

“Freed to Be Alive” // Galatians 4:21–5:22 // Freedom in the In-Between #6

Opening Video:

“Faith is a living, bold trust in God’s grace, so certain of God’s favor that it would risk death a thousand times trusting in it.

Such confidence and knowledge of God’s grace makes you happy, joyful and bold in your relationship to God and all creatures.

The Holy Spirit makes this happen through faith.

Because of faith, you freely, willingly and joyfully do good to everyone, serve everyone, suffer all kinds of things, love and praise the God who has shown you such grace.

Thus, it is just as impossible to separate faith and works as it is to separate heat and light from fire.”

Martin Luther, “Introduction to the book of Romans,” 1522¹

Introduction

That was from **Martin Luther’s famous *Commentary on the Book of Romans***. This week, 500 years ago, Luther walked the ½ mile or so between his house and the Castle Church in Wittenberg and nailed-up

¹ “An Introduction to St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans,” from Martin Luther’s German Bible of 1522.

Works Consulted:

“Give Love a Try,” Joby Martin

Galatians For You, Tim Keller

“The Faithful Gardener,” Leonce Crump

“Free to Love,” Chip Henderson

95 theses that claimed that salvation came by faith alone, not by the works of the law, and in so doing he changed history.

As you can see from that quote, **Luther believed that faith works together with the Holy Spirit** to bring about spiritual change in our hearts.

Christians in churches like ours aren’t sure what to do with the Holy Spirit.

- **We know he’s in there**, we’re just not sure what he does. **We relate to him, I explained a few weeks ago, like I relate to my gall bladder.** I know it’s in there. I guess it gives me gall(?) when I need it? I’ve heard you can live without it. That’s how most Christians are with the HS. “I know he’s in there; I’m not sure what he does.”
- In one of the books I wrote, *Jesus, Cont.*, I tell the story of a guy I refer to as “Justin...” who was really involved in our church here for many years and became pretty close with my family. He was a real leader, bright future, but he had a dark secret. He had a sexual addiction that took him to some pretty dark places... **Falling again and again...**
- “What new thing did you learn?” “Nothing new. I gained an awareness of some things I already knew. The people at this place talked about the Holy Spirit like he was a real person. They communed with him—they had a relationship with him. It was not new facts I learned; I learned to lean on the Holy Spirit.”

Galatians 5 is written to show us the role that the Holy Spirit plays in our spiritual development. (TURN THERE)

Paul shows in Gal 5 that the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential for spiritual growth, and **how we are to access** his power and presence.

- It's a **familiar passage**—where Paul lists out the fruits of the Spirit—and the problem with familiar passages is that they go in one ear and out the other, and you can miss what they are actually teaching.
- So, I want to start this discussion of the fruits of the Spirit at the end of chapter 4, where Paul starts this discussion about how the Holy Spirit brings about change in our lives.
- At the **end of chapter 4, Paul returns again** to the story of Abraham as an example of the right and wrong ways to pursue spiritual growth.

Abraham, of course, was the biological father of the nation of Israel, but when we first meet him in Gen 12 he is a childless old man in his 80's married to a sterile, old woman in her 70's.

And **that's when God appears to them** and promises them that they will give birth to a son who will father a nation who will bring salvation into the world.

That's a pretty big promise for a childless octogenarian, but Abraham believes it, and when he does, **two things** happen:

- ***His faith was credited, judicially, as righteousness.*** Gen 15:6 says that when he believed he was justified; righteousness was credited to his account.
- ***Second, he and Sarah's old, sterile bodies are infused with reproductive life.***

And Paul finds in this the perfect illustration for how we are saved: **he explains in chapter 3 that, just like Abraham, when we believe God's promise that Jesus**, Abraham's great(x4) grandson, brought salvation into the world **like God promised that he would**, our faith is credited, judicially, as righteousness, and spiritual life is infused into our old, dead, sin-sick hearts.

Now, **At the end of chapter 4, Paul pulls out another detail from Abraham's life** that illustrates **the mistake** he sees the Galatians making.

²¹Tell me, you who want to be under the law, don't you hear the law? ²²For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave and the other by a free woman. ²³But the one by the slave was born as a result of the flesh, while the one by the free woman was born through promise.

