

Session 4

September 22, 2024

PURPOSE LIVED

Galatians 5:16-26

Adrian Rogers often said that Christian liberty was not being free to do what we “want,” but rather to do what we “ought.” In other words, once believers are freed from the bondage of sin and the obligation to works, they are finally able to serve Christ with unfettered love through unhindered devotion. And that’s really God’s desire. This week’s lesson helps us understand the necessity of putting away our own selfish desires and freely following Christ. This is done by the person and power of God’s Holy Spirit. The text divides nicely into three main sections.

The fight (vv. 16-18). At first glance, the battle Paul describes has but two sides: the flesh against the Spirit. The flesh is essentially man in his fallen nature. The flesh—left in its lost state and under Satan’s rule—is absolutely opposed to all that is good, and right, and holy. The Spirit is God’s Holy Spirit, that person of the godhead that regenerates the corrupt nature of man and leads him into godliness. Yet to do so involves not only the initial conversion to Christ, but an ongoing (dare I say, lifelong?) conflict (see Rom. 7:15 ff) that requires both commitment on the human side and guidance from the divine side. Hence, the necessity of “walking in the Spirit” (v. 16). The verb tense suggests more than a passive interest in spiritual things. It is a command rather to continually abide in the Holy Spirit’s presence and live by the Holy Spirit’s power. Methodist minister Joseph Benson (1749–1821) put it this way: “Follow his guidance, exercise his graces, and bring forth his fruits.” The odd item out in this scenario is “the law,” mentioned in verse 18. Interestingly, the law is good. It serves as an unwavering standard of God’s righteousness that helps bring us to Christ (see Matt. 5:17; Gal. 3:24). But Paul mentions the “curse of the law” as well (Gal. 3:10 ff). Simply put, the curse of the law is not the law’s shortcomings, but ours. We think it can save us, but it can’t...because we can’t keep it! For reflection: *How does our inability to keep the law become part of the battle between flesh and Spirit?*

The flesh (vv. 19-21). There is no need to dissect each of these hideous attitudes and behaviors separately. We get it! And Paul knows that we do when he adds the words “and anything similar” in verse 21. Notice the clear warning given in that verse as well. “...those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” That is not to say that we cannot be saved out of these atrocities (thank God!), or that we cannot be forgiven if we stray into these things (thank God!). Rather, he means that those who are continually living the lifestyle portrayed in these verses have never been truly saved to begin with. Christian liberty is freedom *from* sin, not freedom *to* sin! For reflection: *Notice the list of sins characterized as “works of the flesh.” Why do you think Paul includes “little” things like strife, jealousy, and anger along with “big” things like idolatry, sorcery, and sexual immorality? Does this mean that all sins are equal? What do you think?*

The fruit (vv. 22-26). The contrasts here are remarkable. First, there is a contrast in *source*. Works are things we do, but fruits are things that are produced. Works are wrought by man’s striving, but fruit comes from the Spirit. Second, there is a contrast in *nature*. The works of the flesh are selfish and corrupting, but the fruit of the Spirit is wholesome and redeeming. Third,

there is a contrast in *number*. The works of the flesh are presented as plural; that is, they are numerous and separate, but the fruit of the Spirit is presented as singular. Yes, there are identifiable, individual aspects, but the idea is not one or the other, but all at once. Don't think "one fruit here, and one fruit there." Think instead of a single fruit basket that has it all! For reflection: *Verse 25 says, "Since we live by the Spirit, we must also follow the Spirit." What are the insinuations made in this statement about the churches in Galatia? Are those insinuations positive or negative? Why?*