

“Gospelizing” the Faithfulness of Christ

Among the Gentiles:

A Study of the Letters to the Galatians and Thessalonians

Diocese of West Texas

Spring & Fall 2010

Study and Reflection Session 6:

Walking in Line With the Spirit

(Galatians 5:13-6:18)

A Translation for Study, with Commentary

Translation of Gal 5:13-15

5:13 For you were called in freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be enslaved to one another. 14 For the whole Law has been fulfilled in a single commandment, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” 15 If, however, you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.

Commentary on Gal 5:13-15

God called the Galatians in freedom from observance of the Law.

- The “call” of the Galatians took place in the practical freedom of living “from faith” rather than from the Law’s requirements.
- Paul summarizes his argument up to this point: the Galatians experienced God’s “call” when the Spirit affirmed them as “sons” of God through their own “hearing of faith” (3:2, 5; 4:6).

Practical freedom means choices about how to act, how to *practice* your faith – so choose wisely or suffer the consequences!

- There are temptations and consequences associated with practical freedom, so Paul suggests that the love of others should guide decision-making on how to act – and even the Law agrees!
- Note the consistent theme of slavery throughout the letter: on the positive side, enslavement to Christ (1:10) or one another (5:13); on the negative side, enslavement to the Law (2:4; 4:24, 25; 5:1), the elemental spirits of the world (4:3, 9), or things that by their very nature are not gods at all (4:8). It appears to be Paul's understanding of human nature that we *all* serve something or someone.

Translation of Gal 5:16-18

16 Walk by the Spirit, I say, and do not satisfy the desires of the flesh. 17 For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, so that you will not simply do what you wish. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.

Commentary on Gal 5:16-18

Walking by the Spirit is an antidote to the destructive personal relationships taking place in the churches. As in the preceding verses, Paul uses “flesh” in a pejorative sense to refer to those worldly desires, attitudes, or norms that lead to destructive behavior.

- “Walk” is a Jewish verb denoting how a person lives daily life.
- To “walk” by the Spirit or to be “led” by the Spirit means living daily life in response to the Spirit's revelations and promptings.

- For Paul, following the Law and being led by the Spirit are mutually exclusive – a person cannot live under *both* standards at the same time.

What does it mean to “walk by the Spirit”? Paul is *not* suggesting that people decide how to act based on some kind of ecstatic individual experience, but to make such decisions informed by the revelations of the Spirit that take place when the community is discussing how to live faithfully.

- From 1 Corinthians we also know that the Spirit is the agent of revelation from God about the gifts God is bestowing on the community (see, for instance, 2:9-12; 12:4-6).
- From 1 Corinthians we know that revelation happens principally in the midst of conversation in the gathered community (14:26-31).

Translation of Gal 5:19-26

19 Now the works of the flesh are visible: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, 21 envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those practicing such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

22 By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. 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 walk in line with [stoicheō] the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, irritating one another, envying one another.

Commentary on Galatians 5:19-26

Paul lists some visible criteria to help believers discern how to act.

- Practical freedom in the Spirit doesn't mean "anything goes."
- So, Paul provides an illustrative list of the effects of specific conduct to help people distinguish between the fruit of faithful living and the destructive results of actions that reflect worldly influences.

The way people live determines if they inherit God's kingdom.

- Succumbing to the world's temptations leads to destructive practices and effects that show that a person is not God's "son" and "heir" to inherit the kingdom (see 3:26, 29; 4:5-7).
- Conversely, identifying intimately with Christ means dying to (crucifying) the temptations of the flesh and living by the Spirit.

Those who walk in line with the Spirit experience life from God. In 5:22-25, Paul identifies some visible signs of life that confirm that members of the community are walking faithfully by the Spirit.

- Paul expects the gathered community to reflect on the experiences of their common life together and to discern whether their behavior is destructive (5:19-21) or fruitful (5:22-23).
- The verb *stoicheō* was often used in military contexts, indicating the way soldiers fall in line behind their leader.
- Paul similarly suggests that believers imaginatively fall in line behind the Spirit. He asks them to remember actions they have taken that have yielded the "fruit of the Spirit," as they attempt to discern faithful actions in the present.

Translation of Galatians 6:1-10

6:1 My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you, as the spiritual ones, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Take care that you yourselves are not tempted.

2 Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. 3 For if those who are nothing think they are something, they deceive themselves.

4 Let each person test his or her own work; then that work, rather than one's neighbor's work, will become a cause for pride. 5 For all must bear their own loads.

6 Those who are being taught the word must partner in all good things with their teacher.

7 Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow. 8 If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit. 9 So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. 10 Therefore, then, as we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the household of the faith [*tēs pisteōs*].

Commentary on Galatians 6:1-10

In this section, Paul illustrates how to “be enslaved to one another” (5:13) and to “be led by the Spirit” (5:25). He offers concrete ways to benefit *others* in the community (6:1a, 6:2, 6:6), while encouraging realistic *self*-assessment (6:1b, 6:3-5).

