

Gospel Character Gal 5:16-25

Tim Anderson 11/8/2019

I have a friend over in New Zealand who I often exchange emails with. He's not a Christian.

And sometimes his emails ask me for an explanation of something to do with Christianity.

This week he emailed me with a puzzled tone.

Another person known to him was behaving with insufferable pride.

And yet this person also spoke using language like 'God willing' when he speaks of his future plans.

It seems like this person is a Christian,

and yet he behaves in a way,

that a person who is not a Christian

can't help but notice the glaring contradiction.

Robbie Boer was telling me this week about a man he's worked with on building sites.

This man is so totally self focused

that all of the other tradesmen can't stand working with him.

He's quite happy to inconvenience everyone else massively to make things a little bit easier for himself.

About 18 months ago,

this behaviour nearly tipped Robbie over the edge.

And so, wanting to live as a follow of Jesus,

Robbie went up to him the next day to try to make peace,

and as he was chatting found that the man attends a church.

It left Robbie's bottom jaw hanging down.

Those kind of stories are very disappointing.

The witness we bring to the world of our Lord Jesus

is just terribly distorted when our lives contradict the message.

And you've heard stories like that too.

Sadly, they are not a rarity.

Today's passage from Galatians addresses the consistency of our Christian lives. We would like our lives to be consistent with what we believe. Last week we heard that the essence of the Christian life is 'faith expressing itself through love'. That is the guide as to what it means to live as a follower of Christ. But that's pretty general. Love is a wonderful word but it doesn't drill down to the nitty gritty. What are the specifics of living for Jesus? Today's passage gives us some specifics of what to do and what not to do.

Now specifics are both very helpful and a danger. They are helpful because they give us clear direction about what pleases God and what doesn't. When I'm doing something I like clear direction about what it is I need to do. But specifics are also dangerous. It's possible to read a list of instructions about things a Christian shouldn't do and use it to compare yourself to others. You may think you are going really well and become proud. You may think you are going not so well and become discouraged. Both are unhelpful. Not much point reading a list of ways Christians ought to live and thinking you measure up, only to realise that pride is on the list of ways Christians shouldn't live. And becoming discouraged actually makes it harder to try. So that doesn't help anyone.

Well let's get to the nitty gritty. How should we live? Three times in these verse, Paul tells the Galatians something about how they are to walk. 5:16 'So I say, Walk by the Spirit,'

5:18 'If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.'
5:25 'Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.'
Walk by the Spirit.
Led by the Spirit.
Keep in step with the Spirit.
Each of them is a walking metaphor.
You may have noticed when you are walking with someone,
often you change the length of your stride
so that your feet hit the ground at the same time.
It's a natural thing to do,
to keep in step with someone you are walking with.
Soldiers of course march that way intentionally.
It's a way of showing that they are a unit.
And we are to walk with the Holy Spirit of God.
Walking along the path that the Holy Spirit lays down.
But what is that path?

Well it's not an easy path to follow.
On one hand you have the path of the flesh.
On the other hand you have the path of the Spirit.
And there's a real battle going on inside of us,
to take us in one direction or the other.
The wrong direction is the desires of the flesh.
'Desires' is a key word.
It's out of control desires
that stop us walking by the Spirit.
They can be desires for bad things or good things.
Although if you think about it,
there are very few totally bad things out there.
Most things are good in the right time and place,
used properly in the right way.
Is a gun a bad thing?
Well they've certainly been used in bad ways,
twice in the last week in the US.
But if a farmer uses a gun to shoot foxes who are attacking his sheep,

