

Study Questions

Free Indeed: A Study in the Epistle of Galatians

The Spirit at War With The Flesh

Galatians 5:13-26

Opening Discussion

1. Have you ever trusted someone and gotten burned? What happened? What did you learn?
2. Have you ever been burned by someone, only later to find out this person had a pattern of hurtful behavior? What difference would it have made if you had known about this person's pattern before he/she hurt you?

Bible Study

1. Read Galatians 5:1-12 and review briefly what you learned in that text.
2. Compare 5:1 with 5:13. Notice the similarities (remember the word "serve" in 5:13 is the Greek word for slave).

It seems Paul's statement regarding subjecting ourselves again to the yoke of slavery from verse 1 would help us define "opportunity for the flesh" in 5:13. What, then, does he mean by this statement in v. 13?

3. To simply define the flesh as "sinful nature" or something similar is to miss Paul's point as it relates to legalism. How has he defined the term "flesh" in Galatians so far? (1:16, 2:16, 3:3, 4:29)

Paul is not going to suddenly change the meaning of his terms halfway through his letter. "Flesh" in Galatians refers to what?

What is the symbolism as it relates to the flesh in circumcision?

4. Define the differences between someone who lives by the flesh (legalist) and someone who walks by the Spirit, according to 5:13-26.
5. In 5:19-21 Paul is not saying that all these sins would characterize the legalist. (However, every legalist would manifest some of these sins, because that's the bent of the flesh.) Rather, those who practice such things (not the "you" referring to the "brethren" in 5:13) simply give evidence to the natural bent of human behavior apart from God. If that is true—if that is the natural bent of human behavior apart from God—why would a believer think that he/she can use that same sin-bent flesh to become more righteous?

Go back and review the "Opening Discussion" questions. The legalist believes that even though the flesh is prone toward sin, it can be tamed to produce righteousness. That's like trusting someone again after a pattern of hurtful behavior. Why would we do this?

6. The alternative to law is to believe only the Spirit of Christ in us can make us righteous (5:5). This was our core belief when we invited Christ to be our Savior (2:20, 3:3, 5:24). If we were made alive by the Spirit (salvation, 5:25), then we can only be made righteous by the Spirit (5:25). If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law (5:18).

Application

1. The issue in Galatians is an issue of a core belief. Can you (your flesh) make yourself righteous or must the Spirit of Christ make you righteous? One is something I merit by my good behavior; the other is one I simply receive by grace. For one, obedience is an attempt to make myself righteous; while for the other, obedience is an outflow of what the Spirit is doing in me.

At the core of your being what do you really believe concerning who makes you righteous? Is it you in the power of your flesh or the Spirit on the basis of grace? If the Spirit's work is not on the basis of grace (undeserved) then you're right back to "meriting" the work of the Spirit which is back to law.

If you do not believe you can make yourself righteous (the flesh) then all practices of legalism must be confessed as sin (5:7). Ask God to reveal the legalism in you and commit to doing what is necessary to rid it from your life.

2. If we are dependent on the Spirit of Christ to make us righteous, then our passion in life should be to pursue Him and learn what it means to walk by the Spirit. As a group, come up with 5 practical things you can do to learn and cultivate a Spirit-filled walk.