

Galatians 5

Synopsis

This week we'll look at a section of Galatians that's especially relevant to us on a college campus, where the most common obstacle to living a life that follows and honors Jesus is a culture that tells us that we should indulge any and every desire. This mindset and lifestyle is what Paul calls "life of the flesh." But there's also another way, which Paul calls "life of the Spirit." Paul sets these two lifestyles in opposition and tells us that life in the Spirit is how we kill our life in the flesh. We should note that Paul lists the life of the flesh, and that he isn't just writing against physical desires or the body, but against just following every desire.

So this is the question: "How do we live life in the Spirit in a world that champions desires of the flesh?" This passage includes the famous list of the fruits of the Spirit. It's easy to gloss over this as too familiar—but center in and you'll see the ways that life in the Spirit is not only the key to overcoming the desires of the flesh, but also instills a new way of life.

Here's how to win this week:

- 1) Discuss the tension between life of the flesh and life in the Spirit
- 2) Explore how to practically avoid life enslaved to desires and how to live further into the fruit of Spirit

Our **recommended scripture** comes from Galatians 5:16-26, where Paul discusses life of the flesh as opposed to life in the Spirit. If the recommended scripture doesn't seem the best option for your group, you can focus in on Galatians 5:1-15, which talks about the temptation to become enslaved to the law.

The Spirit & The Flesh

Paul has talked a lot about freedom—what we're freed from (sin, death, and the Jewish law) and how we're freed (through Christ's fulfillment of the law and his sacrifice). Now he talks about what we are to do with that freedom.

Read Galatians 5:1 & 5:13-26

Commentary

Paul sets up two contrasting lifestyles here: living according to the flesh and according to the Spirit. Our task as Christians—our response to the message of Jesus—is to live a life that is in step with the Spirit.

As Christians trying to live by the Spirit rather than the flesh, one of the tricky things for us as Christians is to avoid two extremes. The first extreme is to just drift along with the current of our culture and give in to whatever desires we have—from sex and drunkenness to

people-pleasing and materialistic living. But this extreme compromises our own well-being and righteousness, trying to find fulfillment in fleeting pleasures.

The second extreme is to renounce everything that's "worldly" and live in our own Christian bubble. But this extreme compromises the well-being of others, focusing us inward when the mission of Jesus is to go and make disciples who follow him. Taken even further, this extreme renounces the entire physical world—which ultimately is to say that God's creation is not good.

In verse 24 we see a sort of culmination of moving from life in the flesh to life in the Spirit. Not only does life in the Spirit crucify the passions and desires of the flesh, it resurrects new desires, more and more aligned with the Spirit. It's like the Psalm says, "Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart," (Ps 37:4). To truly give over our fleshly desires to the Lord is the *only* way to experience freedom and the goodness of God.

② Questions

What does Paul mean by "desires of the flesh?" He sets up "desires of the Spirit" as the better alternative, so does that mean all our more physical desires are inherently bad?

Paul talks about fruits of the Spirit in this passage. Why does he talk about these here? How are they related to (or opposed to) the desires of the flesh? How do the two topics fit together?

Is Paul condemning our bodies, saying our bodies are bad? Is he calling the physical world bad?

God's design for the afterlife is not just a spiritual realm, but a new earth. How does it help us discern how we live in the Spirit vs. Flesh tension now?

Paul says that you "are not to do whatever you want." Is Christianity, and this passage in particular, all about restrictions? Does it impose restrictions that are actually out of tune with or damaging to us as humans?

② Application Questions

What are practical ways we "keep in step with the Spirit?" What does that look like on an everyday level?

It can be easy to look at the list of “acts of the flesh” and really focus in on a few of the ones that seem “worse” or more obvious. Are some worse than the others? Which are more relevant to college students? How do we better address all equally?

How does the Holy Spirit talk to us? Can we be led by the Spirit if we don’t explicitly hear his voice?

Paul says the acts of the flesh are “obvious.” But maybe they don’t always seem obvious. Did any of those acts make the list unexpectedly for you?

We don’t choose our desires, so how can we crucify them?

Verse 24 says pretty strongly that those who are belong to Christ have crucified the flesh. If you still have passions and desires that aren’t godly, does that mean you don’t belong to Christ?

After talking about the fruits of the Spirit and overcoming the desires of the flesh, Paul warns against becoming conceited and jealous. How do we see this temptation in the Christian community?

How do the friends we choose influence which of these two lifestyles we live into? How do we (or should we even) maintain friendship with someone who isn’t making an effort to live by the Spirit?

Accountability

Paul gives us both a list of “fruit of the Spirit” and acts of the flesh. I think we would all agree: “acting in the flesh” is just easier. It’s easy to go along with the crowd in following with the list in verses 20-21. Looking at that list—and coming up with a few of your own—which acts of the flesh do you have most difficulty with?

- Which fruit of the Spirit do you feel come naturally to you? Which do you struggle with?
- Is there a relationship between your struggles with the flesh and your difficulty displaying these fruits of the Spirit?

Resource Toolbox



[Andy Stanley on Galatians 5 and what we do with our freedom](#)



[Tim Keller on the Fruits of the Spirit](#)



[John Piper on the struggle between Spirit and flesh](#)



[N. T. Wright on Galatians 5:13-18](#)



[Gods at War by Kyle Idleman](#)