

78 – SPIRIT vs. Flesh, Works, and Law

The question Paul has asked the Galatians throughout the first 4 chapters of his letter to them is, essentially, after hearing the truth of freedom granted by the grace of God in Christ Jesus, are you going to try to win that grace by the fleshly adherence to rules and regulations in the law of Moses, just because of people who are jealous of your inclusion in God's grace? Will you join yourself to Isaac -- the child of the free woman, or to Ishmael -- the child of the slave woman? Paul could ask the same question of Christians in churches throughout the world today.

Galatians 5:1

1 For freedom Christ frees us! Stand firm, then, and be not again enthralled with the yoke of slavery.

"enthralled" means "hemmed in, entangled, ensnared; also to hold in or hold within" -- today, we hear people talk about holding things inside, and we know the toll that takes in the spirit, soul and even in the physical body ...that's the idea of enthralled. Notice Paul says don't go there AGAIN! It's like, *"You just got free from your own enthrallment with your heathen practices...now you want to go there again with Jewish ones? What are you thinking?"*

Galatians 5:2-4

2 Lo! **I, Paul, am saying to you** that if you should be circumcising, Christ will benefit you nothing.

3 Now I am attesting again to every man who is circumcising, that he is a debtor to do the whole law.

4 Exempted from Christ were you who are being justified in law. You fall out of grace.

Circumcision, which was once THE badge of privilege in the past, Paul likened to a sign of apostasy. Instead of leading to salvation -- according to the Judaizers whom Paul fought against -- circumcision, as a purely fleshly act of religious ritual, lead to exemption from Christ, and gave no room for grace to operate.

Paul makes a bold declaration in verse 4 (read it again above): Notice that one who falls into sin is not mentioned as one who falls out of grace. That one comes under the grace that "superexceeds":

Romans 5:20

where sin increases, grace superexceeds...

In Galatians 4, it is the one attempting to establish his own salvation through works of law who falls out of grace by repudiating it, giving it no room to operate. Most of us have probably heard the term "falling out of grace." In my experience, it was misapplied to

one who sinned; but Paul gives its REAL meaning as one who, despite Christ's complete atoning death and victorious resurrection, which ushered in the grace of God for the forgiveness of all mankind's sins, and the changing of mankind sin nature into one of God's righteousness in Christ, some still have the mistaken notion that salvation can be won by individual effort. Paul effectively declares that striving for salvation, nullifies Christ, and removes one from God's grace which is only present when we are located in Christ. All that is implicit in his bold statement in Galatians 5:4.

Paul now gives the positive side of his previous point in verse four and establishes the most important principle so far:

Galatians 5:5-6

5 For we, in spirit, are awaiting the expectation of righteousness by faith.

6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision is availing anything, nor uncircumcision, but **faith, operating through love.**

What avails most; that is what makes strong? (the word, "avail," means, literally, be strong)? Verse 6: "***Faith, operating through love.***" Notice that it is not only faith, "***but faith operating THROUGH love.***" It is not BY love, FOR Love, or even IN love that faith operates, but **THROUGH** love; love is the channel or agent because of which faith operates. "***Operate***" is Ener-ge-o is Greek, from which we get the word energy. So, one more time, let's look at **Galatians 5:6** again:

6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision is availing anything, nor uncircumcision, but **faith, operating through love.**

Let's quickly review what faith is:

Hebrews 11:1

faith is an **assumption** of what is being **expected**, a **conviction** concerning matters which are **not** being **observed**

Righteousness is by faith—How was faith reckoned first?

Romans 4:3

Abraham **believes God**, and it is reckoned to him for righteousness

Christ Himself IS our righteousness. He, more than anyone in history, believed God. His righteousness is imputed into us when we believe ON Him; that is, when we believe God on account of Christ, Who died FOR us who deserved it!

Now, let's flesh out **Galatians 5:6**: "***In Christ Jesus, it doesn't count whether you're circumcised or not -- no one is made strong by either way. Faith, however; that is, faith that is energized because of or by the agency of love...THAT'S what makes strong.***"

Now we come to one of my favorite verses:

Galatians 5:7

7 You raced ideally! Who **hinders** you not to be persuaded by the truth?
“You were doing so well...who got you so far off balance that the truth was no longer persuasive?” Of course, Paul knew the answer to his question...He had **faced** the troublemakers in Jerusalem only a little before writing this letter. His question here is rhetorical, as if to say, *“Who could have possibly taken your hearts and minds captive, so that you were no longer persuaded by the truth? Who could have persuaded you more than the truth itself? Who carried greater authority than the truth, which we had given you while we were with you?”*

Galatians 5:8

8 This persuasion is not of Him Who is calling you.
Paul says, *“Hey! Christ -- Who’s the One Who called you, by the way -- has nothing to do with where you’ve gone here. He’s nowhere in this!”*

Now Paul re-phrases a principle Jesus introduced in John 16 . . .

Galatians 5:9

9 A little leaven is leavening the whole kneading.

John 16:6

“see and take heed of the leaven of the Pharisees.”