well there's nothing wrong with that.
The problem is when our desires get out of whack.
We want too much of a good thing.
Like my plate at a buffet dinner.
There's nothing wrong with the food,
it's the amount I pile on.
Or we want a good thing in the wrong context.
Sex is a good thing.
But God designed it for a husband and wife.
Our desires outside of that are desires of the flesh.
Friendship is a good thing.
But it's possible for our desire for relationship with our friends
to move over into trying to control them,
or be jealous of other people they are friends with.
Wanting to do your best is a good thing.
In Colossians Paul tells the church,
"Whatever you do, work with all your heart,
as if working for the Lord, not for human masters."
But the desire to do your best can move over into selfish ambition,
where you are happy to clamber over people to get to the top.
The desire to worship is a good thing.
But we must only worship the one true God -
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
And our desires will lead us towards the worship of substitutes.
Whether that is literal substitutes like the idols
that represented goddesses
like Artemis and Aphrodite in the first century,
or the idols that are part of Buddhist and Hindu worship today.
Or the metaphorical idols like money, sex and power
that are worshipped without a second thought in Australia today.

What stops us walking by the Spirit?

It's our desires.

Usually desires for things that are in themselves quite OK.

But our desires have gotten out of control.

And so Paul gives the Galatians of list ways these out of control desires show up.

5:19-21a "The acts of the flesh are obvious; sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; (that's out of control sexual desire)

idolatry and witchcraft;

(that's attaching a right desire to worship with the wrong god)

hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy;

(this is wrong desires destroying relationships)

drunkenness, orgies and the like;

(those are out of control desires for substances.

The word translated orgy is a binging on drink party, not a sexual orgy)

Can you see that this list of vices

is not a random list of things Paul doesn't like?

It's not a way of sneaking back in adherence to the Law after Paul has spent chapters showing that's not necessary.

It's about saying,

the Christian life is faith expressing itself through love.

You can't act in love if your desires are controlling you.

And here's the evidence you'll see if your desires are controlling you.

You see, the Christian is not under the Law,

but we do want to please our Lord and Saviour.

And the Lord is pleased when we walk by the Spirit.

He's not pleased when we walk according to the flesh.

Paul offers the Galatians a clear warning.

5:21b "I warn you as I did before,

that those who live like this will not inherit the Kingdom of God."

Now that's not saying that if you've ever been sexually immoral, or ever hated someone, ever been drunk,

that you can't go to heaven.

That's not the point.

As he said in last week's passage,

'No. We eagerly await by faith, the righteousness for which we hope.'
The point is that if your life is marked by a pattern
of that kind of behaviour,
then that is clear evidence
that you are living by the flesh not by the Spirit.
And as Paul said in the previous chapter,
if you are a Christian,
then God has sent the Spirit of his Son into your heart.
So you will be walking by the Spirit.

Well we've had one half of the story.
We've explored the kind of behaviour we want to avoid.
We know what it is to walk by the flesh.
Now we want to focus on what it means to walk by the Spirit.
And this will be more well known to most of us.
The kids have sung it to us on the last couple of first Sundays.
Many of us would have learned them off by heart
when we were children.

5:22-23 "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance,
kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control."

What does faith expressing itself through love look like?

That is what it looks like.

Now if you are on the ball,
you will have spotted a difference between what the kids sung to us,
and what I've just read out to you.

Anyone want to call it out?

Yes. The version I learned had patience instead of forbearance.

Why do they have to change things?

Well in this case for a good reason.

Patience can mean a couple of things.

You can be patient when someone keeps you waiting.

That's one meaning.

You can also be patient in putting up with stuff
when you are being given a hard time.

Now as the years have rolled on,

the way we use the word patience has leaned more and more towards sucking it up when you are kept waiting. But the virtue Paul was saying is a fruit of the Spirit is putting up with stuff when you are being given a hard time. So they've moved the word to forbearance in our Bible.

Another interesting thing which you can't see in our English translation is that there is only one fruit of the Spirit.

Impossible to see that English.

If Cherida asks me what fruit I had for lunch, you have no idea whether I had banana, apple and pear.

Because we don't say 'fruits'.

The one fruit of the Spirit is love, joy peace and all the rest.

Why is this important?

Because if you are walking by the Spirit, then all of those virtues will be growing in your life, because they together are the fruit of the Spirit.

Notice the contrast between the fruit of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit.

Gifts are optional.

In 1 Cor 12, Paul gives a list of gifts of the Spirit:

'Apostles; prophets; teachers; miracle workers; gifts of healing; helping; guidance; speaking in tongues.'

