

Galatians 5:16-25

Who's Running The Show?

In the Melanesian islands of the South Pacific during WWII, the natives watched closely as the American and British engineers came in and built airstrips. The islanders were amazed to see that when the airstrips were completed, planes began to arrive filled with cargo: food, building materials, and machinery, even vehicles. This, they decided, was something they wanted in on.

The Melanesians figured, that if they built airstrips, then planes would come to them bringing cargo. They hacked makeshift runways out of the jungle and built mock-up control towers out of grass and mud. They put fires along the sides of the runways and then they waited for the airplanes to land. As far as they could see they were doing everything right. The form was perfect. It looked exactly the way it was supposed to. But it didn't work. No airplanes ever came.

Now we laugh at that. We think, isn't that foolish, to think that the planes came because of the runways?

We laugh, but when it comes to spiritual issues we can easily fall into the same faulty reasoning.

We think, "Surely, if my life looks spiritual, then God's blessing are going to follow."

What we can easily miss is the fact that cargo comes not because of runways and control towers but because of a relationship with the one who sends the cargo.

How can we live a godly life in an ungodly world? How can we be people that honor God? Where are we going to get that precious cargo that we all long for down inside: love, joy, peace, patience?

The answer's found in one of the most crucial passages in all of the New Testament, **Galatians 5 pg 1037**.

As we've seen repeatedly the theme of this letter is liberty. It's a letter about freedom.

Paul, a first century Jewish believer in Jesus, was a missionary / apostle. He traveled

around the Roman empire teaching about Jesus Christ and God's forgiveness. He spoke with many Jewish people but his primary focus was non-Jews.

These were the pagans with no biblical background. Paul shared with them the biblical message of salvation. That message is this:

God is perfect and righteous in every way.

John Piper writes: God is good. That is, His nature always inclines irresistibly toward righteousness. God is never torn by evil motives. God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. So He does not need to be reminded about the duty of His deity. No one needs to say, "Now today, God, mind your manners, do what's right, avoid evil, remember the Ten Commandments."

According to the Bible, we are just the opposite. The whole world stands guilty before God. The whole Bible is a challenge to us to do good because by nature we choose sin and self.

So we have this great dichotomy, the righteousness of God and the sinfulness of man.

God in His justice judges our sin. But then God in His grace payed sins penalty at the cross.

That's the great message Paul brought to the region of Galatia, in Asia Minor.

That's the message that the people believed. Churches were formed and worship started.

But soon after Paul, left false teaches came in to say the God only would accept the Galatians if they kept the Law of Moses that God gave to the Jews.

It wasn't just the cross that brought forgiveness, it was their obedience that bought their way into God's family.

Everything we've read in Galatians so far was designed to show how false that idea was.

Now we've come to one of the most pivotal passages in all of the Bible.

Here's the question, if God's forgiveness for our sin comes by faith in Jesus Christ where does love, joy and peace come from?

How are the deepest longings of our heart fulfilled? Maybe it comes from keeping enough rules.

The point we're going to see today is, if forgiveness doesn't come from keeping rules, then either does love, joy and peace.

I. *God Commands Us To Walk In The Spirit* **Read 16**

When a person first trusts Christ as Savior we tend to give them as list of do's and don'ts. If we're not careful they can think that the key to their relationship with God is keeping the list.

According to Galatians 5:16, that's not true. The key to spirituality is to walk in the spirit.

The true Christian life as God designed it isn't just keeping a list of rules, even a list of good rules. Even if the list is God's Law.

The life God has for us is a lot more than keeping a list of taboos.

Now because of that, some Christians go off in the opposite direction and say we need to do away with all lists. They consider rules and standards for life as legalism.

We'll don't forget as we balance things out that God has rules. The New Testament is filled with admonitions. It covers lots of things we're supposed to do and lots of things we're not supposed to do. That's not legalism.

The real issue is our motive for doing what we do.

I can take a list of rules and keep them outwardly without ever bowing my heart to God.

Listen to John Piper again: “There is a great danger in giving morally depraved people like us a list of right things and wrong things. It is the danger of the law that we have seen all through Galatians. The danger is that instead of seeking transformation from God in our hearts to rid ourselves of our depravity, we may take the list of virtues and find a way to use them to express our depravity. “

“For example, if our problem is that at root we are very proud and self-sufficient people, and a moral authority like Paul tells us that kindness and faithfulness are virtues, we may very well train ourselves to do kind things and to keep our promises so that we can be proud of ourselves and feel morally self-sufficient before God and man. Then the list of virtues would not have helped us overcome our depravity at all. In fact, it would have deepened our sin, because now we prostitute the very Word of God and use it to satisfy our depraved desires.”

God says the answer is spiritual. Seven times in our passage for today we’re pointed to the Holy Spirit. If what we do is motivated and directed by the Holy Spirit, then we’ll honor God with our lives and we’ll experience the peace and joy God has for us.

