

# **life group study guide**

## **house rules :: galatians 5:13-26**



*"It is not good to be too free. It is not good to have everything one wants."*

**Blaise Pascal**

*"There are two freedoms -  
the false, where a man is free to do what he likes;  
the true, where he is free to do what he ought.."*

**Charles Kingsley**

*In Life Groups, kids, youth and adults study God's Word  
together and discuss the issues and challenges of life.*

### **Galatians 5:13-14**

*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. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."*

When we hear the word free in our culture we generally understand it in the context of some previous form of persecution, oppression, slavery or bondage. We fall to the side of the idea that we are free FROM something. Paul pushes back on this notion and, instead, seems to be saying that we need not concern ourselves as much with we're free FROM, but what we're free FOR.

Q :: With the message of freedom so central to this part of the Galatian letter, why do you think Paul warns them not to use their freedom in Christ to indulge their flesh?

Q :: Is it the natural consequence of freedom that we are inclined to misuse it? How else might we see this at work in the world?

Q :: I find it terribly interesting that Paul says that our freedom is best used in SERVING others in HUMILITY. The image of a humble servant seems contrary to the whole human concept of freedom, does it not? What can / should we learn from this?

Q :: How is it that the entire law is fulfilled in keeping the command to "Love your neighbor as yourself"? Give examples / applications of this concept.

### **Galatians 5:15**

*If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.*

Paul has been preaching freedom in Christ - that we are not bound by religion, but free in our relationship with Jesus. This truth is so incredibly freeing, that it can become a divisive point with other believers. We can begin to judge their walk with the Lord, seeing anything that looks like religion, any practice that we do not have in our Christianity, and putting them down for it. "You guys wear suits to church? That's legalistic bondage!" "You read prayers out of a book? That's dead religion!" "You sing hymns? You need to find freedom in Christ like I have!" And because we can have this tendency, Paul warns the Galatians, and us, against it.

This wonderful freedom that we have can make us feel so superior to people that have a more traditional church, or a more liturgical Christian experience. But we are not above anyone in the kingdom of God. The condemnation that Paul has brought against religiosity is against those who add to the work of the cross – those who make religious works a necessary requirement for being a Christian. But we are not to have conflict with these believers – on the contrary, we are to love them.

Paul says that love is the key. As a child of God, you are called to love your brothers and sisters. Jesus said (in John 13:34-35) "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will

know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” The devil loves warring factions in Christianity, who speak against each other, who have nasty conflicts and church splits. Our witness is ruined when the body of Christ becomes divided. Now, this is not to say that we cannot have our disagreements, discussions, and debates. We must put teachings, doctrines, and beliefs to the biblical test. We must point out wrong thinking and teaching, and maintain the purity of the Word of God. But are we doing this with love?

Ideally, I should disagree with my brother, but still love him. I should disagree with my wife, but stay committed to her. However, too often we see the opposite: No, actually I don’t even have any communication with my brother anymore. I’m estranged from my sister. I’m separated from my husband, I’m divorced from my wife. I had conflicts with people, and the love disappeared. And so I don’t understand how there can be conflict without a break in relationship.

Q :: In culture, it is very common to have relational splits with those with whom we disagree. Does this impact how disagree with other believers, and in the church at large? In what ways does culture set the bar for dealing with other believers?

Q :: What should be at the heart of biblical conflict resolution?

Q :: In what ways could getting this right in the church have a ripple effect in our world outside the church walls?

Q :: What does this all reveal about ourselves?

### **Galatians 5:16-18**

*So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For 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. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.*

Our flesh is prideful, always wanting to be right. It creates conflict. It doesn’t show love. It is in complete opposition to the Spirit of God – at war with it. 2 Corinthians 10:3-4 says: For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.

Q :: How do we “Walk by the Spirit”?

Q :: How does doing that ensure that we will not gratify the desires of our flesh?

Q :: Interesting that Paul talks about how the flesh is in direct conflict with the Spirit – he then finishes this section by saying that if we are led by the Spirit we are not under the law. What is Paul trying to communicate here by tying the desires of our flesh with the bondage of the law?

The strongholds that have been established in your flesh cannot be defeated with brute strength. You cannot defeat them in the flesh, nor can you have victory if you wage war according to the flesh. When you’re tired of fighting, take this back door approach: forget trying to defeat the flesh, and instead walk in the Spirit.

The philosopher Socrates was tapping into this idea of nullifying the desires of the flesh by shifting our focus when he said:

*“The secret of change is to focus all off your energy, not on fighting the old, but on building the new.”*

Q :: Do you think some find it easier to try and battle their sin, than on walking by the Spirit? Why might that be?

Q :: How might focusing on “sin management” adversely affect our relationship with God?

Q :: What steps can you take this week to begin being more intentional about walking in the Spirit?