

CHAPTER 5:13 TO 6:18

Choose freedom in the Spirit, not “in the flesh” (5:13-26)

Satan has two traps for getting you out your freedom in Christ, which are opposites.

1. **Legalism** (bondage to fleshly religion), emphasised in 5:2-12.
2. **Lawlessness and depravity** (bondage to fleshly freedom), as explained in v 13 & 19-21.

(v 13-14) Apparently, the Judaisers charged Paul's teaching with being an encouragement to immorality. So Paul made it clear (linking back to vers 1), “You ... were called to be free. But do not use your **freedom** to indulge the sinful nature; rather, **serve** one another in love.”

- Choose freedom as “opportunity⁴⁹ for the flesh” (NASB) or serving (slavery) to loving one another.
- **Free/serve**: seems a paradox; serving (slavery) by our own free will.
- (v 14) Love is the summing up of the entire law (Lev 19:18; Mt 22:37-40). Serving in love is the purpose of the law and the fruit of the Spirit (5:22).
- Remember 5:6, “The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.”
- (Cf Rom 13:9-10) “... summed up in this one rule: love your neighbour ... fulfilment of the law.”
- (Cf 1 Jn 3:16) This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life ... we ought to ...
- (Cf 1 Jn 4:20-21) Love both God and your brother, otherwise a liar.

Even what we eat and drink should be determined by our love, considering other people’s convictions:

- (1 Cor 10:23-24) “Everything is permissible - but not everything is beneficial ... constructive. Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others”.
- See also Rom 14:15-17, “Kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”

(v 15) This verse shows us the opposite of love: biting and devouring, leading to destroying. Strife and factions among Christians will lead to destruction. (We should serve one another in love.)

(v 16-17) “Live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature [flesh].”

- Flesh and Spirit are opposites: “... contrary to ... in conflict with each other... you do not do what you want.” (Spirit is the antidote to flesh)
- The flesh is self-serving, the Spirit connects us with God (4:6). Choose the one or the other.
- The freedom of the flesh leads to sin, leading to slavery and death.
- The Spirit is the answer to dealing with sinful desires:
 - Cf Rom 8:2-4 “... the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death...”
 - Cf Rom 8:13-14 “... if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live ...”

(v 18) “But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.” Living under mercy and grace, and beyond:

- The law is not made for the righteous but for lawbreakers (1 Tim 1:9-11). Laws are made for people misbehaving. Jesus didn't come to abolish but to fulfil the law.
- The Spirit is an inner guide; the law an outside one. (Cf Jer 31:33, “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts.”)

(v 19-21) “The acts of the sinful nature [flesh] are obvious ...”

⁴⁹ Gr *aphorme* = basis, starting point, opportunity.

- These acts include sexual immorality, idolatry and witchcraft, hatred and uncontrolled rage, as well as drunkenness and orgies.
- Are we forgetting: “selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy”?
- And what about (v 21) “and the like”?⁵⁰

(v 21 b) “I warn you, **as I did before**, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

- The theme of being heirs was already introduced in previous chapters (3:15-18; 3:29; 4:7).
- The inheritance mentioned here is the kingdom of God; previously about inheriting the promises and the blessings to Abraham, including the promise of the Spirit (3:14, 29).
- Cf Rom 8:8, “Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.”
- Cf Rom 8:13, “... if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die.”

(v 22-23) Contrasting the “acts of the flesh” the “fruit of the Spirit” is mentioned:

- “love, joy, peace,” (*love as the central characteristic; also in v 6, 13; contrary to the flesh*);
- “patience, kindness, goodness”;
- “faithfulness,⁵¹ gentleness and self-control”;
- “Against such things there is no law.” (fulfilling the law; the law is not accusing them))
- One fruit (singular), as there is only one source, the Spirit; they all belong together.
 - Compare: one orange, having (nine) different parts; or, juice with mixture of flavours.
- These are different facets of the work of the Spirit, through all of which we see Him at work.

Could you use the gifts of the Spirit without having the fruit of the Spirit?

