

Galatians 5:13-21 – Walk by the Spirit

Paul made it clear that the Galatians needed to choose Christ or choose circumcision. They could not choose both. They could either be declared righteous in the eyes of God by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, to the glory of God alone or they could attempt to be declared righteous based on their own pathetic “good works”. Adding any requirement to justification, apart from faith in Christ, has dire consequences. Christ will be of no benefit to you. You will need to follow all the law all the time. You will be cut off from Christ. You will not receive God’s grace. Paul was confident in God that God would turn the Galatians away from legalism and get them back to living a life of faith and love through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Read Galatians 5:13-15.

What is a common objection that people have to the idea that we are justified by God’s grace and not our own works? How do they react to the idea that we did nothing to earn our righteous standing before God?

Up to this point in the letter, Paul’s focus had mostly been on legalism. Christ set the Galatians free. They shouldn’t return to being slaves under the law. For the rest of chapter 5, Paul turned his attention to a different abuse of freedom. What was that abuse? Christ freed us from slavery to law and sin. But now we are a different type of slave or servant. What is our new focus as servants? (5:13)

In verses 13 and 14 Paul used words that he had previously used in a negative way and here he used them in a positive way. Slavery to sin and law is bad. Serving (slaving for) one another is good. Being under the yoke of the law is bad but fulfilling the law is good. In verse 14, what Old Testament passage did Paul quote? What is the meaning of this passage? Jesus mentioned this as the second (great) command. What was the first? See Matthew 22:35-40, Mark 12:28-31.

Based on verse 15, what was happening in the Galatian churches? What do you think might have been the cause of this?

What are some of the results of a legalistic or works mentality? What might we expect to see in a church where this exists?

Read Galatians 5:16-21.

In verse 16, what is the antidote for sinful living? What does it mean to walk by the Spirit? Only one major English translation, the RSV, translates the second part as a command “do not gratify the desires of the flesh”. All the other major English translations understand the second part of the verse as a promise. Why is “you will not gratify” properly understood as a promise and not a command “do not gratify”? (5:16-17)

What does Paul mean by “the flesh” in this context? Flesh and Spirit are opposed to each other. Why is that true? What is the result of this opposition? (5:17)

Based on verse 18, what is true of those who are led by the Spirit? Paul’s point will become clearer later in the chapter.

What are some examples of the works of the flesh? (5:19-21)

I don’t have chapter and verse on each vice, but I would guess that most or all of these vices are forbidden in the Old Testament. Did those under the law ever break these laws? Does the law ensure perfect obedience of those who are under the law?

What is true of those who practice these works of the flesh? Can a true believer sin? Have you ever know a Christian who says that they never sin? Does a true believer “lose their salvation” if they commit any of these works of the flesh? How is this statement not contradictory to Paul’s argument that justification is by faith in Christ and not by keeping the law? (5:21)

Have you ever heard the term “carnal Christian” used? Can a carnal / fleshly Christian truly exist? How can someone who is born from above and given the indwelling Holy Spirit continue to live the same old sinful life they did before “they were saved”? Was this person every truly born from above / born of the Spirit?