- **Here's the story:** When Abraham and Sarah believed the promise that God would give them a son, they didn't get pregnant immediately.
- In fact, if you **go back and read Genesis**, there was a 25-year gap between when God made the promise they'd have a son and when Sarah gets pregnant.
 - **25 years** is a long time to wait for a son when you are newlywed; when you're in your 90's it probably feels like an eternity.
- And so, around year 15, **Sarah decides it's time to help God out**. So, she brings out her household servant, Hagar, who is young and beautiful, and says to Abraham, "Look, it's clearly not happening with me, so maybe you should have one with her."
- **(Now, what's she doing?** She hasn't stopped believing the promise—she **still believes** God will give them a son—she just thinks it is on her to make it happen. She is attempting to fulfill the promise of God through a scheme of the flesh.
 - So, she brings out her beautiful servant to Abraham.)
 - **Interestingly, Abraham doesn't make a counter-argument.** He's like, "OK, if you say so..." (He's got more issues than lack of faith.)
 - And **shortly thereafter, Hagar gets pregnant** by Abraham and calls their son, "Ishmael." **Ishmael will himself grow up to father a great nation**, but not the nation of promise.

And this, Paul says, is exactly what the Galatians are doing when they turn to the law to bring them closer to God. They are attempting to fulfill the promise of God through a scheme of the flesh.

- Like Sarah, they haven't totally stopped believing God's promise of salvation, they just think it is on them to accomplish it.

And Paul draws 2 really important lessons from this story:

- **First, he says, God is much abler to accomplish his promise than we are.**
- In vs. 27 Paul quotes an Old Testament song about Sarah (from Isaiah) ²⁷ For it is written, Rejoice, childless woman, unable to give birth. Burst into song and shout, you who are not in labor, for the children of the desolate woman (Sarah) will be many, more numerous than those of the woman who has a husband (Hagar). (IOW, barren Sarah will be more fruitful than beautiful Hagar.)
 - **You'd never think that**, of course, **looking at them**. One has great potential for childbearing—the ideal candidate for motherhood; the other has no potential. But **God chose the one with no potential** to accomplish his promise.
 - And that's the **good news of the gospel**: God doesn't need any potential from you to work miracles in you.
 - As Zech says, "Not by might, or by power, but by my Spirit," says the Lord.
 - **You may think you have no potential, but it's not about you anymore**. It's about **Christ in you**.
 - One of my favorite promises about the Holy Spirit is **Luke 7:28...**
 - **No longer about the ability** you bring, but your availability to Christ.
 - That means it **doesn't matter** what YOU bring in to this place; whether you come from the most jacked-up background or your resume is a litany of failures—**high school dropout; prison; abortion; divorcee; fired from your job; alcohol problem**—God can still bring about his promise through you.

- Because it is **not about you**; it is about Christ in you. **It doesn't matter if you are barren**; Christ supplies EVERYTHING!
- **You see, if God can make something of Abraham**, who the Bible describes as, "as good as dead," then he can make something of you. Granddaddy Abraham is proof that God isn't done with any of us.

- **Second, Paul says, those saved by grace will always be hated by those seeking salvation by the law.**

²⁹ But just as then the child born as a result of the flesh persecuted the one born as a result of the Spirit, so also now.

- **Ishmael's descendants** would become the sworn adversaries of Israel, continuing down to this day.
 - Interestingly, Muslims around the world proudly claim Ishmael as their spiritual father—and Islam is a religion that from start to finish teaches that you are saved by works!
- **Paul predicts that any who rely on obedience to the law**—whether we're talking about Judaizers in Paul's day, the Catholic Church in Luther's day, Muslims in our day, or legalistic Christians in our own churches—will **hate and resent those who rely solely** on the promise of grace for salvation.
- **Because the gospel of grace says to them**, "All your striving, all your zeal, all your knowledge, doesn't bring you one whit closer to God. You are powerless to do anything that accomplishes your salvation. Salvation belongs to God alone, a gift you can only receive by faith."

And that leads us into chapter 5, where Paul starts his conclusion to the whole book. (Warning: It's a long conclusion, and it will take us a couple of weeks to get through it—that's because Paul is a pastor, and when a pastor says "in conclusion" he's usually only about half way done. But I'll bet nobody gave Paul grief when his "countdown clock" went 5 mins over.)

