

February 26, 2017
Lesson 13: Gal. 5:18 – 6:10
Christ Creates Holy Living

Context:

As we have seen in the preceding chapter with Paul's letter to the Galatians, there is a focus on right teachings and the right way to be in the world. For Paul, the Law has become oppositional in the way that some leaders and teachers have been using it. They have used it as a weapon to coerce and lead the people in the direction they want them to go. As they do so, it leads to controversy within the church and there is infighting that has caused them to turn on one another and even on Paul. Even the Law, which was meant to protect them, has turned them on each other in a way that almost defeats the point of the Law. Pride and ambition have led to people destroying one another, all in the name of faith.

To help the church, Paul writes about being led by the Spirit, The Spirit is to lead the people against actions that bring devastation and cause dissention. The Spirit is to help them see they are all brothers and sisters in Christ. The list he gives of selfish actions are to help them see that any of these things can cause people to hate each other and hurt one another. He goes on to say that the Spirit has fruits that become evident in people: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law that guards these types of things.

Paul goes on to say that if they all live by the Spirit, they will get along and see the positive things about one another. They will help those who do wrong with gentle words and they will help each other when they fall down. And as they encourage one another, they will grow on their own.

To drive the point home, Paul uses the imagery of planting and harvesting to say what will happen if people follow the Spirit. Trying to plant something on your own with negative intentions will only lead to a failed crop. Those who do things for others and share life together will have a harvest that benefits all. For Paul, the community of faith is to work together so that the household of faith may be all that they are called to be.

Application:

There are several things that should jump out to us as we read about what it means to live according to the Spirit and how we witness to others in our response to God. Paul's chapter has some very helpful suggestions to how we are to live in accord with one another in both the church and even the world abroad. All of us should be striving to live in the Spirit and see how God can use us to love and support one another.

The one word that threads all the actions in verses nineteen through twenty-one is selfishness. When we are selfish we do things that are only for our desires. We do not think about anyone else and we do not consider how our desires may affect other people. The list of actions that Paul provides reveals that whenever these things become the focus of a group or church or a person, then divisiveness occurs. How many times have we seen a church split or leave a denomination because they

did not get “their way” on an issue? Or how many times have we done things for our own good only to hurt others in the process? Sometimes it is almost too painful to come back together because of the harm that was done by our impatient impulsive nature. The oppositional list that Paul gives to the list of behavior are fruits that leads to good things. Whenever we are loving, joyous, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle, and exercise self-control, we allow God to work through us so that acknowledge that Christ is the one who leads and unites all of us. As these fruits take place in our life, we begin to see that we are all interconnected to one another. So before you take that action, or say that word, or form that opinion, think about how it will affect someone else. Of course, we will slip up and make mistakes because we are all sinners and we all have our weaknesses. But as we grow in our faith, we begin to realize that whenever the fruits of the Spirit are at work in us, we can overcome those negative things.

The second think Paul talks about is living in the Spirit with one another when it comes to accountability. He speaks specifically of not being arrogant and having a helping spirit. I think one thing that all people need is accountability. Not accountability in the sense of someone telling how you’ve done everything wrong, but accountability to help you become a better Christian. For my own life, I have several people I completely rely on to be honest with me when it comes to situations dealing with other people and my own life. Sometimes they tell me outright if I have handled a situation poorly, and other times they do so with gentle nudge to do better. I’ll never forget a dear mentor of mine giving me a beautiful little painting with a scripture that has constantly reminded me to watch how I live with others: “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Romans 12:18.” At the time I received the gift I was struggling with some relationships where there was a lot of brokenness. When I received the gift, I realized that I had to do my part and make peace, even when there was clear tension with those other parties. But the gift also reminded me that this was a person I could trust; someone who really cared about my well-being and my Christian witness. Who are the people you turn to for direction and difficult decisions? Find people who will speak the truth in love and those you know love you so much that they will always have your best interests in mind.

The last point we hear Paul talk about is planting and harvesting. His counsel to the Galatians is to plant things that will benefit all parties, not just one person or group. How important these words are to us today! As we make decisions both individually and corporately, we should think about how they will impact others. Do we want to make hasty decisions that lead to devastation and misery in the future? Or do we want to make decisions where people see that the Spirit was at work in us and with everyone together? These are the kinds of questions we should ask ourselves about the decisions we make today. Think about how your actions today will affect the world of tomorrow. If you think that your words or actions will cause brokenness, pain, or strife, then you should probably rethink them. But if they will create unity, joy, excitement, and give life, then go forward and do or say them. That is the Spirit at work and that is God’s kingdom becoming “on earth as it is in Heaven.”