

Unit 2: Letter to the Galatians

Lesson 8 | July 26, 2026

Life in the Holy Spirit

Study Text

Galatians 5:1 through 6:18

Central Truth

Spirit-led living is Christlike living.

Key Verse: Galatians 5:16, 25

Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. ... If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit (KJV).

Let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves. ... Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives (NLT).

Learning Objectives

- Students will contrast the works of the sinful nature with the fruit of the Spirit.
- Students will embrace spiritual freedom and reject legalism.
- Students will serve other people with love.

Introducing the Lesson

Say: Paul concludes his letter to the Galatians with practical advice for using their spiritual freedom and restoring harmony to the church. After summarizing his arguments, he makes a powerful closing appeal for the Galatians to reject false teaching and embrace life in the Spirit.

Discussion Starter—Free Stuff

Not everything that's called "free" is really free.

- Free Shipping: You have to buy the product, and the cost probably includes the price of shipping.
- Free Hotel Breakfast: It's free, but only if you pay to spend a night in the hotel.
- What other examples can you think of?

Say: Most things labeled "free" come with strings attached. That's how the false teachers in Galatia were presenting Jesus. They argued that He may offer salvation, but the strings of the Law were still attached.

Paul's argument was that, in Jesus, free really means free. Jesus provided freedom from bondage to sin and freely offers salvation and right standing before God. Believers can choose whether they return to the slavery of sin or embrace their newfound freedom by using it to serve each other.

Part 1—Freedom in Christ

Hold On to Freedom

Galatians 5:1–12

Say: What do you think of when you hear the word freedom? Many people associate freedom with democracy, but Paul was not promoting political freedom. In Paul's culture, the Roman Emperor ruled absolutely. But nowhere in his writing did Paul advocate for overthrowing that system—no matter how tyrannical or worldly it may have been. In fact, Paul taught that Christians were obligated to obey the governmental systems of the world and to pay taxes willingly (Romans 13:1–7). When Paul speaks of freedom, he means something very different. He is talking about spiritual freedom from the harsh demands of legalism and bondage to a sinful nature.

Once believers are freed from the obligations of the Law, they must resist the temptation to submit to it again (Galatians 5:1). It's human nature to want to feel like we've earned what we've been given. In verse 2, Paul strongly reminded the Galatians of his expertise in the Law and then declared the Law cannot make anyone right with God. Someone who follows Jesus but then tries to make sure their bases are covered by also following the Law shows that they do not believe Jesus' sacrifice is enough. Paul's admonition is so strong that he repeats it (verse 3). Any attempt to be justified through the Law means throwing away Jesus' sacrifice and denying the grace of God (verse 4).

On the other hand, those who are justified by faith have died to the Law and live by the Spirit's power (verse 5). This new life guarantees believers will inherit God's promises. The faithful express their gratitude by loving God and others (verse 6).

Next, Paul calls out the false teachers again (verses 7–12). They were holding the Galatians back from the truth. They were not following God or presenting the freedom of the gospel. Their influence had permeated the Galatian community, and Paul urged the Galatians to reject their teachings and embrace the truth. Just as false teaching caused the Galatians to be "cut off" from Jesus (verse 4), Paul wished the false teachers would be cut off from the Galatians (verse 12; literally, "cut themselves off").

Discuss

? How is Christian freedom different from political freedom?

? Read Galatians 4:9. How can one false teaching gradually spread until it has poisoned an entire church?

The Purpose of Freedom

Galatians 5:13–15

Say: Freedom carries responsibility, and choices have consequences. We can freely choose to return to slavery under the Law, as the Galatians were choosing to do. Or we can choose to use our freedom to serve God.

Until this point in his letter, Paul advocated strongly for complete freedom in Jesus. But being free doesn't mean having a license to sin. Christians who use their freedom to indulge their own

sinful desires find themselves trapped again in sin's bondage (Romans 6:1–2, 15–18). Once they have been freed from sin, Christians must choose continually to remain free from sin.

