

"THE EPISTLE TO THE GALATIANS"

The Flesh Versus The Spirit (5:16-18)

INTRODUCTION

1. In discussing our liberty in Christ, Paul warned about the flesh...
 - a. Not to use our liberty as an opportunity for the flesh - **Galatians 5:13: *For* brethren, you* were called to freedom; only do not use your* freedom* for a starting-point for the flesh, but serve* one another through love** .**
 - b. To beware of being consumed by one another - **Galatians 5:15: *But if you* are biting and devouring one another, beware, that you* may not be consumed by one another.***
2. How can one avoid the destructive influences of the flesh? Paul is clear...
 - a. We must walk in the Spirit - **Galatians 5:16-17: *But I am saying, walk by the Spirit and you* may never* complete the lust of the flesh. For* the flesh lusts against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh, and these lay in opposition to one another; that* you* may not do the things that you* would wish.***
 - b. We must be led by the Spirit - **Galatians 5:18: *But if you* are led by the Spirit, you* are not under the law.***

Why is it important for the Christian to know this? And how does one walk in the Spirit? How is one led by the Spirit? From our text **Galatians 5:16-18** we observe regarding the flesh and the Spirit that: **But I am saying, walk by the Spirit and you* may never* complete the lust of the flesh. For* the flesh lusts against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh, and these lay in opposition to one another; that* you* may not do the things that you* would wish. But if you* are led by the Spirit, you* are not under the law.**

I. THE TWO ARE CONTRARY TO ONE ANOTHER

A. TWO OPPONENTS, FIGHTING FOR YOUR SOUL...

1. They are in opposition against each other - **Galatians 5:17a: *For* the flesh lusts against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh,***

2. Is the "**Spirit**" referring to the Holy Spirit, or the human spirit?
 - a. There is certainly a war between the flesh and human spirit - **1Peter 2:11: *Beloved, I am encouraging you* , as foreigners and travelers, to abstain from fleshly lusts, which are warring against the soul; Romans 7:23: But I am seeing a different law in my members, warring against the law of my mind and capturing me in the law of sin which is in my members.***
 - b. Yet I believe here in Galatians it has reference to the Holy Spirit
3. The context of the epistle suggests that it is the Holy Spirit
 - a. Note Paul's earlier references to the Spirit
 - **Galatians 3:2-3: *I only wish to learn this from you* . Did you* receive the Spirit from the works of the law or from the hearing of faith? Are you* so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you* now being completed in the flesh? 4:6: And because you* are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.***
 - b. Through the Spirit we eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness- **Galatians 5:5: *For* we are waiting for the hope of righteousness from faith by the Spirit.***
 - c. Paul's later **argument** "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit" would not make sense if the human spirit is meant - **Galatians 5:25: *If we live by the Spirit, we should also march by the Spirit.***
 - d. Reaping everlasting life "**of the Spirit**" must refer to the Holy Spirit - **Galatians 6:8: *Because he who is sowing to his own flesh will reap corruption from the flesh, but he who is sowing to the Spirit will reap everlasting life from the Spirit.***

-- While the flesh pulls us in one direction, the Spirit would have us go in another!

B. A CHRISTIAN MUST SERVE ONE OR THE OTHER...

1. If we follow the lusts of the flesh, we cannot do the will of the Spirit - **Galatians 5:17b**: *and these lay in opposition to one another; that* you* may not do the things that you* would wish.*

2. Following the flesh will enslave, placing one in a dilemma - cf. **Romans 6:12-13**: *Therefore do not let sin reign in your* mortal body, * that* you* might obey* it in its lusts; nor present your* members to sin as weapons of unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God, as living from the dead and your* members as weapons of righteousness to God. ,16: Do you* not know, that to whom you* present yourselves as bondservants to obedience, you* are the bondservants to whom you* obey* ; either of sin to death or of obedience to righteousness? 7:14-23: For* we know that the law is spiritual, but I am fleshly, having been sold* under sin. For* I do not know what I am working; for* not what I will- I am doing this, but what I hate- I am practicing this. But if what I do not will, this I am practicing, I assent together with the law; that it is good. So now no longer am I working it, but the sin which is dwelling in me. For* I know nothing good is dwelling in me, (that is, in my flesh); for* it is lying beside me to will it, but to work what is good, I am not finding it. For* the good which I will, I am not practicing, but the evil which I do not will- I am doing this. But if what I do not will, this I am practicing, no longer am I working it, but the sin which is dwelling in me. Consequently* , I find the law to me, who is willing to practice the good things- evil is lying beside me. For* I delight-inwardly in the law of God according to the inward man. But I am seeing a different law in my members, warring against the law of my mind and capturing me in the law of sin which is in my members.*

