

Galatians 5: 19-26, Part 1

Galatians 5:19-26—¹⁹The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. ²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. ²⁵Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.”

- I want to look at this passage in two distinct ways. First (this week) I want to take kind of a 30,000 foot view. That is, I want to take kind of big-picture approach. Next (next week) I'd like to drill down to the specifics of the text itself.
- **J. Edward Carnell:** “God never urges himself to be good, because he *is* good. That is, his nature always inclines irresistibly toward righteousness. God is never torn by evil motives. God is light and in him is no darkness at all. So he does not need to be reminded about the duty of his deity. No one needs to say, ‘Now today, God, mind your manners, do what’s right, avoid evil, remember the ten commandments.’”¹
- When a person *is* good from root to branch he does not need to be told to be good. His goodness grows like fruit on a tree.
- Is that the way we are? Do we naturally and spontaneously do what is right, think what is right, and carry it out with the kind of humility that goodness requires?
 - Do right attitudes and actions come out of us as naturally as light and heat come out of the sun? We know they don’t.
- We need a list of bad things and a list of good things, like we get here in Galatians 5:19–23. **“¹⁹The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.**
- But there is a great danger in giving morally depraved people like us a list of right things and wrong things. It is the danger of the law that we have seen all through Galatians. The danger is that instead of seeking transformation from God in our hearts to rid ourselves of our depravity, we may take the list of virtues and find a way to use them to express our depravity.
 - For example, if our problem is that at root we are very proud and self-sufficient people, and a moral authority like Paul tells us that kindness and faithfulness are virtues, we may very well train ourselves to do kind things and to keep our promises so that we can be proud of ourselves and feel morally self-sufficient before God and man. Then the list of virtues would not have helped us overcome our depravity at all. In fact, it would have deepened our sin,
- Paul is aware that his teaching can be twisted into an abused in this way (just like Old Testament law was). So he takes special steps to help us not misuse his list of vices and virtues. Paul’s aim is not to change the veneer of our lives with some new learned habits of

¹ John Edward Carnell, *Christian Commitment: An Apologetic* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982).

behavior. His aim is a new creation (6:15) from the root up, so that new habits are the natural outgrowth of new hearts.

- There are, I think, at least four things here to keep us from turning these two lists into just another form of legalism.
1. First, he calls his list of vices “*works* of the flesh” (5:19–21) and he calls his list of virtues “*fruit* of the Spirit” (5:22–23). That is significant.
 - **“¹⁹The acts of the sinful nature are obvious...”**
 - **²²But the fruit of the Spirit is...”**
 2. Second, in verse 24 he says that the basis of our doing right and not wrong is that the root of wrong has died. The flesh has been crucified if we are Christ’s. So the flesh can’t reach up and twist love into legalism. It’s dead.
 - **“²⁴Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.”**
 3. Third, in verse 25, when Paul finally *commands* us to do something, he tells us to do it in someone else’s power, not our own: “If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk *by the Spirit*.” This rules out the possibility that we should ever take a virtue and by our own strength make it a ground for boasting. No, the only way any act has moral value is if we do it in reliance on the Spirit’s power, not ours.
 - **“²⁵Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.”**
 4. Finally, in verse 26 Paul’s command is not addressed primarily to an outward act but to an inward attitude: “Let us have no self-conceit.” Let us not be driven by the love of praise and glory.
 - So in these four ways Paul helps us see that our real problem is not the whitecap of behavior visible above the water; the real problem is the massive dark iceberg of depravity beneath the surface.
 - **“²⁶Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.”**
- So I hope you can see that there is a world of difference between biblical ethical teaching and popular American morality. The Bible soberly acknowledges the awful root of depravity—self conceit, vain glory within the human heart. And the Bible solves the problem with a supernatural encounter with God, called *new birth* at its beginning and *sanctification* afterward. If we come alive by an act of the Spirit, so now let us go on walking in reliance on the Spirit (5:25). Popular American morality, on the other hand, is astonishingly naïve about the depth of our corruption and even turns much of our pride into a virtue.
 - Paul takes to keep us from turning his ethical teaching into another 20th century American self-improvement program.
1. He calls the vices in 5:19–21, “*works* of the flesh,” and the virtues in 5:22, 23, “*fruit* of the Spirit.” Why?
 - Keep in mind that “flesh” does not mean “body,” as though our bodies were the root cause of our sins.
 - There are some sins listed here that don’t come from our bodies (e.g., strife, enmity, jealousy, anger, envy, etc.).
 - Flesh is the old ego that is self-reliant and does not delight to yield to any authority or depend on any mercy. It craves the sensation of self-generated power and loves the praise of men. We have seen earlier that in its conservative form it produces legalism—keeping rules by its own power for its own glory.