Pharisees challenged Paul the same way they challenged Jesus! The religious can’t STAND the grace of God and the liberty of the spirit it produces.

Galatians 5:10

10 I have confidence in you in the Lord that in nothing you will be disposed otherwise.

Now he who is disturbing you shall be bearing his judgment, whosoever he may be.

11 Now I, brethren, if I am still heralding circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? Consequently **the snare of the cross of Christ** has been nullified.

“The SNARE of the Cross of Christ.” SNARE = “Skandal-on” in Greek. That’s where our word “scandal” came from. It means, *“a means of tripping or falling.”* The cross of Christ, Paul said, IS a means of tripping or falling...if someone can trip or fall over the cross of Christ, they SHOULD! This is the wisdom of God that disgraces the wise...the weakness of the world to disgrace the strong...the ignoble (the “unbecoming”) and contemptible things to discard what is. (**1 Cor. 1**)

So, Paul says, *“If I’m still preaching circumcision, as if that were something that earned a place with God, why is anyone having a problem with me...and if I WERE still*

preaching circumcision, Christ's cross -- which is DESIGNED to trip people who can be tripped -- it's been discarded, exempted, abolished, made unproductive!"

"May it not be coming to that," as Paul so often says!

Galatians 5:12

12 Would that those who are raising you to **insurrection** struck themselves off also!

Insurrection is to upset or unsettle minds by disseminating religious error

13 For you were called for freedom, brethren, only use not the freedom for an incentive to the flesh, but through love be slaving for one another.

14 For the **entire law is fulfilled** in one word, in this: "You shall love your associate as yourself."

Paul quoted Jesus' words, which we read in **John 13:34**:

34 "A new precept am I giving to you, that you be loving one another; according as I love you, that you also be loving one another.

35 By this all shall be knowing that you are My disciples, if you should be having love for one another."

Later, Paul calls this "*the law of Christ*" Remember what this love looks like. This is Agape; love for sake of the truth, which requires a ruthless obedience to the truth and the will of God, no matter how much it hurts in the short term for the maturity worked out in the long term. You treat yourself that way, and everyone else too. And look WHY Paul had to write that last bit...

Galatians 5:15

15 Now if you are biting and devouring one another, beware that you may not be consumed by one another.

16 Now I am saying, **Walk in spirit**, and you should under no circumstances be consummating the lust of the flesh.

"Consummate" is "Tele-o" in Greek. It's the same word that shows up elsewhere as finish or accomplish. It's NOT a cessation. Paul says here, "*If you'll walk in spirit you won't be finishing, accomplishing, consummating the lust of the flesh.*" Paul did NOT say that you won't HAVE lusts of the flesh -- he didn't say all those lusts would just disappear...he just said you won't go all the way *down* those roads, 'cause the spirit will convict you and you'll see your error and stop before it's too late; not out of law, but out of a pure heart toward God.

Here's the Concordant Commentary on Verse 16:

Here is the divine prescription for our most troublesome problem—the flesh. Every attempt to directly control the flesh, to curb it or cure it must end in failure. The only

way to deal with it is to ignore it. In the epistle to the Romans this is fully set forth under the figure of death. Here the conflict between flesh and spirit is met by such complete occupation with the spirit, that no opportunity is left for the flesh to accomplish its desires.

What I learned here is to me monumental: I've always considered "lusts" as evil, but the word in Greek is the same for desire and yearning. As usual, it is the context that determines the meaning. Paul's use of the word is in order to call attention to ANY effort to control the desires of the flesh, whether good OR bad! They're all included in Paul's prescription for failure, precisely because the efforts themselves are opposed to—they deny—the grace of God! It doesn't matter how noble my own desires may be, they are still classified as "lusts" as far as God is concerned, when they are out of my inspiration and not His by the Holy Spirit! Let me say this another way: when my efforts are out of my own desire—whether that desire may be perceived as good and right—and is apart from the revelation by the spirit of God to me—I'm involved in "lust"—I am literally in opposition to the spirit. Paul is about to make that case in verse 17.

Galatians 5:17

17 For the flesh **is lusting** against the spirit, yet the spirit against the flesh. Now these **are opposing** one another, *Notice this is PRESENT TENSE!* lest you should be doing whatever you may want. **It's a darned good thing that the spirit is "against the flesh as much as the flesh is against the spirit -- and the spirit is stronger, Praise God! Otherwise, we'd be following those lusts, sure as shootin'!**

18 Now, if you are led by spirit, you are not still under law. **The two just don't go together. You can't mix the law with the spirit -- it's one or the other.**

19 Now apparent are **the works** of the flesh, **Paul does not call the list that follows the FRUITS of consummating the lusts of the flesh. He calls them The WORKS – the Acts. OK, here's the list:** which are adultery, prostitution, uncleanness, wantonness,

20 idolatry, enchantment, enmities, strife, jealousies, furies, factions, dissensions, sects, 21 envies, murders, drunkennesses, revelries, and the like of these, which, I am predicting to you, according as I predicted also, that those committing such things shall not be enjoying the allotment of the kingdom of God. **Notice, Paul had no need to lay down the gauntlet of hell or torment. He didn't need to; missing out on the kingdom is punishment enough, especially as his and other revelations in the scriptures describe what WILL happen when the spirit is ignored in favor of consummating the lust of the flesh, which I am saying is tantamount to mocking God...and God will not be mocked. Now...Paul moves on to describe the fruits of the spirit. These we would do well to consummate!**

22 Now the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

23 meekness, self-control: against such things there is no law.

