

DCCCP 6/26/22.

Sermon Live by the Spirit

In life and in death we belong to God. Through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, we trust in the one triune God, the Holy One of Israel, whom alone we worship and serve.

These are the opening words to the brief statement of faith adopted by the Presbyterian Church in 1983 when the 2 largest Presbyterian denominations in the United States joined together as one.¹ It represents two perspectives on God becoming one in communion. This is an excellent picture of melding the words of praise for God in Psalm 16 and the affirming words of life in the Spirit of Galatians 5.

The letter to the churches in Galatia that we are looking at today was written at a critical time in the start of the Christian church. Paul and Barnabas had traveled through Galicia in the first missionary journey of Paul and they had started churches in the cities of Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe.

Paul's letter to the Christians in Galatia, central Turkey of today, was in response to these churches being attacked by Judaizers who sought to force the laws of Moses on Christian converts. The Jews there were teaching that salvation was gained by works, by doing things, while Paul taught salvation in Jesus by faith alone.

They also argued that to be a Christian meant that you had to have been "Jesus-saved" and follow all of the Mosaic laws, which no-one had been able to do, and many in these churches were being swayed away from the saving message of Jesus.

¹ *Book of Confessions* (New York, NY: Office of the General Assembly, 2016), 308-311.

It cannot be denied, certainly, that moral and ethical conflicts exist within all people, whether religious or secular, Christian or non-Christian. But the spiritual conflict between good and evil is a conflict between flesh and spirit that is irreconcilable in us alone. Paul goes to great pains to describe this conflict, born out in how we act in life and he's telling us that the freedom to choose rightly, to follow the Holy Spirit, is the only path that leads to Christian freedom.

And, Paul is no stranger to this conflict, even in himself... he describes his own struggle in Romans 7: ¹⁵ *I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate, I do.* ¹⁷ *As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me.* ¹⁸ *For I know that good itself does not dwell in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.* ¹⁹ *For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.*

What Christ has done in liberating us is not so much to set our will free from the bondage of sin (because we keep on doing it) as to set our conscience free from the guilt of the sin in us and all around us. We live in a sin-filled world. Yet, our Christian freedom is not license to do any darn thing we want. The Christian is not one who has become free to sin, but one who, by the grace of God, has become free to not sin.²

But this freedom that Paul teaches about is also an obligation. It is freedom from the sinful nature of mankind and from the law that the Pharisees and leaders of the Jewish church had saddled to the backs of the people. But it was also in an obligation to Christ and to one another.

² William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible Series: The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1975), 45.

varieties in it. When you gain Christ, you gain the Spirit, when you gain the Spirit, you gain the Spirit's fruit, all of it.

So, clearly, Paul was also a Holy Spirit kind of guy, he invokes the Spirit 9 times in these 14 verses from Galatians. When Jesus departed, God sent the Spirit to be with us always and Paul leans into this saying: *"Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives."*

And Paul is teaching us that the power of the Holy Spirit to change our lives is how we access - the love of Jesus and the power of God - to be who we should be.

So, the question for us is, how is it possible for us to live, not by our sinful human nature but instead to live in the spiritual freedom of God conducting ourselves as people of the fruit of the spirit? Clearly the answer is yes, but not on our own, it is only possible through the work of the Holy Spirit.⁴

Paul writes boldly: "So, I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves."

Right - Like throwing a switch, it sounds so easy.

In our Tuesday morning Bible study, we have been talking about the concept of surrender, of offering ourselves as living sacrifices to God, as our opening sentences said this morning. We're considering what it truly means to surrender ourselves to God. The more we look at it, the more we realize that we cannot do it on our own but that even if we are fervently seeking to surrender to God it requires the work of the Holy Spirit in us to make it happen and also that it is an ongoing, lifelong activity of surrendering, and living, and surrendering again.

⁴ 145

Thankfully, Jesus said "... those the Father has given me will come to me, and I will never reject them. ³⁹ And this is the will of God, that I should not lose even one of all those he has given me.

But, what if I really do live a life that swirls with hostility, envy, idolatry, and impurity and want to change? Well, Paul teaches that *24Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there.*

Paul is making a clear reference to the crucifixion of the Lord and also to Jesus' direction that "if any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." (Mark 8:34)

The point that Jesus made and Paul is teaching is that for us to be followers of Christ we are to actually take the things that we are made of that are contrary to Jesus, that fit into Paul's list of sins, and nail them to the cross; to give them a proper crucifixion, and then turn to and gain for ourselves, the things that are Spirit given fruit; love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Would this not be bliss? To turn from envy to joy, from impurity to goodness, from hostility to love? Would that not be heaven now, in this time? Would not this gift of the Spirit allow us to sing as the Psalmist sings: I will bless the Lord who guides me, I know the Lord is always with me and I will not be shaken, for he is right beside me. (Psalm 16:7-9)

Luke takes the idea yet further and writes Jesus' words: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me."

So, the idea that we are getting to here is that to live by spirit power means not only that we are letting God be active in us but also that we are actively using the power of the spirit to make changes in our lives, to pick up our crosses daily.