

Anglican Church Noosa
GALATIANS LAW | LIFE | FREEDOM
Galatians 5:16-26
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I hope you're enjoying Galatians. Today we are looking at the end of Chapter 5 v's 16-26.

As we have been going through these chapters have you noticed the stark contrast between opposites. We are offered a choice –

- Slavery or freedom
- Justification by the law or justification by faith
- Circumcision or faith in Christ alone

Today we come to another stark contrast –

- Life in the flesh or Life in the Spirit

This chapter has a great emphasis on the Spirit, the Holy Spirit.

The word Spirit appears seven times in this passage.

Some of the phrases Paul uses are –

V16 Walk by the Spirit

V18 Be led by the Spirit

V25 Live by the Spirit

V25 Keep in step with the Spirit

But in contrast to this is 'life in the flesh'. The description of that is in v's 19-21 – the acts of the flesh.

And Paul says there is a great conflict going on within us between life in the flesh and life in the Spirit. V17 *"For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other."*

Every Christian, whether you're a new believer or a seasoned believer, faces a daily battle - will I walk by the Spirit or will I gratify the desires of the flesh?

This is the battleground and we need the help of the Holy Spirit.

Now from our English translation it would be easy to think this is a battle between the spiritual world and the material world. The flesh might be interpreted literally as meaning our bodies, our material life; and we have to deny that in order to live in the realm of the Spirit. That is not what Paul is saying.

As I've explained previously the flesh is about self-rule in our lives rather than God's rule. Other versions translate it

-*"selfish desires"* [CEV],

-*"desires of the human nature"* [Good News Bible],

-*"what your sinful nature craves"* [NLT].

This is what Paul means by the flesh.

The conflict here is not between the spiritual and the material. The conflict is between the spiritual and fallen human nature which is selfish.

We all start off in the condition Paul calls 'the flesh'. It shows itself as we grow up and discover within ourselves all kinds of negative desires, which if allowed full reign, produce the works listed in v's 19 to 21. ie. sexual immorality, impurity, hatred, jealousy, dissensions, envy etc. This is not the formula for a happy or thriving society.

The good news is that God is establishing a Kingdom within this fallen world where the desires of the flesh have no place. The church is called to be the first fruits of this Kingdom.

This is a Kingdom where the Holy Spirit has full reign and where the fruit of the Spirit blossoms. By accepting Christ as our Lord and Saviour we enter God's Kingdom, are given the gift of the Holy Spirit and find new desires emerging which is the fruit of the Spirit.

Does this mean followers of Jesus are completely done with the acts of the flesh?
What does it mean when Paul says in v24, *"Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires?"*

There are some who take this verse to mean that the passions and desires of the flesh can be completely overcome in this life. To crucify them is for them to have died and have no more impact on us. Now taken on its own, I can see how you could interrupt the verse this way.

However, in the context of the whole passage I don't think that's what Paul is saying. The passage is talking about an ongoing conflict. That is why Paul is saying -

- continue to walk by the Spirit v16,
- continue to be led by the Spirit v18,
- keep in step with the Spirit v25.

These are all exhortations to keep on resisting the acts of the flesh by relying on the Holy Spirit. The fight against the acts of the flesh continues until the day we die.

To crucify the flesh however, does mean making a decisive break with the old self.

- When we came to Christ we repented.
- We crucified everything that we knew to be wrong.
- We took our sinful human nature and nailed it to the cross. If it is nailed to the cross we must leave it there to die.

Do you remember Galatians 2:20. Look back to it if you have it there.

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

My true identity is not my sinful nature, the acts of the flesh; but Christ.

I now want to look more closely at these lists of the *'acts of the flesh'* and the *'fruit of the Spirit'*.

The first three 'acts of the flesh' Paul talks about in v19 are to do with sexual sin - sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery. It used to be that Christian morality and our society's morality were very similar. It was probably the 1960s when everything started to change. The 60's have been called the decade of the sexual revolution. This is when the Christian ethic of sex belonging exclusively inside marriage came under challenge.

The Greek word for sexual immorality in this verse is porneia and it simply refers to any sexual activity outside the covenant relationship between a man and woman in marriage.

Of course, the vast majority of people today think that is very old fashioned and can be discarded.

-The majority of couples who come to me asking for marriage are already living together.

-The advice I see being given to teenagers today is,

- make sure there is consent and
- make sure it is safe.

That seems to be the only morality today that our society accepts.

Well I want to put the case for a Biblical morality. Sex is the most beautiful and wonderful gift from God and it works best when we use it according to his plan.

God did not put restrictions around sex because he wants to stop our fun.

He wants us to enjoy his gift, but when you divorce it from the lifelong commitment of marriage, people inevitably get hurt.

Sex touches the deepest parts of our identity and personality. It involves intimacy and worship. When it is distorted it can wound and destroy lives. Sexual sin is not worse than other sins, but it is incredibly powerful and therefore can cause devastating damage. Sex needs to be treated with the greatest of respect.