24 Now those of Christ Jesus **Those who belong to Him** crucify the flesh together with its passions, and lusts. **We don't just put the flesh to death—and notice WE DO IT!—we give it the kind of death it deserves; a death reserved for the worst kind of criminal.**

25 If we may be living **in** spirit, in spirit we may be observing **the elements** also. **“the elements”** refers to the principles contained in the Law of Moses. Here Paul says, **“We end up ‘attending to’ or satisfying the elements AUTOMATICALLY IF we are living IN Spirit. That which was and is impossible to do in the flesh is satisfied when our lives are located IN the spirit. In the spirit, we won't injure anyone, so there is no need for a list of legal prohibitions against it. This is perhaps the single biggest difference between walking in the spirit and walking in the flesh. Even when a flesh walk may appear righteous according to law, it is still opposing the spirit.**

26 We may not become **vainglorious** **“Empty-Seeming,” conceited, challenging** [or provoking] one another, envying one another. **Envying is having “ill will due to covetousness.”**

Paul ends this chapter on a sober note, and an admonishing tone: *“Here's what we don't do, IF we're walking in the spirit (referring to the context of verses 22-25): we don't appear empty (all show and blow with no substance); we don't make each other crazy, and we honor one another by thinking the best of them rather than resenting what they have that we don't. All this stuff comes out of a spirit of discontent and it dishonors Christ, is demeans the price He paid for us to even be able to live in spirit, and it disrespects one another as brothers and sisters in the Body of Christ.”*

Galatians 6

1 Brethren, if a man should be precipitated, also, in some offense, you, who are spiritual, be attuning such a one, in a spirit of meekness, noting yourself, that you, also, may not be tried.

Precipitated = surprised or detected

Offense = that which wounds the feelings

Attuning = adjust – mend, put in order, strengthen, perfect, complete, make one what he ought to be

Meekness = mildly submissive (as opposed to superiority)

Noting yourself = recognize your own character honestly

Basically, Paul says, “Look out for one another; if one of you is taken by surprise or detected in something that wounds another's feelings; adjust, mend, strengthen,

and put him or her in order; but do it carefully, gently, out of a true assessment and knowledge of yourself, so you can stay out of trouble too.

Galatians 6:2

2 Bear one another's burdens, and thus fill up the law of Christ. Go back to Gal.

5:14: *"You shall love your associate as yourself."*

3 For if anyone is supposing himself to be anything, being nothing, he is imposing on himself. [He is deceiving his own mind]

4 Now let each one be testing his own work, and then he shall be having his boast for himself alone, and not for another,

5 for each one shall be bearing his own load. Note the word "load"—something to be carried—as opposed to "burden" which means "heavy". We can handle this weight...Just like Jesus said, My "LOAD" is light (Matthew 11:30).

This section, verses 2-5 sounds a bit like Paul's instruction to the Thessalonians in **1 Thessalonians 4:11-12**: "be ambitious to be quiet, and to be engaged in your own affairs, and to be working with your hands, according as we charge you, that you may be walking respectably toward those outside and you may have need of nothing."

Galatians 6:6

6 Now let him who is being instructed in the word be contributing to him who is instructing, in all good things.

7 Be not deceived, God is not to be sneered at, for whatsoever a man may be sowing, this shall he be reaping also,

8 for he who is sowing for his own flesh, from the flesh shall be reaping corruption, yet he who is sowing for the spirit, from the spirit shall be reaping life eonian.

9 Now we may not be despondent [utterly spiritless, to be wearied out, exhausted] in ideal doing, for in due season we shall be reaping, if we do not faint.

10 Consequently, then, as we have occasion, we are working for [or toward] the good of all, yet specially for [or toward] the family of [the] faith.

11 Lo! with what size letters I write to you with my own hand!

12 Whoever are wanting to put on a fair face in the flesh, these are compelling you to circumcise only that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ Jesus.

13 For not even they who are circumcising are maintaining law, but they want *you* to be circumcised that they should be boasting in that flesh of yours.

14 Now may it not be mine to be boasting, except *in* the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. That is a major declaration

15 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything, but a new creation.

16 And **whoever shall observe the elements by this rule, peace be on them, and**

mercy, also on the Israel of God. Here, Paul distinguishes two groups: one -- the Body of Christ, who are "observing the elements by the rule of new creations -- on them peace rests, and the other -- the Israel of God -- on which mercy rests.

17 For the rest, let no one **afford me weariness**, for I am bearing in my body the brand marks of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul says, "Look, I know what this evangel has cost me already, so anyone who has a problem with what I've said on God's behalf needs to just get a grip and give me a break. We ought to be way past this stuff, and it gives me a headache, so knock it off.

18 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brethren! Amen!