

Galatians

Bearing Fruit (Galatians 5:15-26)

16 So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. 17 For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law. 19 The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. 24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. 25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

Over the past weeks we have seen the way in which the Gentile Christians in Galatia who had come to Christ under Paul's ministry were turning away from the freedom that they had in Christ and were becoming Jewish proselytes, placing themselves under Jewish law. Paul writes to them to tell them that in the words of 5:1 *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.* If you look back at verse 2 of the chapter you will see a remarkable phrase: *4 You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.* Wow! That's pretty harsh stuff. What he is basically saying is that switching adherence to the law as a means of salvation is tantamount to falling away from grace - it's backsliding. It's tough but we also have to accept that any form of legalism where we rely on the keeping of law in order to please God means you spurn God's grace.

But let's remind ourselves of some verses from chapter 3:

After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? 4 Have you suffered so much for nothing--if it really was for nothing? 5 Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard? You can see from this how starting with grace and reverting to law is just an insult to God.

Paul had already put it even clearer than that : *Gal 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. 21 I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"*

What Paul is basically saying here is that adherence to the Jewish law benefited nobody and actually if we go back earlier in chapter 2 or even in Acts 15, we see Paul, Peter and James all accepting that they had an inability to keep the law and that their

Gal 2:14 When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs? 15 "We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' 16 know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.

Acts 15: "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. 8 God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. 9 He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. 10 Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? 11 No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."

This kind of links back to Gal 5:1 where we see Paul questioning why the Galatians had put on this yoke that not even the Jews could bear. So as Christians we are not required to keep the law. So does that mean we become *antinomian* that is without law so that we can do as we please? The conclusion of some Christians was that they could be. In fact some of the Gentiles were strongly influenced by Greek thought that it didn't really matter what happened to your flesh as long as you kept your spirit pure. That meant they behaved as they will. Their alternative to the law was *antinomianism* in the flesh their flesh was sinful but so what - just feed it with its desired

Paul is quite clear that this kind of behaviour is unacceptable:

So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. 17 For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law. 19 The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

By referring to the sinful nature, Paul makes it clear that you can't separate the spiritual from the fleshly. We have a sinful *nature* so that in our fallen state we cannot please God but as the people of God we are called to live by the Spirit. So just because we don't walk according to law doesn't mean that we walk according to the flesh. We are called to live in the Spirit and keep step with Him. He deals with this to a much greater extent in Romans 7 and 8 where we get this favourite verse of mine from:

8:1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, 2 because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. 3 For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, 4 in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.

These verses explain what is going on here in Galatians 5 very well. When we became Christians we were freed from the consequences of the law of sin and death. Paul always describes the Jewish law in these terms. But we weren't free to do as we pleased but released into the law of the Spirit. I remember explaining it in terms of Sierra Leone. That country was a place where slaves were taken from America and set free at the freedom Tree in Freetown. So they were free from their masters and their rules and restrictions - but they became citizens of Sierra Leone with all its privileges and responsibilities.

At the tree that was Calvary, we were set free from the law of sin and death, but we live in God's kingdom (another word used in Galatians 5) under its privileges and laws - according to the Spirit. And what are the ways of the Spirit *For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature*. That is the easiest short definition. A better one is given by Paul as he

describes the acts of those who though being a Christian was being free to indulge their flesh as they wished:

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Those are the acts of the sinful nature. I'm not going to go into them in any detail. Right at the base of them all is selfishness and self-centredness. It's the satisfaction of one's own personal desires and feelings. They tear the person apart and tear relationships apart and separate us from God as we worship ourselves or descend into idolatry and witchcraft.

They are the acts of the fall and there is a law against each one of them. It was a pretty straight case for Paul. If you're like this you won't inherit the kingdom of God - because you can't possibly have the Spirit because His way is opposite. And that's the issue. If we live according to the Spirit we get to be like Him. And what's He like - holy. The principal characteristic of someone filled with the Spirit is holiness . if that's not present that however Spirit-filled someone seems - it's not the *holy* Spirit they are filled with. Never be confused between that and something else as satan is a good counterfeiter.

So if we are like the Spirit what are we like. Here it is: the famous verse:

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. 24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. 25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

This is the fruit of the Spirit - singular. If you live by the Spirit then you will bear the whole lot of this. How do you recognise a Christian - by the fruit they display. Jesus said: *John 15: 8 This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit , showing yourselves to be my disciples.* Look at what comment is made about this fruit - *against such things there is no law* . Why. because in Jewish law, it wasn't just your bad deeds that cam under law, but the law also said what good things you must do in terms of tithes, in terms of how you treat one another, of how you treat foreigners, how you treat your neighbour and so on.

But when we come to this we see that no law is attached to *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control* . Quite frankly, you can indulge in any of these as often as you like and as much as you like. You are free to do the lot. They affect all situations in life in all circumstances and if they control all your actions as they would if you live by the Spirit, no-one has to define what you can and can't do. You don't need to wait to be asked, you don't need to ask God about it - if you are living by the Spirit then you are walking in His steps anyway.

I'm not going to go into detail on these tonight; just give you the overview. There is a major difference between what Paul is saying here and law. Law has to specify all the circumstances of life in which your behaviour, bad or good, needs to be regulated. It doesn't require an attitude of mind from you - you have to obey whether you like it or not - rather like the 30mph speed limit.

Jesus' approval of that scripture I have quoted quite a lot in the last few weeks is helpful here

Matt 22: 37 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is

like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

The difference in this and the detailed commands of the Torah is that the attitude of mind brings forth the fruit. You can't be commanded to love. It's an attitude you have. But if you love God and your neighbour, then you are likely to comply with the moral implications of the law.

Living by the Spirit produces a new attitude to God, our brothers and sisters in Christ and the world. And that attitude of *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control* will determine how we walk. Not surprisingly, all these attributes here could easily be attributed to God. If we walk in the Spirit, keep in step with the Spirit, we act like Him - in a holy way.

Like it or not, that is our mark. Whether we like it or not, our behaviour, our fruit shows who we are. If we are in Christ, then we bear the fruit of the Spirit. If people who say they are Christians don't bear that fruit, then in whose footsteps are they walking? Makes you think doesn't it. We advertise who we are by the way we live.

24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. 25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

This is the challenge. Even Paul in Romans 7 admitted to a battle with his sinful nature with its passions and desires. Paul mentions the same battle here in chapter 5 of Galatians: *17 For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want* We can easily slip into sinful nature mode. He knew what he was called to but he also knew that in Jesus there is no condemnation, just a desire to live according to the Spirit and walk with Him. Here we have the reminder *26 Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.* We are the people of God. Let's not become complacent but let's walk with the Spirit.

We are who we are in Christ. It is through his broken body and His shed blood that we are God's people and that His Spirit lives in us. Let's commit ourselves afresh to the Spirit this evening. Let's invite Him to just come afresh on us and mould us into the people he wants us to do so that we can bear fruit for Him.

*Spirit of the Living God
Fall afresh on me
Spirit of the living God
Fall afresh on me
Break me, melt me,
Mould me, fill me.
Spirit of the living God
Fall afresh on me*

