

“Free to Grow!”

Galatians 5:19-25

Intro. – Man on train headed to Memphis, TN asked porter to wake him. “Listen, I’m a sound sleeper and I’m afraid I’ll miss my stop. Please wake me. Be aware when you wake me, I’ll be mad, I’ll let you have it and I’ll try to talk you out of it, but you must persevere!” “Okay,” said the porter. Well, next morning, man woke up and sure enough the train was in Atlanta, GA – he missed his stop. First thing he looked porter up. When he found him he really let him have it. For ten minutes he ripped him upon one side/down the other. Finally, the man left. A fellow worker said to porter, “Man, I’ve never seen a guy so mad/so worked up.” Porter responded, “That’s nothing. You should’ve heard the guy I left off at Memphis last night.”

We tend to get upset when we’re hindered from getting to where we want to go. We do this in all aspects of life – education... careers... jobs... etc. What about spiritually? Are you as determined to get where you ought to be spiritually? Are you satisfied with your spiritual growth or do you sense stagnation and if so what about it?

Previous verses to our text deal with God setting us free from sin. But God did not set us free to do whatever we please. He set us free from guilt and sickness of sin so that we could be what God meant for us to be. I hope through this study we’ll all better understand what God meant for you and me to be!

Purpose: to better understand how we are to be growing in God’s grace

A dad woke to the sounds of his little boy. Went to the boy’s room to find him sitting by his bed on the floor. Dad said, “What happened?” Boy: “I went to sleep too close to where I got in.”

Good illustration of our Christian experience. Too many become Christians and then go to sleep spiritually. You see, if we’re *in Christ* we’re called upon to be GROWING. 2 Peter 3:18 “*But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*” I.e. after becoming Christians, God does not want our lives to be static, lethargic, or lukewarm. He desires/deserves vibrant, alive, heartfelt lives. We are free to grow!

I GROWING IS POSSIBLE

A. All Have Two Problems

1. We ALL have sinned... (legal problem)...
2. We ALL have sin sickness... (struggle with sinful flesh = sickness problem...)

B. Justification Deals with the First Problem

1. The work of Jesus on the Cross enabled a holy/righteous God to *impute* (accounting term) His righteousness to our account...
2. This was God dealing with the *legal problem* of our sins – remember *the wages of sin is death* – Christ on the Cross provided the payment for the punishment of all sin, yours, mine, all...
3. HOW one responds to the gift of grace made possible by the Cross of Christ (through faith... at baptism... for good works) = *justification* = God dealing personally with our sin = X paid it all!

C. Sanctification Deals with the Second Problem

1. Sanctification is the *process* through which we can grow into what we now are free to be!
2. Not by putting the chains of *legalism* back on... Illus. – legalism like Vicks Vapor Rub: when applied no healing internally, only a brief burning sensation to cover up symptoms of the illness.
3. Point: Christian life is not difficult – IT IS IMPOSSIBLE by human strength and wisdom...
4. Only Christ lived “the Christian life” thus, we must invite Christ to live the Xtian life in/thru us!
- this is precious what He promises by giving us the gift of His Spirit AT baptism!

II GROWING IS IDENTIFIABLE

- 24 out of 27 books of the New Testament deal with *bearing fruit*
- fruit is the evidence of the Spirit’s presence in our lives:

A. Growing Fruit is a Process

1. Don't plant seed one day and expect to get fruit the next.
2. Thus, if you expect to take a pagan and turn them into a Xtian in 24 hrs. you better use legalism:
 - a. i.e. if you're simply concerned about changing peoples' behavior, legalism much faster...
 - b. this is why legalism is so tempting/prevalent in so many churches... BUT a big drawback with legalism is that its effects are temporary and short lived!
3. Learning to live by the Spirit is slower and "messier"... i.e. it's a process to learn living by Spirit!

B. Growing Fruit is Not Something WE Do

1. You rely on *your works* and Paul point blank refers to this as *works of the flesh* (vv 19-21).
2. You can do works in the power of *flesh* BUT *fruit* is only produced thru H.S. empowered life!
3. Thus, H.S. inspired Paul saying: "You're worried when you become Xtian that if we don't give you a bunch of laws/rules you'll turn into a wild, disobedient child? Why I teach Holy Spirit!"
 - a. we at Ch of Christ could give bunch rules/laws to change behavior... but won't change heart!
 - b. or we Ch of Christ could be biblical...(grace's duel edged sword) = Free to Grow!

