

# BELIEVERS BIBLE BULLETIN

Believers Chapel \* 6420 Churchill Way \* Dallas, Texas 75230

## **GALATIANS**

### **Lesson 14**

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Galatians 5:13-26

## **Life by the Spirit**

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### **Introduction**

The Christian life, now that we have it, how shall we live it?

Unfortunately, although delivered by the grace of God from the guilt of sin, for many believers the alternatives are a return to a life of bondage under the Law of Moses as a means of gaining the favor of God, or a life of freedom from any moral restraint. The latter, of course, is simply license.

Historically the Antinomians and the Puritans fought over the place of the Law in the life of a believer. The former castigated the latter for resorting to "the whippings of the law" to control believers in their daily lives. Bunyan replied to them by putting in the mouth of Christian in his *The Pilgrim's Progress*, "I walk by the Rule of my Master, you walk by the rude working of your fancies." It is easy to see that the struggle was a rather bitter one, and one not without its misunderstandings on both sides. The Puritan position generally prevailed among the Calvinists. Their fundamental position is accurately expressed by Kevan, "The Puritans held that Christian liberty freed the believer, not from the Law, but for the Law; so that although he is no longer 'under' the Law, he is, nevertheless, still 'in' the Law. This, they taught, was freedom itself."<sup>1</sup> Cf. 1 Cor. 9:21. .

The Apostle Paul, taking a position quite similar to this, proposed to the Galatians a third alternative to life by the Mosaic Law or life by license. He proposed a life in the liberty of the Holy Spirit, a life in which was fulfilled "the righteousness of the law" (cf. Rom. 8:4). Against such a life as that "there is no law" (cf. Gal. 5:23). It is the Holy Spirit who has come to indwell the heart of the believer and has undertaken to lead him in paths of righteousness. It is He who has introduced the love of God and the moral law, reflective of the nature and being of the Triune God, into the believer's heart. Thus, the Author of the Law of Moses has become the Christian's Guide for a life of true freedom, freedom from the bondage of having to merit favor from God, and freedom for obedience to God out of love.

The liberty of the Christian life is not license. As John Stott has put it very succinctly, "Christian freedom is freedom from sin, not freedom to sin."<sup>2</sup> It is this freedom, because He, our Law, has become our life, the One who, by virtue of what He has done for us, is the motivator and enabler toward sanctification.

William R. Newell has told of an incident in his ministry that illustrates the power of love toward the true liberty of obedience. "Several years ago," he has written, "great interest was shown by a large company of young people who would gather about me after each meeting asking questions. There were two fine young men who earnestly protested that the words, 'Ye were made dead to the law' (Rom. 7:4), would not mean exactly that—that the Law was the only means God had of preserving our obedience. So for a number of evenings they made their plea to keep Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration, though God left 'Jesus' only there!

"I learned incidentally that one of these young men had recently been married. Therefore, in the course of the lesson the next evening, I went right down to him, for he and his wife were sitting in the second row of seats, and said, 'I understand you have lately been married.'

"He began to redden with embarrassment, but said, 'Yes.' "I said, 'Does your wife obey you?' "'Certainly,' he said.

"I said, 'Have you kitchen rules posted up for your wife's behavior in the kitchen? Have you dining-room rules?'

"None,' he said.

"Have you parlor rules?'

"None.'

"Have you any rules at all posted up in the house?'

"None.'

"And yet you claim that your wife obeys you,' I said. 'Why does she?'

"He said, 'She loves me,' which was a happy solution of our question."<sup>3</sup>

We have ignored the tremendous assets of our Christian life, and one of these is the presence of the Holy Spirit as the believer's Guide in his daily life. We turn now to the apostle's exposition of His importance in the accomplishment of the will of God in the Christian's life. It is by His gracious ability that believers please God.

### **EXHORTATION AGAINST LICENSE**

**What we have been called to (Gal. 5:13a)**. In the opening of the section the apostle reminds the Galatians of that to which they have been called, saying, "For brethren, ye have been called unto liberty." In the historical situation he has primarily in mind the liberty from the bondage of the Mosaic Law, and especially from the rite of circumcision. By extension of principle we are justified in including other requirements, which men have introduced in a legalistic way as necessary for salvation or sanctification. The taboos of modern Christianity would surely come under the apostle's disapproval. He

never would have countenanced the "give-up kind of Christianity," which is so prevalent in our churches today.

**What we have not been called to (Gal. 5:13b).** Paul adds, "only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh," a warning against license. The warning is suggestive, for it implies that the apostle's teaching of freedom from the Law did give some of his readers the mistaken notion that they were free from all restraint and might live in the chaos and anarchy of immorality (cf. Jude 4).

