

Christ Reformation Church

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Breathing the Fresh Air of Liberty in Jesus Christ

Galatians 5:1 For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

“We Don’t Live There Anymore”

March 9, 2014

Sermon Text: Galatians 5:16-26

Scripture Reading:

Introduction-

Gal 5:16-26 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. (17) For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you

from doing the things you want to do. **(18) But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.**

(19) Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, (20) idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, (21) envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. **I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.**

(22) But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, (23) gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

(24) And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

(25) If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. (26) Let us

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

Before we move on to chapter 6, it is important that we are very clear on this vital section of Paul's letter found here in 5:16-26. We have already considered how this describes the Christian's life and experience. We must not be surprised nor unduly discouraged when we see and feel our sinful flesh rebelling against the Spirit. This is the very nature of the Christian's experience in this present life. Spirit warring against flesh. Flesh warring against the Spirit. What we can know, as we experience this leading of the Spirit to do the will of God, is that we ARE in Christ. Because this dynamic does NOT exist in the unregenerate man.

Christian, you ARE the Spirit. By that, I mean that what the Spirit of God is leading you to do and think, IS what YOU want. The new you. The new creation. All the desires that come from your flesh are not you. So yield to the Spirit and *be who you now are*.

Not Under the Law

Verse 18 is a statement of a very important principle:

“But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.”

This is just the same thing as saying that a Christian is not under the law. Because every Christian IS led by the Spirit. Necessarily then, every Christian is not under the law. Let's be certain we understand what that means:

Rom 2:12 For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law.

Gal 3:23 Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed.

Gal 4:4-5 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, (5) to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

Gal 4:21 Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law?

Heb 9:22 Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.

To be “under the law” is to be bound by the law. It is to be obligated to the

demands of the law. It is to relate to God through the commands and prohibitions of the Old Covenant. It is to be judged by the law and by how well or how poorly we meet its demands, and thus it is to be condemned by the law. It is to be judged by God based upon our works rather than by the righteousness of Christ.

Every person who is not regenerated, every human being who is still separate from Christ, is *under the law*. They are obligated to perfectly perform every command of the law, and of course that is impossible. So to be under the law is to be under the condemnation of the law. It is to be at the thundering of Mt. Sinai—

Heb 12:18-24 For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest (19) and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. (20) For they could not endure the order that was given, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned." (21) Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear."

No, this is the Christian's experience:

(22) But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, (23) and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, (24) **and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant**, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

The Christian is NOT under the law. Christ has fully taken the demands and condemnation of the law away by his perfect life and by his atoning death on the cross. As Hebrews says, *the Christian has a new mediator and a new covenant. Jesus, not Moses. The New Covenant, not the Old*. We are sprinkled with blood that really does cleanse and make us whiter than snow, something the blood of the Old Covenant could never do.

What Happens When a Christian Reverts to the Law?

When a Christian starts believing that the way to please God is by means of his own works (and a Christian can easily slide into this very kind of thinking), trouble is just around the corner. Let me explain.

1. Paul has instructed us here in Gal 5 that the way to get victory over sin is to *walk in the Spirit*. To go where the Spirit is leading and do what He is guiding us to, and follow Him as He directs us away from other things. Walk in the Spirit. There it is.
2. But if we attempt to please God, to conquer sin, to pursue holiness *by means of the law* then we are going to fail. This is why a legalistic environment of rules that supposedly ensure holiness never works. Why?
3. Because, *the law is the power of sin*.

1Co 15:56 The sting of death is sin, and **the power of sin is the law**.

Rom 5:20 **Now the law came in to increase the trespass**, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,

Rom 7:5-8 For while we were living in the flesh, **our sinful passions, aroused by the law**, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. (6) But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code. (7) What

then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." (8) But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead.

This is what a "law approach" to God does every time.

Legalism is an attempt to put our sinful flesh to death BY our sinful flesh!

The law, any approach to God that seeks to earn His favor by keeping some set of rules, will empower our flesh, it will increase our sin, it will arouse our sinful passions, it will produce in us the very sin we are trying to conquer. Why? Because that is the nature of our flesh. Our sinful flesh *will not be subject to God's Law*. What it does instead is produce sin in all its forms –

- Sexual immorality
- Impurity
- Sensuality
- Idolatry
- Sorcery
- Enmity
- Strife

- Jealously
- Fits of anger
- Rivalries
- Dissensions
- Divisions
- Envy
- Drunkenness
- Orgies
- And on and on and on the list goes

Now, the Christian must realize that he/she CAN walk in the Spirit. Why? Because even though our sinful flesh can really scream at us and be quite demanding, the fact of the matter is that Paul says *the flesh has been crucified along with its passions and desires*. Which means that when we died with Christ through faith in Him, our old RULER died. Our old Master was put to death. His power was broken on the cross. We were set free from the demands of the Law and the power of our sin was defeated.