3. But with the help of the Spirit, the flesh can be overcome! - cf. **Romans 8:12-14**: *Then * consequently* , brethren, we are debtors but not to the flesh, not to live according to the flesh; for* if you* live according to the flesh, you* are about to die, but if you* slay the practices of the body in spirit, you**

will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.*

-- We must walk in the Spirit, otherwise we will succumb to the lusts of the flesh

C. HOW DOES ONE "WALK IN THE SPIRIT" ...?

1. By setting our minds on the things of the Spirit -
cf. **Romans 8:1-6: *Consequently* now there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who are not walking according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For* the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and of death. For* the law being powerless, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, having sent his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and concerning sin, condemned sin in the flesh; in order that the ordinance of the law might be fulfilled in us, who are not walking according to the flesh, but walking according to the Spirit. For* those who are according to the flesh are mindful of the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit are mindful of the things of the Spirit. For* the mindset of the flesh is death, but the mindset of the Spirit is life and peace;***
2. The things of the Spirit would be that which the Spirit has revealed
3. I.e., the Word of God, which is the sword of the Spirit -
cf. **Ephesians 6:17: *also, able to accept the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,***
4. Just as Jesus used the Word to resist temptation -
cf. **Matthew 4:4: *But he answered and said, It has been written, 'Man will not live on bread alone, but upon every declaration that goes-onward through the mouth of God!' {Deuteronomy 8:3} 7: Jesus said to him, Again it has been written, 'Do not test the Lord, your God.' {Deuteronomy 6:16} 10: Then Jesus says to him, Go behind me, Adversary! For* it has been written, 'You will worship the Lord your God and you will give-divine service to him only.' {Deuteronomy 6:13}***

-- We walk in the Spirit to the degree we follow the Word which He revealed!

So, whom will we serve? The lust of the flesh, or the Spirit of God? Only one offers life and peace; the other offers death, and prevents us from serving God **Romans 8:6-8: *Knowing this, that our old man was crucified together with him, in order that the body of sin might be done-away, that we are to no longer be enslaved to sin; 6:7 for* he who has died has been justified away from sin. 6:8 But if we died together with Christ, we believe that we will also live together with him;***

Paul then adds another point:

II. ONLY ONE OFFERS FREEDOM FROM THE LAW

A. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE "UNDER THE LAW" ...?

1. In the context, "**the law**" has primary reference to the "**Law of Moses**" - **Galatians 4:21: *Tell me, you* who wish to be under the law, do you* not hear the law?***
2. The purpose of the law was primarily twofold:
 - a. To reveal sin - cf. **Galatians 3:19a: *Then* why is the law? It was added because of transgressions, till whenever the seed has come to whom it has been promised;... Romans 3:20: because no flesh will be justified in his sight from the works of the law; for* through the law comes the full knowledge of sin.***
 - b. To condemn the sinner as guilty - cf. **Romans 3:19: *Now we know that inasmuch as the law says, it is speaking to those in the law; that* every mouth may be sealed, and all the world may become under the sentence of God;***

-- To be "under the Law", then, is to be under a state of condemnation!

