

Sunday, September 6, 2020

Bible Study / Galatians 5:13-26 **The Character of Christ [pt. 10]: THE SPIRIT**

Listen to Pastor Maury's sermon for September 6, and then read Galatians 5:13-26.

“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control...” (*Galatians 5:22-23*). These verses lie at the heart of our passage and are held in contrast to the “works of the flesh” which Paul warned against in verses 19-21. These “works of the flesh,” Paul tells us (*Galatians 5:17*) come from the “desires of the flesh,” or our sinful nature. In opposition to these “fleshly works” is the “fruit of the Spirit.” Without the Holy Spirit, that is, the Spirit of Christ (*Romans 8:9*), these qualities cannot be perfected in one's life, and this character of Christ cannot become one's “way of life.” And without the indwelling of the Spirit we cannot put these into practice, live into them, and bear much fruit (*John 15:1-17*).

While Paul would teach the Galatians (and us) that Christ has set us free, and free indeed. Problems can arise if we misunderstand the nature of this freedom. In opposition to some who had infiltrated the Galatian churches, Paul unequivocally states that those under the grace of God through faith are no longer under the law and are therefore free from trying to obtain righteousness through works of the law, which is impossible (*3:1-29; 5:1-12*).

Others took Paul's teaching to claim a laissez-faire way of life where “anything goes”. So, Paul warns that we are not to use our freedom in Christ for selfish gain and “opportunities of the flesh” (v. 13) whereby we end up only “biting and devouring one another” (v. 15).

On the contrary, the freedom for which Christ has freed us is the freedom to love one another unconditionally just as he has loved us. Paul states, “...use your freedom as an opportunity, through love, to serve one another”. This word rendered in most translations as “serve” one another has been softened from the original. Paul is encouraging the Galatian Christians to be “slaves” to one another out of unconditional love for one another.

Imagine the impact that such an ethic might have on a community. Neither under bondage, nor obligation, but through the liberating presence of Christ among us, we submit ourselves to one another in service. I have no need to look out for myself because everyone else in my community is doing that for me. Likewise, I

Sunday, September 6, 2020

see to the needs of those around me, freeing them to serve another...and on...and on...and on it goes...(see *Acts 2:42-47 and 4:32-37*).

This type of selfless service, the freedom that allows for this type of “slavery”, is only possible because of the Holy Spirit (*5:1, 13*). Selfless, unconditional love is the key and this “Love” is only possible through the Holy Spirit. This is why “Love” leads the list among the qualities of the “Fruit” (vv. 22-23). In Paul’s mind, *agapé* is the quality that anchors the other characteristics of the “Fruit of the Spirit”. Indeed, you cannot possess one without the others, but without love (*1 Corinthians 13*), there would be no “Fruit” at all.

And now, looking back at Paul’s contrasting of the “works of the flesh” with the “fruit of the Spirit” — this “Fruit” isn’t “Works”. None of us, through effort (even of the noblest and most righteous quality) can produce this “Fruit”. Neither by works of the law, nor even by works done in the freedom to serve one another, can we produce these qualities ourselves. Paul is clear, the presence of and the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives produces this “Fruit” in us as we walk in step with Him (v. 25).

So, Christ has set us free to give our lives to one another in loving service. And then makes this possible by giving us the Holy Spirit. Christ has set me free to love and serve you unconditionally and His Spirit in me makes this “life of voluntary slavery” possible. Not only this, but in the upside-down-ness of the kingdom (*Mark 8:34-35; Luke 6:27-31; Matthew 20:16, 26-28*) the giving of myself to you in service brings forth the “Fruit of the Spirit”, making me more and more like Christ until His work is completed in me (*Philippians 1:6-11*). The more of myself I give away in loving service to you, the more of myself I receive from Christ through the Holy Spirit. And that’s the Freedom to which we were called (*5:13*).

So, may you live into this Freedom by giving yourself away to your brothers and sisters in Christ. May you find that through your loving service to one another that the Holy Spirit is bringing forth His Fruit in ever increasing abundance. And may we find that Christ is in our midst, making us more and more like Him through it all.

Sunday, September 6, 2020

Questions for Further Reflection

How is Paul's admonition to "serve one another in love" (vv. 13-15) reconciled with his attitude toward those who are in opposition to him (v. 12)? Do you think Paul is good at demonstrating 'tough love'? What does 'tough love' look like in a community where each person "serves one another in love"?

Have you ever seen Christian freedom abused? How does verse 13 challenge those who think their freedom in Christ allows them to do anything they want?

Paul has just warned the Galatians about being enslaved to legalism (5:1-15). What is he warning them about being enslaved to in verses 16-25? What two things are in conflict with each other (v. 17)?

If we were made alive (born again) by the Spirit, why do we still struggle with sin? Is the crucifixion (putting to death) of the sinful nature done *to* or *by* the Christian (v. 24)? How are we led by the Spirit? Which aspects of the Fruit of the Spirit are still 'in the bud' in your life? Which are blossoming?

Recommendation for even further study:

Do a quick search of 'Holy Spirit' in a concordance. What do these passages teach us concerning the work and power of the Holy Spirit to enable us to use our freedom in loving service to one another?

Here are a few of these passages:

John 14:15-17; 14:25-26; 15:26; and 16:4-15

Romans 8:1-15

1 Corinthians 12