

Living by the Gospel

Galatians 5:15-25

Introduction Our study has followed two of the major sections of the letter. ¹⁵

The apostle's authority has been declared, demonstrated and defended.

The arguments for the transforming power of the gospel and the dangers of returning to works are made.

Now we have begun the last section where the applications of the gospel for practical Christian living are worked out.

Liberty, not bondage—5:1–12

The Spirit, not the flesh—5:13–26

Others, not self—6:1–10

God's glory, not man's praise—6:11–18

This text also has a surprising structure. This is one of the places where Paul uses the idea of Hebrew chiasm to structure his thought. It looks like this.

Walk by the Spirit	(v.16)
Conflict with the Flesh	(v.17-18)
Works of the Flesh	(v.19-21)
Fruit of the Spirit	(v.22-23)
Crucifixion of the Flesh	(v.24)
Walk by the Spirit	(v.25-26)

If we are going to love the gospel, defend the gospel, we must also live the gospel by grace. Paul called the believers to fence their freedom by loving service to one another (v.13-15). In so doing he warned of not destroying one another in the midst of conflict. While theological debate and even division is necessary in the exposing of error, we must be careful how we interact with those who are under its sway.

So, if we are to lovingly serve one another in our freedom, what is the real challenge here? Is it the people we are dealing with? Or is there something else more essential that transcends the immediate problem with people and extends to the whole of our struggle with sin?

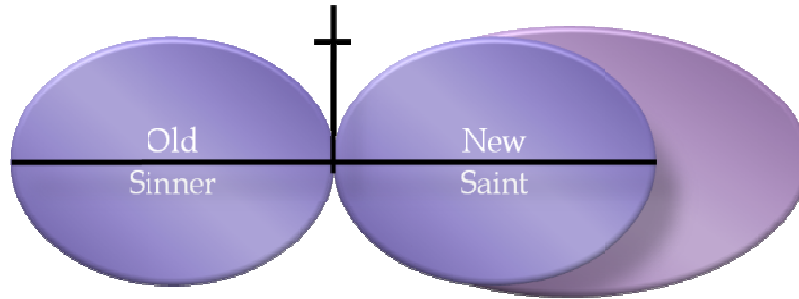
Paul Tripp summarizes this text in these words, "The essence of sin is not the breaking of rules, it is breaking of relationships." Rules have their place to guide and guard. But the two great commandments are about relationships, love God and love neighbor.

Let's think together about living by the gospel.

Its Principle Affirmed**(v.16)**

We live by the gospel with a promise of practical victory over sin. There is a principle here for us. This principle is grounded in a very important truth. It is simply stated as a fact and with what follows from it.

Now let us take a moment to get oriented to these two terms, flesh and Spirit. I want to do so by the diagram we have been using through the book of Galatians.



So, Paul makes a startling assertion: Walk by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

With the Condition

There is a condition that we walk by the Spirit. Frankly, this is much simpler than many make it out to be. In Christ, being a saint in the realm of the Spirit, is where the Holy Spirit causes all that being a saint means. The word walk here simply refers to your lifestyle, the way you live. But it is an imperative, a command. So here is what I believe this means. Live your life in Christ by the principles of being a saint, your spiritual identity, and through the power of the Spirit, your spiritual power. The opposite is to live by the principles of the old and in the power of the flesh.

In the Consequence

There is the consequence that we will not gratify the flesh's desires. Now do not hear this by saying, "you will not gratify the desires of the *body*." This is not what Paul has in mind. The flesh here is the current fallen order. Our bodies exist in the fallen order in which we are tempted. But if we order our lives by the realm of the Spirit we will not gratify the passions, cravings and lusts of the fallen world.

Its Problem Exposed**(v.17-18)**

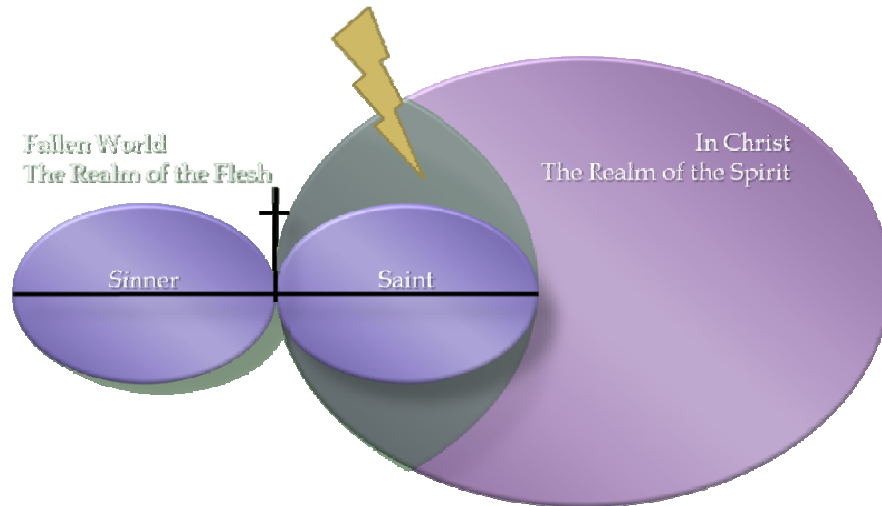
Why does Paul say it this way? Because he is locating circumcision in the realm of the flesh. Legalism and law keeping for positional and practical righteousness are the ways of the old. They cannot and do not prevent the desires of the old, both in the world and in our physical bodies. So, in the next sentence we recognize that the promise of victory is being worked out in the midst of a conflict.

