

Gospel Living: Freedom and Not Flesh

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[0 : 00] If you want to open your Bibles to Galatians chapter 5. We're going to finish off this fifth chapter of Galatians this morning. We'll look at verses 13 through 26.

And as we read through this and walk through this, I want you to begin to get your mind moving towards the Lord's table here in just a little bit.

We will go from here to there. And just be thinking as we walk through this, what it is that Christ has done to make this possible. We'll talk about our freedom.

We'll talk about the flesh. And so just always have in the background what it is that Christ has done. So beginning in chapter 5 of Galatians verse 13, the Bible reads this way.

For you were called to freedom, brethren. Only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word in the statement, you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

[1 : 09] But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another. But I say walk by the spirit and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.

For the flesh sets its desires against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh. For these are in opposition to one another so that you may not do the things that you please.

But if you're led by the spirit, you're not under the law. Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarned you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

Against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the spirit, let us also walk by the spirit.

[2 : 36] And let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another. Father, thank you for the reading of your word.

And I pray that you would use it to expose our own sin, to encourage us to live by your righteousness, by your spirit.

And I pray, Father, that as we become more like you, that you would use our lives to shed the light abroad to other people, that we would be examples, that they would see the good works, and they would glorify your name.

So help us understand what your word says. We pray in Christ's name. Amen. When I preach a sermon, I always write what I call an objective statement.

It's what I'm trying to accomplish with my sermon. And in this case, my objective statement says this, that every Christian can live in freedom and not the flesh by answering three questions.

[3 : 40] And it sounds very sort of stilted sometimes, but I just wanted to explain for a second sort of what this means for us, that if we can live in this freedom and not live in the flesh, what does this mean?

And so let me say it this way, that if you want to grow in maturity as a Christian, if you want to be more Christ-like, if you want to be sanctified in your life, if you perhaps struggle with anger, or you struggle with lust, or you struggle with selfishness and self-centeredness, you can overcome those things of the flesh by answering these three questions just as well.

It gets to our life. We say we're Christians. We're supposed to live a certain way. How does that actually happen? And it's by answering these three questions that help us sort of understand what it is that we're talking about when we say the flesh.

So, that's the first question. What is the flesh? The flesh is three things. Number one, the flesh is contrary to the Spirit.

In Galatians 5.17, it says that the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. They are in opposition to one another.

[5 : 11] So, whatever the flesh is, it is contrary to the Spirit, and by Spirit we mean the Holy Spirit of God. It is something that is contrary to the Holy Spirit.

Secondly, the flesh commits deeds. The flesh does things. You can see in Galatians 5.19-21 that the deeds of the flesh are evident, and then he lists out 15 different deeds.

And at the end of that says, and things like these. The flesh does things. There are deeds that the flesh does. And then the third thing I would say about the flesh is that the flesh is inside of you.

It's inside of you. In Galatians 5.17, to see that it says that the flesh sets its desire. A desire is something on the inside of us.

It's not something on the outside of us. My skin and my fingernails do not desire. It is my heart and my mind inside of me that desires.

[6 : 18] Verse 17 goes on to say, so that you may not do the things that you please. The things that I please to do, the things that I want to do, that pleasing and that wanting is inside of me.

So Christians, what we need to understand and believe is that the flesh is the sinful nature with its desires and cravings against the spirit that resides in us, that does these wicked things.

The flesh is the sinful nature. We were born with this sinful nature. Not a single person on the planet has ever been without the sinful nature except for Jesus Christ.

You were born with a sinful nature. Your parents were born with a sinful nature. I was born with a sinful nature. And everyone from here on out is born with a sinful nature.

We have this sinful nature. We've inherited this sinful nature from Adam. And a lost person only has a sinful nature, but a Christian has both the sinful nature and the Holy Spirit of God in them at the same time, which is why for Christians, there's always such a fight.

[7 : 39] There's always such a fight. And if you want to know more about that and see that in detail, you can go to Romans chapter seven and take a look at that. But as we think then about that, that the flesh is this sinful nature, we have the sinful nature.

How can we tell that the sinful nature is active and is moving? How can we tell what it's doing? And that's where Paul gives us this list of 15 things. You'll notice he says that the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are immorality.

Immorality, that Greek word, is the broadest term possible for sexual sin. It can cover every kind of sexual sin out there from adultery, premarital sex, homosexuality, pornography, you name it, it covers it all.