So walk in the Spirit. Now what does that mean? Is it some mystical thing where we “Waaaalk in the Spiiiiiirit?”

The word walk in the New Testament means live. Here’s the key, If we live on the basis of the Holy Spirit and what He teaches and how He directs and impowers, we will not fulfill the desires of the flesh.

Notice it doesn’t say, “Stop fulfilling the desires of the flesh and you’ll be spiritual.” That the way we want to read it.

Actually it says just the opposite. Now, why is it truer that if we live in the power of the Holy Spirit we won’t fulfill the desires of the flesh?

- I. *God Commands Us To Walk In The Spirit*
- II. *The Flesh And The Spirit Are Opposed To One Another*

Read vs 17

Listen closely here because this is where a lot of people get confused.

A person trusts Christ as Savior and they're excited. They see from the Bible that they're forgiven of their sins. They want to live for God and please Him.

Then low and behold, a few days later they sin previously. It's like out of nowhere sin jumps out and grabs them. And they wonder, "Where in the world did that come from?"

When I was a brand new believer I had a passion to share my faith with my friends. One of the things I mistakenly came up with from my rather brief reading of the gospels was the idea that Christians should never get sick. If you have faith you'll always be healthy.

So I told my best friend that's what I read in the Bible. Two weeks later I ended up in the emergency room of the hospital. So Bob really started razzing me. He got so angry I swore at him and made an obscene gesture.

Actually I was showing him my IQ right at that point.

I went away from there completely broken and confused. I thought, "Where did that come from? I'm supposed to be a Christian. I can't believe I did that." I was flooded with doubts, with fears, and with questions.

Here's where it's critical to know this truth.

The Bible says we're born with what's called "the flesh." Not your skin and bones, but a sinful nature. It's the desire and tendency to sin that's been passed down from Adam.

Listen to some of these biblical statements about the flesh:

"That which is born of the flesh is flesh."

"The flesh profits nothing."

"For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells."

"Those who are in the flesh cannot please God."

"We worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh."

A Christian is born with and will die with the flesh.

But we don't just have the flesh. We also have "The Spirit." I believe "The spirit" refers to our new nature. That's the divine nature or life we receive when we trust Christ.

That new nature is Spirit produced and Spirit empowered so it's referred to here as "The Spirit."

Referring to the new nature the Bible says:

"...that you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust."

"Put on the new man which was created in righteousness and true holiness."

"Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God."

The new nature is the divine nature. It's righteous and cannot sin.

What you end up with is two competing natures. There's a war within us. Just because we sin after we receive Christ doesn't mean we must not really be saved. What it means is that the flesh is controlling us instead of the Spirit.

"The flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh." The word translated "lusts," *epithumeo*, means "strongly desires." They're battling it out for control.

If there's a battle going on, who do you think is going to win? How about the one we feed and exercise the most?

Why did I respond that way to my friend? Because I'd spent years feeding and training my flesh. I was just starting out in the spirit.

I wish somebody could have explained that to me back then.

So follow what we've read so far: "Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For (Because, this is the reason walking in the Spirit will override sin in our lives) the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another.

The victory comes when the spirit rules the flesh.

- I. God Commands Us To Walk In The Spirit*
- II. The Flesh And The Spirit Are Opposed To One Another*
- III. There Is A Clear Distinction Between The Works Of The Flesh And The Works Of The Spirit*

Read vs 18

Now follow this.

The flesh is controlled by the Holy Spirit. That's how we live a righteous life. But if you're led by the Spirit you're not under the law.

If you're submissive to the Holy Spirit you're not under either a man made list of do's and don'ts or God's law given to Israel. That's not the way to spiritual maturity. Here's why. The flesh and the law go together. They both deal with outward material things.

The Judaizers had come in and said if you want to be godly follow the law or you'll be lawless.

The Bible tells us follow the spirit and you will be truly Godly.

But now we wonder, "How do I tell if I'm walking by the Spirit or the flesh? How do you measure godliness in your own life?"

Well here's a practical test. It's good for any culture, at any time, any place. This is a universal standard.

Read vs 19-21

Here's 4 classes of behavior that are works of the flesh. If these characterize your life your controlled by the flesh instead of the Spirit in those areas.

- a) Sensual Passions
- b) Improper Spiritual Dealings
- c) Sins Against Others
- d) Lack of Personal Restraint

We understand these things are wrong. What a lot of people have trouble with is that last statement: “those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

If we believe in salvation by faith, eternal security, the standing of the believer as righteous in Christ, the doctrine of justification, how do we interpret these verses?

Out of 14 commentaries that I looked in:

Three had no comment. Don’t you hate that when your trying to figure out a verse and you look in a commentary and they skip right over it. It’s like the commentator didn’t know what it means either.