(v 24) “... have crucified the sinful nature [flesh] with its passions and desires.” Crucified with Christ:

- **spiritually** (alive through him; 2:20)
- and **practically** (dead to the old self);
- (Rom 8:13 b) “If by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.”
- Is this an active reality? We need to **choose** between “acts of the flesh” and the “fruit of the Spirit”.
- The **flesh** is the easy, default choice; for the **Spirit** we need to seek God (based on the cross, our sonship and the promises).

(V 25-26) Living by the Spirit, seeking to deal with the flesh, is an active pursuit, for which we should keep in step with the Spirit.

- Not just walking; marching in harmony.
- Combining the mystery of being hidden in Christ (Col 3:3) with putting to death (Col 3:5)
- That includes a right attitude to each other (v 26), also keeping in step with other Christians. What ruins harmony among Christians:
 - conceit, pride \longleftrightarrow love, humility (virtues, not a weaknesses!);
 - provoking, envying \longleftrightarrow without competing or jealousy; considering others better and looking to their interests; Phil 2:1-4).

Show love to all, doing good (6:1-10)

The next part shows the positive actions, how to show love to others in different situations, contrasting again the flesh and the Spirit.

1. **Somebody who fell into sin (a trespass⁵²) – v 1** (or: is entrapped by sin)
 - What to do? “You who are spiritual ...” (having the fruit of the Spirit, v 22-23; mature)
 - ... should restore him (literally: “in a spirit of gentleness”⁵³); help him gently; you may fall in the same situation. Remember keeping in step with the Spirit in 5:25.

⁵⁰ See other lists of vices: 1 Cor 6:9-10; Eph 5:3-5; Rev 22:15. Also: Col 3:5-10; Rom 13:13.

⁵¹ “Faith” instead of “faithfulness” is also a proper translation of the Greek word, but less in harmony with the context. In this context the word focuses on faithfulness towards people.

⁵² Gr *paraptoma*.

⁵³ Gentleness belongs to the fruit of the Spirit (5:22-23).

- Not in harsh judgment (as under the law) or being smug, but acting as one who lives by the grace and mercy of God and knows the power of temptation.
- How to condemn the act of sin and to restore the person? How to restore freedom?
- Jesus had the right to stone adulterous woman (Jn 8:11), but said, “Go now and leave your life of sin.”⁵⁴
- Church discipline? Leaders in such situations? (Shooting wounded officers?)
- Do you think you are better and stronger? (1 Cor 10:12) “If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!”

2. Somebody overloaded with heavy burdens – v 2-5

- Carry it with him, for him, which is fulfilling the law of Christ (law of love).
- You can carry sorrow, pressure, time, finances etc. Not from your abundance, then you are not carrying at all. Cf 1 Cor 12:26; If one part suffers, every part suffers with it.
- Could v 2 be connected with (personal) weaknesses? Cf Rom 15:1-3.
- Some would even relate this to the person in sin (v 1).
- (v 3) Don't feel better than others; don't think it couldn't happen to you. Act as you yourself would want to be treated in the same situation.
- Pride is a hindrance to help. Are you something or nothing? Test your own actions. Comparing yourself with somebody else is too easy (I'm better than him – Pharisee). God's standard is much higher.
- “... for each one should carry his own load.” Not contradictory to v 2 and two different (though similar) words are used. As used in this particular context, “burden” (v 2) seems to refer to a very heavy load and “load” (v 5) to a lighter, bearable one.⁵⁵
- Christians are responsible for their own “loads”, carrying their responsibilities and duties, but are also encouraged to help others with their (overwhelming) “burdens”.

3. Your leaders – v 6

- Share all “good things” with those who instruct in the word. Share spiritual blessings and material goods with those who set time aside to teach the believers.
- Their burden is to look after the church members and to provide for their own family. The church members can help carry the second part of their burden. See also.
- Paul spoke in similar fashion in 1 Thes 5:12-13 & 1 Tim 5:17-18 (“double honour”), but he also declined being paid by some of the churches, not wanting to be a burden (2 Thes 3:7-9) or to exercise his rights (1 Cor 9:4-18).

