

Galatians 5:13-26

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[0 : 00] Now may the words of my mouth and the thoughts of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

On that reading from Paul's letter to the Galatians, chapter 5, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

Well, Paul's letter to the Galatians treats two great matters. The first and the greatest of these matters is the gospel of justification. We are, Paul says, justified through faith in Jesus Christ. The very core of Paul's gospel in Galatians is this. God has set aside our condemnation. The law declared us unrighteous, that is, unacceptable to God.

[1 : 21] We stood with a sentence of condemnation against us. But, Paul says, in Jesus Christ, God has made a declaration.

He has declared us to be acquitted, to be acceptable. In Jesus Christ, God has made unrighteous sinners to be righteous before him.

And how has this happened? Well, Paul says to his people in Galatia, not by any human works, not by some great moral effort or struggle on our part.

No. It's happened outside us. It's happened in Jesus Christ. It's happened because Jesus Christ became a curse for us.

That is, Jesus Christ took upon himself our condemnation and precisely in doing that, set us free so that we became righteous in him.

[2 : 23] And the result, Paul says, is that we've been set at liberty. This is the first and greatest matter of the gospel then in Galatians. This great work of God the Son, who comes to us in mercy, who delivers us from sin, who blesses us, and sets us in right relation to God.

But alongside this first great matter of the gospel in Galatians, and following from this first great matter, there's another thing to which the Apostle wants to call our attention. And this second matter is the new life and conduct of those who've been justified and set free by Jesus Christ.

Paul, in other words, is saying to his people, God's work of salvation doesn't end in justification. Justification is crucial, of course.

It removes condemnation. It sets us free. But what it sets us free for is a new way of living. Justification makes us alive.

And as we are made alive by the gospel in Jesus Christ, then we enter into a new way of living, a new manner of life. Now, there's a proper order here in these two great things that Paul is telling us about in Galatians.

[3 : 50] We don't begin talking about our new way of life until after we've first of all talked about God's work of salvation.

We don't start by talking about our own holiness or our sanctification. No, first of all, we talk about justification. We talk about God's great work of setting us free and making us righteous.

But once we've done that, once we've understood what God in Jesus Christ has done for us, then we move on also to talk about what it is that we are to be and do in our Christian lives.

And we wouldn't, for Paul, understand the full scope of God's saving work if we didn't also go on to talk about how God not only justifies, but also sanctifies.

How from the gospel of justification there flows the reality of holiness of life and of Christian conduct. To believe in the gospel is to believe that we've been made new and that we've been made new and called to newness of life.

[5 : 00] Now, it's this second theme, this newness of life, in which the gospel issues. It's this theme which Paul turns to in the later part of his letter to the Galatians.

And to do this, to talk about Christian conduct and the Christian life, he talks about a further work which God does for our salvation and that work is the work of God, the Holy Spirit.

What he says about the Spirit, he sums up very simply in verse 25 there of Galatians 5, if we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

Now, let's think about each of those in turn, living by the Spirit and walking by the Spirit. First of all, Paul says, we live by the Spirit.

Now, what does he mean? What is it to live by the Spirit? Well, to answer that, to understand, to get deep into what Paul's saying here, we need to start a little bit further back.

[6 : 03] We need to ask ourselves about just what it is that God's work of salvation has accomplished for us. What is it that God in Jesus Christ has done to change us?

Well, the Gospel's answer, as Paul is setting out the Gospel here in Galatians, is that God in Jesus Christ has done two great things for us. His Son accomplishes two great works.

The first of these works is this, that God has placed us in a new situation. God has placed us in a new situation. We're the creatures of God.

And that means we're made by God for fellowship with God. We're made, in other words, to live our lives in God's presence. And as we live in God's presence, to enjoy his gifts, to praise him, and to honour him by lies of obedience.

But, we know, sin has entered into that creaturely life of ours. And we've chosen not to be in fellowship with God, but to try to live apart from God, to turn from fellowship with him, to despise his gifts, to refuse to worship, to withhold our obedience.

[7 : 24] In other words, to break apart the bonds between ourselves and him in which our life consists. And it's as we do that, as sin enters human life, and as sin reigns in human life, that we find ourselves estranged from God.

Where there should be fellowship, there's hostility, and enmity, and our relation to him falls apart. The creatures whom God made to be his friends become his enemies.

And yet, and yet, the supreme word of the gospel is that God does not abandon us in that situation. God does not leave us in estrangement.

God does not leave us in guilt. In Jesus Christ, God takes the initiative to restore fellowship with those estranged from him. He, Jesus Christ, is our peace.