It uses the word impurity. Impurity. Then it says sensuality. Sensuality is unrestrained lewdness. Unrestrained lewdness or immorality.

And all you got to do is look at our culture, watch the news programs, and you can see that in our libraries, lewdness is happening all the time. He goes on and talks about idolatry.

[8 : 55] Idolatry is this, that is something that is good, that becomes necessary, that becomes a demand. Something good, that becomes necessary, and becomes a demand.

So this thing that I want, becomes something I need. And if I don't get it, I can get angry. And if I get angry, anger usually is a symptom of idolatry.

So one of the deeds of the flesh, one of the things that the sinful nature does, is that it is where idolatry comes from. So if a husband or wife is in their minds, demanding that they be treated a certain way by their spouse, and that treatment doesn't happen, and they get angry about that, then they've turned that wanting to be treated in a certain way into an idol.

You can commit idolatry. He goes on and talks about sorcery. So you've got to, you know, stop with the horoscopes. You've got to stop throwing salt over your shoulders and trying to counteract bad luck.

You've got to stop taking and putting chicken feet under your bed at night. Whatever other voodoo that you want to do, sorcery is a deed of the flesh. It trusts in the created order and not the creator.

[10 : 22] And I put all of these together. He says enmity, strife, outburst of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions. All of that has to do with a lot of relationship problems with somebody who is discontent, and so they stir up strife.

They have an outburst of anger. And let's just be really clear about this. An outburst of anger does not have to yell. An outburst of anger can be a quiet, calm, seething.

Growing up, this is probably the thing that hits me the most. I struggle with anger the most. With my kids, because of feeling bigger and stronger and more powerful, my anger would take the shape of a yelling or screaming or being very aggressive.

But as a kid with my parents, my anger was always very quiet and seething, not being spoken about, but it was there, me laying on my bed at night, visualizing terrible things to my parents because I was so angry with them.

Both are outbursts of anger. So just because somebody is always quiet doesn't mean that they're not angry. You've got to look at their actions and the judgments that they make.

[11 : 46] These outbursts of anger. He goes on and speaks of envying, drunkenness, carousing. Envying is where you want what someone else has, wishing that their life was your life.

Drunkenness. You need to be clear about drunkenness in two cases. Number one, the Bible never condemns just drinking of alcohol, but it absolutely, unequivocally condemns drunkenness.

You cannot, you cannot let anything control you except the Spirit of God. Carousing goes along with drunkenness. It's people who are once drunk causing problems and troubles for other people.

My point in going through all this list is to challenge you to look at your life and say, do you practice these things? And he goes on to say, and things like these.

If these things are a part of your life, they could be the identifier of who you are, then you're not a believer or you're a believer that is in desperate need of repentance.

[12 : 55] This is the flesh. This is what it does, and we are supposed to live differently. And if these are the things that are in our lives, then the challenge to us today is to repent of these things.

Recognize and agree with God that they're evil, that they're wrong, and go the other direction. That is then the first question. What is the flesh? Let's look at the second question.

What are the dangers of the flesh? I see two dangers of the flesh here in our text. The first one is that it damages your relationship with others. It damages your relationship with others.

I see this in two verses. Verse 15, he says, But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another. In other words, if you're going to live out the flesh, and you're not going to serve, but instead you're just going to live out the flesh, you're going to begin to bite and devour one another, which means you're going to be consumed.

It means that you're going to damage the relationships you have with one another. And when we just let the sinful nature in us go, unchallenged, unrepented of, undealt with, then the relationships around us get damaged as we live out.

[14 : 10] I mean, just think about just anger, just my own issue. If I don't control that anger by the power of the Spirit, if I don't deal with that anger, it is going to destroy the relationships around me.

And just think about the other deeds of the flesh. Think about the immorality. Think about the strife and the dissension. Think about the drunkenness. These things destroy relationships around us.

Oftentimes we are maybe feel bad about the relationship things that happen, but it's only because we've either gotten caught or things have gotten messy, but it's not because we have violated God and His Word.

Living in freedom is not an excuse to engage in the works of the flesh. He says then, the second verse is in verse 26. He says, let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another.

That challenging one another, I was like, why in the world does it say challenging one another? It's like, I challenge you to a game of darts. Is it talking about that? No, it's talking about provoking one another. It's like fathers, do not provoke your children to anger.

