

Scripture and the Life of God

Session 5

Table Talk

- Discuss the questions at the end of chapter 5 of *Scripture and the Life of God*
- What additional questions has this course raised for you?
- What specific questions do you have about what we have discussed so far?

A Review

- What is the problem that Paul is addressing in Galatians?
- What is the major theme of the letter?
- What is the outline of Paul's argument thus far?

Galatians 5:2-15

- This section reveals some insight into the problem in Galatia
- A mirror reading- we have to guess what was going on by reading one side of the conflict
- For Paul, the idea of the Messiah Jesus and the idea of circumcision belong in two different worlds
- If you get circumcised, the Messiah will be of no use to you - it would be going back to the old world
- In the Messiah, God has launched his new creation

Paul and the Torah

- Paul never says that the Torah was bad, but it's use in identifying God's people has run its course
- v. 3 - if you get circumcised, you would have to keep the whole law - Galatians may not have realized what that meant
- it's not Paul who's trimming the message, it's the agitating missionaries
- 6:13 - even these circumcised missionaries aren't keeping the law

Galatians 5:4-6

- v. 4 - you are split off from the Messiah if you get circumcised (literally "cut off from Christ" - pun intended!)
- you have fallen away from grace and fallen back to the law
- v. 5 - "eagerly wait..." - what the rival missionaries wanted was to get everything sewn up right now, but Paul says it's about the inauguration of God's new age, waiting in faith and hope for its ultimate arrival
- v. 6 - "in Christ Jesus" - neither circumcision nor uncircumcision matter, only "faith working through love"

A Clash of Religions?

- Some see Paul as abandoning Judaism here and coming up with a new religion called Christianity
- But that is not the case. Paul is not a supercessionist.
- Paul believed that the Jewish hope had been fulfilled in Jesus and the new creation
- To understand Christianity, you have to understand Judaism! Without it, it makes little sense and is easily misunderstood
- Many heresies take this approach, i.e. Marcionism

Galatians 5:7-12

- A more direct reference to the agitators (perhaps one in particular)
- v. 7 - you were “running well” and someone has tripped you up
- v. 8 they have persuaded you away from the truth - didn’t come from “the one who calls you” (God) - remember, Paul has given us the resume of his call directly from God
- v. 9 - “yeast” - you can’t have a dilution of the message - either you have freedom in Christ or you don’t

Galatians 5:7-12

- v. 10 - I think you will come around, but the one who is troubling you will bear the blame
- v. 11 - Preaching circumcision vs the cross. Why would Paul be persecuted for preaching circumcision? It removes the offense of the cross (ref. 1 Cor. 1:23)
- Back to 2:19-20 - that’s the scandal - Paul has grasped the scandal of the cross
- v. 12 - if circumcision is what they want, then why not just castrate themselves and be done with it?

Galatians 5:13-15

- You were called to freedom, but do not use that freedom as a license to self-indulgence in the “flesh”
- “flesh” = 1) circumcision, 2) a kind of sub-human existence in which people engage in sinful behavior
- “but through love become slaves to one another” - giving people the joy of living in a new community, new humanity

Galatians 5:13-15

- v. 14 - the whole law is summed up in one phrase - “love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18)
- The command to love is the quintessence of the law
- Paul is discerning that the heart of the law is the command to love
- love is the real identity of the Torah
- v. 15 - on the other hand, if you engage in biting and devouring one another, you will be consumed

Galatians 5:16-26 Law vs. Faith?

- We arrive at a problem that has long caused misunderstanding and bad theology
- Popular reading of Paul: “You don’t have to obey the law (including the moral law); you just have to have faith (i.e. believe the right doctrines) and you will be saved.”
- BUT GALATIANS IS NOT ABOUT BEING SAVED!!
- Why does Paul suddenly shift into ethics? A new legalism? No
- Addressing problems in the Galatian church (people keeping the law vs. people doing what they want)

Galatians 5:16-26

- Paul's polemic against the law is not a polemic against good behavior
- It's a polemic against law as a marker for the community
- There is a Christian standard of proper behavior - picking up the warning of 5:15 - your behavior will show who you belong to
- The people wanting you to be circumcised are emphasizing the flesh - just look around to see what company you will be keeping

Galatians 5:16-26

- If you go on to Torah, it's not taking you up to a higher level
- All you are doing is emphasizing your fleshly nature, which is where you started in the first place
- This is not dissimilar to the arguments Paul has made earlier
- He now contrasts the works of the flesh with the works of the Spirit (a new way to be human, a way in which the law itself would actually delight)

Galatians 5:16-26

- v. 16 - Live by the Spirit and do not gratify the desires of the flesh
- v. 17 - flesh and Spirit are opposed to one another; prevent you from doing what you want
- v. 18 - if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law
- People have often imagined this means, "If you are led from within, then you can throw away all moral restraint as long as you think God is leading you." It's about being "true to myself."

But that is NOT what Paul is saying!!!