That is, in his person, in who he is, and what he does, he establishes peace between God and us. He takes upon himself our lost cause.

[8 : 36] He associates himself with us. even in our depravity and our unrighteousness. He takes our place. And as he does so, he repairs the estrangement between God and us.

He makes us, once again, to be the friends of God. And all that means that what Jesus Christ brings about for us is a new situation.

He establishes the reality of reconciliation. That those who are estranged from God are once again brought into fellowship with him. And that, for Paul, is the first thing that God does for us in the person of Jesus Christ.

He establishes reconciliation. But there's a second thing. In Jesus Christ, God gives us a new nature.

You see, the sins into which we fell and which so tied us to disorder. That sin damaged the nature which God gave to us.

[9 : 43] Our nature became corrupt. It could no longer function. It was no longer properly itself. Of course, we think, don't we, that sin actually is exaltation.

We think that it makes us flourish. But that's the deception of sin. In fact, sin does not make us flourish. It debases us. It diminishes us.

It damages the good nature which God creates and gives to us. Sin spoils us and leads to our ruin. Now, the word which Paul uses for this damaged nature is the flesh.

And by the flesh, Paul means not simply our material bodies, he means sinful human nature as a whole as it resists and opposes God.

And that, Paul says, is what we all once were. We were tied to the flesh. We were overwhelmed by it. We lived in that reality. That was once our nature.

[10 : 52] God in Jesus Christ has put an end to that reality. The dominance of the flesh, Paul says, is over.

It's been set aside. Verse 24. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Have crucified not by what they've done, but have crucified it because they have shared in the fruit of Jesus' own crucifixion. As he dies, so our sinful nature is crucified with him and set aside.

God in Jesus Christ has set an end to it. And in the same one, in Jesus Christ, God has also put in place of the flesh a new nature.

God has made us new in him. That means therefore, that if the first thing which we have in Jesus Christ is reconciliation to God, the second thing which we are given is our regeneration, our being made new.

[12 : 01] We're made friends with God and we are given a new nature. Now that in short is what, for Paul, God in Jesus Christ has done.

That's God's saving accomplishment. That's the things which God does to turn our lives around. God is real. But how does it become real?

How does this divine work, this work accomplished in Jesus Christ, how does it become something which as it were takes up residence in us? How does it become the very reality of our lives?

Well, Paul's answer is this. God's saving work in Christ becomes real through the work of the Holy Spirit. You see, God the Spirit unites us to Jesus Christ.

That is, through the Spirit, God binds up our lives with the life of Jesus Christ so that what Jesus Christ does for us outside us as our Saviour comes to be real for us and indeed in us.

[13 : 12] So that his, if you want, objective work, his work out there which he does in himself that becomes the reality of who we are and what we do.

God the Spirit makes real for each of us what God the Son has accomplished. And so God the Spirit says, this is your situation.

You are reconciled to God through Jesus Christ and this is who you are. You are those who have been given a new nature. God the Spirit in other words, God brings to fulfilment the work of Jesus Christ.

And the Spirit is able to do this because he is indeed God the Spirit. He is the Lord. He possesses infinite divine power.

Before him the flesh and all its works simply cannot stand. The Holy Spirit is the omnipotent Spirit, the one who sets sin aside.

[14 : 16] He's the Lord and as the Lord he is the giver of life. God the Spirit is God loving us and as he loves us, he blesses us with the gift of life, new life.

He allows us a share in Christ's risen life and so a life which is beyond death and destruction. Now all this, this making real of Christ's work in us and for us, all this is what it means to confess with Paul that we live by the Spirit.

Just pause for a moment. These are staggering truths, aren't they? And they're so staggering, the claims are so big that Paul makes, that we often find them hard to believe or to apply to ourselves. Can it really be so? Can it really be that our lives, not just the lives of others, but our lives, have been caught up by this great work of God?

Can it be that we too do not live by the flesh but live by the Spirit? To grasp that it's really so, that it really is we who are being talked about here, we need to look away from ourselves.

[15 : 43] If we do look to ourselves, we see of course much that's unclean and tawdry, we see failure, we see things of which we're ashamed, there are many things which discourage us, and if we turn in ourselves, it is hard for us to believe the great things that the gospel declares about us, but, Paul tells us, don't start there, don't start from yourself, start from Jesus Christ and his saving work, start from the Holy Spirit and his work of making new and giving new life, say to yourself, this is what God tells me about myself through his apostle, that I live by the Spirit, that in the Spirit I am alive, and trust yourself to those things.

