

**Live by the Spirit
Galatians 5:16-24**

February 17, 2019

16 Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. 19 Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, 21 envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. 22 By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. 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 be guided by the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another.

Galatians is a letter written by the Apostle Paul. He founded the Galatian church on his mission journey. Sometime later he finds out that his work is being undermined. So, he writes this urgent letter to address the crisis there. The Scripture is a bit authoritarian. It is blunt, he is hard hitting, and speaks as a matter of fact. There are two competing concepts that are opposed to each other. You either live by the Spirit or you live by the flesh. This is an "either/or" concept that runs throughout the Bible. It is the same problem - the will of God vs. humanity doing what they want to do. To live by the Spirit is a frequent lesson of the Bible - to live God's way. The same problem exists over, and over, and over again in the Bible. My way or God's way is the same root problem with only different specifics.

The Problem that the apostle Paul faced is that there were people who emphasized obedience to the law of Moses. Now let's stop and think about this. To obey the law of Moses is good. We have the law of Moses. It is in the Bible. We teach obedience to the law of Moses. You know the 10 commandments because Christians preach it and teach it. So, what is that apostle Paul up to in writing this letter about a problem with obedience to the law? Well, before we answer that, we need to try to understand the theology of the apostle Paul.

Paul's theology is based on the gospel of grace. Whereupon, the human being is in a right relationship with God, not through obedience to a code of law, but through the faithfulness of Christ who gave of himself for us. Christ adopted us as children of God. Christ brought us into the family of God. It is a result of Christ's redemption. It is the redemptive death of Christ that brings salvation to us. It is not anything that we have done or can do. We are in covenant with God by God's grace through that saving action of Christ for our sake.

Paul's theology is that the cross liberates us. It is the cross that confirms our status as children of God. Therefore, as God's children, we produce fruit that is pleasing to God. It is the same story, same theme, same song and dance, as many other Bible lessons. You are either ruled by love or ruled by the law. We are obedient out of love and appreciation as opposed to being obedient out of the fear of punishment. Within the realm of Paul's theology, we are one in Jesus, bound together by love and faith. Therefore, the things that separate us, such as rituals and circumcision are invalidated. In Paul's theology we are free. This is due to the saving work of God, in Christ, by Christ, and through Christ. We live by the power of the Holy Spirit. Since we live by the Spirit, it is the Spirit that guides us toward obedience. We do not need forceful regulation because we have natural obedience. We are governed by love.

I think the apostle Paul probably saw a problem that others could not see. He knew that when they emphasized obedience and circumcision it negates the sufficiency of God's grace. It is the cross - not the law - that brings us into relationship with God. The reconciling power of God does not force Gentiles to become Jews but brings us all together.

Christ came to set us free. The contemporary lesson is in how this applies to us today. The death of God's Son on the cross changes everything. We are guided by the Spirit. It is the power of the Spirit that guides the life of the faithful. We live by the Spirit and are guided by the Spirit. The Scripture is not about sin bashing and shaming. The Scripture promotes living by the Spirit. The struggle of the Christian life is daily. You can go through life thinking "well, this is what I want to do." Or you can ask "what does God desire of me?" There is great internal and everlasting satisfaction that comes from living a life that is pleasing to God. What we need is what we have - God's grace. What God needs is our response.