

# STUDY NOTES for GALATIANS FIVE

## The BEHAVIOR of a BELIEVER

### GALATIANS 5:1-26

**PLEASE do not read these comments until you have read the scripture for this lesson. Begin by letting the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word.**

#### Summary and Historical Background

Paul handled three major concerns in his letter to the Galatians. He dealt with the defense of his apostolic authority (Gal. 1-2), the doctrine of justification by faith alone (Gal. 3-4) and the deportment of liberated Christians (Gal. 5-6). The deportment of Christians begins the practical section of Paul's letter. It is one thing to be liberated by faith in Christ; it is quite another to use that liberty to walk by the Spirit. Chapters five and six show the practical value of justification by faith.

Paul began this section by admonishing the believers to stand fast in the liberty of Christ and not to step back into the legalism of the Law (5:13-15).

Paul then commanded the believers to walk in the Spirit, that is, they were to live their lives by the power of the Spirit and not by the lust of the flesh (5:16-26). Under this subject he contrasts the works of the flesh (5:19-21) with the fruit of the Spirit (5:22-23). The works of the flesh break the Law, while the fruit of the Spirit supports the Law.

#### A. Liberty in Christ; Liberty vs. Bondage (5:1-15)

##### 1. Do not lose your freedom (5:1)

5:1 - "*Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty*" - this is a transitional thought from the section on doctrine (Galatians 3-4) to the section on deportment (Galatians 5-6). Chapter four ended with the thought that Christians are not born of the bondwoman but of the freewoman. As a result, they are not slaves, but they are free. They are told to stand fast in the liberty given to them by Christ and not to waver.

*"Christ hath made us free"* – Christ has freed believers from the Law by fulfilling all of its demands on their behalf. Liberty does not give a believer the license to sin, but it gives him the freedom and power to bring glory to God while they bless others. This freedom is by God's grace and this power is by God's Spirit. The legalist depends on laws to keep himself and others in line with God's will, but eventually they fail and fall into the very sins that they are trying to avoid. Why? Laws have no power to help. Laws can only expose sins. Keeping laws cannot give permanent victory over sins, because this approach depends on the flesh and the flesh is weak. Furthermore, keeping laws produces pride and God will put down the proud person. God wants us to be free from the Law and depend on His Spirit for power to serve Him. Then all glory goes to God.

*"Be not entangled . . . yoke of bondage"* - there is no article with "yoke" because it refers to any legal system, whether it be that of the Jews or Gentiles. A yoke restricts oxen; it puts them in bondage and forces them to serve their owner. In like manner a religious yoke restricts (entangles) a person. It puts him in spiritual bondage and forces him to serve his sinful nature. How is the yoke of any law different than the yoke of Christ (Mt. 11:28-30)? It is different in that Christ's yoke is empowered by the Spirit. It makes the believer's work easy and, contrary to reason, it gives him

rest. How? It is less stressful. The burden for success is the Lord's and He never fails.

## **2. Do not lose your riches (5:2-6)**

5:2 - "*Behold, I Paul say unto you*" – this is emphatically stated. Paul emphasizes his authority to make them listen more carefully

*"If ye be circumcised"* - this indicates the Galatians had not yet been circumcised, but they were seriously contemplating it.

*"Christ shall profit you nothing"* - if they sought to complete their salvation by being circumcised, they would discover just the opposite. They would find that keeping the Law of God would negate the Promise of God. Law and Promise operate in different spheres. A person who chooses to live in the sphere of the Law cannot live in the sphere of the Promise. The blessings of the Promise cannot be transferred to the sphere of Law. If they choose to live by the Law, they will forfeit the blessings of Christ.

5:3 - "*I testify*" – Paul gives a very solemn warning to those who are thinking about being circumcised.

*"Is circumcised"* - this verb is in the present tense to indicate it was a mark of a person's whole way of life.

*"Debtor to do the whole law"* - circumcision represented the whole Law. Once a man embraced circumcision for salvation, he embraced all the commands of the Law.

5:4 - "*Become of no effect*" - Christ is "severed" from those who embrace circumcision. Those who are circumcised have put themselves under the Law and have cut off the blessings of Christ.

*"Justified by the law"* - they had been told without Scriptural support that they could be justified by keeping the Law (cf 3:11; Rom. 3:20).

*"Ye are fallen from grace"* - fallen from the principle of grace for salvation. They were putting faith in their works of obedience to the Law; instead they needed to put their faith in the work of Christ on the cross to be saved.

