

August 6, 2023

“Inheriting the Kingdom”  
Lesson 4

Galatians 5:13-26

**Intro**

Paul's letter to the Galatians was written to address a key controversy among churches he founded on his first missionary journey. Do Gentiles need to obey the requirements of the Law of Moses in order to belong to God's people?

Paul answers this with several points. In chapter 2, he writes that faith in Jesus, not keeping the works of the Law, is the true mark of identity of God's people. He furthers this idea in chapter 3 by saying that the Law was given to Israel originally to guide them until He brought about the fulfillment of His promise, which is Jesus. Work of the Law, and circumcision had not resulted in people living the way God had called them to live—that being fully devoted to Him in holiness. But in Jesus and through the Holy Spirit, there was freedom and empowerment.

**Read Galatians 5:13-26**

1. vs. 13: Paul uses the term “brothers and sisters” here

Commonly used, it has special importance in Paul's writing to the Galatians  
He's referring to Jewish and Gentile converts to Christianity as brothers and sisters  
They are now family, having salvation in Christ and the same Father  
They have been called into God's family by God  
This call results in freedom, he says  
The Jewish Christians would likely be reminded of the exodus from Egypt  
They were freed from oppression and slavery  
God's promise is an end to being exiled/separated from His presence

However, freedom doesn't mean one is now free to do anything they want to do  
Using freedom to continue in sinful actions doesn't express faith in Jesus' atonement  
Instead, Paul calls them to serve one another, which is an act of love  
Putting one's self first is “indulging the flesh”  
Indulging the flesh here means being self-centered  
It's not putting God first, or others before one's self

2. vs. 14: Paul reminds them of a key OT concept: love your neighbor as yourself

Paul says doing this fulfills the entire Law  
We are also to love God with all we are and have  
If we do this, that will lead us to want to love others

3. vs. 15: The alternative to vs. 14 is what Paul brings up in vs. 15

If they don't love each other, they will be fighting each other  
Paul warns such actions will cause them to destroy each other  
Despite their differences, they must learn to love each other because they are family now  
They don't ignore these differences, but rather unite across them in Christlike love

4. vs. 16: Paul has just encouraged loving your neighbor as yourself

How can this be done? Where is the power to live this kind of life?

He says here to “walk by the Spirit”

The Spirit’s power is available to us when we come to Him in faith

Joel prophesied that God’s Spirit would be poured out on all in the age to come

Since Pentecost, we have lived in this reality

Peter verified this in Acts 2:38

The indwelling-Spirit is what allows us to live rightly before God

The Galatians had already received the Spirit at conversion

But Paul knows the Spirit can be resisted (Acts 7:51), even by those who are saved

He reminds them that walking by the Spirit gives power to not live by fleshly desires

5. vs. 17: There are two sets of desires at work in us

The desires of the flesh, and the desires of the Spirit

They are in conflict with each other, and we are motivated to follow one or the other

As God’s people by adoption, we ought to choose daily to live by His Spirit

His Power allows us to become who God intends us to be in our daily lives

We will reflect God’s holiness to the world through the Holy Spirit

6. vs. 18: Paul’s thoughts here are directed toward the Jewish converts to Christianity

Those converts had grown up with the idea that the Law was salvation

Paul reminds them that living by the Spirit frees them from the limitations of the Law

They are being challenged to shift their thoughts and behaviors

They are to be directed by the Spirit, not by the Law

7. vs. 19: For the next three verses, Paul lists multiple examples of “the acts of the flesh”

He calls them “obvious”—they are easy to recognize when committed

This list he provides isn’t all of the vices; but these fall into four categories

The first is sexual sins: sexual immorality, impurity, and debauchery

These are all sexual activities that occur outside the marriage relationship

They hurt others, but also hurt the one who commits them (see I Cor. 6:12-20)

8. vs. 20: The second group is false religious practices

These include idolatry and witchcraft

Idolatry is worshipping anything more than God, who created everything

Witchcraft is using the physical world through rituals to manipulate the spiritual world

The third group is attitudes which work against self-sacrificial love

He includes many: hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, and factions and envy

Discord, jealousy, dissensions, and factions are leading causes of church strife

All of these focus on differences, in “us vs. them” thinking

These attitudes allow disharmony to grow, rather than seeking to overcome differences