So first, Paul says, we live by the Spirit, second, we walk by the Spirit, we walk by the Spirit. This new situation of reconciliation and this new regenerate nature which have been given to us by Jesus Christ don't constitute the whole of the Christian life, because our new nature, our new situation, bring with them a new vocation.

That is, what God does for us in reconciliation and in making his new includes a calling. It's a summons, a summons to live our lives in a certain way.

Because if we truly know that we reconcile to God and we've been remade by him, we can't as it were simply rest there.

We can't think that nothing further is required. No. We're summoned to act out the new life which we've been given. In Paul's terms here, precisely because we live by the Spirit, we are to walk by the Spirit.

[17 : 51] God has made us to live and called us to walk. In other words, God's saving work, there arises a new way of living, a new course of life.

Well, what does the Apostle say about this new life here? Well, first of all, and very importantly, he says this, that we walk by the Spirit.

What do you mean to this? This walking, this active course of life to which we're summoned by the Gospel, is not something that we undertake by our own power.

It's not simply our work, it's not simply that God does a certain amount for us and then we respond by performing our work as an answer to what God has done.

No, the Christian life is something which we undertake not out of our own strength, not on the basis of all our accomplishments and the character that we have, no.

[18 : 53] the Christian life is what we undertake by the power of the Holy Spirit. He, God the Holy Spirit, makes that Christian life possible. He works in us and he works through us.

He makes us capable of walking in glad obedience to God. And at this point the Gospel hits home at a natural tendency that we have.

life, it's our natural tendency, isn't it, to think that our lives are basically what we make of them, that the only resources that we can call upon as we live our lives are those which are our own.

But the Gospel says otherwise. The Gospel says your Christian life is not first and foremost what you do, it's what you do by the power and working of God the Holy Spirit.

it's what you do because God does it. God, if you want, moves us. God enables us. God is at work in us so that we are able to be at work.

[20 : 05] I think many Christians stumble at this point. Most especially many Christians of long standing older Christian believers feel, I think, a deep sense of responsibility to live their lives in obedience to God.

And many are crushed by a sense of inadequacy, by a sense that having struggled for many years as Christians they've not got very far.

What does Paul say to that? What does Paul say to that sense of inadequacy that often accompanies our Christian walk? Paul says we are led by the Spirit.

We're not on our own. God does not leave us to live out our new nature with our own resources. To live the Christian life is not to take the lead, it's to follow, to follow the leading of the Spirit, to come after him, to be given power by his power, to be moved by him so that we are set free to live out our new life.

It's only when we come to see this that we can begin to appreciate the real meaning of the gospel commands. Of course the gospel summons us to new life, but its commands are not just orders.

[21 : 34] The gospel's commands arise out of God's promises, above all, the promise that the Spirit will lead us, that the Spirit will go ahead of us, so that we can lead the new life to which we have been called.

But what is the shape, then, of this new life which the Spirit creates? What is this new life which the Spirit creates and which we're called to walk? Well, Paul sums it up in verse 22 of Galatians 5, in the very famous words of the fruit of the Spirit.

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and the rest. Now, why does he talk about fruit?

Why not talk about the works of the Spirit? Paul, I think, wants to draw a strong contrast between the fruit of the Spirit and the works of the flesh.

And the point of the contrast is this. Works are what we make of ourselves. Works, for Paul, are just about sinful self-assertion.

[22 : 50] When we talk about works, for Paul, it means there's no reliance on the grace of God. There's no sense of our need for God, of our dependence upon him. There's no looking to God for help.

No, works are our sinful attempt to live by ourselves, from ourselves, and in the end, for ourselves. And that's why, as Paul sets it out, works are in league with the flesh.

In other words, works are what happens when corruption takes over human nature. And that's exactly what we see from the list of examples of the works of the flesh that Paul sets out.

Immorality and impurity and licentiousness and idolatry and much else besides. This, Paul says, is what sinners make of themselves by their works.

This is what sinners do. But the fruit of the Spirit is an entirely different matter for Paul. The fruit of the Spirit is not us working out our corrupt nature, no.

[24 : 00] The fruit of the Spirit is what comes about in our life conduct, because the Spirit is the core of our life. We live by the Spirit once more.

He is our life. He moves us. He sustains us. He makes our new nature real. And not only that, but the Spirit shapes our active lives.

The Spirit produces in us new ways of conduct, new lives of holiness. holiness. We can't bear this fruit of ourselves, but because God the Holy Spirit is with us and in us, then our lives can indeed become fruitful, so that we can not only live by the Spirit, but also walk by the Spirit.

