

Galatians 5:16-25

“Living by the Spirit”

1. Begin with prayer and read Galatians 5:16-25 [5 minutes].

2. Review briefly the previous lesson on Galatians 5:1-15 [5 minutes].

3. Discuss how Paul unfolds the struggle within us all in Galatians 5:16-18 [10 minutes].

- A. Central instruction: follow the Holy Spirit in transformed heart, not sinful human nature (Greek “sarx,” [“sinful nature” in NLT] often translated in other versions (KJV, NRSV, NIV) as “flesh” is NOT physical body, but humans’ sin-loving nature)
- B. Opposites collide: Sinful nature craves evil, while heart reborn by Holy Spirit craves good as revealed in God’s will (see Romans 12:2 as example); constant internal war with Spirit-changed heart and sinful nature (Romans 7:14-25 as further illustration)
- C. Keller terms what sinful nature desires as “over-desire”: “Literally, Paul calls the ‘desires of the sinful nature’ *epithumia*. In the older versions, this word was translated ‘lust,’ which led the reader to think of sexual desire... Literally, *epithumia* means an ‘over-desire’, an ‘inordinate desire’; an all-controlling drive and longing. This is crucial. The main problem our heart has is not so much desires for bad things, but our over-desires for good things. When a good thing becomes our ‘god,’ it creates ‘over-desires’ (see Ephesians 2:3; 1 Peter 2:11; 1 John 2:16). Paul says that sinful desires become deep things that drive and control us... The sinful nature is really our old motivational system—with its own goals and thus its own needs—still somewhat intact. It is focusing on some object that is in itself good, but which it turns into an idol by which we seek our salvation (‘I can have worth if I am loved... if I have a good career... if my children love me’), and which finally then creates over-desire for that idol” (*Galatians for You*, 146,148)
- D. Paul connects living by sinful nature with living by the law in 5:18, so this connects with his project in Galatians of “Jesus alone” versus “Jesus + something else”
 - *Christians do not believe the physical is inherently evil while the spiritual is inherently good. What historical heresy actually taught this? Why should Christians say “no” to this false dichotomy of physical and spiritual?*
 - *Per Keller’s discussion of “over-desires” above: When in your experience has your love for something good morphed into something idolatrous? How did you, or how will you, break the grip it had/has on you?*

4. Discuss how Paul uncovers living in our sinful natures in Galatians 5:19-21[10 minutes].

- A. Paul offers list of vices (before the virtues); not all of them actions, but some attitudes
- B. Sexuality focus in 5:19 (first word “porneia,” from where we get “pornography”); then religiosity with first two words in 5:20; then relationships rest of 5:20-21a:

- C. Important to review list in some detail; Keller's explanations are helpful (*Galatians for You*, 148-150); also see Stott (*The Message of Galatians*, 114-115)
- D. 5:21b references non-repentant, continual practice, as opposed to practice fought against and becoming more infrequent; "I've given up the struggle and doing what I want" vs "I'm struggling with it; please help, encourage, and support me"
 - *The list of vices begins with a sexuality focus, but then moves on to many other areas. How do we maintain the historic Christian witness on human sexuality without leading people to think "Christians think these are the worst (or only) sins," when flawed human behavior covers so much more territory?*
 - *When a friend from your small group comes to you privately and confesses his/her struggle with pornography, how might you respond? How might your response change if the struggle instead is with "selfish ambition" (5:20 NLT)?*

5. Discuss how Paul unpacks living in the Holy Spirit's presence and power in Galatians 5:22-25 [10 minutes].

- A. Fruit produced by the Holy Spirit in direct opposition to what human nature produces
- B. Note: "fruit" is singular, not plural, so all the characteristics or qualities are to be developed and included in a Christian's life and practice: for example, cannot say that while we see the importance of love, joy, and peace, we give little attention to patience because we know when we pray for patience, events happen to us that help to grow patience within us—a "package deal" of all or none
- C. Analogy with fruit also helpful to emphasize the *gradual* nature of growth in these areas (as with watching plants grow: usually not instantaneous) and the *eventual* nature of growth in these areas (apple trees should produce apples; if they don't, then something is wrong)
- D. Work through list of qualities in some detail as well: Keller's discussion helpful (*Galatians for You*, 153-155), as is Stott's (*The Message of Galatians*, 116-117)
- E. Revisiting of Galatians 2:20 in 5:24 (NLT): fruit grows as we have "nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there"
- F. Instead "keep in step with the Spirit" (5:25 NIV) as we live in the Spirit, walking in daily communion with the Holy Spirit in life and service
 - *Look at the list of Spirit-led qualities in 5:22-23. Which one seems to be most developed in your life? Which one needs the most development? How do we help each other to grow and mature in the Holy Spirit's fruit?*
 - *How do both the gradual nature of growth in the Fruit of the Spirit. and the eventual nature of growth in the Fruit help you to notice God at work in your life? What blessings and challenges come to mind?*

6. Close in prayer.