

Galatians Chapter 5 v 16 - 26

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 14 June 2020

Preacher: Barry Davies

[0 : 00] Well earlier we read a passage from Galatians and it's a great passage. It's one that really lifts our hearts and it's got some great things to say about the Christian life.

So we're going to look at this passage and search it out to see what it can teach us, what we need to know about following the Lord Jesus Christ. Now I want to start with an illustration which might seem a strange one, but it is appropriate for what we're going to be talking about later.

Kath and I once knew a person who, a long time ago now, it shows you how old Kath and I are, but this person used to virtually live on tuna.

Why? I've got no idea. Perhaps he'd heard somewhere that the benefits of tuna because it's an oily fish were good for your heart, etc. Not sure, but it seemed that every day he would have a tin of tuna.

Not sure what else he ate, but certainly this was something that everybody knew about him. And at that time, there was another panic similar to the one we have now, but not quite on the same scale, where it was thought that fish in the sea, particularly tuna, was susceptible to finding things in the ocean that contained mercury that had been discarded.

[1 : 31] And this would build up in the fish. And the worry was that this build up, if people ate lots and lots of tuna, whether you needed to eat a ton of it or not, we don't quite clear.

But if you had a sufficient amount, it could well poison you. Now, this boy thought about this and clearly it must have been a worry to him.

But in the end, he decided he would continue despite the warnings and he continued to eat his tuna. Now, you might think that's a strange thing to tell you.

But as you'll see, as we go on, it will have something to do with what we're going to speak about this morning. Because this passage that we read clearly shows us that there's a battle going on, a war, a conflict, as it says in the words that we read.

And that war or battle is between the flesh and the spirit. And this morning, we're going to look at what that battle entails.

[2 : 42] We're told at the outset of this passage that we read that we're to walk by the spirit. But what exactly does that mean to walk by the spirit?

Well, as we look into these things, hopefully we'll get a clearer picture of what that means. But it's obvious that for every Christian, the idea of walking with the spirit, the one who was sent to this to guide us and to teach us all those things that we need to know about God.

And the one who is the one who is the one who is the one who is the one who we do need to follow. And here's a conflict. Because we're not to do, this passage also tells us in verse 13, we're not to do whatever we want.

And unfortunately, that whatever we want comes from this thing, which in our version is translated as the flesh.

Now, it doesn't mean necessarily physically our flesh. It's more of a term which includes every aspect of our human lives.

[3 : 57] And as we know, our human lives are tainted by the sin that attaches to us and none of us are exempt from it. The Bible itself tells us that no one is without sin.

All are fallen short of the glory of God. So everyone has sinned. But this is telling us we're not to do whatever we want.

It then begins to give us a list of things that will harm us. Just as that boy who was eating a tuna was told that it could poison him.

Even if he continued eating less, but it was still potentially poisoned him. In other words, there were inherently bad things that he would be involved in if he ate that food.

But he continued. And what this list of things here tells us is that we've got various things which will be the effect of us following the flesh.

[5 : 02] In other words, following what as humans we would normally be involved in. Even though we're told that these things are at the very least not going to be helpful in terms of our spiritual lives.

And in fact, might be positively harmful. It says these lists of things are sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery, idolatry and witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, bits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy, drunkenness, orgies and the like.

We're not told what the like is, but we can imagine. But the biggest danger for the Christian or the even greater danger for those who have no faith is that we might look at that list.

And even if we read it, even if we heard somebody preach on it, we would look at that list and we would say, well, I don't do those things. Well, that's not quite true, is it?

We probably say we're not involved in witchcraft. We're not those people who are going to orgies and things like that. But we forget all of that list.

[6 : 21] In other words, we assume that it doesn't apply to us. But when you look at some of those things in there, like discord, like jealousy, like ambition, like envy, these are things which everybody from time to time will come across.

