



Spirit versus Flesh in Attaining Justification Galatians 5

Introduction

Legalism is as opposite to Christian freedom as is slavery. And contrariwise, Christian freedom opposes legalism. This was the point of the analogy of Abraham's two sons. The older, Ishmael, was the son of a slave girl, Hagar. The younger, Isaac, was the son of Abraham's wife, Sarah, a free woman. In order for Isaac to mature and develop as Abraham's rightful heir, Ishmael had to be cast out. No compromise was possible. They two could not share the same dwelling nor inheritance. Abraham had to be firm about it. So Paul urged the Galatian believers to stand firm in their liberty. You and I must stand firm, too, in the freedom bought for us by Jesus Christ.

Outline of Galatians 5

- I. Standing Firm and Free - Galatians 5:1-2
- II. Serving in Love - Galatians 5:13-16
- III. The Conflict Between Flesh and Spirit - Galatians 5:17-26

I. Standing Firm and Free - Galatians 5:1-12

A. Free or Fallen - Galatians 5:1-4

Freedom does not just happen. Since the Garden of Eden it has not been the natural state of man. Man is naturally a slave, if not to a despotic state, or to his own appetites and lusts, then to some religion. Religion enslaves. The devotee is brought under some form of bondage. This is painfully evident in the cults.

Freedom must be exercised, defended and maintained. False teaching is ever ready to engulf freedom and remove it. Therefore, just as one must guard political freedom and liberty, every believer must stand firm and fast in the spiritual liberty bought by Jesus Christ. No yoke of bondage can be allowed to entangle or weigh one down. This involves an awareness of both the precious liberty and the insidious bondage. That is what Galatians is all about.

There are four undesirable results of circumcision.

1. Christ is of no use - 5:2

The bottom line, says Paul, is that if a person insists on buying his or her salvation through circumcision, or anything else, Christ means nothing to them, and is of no use to them.

2. The whole Law must be kept - 5:3

Paul says one more time that anyone who incorporates any aspect of the Law, such as circumcision, must keep it all. There is no picking and choosing what one will keep or not keep.

3. One becomes estranged from Christ - 5:4

If the objective is to be saved, then one surely does not want to become estranged from Christ, the Savior, by insisting on keeping the very Law He fulfilled in His obedient death.

4. One falls from Grace - 5:4

Grace is a higher calling than Law, and preceded Law, so why would anyone work for something that is offered freely?

B. A Little Leaven - Galatians 5:5-12

Not everything is evident right now. People are materialistic and prefer that which they can see, such as circumcision, for then there is no suspense, no need for faith or patience. However, those who are free in Christ have no badge that says "this is a believer." Believers wait in hope that their righteousness in Christ will be revealed. The Spirit encourages that hope.

Actually, it is circumcision that is the illusion, for it gives a false security. There is no benefit spiritually to having a badge or not having one. The real badge is invisible, namely, faith working through love.

Paul gives the Galatians credit for running well until now. He writes that they would have continued to progress had they not been hindered from without. He asks, "Who did this to you?" It only takes a little infection to corrupt healthy tissue. Even as a little yeast is sufficient to permeate the entire dough.

Paul trusts the Holy Spirit in them to hold them through this temptation, but he sees dire consequences for the ones responsible for corrupting them. He even wishes for them a worse mutilation than they plan to perpetrate on the Galatians (5:12)!

II. Serving in Love - Galatians 5:13-16

Liberty is to be defended and used, but not abused. Liberty is not license. Its purpose is for the highest service to God and people, not for the indulgence of the flesh.

Freedom is not freedom from responsibility, but freedom with responsibility. Without human responsibility, it will surely be lost or will self-destruct.

If Christians use their freedom to choose to serve others in love, freedom fulfills its highest purpose. Just as love is the fulfilling of the Law, love is also the fulfilling of freedom.

The alternative to loving your neighbor as yourself is selfishly to devour your neighbor and be devoured by him as well as by your own selfishness.

