

Pastor's Corner – 9-30-2017

Life by the Spirit

“So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.... But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

I love it when the Bible surprises you. Just when you think you have a pretty good grasp of things, the scriptures can jump out and show you something new. I had that happen to me a week or so ago during Sabbath School as I was skimming through some verses in Galatians. I had read these verses many times before but for some reason a nuance I hadn't seen before became came into focus.

In this passage Paul is talking about how the Christian life is defined by the Spirit of God who dwells in us. He contrasts living in the Spirit with living according to the sinful nature and shows how the two forces are opposed to each other. This is a popular theme in Pauline writings which is perhaps why it never really stood out to me before. I guess I figured, “there's nothing to see here. Move along.”

My new appreciation for this passage began as I considered the phrase, “if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.” That's kind of a curious thing to say. Does this mean that if I'm a Christian that the law of God no longer applies to me? Some Christians have certainly interpreted the passage in this way. But how could Paul say that if you are led by the Spirit you aren't accountable to the moral law anymore?

The answer to that question comes from the first part of the passage where he talks about living by the Spirit. In first sentence there is a promise. The promise says that if you “live by the Spirit, you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.” Instead, those who are “living by the Spirit” will manifest the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, etc. There's no law that condemns love. The moral law doesn't have any restrictions on joy, or peace. You're free to show all the patience, kindness and goodness that you want. God doesn't mind and his law doesn't forbid these things.

The reason that the moral law (yes it's the moral law in view here) isn't overseeing someone led by the Spirit is because all the law can do is condemn. It's there to point out sin but because those who live by the Spirit don't gratify the sinful nature the law has nothing left to say.

The law is there, prepared to jump up and point angry fingers at you and call out all your bad deeds but since the Spirit isn't leading you to commit bad deeds the law just sits there silently moping. I imagine the conversation is something like this.

Law: “Hey you! What do you think you're doing there?!?”

Spirit led Me: “Uhh, praying for my enemies and rejoicing in the Lord?”

Law: “Oh, right. That's cool. Carry on. But don't get any funny ideas, I'm watching you!”

Spirit led Me: “No worries. After this I’m going to show kindness to someone who is mad at me, then I’ll be patient with my wife, later I plan to be gentle with my daughter. I think I’ll finish off the day by exercising a bit of self-control. You can watch if you want.”

Law: “Naw, I’m good man. You just keep on living by the Spirit, I’m gonna go keep an eye someone else. I hear there’s a church elder eating cheese. That might be interesting.”

If you want to be exempt from God’s law, then live by His Spirit so that you produce His fruit. Paul doesn’t say Christians aren’t accountable to the law. What he says is that Spirit-led people simply won’t be doing things that the law condemns, therefore it no longer has anything left to say.

I long for the day when we all truly learn how to live by the Spirit. May his fruit be more evident in my life.

Have a Happy Sabbath,

Pastor Tyler