

## 08.22.10 / Galatians 5:16-25

**Passage Insight**

At the beginning of Chapter 5, Paul has just finished explaining the freedom we have in Christ. Freedom from having to justify ourselves before God by following a set of rules. The alternative, now that Jesus has been crucified, has risen, and has sent His Holy Spirit to live inside of us, is the source of our new life in Christ. Before we knew Christ, we were dead in our transgressions, but for those who believe in the saving work of Jesus Christ, 1 Peter 3:18 says this: "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit. . ." The only way we now live is by the power and good grace of God's own Holy Spirit, which lives inside of us as followers of Jesus. This passage speaks about what our new Spirit-empowered lives look like, and we see that they are in stark contrast to our previous lives, which were both lived for and empowered by ourselves.

As it says in verse 17, the Spirit and the flesh are opposed. When we read "flesh", we should interpret this to mean what we were by our natural birth. Therefore, desires of the flesh are simply any desires that stem from our nature (not just those desires that are related to our bodily appetites), which is a self-serving nature that seeks only to meet its own needs (and believes that it is capable of doing so). As we see in verse 17, by nature we WANT to do that which is against the Spirit, that which is opposed to God. In other words, we simply cannot count on our will to do what is right. We can't muster the capacity to do the right thing. Consider Romans 7:18 – "For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out." If we're walking and working by OUR WILL, we're walking and working by the flesh, and all attempts to bear healthy spiritual fruit will ultimately fail. God knew this, and it is for this reason that He sent Jesus to pay for our sins and that the Spirit was sent to empower us to do what God alone can do. We can't do it. God can. So He does. By living inside of us when we follow Jesus. Beautifully, and there is much freedom for us in this, as a result of God's work, we simply cannot boast in the least about what is being done in and through us, for it is God's hand alone, and God alone who deserves the glory as a result.

When we read verse 21, we see that those who do the things listed will not inherit the kingdom of God. The works of the flesh are "evident," meaning that if we see these works, they are "evidence" that the person doing them is being led by the flesh rather than by the Spirit. If this is the case, they are taking part in a kingdom of self rather than a kingdom of God. We won't get into a long discussion here about whether or not someone can be saved and still do these works of the flesh, but I will mention that just as we see in 1 Thessalonians 5, even those who are saved may quench the Spirit by their disobedience. This does not speak of losing one's salvation, but it does suggest that our true spiritual identity in Christ as a saved believer may sometimes be overshadowed outwardly by unhealthy fruit borne of fleshly passions and desires. This passage is not so much about unhealthy fruit as it is about the healthy fruit that comes from walking by the power of God's Spirit. These Spirit fruits are "evident" as well in that when we see them in a person's life, they are "evidence" that the person is being led by something outside of him/herself, something that takes them somewhere they could not otherwise go, into God's kingdom.

All the flesh fruits are borne out of a desire to "get our own," and when this is our mantra (whether or not we would verbalize it as such), our affection in the flesh is for OURSELVES as we try to get for ourselves, by our own power, the things we think we need. Contrast this with Matthew 6:25-33, particularly verse 33, where it says, "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." When we seek the kingdom of God

and His righteousness (which is only available to us in Jesus), we will truly have everything we need. Interestingly, and in contrast with the fruits of the flesh, all the Spirit fruits are borne from focusing AWAY FROM OURSELVES, where our affection is for THE LORD instead.

Some Jews at the time this passage was written were saying that gentile converts had to adopt Jewish ways. Others said they should do exactly what they were already doing before they were saved, even if it was sinful. But Paul is saying there is a third way. Walking by the Spirit does not mean striking a balance between living by rules and by sin. It's a third way altogether, where there is no binding to the law, nor to sin, and instead we walk in the light and path of God Himself who goes before us as He redeems.

The fact that we can't do it on our own, that we NEED God's Holy Spirit in order to bear good fruit, tells us that we can't boast in the slightest about our salvation and sanctification, that God alone gets the glory for saving us and transforming us into His image. Praise the Lord.

### Application Questions

#### Rejection of the Flesh

- 1) We are called to crucify the flesh with its passions and desires. What is one passion or desire that you still willingly hold on to and are afraid to see crucified?
- 2) What does this passion or desire provide for you that you think Jesus cannot provide?
- 3) What are you truly seeking when you follow this passion or desire?
- 4) Consider that when you seek the Lord, you lack no good thing (Psalm 34), and that when you seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, all else that you need will be added to you (Matthew 6). How does your search for provision elsewhere look in the light of these truths?
- 5) How can we trust that Jesus truly is enough for everything?

#### The Abuse of Grace

- 1) Where are you abusing grace and sinning knowingly, claiming God's mercy and grace as you do so?
- 2) When you do even this, you still receive grace and mercy from the Father. What does this tell you about our Lord?
- 3) How should you repent?

#### Walking by the Spirit

- 1) We can quench the Spirit in our disobedience, and we can open ourselves to the movement of the Spirit in our obedience. How have you seen more clearly the movement of the Spirit as you obey the Lord?
- 2) Where are you failing to take Spirit-filled action (in caring for others, in your pursuit of the Lord's kingdom, in the way you steward your resources, etc.)?
- 3) The Spirit is God Himself living inside of you, keeping you alive rather than dead in your sins. What is the proper response to this gift?
- 4) The fruits of the Spirit are rich and deep. Where are you lacking this fruit in your life?
- 5) What's behind that?
- 6) Where are you seeing this evidence of God's Spirit at work in you?
- 7) Spend some time praying that the Lord would bear fruit in your group as each person rejects the flesh and embraces the Spirit that now lives inside of them.

**Sources**

- Prayer
- BST
- Word Bible Commentary