

The Holy Spirit

Galatians 5:23-26

It is our understanding as a church that there were special gifts of the Holy Spirit given to the apostles that ceased, or ended, with those apostles. The so-called gifts of prophecy and tongues, particularly. And the gift of miracles, the ability to speak miracles ourselves in the name of God. The Apostles' were to bear witness to Jesus, but when that apostolic foundation of the church was completed, the special role of apostolic gifts ceased.

The idea is that the special means of God's revelation have ceased because we now have Jesus as the perfect and final Word of God's revelation. That contrast is made clear in,

Heb. 1:1 "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world."

God spoke to his Old Covenant people by the prophets. He has spoken to us now by his Son. That is the contrast, so we read in,

1 Cor. 13:9 "For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away."

So the work of the Holy Spirit in giving to us God's special revelation has ended, and, therefore, some Christians would say to us that we don't really believe in the Holy Spirit any more. Or that we are putting God in a box, limiting by our doctrine what the Holy Spirit is able to do. And there are those who would criticize our Westminster Confession of Faith, for example, because it lacks a chapter on the Holy Spirit.

To the contrary, however, let me emphasize that the work of

the Holy Spirit is evident and obvious throughout the Scripture. Surely that is evident as we have studied this list of the fruit of the spirit in Galatians 5. I was thankful for a couple comments after the sermon last week in that regard, recognizing and appreciating that emphasis upon the work of the Holy Spirit. Because this fruit is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Only the Holy Spirit can work this fruit in us, and as we conclude our study of Galatians 5, that emphasis comes to forefront again. So I titled this sermon very simply, *The Holy Spirit*.

In that context, we begin with,

I. A PROMISE.

It is something of a perplexing promise, though. The words are very simple, but the meaning isn't necessarily immediately obvious. After the list of the fruit of the spirit, we read in verse 23, "against such things there is no law."

I believe that the idea of those words is this, that Paul is freeing the people of the churches of Galatia from the burdens and the curses of the law which the Judaizers have sought to impose upon them. In other words, the Judaizers were using the law to impose the Jewish ceremonial laws upon all Christians. They were emphasizing the law and making it a burden. And Paul's point is that when you live by the Spirit, when you walk in the Spirit and demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit, the law imposes no such burden upon you.

So the idea might be something like this. When you travel down Rockford St. and are driving at the posted speed limit, you don't have to worry about getting pulled over by the Mount Airy police car that is sitting on the side street with a radar gun aimed right at all the passing cars. When you are obeying the law, you are free from its curse and judgment. When you are living in

conformity to the law, the law holds no threat against you. There is no law against you.

So when the Holy Spirit is at work in your life, working in you these marvelous fruits, then there is no law that will stand against you! You are free. “Against such things there is no law” really means, to put it positively, that when you manifest these things there is no danger of judgment from the law, no threat of punishment. That’s the promise. In other words,

A. We have a new life of freedom in Christ.

And that is further explained in,
v.24

There is freedom from the curse of the law, to those who “belong to Christ Jesus.”

Rom. 8:1 “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

Or go back in Galatians to,

Gal. 3:10 “For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.” 11 Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.” 12 But the law is not of faith, rather “The one who does them shall live by them.” 13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”— 14 so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.”

That’s our freedom as Christians. And it goes even one step further in verse 24.

v.24 “And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”

We have crucified the flesh. That’s a promise first, as well as an accomplishment.

B. We have a definitive death to sin as a Christian.

Just a brief explanation here. “Flesh” would refer to all the desires and impulses of the fallen nature, the sinful desires attributed to the fact that we are all descendants of Adam. We inherited his sinful nature. That’s the “flesh”, as Paul uses this term. Sometimes in the Bible, that word just refers to our physical life, identified as “flesh and blood,” but here the idea is clearly our moral condition. It is a moral definition of human depravity. And the encouragement is this, according to verse 24, for Christians, that flesh is dead. It is crucified, put to death. There is a definitive victory, especially in the sense that that flesh is no longer your master. If you are a Christian, you are no longer a slave to sin, you are no longer a slave to your flesh.

A good cross reference for this is,

Rom. 6:6 “We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. 7 For one who has died has been set free from sin.”

And the meaning of that is further clarified by,

Rom. 6:14 “For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.”

As a Christian, you are freed by God from the dominion of the slavery of sin.

Paul writes that as an encouragement, a promise as I put it this morning, and as an exhortation as we’ll see in a few

moments. But let me emphasize this idea of a promise. There is a definitive death which the Christian experiences at the moment of his salvation. He is a new creature in Christ. The old man, in terms of power, is dead. “For one who has died has been set free from sin.”

Praise the Lord!

v.24 “And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”

That’s the promise. But with it come both an exhortation, in verse 25, and a warning, in verse 26. Let’s look at the warning first.