5:5 - "*Wait for the hope of righteousness*" – true believers eagerly expect the full blessing of salvation will be theirs at the coming of Christ, so they patiently wait for Him to appear at the Rapture. Christians have some aspects of salvation now, but they will enjoy complete salvation in that day.

*"By faith"* – true believers wait for the full benefit of salvation by faith. This is in contrast with the teaching of the Judaizers who said that the full blessing of salvation is obtained by keeping the Law.

5:6 - "*Neither circumcision . . . nor uncircumcision*" - neither of these conditions are important to salvation (cf 6:15). Covenant theologians teach that baptism replaced circumcision after Christ came, so they baptize babies to insure their salvation. If baptism replaced circumcision, this sentence would read, "In Christ neither baptism avails anything, nor the lack of baptism." Such teaching is not found in the Bible. Baptism has nothing to do with salvation. Baptism does not save babies or anyone else in part or in whole.

*"Faith which works by love"* - this was the crux of Paul's message to the Galatians. Faith in Christ was needed for salvation and faith in Christ was needed to produce good works (Eph. 2:10).

## **3. Do not lose your race (5:7-8)**

5:7 - "*Ye did run well*" - Paul used the figure of the athlete in a race. He told the Galatians that they started their race well; literally, "you were running well" (imperfect tense).

*"Who did hinder you?"* - literally, "Who cut in on you?" Paul is referring to the Judaizers who were interfering with the running of the Galatians so that they were not able to run a good race.

They were hindering the Galatians from obeying the truth.

5:8 - *"This persuasion"* - the Judaizers were using strong persuasive tactics to change the minds of the Galatian believers.

*"Came not of Him that called you"* – this refers to God's call. This persuasion of the Judaizers was not coming from God.

#### **4. Do not lose your purity (5:9-12)**

5:9 - *"Leaven"* - this is a symbol of false doctrine. A little false doctrine would be dangerous to the Galatians because it would spread and corrupt the whole church. Already they had accepted some false doctrine (4:10) and they were about to accept the false doctrine of circumcision.

5:10 - *"I have great confidence in you"* - Paul was still confident that the Galatian Christians were saved.

*"He that troubles you"* – probably refers to the leader of the Judaizers since the singular pronoun is used. However, more than one Judaizer was involved because the plural is used in 5:12 when Paul is speaking of them.

5:11 *"Preach circumcision"* - evidently the Judaizers accused Paul of advocating circumcision whenever it would be well received by the people, especially among the Jews. Paul did circumcise Timothy, because he was born of a Jewish mother (2 Tim 16:1-3). He seems to have done it for cultural reasons pertaining to the Jewish nation. He did not circumcise Timothy to save him, otherwise he would have had Titus circumcised (cf 2:3).

*"Suffer persecution"* - Paul denied that he preached circumcision when the circumstances were favorable and proved it by the persecution he suffered (from the Jews) for not preaching it.

*"Offense of the cross"* – Paul preached salvation by faith in Christ without good works and suffered the offense (the scandal) of unbelievers.

5:12. - *"Cut off"* - this may mean that Paul wanted the Judaizers cut off from the Galatian believers since they wanted the bodies of the Galatians cut up through circumcision. Or, it may mean that Paul wished they would mutilate themselves so that they would become eunuchs since they felt the fleshly rite of circumcision was so important to salvation.

#### **5. Do not lose your love (5:13-15)**

5:13 - *"For, brethren, ye"* - an emphatic, and yet tender, statement from Paul concerning the Galatians. He speaks to them about liberty, lust and love.

*"Called unto liberty"* - the goal or purpose of salvation is liberty.

*"An occasion"* - the starting point or base of operations for Christians is liberty. Liberty is a blessing, but they were warned not to let it become a basis for the flesh to lust after sin (cf 5:24).

*"To the flesh"* - refers to the sinful old nature. The Christian is given a new divine nature when he is saved (2 Pet. 1:4), but he still has the old sinful nature after he is saved. However, he is not to let his old nature operate after he has become a Christian. He is to put off the old man and put on the new man (Eph 4:22-24). Or, in the words of this epistle, he is to crucify the old man (Gal 2:20; cf Rom 6:6-14).

*"But by love"* - love is the key factor in using liberty properly. Liberty without love breeds selfish actions. It corrupts a person and becomes a license for sin.

*"Serve one another"* - the Christian is to take his liberty and combine it with love so that he can serve others (literally, being a slave to others). They are not to love themselves, but rather they are to love God and then love their fellow men. This love will enable them to use their liberty properly. Also, the Judaizers had taught the Galatians to serve the Law, but Paul told them they were freed from the Law so they could serve others.