You wouldn't be a human if you didn't come across these things. You wouldn't be human if from time to time we didn't stray into those areas which might cause us to do those things.

We've probably all in our lives been jealous of someone or envious of them, perhaps because of their money, perhaps because of their abilities. Might be any one of a number of things, but we would all experience those things.

So it's not good to look at that list and simply really tell because some of those things we would definitely not be involved in, at least as far as we know.

But we would be involved in some of them. Inevitably. And yet, if we read on to the end of that list, this is where it says that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

[7 : 39] So this is a tremendous warning that to simply follow our human desires, which tell us, this is good for me. I can go and do this.

It won't do me any harm. I can carry on doing these things. The warning is there in these words. Those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

This could not be clearer. In contrast to that, this is what the flesh is leading to. In contrast to that, we're then given another list.

But this time is a list which as Christians, we would really love to exhibit ourselves. Let's look at them. The fruit of the spirit is the heading of this section.

And it's love, joy, peace, forbearance or patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

[8 : 45] And it tells us in this passage that there's no law about doing all those things. Rather, it puts us outside the law in some respects.

Because by doing these things, we're obeying God. We're trusting in him. But, at the end of that list of really wonderful properties or attributes of humanity, potentially.

Listen to what it says next. It says, those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Now, the clear implication is that we can't enjoy all those fruits of the spirits if we're not Christians.

These are things which apply to Christians. Those who belong to Christ Jesus. But, if we do belong to Christ Jesus, look at those words that followed it.

[9 : 51] We must crucify the flesh. We must crucify the flesh. Now, that is a very vivid picture, which all of us can imagine. Because all of us have heard the story of the cross and what Jesus went through as he was crucified.

It was a horrific death. It was a horrific death. And it was one that he was willing to go through because he wanted to demonstrate his love towards us.

And also in obedience to the Father. And yet, crucify the flesh. Crucify our humanity. Crucify our humanity.

That is a stark statement, isn't it? And yet, it literally says that. In other words, we have to completely go against the human view of things.

We have to go against the idea that everything is good for us, if we believe it's good for us. As it says, we're not to do whatever we want.

[10 : 58] We are to be controlled, as it were, by the Spirit. And here is where the battle goes on in our lives. Because the flesh, the humanity of us, because it's based in a sinful person.

It's the natural thing, as it were, from our perspective, for us to listen to, for us to do, for us to continue to do. And yet, the spiritual side of it, the Holy Spirit's guidance and leading, is that, far from being helpful in our lives, we've got to put that to death.

We've got to crucify it. We've got to avoid it. And, of course, this is something which, as it says in that passage, since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

It's the Holy Spirit, which gives people, first, the instruction about these things. And then, secondly, gives us the strength to resist them and to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit.

So, this is the battle that's taking place in everybody's life, day after day. And in that first part of Galatians that Joel preached on last time, it said this in verse 6.

[12 : 27] We're in Christ Jesus now, the circumcision of our own, circumcision of any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

And, of course, it's because of our love for Christ that we would want to follow what the Holy Spirit is telling us about these things.

Let me just read you a passage from Romans chapter 8, verses 12 to 14. We find these words.

Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation, but it's not to the flesh, in other words, not of our humanity, to live according to it.

For if you live according to the flesh, you will die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. What were those words that we read at the start of that passage? It says, so I say, walk by the Spirit.

[13 : 39] In other words, we're not to follow the things of this world, but we're to follow the things which the Spirit would have us understand and follow.

So let's look at some of those things that are mentioned of as the fruits of the Spirit. Some of them are in detail. Some we will just leave for you to study later.

But let's look at a few of them. The first one that's mentioned in that list of fruits of the Spirit is love.

And how can we demonstrate this love to our friends or sometimes to our enemies?

John chapter 15 verse 12 says this. My command is this. Love each other as I have loved you. Notice it's a command.

It isn't an option. It's a command. Love each other as I have loved you. Now, just pause for a moment there. Love each other.

