the same way that being led by the flesh results in the above negative characteristics, being led by God’s Holy Spirit results in an abundance of positive characteristics referred to as “fruit” by Paul. These are the desirable qualities demonstrated in the life of every born again believer following Jesus. However, just like a tree doesn’t automatically produce ripe fruit to be enjoyed and consumed, a new believer doesn’t automatically produce fruit of the Spirit without first repenting. The seeds of this fruit are planted when we become aware of our sin and the need to repent from it. Like a gardener must first prepare the ground before any harvest can take place, the Holy Spirit prepares our heart by convicting us of our sin (John 16:8) causing us to repent and turn away from the works of our flesh. Repentance is the catalyzed link between the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit.

*“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”
(Romans 12:1 ESV).*

36. Circle the word “present your bodies” in the above verse. What picture comes to mind when you read this word in this passage of scripture?

37. Imagine you are the child in the house fire being rescued by your father. What might your body position look like if you aren't fully committed to the rescue mission of being freed from the smoke and hot flames but instead want to go back in for your stuffed animals, toys, etc.?

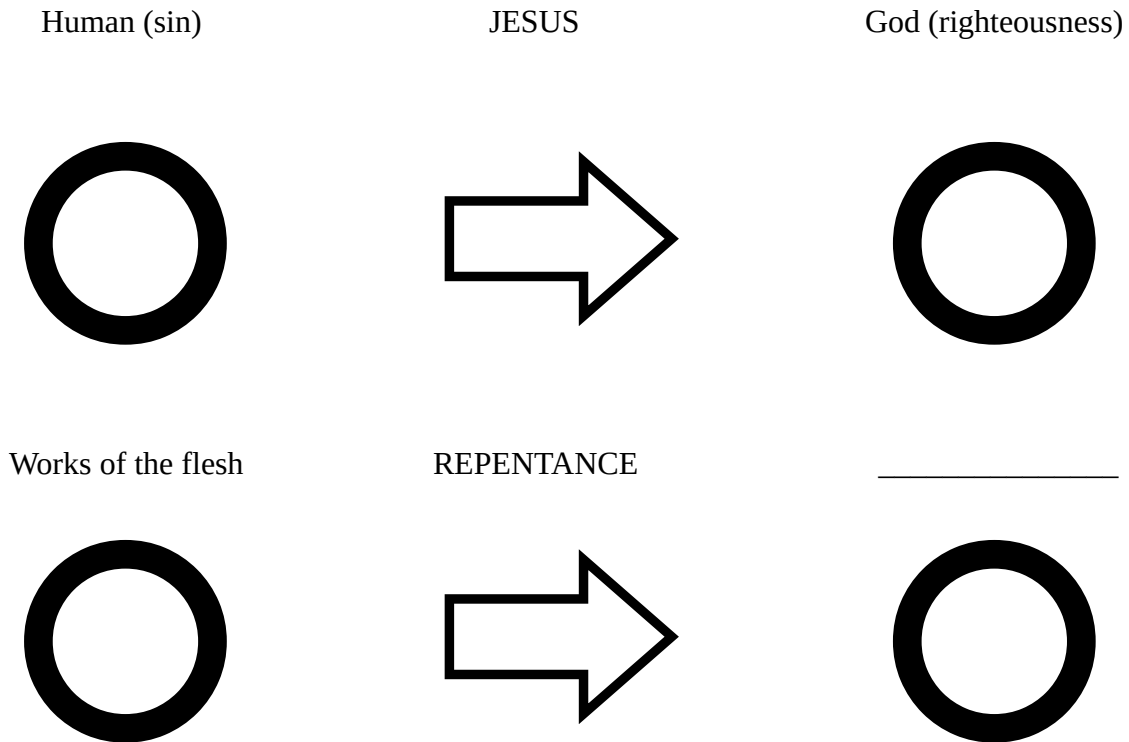
38. What might the "presentation" of our heart look like to God if we keep saying we're sorry, but we keep doing the very thing we're saying we're sorry for?

This is hard, isn't it? If you're being honest, isn't this a daily struggle? You have an amazing morning quiet time with God as you confess and repent by laying burdens at His feet, only to pick them right back up that same evening. I can't even count on two hands and two feet the number of times I've asked God to forgive me for certain things only to fall right back into temptation and do them all over again. Can you imagine how Peter must have felt when Jesus told him he would deny Him three times before the rooster crowed? Peter thought he was ready to follow the Lord into prison and death (Luke 22:33-34)! Only to find out he wasn't. Even Paul laments over his inability to live like he knows he ought to live (Romans 7:21-24). No one is exempt from this cycle, and we are often given multiple opportunities to stand firm. But this is why Jesus came! God knew we would never, in our own strength, be able to turn completely to Him with the flames of deception and smoke from temptation licking at our backs. He knew separation would exist between a sinful-flawed-us and a Holy-perfect-Him if He didn't do something to bridge the gap. Jesus is the bridge because *He* was the only one that could be. And fortunately for those who have placed faith in Him, now, when God looks at us, He sees Jesus (Galatians 3:26-27) - the perfect and righteous lamb of God. But like Paul alluded to in the last chapter, just because we have Jesus as our intercessor *does not* mean we can go on sinning without intentional repentance - a confession of our wrongdoings and human mishaps accompanied with a sincere and humble heart. Besides, if we continued willfully sinning after receiving knowledge of the truth, what would be the point of Jesus' sacrifice? (Hebrews 10:26). Coming to Jesus, our Rescuer, with a repentant and humble heart when we've messed up is what He desires. A teachable heart that's eager to be led by the Spirit is what He wants most. Presenting our bodies to God as a holy and living sacrifice is a choice we must make every day

