

Galatians #15

November 10, 2024

Series: Galatians: Treasuring the Gospel of Grace

Today's Message: Living Well in a War Zone; Galatians; 5:16-18

In the previous chapters he's been building on the foundation of the person and work of Jesus Christ and His responsibility in providing for the justification of the believer, which comes by God's grace and is received by faith. Now, in Galatians 5-6 Paul is concerned with the believer's sanctification and the necessity of the work of the Holy Spirit in causing believers to grow up into Christ likeness. We need to understand, however, that unlike justification which is completely dependent upon the works of Jesus Christ on behalf of the sinner, sanctification is a cooperative work. In other words, the Spirit indwells the believer providing the animating power necessary for us to cooperatively yield our bodies to Christ and produce the fruit and fragrance of the presence of Christ through each of our lives.

But this work of sanctification and the production of the fruit finds opposition. And as Galatians 5:17 tells us, the opposition lies within us! But though it gets hard and our "wretchedness" is oftentimes apparent, our rescue is close at hand. Paul declared so in Romans 7:25, "But thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

Today's text is so helpful. Many of us have it in our minds that if we truly trust the Lord and truly let Him have full control in our lives, then as *good and faithful servants* we be done with feeling the pull and draw of sinful desires. The problem with that mindset is that it turns us to an inward focus. If we think like that we essentially abandon our true purpose which is to express our faith through love for one another (Gal. 5:6). So, Paul helps us to think right in these three verses so that we can carry on in the Spirit loving one another. He helps in three ways. 1) By commanding us *to live* by the Spirit. 2) By telling the truth about the certainty of conflict. And 3) By reminding us that to be led by the Spirit means that we are free from an obligation to the law.

I) **(5:16) Believers are commanded to live by the Spirit.**

A) 5:16 is set in contrast to 5:15. It is the antidote to selfish, self-centered living

1) In 5:15 remember we talked about the danger of having an attitude which judges the sincerity of others rather than a loving attitude with a desire to look out for the interest of others.

(a) If you become a "fruit inspector" or the "spiritual truancy officer" you will devour each other.

(i) When we do *this* we are *living under the law* ourselves and burdening others with a requirement to live up to—a performance standard that no one can live up to.

(a) Instead of walking in the Spirit, we are walking in the flesh.

2) In 5:16 Paul shifts the focus back to the Spirit!

(a) "So, I say"

(i) Paul is saying, "here is my advice to you so you don't bite and devour each other."

(b) "Live by the Spirit"

(i) First, there is no other way for a Christian to walk. The *LIFE* is impossible apart from Him.

(a) The Christian is to "be holy as [God] is holy" (1 Peter 1:16) in everything we do (1 Peter 1:15).

1. We might be able to uphold a personal standard and please ourselves or carry out rules established in a church covenant of behavior.

a. Only the Spirit can pull, direct, and lead us to do what truly pleases God.

i. There are two choices on the shelf: To please God (in the Spirit) or please yourself (in the flesh).

ii. To please God by the Spirit who transforms us.