**The Pauline antidote (Gal. 5:13c-15).** The freedom that believers have is the freedom to serve through love. Liberty with love leads to service of others, while liberty minus love leads to license. The love, of course, is the love implanted in the heart by the Holy Spirit and directed toward the One who has loved us and given Himself for us. The service that proceeds from love for Him fulfills all the righteous demands of the Law. This the apostle indicates by the citation of Leviticus 19:18.

The citation of the text from Leviticus indicates that Paul conceived of the fulfillment of the Mosaic Law as the natural issue of love for Christ. In other words, we are not to think that, since we have come to faith in Christ and have been freed from the Law's bondage, we may now disregard or disobey the Law. It remains as the expression of the moral will of God, and those who truly love the God of the Word will love His Law in its expression of Him. That it also reveals His desires is indicated by the fact that nine of the Ten Commandments are repeated as exhortations in the New Testament.

### **THE EXHORTATION TO WALK BY THE SPIRIT**

**The command (Gal. 5:16).** "This I say, then," Paul continues, "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh." The marvelous third alternative in the Christian way of life comes before us now. It is this that eliminates judaizing, biting and devouring of one 'another (cf. v. 15).

There is a beautiful promise attached to the command to walk in the Spirit. It is, "and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh." He does not say that believers shall never have the lust of the flesh. He rather says that they shall not "fulfill" the lust of the flesh. Christians are not, to use Luther's memorable words, "stocks and stones." They do have desires and passions. There is an inner conflict and struggle in the believer's inner man as long as he lives, but there is a way of deliverance for the Christian man through the enabling power of the Spirit of God. The Spirit is fully able to bring victory in the experiences of life.

**The cause (Gal. 5:17).** Ishmael and Isaac still struggle against one another, only now it is in the inner man of the believer! That is why we ought to walk in the Spirit. As Paul puts it, "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." Instead of "ye cannot do," the original text should be rendered ye may not do. The apostle is not denying that a believer can have success in the warfare with the flesh. He is simply saying that the overcoming of the flesh does not rest in his own power. It rests in the power of God. But this verse does point to the fact that walking by the Spirit will not issue in subjection to the flesh.

**The consequences (Gal. 5:18).** The opening clause of this verse, "But if ye be led by the Spirit," expresses an assumption, confirmed by other passages in the New Testament. All believers are led of the Spirit; it is their birthright (cf. Rom. 8:14). They are, therefore, not under the Law, which spells defeat, bondage, and spiritual impotence. Hendriksen defines the leading of the Spirit in this way, "It is that constant, effective, and beneficent influence which the Holy Spirit exercises within the hearts of God's children whereby they are being directed and enabled more and more to crush the power of indwelling sin and to walk in the way of God's commandments, freely and cheerfully."<sup>4</sup> It is more than simply being guided: it means that He

becomes the controlling influence of the believer's life. Life by the Spirit is for Paul the third way of life', distinct from life under the Law and life in license. "It is by no means a middle course between them," Burton says, "but a highway above them both, a life of freedom from statutes, of faith and love."<sup>5</sup>

Success, then, in the Christian life is dependent upon the work of Christ, by which we are brought under the direction of the Holy Spirit who indwells all believers, the constant working of the Spirit in the believer's life, and the response in faith of the believer (cf. Phil. 2:12-13!), a faith wrought also by God.

Those who are led of the Spirit love the Word of God (cf. Psa. 119), learn to obey God's precepts with gladness of heart through grace (cf. John 13:34; 14:15, 21; 15:10, etc.), and begin to see the fruit of the Spirit in their lives.

### **THE EVIDENCE OF THE TWO KINDS OF LIFE**

**The evidence of license (Gal. 5:19-21).** In this section we come to the proof of a life of license and a life by the leading of the Spirit.

The "works of the flesh" are the evidence that the life is not under the control of the Spirit. Where these things are the individual's pattern of life, there is no evidence that they belong to the holy Triune God.

It is almost impossible to classify the works of the flesh. The words used to describe the works far outnumber the words used for the virtues of the fruit of the Spirit. Someone once said that it was a proof of our fallen state that our vocabularies are much richer in words for sin than in words for the graces. There are sex sins here, social sins, and spiritual sins.

Finally, the apostle says, "they who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." The word translated "do" is a Greek word that means to practice. He means simply that the person whose bend of life is characterized by these sins is excluded from the kingdom of God

(cf. 1 Cor. 6:11; Eph. 4:20; 5:7-11). The salvation purchased by the Lord Jesus Christ's atoning work is a salvation from sin. The kind of salvation that does not result in practical holiness of life is not His.