Surely this battle is what Paul is speaking of here in passages like these:

Php 2:12-13 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, (13) for it is God who works in you,

both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Php 3:1-3 Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you. (2) Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. (3) For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh--

Col 2:21-23 "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch" (22) (referring to things that all perish as they are used)--according to human precepts and teachings? (23) These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

Col 3:5-10 Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. (6) On account of these the wrath of God is coming. (7) In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. (8) But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. (9)

Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices (10) and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

But let's be very, very clear on this. *The way that we fight this battle is that we put no confidence in the flesh. That is, we do not turn to man-made regulations such as do not taste, do not touch, etc. These are of NO value in this fight!* No, we put to death "what is earthly in us" (the flesh) by the Spirit. He IS leading you, Christian. Hear Him and walk in Him. And I might suggest that you can hear Him much more easily the more that you immerse yourself in God's Word. That is to say, the more perfectly that we know God's will, as revealed in His Word, the more easily we are going to hear the leading of the Spirit.

Now notice something else in regard to this leading of the Spirit. It seems to me that:

Rules and laws are made ahead of time, then we try to obey them. But the leading of the Spirit comes in the moment. One is a code externally written outside of us, while the other is internal, living, and always speaking and leading.

Do we perhaps see something of this in Christ's instruction? –

Mat 10:19-20 When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. (20) For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

This doesn't mean that we don't read our Bibles, nor does it mean that all rules are to be thrown out or that we are never to plan or think about what we are going to say ahead of time. It does mean however that we must look to the Spirit for His leading in all that we do. Even in the rules we make or in the preparations we do.

Pro 3:5-8 Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. (6) In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. (7) Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil. (8) It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones.

Now, this has very practical implications for us, does it not? This means that we must be constantly "tuned in" to the leading of the Spirit. Remember this principle:

Gal 5:17 For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.

Whenever the one desires, the other opposes that desire with its own desire. So you can be assured that when your flesh is doing its thing to lead you to sin, there WILL BE a corresponding and opposing desire of the Spirit, AND that desire is YOU. It is what YOU as a new creation in Christ want. Christ has set us free from the dictatorial power and tyranny of the flesh so that we are free to follow His Spirit. Christian, you do not have to sin!

The Warning of Vs 21

Because the Christian's flesh has been crucified, and because the new dominating power in his life is the Spirit, *the fruit of the Spirit will increasingly be the characteristic walk of his life.* The Christian does not even sin the way he used to! You might say that now, his heart is not in it. And because of this, Paul reminds us that in regard to the deeds of the flesh, *those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

Now let's be certain that we have this very clear in our minds. Paul does not

mean "so you better be sure you do the fruit list and not the deeds of the flesh list or you are going to hell." No, his warning is that this is a fact: a Christian's old flesh has been crucified in Christ so that it no longer is THE defining and dominating power in our life. The Spirit is. Therefore if someone claims to be a Christian but in fact WHO they are has not changed, if they still walk in the flesh and are defined by it so that it is evident that their flesh still reigns, then they are not a Christian. They are not heirs of God's kingdom.

So, Christian – *be who you are.* You are alive by the Spirit of Christ. Therefore, live like it. Walk by the Spirit. Don't permit your flesh to have its way. Don't be conceited, don't provoke others, don't envy one another – those things are the flesh. You are dead to the flesh. It has no right over you any longer.

Notice Paul's emphasis here on *pride*:

- Conceit
- Provoking
- Envy

Earlier, he had warned us against "biting and devouring" one another (vs 15). This is a common trap, is it not? And what lies at the root of it? Self. This ugly thing called "self" which is the same thing as the "flesh." Even

Christians can do this if we fail to put our flesh to death by the Spirit. What is our purpose here in this church? It is to worship God and glorify Christ by our lives. It is to grow in Christ and see more and more of our sin destroyed. Why do we have troubles? Pride. Listen to James –

Jas 3:13-18 Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. (14) But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. (15) This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. (16) For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. (17) But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. (18) And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Jas 4:1-2 What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? (2) You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask.