Four said a person committing these sins can’t be saved

Seven said the fact that they’re committing these sins shows that they’re not really believers in the first place.

Let me make a couple of observations about these verses. I tread lightly when I go against all the learned commentators but this time I think they all missed it.

When you don’t have a correct interpretation you miss the correct application. In the end all 14 overlooked the conclusion that Paul is drawing for us.

Observation Number 1 Some people make a big deal over the word “practice.” in verse 21. They say that it’s not committing these sins that shows a person isn’t saved, but it’s the habitual repetition of them that’s the problem.

The word that the NKJV translates “practice” is the Greek word poieo, which means “to do.” There’s another word “prasso” that means practice. That’s not the word that’s used here.

Observation number 2 Look at the other things Paul includes in his list. You’ve got the heavies like adultery, fornication, murder and drunkenness.

But now look at verse 20. Hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish

ambitions, dissensions, envy. Those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Ever had trouble with any of those things in your life? I have. More than once. Does that mean I'm not really a Christian?

In fact, there are people specifically identified in the Bible as practicing these things. Hold your place here in Galatians and **turn to I Corinthians 3, Pg 1014**

Read vs 1 I couldn't address you as spiritual people because of your lifestyle. I had to address you as babes in Christ. Not as unbelievers, but as immature Christians.

Read vs 2

The word "carnal" means "of the flesh." NASB translates this "men of flesh." Paul says here you're behaving like mere men. In other words you're behaving like unsaved, unbelieving men.

You're Christians, but you're sure not acting like it.

Read vs. 3

I Corinthians

Envy

Strife

Divisions

Galatians

jealousies

contentions

dissensions

These are habitual actions. It's what many of the believers in Corinth were practicing.

In I Cor Paul is saying, "You are Christians but your actions prove you're walking under the control of your Old Nature not the New.

He's not saying, "Because you're doing these things you're not saved." He's saying, "Because your doing these things you're not walking in the Spirit."

Now go back to Galatians 5. That's the very same argument in Galatians. If your controlled by the flesh then you'll be acting like the people who are unsaved.

You're mimicking the people who will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Just hang out with any legalistic person or church group long enough and you'll see jealousies, contentions, dissensions, anger, and a lack of compassion.

That's the flesh. But now look at the difference when the Spirit's in control...

Read 22-23

Did you catch the contrast? It's the "works of the flesh" but it's the "fruit of the Spirit."

Fruit is just the opposite of works. Fruit is the organic, spontaneous, natural product of the tree. These characteristics are the natural, spontaneous outworking of being under the control of the Holy Spirit.

You can't manufacture joy, peace, and patience. That would be like building a runway and thinking the planes would show up.

These are divinely produced qualities that come because of our union with God.

And notice, God's Law isn't against these things. They fully meet the demands of God's holy law.

- I. *God Commands Us To Walk In The Spirit*
- II. *The Flesh And The Spirit Are Opposed To One Another*
- III. *There Is A Clear Distinction Between The Works Of The Flesh And The Works Of The Spirit*
- IV. *Our Victory Is Based On Our Death, and Resurrection With Jesus Christ*

Read vs 24

Remember Galatians 2:20? **(Read)**

If you have trusted Christ for the forgiveness of your sins then you have died with Him.

Romans 6:6&7. *Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of*

sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin.

That's the most essential truth of the Christian life. it's also one of the most abstract. It may not seem like it because of the battle that goes on, but our Old Nature has been defeated at the cross.

Romans 6:11 goes on to say: *Reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Know the truth. You're a new person in Christ. Count it to be true in your life. Then act upon that truth.

Romans 6:13: *And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.*

Read vs 25

zao means "to be alive" not how we live, but the fact of having life. So the challenge is, if we are alive by the working of the Holy Spirit, we should take our steps by the Spirit.

Now at this point you may be thinking, OK I get it to a point. I can understand the basics of what the Bible is getting across here, the Holy Spirit has to be controlling my life, But how do I really do it? How do I walk in the Spirit? How do I put myself under God's control?

In the end, the spiritual life is a paradox. An apparent contradiction of Christian living is that while my whole life isn't mine, it's Christ's, at the same time I'm living it out.

It's all by the Spirit's power, but it demands all my yieldedness and commitment.

It means:

Being sensitive to the Spirit's direction. Knowing the Word of God so that I can know the will of the Holy Spirit.

Yielding my members as instruments of righteousness, reckoning myself to be alive unto God.

Opening up my will in submission and allowing the Holy Spirit to energize and move me.

Who's leading you through life this morning? Is it your flesh, or is it God's Spirit within you? Have you put on that new man who's created in righteousness and true holiness, or are you running the show?

Paul so plainly and powerfully told the Christians in Rome, *"To be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace."*

Are you building the runways? Doing the externals and hoping the planes will show up? Are you longing for peace and joy in your life?

Remember, the fruit of the Spirit is the product of a relationship with the Spirit.