Instead of using their newfound freedom as an excuse to sin, Paul tells the Galatians to use their freedom to love one another (Galatians 5:13). Using liberty to show love fulfills the essence of the Old Testament Law (verse 14). Jesus himself had identified loving others as one of the great commandments, second only to loving God completely (Matthew 22:39–40). By loving one another, the Galatians would honor the heart of the Law without being bound by its restrictions (Romans 13:8–10).

After spending most of his letter declaring Christians free from servitude, Paul committed them to serving each other in love (Galatians 5:13–14). One of the great paradoxes of Christianity is that Jesus freed us from sin and the Law so that we could voluntarily give our lives back to Him and serve His people. Christians enjoy tremendous freedom, but our love for others places a limit on it. In Romans 14, Paul explained that personal preferences are allowed but should be tempered in the presence of more sensitive believers. Love creates boundaries in the exercise of Christian liberty.

The opposite of serving others in love is “biting and devouring one another” (Galatians 5:15). This expression was used to indicate criticism. Under the Law, it is natural to criticize those who fail to measure up. But criticism leads to broken relationships and mutual destruction. Freedom in Jesus removes the need for this negativity; our goal is not to criticize but to humbly love and serve our brothers and sisters, even when correction is necessary.

Resource Packet Item 2: Free to Serve

Your group will consider some of the needs in the church and community and then brainstorm ideas for sharing God's love and meeting those needs together.

Discuss

- ? What are some examples of how love creates boundaries for Christian freedom?
- ? How can we minister to people who have been wounded by biting criticism?

Part 2—Walk in the Spirit

The Spirit vs. the Flesh

Galatians 5:16–21

Say: Perhaps you remember old cartoons where a character had a devil on one shoulder and an angel on the other, each trying to persuade the character to do their bidding. Sometimes we can feel caught in a tug-of-war between our new born-again nature and our old sinful nature. But unlike the cartoon scenario, our new and old natures are not evenly matched. Our new nature in Jesus is endowed with the Spirit's power, and the old nature is dead. Our job as Christians is to choose to live according to the Spirit and not the flesh.

When Christians surrender to the leading of the Spirit, then the sinful nature's desires go unfulfilled (Galatians 5:16). Paul makes the same argument in Romans 8:1–11. The Old Testament prophets had foretold a time when God's people would be transformed from the

inside out (Jeremiah 31:31–33; Ezekiel 36:25–27), and Jesus’ sacrifice marked the fulfillment. He instituted the new covenant for God’s people—not based on obeying the Law, but based on having faith in Him (Luke 22:20). Christians no longer need a Law written in stone because God engraved His character into their hearts through the indwelling of His Holy Spirit.

Being led by the Spirit does not imply passive participation or eliminate warring with the flesh and worldly influences (Galatians 5:17). Instead, Christians must constantly choose to follow the Spirit’s leading. Choosing otherwise produces sinful results (verses 19–21).

- Paul first lists various types of sexual sins common in the Gentile world (verse 19). While Paul refrains from getting too specific, the terms generally refer to all sexual relationships outside of marriage between a man and a woman.
- Then Paul mentions idolatry and sorcery (verse 20), which were closely linked in the ancient world. At Ephesus, a city in Asia Minor west of Galatia, Paul’s ministry led to the massive burning of magic books and significant loss of income for the makers of idols (Acts 19:18–28).
- Next, Paul lists eight sins that destroy relationships and two sins that indicate a lack of self-control leading to indulgence (Galatians 5:20–21). Some of these sins might be viewed as minor. Yet Paul lists them alongside so-called “major sins” like sexual immorality and idolatry. Christians should pause to prayerfully reflect on whether they have become bound to any of the sins on this list.

Paul reminds the Galatians of the consequences of these behaviors, something he had told them before (verse 21). People who live this way have no place in God’s kingdom. Our inheritance as Christians can be forfeited if we refuse to walk in the Spirit.

Discuss

- ? How do you experience the conflict between the Spirit and the sinful nature?
- ? Which of these sinful behaviors do believers tend to tolerate most? Why?

Results of Life in the Spirit

Galatians 5:22–26

Say: Apple trees produce apples, not oranges. Banana trees produce bananas, not grapes. In the same way, the Holy Spirit produces spiritual fruit, not sinful fruit. Indulging the sinful nature leads to death; being led by the Spirit produces life.