The Nature of the Struggle

(v.17a)

We must understand that there is going to be a difficult struggle. While we have been delivered from the flesh and placed into the Spirit, we still physically live in the midst of the flesh, that is, in a fallen world.

Once again, think about the following diagram which helps us recognize the “already, not yet” of this deliverance.¹⁶



So the conflict is in category of desires and cravings. The Holy Spirit instills desires and cravings informed and shaped by the Word of God. These are contrary to the desires and cravings informed and shaped by the world. Because we are living at present in both worlds, there is a great struggle. This struggle is experienced in hearts. We feel the tug of the world and the sinner we used to be. We feel the urges of the Spirit out of a renewed mind by the Word.

The Effect of the Struggle

(v.17b)

This struggle is a problem because it affects what you do. You want to do what is right, the Holy Spirit prompts that desire. But even then, because of the presence of fallenness in your body and because of your presence in this world, you struggle to do what you know is right. Paul speaks often of this struggle. We experience it often. So how do we deal with it?

The Answer to the Struggle

(v.18)

In the midst of the conflict, we need to be able to answer a question which establishes who we are and where we are. Are we led by the Spirit? The solution is in locating ourselves by the truths of the Word of God. We who are led by the Spirit are not under Law. We are not under the control or the condemnation of the Law. We are in the realm where grace reigns as we live out our identity in Christ by the power of the Spirit.

Here is the practical way the principle works out in life. We know we are in the realm where the gospel promises and provides victory because we are led by the Spirit. The sense if this, in the words of someone else, is “to keep in step with the Spirit.”

Now, what does it mean to be led by the Spirit? There is a lot of confusion here. People think of the Spirit leading them as an inner voice guiding them. Nothing in this text or this book points us in that direction. Paul is saying we walk where we are led. We are led by the Word of God illuminated by the Spirit and our hearts enlightened by the Spirit. You must *never* separate Word and Spirit. The Spirit and Word are intertwined. To walk in the Spirit and to be led by the Spirit is to be Word focused.

Its Products Contrasted

(v19-23)

So what will each realm produce? If the desires of the flesh control us, what will be observable? If the desires of the Spirit control us, what will be manifested?

The Works of the Flesh

(v.19-21)

What the realm of the flesh produces is plain to all. There should be little debate about what the flesh produces. The Scriptures describe it. The world extrudes it. We do not have to wonder. The realm of flesh, the world, fallenness craves and does these things.

Here is an illustrative list of the works of the flesh. These fit loosely into four classes or categories. But this list is not arbitrary. These works of the flesh were what the people in Galatia were vulnerable to and being tempted in. These are the sins that they were committing and were trying to regulate by legalism.

Sexual

- Sexual immorality as heart cravings and physical acts of sexual sin.
- Impurity as the uncleanness by the effects of sexual sin.
- Sensuality as the orientation leading to excesses of sexual sin in debauchery.

Spiritual/Religious

- Idolatry as an orientation of the heart producing all sorts of sin in rebellion to God's will.
- Sorcery as an illicit use of natural and demonic powers contrary to God's will. The word here is *pharmakeia*.

Interpersonal

- Enmity where there are heart hostilities towards others viewing them as enemies.
- Strife as on-going conflict where there ought to be on-going peace and unity.
- Jealousy where the heart sinfully craves the undeserved and unwarranted sole attention of another.
- Fits of anger where the heart's raging and furies break forth in outbursts of unreasonable rage.

- Rivalries as the heart in hostile competition with someone where there ought to be partnership.
- Dissensions as the expression of discord contrary to God's will and dissonance with God's Word.
- Divisions as the separating out into theological sects or personal cliques where there ought to be oneness around truth, diversity in wise application and welcome to all.
- Envy where the heart craves another's place, position or possessions.

Cultural

- Drunkenness as being under the control of an intoxicating substance like alcohol.
- Orgies as participating in sensual sins with a crowd where there is a gross lack of conscience, control and sensibility.

Listen to the stern warning against the works of the flesh. This warning is intended to keep you from these sins. It is also intended to cause you to examine your profession of faith. We are warned that those who keep on doing the works of the flesh will not inherit the kingdom of God. Why is this so?

Those who are still in the realm of the flesh do its works.

Those who are in the realm of the Spirit are in the kingdom of God.

Therefore, to continue to do the works of the flesh as a manner of life is clear evidence that you are not in Christ, in His kingdom, a recipient of His Spirit and saving graces.

The Fruit of the Spirit

(v.22-23)

In contrast is an illustrative list of the fruit of the Spirit. This list is not complete. There are many other products of the Spirit's work in our lives. These products of the inward work of the Spirit are particularly what were needed in the Galatian churches. In contrast to the chaos and categories of the works of the flesh, they are not given in categories for they are a single cluster of fruit.

