

Keeping in Step with the Spirit

Opener: Tell about a time when you've had trouble keeping up with someone or something.

Scripture: You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. ¹⁴For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁵If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other. ¹⁶So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. ¹⁸But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

¹⁹The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. ²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other. Galatians 5:13-26

Discussion Questions

1. Here in Galatians we're called to be free and then told not to use that freedom however we want. How can freedom that's restricted be freedom at all? Maybe it helps to realize there's "freedom from" and "freedom to" and "freedom to be." How does that apply to Galatians 5:13-14?
2. What are some examples of how Christians "bite and devour" one another? What's their goal? What's the actual result and what does it reveal? Galatians 5:15
3. Define "the desires of the flesh" as Paul uses it in Galatians 5:16. How does walking by the Spirit combat giving in to the desires of the flesh? Does it get easier as time goes on? If so, how? If not, why?
4. What stands out to you in Paul's list of acts of the flesh? How can his warning in verse 21 be reconciled with his emphasis on justification by faith? Galatians 5:19-21
5. Paul lists the "acts" of the flesh and the "fruit" of the Spirit. Is this significant? Why is fruit a good description of the Spirit's work in us? How can we work with the Spirit to produce fruit?
6. Paul recognizes that even though all Christians have the Holy Spirit, they don't always "keep in step with the Spirit." In what ways do we struggle to keep in step with the Spirit? How would being "conceited, provoking and envying one another" contribute to that struggle? Galatians 5:24-26
7. If we're led by the Spirit then do we follow the law? Why or why not? How would loving our neighbor fulfill the law? Galatians 5:14, 25-26

Wrap Up: These verses in Galatians demystify what it looks like to be in Christ and to cooperate with the Holy Spirit as He lives in us. It's not about earning brownie points. It's not about getting what we want. It's all about being truly free to experience the life we were created to live. That freedom looks like this:

- Freedom **from** judgment. (Jesus + nothing = acceptance by God)
- Freedom **to** live in step with the Spirit. (Jesus + acts of the flesh ≠ freedom)
- Freedom **to be** like Jesus and serve Him. (Jesus + the fruit of the Spirit = a transformed life that fulfills the law by loving others)