**The evidence of the leading of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-24)**. The evidence of the leading of the Spirit lies in a cluster of nine virtues that make up "the fruit of the Spirit." This fruit is the product of the life of the Spirit in the believer. It is characterized by several interesting features. First of all, in the fruit of the Spirit there is unity. We notice that the word, "fruit," is in the singular number. There is only one fruit of the Spirit, but it contains nine virtues. If one of the virtues is missing, then we do not have the fruit of the Spirit. The Spirit's product is like a watermelon with nine flavors! Many commentators have suggested that the nine virtues illustrate the full-orbed, symmetrical character of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is His life that the Spirit produces in the believer.

Second, the fruit of the Spirit possesses a notable harmony, the first triad of virtues being inward in nature, the second, outward, and the third upward.

Third, there is a necessity that believers have the fruit of the Spirit. The lack of the virtues indicates sin against the Holy Spirit who is engaged in producing the virtues in the lives of the saints.

Finally, in the concluding words of verse twenty-three there is an important point made by Paul. The Law of Moses finds no flaw in the fruit of the Spirit. The flesh may imitate, or counterfeit, certain of the virtues, but it can never produce them. The Spirit alone can do that, and the result satisfies all the demands of the moral law in<sup>1</sup> the believer's life.

It is sometimes forgotten that life by the Spirit is not a lower standard than life by the moral law, or the Ten Commandments. It is, if anything a higher standard. Arthur Way has caught that in his

rendering of verse eighteen, "But if you definitely surrender yourselves to the Spirit's guidance, you are then not under the law, but ON A HIGHER PLANE."

**A new position (Gal. 5:24).** To reinforce the evidence of the new life in the fruit of the Spirit the apostle reminds the Galatians that they who belong to Christ have already crucified the flesh with its dispositions and desires. This is the reverse side of the coin.

There are several things to notice in the statement of verse twenty-four. In the first place, the verb "have crucified" is important. The tense refers to the past moment of their conversion. It was then that the decisive step was taken, and a definite break with the past was made. In their Representative they died, and a death-blow was administered in Him to the flesh. They stand on resurrection ground now, in union with Him, and are to be in practice what they are in position, or in principle.

In the second place, the words "have crucified" are in the active voice, contrary to the pattern of 2:20 and Romans 6:6, possibly because the emphasis here rests upon the faith of the believers which sealed the union and the identification with Him in His saving work. Cf. Rom. 6:11, "Reckon." On the other hand, it is well to remember that crucifixion is one death that a man cannot inflict upon himself, and we must not make too much of the active voice here.

**The effectuation of life by the Spirit (Gal. 5:25-26)** . Again, the apostle brings forward an assumption, and upon the basis of it he exhorts his readers to a life in accord with it. The assumption is, "If we live by the Spirit," and the construction and context enforce its reality. Believers do live by the Spirit, for He is the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. Believers live by the Spirit (v. 25), are led by the Spirit (v. 18), and walk by the Spirit (vv. 16, 25), the first referring to the vital principle of life in union with Christ, the second to the Spirit's control of the life, and the third to the conduct of the life.

The exhortation, based on the assumption, naturally follows. The walk should follow the life. The word, rendered here by "walk," is different from that used in verse sixteen. The former word refers to the activity of walking in a general way. It is, therefore, suitable for a general reference to the spiritual walk of a believer. The word used in this passage came to mean to conduct oneself rightly, but it originally meant to walk in line, or to take a step in line (cf. 6:16; Rom. 4:12; Phil. 3:16; Acts 21:24). The apostle's point is simply that, since we live by the Spirit, we ought to take each step by the Spirit. The figure of walking and the means by which men learn to walk are useful aids in the explication of what it means to walk by the Spirit in the spiritual life. Babies in learning to walk do not theorize about the matter, but they gradually learn to walk by taking steps, first one, then more. So it is in the Christian life. Life begins with a step under the Spirit's guidance, and it continues with further adventures in trusting the Spirit until the believer learns to walk spiritually. It is not a sudden accomplishment; it requires time and practice. Further, we never reach the place where we cannot fall.

Perhaps the most beautiful illustration of the Spirit's method of guidance is found in Israel's experience with the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire in their wilderness journey (cf. Num. 9:15-23).

### **Conclusion**

The Christian life, then, is not a life under the Law of Moses, although the Christian life will always be in harmony with the righteousness of that Law. Nor is it a life of license. It is a life under the Spirit and His controlling presence. That third way is the way of freedom, of light, and of life. May the Lord enable us to walk by Him, and may the fruit that He alone produces be seen in us.

### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>Ernest F. Kevan, *The Grace of Law; A Study in Puritan Theology* (Grand Rapids, 1976), p. 267.

<sup>2</sup>Stott, p. 140.

<sup>3</sup>William R. Newell, *Hebrews Verse by Verse* (Chicago, 1947) , p. 235.

<sup>4</sup>Hendriksen, p. 217.

<sup>5</sup>Burton,, p. 303.