5:14 - *"The law is fulfilled in one word"* - love for God and love for your neighbor summarize the demands of the Law (Mt 22:36-40). In this verse, Paul is speaking about love for your neighbor

*"Love thy neighbor as thyself"* - Jesus taught that one's neighbor is anyone you meet who is in true need of your help (Luke 10:30-37). Love your neighbor like you would want to be loved, if you were in his situation. This will fulfill the Law (Rom 13:8).

5:15 - *"Bite . . . devour . . . consumed"* - these are characteristics of wild beasts in a deadly struggle. The Galatians were fighting over the doctrines that they had learned from Paul and from the Judaizers. The liberty they had was being misused by selfishness and hatred. They needed to crucify their old natures and not crucify their neighbors. They needed to love their neighbors as they loved themselves.

## **B. Life in the Spirit; the Spirit vs. the Flesh - (5: 16-26)**

### **1. Conquer the lust of the flesh (5:16-21)**

5:16 - *"Walk"* - this term was used to express the conduct of one's life. Paul uses this term over thirty times in his epistles (cf. Eph. 4: 1, 17; 15:6, 8, 15). The present tense is used which speaks of continuous action: "Keep on walking."

*"In the Spirit"* - a better translation is "by the Spirit." The Spirit is the divine agent who enables the Christian to live a godly life.

*"Ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh"* - the Spirit will regulate the Christian's life, when He is allowed to control it (Eph. 5:18) so that sin will not be able to rule over him.

5:17 - *"The flesh lusts against the Spirit,"* - the flesh and the Spirit are strongly opposed to each other (cf. Rom. 7:15ff).

*"So that you cannot do the things that ye would"* - the Christian that allows the flesh to rule his life cannot do what is right. He must confess his sin and take a clear, godly stand for the Spirit to be in control of his life or he is going to have war in his life. When he allows sin in his life, the Spirit opposes him; and when he desires to do well, the flesh opposes him. This is a wretched way to live the Christian life.

5:18 - *"Led of the Spirit"* - the answer to the conflict is for the believer to confess his sins, forsake them (Prov 28:13; 1 Jn 1:9), and count on the fact that he was crucified with Christ (2:20; 5:24). He is indeed dead to all sins and now he must believe that he is alive with Christ and let the Spirit take control of him. Then he will have power over the lusts of the flesh (Eph 5:18) and be controlled by the Spirit (Eph. 5:18). When he is led of the Spirit, he will not be under the authority of the Law.

*"Not under the law"* - the answer for victory over the flesh is not found in the Law. That is the bad counsel that the Galatians were getting from the Judaizers. The Law does its work in bringing the sinner to Christ (3:24), so Christ can free the repentant sinner from the curse of the Law (3:13; 5:1). Then he is no longer under the control of the Law (3:25). Instead God has given the Holy Spirit to him to control him (4:6; 5: 16). By the Spirit's power the believer is able to love his neighbor as himself, and thus fulfills the Law of God (5:13, 14).

5:19 - *"Works of the flesh"* - the outward expression of the old sinful nature.

*"Are manifest"* - these works are open and well known. The nature is hidden, but the works are visible.

*"Which are"* - this is a representative list, not a complete list by any means.

*"Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness"* - these are sins relating to sexual impurity. "Adultery" is not found in most Greek texts, but it is covered under "fornication," which is a general term for illicit sexual activity. "Uncleanness" refers to moral filth--any sexual sin, including one's thoughts and associations. "Lasciviousness" is open lewd behavior that is indifferent to social standards for decency."

5:20 - "*Idolatry, witchcraft*" – these two sins are related to heathen religions. "Idolatry" has reference to the worship of false gods, which was usually associated with sexual wickedness. "Witchcraft" comes from a word meaning "drugs." Witches in their evil practice often used drugs and the word eventually came to be associated with this sin.

"*Hatred, variance,*" etc. - the next eight works of the flesh are sins of ungodly temperament. "Hatred" is plural in the Greek and speaks of hostile feelings, words and deeds. "Variance" is strife and quarrelling that comes from hatred. "Emulations" are jealousies that come from rivalry. "Wrath" is also plural in the Greek and denotes repeated outbursts of anger and rage. "Strife" refers to party spirit or selfishness, probably the latter is the right thought. "Seditions" are divisions that come as a result of personal conflict. "Heresies" are those actions that cause divisions. Later, the term took on the meaning of unorthodox doctrine.