5:1 For freedom, Christ set us free. Stand firm then and don't submit again to a yoke of slavery.

- **What did Christ set us free for?** Freedom. The freedom for what? What's he talking about? He's talking about the freedom of love.
 - **When you love to do something**, you don't need to be commanded to do it.
 - Last week we talked about **the dilemma of the Great Commandment**. We are *commanded to do something* that by definition cannot be commanded, because if you love something, you don't need to be commanded to do it, and if you don't love it, no command can change that.
 - I used the **rather gross analogy of vomit**... You don't need to be commanded not to eat vomit. **Instinctively you avoid it**. If you encounter a **pile of it out there** on the sidewalk, you don't see how close you can get to it without actually touching it. You naturally form a wide berth around it. Because it is disgusting.
 - On the other hand, I **never have to be commanded to eat** prime rib. I love it.
 - **God's desire is to change our heart so that we love him without being commanded to, so obeying the Great Commandment** feels like freedom. He does that through faith in the gospel.
- **So, Paul says, "stand firm in that faith, and don't go back into the law."**
 - **Scholars point out that** that phrase, "stand firm" is an explicitly military term. It means "fight" to stay in the faith.
 - Paul is showing us that unless we actively keep ourselves in that faith, we'll drift back into works-righteousness, thinking that is on us to save ourselves.
 - **Luther said that we must constantly preach the gospel to ourselves, because our hearts are hard-wired** for works-righteousness.
 - We are like a **car severely out of alignment**. The moment you take your hands off the wheel, you'll drift into the ditch of

works-righteousness—believing that it is on you to make yourself closer to God and produce spiritual life in your heart.

²Take note! I, Paul, am telling you that if you get yourselves circumcised, Christ will not benefit you at all.

- IOW, if you go back to **trying to do something yourself** to get closer to God, you are severing yourself off from the power of grace.
- You are turning back to **Hagar!**
- You **circumcisers are cutting off a lot more** than you realize!

⁶For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision accomplishes anything; what matters is faith working through love.

- God's goal is to produce in you a **new heart that loves the right things**. A heart that hates the spiritual vomit of sin and love the prime rib of righteousness.
- That love is produced—not by doing through a list of what you must do, but by soaking in the truth of what Christ has *done*. That love comes by faith in the gospel.

Let's review—How does faith in the gospel produce love? (2 ways Paul has explained in Galatians)

- **First, it restores God to us as Father (4:6).**
 - You see, as long as you think of God mainly as Judge, you'll never really love him.
 - You know that feeling you get when a policeman pulls up right behind you on the road? You don't feel love. **No offense** to you law enforcement people. You feel **fear**, and **resentment**. "I wish he'd get behind somebody else."
 - Because they relate to you primarily as judge, you don't love them.
 - **That's how many of you feel about God.** "I wish he'd get behind somebody else, and stop looking at me!"
 - God wants you to learn to relate to him as Father. When my kids feel my affection for them, they want to be around me.

- The **gospel restores God to us as Father** by removing his capacity to judge us by having Jesus judged in our place.
- **(Let me quickly here deal with a myth** that a lot of people believe about God: they believe God wants us to be scared of judgment, because then we'll be motivated to do good.
 - **God uses heaven like a carrot** and hell like a stick that motivates us to do righteousness. "You want heaven?..."
 - Luther called that the **"damnable doctrine of doubt."** He said, 'Yes, that will produce a surface level-obedience,' but underneath that thin veneer of righteous living will rush a river of pride, distrust, anger and selfishness.
 - **Real love for God**, Luther says, only grows in the security of the love of God for you.
 - **Think about** it: Do you try to motivate your children to do good by making them afraid you don't really love them?
 - When I get ready to go on a trip, "I'll be back... or maybe not. Maybe I'm not really your dad and I don't love you. Think on that while I'm gone and let that compel you to become better children. If you're good enough while I'm gone, I'll come back for you."
 - My kids wouldn't grow up healthy; they'd grow up as psychopaths!
 - **God doesn't motivate us with the carrot of heaven** or the stick of hell. The gospel is that God took the stick and beat Jesus and gave us the carrot so now we serve him in love.
- **Second, God puts his Spirit of love inside of us (5:22).** And that Spirit is so full of love that it starts to exude out through you.