[15 : 18] This is the same kind of a thing. We're not supposed to provoke one another. We're supposed to live in such a way that we show love. So we cannot live in our relationships with love and joy and peace if we are living out the deeds of the flesh.

We have to get rid of deeds of the flesh because it's going to destroy our relationships. The second danger is we place ourselves in danger of missing heaven.

Verse 21, those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom. The kingdom of God. Do you know and do you not see, do you not understand that there are two places for all eternity?

Heaven and hell. There is this thought, this idea in some people's minds that when everyone dies, everyone goes to heaven.

But that's just not true. There are two places and you will go to one place or the other. And what Paul is saying is that if those who practice the deeds of the flesh, those who make it their habit to act in these selfish ways, those who live out these ways, he is crystal clear that they will not inherit the kingdom of God.

[16 : 41] Any person who's defined by these actions, without remorse, without feeling any guilt, without wishing for Christ to be honored, they're lost.

And if lost, they're doomed to face eternity under the punishment of God. If your life is characterized by these things, you're headed towards hell.

And that's not what I'm saying. That's what Paul the apostle is saying. You will not inherit the kingdom of God. That means that you're going to miss heaven. One of the ways we can test ourselves is to think about the law of God and think about the commandments that he gives us.

You can kind of sort of excuse some of your behavior and sort of push it off. But I wanted to push us just a little bit to think about the law of God, and particularly one of the commandments that says, you shall not bear false witness.

This is a great way to test your own heart to see, are you really a believer? When we think of not bearing false witness, we have a tendency to think about, well, don't tell lies.

[17 : 52] And that's true. That's a big part of it. But it means more than just that. Let me just press a couple of things on you. To obey this commandment perfectly, we cannot believe false things about other people.

We can't believe false things about other people. We also can't twist someone's words to mean something that they did not mean.

That's lying. It means that we cannot gossip about someone or slander. And you understand the difference there. Slander is when you make up something about someone to tell to someone else.

Gossip is when you repeat slander. Right? As Christians, as even lost people, God commands us to live in such a way as to not bear false witness, to speak the truth.

And if we gossip or we slander, we are breaking that commandment. We're not to condemn someone without hearing evidence from two or three witnesses.

[19 : 04] Matter of fact, I would say that most marriages, we break this commandment when we get mad at our spouse without the evidence to support that they actually did something wrong rather than we were just offended.

This commandment means we're to avoid all lying and deceit. It means we're supposed to love the truth. We're supposed to confess the truth honestly.

It means that we ought to be about protecting and defending our neighbor's reputation and honor. You see, what I'm saying is that this commandment means so much more than just don't tell a lie to your mom when she asks you where you were last night.

It means we love the truth and we try to live out the truth in every area of our lives. And if you have broken that commandment, my question to you is this.

On the day of judgment, when God judges you by the Ten Commandments, will you be innocent or guilty? Guilty. And should that mean heaven or hell?

[20 : 19] It should mean hell. But what is it that God has done for sinners? What is it He has done for sinners out of His great love?

He has sent His Son into this world to take the punishment for us. The Father has raised His Son from the grave, proving that He was satisfied with His Son's payment. And that has been paid in full.

And now He says to you, repent of your sin, turn to Christ, believe upon Him, and be saved today. The flesh is dangerous.

And for Christians, as we think about how the flesh is dangerous, and we look at even our lost friends, and they're getting trapped in the flesh and doing things of the flesh, it ought to spur us to do two things ourselves.

Number one, it ought to spur us to put to death our own flesh, which we're going to talk about in the third point. But it also ought to push us to want to share the hope of the gospel in Jesus Christ with our friends.

[21 : 24] If you see your friend lying, if you see your neighbor or your loved one lying or gossiping or slandering or spreading things like that, that ought to spur you with compassion to realize that they are caught in a sin.

And you want them to not be under that bondage, but instead share with them the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. We don't want to wink at their sin, but we also don't want to think to ourselves that we're better than them.

We want them to know the life-giving message of the gospel that can help them through that. So that just leaves us with one final question, and that is, how do we fight the flesh?

Two things. Number one, you can't use freedom in Christ as an excuse for sin. Look at verse 13. Verse 13, he says, for you were called to freedom, brethren, only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh.

