

Life by the Spirit Galatians 5:16-26

One of the great ironies of religious life is how some of the people whose lives are most dictated by rules are often the people who are greatest offenders of the rules. This makes no sense to many people who are outside of religion. Religious people who fail to uphold the rules are very quickly labeled as “hypocrites” and cast aside as the worst sort of sinners. Surely they failed at religion in a way that most religious people do not.

The Bible offers a different explanation for our failure to uphold religious rules. The darkness of the soul that is evident in most religious failures is not in spite of religious thinking, but because of religious thinking. When we begin to believe that salvation can be found in works, then works become the very thing that brings us down to failure. The only solution to the failures of the flesh is to enter into a New Covenant that is offered to us through faith in Jesus Christ.

Galatians 5:16-26

¹⁶ But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.¹⁷ For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. ¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality,²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions,²¹ envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. ²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

When Paul is speaking of the works of the flesh in verse 19, he is primarily speaking about the consequences of a life spent trying to please a manmade code of ethics. This is one more piece of evidence that salvation by works and salvation by grace through faith can NEVER coexist. The consequences of a life spent living by the spirit are completely different (vv. 22-23). The evidence of our life is why running away from works salvation (flesh) and toward Christ (spirit) is a matter of eternal life and death.

Discussion Questions

- **How does adherence to an old covenant feed (gratify) the desires of the flesh?**
- **Why do religious people tend to break the very laws they seek to uphold?**
- **What are the differences in Galatians 5 between the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit?**
- **Why are the works of the flesh and the fruit of the spirit incompatible?**

- **What does it mean to be led by the Spirit?**
- **How have you seen life in the spirit push out the desires of the flesh in your own life?**
- **What fruit of the spirit would you like to see become more evident in your own life?**
- **How does living by the Spirit allow you to live with greater peace in community with others.**