

MORE ABOUT SELF-CONTROL

Galatians 5:22-23

Scripture Reading: Galatians 5:13-26

Intro: Last Sunday we completed the list of divine characteristics which together make up “the fruit of the Spirit” as they appear in Galatians 5:22 and 23. They are characteristics that find their perfect expression in our Lord Jesus Christ. God’s purpose in saving us from our sins and giving us the gift of eternal life, is to make us like the Lord Jesus Christ. In our natural state there is nothing about us that is like Christ. I know that when God created Adam and Eve, they were made in the likeness of God. We still carry some traces of that likeness, but sin has marred us irreparably. We were born sinners by nature and before we were saved we were sinners by choice. No person by nature is interested in knowing God, nor in pleasing God. This basically is what is wrong with the world of human beings. It is only when the Holy Spirit convicts us that we are sinners, that we see our need of a Savior, and again, by the work of the Holy Spirit we by faith are born again, born from above, given a new life, and brought into the family of God. The Bible speaks of this as “a new creation.” In 2 Corinthians 5:17 we read,

Therefore if any man be in Christ he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”

It can also be translated, and it actually is in the NKJV,

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

A true Christian is not a person who has turned over a new leaf, or one who has decided that he wants to go to church, but he, or she, is a person in whom God a work of creation just as wonderful, and perhaps even more so, than when God simply spoke the words, and this whole universe came into being from nothing. When a person believes in Christ, he, or again, she, is joined in a living relationship and becomes a new person. He is given a new nature.

But God does not take the old nature away. He is going to take it away some day when we see the Lord, but for now it is still in a Christian. And that old nature is called “the flesh.” That old nature is going to be with us until we die.

But a Christian is a new creation, and he has a new nature – a nature that wants to know God, a nature that wants to please God. A true Christian has undergone an inner change. He is not perfect yet, but he wants to be,

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and some day he is going to be. But for now he needs to learn about the Lord and to live an entirely different life, a holy life, which in no way could he have lived before Christ became his Savior.

There are many things about the work that God does in us as Christians that we do not fully know how they come about, but in this passage which we have been looking at now for the past ten weeks Paul tells us that we now have the third Person of the Godhead living in us. This creates a situation in us which we are very conscious of as soon as we are saved, and that is a conflict, a fight, a real warfare that is going on within us. And we read about this in Galatians 5:16 through 18. Please look at those verses as I reread them to you:

16 This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.

17 For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.

18 But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law.

Now the reason that Paul added those words at the end of verse 18, was because there were false teachers moving among the Galatian churches who were teaching that they needed to put themselves under the law, the law of Moses, and that by obeying the Law they could free themselves from the sins of the flesh. But the Law never freed anybody from sin. That is why Christ came, to set us free. Did you pay attention to verse 13 when Kelly Spafford was reading the Scripture for us? By the Law we learn what sin is. When Paul wrote to the church at Rome, this is what he said to them about the Law in Romans 3:19-20:

19 Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.

20 Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

The Law can tell you what displeases God, but it can't help you to keep from doing what displeases God. That is why Christ came to die for our sins, and why the Holy Spirit has been sent to help us keep from sinning. How many times have we been determined that we weren't going to do, or say, or think something that we know was wrong, and then we did it anyway. The laws of our cities tell us what we are not to do, but the laws don't keep us from doing them. The only way even we as Christians can keep from sinning, is by the power of the Holy Spirit Who lives in each

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one of us. So Paul said in verse 16 of our chapter, “Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh.” What does it mean to “walk in the Spirit.” It means to walk in dependence upon the Spirit. It means to learn that when the Word is in our hearts, the Holy Spirit will strengthen us to keep us from sin. This is one reason why it is important for us to be memorizing the Word. As we struggle to get the right words in the right places and in the right order, the Holy Spirit is using that Word to make us strong. In ourselves we are the personification of weakness. We need, desperately need the help of the Holy Spirit. He is in us because that is where he works – in us!

And it is *in* us that He bears His fruit – “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and self-control.” He produces all of these in us IF we are walking in Him. And you will remember that the meaning of “temperance,” or *self-control*, is that the Holy Spirit gives us that “inner strength” so that, among other things, we will live victoriously in our personal battles with the flesh, and the sins which the flesh, our old nature, produces. But it is not just self-control that we need in our battle against sin, but it is all that makes us the fruit of the Spirit.

Let us take “love” as an example. The two greatest commandments in the Bible are, according to our Lord, given to us in their most complete form in Mark 12:30-31. Let me read those verses to you.

30 And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.

31 And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.

The Lord was asked about just the first commandment, but He had to tell them about two because they can't be separated. And in mentioning two He mentioned a third that exists in all of us whether we are Christians or not Christians.

