

GALATIANS - SERMON 37
GALATIANS 5:24-26 — WALKING IN THE SPIRIT
Pastor Max Doner, Sovereign Grace Bible Church Lebanon, Oregon
6 September 1998

INTRODUCTION: Read Galatians 5:14-26

The larger context of Galatians 5:14-26 provides the framework for our study of verses 24-26. Two lists of character traits are contrasted in this larger passage; the works of the flesh (vv 19-21) and the fruit of the Spirit (vv 22-23). The contrast is sharp. The works of the flesh are the behaviors and attitudes of those who will NOT inherit the kingdom of God. The behaviors described under the heading of the fruit of the Spirit belong to those who WILL inherit the kingdom of God. Each of the components of the fruit of the Spirit are aspects and attributes of God and hence characteristics of those who are saved.

The significant question to ask is - which list characterizes me? In this life we will truly not follow one list and its characteristics exclusively. The lost may occasionally manifest one or more of the character traits represented by the fruit of the Spirit, but this will not be the larger persuasion of their character. Occasionally a saved individual will manifest some of the works of the flesh though he will primarily be characterized by the fruit of the Spirit. This is one of the ways we can know that we belong to Christ for by their fruit they shall be known.

OUTLINE:

- I THE DECLARATION MADE: GALATIANS 5:24
- II THE EXHORTATION GIVEN: GALATIANS 5:25
- III THE WARNING ISSUED: GALATIANS 5:26

I THE DECLARATION MADE, GALATIANS 5:24

And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

A Declarative statement

This is not an exhortation. It is a declaration. This is a statement of fact. Paul says that there is a distinctive mark that characterizes those who are living in union with Jesus Christ. Those who belong to Jesus Christ will have done something that particularly marks them out as those belonging to Jesus Christ. That thing which they have done is contained in the phrase - *crucified the flesh*.

According to the grammar of the passage (3rd person plural aorist active indicative) this is not something that these people are doing now. It is not something they hope to do in the future. It is something they have already done in a definitive act in their past experience. They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh. It is a past experience. Furthermore, it is something that every Christian has done for all of those who belong to Christ have done it. As it reads - the ones who belong to Christ (now) have crucified (already) the flesh. It is a universal and infallible mark of the true Christian. There are no exceptions.

B What is this crucifixion of the flesh? When did this crucifixion occur?

To crucify something means to put it to death. The imagery is to the Roman practice of capital punishment upon a cross. The purpose of the nailing to the cross was that the life might be taken and death occur. To crucify the flesh means to put the flesh to death. Death is separation (soul and body are separated).

What happens to every believers is this. He makes a definitive separation from the flesh with its lusts and affections by means of a decisive repentance toward sin. In his conversion he declares war on the passions and desires of the flesh. He determines to separate himself from those desires and passions. And by the enablement from the new nature which he receives from God and the assistance of the Holy Spirit, the believer decisively separates himself from the works of the flesh and its lusts.

The act of repentance is the act of crucifixion. Repentance is, in effect, a dying to sin. It is an act of crucifixion, putting sin out of the sphere of our personal behavior.

C An important qualification.

It is important to make a necessary qualification at this place. This death to the flesh and its works is obviously not a perfect death. Hence, in verse 26 of this passage we are warned of the possibility of falling back into the sins called works of the flesh.

Galatians 5:26

Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

Envy is one of the works of the flesh. Having separated from sin, the believer must be careful not to fall back in to it again. So we can conclude that crucifying the flesh is a definitive work but not a perfect work. The possibility of falling back into sin remains. There are times when we temporarily lose our separation from this or that aspect of the flesh and its desires and passions. The fact remains that the separation we made at conversion from the flesh, its passions and its desires, is of such a comprehensive and radical nature, that though it is not a perfect separation, it can still be called a death or crucifixion to the flesh.

The conclusion and implication of the matter is that those who are saved and belong to Christ have experienced at conversion and continue to maintain throughout their lives a separation between themselves and the flesh and its works so as to be no more characterized by them or live in them. Believers become strangers to the works of the flesh in the habit and practice of their lives. This is a statement of fact. Verse 24 is a declarative statement, not something to be wished.