God's way may seem harder, but it is always for our ultimate good. His way can save us from a lot of pain and heartache down the track.

Are you aware that the New Testament teaching on this, was just as radical in Paul's day as it is today. The ancient world was a sexual free for all and it was the Christians who showed the world a new way to live with Jesus as Lord. We have the same opportunity to be countercultural today and point people to a better way.

Can I just make two pastoral footnotes about this topic.

1. I am very aware that there are some in the Anglican church who want us to adopt the new ethics. If that is you I am very happy to have a further conversation about how we approach the theological and practical issues around this topic. I'm happy to make a time to see you if you want to talk further.
2. This is also a pastoral issue and everyone's situation is different. I know there are people in this congregation who are in difficult situations. I am aware that relationships are very complex, and if that is you, you may appreciate a conversation about how this applies in your particular situation.
3. If you have past experiences where you have caused hurt or have been deeply hurt, I want to assure you there is grace and forgiveness in the Gospel. Once again I'm happy to make a time to talk further.

But let's talk about the fruit of the Spirit and possibly the best known verse in Galatians – 5:22. The fruit listed here are beautiful qualities God wants to develop in us as we walk in step with the Spirit - love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

This is not a list of personality traits that we have to work hard at to produce. If it's just hard work then these qualities lose their attractiveness. For example, if you suspect that someone who is being kind to you is having to try very hard to do it, the kindness sort of loses its flavour.

These qualities should be the natural outcome of a life lived in the Holy Spirit. When we trust our lives to Christ, the Spirit begins to transform us from the inside out. Notice how different these qualities are from the self-centeredness of the acts of the flesh.

-Living by the flesh is about an inward-looking self focus.

-Living by the Spirit is outward-looking, it seeks the good of others, it wants to put the Kingdom teaching of Jesus into practice. In fact it is as we sit under Jesus' teaching as his disciple that we walk by the Spirit and bear fruit.

What did Jesus teach about

1. Love – *"If someone asks you to go one mile, go two with them."*
Put that into practice!
2. About joy - Jesus said there is, *"joy while the bridegroom is with you."* And he is the bridegroom.
3. Peace - It's the resurrected Christ who said to his disciples "Peace be with you".
4. Forbearance - Look at the cross.
5. Goodness and Kindness - Paul writing to Titus said, *"But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared".* 3:4
6. Faithfulness - In Philippians Chapter 2 we read, *"Jesus was obedient unto death even death on the cross."*
7. Gentleness – Jesus said, *"Let the children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the Kingdom of God."* Lk 18:16
8. Self control, read the story of Jesus trial before Caiaphas and then Pilate and you will see amazing self control.

My friends if you want to walk by the Spirit you have to have your Bible open sitting under this teaching. I encourage you to have a quiet time every day, to open the scriptures and read the teaching of Jesus. Read the New Testament epistles to learn more about who Jesus is and what he has done. Read the Old Testament to get a bigger picture of God's eternal plan fulfilled in Jesus.

Make sure you pray. Ask the Holy Spirit to speak through God's Word and make it clear how it applies to your life. Be ready to act on it and put it into practice. This is what it means to walk in step with the Holy Spirit.

Let me finish with this illustration.

In December each year Lynda and I get a box down from the shelf in our wardrobe. Can work out what's in it? It's a Christmas tree. We also have a box of decorations and we decorate the tree with all kinds of trinkets and decorations and of course beautiful multi-coloured lights. The tree comes to life and brightens up our home.

But of course, it's not alive. After Christmas we pack up the decorations; pack up the tree; they go back in their boxes and into the wardrobe for another year.

Well, I want you to compare that tree with an ordinary, humdrum, real fruit tree in an orchard. It doesn't look nearly as spectacular as the Christmas tree. It doesn't have the glitter and the fancy lights; but one thing it does have is delicious fruit.

Which tree is more important in the end? Not the artificial tree but the tree which produces real fruit.

Jesus is the real thing.

By attaching ourselves to him in the power of the Holy Spirit our lives produce fruit.

Following Christ is about turning our backs on the acts of the flesh and walking by the Spirit.

There is a battle to be fought in doing this. It's about being a disciple who takes Jesus' teaching seriously and keeps in step with the Holy Spirit putting it into practice.

It may not look spectacular in worldly terms but it's a life which produces much fruit - a life full of love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. My friends, 'Walk by the Spirit'.

Let me pray.

Heavenly Father,

Thank you for the gift of your Holy Spirit. Help us to walk by the Spirit each day, to turn away from the acts of the flesh, and to live in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Lord, we confess our weakness and our need for you. Teach us to crucify the old self and to live as new creations, bearing the fruit that pleases you. Keep us in step with your Spirit, and make us more like Jesus.

In his name we pray, Amen.