Who are the “spiritual ones” in 6:1 who are to restore transgressors?

- Aren't all the Galatians “spiritual” (see 3:2, 5)? Apparently not!
- The “spiritual ones” are probably those in the community still discerning what the *Spirit* is leading them to do (5:18, 25), rather than those who are letting the Law determine what they do.

- The goal is to *restore* the person *gently* (probably, to wholeheartedness and right relationships in the community) rather than to judge, punish, or expel.
- Paul is wise and practical, warning of the temptation to lord over a transgressor rather than treat him or her with gentleness.

Bearing one another's burdens makes us instruments of God's grace to each other.

- Paul encourages community members to seek out and support those whose life experiences are weighing them down.
- His encouragement highlights the *interdependence* of all members of the community of Jesus-followers who, by doing work fitting for a slave, enslave themselves to one another (5:13) and fulfill the Law's command to "love your neighbor as yourself" (5:14; Williams, 154-55).
- Community members who see themselves as self-sufficient, and who are unwilling to bear this *mutual* responsibility deceive themselves (6:3) and are failing to assess honestly their own contributions to the community.

Paul draws on language from the world of Greco-Roman morality.

He characterizes life under the Spirit as "doing what is right" and working "the good," with the promise that this behavior in everyday life (the "sowing" in Paul's metaphor) will be eternal life (the "reaping") at God's appointed time.

Those who are led by the Spirit serve the well-being of *all* people, not just those in the church. Paul characterizes the church as the household of "the faith," highlighting that the church is the community living the pattern of "the faith of Christ."

Translation of Gal 6:11-18

11 See what large letters I make when I am writing in my own hand! 12 It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who try to compel you to be circumcised – only that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. 13 Even the circumcised do not themselves obey the law, but they want you to be circumcised so that they may boast about your flesh. 14 May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. 15 For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything! 16 As for those who will walk in line with [*stoicheō*] this rule [*kanōn*] – peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God. 17 From now on, let no one make trouble for me; for I bear the marks [*stigmata*] of Jesus on my body. 18 May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters. Amen.

Commentary on Gal 6:11-18

Paul gives the Galatians a special message in his own hand! Paul takes the pen from the hand of the scribe (who has been writing the letter according to Paul's dictation) and writes his final, personal appeal.

Walking in line with the cross of Christ renders irrelevant the distinction between Jew and Gentile and leads to persecution.

- Drawing on his own experience from *both* sides (see 1:13-14; 3:1), Paul says that those who embody the cross of Christ by eating and socializing with Gentiles expose themselves to persecution.
- Paul also echoes 2:11-14, where Peter and others were intimidated by the “men from James” (other Jewish-Christians in Jerusalem) and refused to eat with Gentile followers of Jesus.

- Paul contends that those who insist that the Galatians undergo circumcision are trying to avoid that same persecution.
- For Paul, the cross is the *kanōn* (literally, “measuring rod”) for the actions of those who follow Jesus; *kanōn* is the same Greek word applied centuries later to describe the books of the Bible.
- Those who walk in line with the cross no longer enforce the Law’s distinctions between Jews and Gentiles (see 3:28)

**God’s *new creation* is the place
where ethnic distinctions and practices
no longer function to divide people!**

Paul bears the marks (*stigmata*) of Christ crucified. Thus Paul describes the scars of his own persecution at the hands of others, because he is willing to pay the price for walking by this new rule of the cross.

Questions for Reflection

1. Paul says that our practical freedom in Christ is limited because we have chosen to be “enslaved to one another” (5:14). Tell a story about a recent time when you decided not to do something you wanted to do because you took into consideration the needs of someone else in your community. For Paul, “being led by the Spirit” takes place by means of conversations in the community. In the decision you described

- in the first part of this question, how did other people in the community help you make your choice about how to act?
2. Tell a story about a recent time when you saw certain actions lead to the results that Paul calls “works of the flesh” in 5:19-21.
 3. Tell a story about a recent time when you saw certain actions produce what Paul calls “fruit of the Spirit” in 5:22-23.
 4. Can you tell a story about a time recently when you witnessed someone “restoring” another person to the community in a way that manifested the gentleness that Paul is speaking of in 6:1? What makes correcting others difficult in a community of faith?
 5. Tell a story about a recent time when you or your community helped bear the burdens of a community member or family. What impact did these actions have on the community as a whole?
 6. Paul encourages the Galatians not to grow weary in doing what is right (6:9). Tell a story about a recent time when you were *tempted* to throw up your hands and give up on your attempts to respond faithfully to a difficult situation. Who or what sustained you or encouraged you to continue engaging the difficult situation? What was the outcome?
 7. Paul says that walking in line with the cross puts all people in right relationship with one another. Tell a story about a recent time when you or someone you know “walked in line with the cross” and reconciled a broken relationship.
 8. Paul bears the marks of Jesus on his body – the result of walking in line with the cross. For Paul, these marks were the

physical signs of the persecution he had endured. But what might the marks of Jesus look like in our own setting?