Well, what's the practical shape of this new walk, this walking by the Spirit? Well, Paul sets out, doesn't he, a list of examples, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

It's not intended by Paul as an exhaustive list of the good things that are to be seen in our conduct. It's intended simply to tell us the kind of thing that our actions and attitudes are to show when the Spirit produces good works in us and in which we are to walk.

[25 : 28] Well, time doesn't permit us to dwell on each of those great fruits of the Spirit, but we can say a few things. First, notice that these various elements of the fruit of the Spirit are seen most perfectly in God himself.

They're not just human acts, they're not simply attitudes that we have or works we perform. No, first and foremost, they are characteristics of the Lord God.

God himself is love. God himself takes joy in what is good and righteous. God himself is perfect peace, rest and tranquility.

God himself is supremely patient, giving us time to repent and turn to him. God himself is kind, looking to our needs and meeting them with infinite generosity.

God himself is good. He shares his very life with us. God himself is faithful. He stands by us, he's committed to us, he keeps his promises, he stands by his word.

[26 : 43] God himself is gentle, does not deal with us in a harsh or hostile way, but quietly and tenderly. He doesn't seek to break us, but to uphold and help us.

God himself exercises self-control, there's no rampage of anger, there's no wild and undisciplined act on God's part, but always and everywhere God deals with us in a steady and measured and reliable way.

Where do we see these things about God? Well, we see them in God's dealings with his people, but most of all, we see them in Jesus Christ himself. He is the embodiment of these good things.

He is God's gentleness, God's love, God's self-control and all those things in him. God's love and joy and peace and patience take human form.

So we see the fruit of the Spirit matching, first of all, God's character. Second, each of these elements of the fruit of the Spirit involves us in a relation to God and a relation to our fellows.

[27 : 56] Take, for example, peace, the fruit of the Spirit, peace. The peace which the Spirit brings about is, first of all, a relation to God.

It means that we're no longer in conflict with God, no longer fighting or rejecting him, no longer fleeing from his presence of something we don't wish, no longer at enmity with him, no longer regarding God as one who opposes us and whom we therefore must oppose.

No, we enjoy a tranquil friendship with God by the Spirit. We have a settled and orderly relation to God our Maker and Saviour.

But this peace with God, which is a fruit of the Spirit, also spills out into the life which we have with our fellows. Each of us knows that human life, is not devoid of conflict.

Groups and nations pull in different directions. Neighbours and families quarrel and end up unreconciled or divided or set against one another.

[29 : 02] But the Spirit puts an end to that. The Spirit makes peace with God and in making peace with God makes peace between creatures. And because the Spirit does that, he also makes us into peacemakers.

That is, he makes us into those who are reconciled and therefore seek to reconcile. Those from whom enmity has been put aside and so therefore those who try to put aside enmity to build common life, to make peaceful life with others.

So each of these fruit, in other words, spills over from our relation to God into our relation to others. third, the fruit of the Spirit stands opposed to so much of what the world is.

To walk by the Spirit, to seek to demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit in our lives, is to be a stranger to the world. What happens in the world?

Well, the desires of the flesh are given free reign. they dominate human desire and human action. All that catalogue of vices that Paul sets out as the works of the flesh crowds in upon the world, in politics, in business, in education, in family life, there's so much where the flesh is at work.

[30 : 27] And all this, Paul says, is entirely foreign to those who belong to Jesus Christ. Because in Christ, the Christian has gone through a kind of crucifixion, Paul says, a destruction of sinful flesh, a setting aside of one way of life.

And because that's the case, because we have been changed from those who are led by the flesh to those who are led by the Spirit, then we find ourselves strangers to the world.

And fourth, to walk in the Spirit, to demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit in our lives mean that we flourish, that we become most fully ourselves.

People in the world will tell us that all this stuff about the fruit of the Spirit means our lives are cramped and bleak and dull, but no. The fruit of the Spirit means true aliveness.

It means fulfilment. It means that our new nature given to us by God comes to full expression. It means that we do indeed come alive. That's why there is something deeply attractive, isn't there, about the fruit of the Spirit which Paul sets out, and why there is something deeply attractive about the life of walking by the Spirit.

[31 : 57] It is a lovely way of life. It's a way of life which is luminously good, which is holy, which is right for us. It's a way of life which leads to a genuine and lasting and deep happiness.

Yet if we're honest, many of us, when we read this list of lovely virtues, we don't feel encouraged or assured or very happy.

Instead, we often feel a measure of disquiet or of discouragement. Why? Well, because of the simple fact, I suppose, that we know we're not very good at walking in the Spirit, because we know that our lives don't demonstrate in every aspect of the love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and all the rest that they are supposed to show.