That's Paul's whole argument from verse 13 to verse 26. Because the whole thing in Galatians is you've got people who've been coming in saying, you're not a real Christian unless you get circumcised, unless you follow ceremonial law, so you can't just believe in Jesus and be okay.

[22 : 43] You've got to do these law things and become a legalist. And so Paul has been saying that it's faith, not works. It's promise, not the law. It's freedom, not legalism. It's legalism. But the possibility is then for some people to say, well, since the law is such a bad thing, then let's just get rid of the law entirely and just live how we want to live.

And so now Paul is coming to the opposite side and saying, no, no, you can't use freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, as an opportunity for the sinful nature, as an opportunity to just do whatever it is you want to do.

So you can't use and excuse sin because God is gracious. God's grace, God's mercy, Jesus' death on the cross is not to be used to excuse sin.

We have to believe that. But the second thing that we've got to do is we need to walk by the Spirit. And this is where I want us to spend the rest of our time.

And I think it's important for us to understand what this means. Walk by the Spirit. This is how we're going to fight the flesh. This is how you as a Christian, you're going to be able to progress in Christ-likeness.

[24 : 00] You're going to be able to progress and being more like Jesus and having more holiness and having the faithfulness and having the righteousness that you need to grow in. It only happens by walking by the Spirit.

That's it. So we need to understand what does this mean and how do we do this. So let's talk about what it means.

And here's a summary statement for you. Okay? I took everything and I've summarized it into one statement and then I'm going to show you from the text where I'm getting that from and then we're going to make application of it.

Okay? Here's my summary statement. To walk by the Spirit, that's when, by the power of the Holy Spirit, you seek to know and obey the law of God. Walking by the Spirit means that by the power of the Holy Spirit, you seek to know and to obey the law of God.

Now, I don't know how that's going to hit some of you. Hopefully, for some of you, it hits you in such a way as like, huh, that sounds pretty simple. Good.

[25 : 09] Because it is. Maybe some of you find it shocking. It's like, wait a minute, I didn't think walking by the Spirit was that. I thought walking by the Spirit was something completely different. I thought it involved emotions and I thought it involved lots of prayer and quiet and hearing things in my head.

No, it doesn't involve any of that. It involves the power of the Holy Spirit, you seeking to know and obey the law of God. So let me lay this out for you.

First, verse 16, we see that's where he says, walk by the Spirit. The word walk is this idea of living your life. Living out.

The word by, this is a way by the Spirit to show the means by which you do this. So you're living by the power of the Holy Spirit.

You cannot do it in any other way. It must be by him. The second thing is that in verse 13 and verse 16, he puts down the flesh, right?

[26 : 09] So in verse 13, he says that we're not to give an opportunity for the flesh. And then in verse 16, he says that if we walk by the Spirit, we will not carry out the desires of the flesh, right?

Because the two are contrary to one another. So he puts down the flesh. He's saying we kill the flesh. We get rid of the flesh when we walk by the Spirit. And then the third thing is that we obey the law.

If you look at verse 13, he says instead of giving the flesh an opportunity, we do this instead. What's the instead part? Through love, serve one another.

Verse 14, he defines what it means or the biblical basis for serving one another in love.

Read verse 14 for yourself. What do you see? He says love your neighbor as yourself.

[27 : 20] That's from Leviticus 19 verse 18. Right out of the law of God, Paul says instead of giving the flesh an opportunity, obey the law.

Love your neighbor as yourself. So to walk by the Spirit means that by the power of the Holy Spirit, we seek to know, we seek to obey the law of God.

Now somebody may give an objection to me because they may turn to verse 18. And in verse 18, it talks about how we are no longer under law, that if we're led by the Spirit, we're not under the law.

So Brady, see there it says, I don't have to obey the law of God. And I say to you, actually it doesn't say you don't have to obey the law of God. It says you're not under the law of God.

To not be under the law of God is something entirely different from you don't have to obey it. To be under or led by the Spirit but not under the law is the difference between you are a part of the new covenant and not a part of the old covenant.

[28 : 27] But the law in both covenants is the same thing. It's the same thing. Let me see if I can illustrate this for you.

If you've got to build a building and you've got to build a big building, typically you're going to have to build scaffolding to be able to build this building. When my parents built a house, we built this big old barn-shaped house.

It was 34 feet by 40 feet, two-story, massive, big chunk. And we built scaffolding around this house in order to build up and add the siding to the walls and all the other things.