5:21 - "*Envyings*" - this is the last of the eight sins relating to ungodly temperament. It is closely associated to jealousies ("emulations"), but this word is more serious than the former word. This word has to do with hostile deeds, whereas the former word is limited to hostile thoughts and looks. ("Murders" might also be included in this list, but it has weak textual support. However, it illustrates the description of envyings in hostile deeds.)

"*Drunkenness, revellings*" - these sins are both related to alcoholic sins. "Drunkenness" was often associated with idolatry. "Revellings" referred to wild parties where drunkenness and sexual immorality were prevalent. Drunkenness and revellings are also listed together in Romans. 13:13.

"*They which do such things,*" etc. - those who are unsaved practice the works of the flesh, but they will not inherit the kingdom of God. It is true that a Christian may commit some of these sins, if he yields to the flesh, but these works will not be characteristic of his life. The Spirit will be rooting these sins out of his life as He is allowed to control his life.

## **2. Bear the fruit of the Spirit (5:22-26)**

5:22 - "*The fruit of the Spirit*" – the fruit is in contrast to the works. Fruit is a natural result of the Spirit's power in a Christian's life. It is not a product of man's work. Furthermore, the "fruit" is a unity in contrast to the diversity produced by the works of the flesh.

"*Love*" - this virtue heads the list (I Cor. 13:1-13). Love for others is the meaning in this context, but love for God is the basis for that love (1 Jn 4:7, 11, 12). It is a divine love that does not change, even when one is mistreated. The Spirit enables the believer to love others, even his enemies.

"*Joy*" - Christians are to rejoice in all circumstances of life (Phil. 4:4). This is not possible to do in the flesh, but Christ gives us His joy (Jn 15:11) and the Spirit can make it full in the believer's life.

"*Peace*" – this is not the peace that unites God with the sinner when he received Jesus as his Savior. This peace is the tranquility that Christ offers believers and the Spirit produces in them when times of trouble come (1 Jn 14:27; Phil 4:7).

"*Longsuffering*" - this virtue strengthens a believer to endure difficult circumstances with joy for long periods of time (Col 1:11). It also enables a believer to forgive someone who sins against him many times (Mt 18:21-35).

"*Gentleness*" –it literally means "kindness." Believers grieve the Spirit by unkind words and deeds, but they bless the Spirit when they are kind and tender to one another, forgiving one another (Eph 4:30-32).

"*Goodness*" - it refers to one's moral excellence and can refer to his generosity. Barnabas was such a Spirit-filled man (Acts 4:36-37; 11:22-24).

"*Faith*" – it may refer to a person's trust in God or to his faithfulness to God and others. Jesus spoke about the need of faithfulness in our service (Lk 16:10-12) and so did Paul (1 Cor 4:2).

5:23 - "*Meekness*" - this is not weakness. This word combines strength and gentleness. It



produces strength to do what is right and yet it is gentle in doing it. Meekness was a characteristic of Moses (Num. 12:3) and of Jesus Christ (Mt. 11:29) and the Spirit can enable all believers to be meek (6:1; 2 Tim 2:25).

*"Temperance"* - this is self-control regarding sin. It disciplines the believer to have a proper use of anger, sex, work, pleasure, time, money and anything else that might be used to commit sin. The Spirit encourages and enables the believer to build self-control into his life (2 Pet 1:6).

*"Against such there is no law"* - no law is opposed to the fruit of the Spirit, which is just the opposite of the works of the flesh. Actually, the fruit of the Spirit supports the Law.

5:24 - *"Crucified the flesh"* - this is done by reckoning oneself to be dead to sin with Christ, but alive to God with Christ (Rom. 6:6-11).

5:25 - *"If we live in the Spirit"* - this refers to our life as a believer (our salvation).

*"Let us also walk in the Spirit"* - this refers to our walk as a believer (our sanctification). "Walk" in this verse is not the same Greek word translated "walk" in 5: 16. This word means "keeping in a straight line." A Christian is to walk in a straight line with the will of the Spirit and not revert back to Law-keeping. Those walking by the Spirit and then by the Law are walking a zigzag course. This will ruin his testimony for Christ; it has to stop before he can attract people to the Lord.

5:26 - *"Vainglory"* – a conceited person. The Christian should be humble and gracious.

*"Provoking"* – a combative person. The Christian should be tenderhearted and gentle.

*"Envy"* – a covetous person. The Christian should be generous and contented.

The Christian must replace conceit with grace, combativeness with gentleness and covetousness with generosity so that he can bring glory to God in Heaven and win sinners to Christ on earth.