We fall short. We know that we fall short, and so we are often anxious or discouraged or guilty. And for Christians who take their Christian lives seriously, anxiety and discouragement and guilt bring temptations with them.

There's the temptation, of course, just to give up. That having failed in our own eyes to walk in the Spirit, we can cease to try in some extent, because it all seems beyond us.

[33 : 24] It seems as if we have not and perhaps never will manage to do it properly, and so we're tempted to give up. Or again, there's the temptation to fall into a kind of barren self accusation as an undertow of our lives, to think of ourselves as basically those who've not done well in the Christian life, those who fail to live out the life of the gospel, and so that we carry guilt with us wherever we go.

What do we do in that situation? What do we do as we try to deal with our own sense of inadequacy before the things which the gospel sets out here? Well, one thing we need to remember, one thing we need to bear in mind at each moment is that the new life which we've been given by God is not yet complete.

It's not yet perfect. Of course, we live now after Christ has intervened in our lives to change our condition and to give us our new nature, and that gift is a complete reality.

Once for all, it's finished in Christ's death and resurrection and his ascension to the right hand of the Father. We live after that, but we live before the final full formation of our new nature.

Our new nature is not complete in every way. We live before our full Christian maturing. In other words, our Christian lives now take place between the first work of renewal and the final coming work of resolution, between the great first gift of God and its final perfecting.

[35 : 08] We are, in other words, incomplete. And in that incomplete situation that each of us finds ourselves in, we find also that our old corrupt nature lingers.

It's been abolished. It's been crucified with Christ. It's been put to death. And yet we find it has a strange afterlife. It continues in some measure to haunt us.

So there comes about, for each Christian believer, the reality of conflict. The desires of the flesh are against those of the spirit. The desires of the spirit are against those of the flesh.

And each of them, Paul says in Galatians 5, are opposed to each other. And we're in the middle of that opposition. We are torn, in some measure, in two directions. Torn, on the one hand, by the reality of our new nature, and on the other hand, by that which lingers from the old.

What does the Gospel tell us about this conflict? What encouragement and consolation does it offer to us if we know that about ourselves? Well, the Gospel says this.

[36 : 17] In that Christian conflict, flesh and spirit are not equally balanced forces. The reality of the spirit is wholly superior. The reality which the spirit establishes, living by the spirit, is real and true.

This is who we truly are. This is what we are truly to be. The reality of the flesh, however spectacular it may be, however troubling, however apparently real, is a reality which has been set aside and condemned and excluded.

It's been banished. And because it's been banished, it's got no place in the new world which God has brought about by Christ and the spirit. It can claim no rights over us.

It's what we once were, but no longer are. And if that's really the case, then in the midst of conflict, when we're afflicted by our failure, when life in the spirit seems very far from us, we can do two things.

We can try to see ourselves, first of all, as steadily and consistently as what we are in Christ and the spirit. Our hearts and our experiences will try to convince us otherwise, but it's true.

[37 : 36] We live by the spirit. Nothing can revoke that. Nothing can revoke it because that reality is of God's making. God has decided that it will be so.

God has set our new life in motion. God will not revoke what he has begun. There's only one present and one future for the Christian, and that is to walk in the spirit and to live out the new life which has been given.

And the second thing we can do in Christian conflict, the second thing we can do to deal with our affliction and our sense of guilt, is turn to God in prayer.

We have to turn to God the Father to give him thanks that from all eternity he has purposed that we should be his children, that we should walk before him in holiness and righteousness.

We have to thank God the Father for his infinite goodness, for the fact that he cares for us, that he provides for us, that he promises to stand by us and to bring our lives to fulfilment.

[38 : 40] And we have to commend ourselves once again to his hands, to place ourselves before him, to trust his promises, to look to him for blessing. We have to turn to God the Son to offer him praise and thanksgiving for his great saving work.

He has crucified the flesh and made us new and he rules over us now. He is our king and our governor and his rule is powerful and good and wholesome. And we have to turn to God the Spirit to thank him that he now does indeed lead us, to ask that he will create in us good desires, that he will renew our love of God and others, that he will give to us an appetite for holiness and strengthen us to walk in newness of life.

And so we pray, oh gracious God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, renew us and empower us. Take away from us our fear.

Give us confidence and trust that we have been made new. And give us grace to live the new life and to walk the life of the Spirit with confidence and cheerfulness and hope.

Bring our lives to completion, we pray. Bless us as we seek to serve you through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.