B. THOSE LED BY THE SPIRIT ARE NOT UNDER THE LAW...

1. I.e., they are not under the condemnation of the Law
2. For obedience to the gospel revealed by the Spirit results in freedom

- a. Freedom from condemnation - **Romans 8:1:** *Consequently* now there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who are not walking according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.*
- b. Freedom from the law of sin of death - **Romans 8:2:** *For* the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and of death. 6:17-18: But gratitude to God, that, though you* were bondservants of sin, you* obeyed* from the heart to that pattern of teaching to which you* were given; and having been made free from sin, you* were enslaved to righteousness.*
- c. Freedom from the obligation to keep the Law - cf. **Romans 7:1-6:** *Or are you* ignorant, brethren (for* I am speaking to men who know the law), that the law has lordship over a man inasmuch time as he is living? For* the woman in wedlock has been bound by law to the living husband, but if the husband dies, she has been discharged {Greek: done-away} from the law of the husband. Then* consequently* , if the husband is living, if she becomes joined to a different man, she will be divinely-called, an adulteress. But if the husband dies, she is free from the law, she is not an adulteress, even if she had become joined to a different man. So-then my brethren, you* were also slain to the law through the body of Christ; * that* you* should become joined to a different one, that is to him who was raised up from the dead, that* we might bear-fruit to God. For* when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were through the law, was working in our members, * that* they might bear-fruit to death. But now we have been discharged {Greek: done-away} from the law, having died in that in which we were being held; so-that we serve* in newness of the spirit and not in oldness of the writing.*

-- Led by the Spirit, one is free from both the condemnation and obligation of the Law

C. HOW IS ONE "LED BY THE SPIRIT"...?

1. "The Spirit leads both **externally** and **internally**.
Externally, the Spirit supplies the gospel truth as set forth in the New Testament, and the rules and precepts therein found are for the instruction and guidance of God's children. Internally, the Spirit aids by ministering strength and comfort to the disciple in his effort to conform to the revealed truth and will of God." - **J.W. McGarvey** and **Philip Y. Pendleton**, Thessalonians, Corinthians, Galatians and Romans, p. 361 commenting on **Romans 8:14: *For* as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.***
2. The Spirit leads us **externally through the Word**
 - a. The Word is the instrument used by the Spirit to instruct and convict
 1. The Spirit was sent to convict the world
- **John 16:7-11: *But I tell you* the truth. It is advantageous for you* that* I should go away; for* if I do not go away, the Helper* will not come to you* , but if I go-onward, I will send him to you* . And when* he has come, that one will convict the world concerning sin and concerning righteousness and concerning judgment. Concerning sin, indeed, because they did not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I am going to my Father and you* view me no more; and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.***
 2. The Spirit guided the apostles into all the truth
- **John 16:12-13: *I still have many things to say to you* , but you* are not able to bear them now. 16:13But whenever that one, the Spirit of the truth, comes, he will guide you* into all the truth; for* he will not speak from himself, but as many things as he may hear, these he will speak, and he will report to you* the things that are to come.***

3. Thus, the Word is the **"sword"** (instrument) used by the Spirit – see also **Ephesians 6:17: *also, able to accept the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,***
- b. To resist the Word is to resist the Spirit
 1. As when Israel resisted the inspired word given through prophets - **Acts 7:51-53: *You * are stiff-necked and non-circumcised in heart and ears. You * are habitually defying the Holy Spirit just like your * fathers did, so do you * ! Which of the prophets did your * fathers not persecute? And they killed those who proclaimed beforehand God's message concerning the coming of the Righteous One; of whom you * have now become betrayers and murderers. You * who received the law at the commandment from God's messengers and did not observe it.***
 2. As when we resist the inspired word given through apostles - **1Corinthians 14:36-37: *What? Was it from you * that the word of God went forth? Or did it arrive only * for you * ? If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him fully know of the things which I write to you * , that they are the commandments from the Lord.***
 - c. When one sets their mind on the things of the Spirit (i.e., His revealed Word)...
 1. They will live according to the Spirit - **Romans 8:5: *For * those who are according to the flesh are mindful of the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit are mindful of the things of the Spirit.***
 2. They will experience life and peace - **Romans 8:6: *For * the mindset of the flesh is death, but the mindset of the Spirit is life and peace;***
 - d. When one walks in the Spirit (by heeding His Word)...