III GROWING IS PRACTICAL

- does your life prove this text? Does it prove quality/noble people are grown by power of H.S.?
- what does your life show? Does it show fruit or does it show flesh? Some general principles:

A. General Principles of the Flesh

1. Evil is *evident/obvious* – v 19 point blank says "*Now the deeds of the flesh are EVIDENT...*"
 - reason we sin after becoming Xtian, isn't because we're ignorant... fail to declare war!...
2. This includes attitudes and not just deeds:
 - remember what X said in Matthew 15:11 "*It's not what goes in but what comes out that defiles a person.*" Proverbs 23: 7 "*For as a man thinks within himself, so he is.*"
3. Message of grace is NOT soft on sin – v 21 "...those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God."
 - a. verb makes clear talking about habitual actions = i.e. if sin is your lifestyle (not a lapse to sin...) but if this is the practice of your life you can't be of His kingdom.
 - b. thus in preaching/teaching grace must still WARN people about sin!
 - c. Paul makes clear, "I love you too much NOT TO WARN you that sin is deadly!"

B. General Principles of Fruit

1. Love is THE fruit of the Spirit with many flavors
 - a. note: fruit is singular and love is given first for a reason
 - b. life in community can be hard, but what is really hard is living as a legalists – why? Legalists fight all the time about who is right/wrong about every minute detail...
 - c. Illus. – Fred Kradick, prof. Emery U. went to Holy Land. Standing by Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, group of young rabbis showed up to pray. Discussion ensued as to when the Sabbath. One group said "soon as sun down" other said, "at sight of first star." Began to argue... then began to shove... then swing, then an all out fight... Had to call the police to separate these rabbis rolling around the ground punching each other out. Kradick standing by older Jewish woman, "Are you an American?" "Yes." "Are you a Christian?" "Yes." "Now you see why Christ didn't have a chance in this town."
 - d. if legalism is the heart of your motives, you won't get along with anyone...
2. Each fruit is for every Christian
 - a. fruit of Spirit NOT like gifts/talents of Spirit (e.g. gift of giving... hospitality...teaching etc.)
 - b. fruit is different = Spirit does not give one person love and another joy etc. = if Spirit is at work in your one's life they get the whole package...
3. Life in the Spirit does not need the restraint of law – nothing H.S. going to do your life needs to be restrained = e.g. don't have to worry you're going to love too much, or be too joyful or too patient.
 - people ought to look at our lives and say, "Tell me more about your Gardener!"

IV GROWING IS NECESSARY

A. The Flesh Will Lead if We Feed

1. 5:17 *“For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another...”*
2. Illus. – Coo-coo birds don’t build nests, they steal them. Female Coo-coo bird will fly around and find a bird like a Thrush where she’s laid eggs and flown off. Coo-coo will lay her egg in that nest and fly off. The mother Thrush comes back and not being good at math, lays on those eggs, including the Coo-coo egg which is much bigger. Thrush will hatch these eggs, and the baby Coo-coo being larger eventually the Thrush ends up feeding the Coo-coo bird to the neglect of the Thrushes...
3. In your body, H.S. and the flesh are in conflict... Fact is the one you feed wins!
4. 5:24 *“Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”*
- at baptism you put your sinful flesh on the Cross. Leave it there and starve it to death...!

B. The Spirit Will Fill if We so Will

1. 5:25 *“If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.”* – Our relationship with His transforming work is not passive. The Spirit of God will do the leading, but each of us must choose to follow – literally “walking in step with the Spirit.”
2. Question is this: Do you really want the Spirit directing your life? Then you can’t be doing things that walk in step with the Spirit on Sunday, AND feeding the flesh the rest of the week!
3. God produces the fruit, but fruit can grow only in certain climates – we choose the climate!

Conclusion: In summary to this message I have a book want to highly recommend. It is entitled: *The 77 Habits of Highly Ineffective Christians* by Chris Fabry. It’s a book filled with witty, mocking illustrations of how we all fight and resist growing in the Lord like we should. For instance, the following verses are found in this book. They are to be sung to the tune of “Come, Thou Fount”:

I try hard to lead a good life,
I recycle, clean my feat.
I buy presents for my good wife,
Help old ladies cross the street.
I have quit my game of poker
And I’m trusting you’ll be glad.
My life is so mediocre,
But I’m really not that bad.

O to self how much I’m focused,
Daily I’m constrained to be!
You give manna, I choose locust,
And world revolved ‘round me.
Prone to squander love, so infinite,
To forget my loving Lord.
Take an hour, no, take two minutes,
That’s all I can afford.

Are you sleeping too close to where you got in bed or are you growing in grace? Are you becoming what Christ set you free to be? You don’t have to settle for a mediocre spiritual life. If you desire He will enable and empower you. Brethren and friend, see with me that we are “Free to Grow!”