- But here Paul opens the lens so we see that the flesh also (in its more liberal form) produces grossly immoral attitudes and acts: “sexual immorality, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery,” and hateful, harmful tendencies: “enmity, strife, jealousy, anger,” etc. The flesh is the proud and unsubmitive root of depravity in every human heart.
- Now why does Paul call the products of our flesh “works” and the products of God’s Spirit through us “fruit”?
- Strife, jealousy, anger and the others are not generally calculated to *earn* anyone’s approval. But let’s be careful here. Such things are not in themselves performed to earn anything; *but* they are an emotional attempt to settle accounts because we didn’t get what we thought we had earned or deserved.
- **Piper:** “In other words, the kind of heart that produces these vices is a heart that thinks of itself as creditor and everyone else as its debtors. The flesh is convinced of its own merit and expects God and man and nature to pay dues by giving the satisfaction it desires. When these payments of satisfaction are not made, the flesh reacts the way it does not to earn anything, but because it feels that it already had earned what it didn’t get.”²
- This is precisely why marriage is so tough on us initially. We naturally think that we deserve happiness, fulfillment, satisfaction, to be served, etc. The primary purpose of marriage, however, is not to make you happy but holy!
- The flesh/sinful nature doesn’t think of its satisfactions as free gifts from a merciful God. It thinks of it as a series of debts which it deserves to be paid. This is why all its products should be called “works.”
 - This is the root of so very much of our problem!
 - We believe we are entitled to something, someone, some condition
 - We genuinely think that our happiness/fulfillment is *owed* to us.
- So everything it produces is flavored by the mentality of merit and is called “works.”
 - This is why you get angry when your husband/wife/roommate/ brother/sister/parent doesn’t do something that you want them to do.
- But the mentality behind the fruit of the Spirit is the mentality of *faith* depending upon grace.
 - People who bear the fruit of the Spirit know what they deserve: condemnation.
 - They know that the only *pay* they can *earn* is the wrath of God.
 - Therefore, they have turned away from self-reliance and look only to mercy in Christ who “loved us and gave himself for us” (2:20).
- Any satisfaction will be a free gift of grace. And out of that mentality of faith depending on grace grows not “works” but “fruit”: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness...
- Paul assumes that some powerful battle has been fought and won in the deep territory of our soul. That’s the meaning of verse 24.

Slaying the Dragon of Flesh

- “Picture your flesh—that old ego with the mentality of merit and craving for power and reputation and self-reliance—picture it as a dragon living in some cave of your soul. Then you hear the gospel, and in it Jesus Christ comes to you and says, “I will make you mine and take possession of the cave and slay the dragon. Will you yield to my possession? It will mean a whole new way of thinking and feeling and acting.” You say: “But that dragon is me.

² John Piper, “Walk by the Spirit!,” August 1983, http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByScripture/7/399_Walk_by_the_Spirit/

I will die.” He says, “And you will rise to newness of life, for I will take its plan; I will make my mind and my will and my heart your own.” You say, “What must I do?” He answers, “Trust me and do as I say. As long as you trust me, we cannot lose.” Overcome by the beauty and power of Christ you bow and swear eternal loyalty and trust. And as you rise, he puts a great sword in your hand and says, “Follow me.” He leads you to the mouth of the cave and says, “Go in, slay the dragon.” But you look at him bewildered, “I cannot. Not without you.” He smiles. “Well said. You learn quickly. Never forget: my commands for you to do something are never commands to do it alone.” Then you enter the cave together. A horrible battle follows and you feel Christ’s hand on yours. At last the dragon lies limp. You ask, “Is it dead?” His answer is this: “I have come to give you new life. This you received when you yielded to my possession and swore faith and loyalty to me. And now with my sword and my hand you have felled the dragon of the flesh. It is a mortal wound. It will die. That is certain. But it has not yet bled to death, and it may yet revive with violent convulsions and do much harm. So you must treat it as dead and seal the cave as a tomb. The Lord of darkness may cause earthquakes in your soul to shake the stones loose, but you build them up again. And have this confidence: with my sword and my hand on yours this dragon’s doom is sure, he is finished, and your new life is secure.”³

- This, I think, describes the meaning of verse 24.
- The Christian life, the fruit of the Spirit, is a constant reckoning of the flesh as dead (piling stones on its tomb) and a constant relying on the present Spirit of Christ to produce love, joy, and peace within.
 - The difference between the Christian life and popular American morality is that Christians will not take one step unless the hand of Christ holds the hand that wields the sword of righteousness.

²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. ²⁵Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

³ John Piper, “Walk by the Spirit!,” August 1983, http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByScripture/7/399_Walk_by_the_Spirit/.