



Galatians #7

War Between Flesh and Spirit

w/c 8 March 2026

"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery." (Galatians 5:1 (NIV))

Let's start by reflecting on the first verse of Sunday's reading: just what is freedom and what is it for? 'Freedom' may be shouted everywhere, but too often it seems to be little more than a recipe for an anarchy where the powerful can run roughshod over the weak.

Read Galatians 5:13-26

If you read the intervening verses, Paul is giving us some further thoughts on what he considers to be the "yoke of slavery" he had mentioned in verse one. The next paragraph expands this, noting the impossibility of, to borrow a couple of modern proverbs, either having your cake and eating it or managing to ride two horses at the same time. You have to follow one way or the other, he says. And the right one is the way of the Messiah.

Verse six sums up what this must then mean for us, "*The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.*" Verses seven to twelve offer a fast-moving set of illustrations jumping abruptly from one scenario to another.

As we rejoin Paul's words in verse 13, he embarks on a lengthy argument that freedom does not mean licence. We are not free to simply do as we feel like. As Nelson Mandela put it, "*For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others.*"

What really matters, Paul says, is just one word – in the Greek *agapesis* (v14) – in translation, "*you shall love.*" For once Paul writes this in the singular, it really is for each of us to do. It's not you generally, the church, but rather you and you and you and you... (and me).

The fruit of the Spirit may be so well known that we are liable to underplay it – or over-spiritualise it all. Paul makes it clear that their formation is simply what happens to people who walk with Jesus. Not though a quiet Sunday afternoon stroll but rather verse 25 paints a picture of an army marching in step.

What is the difference between human promises of freedom and those Jesus gave us?

How do we achieve those qualities noted by Nelson Mandela in his words above?

What would society look like if we all could follow the words of verse 14 and love our neighbour as ourselves? We need to keep in mind the answer Jesus gave in response to the question "*Who is my neighbour?*" (Luke 10:29).

Martin Luther King noted that, "*The time is always right to do what is right.*" How do we recognise such times?

Is the list of human failings in verses 19 and 20 something generic or is it tailored to the issues of first-century society in Anatolia? What list might Paul write for the twenty-first century west?

"Freedom consists not in doing what we like, but in having the right to do what we ought."
(Pope John Paul II)

Draw Near - week 3: Sharing Communion

As with last week, you may also wish to spend part of your time on some or all of the questions found in this week's group material for *Draw Near*.

You may also find it helpful to start by listening together to the video that accompanies these studies.

This week's theme is *Sharing Communion*. In groups we are asked to reflect on four questions:

Does thinking of communion as 'sharing' in Christ feel different than 'remembering' an event from the past?

Does it feel like a private moment between you and God, or a shared moment with others in the church? Can it be both?

How might Jesus be inviting you to challenge the divisions and disagreements?

What are some of the things you are most thankful for right now?

"Although we do not see Jesus physically, we share in him through the bread and wine we share with each other. His readiness to be broken mends our relationships, and his readiness to die gives us life, and we can be signs of God's life for our world."

(Draw Near)