- **Paul's point:** "You simply can't experience the gospel and not become a person overflowing with generosity and love."
 - This may be a little cheesy: **Stick out everywhere...**

16 I say then, walk by the Spirit and you will certainly not carry out the desire of the flesh.

- "Flesh," confusing word. Translates **the Greek word sarx**. Now, Paul is **not saying your** body is bad and your soul is good—we **know that because** a lot of the wicked "flesh" things Paul is about to list out are heart things, not body things, **and Paul tells us** to glorify God with our bodies.
- **"Sarx"** (or flesh) is the un-renewed part of us that still desires sin—**those parts of our hearts** which the Spirit has yet to fill with resurrection power.²

17 For the flesh desires what is against the Spirit, and the Spirit desires what is against the flesh; these are opposed to each other, so that you don't do what you want.

19 Now the works of the flesh are obvious: He's going to give a list of **16 characteristics here**. Call these The Decaying Fruits of the Flesh

The **first 3 are sexual**, because our depravity often reveals itself more in this area more than any other: sexual immorality (*porneia*, which means any sexual intercourse between unmarried people; moral impurity (*akatharsia*, which means unnatural sexual relationships; promiscuity (*aselgia*), which means uncontrolled sexuality.

The next 2 words **have to do with the corrupted religion that comes out of a depraved heart**: 20 idolatry, (where you love other things more than God) sorcery, (where you try to manipulate God through a good luck charm, or ritual, or some word-of-faith teaching.)

² Keller, ch. 11

Next Paul gives us **8 words that describe relational conflicts**: hatreds, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions, 21 envy,

And finally, **3 words** that refer to **substance abuse**: drunkenness, carousing, and anything similar. Where you need a hit or some release of **dopamine** in order to feel alive—whether that comes from alcohol, drugs, pornography, prostitutes, impulsive buying, or getting likes on Facebook, you name it. **The point is your soul feels dead, empty and bored** and needs that hit to feel alive.

I am warning you about these things—as I warned you before—that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

- Practice here means *habitual practice*, not infrequent, and repented-of, lapses.
- **If you delight in these things, and pursue these things, you have no part in the Kingdom of God!**

Now the **Living Fruits of the Spirit**:

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is...³

- **love, (*agape*)**. Paul undoubtedly puts this one **1st to show its primacy**, because all the others are extensions of it.
 - **Genuine** love toward GOD as the greatest treasure and love for others
- **joy, (*chara*)** Joy is a delight in God for the sheer beauty of his presence. **Its opposite is “happiness,”** where you depend on circumstances to make you happy. *Difference in happiness and joy. Or think of it this way: Happiness is based on the blessing; joy comes from knowing the Blesser.*
- **peace, (*irene*)** Peace is when your soul **feels at rest in the control** of a loving, sovereign God.

- **patience, (*makrothumia*)** This is the **ability to face trouble** or setbacks without going into **despair or blowing up** in anger **because** you trust in God’s loving, perfect plan for you.
- **kindness, (*chrestotes*)** Kindness is the **disposition to take care of others**, even when it costs you. Always being moved by their needs, taking on their burdens.
- **goodness, (*agathosune*)** **Goodness means integrity**: you are the same person through and through.
- **faithfulness, (*pistis*)** means **consistent loyalty**, to do or say what’s right even when its inconvenient or unpopular.

For example, to be willing to **tell people the truth** even when they don’t want to hear it; **or, to stay devoted to high maintenance friend, or spouse, or parent**—even when it’s unenjoyable, painful, or messy.

- **gentleness, (*prautas*)** **Humility, or self-forgetfulness**. In the immortal words of C.S. Lewis, it’s not thinking less of yourself as much as thinking of yourself less. You’re just not that into you.
- **and self-control. (*egkrateia*)** Self-control is the **ability to bring whatever desire** under the control of God’s will.

- 9 things that describe the character of the Christian.** Then he **concludes, rather cheekily, with: “The law is not against such things.”**
- **People like this don’t need laws!** No one gets put in jail for being too good, too kind, too self-controlled.