that we wake up. To have an aware heart that repents and turns its back to this enslaved world in which it lives, fully and wholly through Jesus Christ, is when the seeds of the fruit begin to take root.

39. What do you think repenting does in terms of our communication with God? Explain.

40. In the diagrams below, fill in the missing blank as it relates to what we've studied just now.



41. Note the similarities between the two diagrams from above. Draw any other arrows or lines to illustrate the similarities you find.

“My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.”

(1 John 2:1-3 NASB)

Read Acts 3:19.

42. According to this passage, what word follows the word, “repent”?
43. Who died and served as the final sacrifice for our sins so that we would be reconciled or “returned” to God?

Read Romans 8:1-3.

44. This passage of scripture was written by Paul *after* he had just written to the Romans about the struggle he endured between his own flesh and spirit (Romans 7:21-24). Jot down the thoughts and/or the emotions you have after reading this verse.

When we repent, a shift happens. A literal “about face” is happening in our heart where we acknowledge the ways in which we’ve sinned against God and we ask for forgiveness. This *returns* us to God by opening up the lines of communication and letting Him know we need Him every step of the way. Then, through faith in Jesus Christ and the power of His Holy Spirit, we are able to live a life pleasing to God producing fruit along the way. Read Galatians 5:22-23 and list out the fruit that is displayed in your life when you live by the Spirit. This is a great time to ask a close friend or relative what they see since we often don’t see it ourselves. Record findings below next to each fruit.

The Double C Faith (Galatians 5:24-26)

Jesus didn't die for perfect people. Jesus died for perfectly *imperfect* people. Some of us may find ourselves running back and forth from the fire in an attempt to gratify our flesh and its desires while trying to please the Spirit. This type of behavior exhibits itself as lukewarm faith...where we're not hot, but we're not cold either. We find ourselves right in the middle living out a "double C faith": Comfortable and Complacent. We try to live in this enslaved world like a tightrope balancing act never truly experiencing the freedom that being fully surrendered to God and His ways can bring. We go to church on Sundays, but Monday through Saturday tell a different story. We *know* how to walk, but we don't do it. Paul finishes this section by telling us that if we belong to Christ, we've crucified this back and forth behavior! The chains were broken when we acknowledged the work Jesus did on the cross by way of faith, so why are we continuing to walk in a way like they aren't? (Galatians 5:24-25).

45. What are some inhibitors in your life that may make it hard for you to realize your shackles have been broken?

46. Based on what you've studied this chapter and the reflections you've made, would you say you are following Jesus and letting the Holy Spirit lead your life?

As we close, it's important to remember that the fruits of the Spirit are not drummed up by outward works. The seeds of fruit are planted by the awareness that we've missed the mark and we need Jesus for it all. It's the belief that God sent His son to do something we could never do on our own. It's faith in the risen son of God and faith in Him alone. Acceptance of His unending love heals our broken hearts and restores our crushed spirits after having been worn down through enslavement to this world. Through Him, our old identity is gone and we are given a new identity that is righteous and redeemed. The horrors of our past no longer have control of us because a great price was paid to free us. We belong to God, and it is by His grace that we are able to walk in freedom and live by His Spirit. These fruits are produced as a result of a genuine heart that is sensitive and teachable to the promptings and convictions of the Holy Spirit. They are produced by presenting our bodies as living and holy sacrifices, acceptable to God (Romans 12:1).

Reflection and Action

As a former coach, I can recall on multiple occasions when college coaches would choose to pass up offering scholarships to extremely talented athletes. After talking to the recruiter more, I would find out the reason why: The athlete wasn't coachable. Programs cared more about the coachability of the athlete than their performance on the court. They would often recruit players who might not be the best, but they were coachable and willing to learn. Isn't this the same with God to a certain extent? Choose any bible story and it's characters; you'll find that God doesn't recruit the best, the ones with the most knowledge, or the most qualified. God is looking for a teachable heart. A heart that's humble and receptive to His direction. One whose availability can be occupied by His Holy presence.

The good news is we've all been recruited by God's grace. A broken people who didn't even realize the depth of their depravity and need for a rescuer were afforded one in the form of Jesus Christ. But what is the posture of your heart at this moment in time? Is it teachable and willing to be trained up by God's Holy Spirit?

Write down a prayer asking God to show you the answers to these questions and record below, asking forgiveness and praising Him for the work He's doing in your life.

“Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” (Psalm 139:23-24 NIV)