

Paul's Epistle to the Galatians

Lesson 10 – Free To Be and Free to Become (Gal. 5:16-26)

In Lesson 9, we read in Gal. 5:1 that Christ has set us free simply so we could be free. In that verse after telling the Galatians and us that Christ has set us free (completed action), Paul tells us that we have to keep standing firm (continuing action) to remain free. As we continued in Gal. 5, we saw that some attacks on our freedom come from others; but sometimes they come from within us, from our own passions and lusts. We live in a world that is filled with the bondage of sin and death; and within this "present evil age" (Gal. 1:4), humans have a way of seeking power and control over others, even those we say we love. You know it, and so do I. You feel it, and so do I. Manipulation, intimidation, and even domination are ways of life in the world in which we live. To say the least, Christ offers a different approach to life, one filled with true love and freedom. That's about as different as it gets.

When the topic of freedom arises, Paul may find it very natural to turn to a discussion of the Holy Spirit. After all, he tells the Corinthian church in II Cor. 3:17 that "where the Spirit is, there is freedom." Paul has referred to the Spirit already in his letter to the churches in Galatia. In Gal. 3:2-3, he asks the Galatians if they received the Spirit through works of the Law or by hearing with faith. If the answer to his rhetorical question is not obvious, he states plainly in Gal. 3:14 that those in Christ Jesus receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. In Gal. 4:6, he says that God has sent the Spirit of His Son into the hearts of His children so that we cry out, "Abba, Father." In Gal. 5:5, Paul writes that "through the Spirit, by faith, we eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness." As we continue in Galatians 5, Paul will elaborate further and deeper on the role of the Spirit in the lives of Christians.

In Gal. 5:16-26, Paul tells us that the Spirit and our fleshly nature are in opposition to one another, and he contrasts a life controlled by the flesh to one based on the guidance and presence of the Spirit. **He encourages the Galatians and us to "walk by the Spirit," (Gal. 5:16), to be "led by the Spirit," (Gal. 5:18), and to "live by the Spirit" (Gal. 5:25). Those type of phrases indicate that the Spirit is not interested in commandeering our lives and controlling us.** We choose to walk by the Spirit, we allow ourselves to be led by the Spirit, and living by the Spirit is a conscious decision requiring trust and faith on our part. The Spirit does not come into our lives and take over; and for Him to be active in our lives, we have to crucify our fleshly nature with its passions and desires (Gal. 5:24). **Paul says that the Spirit is in opposition to the flesh (Gal. 5:17). Within the tension that results from the struggle between our fleshly nature and the Spirit, we sort out who we are and whom we want to grow to become.**

In Gal. 5:19-21, Paul describes a life defined by the deeds or works of our fleshly or, one might say, fallen human nature. The first three works which Paul lists deal with immoral or impure sexual behavior. The next two, idolatry and witchcraft, fall under the umbrella of sinful religious practices. Idolatry is the elevating of anything in our lives as a substitute for God, and witchcraft seeks to simulate or falsely demonstrate the power of a deity. The next eight in the list reflect how the flesh destroys our relationships with both God and our fellow humans. Four of those eight (selfish ambition, envy, jealousy, hatred or enmities) are attitudes or characteristics within our fleshly nature, and the other four

(discord, dissensions, divisions, outbursts of anger) are the results of those attitudes. The last two, drunkenness and wild parties or orgies, are characteristics of a life out of control, or perhaps, more accurately, a life controlled by nothing good.

After having listed the works of the flesh, Paul now gives us in Gal. 5:22-23 an inventory of the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. **By Paul's terminology, we have to conclude that these are not our works, or fruit, under the influence of the Spirit, but rather the work of God through His Spirit in our lives as we walk with Him and are led by Him.** The word fruit has several connotations. First, fruit does not give life to the tree. It is a reflection that the tree is alive. The Spirit's fruit does not impart life to us. It is a reflection that the Spirit is alive and well in our hearts and souls. Secondly, fruit reflects growth, and more accurately, gradual and consistent growth. Fruit doesn't appear overnight on a tree, and time is required for fruit to ripen or mature. **Thirdly, note that Paul refers to fruit of the Spirit and not to fruits of the Spirit. Paul is not describing a produce aisle where we pick and choose our favorites and ignore the rest. Hopefully, we can see the benefits to our lives that would result from each characteristic listed by Paul, and we should desire the Spirit's fruit in its entirety.**

Paul has written to the Galatians to clarify the distinctions between the Law of Moses and the good news of gospel message, and it is within that larger context that Paul contrasts our fleshly nature with the Spirit's role in our lives. In Gal. 5:18, Paul writes, "if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law." At the end of Gal. 5:23 after describing the fruit of the Spirit, Paul says, "against such things, there is no law." The fact of the matter is, that when we calm down and look honestly at the fruit of the Spirit, not only is there no law against such things, there is really nothing that anyone can say against any of it. Why would we not want to manifest and experience love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control in our lives? If we could, which would we exclude? **Such things cannot be achieved in our lives through legislation and the practice of rules, laws, and religion. Paul's message is that they result because God has given us His Spirit, the same Spirit He has sent forth into our hearts, crying, "Abba, Father." (Gal. 4:6). If we haven't figured it out yet, Paul wants us to see that God desires a relationship with each of us that is not based primarily on rules and laws, but rather on love and freedom, the way life was supposed to be lived all along.**

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