Sermon Series: Fruit of the Spirit

Sermon Title: Walk by the Spirit

Scripture: Galatians 5.13-21

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Sunday February 18th, 2024

How many times this past week did you find yourself fighting an internal battle? One part of you wanted something so badly while the other part of you didn’t. Maybe it was a battle for you to come to church today or maybe you wrestled against temptation, doing something you knew you should not do. Maybe it was your temper…one part of you really wanted to lash out while the other part urged restraint. I find myself in the midst of these battles what seems like all the time!

For the Christian, this internal struggle is the war between the flesh and the Spirit. It’s the immediate context to the fruit of the Spirit and it’s what we’ll be focusing on in Galatians 5.13-21.

If you remember, there’s one big problem the Apostle Paul addressed in his letter to the Galatians, the “Jesus and…” problem. The Galatians were seduced by a false gospel that taught they needed more than Jesus, Jesus and…something else, for salvation. Together we’ve affirmed the true gospel, explored the innerworkings of the gospel and observed why it is the way it is, and understood that the Holy Spirit works to glorify Jesus and is involved in every aspect of salvation. But in **Galatians 5.13**, we learn that there was another, perhaps less widespread problem among the Galatians which we ourselves struggle with: the abuse of our freedom in Christ.

**Freedom in Christ**

Paul wrote in **Galatians 5.13**, “You were called to freedom, brothers and sisters. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh.” And then in verse 15 he said, “If you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.”

In the context, this freedom Paul speaks of is not freedom from political oppression or physical slavery but freedom from bondage to the requirement of the law of Moses given in the Old Testament. Paul talked a lot about the law in the previous chapters but it all amounts to this: the law of Moses made people aware of their sin and their inability to escape from sin on their own. The law was never intended to save people[[1]](#footnote-1) but people sought salvation through obedience to the law anyway. This then turned the law into an oppressive master who would never be satisfied.

The law remained that way until Jesus came and fulfilled the law by his perfect obedience and death on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins.

However, if we realize that trying to earn our salvation by great feats of obedience is actually a result of pride and arrogance, then we can understand that the freedom Christ Jesus gives to us is ultimately freedom from slavery to our own sinful human nature, or as Paul might put it, freedom from our flesh.

If we look back at Galatians 5.13, we can understand then that the issue at the heart of using freedom from the law as an opportunity to indulge the flesh is still the same: slavery to our own sinful human nature.

Both issues, adding to the gospel and abusing the freedom afforded by the gospel, are ways our flesh attacks us.

Now, just to be clear, the flesh here in Galatians refers to the sinful nature of humanity. It’s laid out for us by example in verse 19 which says, “**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.” It’s not an exhaustive list but you get the idea that the flesh is purely selfish and has no regard for others.

Christians, freed from slavery to the flesh, are not to use freedom as an opportunity to go back to our flesh. We can’t use the twisted logic that Jesus’ grace covers all therefore, I can do whatever I want because I know I’ll be forgiven.[[2]](#footnote-2) That’s an abuse of our freedom and only demonstrates that we are not free at all but still in bondage.

Instead, Paul says at the end of verse 13, “but through love, serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

What an incredible reversal that is…having been given freedom through Jesus, we are to use our freedom to willingly become servants for others through love. **We are freed to serve through love.**

Loving others by serving them is contrary to our sinful human nature. Everything about being free to serve others through love feels wrong to our flesh because we are naturally selfish. We would much rather that statement say “freed to be served” but it doesn’t. Jesus, God in the flesh, the freest of all, said He came not to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Do you think it’s hard to serve others through love? Don’t we all know how hard it is to stop thinking about ourselves? It’s so hard that we can’t do it on our own…we need help! We need Jesus first of all to save us, but we also need His Spirit to help us kick the habit and become more like our servant King. This is where **Galatians 5.16-18** comes into play.

Having just announced the ultimate purpose of our freedom, serving others through love, Paul commands Christians in verse 16 to walk by the Spirit. If we do, we will not gratify the desires of our sinful flesh. The Holy Spirit then is our help and the means by whom we are able to overcome our sinful nature and serve one another through love.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus and is therefore diametrically opposed to our sinful flesh. Conversely, our sinful flesh is totally opposed to the Holy Spirit dwelling within us. This therefore is the source of our internal conflict. However, there is the promise from Paul that if we walk by the Spirit we will not gratify the desires of the flesh which begs the question, “How do I walk by the Spirit?”