So, what should we learn from this? 3 things

The Scoop on Fruit

³ These descriptions owe, in large part, to Tim Keller’s analysis in *Galatians For You*, pp. 153–54

1. Healthy fruit come from deep roots.

- **Most important: You don't grow fruit by focusing on the fruits.** Fruit happens naturally when the roots are deep and healthy.
 - The **first week I said that some Christians approach** spiritual growth like stapling roses to a dead rose bush. If you have a dead rose bush, you don't fix it by stapling roses to it.
 - **In the same way, you won't grow spiritually** by trying to add love, joy, peace, etc. to your life, but by **driving your roots deep** into Christ.
 - **The more you embrace his love and promise in the gospel,** the more spiritual fruits will appear naturally in your life.
 - I think there is a **great analogy** with physical fruit... My wife and I have 4 kids. When we conceived them, we didn't come together thinking about the kid—we want to have a little boy with blonde hair... no. This almost feels like it is about to get awkward. We got swept up in loving intimacy with one another...
 - **You are pursuing exactly the wrong strategy for spiritual growth. Already this weekend some of you have thought: "Ahh! I am so bad..."** I have no love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, definitely not self-control. I need to **work on "kindness"** and patience this week. I'm going to be Mr. Makrothumia this week." We can hear the sound of **stapling**.
 - **What you should do is look at Jesus, instead of yourself,**
 - **And say, "In Christ, I am..."**
 - **Righteous.** He has said, "There is therefore no condemnation..."
 - **Chosen** before the foundation of the world. Predestined to bring forth fruit and give him glory.
 - **Appointed to be an overcomer.** I can do all things...
 - **Precious to him:** not one hair falls from my head. So precious he poured out his blood for me
 - **In Christ, I am no longer only a servant,** but also a friend.
 - Not a slave, but a son

- Not an **orphan**, but blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, names written down in the Lamb's book of Life, filled with all the fullness of God.
- **...Blessed to be a blessing.** Predestined for good works that I should go and walk in them.

- **And as you drive your roots deeper into those truths, fruit will come.** (AMEN!)
- How about this: For every one look you take at yourself bemoaning your fruitlessness, take 10 looks at Christ, boasting in his faithfulness.

2. You are only as mature as your most immature fruit.

- When you first read Paul's letter to the Galatians, at first you might wonder about **Paul's subject/verb** disagreement in vs. 22. **Paul says "Fruit is... (singular) and then gives a plural list.**
 - Why not say "the fruits of the Spirit are..."?
 - Again, it's because these are **not separate virtues** you staple onto your life, but the **collective evidence** of Christ in you. If he's in you, they will all start to appear!
 - **Which means you are really only as mature as your most immature fruit,** because that shows you how deep the transforming gospel has really gone in you.
 - **You see, sometimes we confuse personality traits** for spiritual fruits.
 - **For example, we see...**
 - Some Christian **more stoic** by nature, so we look at them and say, "Now that person has patience." But they are not **joyful or kind.**
 - Or **some Christian who is really gentle and kind** to others, but they never tell people about Jesus.
 - **Bold telling others** about Jesus, but with no kindness.
 - That means these are likely **just personality traits,** not gospel fruit.
 - **Where Jesus is,** all the fruits grow as one. When he is there, you'll be bold and kind, gentle and compassionate, patient and

joyful. Therefore, I can say **you are only as mature** as your most immature fruit.

- And so, **when you observe an area where you are fruitless**, this is an area where you have yet to believe and apply the gospel to your life.
 - **We talk about going on mission trips here at TSC.** Taking the gospel to new places. Great. You also have a bunch of unreached areas in your life, and your job every day is to apply the gospel to those areas. You send out little missionaries to those areas to preach the gospel to your fear, your despair, your selfishness, your impatience.
 - **2 action steps with this:**
 - Daily pray the gospel over your life. *Prayer bookmark*
 - Get into a small group! Like ground troops applying the gospel. Only listening to me is like trying to clean your room with a leaf blower. Only get the surface stuff. To do a deep cleaning, you need to pick up stuff and wipe behind it.