The Holy Spirit will NEVER lead a Christian to exalt himself. Never. He will never lead us to put ourselves and our desires first to the harm of others. He will never produce jealousy in us or boastfulness. James tells us where that sort of thing comes from –

- The world
- The flesh (unspiritual)
- The devil (demonic)

This is the flesh, and it is ugly. Fights, quarrels, coveting, and even a spirit of murder. The flesh is that wicked. It desires and it WILL have, and if it doesn't get what it wants it will kill.

Gen 4:1-8 Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD." (2) And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. (3) In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, (4) and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, (5) but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. (6) The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? (7) If you do well, will you

not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it." (8) Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him.

Why was Cain angry? Because he was jealous. He killed Abel because Abel was righteous and Cain was not. That is this horrible flesh Paul is speaking of here in Galatians. It used to reign in us, but if you are in Christ it no longer has that right to master you. So we must not permit it to do so. God has given us His Spirit to enable us to put our flesh to death every time it raises up.

I think that you would agree that over the years as we have served the Lord together in this church, the greatest trials we have had – the most typical manner in which this “biting and devouring” has broken out – has not been from –

- False teaching
- Persecution from the world

--but rather it has been from what Paul is warning us against here – the pride, conceit and envying of the flesh. It is what I call the “Diotrepehes Syndrome.”

3Jn 1:9-10 I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. (10) So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us. And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church.

Each one of us must do battle by the Spirit of Christ and put the remnants of Diotrephes within us to death. This craving to be first. It is not from Christ. Each one of us can without doubt find plenty of battling to do within ourselves in this regard. Let’s consider the list of the works of the flesh again, and I will bold-face each one that is “Me First” in nature (really they all are, but we will highlight the most direct ones) –

- Sexual Immorality
- Impurity
- Sensuality
- Idolatry
- Sorcery
- **Enmity**
- **Strife**
- **Jealousy**
- **Fits of anger**
- **Rivalries**
- **Dissensions**
- **Divisions**

- **Envy**
- Drunkenness
- Orgies

Do you find that interesting? Over half are virtual synonyms for pride – me first. Diotrephes.

Through the years we have all struggled with these things in our own selves. But I have no doubt that the elders will agree with me when I make this statement:

The greatest source of grief and misery that we have experienced in these many years of shepherding Christ’s flock has been having to deal with Diotrephes. With people who crave to be first. The chaos and misery such people have caused – well, we could write books and books about it.

You do not want to be such a person. If you do, then you don’t know Christ.

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

Conclusion

Now, this subject of pride brings us right back to the purpose of Galatians. False teachers had invaded these churches with their false gospel of works righteousness. Paul has

repeatedly warned us what their motive is. They want us to be enslaved to them so that we will “make much of them.” In other words, they are motivated by their evil flesh.

Listen to Luther on this as we close:

“Vainglory or arrogance has always been a common poison in the world, vehemently criticized even by the heathen poets and historians. There is no village where someone cannot be found who is wise and more esteemed than all the rest; but those who stand upon their reputation for learning and wisdom are the most infected with this disease. In this case no one will yield to another the praise of wit and skill, for it is good to see people point at you and say, ‘That’s him.’ But it is not as harmful in private individuals or any kind of magistrate as it is in those who are any sort of church leader. Even in civil government this is a cause of trouble, as witnessed by the histories of Scripture and secular writers.

When this poison creeps into the church, the spiritual kingdom, we cannot express how harmful it is, for there it concerns salvation or damnation, eternal life or eternal death. Therefore Paul earnestly exhorts the ministers of the Word to flee from this vice. If it is true that we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.

Nothing is more dangerous to the church than this especially wicked vice, and yet nothing is more common. When God sends laborers into his harvest, Satan soon raises up his ministers also, and they will not be counted inferior in any way to those who are rightly called. Straightaway dissension arises. The wicked will not yield one hair's breadth to the godly, for they imagine that they far surpass them in intelligence, learning, godliness, spirit, and other virtues. Much less ought the godly to yield to the wicked, lest the doctrine of faith come in danger.

Moreover, such is the nature of the ministers of Satan that they can seem good – they are very loving, humble, peace-loving and appear to have other gifts of the Spirit. Also, they protest that they seek nothing but God's glory and the salvation of souls. Yet they are full of vainglory, doing everything simply in order to win people's praise and esteem. In short, they think that gain is godliness (1 Tim 6:5) and that the ministry of the Word is given to them so they can win fame and repute by it. They cannot, therefore, avoid starting dissensions and factions.

Vainglory is a sure sign that neither teachers nor their followers live by the Spirit, but rather follow the sinful nature and do its work. [Luther,

We must guard against such people. And we must guard our hearts from the desires of our own sinful flesh to be first.