- Love as both your experience and expression of sacrificial care for another. This is the forefront fruit whose character and qualities are replicated in all the rest.
- Joy as your experience and expression of delight in God and in others where the fullness of fellowship overflows into inward happiness.
- Peace as the inward quietness of your heart when submitted to the purposes and providences of God even in the midst of conflict and suffering.
- Patience as your sturdy willingness to actively wait and forbear with others until God carries out His purposes in relationships.

- Kindness is your inward bent and the outward expression in words and deeds of generosity, gentleness and goodness designed to meet the others true needs.
- Goodness is your inward desire for what is right that expresses itself in intentional acts benefiting others.
- Faithfulness is the virtue of being trustworthy and reliable to keep your word and do your task.
- Gentleness or meekness is the quality of submitting to the power of God so that your strength is under control and used for the good of others.
- Self-control is the virtue of desiring by grace to aim your will to pursue and practice God's agenda and will for your life. It is the necessary ingredient to principled and practical righteousness.

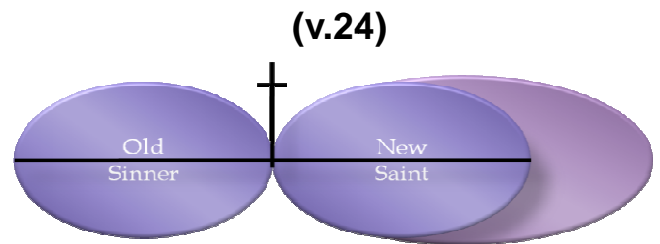
In an ironic statement, we are told that there is no law against the fruit of the Spirit. At first, this sounds odd. But he is making a point to the Judiazers: You want to function under the Law? Well, the Law does not forbid any of these fruit. So, where are these fruit in your lives? Why are you not talking about them? Why are you not emphasizing them?

Here is the problem with legalism in our growth and transformation as Christians. We are rarely legalistic about the virtues and graces emphasized by the New Covenant. We are legalistic about areas of liberty often ignoring real issues of the flesh and world fostering vile and vicious breaks of relationship.

Its Provision Explained

Parallel to verse 17, we are told how the flesh has been dealt with. From our illustration earlier we can see what Paul is saying. The flesh, the world, the old has been crucified. What does that mean? It means that while we still live in fallenness and the old still exists, it has been executed through the cross. We are separated from its power and control over us. Through all that remains in this world, that is our bodies and the world around us may tempt us but cannot make us sin.

So the flesh, as a principle and power of sin that we reside in and that remains in us, has been crucified with Christ. All those who are in Christ and belong to Christ have this provision. This provision is activated by faith. So, the reason it does not "work" for many believers is that they either do not know about it or do not actually believe it to be true. Many believers have been taught errors that mis-define the flesh, talk about two natures and thus cut the believer off from the grace that actually enables the fruit of the Spirit.



Its Practice Commanded

(v.25-26)

So, you will choose which realm you live in. Since all this is by faith, your desires, emotions and actions will all be shaped and organized by what you believe and confess. We work out what it means to live by the gospel in these two important commands.

To Walk by the Spirit

(v.25)

What this means has been the main part of this text and this message. But now, in addition to it being characteristic of those live by the Spirit, it is also a command. Living this way is not an option. It is required. To live a crucified life cultivating all the fruit of the Spirit is the privilege and power of being in Christ. It is believed in an obeying way by faith.

To Humility in our Relationships

(v.26)

So what will it look like practically? It will look like loving God and neighbor. For the believers in the churches in Galatia and for each of you, it means being humble towards others and not conceited about yourself.

Two practical ways that humility, love and the fruit of the Spirit affect our relationships. We will stop provoking and envying others. These were two particular problems in Galatia. We saw it in verse 15 where it is called, “biting and devouring one another.” But these are important for us today. Humble yourself before the Lord. Don’t look down on others from the lofty and precarious perch of self-conceit. Stop poking at others with your words and ways. Stop craving the good blessings good has given another in their position, place or possessions. Stop allowing lusts and passions of the flesh, the world, the old man you were to orient your heart. Affirm in your heart that you are dead to the old and alive in the new. The Spirit will produce His fruit if you will walk in Him.

Conclusion How do you live gospel?

Does living the gospel primarily mean trying to keep rules? Is your Christian life primarily about law or is it primarily about faith working by love?

Do you practice the evident sins of the flesh? If so, are you in Christ? Have you believed the gospel and bowed to Christ our Lord and King? Do you trust His finished work for all?

Do you struggle with the sins of the flesh? If so, in what way do you struggle? Is it a matter of will and strength? Or is a genuine belief in these principles and an active and intentional love for God and others?

Let us all walk in Spirit so that we do not gratify the cravings of the flesh and so that we do not break our relationships with one another.

May God’s grace enable all that His Word has taught and commanded us this day.

Notes

¹⁵ Adapted from Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*.

¹⁶ We will be looking at these principles more in depth this coming summer in Adult Bible Education, Sunday AM 9:15 hour.