4. Do good to all: Sow in the Spirit, not “in the flesh” – v 7-10

- Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. Even if you can fool others or yourself, you can't fool God. Serious warning, as before.
 - 5:10 paying the penalty
 - 5:21 not inheriting the kingdom of God
 - 6:7 reaping what you sow (what kind of harvest?)
- Spiritual principle! Cause and effect. Your actions lead to a particular outcome.
- (v 8) Sowing to please sinful nature [flesh]⁵⁶ → reaping destruction.
- Sowing to please the Spirit → reaping eternal life.
 - It is not about **what** you sow, but **where** you sow. Remember even setting and following religious rules (the theme of Galatians) can satisfy the flesh (and will lead to destruction).
 - He who acts in the Spirit, dependent on the Spirit and expecting from the Spirit, will reap (from this field) eternal life.

⁵⁴ Cf Jesus' words about a brother sinning in Mat 18:15-17.

⁵⁵ (v 2) Gr for **burdens**: *bare*, plural for *baros* = load, weight. (v 5) Gr for **load**: *phortion* = load. In another context, however, this last word is also used for the heavy loads/burdens that the Pharisees put on people (Mat 23:4; Luk 11:46).

⁵⁶ Literally sowing **in the flesh** (NEB: **in the field of his lower nature**) and sowing in the Spirit (NASB: **sowing to his own flesh ... to the Spirit**). Flesh and Spirit are the fields in this example.

- He who acts in the flesh, dependent on his own flesh and lives for the “flesh”, will reap (from that field) destruction (corruption) – the opposite of eternal life.
- (v 9) Do not become weary in doing good → harvest (if we do not give up).
 - Doing the ‘correct’ thing (sowing in the field of the Spirit; in line with the Spirit).
- (v 10) “Let us do good to all people, especially to ... believers.”
 - “Good” in this verse is a different word and the same as in the fruit of the Spirit in 5:22, both related to doing good to other people.⁵⁷
 - This should be extended to all, without distinction (also in Tit 3:1-2), but especially to fellow believers.

6:11-18 Conclusion

In the conclusion Paul gave his final remarks on the matter, summarising his opinion and contrasting his doctrines and practices with those of the false teachers.

(v 11) “Large letters ... with my own hand.” Just to give emphasis to this? Is the letter dictated to a secretary with a closing paragraph in his own hand, as in other letters? (2 Thes 3:17; 1 Cor 16:21; Col 4:18)

(v 12) The motives of the Judaisers (all very fleshly):

- to make a good impression outwardly;
- to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ;
- to boast about your flesh (v 13).

(v 13) Hypocrisy! Not even they obey the law! Note similarities between them and the Pharisees (Acts 15:5; also Mt 23:4).

(v 14) Paul wasn't interested in success measured by the number of followers.

- Paul only ever wanted to boast in the cross, through which the world was crucified to him and he to the world.
- The cross (1 Cor 1:23): a stumbling-block to the Jews; foolishness to the Greeks.

(v 15) “[For⁵⁸] Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation.”

- Circumcision has nothing to do with salvation; the only basis is the work of Christ.
- 5:6; circumcision has no value ... “the only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.”
- 1 Cor 7:19; circumcision is nothing ... “Keeping God’s commands is what counts.”
- Col 3:10-11 “Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised ...”
- Phil 3:3 “For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God ...”

(v 16) Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God.”

- Given earlier statements (3:29; 4:25-31), it seems impossible that Paul refers here to the natural Israel. He must refer instead to both Jews and Gentiles in Christ, the new covenant people of God.
- In Rom 9:6 **Israel** is used with two different meanings (“For not all who descended from Israel are Israel”).

(v 17) At the end, Paul told them that he had had enough troubles, bearing the marks of Jesus on his body. Paul had said enough about the issue. Paul had the scars of persecution and the stamp of Jesus on him,⁵⁹ why more troubles from fellow-Christians?

(v 18) “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen.” It is all grace after all.

June 2010

⁵⁷ Gr *agathon* from *agathos* = goed.

⁵⁸ The word “For” precedes this sentence in the Greek, relating it to v 14.

⁵⁹ Gr *stigmata*=scars, but also the marks made on slaves with the branding-iron.