Our relationship to Christ is to be pre-eminent, rather than our worldly differences

9. vs. 21: This verse begins with envy, but it belongs with the other attitudes of vs. 20  
There is a semi-colon after it, showing a division of thought with what comes after it

The fourth group is public displays of self-destructive behaviors caused by selfishness  
Drunkenness is definitely self-destructive, but could also hurt others  
Orgies are unrestrained sexual immorality, which hurts all who are involved

Paul concludes this section with a warning  
“Those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God”  
This is true because all the previous actions are contrary to the nature of God’s kingdom  
A person is either led by their fleshly desires or by their spiritual desires  
Living by fleshly desires, which deny Christ’s holiness, will not lead one to eternal life

10. vs. 22a,b: The fruits of the Spirit are listed in the next two verses

Fruits are things which are planted and then grow  
This is the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, as we submit to Him

Paul said in vs. 13 that the goal of our lives is to “serve one another humbly in love”

The actions in vs. 22-23 are those of people who seek to serve others lovingly

The first three are foundational aspects of someone who follows/serves Jesus

Love: isn’t based on what the other person deserves

It comes from grace, from blessing someone undeserving, as God did with us

Joy: is an inward attitude of well-being, of gratitude and contentment

If lived in daily life, others will see it, and our actions toward them will contain joy

Peace: begins with the end of hostility with an enemy, but God means more here

God desires goodwill and fellowship with us

The Spirit empowers us to desire and act in goodwill and fellowship with others

The next three are characteristics that support and ensure good relationships with others

Forbearance: means patience regarding others failures, including wrongs they have done

God is patient with us, so we are called to be patient with others to be like Him

Kindness: seeks to do good to others in every circumstance; it nurtures and protects others

God is kind to us, so we should also desire to be kind to others and protect them

Goodness: This idea builds on the idea of kindness

We don’t just want good things for others; we do good things for others

We support fellow believers, committing ourselves to doing things for their good

11. vs. 22c-23: The final three in the list are to be qualities we show in all our actions

Faithfulness: Our goal is to practice, without fail, what we believe

We are to persist in our devotion to Christ, and growing more Christlike

Gentleness: Christ emptied Himself of His privileges to become human

The gentle, therefore, do not seek their own rights and privileges

Self-control: This refers to our ability to keep our desires in check

For all Christians, there are areas of our lives that call for us to control the self

Paul concludes by saying, “Against such things there is no law.”

Producing these fruits means no law—Jewish or Roman—can stand against them

There is no way of life better than this, with more good fruit that comes from it

12. vs. 24: Paul notes here that believers have “crucified the flesh with its passions”

We are joined to Christ in His death and resurrection

Our old selves/desires will diminish and disappear over time, but not all at once usually

It requires our cooperation and work with the Holy Spirit to remove the old man

13. vs. 25: We are to live by the Spirit in all areas of our lives

One translation puts it, “Get in line with the Spirit.”

This means deliberately reordering our lives to reflect what God has done and still is doing

We are to bear these fruits of the Spirit as a routine practice

14. vs. 26: Paul finishes this section with a reminder against acting in a counter-Christian manner

Don’t become conceited

Don’t provoke each other

Don’t envy each other

All three of these attitudes/actions cause disharmony through disrespect for other believers

All three are the exact opposite of the fruits of the Spirit Paul has just listed

We have been saved by a Lord who was/is worthy of glory

But He chose lowliness instead to serve others (us)

Following His ways by the Spirit’s power directs Christians to love others, a better way

Application: Paul begins and ends his list of vices (vs. 19-21) with common pagan practices; the ones in the middle deal more with things relating to hostility and disunity. His point to the Galatians applies just as much to us today: when we divide the body of Christ for self-serving reasons, we are serving the flesh. Our selfish attitudes and hostility is just as vile and evil as anything ungodly that happens in the world. We act like pagans, maybe even worse, when we refuse to love one another. If we want to live a kingdom life for Christ, we have to let the Holy Spirit bear His fruit in us.

Prayer: Father God, thank You for the blessings we have received from You. We have freedom and forgiveness from our sinful past, and we now have new life in the Spirit. Help us to continually and to an increasingly greater degree to rely on the power of the Holy Spirit so we can reflect Your life and love to those who don’t know You. In Jesus’ name, Amen.