[14 : 47] Love each other. That seems fine. Hard? Yes. But we could understand that. But love each other as I have loved you. Christ was willing to go to the cross and die that we might be saved, that we might one day have a place in heaven with God.

Can we really love others the way that Christ has loved us? It seems like an impossible task.

But we're commanded to do it. No options. It's a command from Jesus himself. What about the next one?

The next one talks about joy being another fruit of the Spirit. I've got a few questions as we go through here. And my question on joy is this.

If people met you in the context of church or in the context of your life, would they afterwards be able to talk about the joy that you appear to have?

[15 : 58] I suspect for most of us, we'd have to admit that for quite a large proportion of the time, we're probably not joyful or wouldn't appear to be joyful.

Let me give you another reading from Romans chapter 14, verse 17. It says, For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

So notice the eating and drinking bit, that's the flesh. But the joy is in the Holy Spirit. This whole passage is about the work of the Holy Spirit in people's lives.

Seeking to teach them how to live, how to walk with the Holy Spirit, how to experience the joy, the love and all the other fruits of the Spirit.

What about peace? If you asked someone, do you have peace, inner peace? Certainly in today's day and age, with the crisis that we've gotten currently, there are several times when they've interviewed people on television about how they're feeling about being in isolation and things like that.

[17:19] And they're often depressed. They have no peace. They don't know what's going to happen next. And when that is the case, most people find it difficult to have that peace, that inner peace, which gives them contentment.

Colossians chapter 3, verse 15 says, Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body, you are called to peace and be thankful.

I think anybody who's been through any time when they've not felt that inner peace will know that when you do sense that peace, you can be completely thankful to God.

Because he's the one who gives us that peace. Because he's the one who gives us that peace.

What about patience or forbearance? Are we patient with others?

I can tell you the answer now. No. Sometimes maybe we are. Sometimes it's against, as it were, our nature. But sometimes we can be impatient with people, quite often.

[18:34] But 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, verse 14 says, Be patient with everyone. Now, all of us find some people so, as it were, against what we would expect from them, that we get impatient with them.

And probably they would get impatient with us. So it's not a trivial thing to exhibit patience. I'm going to go through the others, but not to mention any particular references, but just to use the words to remind us.

And then end with one of the most important ones. The next few that I mention, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness. I'm sure from time to time, we would hope that as Christians we are those things.

But again, probably not all the time. And maybe when we reflect on this passage, those are the sorts of questions that we might ask ourselves. How can we ensure that these are attributes that we have and we can demonstrate in our lives?

But the last one in that list is self-control. Let me just read you some words from Galatians. This chapter, this passage we've been reading in verse 24.

[20:02] Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. I would say that if we put to death our humanity, our flesh, the things which would cause us not to worship God in the way that we should.

That is true self-control. And of course, there are many other parts of the Bible where it talks about having control of ourselves. Rather than being led by any other doctrine or by any other person or by any other whim that we might have, that we feel might help us as individuals.

So the conclusion of all this is that this is a battle, as it were, that the Christian has to win. That the Lord promises he will help us with, that the Holy Spirit is there to help us to win this battle.

And it's a battle for everyone. So the second one is that this is a battle for you. I'm going to just finish this particular section by giving you a reading from Ephesians chapter 5 verses 15 to 20, which sort of summarizes these things, but in different words.

This is what it says. Be very careful then how you live, not as unwise, but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

[21:36] Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. Do not get drunk on wine which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns and songs from the Spirit.

And make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let's seek to do that as we seek to learn to enjoy more the fruits of the Spirit.

And as we put to death the things that this flesh, our humanity, would seek to take us away from the word of God to do instead.

Let's just pray. Amen. May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith, that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Amen. Now we're just going to sing next our last hymn, which is Holy Spirit, Living Breath of God.

[23:08] And of course, it's the Holy Spirit we've just been talking about.