- back to v. 16-17 - if you live by the Spirit, you won't do what the flesh wants you to do, because the flesh wants you to go against the Spirit - flesh and Spirit are at war with one another
- Very close to what Paul says in Romans 7

Charles Wesley

Whate're the Spirit speaks in me
Must with the written Word agree;
If not, I cast it all aside
as Satan's voice or nature's pride.

Life in the Spirit = Living in God's New Creation

- v. 18 - When Paul says you are led by the Spirit and not under the law, he means you are in a completely different sphere
- You are in the Messiah's sphere, the new creation world
- Within that world, there is a new way to be human, but also a new motivating power to move you toward it (the Spirit)

Galatians 5:19-21

The Works of the Flesh

- It's not that they are imminently in danger of going this way, but Paul is saying that all these things are destructive and dehumanizing ways of behaving
- If you emphasize the flesh, this is the world you will be returning to
- People who live like this will not inherit God's kingdom
- When the new age arrives, there is no place for behavior like this

Galatians 5:19-21

- God hasn't set up an arbitrary set of rules, expecting everyone to obey them...
- It's that God's world is about new creation with humans taking their proper vocation. In that vocation, there is no place for these "works of the flesh"
- God is transforming the world to be what he intended it to be, and these things are out

The Works of the Flesh

- **Sexual sins:** fornication (*porneia*), impurity, licentiousness
- **Spiritual sins:** idolatry, sorcery
- **Social sins against the community of faith:** enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing
- Danger from within and without the community (pagan worship and intra-community struggle)

The Works of the Flesh Explained

- **Fornication** (*porneia*) = sexual sin in general, cult prostitution in particular
- **Impurity** = sexual uncleanness
- **Licentiousness** = extreme and public debauchery
- **Idolatry** = idol worship
- **Sorcery** = aberrant religion, witchcraft, use of drugs in pagan religion to alter consciousness
- Many of these things happened in pagan temples

Works of the Flesh Explained

- Sins against the community of faith = sins Paul envisions happening when the law and its observance is introduced into the mix of the Christian community (fleshing out the argument of v. 18) - Witherington
- A picture of what happens when people take sides and conventions of enmity are set in motion
- These are the sins that will follow if the agitators' agendas are followed

The Summary

“Paul wishes his community of converts to be like neither the community centered on the pagan temple nor the community centered on the Mosaic Law. Rather, they are to be a community centered on Christ and in the Spirit.”

- Ben Witherington III

The Contrast

- v. 19-21 vs. 22-23
- Vices are things you don't have to try very hard at - they come when we stop paying attention
- Virtues are things you have to think about, be intentional about - requires prayer and self-examination
- If you're led by the Spirit, shouldn't these things happen naturally?

The Fruit of the Spirit

- Ends with "self-control" - key point
- What is self-control doing in this list if it's just about the Spirit in you? All of these "fruits" demand reflection, discipline, prayer, and wise counsel
- "Fruit" requires pruning, protection, nurture
- Anyone who wants the fruit must be willing to prune and protect. Be sure (via self-control) to allow the Spirit to do what the Spirit wants.

James D.G. Dunn

"In view of the clear echo of Jesus' characteristic on the theme (see 5:14), and the immediately following description of those who bear this fruit as 'those of Christ Jesus' who have patterned themselves on Christ's passion (5:24) and who are 'to fulfill the law of Christ' (6:2), the suggestion is also very inviting that Paul had in mind here a kind of 'character sketch' of Christ. This would certainly tie in with his characteristic understanding, and indeed definition of the Spirit as the Spirit of Christ...who transforms the believer into the image of Christ."

Fruit of the Spirit

- **Love** - *agape* - the signature quality of Christian community - most important
- **Joy** - *xara* - contentment, not produced by circumstances but by the Spirit
- **Peace** - *eirene* - shalom, personal wholeness, healthy relationships
- **Patience** - *makrothumia* - "having a slow fuse," patient endurance of suffering
- **Kindness** - attitude toward others
- **Generosity** - actions on behalf of others
- **Faithfulness** - *pistis* - mirroring the faithfulness of Christ in obedience to God
- **Gentleness** - *prautes* - a person in control of his or her emotions, consideration
- **Self-Control** - *egkrateia* - control of one's passion, ability to resist temptations

Galatians 5:23-26

- v. 23 - there is no law against such things - you are not in a sphere where people don't care how you behave
- v. 24 - Those who belong to Jesus crucified the flesh and its desires (ref. 2:19)
- Paul is talking about a life determined by the cross in order to be energized by the resurrection and the Spirit
- Not an easy path, but when you become "in the Messiah" then you can see that goal and, with practice, you can begin to find the way to it

Galatians 5:25-26

- A warning - line up with the Spirit
- It's not about vying with one another
- The missionaries have sparked other rivalries - once people start comparing themselves and questioning their identity, conflict arises
- The fruit of the Spirit, by contrast, will make for a single community, which has been the subject of the letter

Table Talk

- What are the arguments Paul uses against turning back to the law in Galatians 5?
- Why would Paul's statement, "I have been crucified with Christ" been offensive to his opponents?
- What might the Christian church look like without the letter to the Galatians?
- Discuss the practices that a believer might do to grow the fruit of the Spirit in his or her life.