II. A WARNING.

v.26

Such a danger, it seems, for so many of us. The danger of becoming conceited, the danger of pride. And the reference point of pride, of course, is a comparison of yourself to others. Beloved,

A. Beware of pride in comparison to others.

Beware of looking at yourself in a favorable light to others. Beware of looking at others as being worse off than yourself, spiritually inferior. In other words, don’t take this promise of a new life of freedom in Christ, and boast about yourself by putting someone else down.

Paul never did that, did he? In fact, he never lost the sense of his own sin. He never doubted the glorious salvation of God’s marvelous grace, but he never lost the awareness of how much he needed that grace. God always got all the praise!

1 Tim. 1:15 “The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full

acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. 16 But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.”

So there is no room to look at yourself and come away with the conclusion that you are better than someone else, superior in any way. The reason is this, that whatever good is in you, whatever spiritual maturity there is in you, it is the work of God! Whatever fruit of the Spirit is evident in you and in your life, it is always recognized to be the work of God in you!

Remember the parable of the Pharisee and the publican, the tax collector?

Luke 18:9 “He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt:10 “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get. ’ 13 But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ 14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

1 Peter 5:5 “Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” 6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you.”

This warning is always appropriate, and always relevant. Beware of pride in comparison to others. And with that,

B. Beware of the competitive zeal for an advantage over others.

How competitive we can become! How quick we are to seek an advantage over others. Maybe by putting them down, provoking them as Paul puts it in verse 26. Challenging them, belittling them, mocking them, putting them down. Doing whatever you can to gain an advantage, to make yourself look good. And that can happen without you even thinking about it. I see it all the time in people, especially, sadly, among our young people. It can come out as sarcasm, or just a few short words. Words that put someone else down. Beloved, beware of the competitive zeal for an advantage over others. And in the context of the fruit of the spirit, in the context of the work of God in the heart and soul of Christians, don't think highly of yourself at the expense of others. Whatever the extent of your spiritual growth and maturity, it is all a work of God in you, so beware of the pride that so easily besets so many of God's people.

But let's go back to verse 25, because here really is the conclusion and climax to the whole of our study on all of the fruit of the spirit. Here we really do have a summary of the past nine sermons on each of those nine fruit that are specified. And actually, if you remember even before that, go back to Paul's explanation of the war that goes on in the life of a Christian, the war between the flesh and the Spirit.

v.16 "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."

This doesn't contradict the promise I emphasized earlier. We have a new life of freedom in Christ. We have a definitive death to sin as a Christian.

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

But here's the rub. Here is the struggle for us to rightly understand. We have that definitive death, and we are free from the slavery of the flesh. But we are not yet free from the temptation of the flesh, nor from the presence of sin. So we have the power to resist. We have the freedom to live according to the Spirit as those released from the bondage of the flesh, but the flesh still wages war with the soul. That ongoing struggle continues to be our ongoing experience.

So we have a promise, a promise of freedom. In Christ. And then, on the basis of that promise, we have,

III. AN EXHORTATION.

As many others often put it, using grammatical words that describe the verb forms that are used, in Scripture there is the indicative and there is the imperative. Indicative is the statement of fact. The declaration of the reality of the promise of God which is ours in Christ Jesus. "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."

Or, as I read earlier from,

Rom. 6:6 "We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. 7 For one who has died has been set free from sin."

So if you are a Christian, you have the Holy Spirit, and he is at

work to work in you this fruit, “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” That’s the promise. That’s the encouragement. That’s the hope and the assurance. That’s the gospel.

Now, with that promise, the exhortation. People of God, you who believe in Jesus and trust in him for your eternal salvation,

A. Live out your life by the power of the Holy Spirit.
v.25

Live by the Spirit. Walk by the Spirit. By the power of the Holy Spirit, and that is what is so different from the troubling Judaizers in the churches of Galatia. They were forever seeking to impose upon the people of God their own laws and traditions, seeking to reimpose the ceremonial regulations of the Old Covenant, trying to convince the Galatian Christians that they were justified by their works; by their own effort.

No, beloved. No, says the Apostle. Live by the Spirit. These fruit are the fruit of the Spirit, not the fruit of your own natural ability. So live by the power of God who works within you. And with that, there is one final application. One final exhortation. Walk in the Spirit. It is sometimes translated, “Keep in step with the Spirit.” In other words,

B. Live out your life according to the direction of the Holy Spirit.

The Greek word means to stand in a row, to stand in line. If you have been in the military, you know exactly what that means. Stand at attention. Stand in formation. And picture in your mind the most impressive military performance you can imagine. Sailors, soldiers or marines, standing in perfect order. And I mean perfect.

As a student in high school and college, I marched in a marching band, and the same image would be appropriate. Standing in order. I remember looking down the rank to make sure everyone was in line, to make sure everyone was in step. Left foot, right foot. Everyone together. Everyone in line.

Keep in step with the Spirit means that you follow the right steps, you keep in step with all the others. That is a very good and healthy image for the living out of your Christian life.

v.25 “If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.”

To be specific, here are the steps. Here is the formation and the choreography, which is to order your life as a Christian.

v.22 “...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self- control.”

People of God, walk in the Holy Spirit.