- iii. Or to please yourself through performance generated by the flesh.
 - (ii) Second, we must be carried along by the Spirit because the flesh is too powerful to overcome by our own methods and efforts. (MacArthur: “A formidable foe!”)
 - (a) Romans 7:18: Paul says, “I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my sinful nature (the flesh). You can’t draw pure water out of a polluted well!
 - (b) 1 Peter 2:11 tells us that our sinful nature (the flesh) wages war continually!
 - 1. Have you ever noticed how easily sinful desires are activated. Flesh is powerful!
 - (iii) Third, we have to live by the Spirit because our enemy, the devil, prowls around.
 - (a) Always active. Like a roaring lion, assaulting the flesh looking for a foothold.
 - (c) Live by the Spirit
 - (i) Does not mean to focus on fighting off sinful thoughts or keeping a list of rules.
 - (a) The outward declarations of “No! I will not!” and the “rules” arouse the flesh.
 - (ii) But it does mean that we, moment by moment keep our eyes on Christ and learn from Him. “Beholding His glory...we will be transformed into [His] image.” (2 Cor. 3:18)
 - 1. Beholding His glory! Being in awe of Him. Keeping our eyes fixed on Him. Delighting in Him. Enjoying Him.
 - a. Every breath for Christ.
 - b. Every step toward Christ.
 - 2. As a believer, having been born again, we have a responsibility to follow Him and choose to obey Him, trusting Him; but the Spirit does the transforming.
- 3) “...and you will not gratify the desires of the *flesh*.”
 - (a) Paul does not say that if you live by the Spirit, you will never have sinful thoughts.
 - (b) But he does say that if you live by the Spirit, you will absolutely NOT carry out the sinful desires of the flesh.
 - (i) Our hope does not rest in our determination to say no to sin, or good resolutions.
 - (a) The law and rules are powerless; instead, it arouses temptations. (**Rom.7:8**)
 - (ii) Our hope rests in full dependency upon the Spirit who graciously gives us victory!
 - (a) The Spirit ministers grace to us as we submit ourselves to Him and the Word!
 - 1. Titus 2:11-12: “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.”
 - a. The Spirit of grace transforms our purpose from rule keeping to Christ following. **Every breath for Christ. Every step toward Christ!**
 - (c) We can live well, by the Spirit in full submission to Him, even in the midst of a war zone!
 - (i) Hindrances to living well in a war zone: gratifying the habitual desires of the *flesh*.
 - (ii) But, when we live a life of faith and love, delighting in Christ, we will enjoy Him.
 - (a) We delight in the transforming work of the Spirit as He changes our thinking, etc.
- II) **(5:17) Believers are warned about the certainty of conflict between *the flesh* and Spirit.**
 - A) Walking in the Spirit is key, but this verse should make it clear, but walking doesn’t come easy.
 - 1) It is an ongoing battle. The Spirit and flesh are irreconcilable.
 - B) *What* does Paul mean by *flesh*?
 - 1) Not our actually bodily flesh.
 - 2) Not even that old “fallen nature”, the “old man” that we inherited from Adam.
 - (a) Romans 6:6 gives us hope: “For we know that the “old man” was crucified with Him so that the body ruled by sin would be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—”

- (i) For the believer the “old man” died with Christ on the cross. It’s dead. It doesn’t live anymore! In Christ our sinful nature was killed!
 - 3) David Guzik writes, “Instead, as Paul uses *flesh* here, the *flesh* is the inner man that exists apart from the “old man” or the “new man.” [It is that part of us] which was trained in rebellion by the old nature, the old man, the world, and the devil.”
 - (a) Although the “old man” is dead and gone, the influence of old man lives on through the flesh, and that influence will battle against the Spirit until we experience God’s final deliverance from the “flesh” when we receive a new resurrection body!
 - (i) Until then, we are in a battle. And it’s a battle for control of the mind for control of the “members of our body”. **(look and read Romans 7:21-25)**
 - C) How to win the battle between Spirit and flesh:
 - 1) Luther asserted that when the *flesh* begins to force its evil desires upon us, the only recourse is to take the Word of God, the sword of the Spirit, the word of salvation, and fight against the *flesh* and its well-trained evil intentions. Without the Word and Spirit, you and I are helpless against the wiles of the *flesh*. But as soon as we take hold of the Word of God, temptations are blunted. The Word of God is absolutely necessary in fending off the desires of the *flesh*.
 - (a) Psalm 119:11: “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against You.”
- III) **(5:18) Believers are reminded to be led by the Spirit Who frees us from obligation to the law.**
- A) The key is that the Spirit does the leading. Not our determination to keep the rules! We hitch on to the Spirit and are led by His power and strength.
 - 1) To be under the law means that we try to live according to the outward influence of the law/rules.
 - 2) The Spirit works from the inside, influencing us inwardly!
 - (a) God writes His law on our hearts, inside of us. This is the great promise of the New Covenant as promised in Jeremiah 31:33: “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” (Guzik)
 - B) The necessity of being led by the Spirit:
 - 1) The inner influence of the Spirit is infinitely more effective than the outward influence of the law.
 - (a) Kenneth Wuest writes, “The mistake that is made so often is that the Mosaic law is substituted for the restraint of the Holy Spirit, and with disastrous results... A policeman on the street corner is a far more efficient deterrent of law-breaking than any number of city ordinances placarded for public notice.”
 - (b) It is the Spirit who guides us with supernatural power and influence from the inside.
 - (i) Isaiah 30:21 describes it like this: “Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, ‘This is the way; walk in it.’”
 - 2) The Spirit works through the word “teaching us what is right, teaching us what is wrong, teaching us how to get right, and training us how to do right.” (2 Timothy 3:16)

Paul simply said, “So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify and arouse the old habits residing in the flesh. This is how we will go about “living well in a war zone.”