In contrast with his list of vices produced by the sinful nature, Paul next lists virtues produced by the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23). Paul refers to these spiritual qualities as “fruit.” Just as fruit is produced naturally, these spiritual virtues cannot be produced through human effort. They are fruit of (as in, *coming from*) the Spirit.

- **Love** stands at the top of the list. After all, love is the firstfruit of all others (1 Corinthians 13:13; Colossians 3:14).
- Through the Spirit, Christians experience **joy**—even in the midst of suffering (Romans 5:3; 1 Thessalonians 1:6).

- Believers also experience the Spirit's **peace**. The God of peace (Romans 15:33; 2 Corinthians 13:11; Philippians 4:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:23) gives peace individually and within our Christian community (Romans 15:13; Colossians 3:15).
- **Patience** is the virtue of putting up with others. God is patient with people (Exodus 34:6; Romans 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9), and His Spirit enables believers to be patient too (2 Corinthians 6:6; Colossians 3:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:14).
- God models **kindness** through how He treats sinners (Ephesians 2:7), and kindness is essential for love (1 Corinthians 13:4; Ephesians 4:32).
- The fruit of **goodness** carries the idea of generosity, both in sharing material possessions and a generosity of spirit. It is the opposite of envy.
- **Faithfulness** means not only fidelity toward God, but in our interpersonal relationships (Luke 16:10; Colossians 1:7, 4:7, 9).
- **Gentleness** is not weakness, but humility in relationships (Matthew 5:5).
- **Self-control** empowers a person to resist temptation and maintain discipline (1 Corinthians 9:25–27; Titus 1:8).

Paul notes that these virtues are unrestricted by the Law (Galatians 5:23). In fact, they transcend the Law. Bearing the Spirit's fruit means a person—through Jesus—is fulfilling the intention behind the Law. Those who are justified by faith have crucified their sinful natures alongside Jesus (5:24). Because their sinful natures are dead, they choose instead to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit. Spiritual fruit is not required for salvation, but it is evidence that salvation has already taken place (verse 25).

Paul warns the Galatians not to become proud as the Spirit's fruit grows and they follow His leading. A tree can take no credit for producing fruit, nor can it brag about the amount of fruit it has produced. All credit goes to the gardener. Likewise, any fruit we bear is credited to God alone.

Resource Packet Item 2: The Spirit's Fruit in My Life

Students will honestly evaluate how the fruit of the Spirit is growing in their lives.

Discuss

- ? Why is it important to acknowledge the source of the fruit of the Spirit?
- ? What is your role in producing the Spirit's fruit in your life?

Part 3—Do Good to All

Life in Community

Galatians 6:1–10

Say: Many people in the Galatian churches had accepted false teachings. Could they ever be restored? Paul's answer still gives hope to Christians caught in sin, while also offering a warning for those who are looking to restore wayward believers.

Walking in the Spirit means more than avoiding sin. It also means taking positive action by doing good. In Galatians 6, Paul addresses several ways this takes place in a community of believers. First, he addresses how believers who fall into sin should be treated (Galatians 6:1–3).

Perhaps Paul was thinking of the restoration of false teachers, but his instructions apply beyond that situation. Paul assigned the task of restoration to those who are spiritual, who are walking in the Spirit as described in chapter 5.

The method of restoration matters. It must be gentle, so as not to cause more damage. Whoever is walking the offender through the process of restoration must practice humility, not acting out of superiority or pride. Such humility will keep the agent of restoration from falling into the same sin as the one being restored. A prideful person can too easily fall into temptation by believing he or she is invincible.

Restoration also means helping to carry others' heavy burdens, which fulfills the "law of Christ" (verse 2). Paul is not replacing one type of legal system with another. The Galatian false teachers had been concerned with keeping the Law of Moses, but Paul says we are responsible to fulfill a higher law by imitating Jesus (John 15:12).

Paul encourages believers to be mindful of their own lives instead of judging others (Galatians 6:4–5). Legalism produces people who focus mostly on how others are living rather than evaluating themselves. This creates an unhealthy system of comparison. Yes, we should carry others' burdens. But we must also bear responsibility for ourselves.