So it doesn't matter if the building you're going to build is tall and skinny. You put scaffolding around it and that scaffolding is going to match the shape of the building, right, that you're going to build. If it's a short, squatty building, it's going to be that shape of scaffolding.

But the scaffolding is the exterior thing that gives the shape and the direction to the building that you're going to build. Once the building is complete, you pull down the scaffolding and you don't need it anymore.

[29 : 34] But it's not as though you built skinny scaffolding and came out with a big, wide, fat building. The building is the same shape as the scaffolding. Are you with me? Okay, I'm just making sure you're with me because, you know, a couple weeks ago, I asked you if you were with me and all of you just smiled at me as I said something in Latin that was completely crazy.

Yeah, you know what I'm talking about. Yeah, yeah. So I'm just making sure I'm not saying anything crazy here, okay? The old covenant is the scaffolding and it went a certain direction.

But when Christ came, the scaffolding came down, but the direction of the new covenant is in the exact same way as the old covenant. What that means is, is that in Jeremiah 31, 31, when God promises in the new covenant that Jesus purchased by his blood, he says, I will write my law upon their heart.

What law is that going to be but the law of the old covenant given to us? In Ezekiel 36, verse 27, he says there that one of the things that he's going to do is he's going to put my spirit within them so that they will obey my statutes and commands.

Which statutes and commands? The ones he's already given to us. Beloved, the point is this. Walking by the spirit is when by the power of the Holy Spirit, we seek to know and to obey the law of God.

[31 : 08] So then how do we do this? Three words and I'm done. Pray, obey, and test. Pray, obey, and test.

The first thing we must do, if this is truly by the power of the Holy Spirit, it's promised in the new covenant in Jeremiah and Ezekiel, then we must pray to the Holy Spirit, pray to the Lord to give us the power, the strength to obey him.

We must lean upon him in prayer. We must pray, God, help me to know your word. We must pray, God, help me to obey your word. We must pray, God, help me to love your word.

God, help me to live out what you've commanded me to do. We need to pray and depend upon him. Let me just say this. When you go to pray, I want to encourage you, pray for yourself first.

I know that that feels contrary, and I know there's an argument to be made, not to be selfish, but if you are not praying for your own personal growth in Christ, then you are missing a massive part of the Christian life.

[32 : 33] Pray for yourself to grow. Pray, when you find yourself getting angry, pray, Lord, help me stop being angry. When you find yourself struggling with doubt or confusion, or you find yourself struggling with greed or envy, or when you find yourself struggling with selfishness or self-centeredness, or even depression or fear and anxiety, pray for the Lord to grow you.

Pray. I mean, one of the things, if you come to me and you say to me, listen, I need some counsel about this. I'm struggling with these things. One of the first things I'm going to ask you is, have you been praying to the Lord for yourself to grow?

You must pray. If we're going to depend upon the power of the Holy Spirit, we must pray. We must pray. Second word is the word obey. That is, you need to know the commandments of God, both in the Old and the New Testament.

And yes, I understand that there are some of these commandments that need to be interpreted in the proper way. I'm not negating proper interpretation. You know, you're going to see in the Old Testament about the commandments to go sacrifice goats.

I'm not telling you to go sacrifice goats. If we properly understand and interpret the word of God, we will understand what these commandments are that we need to do.

[33 : 54] So you need to not only pray, but understand what's there and obey. And the third word I would tell you is the word test. So if you are praying and you're depending upon the Holy Spirit and you're obeying the commands of God as he's given them to you, then the way to test yourself to see if you're on track is with the fruit of the Spirit.

Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

If you're truly walking by the Spirit, if your life is led by the Spirit, then more and more and more you will grow in this love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness.

The goal is that in two years from now, from this date, your love for Christ, your love for others would be greater than it is today, would be more Christ-like, would be more God-honoring, would be more pleasing because by the power of the Holy Spirit, you have been obeying him.

The goal would be that in two years, your self-control would grow and increase so that you are more honoring to Christ in two years than you are today.

[35 : 22] See, that's the goal of the Christian life. And the more that we as a body individually seek to obey the Lord and do what he says, the more that we grow in holiness as individuals, the more we as a church body grow in holiness together.

Then what Jesus says would be true. They will know you're my disciples because you have love for one another.

One of our greatest evangelistic tools tools we have is to love one another. So we want to walk in freedom, not in the flesh.

Let's pray together.