

## Gospel, Faith and Freedom (Studies in Galatians)

# Gospel Fruit - By The Spirit

### Galatians 5:16-26

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Last week we heard Paul exhorting the Galatian believers not to *lose* their freedom, by submitting again to a yoke of slavery under the law (5:1), and not to *abuse* their freedom, by using it as an opportunity for the flesh (5:13). Instead, they were to 'stand firm' in the freedom of the gospel of grace by faith which would be both energised and expressed through love (5:1, 6, 13).

Both legalism and lawlessness spring from the flesh— they are self-saving and self-satisfying ways of life which reject the saving love and grace of God. Paul shows how walking the path of legalistic religion severs us from Christ, and the path of lawlessness destroys the community of faith (5:4, 15). Instead, we are to 'walk by the Spirit', and as we do, we will not gratify the desires of the flesh (5:16).

#### **A Battle Within**

It is important to note from the outset that the battle waging within the believer is brought about *by* the Spirit's presence. Before we received the Spirit, there was only 'the flesh,' ruling unopposed in our lives. Now, although "those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires," the 'old man' refuses to lay down and causes much strife in the heart of the believer, keeping us from doing the things we want to do in accordance with the will of God and our sonship in Christ.

- As John Stott writes, "*We do not deny that there is such a thing as moral conflict in non-Christian people, but we assert that it is fiercer in Christians because they possess two natures—flesh and Spirit—in irreconcilable antagonism.*"
- "Flesh" (*sarx*) in Paul's writing can refer to the physical material which our living bodies (and that of animals) are made of (Eg. 1 Cor 15:39). It can also refer to the morally neutral sphere of humanity and heritage, as in Romans 4:1 ('according to the flesh'). More often however, Paul uses *sarx* when speaking of the morally negative sphere of the world and its value systems (self-justifying) in opposition to God and his grace (Eg. 2 Cor 5:16). This combines with Paul's most frequent and typical use of *sarx* where he refers to fallen human nature, often in contrast - *sarx* with *pneuma* - the flesh with the Spirit, as he does here in Galatians 5:16.
- And so, when Paul speaks of the 'desires of the flesh' (*sarx*) he is not only speaking of unrestrained sexual or bodily appetites. He is referring to all the inordinate sinful desires of our fallen human nature (including the strong tendency to justify ourselves rather than trust in Christ for our justification). The list of 'works of the flesh' from verse 19-21 confirms this.
  - The word 'idolatry' is used in the Old Testament to describe our yearning for anything apart from God, causing us to turn away from him. The word for 'desires' (*epithumia*) can be considered the New Testament equivalent.

In the battle against the desires of the flesh, Paul does not command us here to refrain from certain behaviours, or to resist temptations or the like. Instead, he writes, "walk by the Spirit and you *will not* gratify the desires of the flesh."

- In his essay, 'The Expulsive Power of a New Affection', Thomas Chalmers wrote, "*A moralist will be unsuccessful in trying to displace his love of the world by reviewing the ills of the world. Misplaced affections need to be replaced by the far greater power of the*

*affection of the gospel... A new affection is more successful in replacing an old affection than simply trying to end it without supplanting it with something better."*

- Luther went one step further *"The remedy for curing desire does not lie in satisfying it, but in extinguishing it" (LW 31.54).*

It is not more education, instruction, information, discipline or discipleship which will help quash the desires of the flesh– it is crucifixion! It's the gospel of Christ!

- This removes the possibility of the flesh taking pride in any progress, or to losing hope in any regress. Our lives our hid with Christ in God, and so our righteousness is not measured according to our performance, but his. As Paul writes in 5:24, *those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.*
- As verse 18 reminds us, if we are led by the Spirit we are not under the law. The flesh drives us back to a yoke of slavery, under the law. The Spirit, on the other hand, guides us into all truth (John 16:13) and reminds us of our sonship (Romans 8:14-16) and leads us deeper into the freedom and grace we have been set free for.
  - Yet, the flesh and the Spirit continue to wage war within us 'to keep us from doing the things we want to do' (5:15).

Paul connects being 'led by the Spirit' with being 'not under the law' (5:18). Elsewhere we read that we are not under law but under grace (Romans 6:14). And so, walking by the Spirit and not gratifying the desires of the flesh is connected with being under grace, not under the law. In other words, it is not when we have successfully conquered the flesh that we will find ourselves standing in the grace of God. Rather, it is *being* 'under grace' and not 'under the law' that *helps us* in our battle against the flesh.

Contrasting religion and the gospel in his book, 'The Supremacy of Christ', Ajith Fernando writes, *"Religion says 'attain'; the gospel says, 'obtain'. Religion says 'attempt'; the gospel says 'accept'. Religion says 'try'; the gospel says 'trust'. Religion says 'do this'; the gospel says, 'it is done'.*

Ultimately, to 'walk by the Spirit' is to go on in life, 'hearing with faith.' It is not about trying to live a better, more godly, life. The flesh will always want the rule book for that, together with the praise for any progress, and flagellate itself for any failure. But we have no boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ (6:14). Living by the Spirit puts no trust in our own effort or obedience, but all trust in God. To live by the Spirit and to walk by the Spirit is first and foremost (and fully!), to live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me (Cf. 2:20; 5:6).

- To live by the Spirit is to live by faith in the fullness of the grace and the freedom of our sonship in Christ, with the promise and sure hope of our inheritance in him.

***"If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit."***

We have been crucified with Christ, and 'the flesh with its passions and desires' together with us. Therefore, *as* justified, redeemed children of God, with the Spirit in our hearts, we are now to walk by the Spirit as we *go on* hearing the gospel with faith and putting to death in us, that which has been crucified in him.

- As we walk by the Spirit, there *will be* a harvest of the Spirit - the fruit of the Spirit - it is inevitable.
- Just as the fruit of an orange tree is oranges - with all the colour, flavour and character of an orange that an orange tree produces - *so too* the fruit of the Spirit of God in the life of a child of God is 'God-like' godliness and character - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.