The Galatians may have been misled by false teachers, but Paul insisted that the role of teacher was still worthy of support (verse 6; 1 Timothy 5:17). The Galatians should remove or restore false teachers and be careful not to assume that all teachers are unworthy. Those who lead and teach in the church carry special burdens and are worthy of special honor (Hebrews 13:7, 17; James 3:1).

Paul next appeals to the agricultural concepts of sowing and reaping, which would have been very familiar to his readers (Galatians 6:7–10). Those who plant seeds of the sinful nature harvest destruction, while those who plant seeds of the Holy Spirit harvest His fruit. Neither natural fruit nor spiritual fruit grows overnight, and Christians must never stop yielding to the influence of the Holy Spirit, even if the harvest feels slow to arrive. God will bring about the harvest at the right time. Until then, believers should continue to do good works without giving up.

Resource Packet Item 3: Don't Give Up

This handout includes a selection of Scriptures to help students when they are discouraged, tired, or tempted to give up.

Discuss

? How can we help restore Christians who have fallen into sin?

? How can believers "not get tired of doing what is good" (Galatians 6:9)?

Final Thoughts

Galatians 6:11–18

Say: Paul closes his letter to the Galatians by summing up all his arguments and addressing the believers personally in his own handwriting.

At this point, Paul took the pen from his scribe to close the letter in his own handwriting (Galatians 6:11). Paul's large letters may hint that he was suffering from an eye condition (4:15), but he apparently considered it important to certify his message so that no one could question its authority.

The false teachers preaching justification through the Law were obviously concerned about how they would be perceived by other Jews (6:12). They also were unwilling to experience persecution like Paul had experienced on his mission to Galatia (Acts 14:19–20). Their goal was to appear spiritual. But as Paul had already taught, perfectly keeping the whole Law is impossible. Even the false teachers could not keep it fully (Galatians 6:13). They merely wanted to make themselves look good and claim the Galatians as their converts.

Paul's boasting in verse 14 had nothing to do with himself or the number of his converts. He boasted only of Jesus' sacrifice. The Cross represented the end of Paul's concern about what the world values (verse 15). What really matters is transformation through the power of the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 5:17). Those who receive this justification by faith qualify as the true people of God (Galatians 6:16; Philippians 3:2–3).

In Galatians 6:17, Paul attacked the false teachers with one final stinging rebuke. They claimed the marks of circumcision were required to demonstrate someone belongs to God. But Paul argued that he had other marks to show he belonged to Jesus, likely referring to his scars acquired through persecution. They testified to his dedication to Jesus and the authenticity of his gospel message.

Paul's final remark in verse 18 blessed the Galatians with grace. Instead of focusing on works, Paul prayed they would rely on and rest in the finished work of Jesus.

Discuss

? How is Paul's boasting different from the false teachers' boasting? What do we as Christians have to brag about?

? How did Paul's scars provide a testimony? How might our scars do the same?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: We are free *from* captivity to sin and the Law, and we are freed *to* serve one another in love. This freedom means we have the choice to become entangled again in slavery, but we should never throw away the freedom for which Jesus paid such a high price. As we live by the Spirit's power, we leave behind the sinful nature that was crucified alongside Jesus, and the fruit of the Spirit is produced in our lives.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

■ Think of someone in your church or community who has a serious need. Plan as a class how you can help carry their heavy burden by doing an act of service.

■ Assess your spiritual health. In what areas are you fruitful? In what areas are you bearing little or no fruit? Pray that the Holy Spirit would restore your connection with Him so that you can bear His fruit.

■ Evaluate how you think about people who have fallen into sin. What can you do to help someone who is in this predicament?

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Spirit-Anointed Messiah.

Isaiah 11:1–5

Tuesday:

Spirit-Empowered Prophet.

Ezekiel 3:10–14

Wednesday:

The Holy Spirit Promised.

Joel 2:23–29

Thursday:

Life in the Spirit.

Romans 8:1–9

Friday:

Led by the Spirit.

Romans 8:12–17

Saturday:

The Spirit Prays for Us.

Romans 8:24–28