The only way out of selfishness and indulgence of the flesh is to walk in the Spirit.

III. The Conflict Between Flesh and Spirit - Galatians 5:17-26

A. The Immobilizing Conflict - Galatians 5:17

The Spirit and the flesh have entirely different wants and goals. They engage in a tug of war within the soul. Believers may become immobilized by the conflict. The consequence is that it becomes impossible to do well in either sphere until they yield fully to the Holy Spirit's control.

B. The Spirit's Leading - Galatians 5:18

The Holy Spirit in each believer will lead them away from the Law, not bring them under it.

C. The Works of the Flesh - Galatians 5:19-21

Paul identifies and lists the flesh's works so that his readers will make no mistake about the Spirit's leading. He will not lead believers into the following:

1. Sensual and sexual deeds - 5:19

Despite knowledge, people are more deceived about the potential destructiveness of casual sexual behavior than ever. Despite sex education or mental and physical health knowledge, they indulge in harmful behavior.

- a. Adultery - sexual intimacy with a married person.
- b. Fornication - all other sexual activity
- c. Uncleanliness - pornography and obscenity
- d. Licentiousness - nudity, suggestiveness

2. Intellectual and mental deeds - 5:20a

The godless mind finds other pursuits such as:

- a. Idolatry
- b. Sorcery
- c. Hatred
- d. Contentions

3. Emotional deeds - 5:20b-21

These represent the ugliness of unbridled emotions:

- a. Jealousies
- b. Outbursts of wrath
- c. Selfish ambitions
- d. Dissensions
- e. Heresies
- f. Envy
- g. Murders
- h. Drunkenness
- i. Revelries, etc.

Those who do not repent of these sinful excesses will find that God will not permit them beyond this earth. Only repentant sinners who come under the cleansing blood of Christ will inherit God's Kingdom.

D. The Fruit of The Spirit - Galatians 5:22-26

It is interesting that the following refreshing items are referred to not as "works", but as *fruit*. Fruit reproduces itself and is truly satisfying. The above indulgences of the flesh promise satisfaction but cannot deliver it. The only thing they deliver is frustration.

1. A Luscious Cluster - 5:22-23

- a. Love, joy, peace - foundational and visible
- b. Longsuffering, kindness, goodness - visible
- c. Faithfulness, gentleness, self-control - invisible

No law can survive which is against these.

2. Resolving the conflict - 5:24-26

- a. Flesh crucified

Ishmael had to be cast out in order for Isaac to thrive. Thus, the unhealthy passions and selfish desires that characterize the flesh must be denied so that they wither and die as in crucifixion, where the victim suffocates to death. Depravation and denial are the ways to render the flesh inoperative and take away its controlling strength. This does not mean that Christians are to become ascetics denying all physical needs. But rather they are to recognize and confess fleshly thoughts and desires and surrender them to Christ who died to set men and women free from such things. As *those*

who are Christ's bring them to the cross, the power of God through Christ works on them like radium on cancer.

b. Living and walking in the Spirit

The Spirit must be heeded and obeyed. Each believer must feed his or her spirit with spiritual food, the Bible, and with spiritual acts such as prayer, sharing Christ with others, meditating on those things which are *true,... noble,...just,...pure,...lovely,...of good report* (Philippians 4:8) and obedience to God's word. Each believer's daily walk must be Spirit-filled by choice and preparation, not by stale tales of ancient experiences.

c. No provoking and envying

Each one must then guard against spiritual pride and ambition to be the "most spiritual", or "holier than thou". Paul warns against provoking and envying one another. We are to focus on Christ and not upon ourselves and others. Jesus Christ is our example of obedience and humility. We are to live for Him.

Applications

1. Are you trusting Christ plus nothing? Do you believe that faith alone will take you to heaven?
2. Whom are you serving in love?
3. Is all your service motivated by love and carried out in love, so as not to fall into a legalism in service?
4. Will you begin today to starve your flesh and feed your spirit?
5. Will you begin your day with the Holy Spirit's guidance through God's Word?