

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen!

Introduction

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, today we explore Galatians 5, where Paul proclaims the freedom we have in Christ and the life we're called to live in that freedom. From a conservative Lutheran perspective, this freedom is a gift of grace through faith in Jesus Christ, not earned by works. Yet, it's not a license for sin but a call to walk by the Spirit, bearing fruit that reflects God's love and holiness. We'll unpack this passage verse by verse, using illustrations from government, family, education, business, and American history to show how this truth applies today. May the Holy Spirit guide us as we hear God's Word.

I. Freedom in Christ

"For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery." (Galatians 5:1, ESV)

Paul's opening declaration is the heart of the Lutheran confession: we are justified by grace through faith alone, apart from works of the law. Christ's death and resurrection have freed us from sin, death, and the law's condemnation. This freedom is a gift, not an achievement, secured by Christ's blood.

Consider the American Revolution. In 1776, the Declaration of Independence proclaimed liberty from British tyranny. Colonists were no longer bound to a distant king but free to govern themselves. This freedom came at a cost—lives lost and years of struggle. Similarly, our spiritual freedom was purchased by Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Just as the Founding Fathers urged the new nation to guard its liberty, Paul calls us to stand firm in Christ's freedom, resisting legalism or sin that would enslave us again.

In daily life, this might mean rejecting the idea that you must earn God's favor. How often we fall into the trap of thinking we need to be the perfect Christian, constantly striving to prove our worth. When we embrace the truth that Christ's grace is enough, we are free to live joyfully, not under pressure.

Application: Where are you tempted to return to a yoke of slavery? Is it the pressure to earn God's love, the pull of old habits, or an overbearing parent? Stand firm in the Gospel, trusting Christ has set you free.

II. Freedom for Service, Not Self-Indulgence

“For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.” (Galatians 5:13-15, ESV)

Paul clarifies that freedom in Christ isn’t a pass to indulge selfish desires but a call to serve others in love. The entire law is summed up in loving your neighbor, and selfishness—biting and devouring one another—leads to destruction.

In a family, parents don’t use their authority to dominate but to serve—cooking, cleaning, teaching, changing diapers, and sacrificing for their children’s good. When family members turn inward, strife erupts. Siblings often clash over their aging parents’ care, blaming each other instead of serving in love. Only when they prioritized love—sharing responsibilities—did peace return. And then hopefully they don’t feud over the inheritance.

In business, a Christian entrepreneur used much of his company’s profits to fund a local youth center, not to indulge himself. His freedom in Christ became a blessing to others. Contrast this with companies that prioritize profit over people, fostering division among workers or customers.

Application: How are you using your freedom? Are you serving others in love, or prioritizing everything around your own personal gain? Choose one act of service this week to reflect Christ’s love.

III. The Battle Between Flesh and Spirit

“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.” (Galatians 5:16-18, ESV)

Paul describes the conflict within us: the Spirit and flesh are at war. As Lutherans, we confess we are simultaneously saint and sinner—forgiven in Christ yet battling sin. The Spirit empowers us to resist temptation and live righteously.

In education, this battle is vivid. A student might be tempted to cheat on a test to get ahead. The flesh says, “It’s just one time.” But the Spirit, through a conscience shaped by Scripture, calls for honesty. A high school teacher caught a student cheating but used the moment to teach about integrity. The student, convicted by faith, confessed and grew in character, choosing the Spirit’s path.

In government, we see this struggle too. Abraham Lincoln, during the Civil War, faced pressure to compromise his principles for political gain. Yet, his conviction to preserve the Union held firm, reflecting a Spirit-led resolve to do what's right.

Application: Where do you feel the flesh's pull? Pray for the Spirit's strength to guide your choices at work, school, or home.

IV. The Works of the Flesh

"Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." (Galatians 5:19-21, ESV)

Paul lists the works of the flesh, warning that those who live in these sins unrepentantly cannot inherit God's kingdom. This isn't about believers losing salvation but a reminder that persistent sin is incompatible with faith. These works reveal a heart enslaved, not freed by Christ.

In government, the works of the flesh are seen in corrupt politicians. The Teapot Dome scandal of the 1920s saw officials abuse power for personal gain, driven by greed and rivalry. Secretary of the Interior Albert Fall secretly leased federal oil reserves to private oil companies without competitive bidding. He was the first cabinet member to be jailed for crimes committed during office. Their actions sowed distrust and division, mirroring Paul's warning. In our lives, unchecked jealousy or anger can fracture relationships, like a coworker envious of another's promotion, leading to bitterness.

Application: Examine your heart. Are works of the flesh—envy, anger, or strife—taking root? Confess them to God, trusting His forgiveness through Christ.

V. The Fruit of the Spirit

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law." (Galatians 5:22-23, ESV)

In contrast, Paul lists the fruit of the Spirit—virtues produced by God's work in us, not our efforts. It's "fruit," singular, showing a unified work of the Spirit. These traits reflect a life led by God.

Clara Barton, founder of the American Red Cross, showed love and gentleness, tirelessly serving wounded soldiers during the Civil War, reflecting the Spirit's work. She exhibited many of the fruits of the Spirit mentioned here.

Application: Which fruit of the Spirit is growing in you? Which needs cultivation? Ask the Spirit to produce His fruit as you abide in Christ.

VI. Crucifying the Flesh and Keeping in Step with the Spirit

“And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.” (Galatians 5:24-25, ESV)

In baptism, our old self was crucified with Christ, and we now live by the Spirit's power. Keeping in step with the Spirit means daily repentance and faith, aligning with God's will.

Picture a soldier marching in formation, staying in step with the commander. In our Christian walk, the Spirit is our guide. The early church devoted themselves to prayer and communal living as described in Acts 2. The believers were united in their commitment to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer. They were walking in the Spirit which allowed them to be led by Him and experience transformative growth in their faith. That faith kept them in step with the Spirit.

Application: Are you keeping in step with the Spirit through prayer, Scripture, and worship? Commit to one spiritual discipline this week to stay aligned with God.

Conclusion

Galatians 5 reminds us that Christ has set us free—not to indulge the flesh but to live by the Spirit, serving others in love. As people freed by Christ, we cling to this Gospel, trusting our salvation is secure in Him alone. There's no doubt we're called to walk by the Spirit, bearing fruit that reflects God's work. The Spirit is working in us to crucify the flesh and keep in step with the Spirit. God grant us grace to do so, for His glory and the good of all. Amen.

The peace of God guard your hearts and minds as you believe and trust in Him.

Pastor Ron Breight

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