1. They will not fulfill the lust of the flesh
- **Galatians 5:16: *But I am saying, walk by the Spirit and you* may never* complete the lust of the flesh.***
2. They will be thus led by the Spirit - **Galatians 5:18: *But if you* are led by the Spirit, you* are not under the law.***
3. They will produce the fruit of the Spirit
- **Galatians 5:22-25: *But the fruit of the Spirit is love* , joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, meekness, and self-control. There is no law against such. But those who are of Christ have crucified the flesh together with the passions and its lusts. If we live by the Spirit, we should also march by the Spirit. Do not become conceited, inflaming one another, envying one another.***

-- Do you desire to be led by the Spirit? Let Him lead you through His Word!

3. The Spirit leads us **internally through His indwelling**
 - a. By strengthening the inner man...
 1. God is at work in the Christian - **Ephesians 3:20: *Now to him who is able to do, exceptionally beyond all things, what we are asking or are perceiving, according to the power, which is working in us,***
 2. Even as we work out our own salvation
- **Philippians 2:12-13: *So-then my beloved, just-as you* have always obeyed* , not only as in my presence, but now much more in my absence, work out your* own salvation with fear and trembling. For* it is God who is working in you* both to will and to work, on behalf of his delight. 4:13: *I am strong in all things in Christ, who is empowering me.****
 3. The instrument by which God strengthens the Christian is His Spirit in the inner man

- **Ephesians 3:16:** *that* he may give you* , according to the riches of his glory, to be powerful with his power, through his Spirit in the inward man; see also 1Corinthians 6:19: Or do you* not know that your* body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you* , whom you* have from God? And you* are not your* own;*

4. By His Spirit, we are able to put to death the deeds of the body - **Romans 8:13:** *for* if you* live according to the flesh, you* are about to die, but if you* slay the practices of the body in spirit, you* will live.*

5. In this way the Spirit likewise leads us - **Romans 8:14:** *For* as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. Romans 8:11: But if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus up from the dead is dwelling in you* , he who raised the Christ up from the dead will also give-life to your* mortal bodies through his Spirit who is dwelling in you* .*

b. In conjunction with the Word...

1. When we make effort to heed the Word, the Spirit aids us

a. Supplying what strength, we may need

b. So that which is produced may rightly be called the fruit' of the Spirit

2. To illustrate, consider the development of a Christ-like character

a. Peter reminds us of the need for diligence on our part – **2 Peter 1:5-10:** *who, in the power of God, are being kept through faith to a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In which you* are glad, having been made sorrowful in various tests, it is only now for a few moments; if it is essential that* the trial of*

your faith, (being much more precious than gold, which is perishing), even now being tested through fire, may be found* for praise and honor and to glory in the revelation of Jesus Christ. You* love* whom, you* have not seen {Or: known}; now you* believe in whom you* do not see; in both you* are glad with unspeakable and glorified joy; getting to the end of your* faith, that is the salvation of your* souls. Concerning which salvation, the prophets, who prophesied concerning the grace that should come to you* , sought out and searched out;*

- b. Paul explains these qualities produced are the 'fruit of the Spirit - **Galatians 5:22-23: But the fruit of the Spirit is love* , joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, meekness and self-control. There is no law against such. But those who are of Christ have crucified the flesh together with the passions and its lusts.***

-- Do you desire to be led by the Spirit? Let Him strengthen you as you obey His Word!

-- Christians are led by the Spirit externally as they are taught by the Word, and internally by His strengthening the inner man as they strive to obey the Word

CONCLUSION

1. Paul has more to say about:

- a. The works of the flesh and their jeopardy to our souls - **Galatians 5:19-21: Now the works of the flesh are apparent, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, unbridled-lusts, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousies, furies, selfish***

ambitions, dissensions, sects, envies, murders, drunkenness, revelings and things similar to these; which I am telling to you beforehand, also justas I did say to you* beforehand, that those who are practicing similar things- they will not inherit the kingdom of God!*

- b.** The fruit of the Spirit and the blessedness He provides
 - **Galatians 5:22-23:** *But the fruit of the Spirit is love * , joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, meekness, and self-control. There is no law against such.*

2. What Paul has said so far is this:

- a. There is a great conflict between the flesh and the Spirit
- b. Only those who walk in the Spirit and are led by the Spirit experience true freedom

In the battle of "**The Flesh Versus The Spirit**", which side are you on? Are you being led by your own fleshly lusts, or by the Spirit of God? Eternal consequences hang in the balance...!