

Living By The Spirit

study 5

Galatians 5:1-26

If you've followed this series of studies from the beginning, you'll remember we've followed the Biblical plot-line from a key promise - if the Israelites were exiled and scattered for their unfaithfulness, all they had to do was call the emergency number - turn back to God with all their hearts and souls - and he promised to bring them back, and circumcise their hearts... *so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live.* [Dt 30:6] The prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel amplified the idea. At that time, they said, God will replace our hearts of stone with hearts of flesh... God says "I will put my law in their minds, and write it on their hearts" [Jer 31]... "I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws." [Ezek 36.]

In other words, when God's Spirit comes, God's people - Jewish or not - will now by nature **desire what God desires**. We will love what God loves. By nature (rather than because of rules and laws) we will love what is right. **In summary, God's Holy Spirit will produce Holy People.** Our personalities... will become like His Personality.

Sadly, the first Jewish Christians missed the point - as have lots of Christians since. They wanted to keep imposing their old rules and regulations, even though they had served their purpose.

Read Galatians 5:1-15.

1. Why does Paul say Gentiles must not be introduced to Jewish ways and 'law-keeping'?
2. Paul isn't saying righteousness is optional. Quite the opposite. But According to verse 5, what - as opposed to obeying rules - is the true key to righteousness? Fill in the gaps..

But by _____ we eagerly await through the _____ the righteousness for which we hope.

This is a stunning statement. Rather than struggling to keep laws, Paul says we should simply struggle to keep trusting Jesus, while the **Holy Spirit produces in us the righteousness we long for!** Compare this with 2:20-21, and Paul's prayer for the Galatians in 4:19. Trusting and following Jesus who gives us the Spirit is how the Christian life is lived out - not keeping rules and laws. Miss that, and Paul says you fall away from grace!

3. According to verse 6, what is the only thing that counts?
6. Rather than using our freedom from the law for self-indulgence, what should we be doing? (v13)

In what ways have you "served others" lately? Or been served? Did you realise this was the outworking of faith?

7. How does the one statement in verse 14 sum up all the Old Testament laws? (Think through the ten commandments as an example.)

But how does this play itself out in practice? Do you just relax, do what you like, and let God do the rest? Is the Christian life easy now we've got the Spirit? Quite the reverse. In fact, maybe it's even harder... because the Spirit of God at work in us now goes head-to-head with our old inclinations...



Natural Enemies

When you get right to the core, is human nature basically good - or do you find something else? A few years ago, a large supermarket had a blackout that lasted three minutes. By the time the lights and cash registers came back on, thousands of dollars worth of merchandise had been stolen. When the flood waters of Hurricane Katrina ravaged the United States, the looters were not far behind. It seems that given the opportunity, ordinary, “honest” people steal. It’s natural. In fact, Paul says there’s a constant conflict between that ordinary human nature, and the new nature we take on as Christians. When you become a Christian, you’re entering a war zone - the urges of the Holy Spirit, fighting it out with our desires to be envious, or selfish, or impatient. But for Paul, the solution is not more law... it’s something else.

Read Galatians 5:16-26

- Many Christians today speak about dramatic evidences of the Holy Spirit at work in their churches or their lives. According to verse 16, what will the MOST dramatic evidence of the Holy Spirit be?
- How surprised should you be as a Christian if you find yourself losing your temper or being jealous? What perspective does verse 17 give on this?
- Verses 19 to 21 give a list of the natural acts of our sinful nature. Verses 22 and 23 give a contrasting list, showing what living by the Spirit will look like. Fill in these qualities in the lists below...

sinful nature

fruit of the spirit



- Look carefully at the list of the “sins of the flesh”. They’re not all “R-rated”! What does the future hold for people who want to continue down this path?
- How does living by the Spirit do away with the need for Old Testament laws? (v18, 23b)
- From verse 15 and verse 26, what were the biggest struggles for the Galatians? What are the biggest struggles for you?
- The work of the Spirit is God’s work IN US. But that doesn’t mean we are passive. Read through verses 16 to 26 again, and find out what we as Christians are TO DO as people who have been given the Spirit.

Memorise the list of fruits of the Spirit. Look for times during the week where you can identify the urging of God’s Spirit in you, and see if you can “walk in step.”

Conclusion

So what can we say about The Holy Spirit? Long promised by God, the Holy Spirit was going to come and change the hearts of His People. Rather than living under a set of rules they didn't really want to obey, the people of God would serve him because they want to.

Jesus came as the long awaited "Spirit baptiser." In the book of Acts, it became clear that repentance - turning back to God - and faith in Jesus were the keys to receiving the Spirit, both for Jews and anyone else who responded. In summary, **Christians are people who "have a heart."**

Christians in Corinth, however, were over-excited by what they considered "gifts of the Spirit" - but Paul points out that the best gifts of the Spirit are the ones you can use to lovingly **build up your church family.**

A spirit-filled church will be one where that's what people are keen to do... where, motivated by the Spirit of God, we are growing in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control. It's great to be part of a church like that!

Look back through these studies, and discuss any issues that have been clarified for you.

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