So by the fruit of the Spirit you and I who know the Lord are going to love the Lord. And it is a growing love. If I love the Lord I am going to want to please Him, and, at the same time I am going to want to avoid any and every thing that will displease Him. I need the “inner-strength” of the Holy Spirit to love the Lord that way.

In the same way, if I am going to love my neighbor, I am not going to

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want to hurt him, especially another Christian, so again I am cast upon the Holy Spirit to help me.

But do you know that we all naturally love ourselves. Now that can become a very dominating, self-centered love, and it often does so. But the Lord has given us a legitimate love for ourselves. That is what keeps us from putting ourselves unnecessarily in danger. If we are inclined to fall, we take every precaution to keep from falling. If we get sick, we go to the doctor. Self-preservation is a part of our nature. Now the Lord said that you and I can check how much we love our neighbor by whether or not we are as concerned for their happiness, and for their well-being as we are for our own. Now that takes “self-control.” That takes “goodness.” That takes “meekness.” And it takes a lot more.

When the Lord Jesus died on the Cross, He not only died taking our penalty upon Himself, but He also died to set us free from the power of our sins. But we need the Holy Spirit to be able to exercise that power so that we can live holy lives for God’s glory.

The fruit of the Spirit has everything to do with our ability to live in victory over sin. To state it another way, the Holy Spirit by the fruit He bears in our lives enables us to live in victory over our old nature.

But I would remind you that “the flesh,” our old nature, is not our only enemy. We have two other enemies. “The world” is our enemy, and the world is closely tied in with our flesh, our old nature. And this is where self-control plays a tremendously important in our warfare.

When we talk about “the world” as an enemy, we are not as Christians talking about God’s creation. “The earth is the Lord’s.” “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handiwork.” Viewing the beauties and the wonders of creation should lead us to worship the Lord. But the word “world” is used in another way also in the Bible. The Apostle John defined it for us in 1 John 2:15-17. Listen to what he wrote:

15 Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

17 And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that

doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

The Apostle John was speaking of the way in which an evil system has gained control of the world in which we live. It is headed up by the Devil who in 2 Corinthians 4:4 is called “the god of this world.” Lit. it should be translated, *the god of this age*, considering the world from the standpoint of time. He is in power now, but as limited by the greater power of the One, True God. The Devil exercises great power at the present time, and he has blinded the minds of those who do not trust in God so that they will not trust in Him. But the Apostle John who was chosen by the Holy Spirit to give us the truth about the world under Satan’s power is:

- 1) The lust of the flesh,
- 2) The lust of the eyes.
- 3) The pride of life.

He is seeing to it that the majority of people under his control are dominated by these three evil influences. Note that first and foremost is the flesh. Secondly, the way we are trapped and deceived by what their eyes see. And finally the dreadful influence of pride which causes men to think that they need no help, but that they can do everything for themselves that will make them happy here, and hereafter.

We all have a natural love for that which can only lead to our eternal judgment. We may admit that we have been deceived, but we believe that ultimately we will find perfect joy. But the word from God is that we are not to love this world. It is not even to be on our list for consideration.

In Romans 12:1-2 Paul had this to say about the world:

1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

How can we be victorious over the world? First, by presenting our bodies wholly to God, to live for Him. Second, by refusing to fit into the mold of the world’s fashions, the world’s ways. Third, by undergoing an inner transformation which begins with our minds, the way we think, so that we can demonstrate outwardly that God’s will is good, well pleasing, and sufficient in its for our perfect happiness and total satisfaction.

But what are we to do about the Devil? He is greater than we are, What is most alarming, he is unseen. He has an unnumbered army of demons

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who serve under his command. We need to be afraid of Him if we are facing him in our own strength. But James and Peter both tell us, “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (Jas. 4:7). Peter says the same in these words found in 1 Peter 5:8-9:

8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:

9 Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same

afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.

But how can we resist him if he is stronger than we are, more subtle than we are, and when we are outnumbered by the multiplied thousands to one?

Do you remember the meaning of self-control? We resist the Devil and all of his demonic forces by the “inner strength,” the sovereign power of the Holy Spirit Who even now is producing that strength in us as we learn to “walk in the Spirit.”

Concl: So you see how important it is that we be learning to walk in the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, because it is the Holy Spirit Who is inwardly so that we will not only be able to stand against the wiles of the Devil, but that we may live in victory over such an enemy.

Remember, too, that the Apostle Paul, after describing the armor that we are not only to put on, but to wear every day, added in Eph 6:18:

18 Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.

Paul also reminded us of this about the work of the Holy Spirit and prayer in these words written to the church at Rome, but just as applicable to Trinity Bible Church today:

26 Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

27 And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God (Rom. 8:26-27).