**Walking by the Spirit**

I must admit that this is a difficult question to really nail down with an answer because Paul doesn’t give any more explanation other than the command to do it. But it’s such an important question to answer because walking by the Spirit seems to be the means by which we are able to love others instead of ourselves. It also happens to be the way we will produce the fruit of the Spirit instead of the works of the flesh. What I’m about to present to you is the best answer I can give and I pray that it’s both helpful and appropriate.

To begin, let’s consider the Holy Spirit Himself. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus, and so whatever the answer is, Jesus must be a necessary part. When I consider that the role and joy of the Holy Spirit is to glorify Jesus, I believe that must be directly linked to what it means to walk by the Spirit; if the Holy Spirit works to glorify Jesus, and if the Holy Spirit dwells within us, then the desire of my heart be the same: glorify Jesus. Therefore, at least part of what it means to walk by the Spirit is **having the desire for Jesus.**

When considering the command to walk by the Spirit, I’m reminded of Jesus’ command in John 15 to abide in Him. As a branch abides in the vine, so must believers abide in Jesus. To abide in Jesus is to be connected to Him in such a way that we receive our very life from Him and separated from Him we would die. **John 15.9** gives a pattern useful for understanding. Jesus said, “**9**As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.” What we see from this verse is that the Father loves Jesus and so Jesus obeys the father and loves us. Jesus loves us and so we are to obey Jesus and love others. We are to abide in Jesus’s love which we can only do according to John 15.10 by keeping Jesus’ commandments. What are Jesus’ commandments? They can be summed up in this: **love one another**.[[4]](#footnote-4)

So, walking by the Spirit includes at least these components: desiring Jesus above all and loving one another through the love of Christ.

These are things we can do because the Holy Spirit dwells within the believer. He is already with us and so to walk by the Spirit, we need to reach out to the Holy Spirit for help desiring Jesus and loving one another. And because the Spirit dwells with us, we are able to commune with Jesus through His Spirit. What does this communion look like? Intimate relationship where we submit, confess sin, worship Him, pray to Him, ask Him for help, and obey His commands.

Therefore, because of what God has done for us by saving us, making us a new creation, and giving us His Spirit, He enables us to walk by His Spirit and love one another if only we would hold the Holy Spirit’s hand and go with Him as He leads us to Jesus. After all, if we are led by the Holy Spirit, then we are not under the law but living in the freedom of Christ where we can love one another as God has first loved us.

If we are led by the Spirit to Jesus, then the fruit of the Spirit will grow.

**Abiding in Jesus statements in 1 John**:

1. By this we know that we are in Him: whoever says he abides in Him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. (2.5-6)
2. Whoever loves his brother abides in the light. (2.10)
3. Whoever does the will of God abides forever (2.17)
4. This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as He has commanded us. Whoever keeps His commandments abides in God, and God in him. (3.23-24)
5. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us. (3.24)
	1. By this we know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God. (4.2)
6. If we love one another, God abides in us and His love is perfected in us. (4.12)
7. By this we know that we abide in Him and He is us, because He has given us His Spirit.(4.13)
8. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him and he in God. (4.15)
9. God is love and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. (4.16)
10. This is the commandment we have from Him: whoever loves God must also love his brother. (4.21)
11. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey His commandments (5.2)
	1. This is the love of God: that we keep His commandments (5.3)
	2. His commandments are not burdensome (5.3)

Summary of the above statements: Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God abides in Jesus. We know that we abide in Jesus for these reasons: (1) Jesus gives us His Spirit (4.13) who confesses the truth of Jesus (4.2), (2) we walk in the same way Jesus walked (2.5-6), (3) we keep His commandments by loving one another because we love God who first loved us. (3.23-24, 4.10,21). It’s important to note that there is still commandments to be kept, but as John and Jesus put it, they are not burdensome (1 John 5.3, Matthew 11.30). **These commandments are summed up in the single command to love one another** (4.21)

1. Galatians 3.21 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Romans 6.1-2: Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? **2**By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Mark 10.45 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. For a deeper explanation of abiding in Jesus from the book of 1 John, see the attachment at the end of the sermon manuscript. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)