D An important distinction.

This is not to be confused with the with the death of sin which we experience in the initial act of sanctification in the taking out of the old nature and the implantation of the new. That is a work of God as the result of regeneration. The act in question in our text is a work of man, the result of definitive repentance. This text in Galatians 5 is not saying that we crucify the old man for that is something only God can do. What we are to crucify is the flesh, which is something entirely different from the old man - old nature. The flesh is the imbalanced appetites of the human body. Galatians 5:24 is not parallel to Romans 6.

In Romans 6 the statement is that our old man has been crucified. It speaks of something passive to us, something that God has done. However, in Galatians 5

something very different is addressed. The flesh is not the same as the old man / old nature. Clarity on this point of distinction is helpful to a right and accurate understanding of the doctrine of sanctification.

II THE EXHORTATION GIVEN: GALATIANS 5:25

If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

Verse 25 includes the exhortation which assumes a particular condition - *if we live in the Spirit*. True salvation is assumed. Every true believer lives in the Spirit. Paul is assuming that this exhortation is applicable to every true Christian and only to Christians.

Romans 8:9

But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.

Since this is the case with every believer, then we are therefore exhorted to *walk in the Spirit*. This exhortation is the same command given to us in verse 16, . . . *walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.*

Though the word for walk in verse 16 differs from the word used in verse 25, the command is the same. To walk in the Spirit means - to conduct ourselves in a relationship with the Spirit. This way maintains and deepens our relationship with the Holy Spirit. The way in which we conduct ourselves in a way that maintains and deepens our relationship with the Spirit is by;

- 1 praying earnestly for greater measures of the Spirit's influence (Luke 11:13, Eph 1:16)
- 2 listening to the voice of the Spirit (by the Word, consciences, and gathered church)
- 3 cultivating an attitude of conscious dependence upon the Spirit (Zech 4:6)
- 4 exercising faith in the Spirit (Heb 11:6)
- 5 discovering, developing, and exercising our spiritual gift.

By walking in the Spirit and conducting ourselves in a way that maintains and deepens our relationship with the Spirit we will be enabled to maintain that initial repentance and separation from the works of the flesh that occurred at our conversion.

Romans 8:13

For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

There is an initial definitive separation from the works of the flesh at conversion. There must also be an on-going maintenance of that division and separation from the works of the flesh throughout our lives. Walking in the Spirit is the way of maintaining this separation.

III THE WARNING ISSUED: GALATIANS 5:26

Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

The warning is that we can lose our separation from the works of the flesh in particular areas and fall back into conceit (pride), provocative - irritating behavior towards our brethren, and into envy (jealousy). This is possible if we do not maintain our separation from the works of the flesh by walking in the Spirit. The best way to overcome the tendency fall back into the works of the flesh is to walk in the Spirit manifesting the fruit of the Spirit in our lives.

To seek to cultivate the works of the Spirit in our lives is the best way to combat the works of the flesh. The works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit are contrary to one another. To employ one is to exclude the other. If you are exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit you will not manifest the works of the flesh.

Conclusion:

With this material we can examine ourselves. Christians can fall into any of the sins described under the heading of works of the flesh. True Christians will not fall into those sins comprehensively, characteristically, or continuously. The reason for this is because that initial death to sin at regeneration was and is such that true believers cannot go fully back into sin.

There are some sins into which we can fall and continue, but those described by the heading of the works of the flesh are not among those sins. Only temporary declensions into those sins is possible. Nevertheless, there is a real danger of occasional declensions and the antidote to such is - *walking in the Spirit*. We are to conduct ourselves in such a way as to maintain and deepen our relationship with the Holy Spirit. This is done by the guidelines given:

The way in which we conduct ourselves in a way that maintains and deepens our relationship with the Spirit is by;

- 1 praying earnestly for greater measures of the Spirit's influence
- 2 listening to the voice of the Spirit (by the Word, conscience, and gathered church)
- 3 cultivating an attitude of conscious dependence upon the Spirit
- 4 exercising faith in the Spirit
- 5 discovering, developing, and exercising our spiritual gift.

If we will do the above we will not fulfil the lusts of the flesh.

Hymn # 460 (2nd tune)