3. Walking in the Spirit is the way to avoid the lusts of the flesh, not vice versa.

16 I say then, walk by the Spirit and you will certainly not carry out the desire of the flesh.

- **Notice the order.** Not: “Escape the lusts of the flesh and then you’ll be filled with the Spirit.”
- **That’s how most of us see it:** *If I avoid these sins, I’ll stay filled with the Spirit.*
- But Paul says **walking in the Spirit comes first.**

That’s because without the Spirit, you’ll never be able to say “no” to the lusts of the flesh.

The word in **vs. 16** for “desire” in Greek is *epithumia*. **Interesting word that means “inordinate craving.”** Where you feel like you need something to be alive.

- **It goes back to what we’ve talked about happened in the Garden of Eden** after our first in. **When Adam and Eve first sinned**, they were stripped of the love and acceptance of God, so their souls feel naked, and naked souls look for clothing... we crave it.
- **That feeling is *epithumia*.**
- Or the way **Blaise Pascal** said it: Without God, our souls are like a gigantic vacuum...
 - And we turn first to the flesh to fill the vacuum—with stuff off that list of “the works of the flesh.”
- The **way to escape these cravings** is by being reunited to God, by walking in the Spirit.
- **Until you do, your attempts to control the flesh won’t work.**
 - Your desires are too strong.
- One of the **best illustrations** of this... **Fraternity... (Some of you say, “I’ve heard that illustration no less than 30 times.** I know, because I keep a little tally sheet in the front of my Bible, and right there beside the phrase ‘Fraternity story,’ it has 29 little marks.” **Well,** I’m not sure if you guys noticed, but Paul is **pretty redundant** in Galatians. So, I figure if he’s allowed to make the same point every 4th verse, I’m allowed to use the same illustration every 4th week.)
- ...The problem is the presence of God in your life is so weak.
 - You need a **larger dose of the Spirit’s presence** in your life!

And **how is his power released in you?**

- By daily believing “It is finished.” The **first time you believed “it is finished,”** you were released from the penalty of sin. As you continue to believe it, you are released from the power of sin by the Spirit.

The more you soak yourself in the love of Jesus, the more these fruits will naturally appear. Why? **Because you can’t experience Jesus** and not develop these things!

Go back through that list and think about it: **Jesus is...** (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.)

- **love:** The greatest act of love in the history of mankind was Jesus sacrificing himself for us. When you believe that, you become loving toward others.
- **joy: he is our joy**, because he wouldn't let his joy be complete until we were included in it. He was willing to endure great pain, because we were his joy. Heb 12:3
- **peace:** he is our peace, because he wouldn't be at peace until he had purchased our peace. He trusted the Father even when the Father sent him to a cross, which included our salvation.
- **patience:** How many times could he have walked away from me?
- **kindness:** he never turned anyone away in need. He weeps with us in our pain, and hurts where we hurt. When I confess my sin to him, or cry out for help, he doesn't scold or lecture me. His arms are open wide for help.
- **goodness:** he is all good, all the time, and all the time, he is good.
- **faithfulness:** he always told us the truth and never gave up on us. Never.
- **gentleness:** has there every been anyone who thought less about his needs and more about ours? Phil 2:5, "let this mind be in you."
- **self-control:** At any point, he could've called upon armies of angels to deliver him, but he kept silent, for me.

He was these things **for** me; and now his Spirit is **in** me.

Which means, if you are going to memorize this list, memorize it less as a list of things you should do, and more as a description of who he was for you.

And as you do, sin will lose its grip on you.

So, let's return to that statement of Luther's I started with (MUSIC)

"Faith is a living, bold trust in God's grace, so certain of God's favor that it would risk death a thousand times trusting in it.

Such confidence and knowledge of God's grace makes you happy, joyful and bold in your relationship to God and all creatures.

The Holy Spirit makes this happen through faith. (this = love, joy, peace...etc)

Because of faith, you freely, willingly and joyfully do good to everyone, serve everyone, suffer all kinds of things, love and praise the God who has shown you such grace.

Thus, it is just as impossible to separate faith and works as it is to separate heat and light from fire."

Martin Luther, "Introduction to the book of Romans," 1522

This is the truth that revolutionized the world, and it can revolutionize your life.

Prayer

Ever received it personally?

Need to just soak in it?