No one has all the gifts.

You might not have any of them.

That wouldn't stop you being a Christian.

Just because you had one of them, doesn't ensure that you are a Christian.

Did Judas work miracles?

Yes he did.

Will you meeting him in heaven?

No you won't.

Remember those rather troubling words of Jesus.

Mt 7:22-23 "Many will say to me on that day,

"Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name
and in your name drive out demons
and in your name perform many miracles?
Then I will tell them plainly,
I never knew you."

Spiritual gifts are no guarantee of saving faith.
But the fruit of the Spirit is a sign that you are walking by the Spirit.
That means not walking by the flesh.
That means you will inherit the kingdom of heaven.
Not because love joy peace and the rest earn you a place in heaven.
No. Only Jesus death for your sins earns you a place in heaven.
But if you have the fruit of the Spirit in your life
then that shows that the Spirit of Jesus has been sent into your heart
because you are a child of God.

God has given you the fruit because you have new life in Jesus.
You don't get new life on the basis of the fruit.
The life in the tree produces the fruit.
The fruit do not produce the life in the tree.

I'm going to finish up by saying a little about each of the fruit.
This is basically straight from Tim Keller,
so if you've already read it,
listen hard because it will be a valuable reminder.

Love means to serve a person for their good and intrinsic value -
not what they bring to you.
The opposite of love is fear, self protection and abusing people.
A fake version of love is when you treat someone well
because of how they make you feel about yourself.

Joy is delight in God for the sheer beauty and worth of who He is.
The opposite of joy is hopelessness or despair.
A fake version of joy is when you feel elation
because of the blessings God has given you.

Peace is a confidence and rest in the wisdom and control of God, rather than trusting in your own wisdom.

The opposite of peace is anxiety and worry.

A fake version of peace is indifference, apathy and not caring.

Forbearance is facing trouble without blowing up or hitting out.

The opposite of forbearance is resentment towards God and people.

A fake version of forbearance is cynicism and not caring.

Kindness is being able to serve others practically in a way that makes me vulnerable.

The opposite of kindness is envy, being unable to rejoice in another's joy.

A fake version of kindness is doing good deeds to be able to congratulate yourself or feel that you are good enough for God or other people.

Goodness is integrity.

Being the same person in every situation.

The opposite of goodness is being a hypocrite.

Faithfulness is related to loyalty and courage.

It means to be utterly reliable and true to your word.

The opposite of faithfulness is to be an opportunist: a friend only in good times.

A fake version of faithfulness is to be loving but not truthful, so that you are never willing to confront or challenge.

Gentleness is humility.

The opposite of gentleness is to be superior or self absorbed.

A fake version of gentleness is weakness coming from feeling inferior.

Self control is the ability to pursue the important over the urgent.

The opposite of self control is being impulsive or uncontrolled.

A fake version of self control is will power based on pride.
It results in being a control freak.

Well I found it quite helpful to think about the fruit of the Spirit
with opposites and fake versions.

The opposites help us to identify
where we might be lacking the fruit of the Spirit.

The fake versions help us to recognise
where we might be kidding ourselves.

And the capacity of the human heart to deceive itself knows no bounds,
so that is very helpful.

How can we grow in the fruit of the Spirit?

Well hard work will help.

Reflecting on fruit

and on insightful thinking about them

can open our eyes to the realities of our own lives.

But characteristically for the apostle Paul,
he finishes an encouragement to living well
with the encouragement to be what you are.

5:24 "Those who belong to Christ Jesus
have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."

Notice it's not you need to crucify the flesh.

It's that you have already.

When you were joined to Jesus Christ by faith,
your flesh was crucified on his cross.

That's the truth of the matter.

Our experience at times may be of a great struggle
between the flesh and the Spirit.

But we can take heart that Jesus has already won the battle.

And

5:25 "Since we live by the Spirit,
let us keep in step with the Spirit."

We already have been made alive

through the Holy Spirit's work putting faith in our hearts.
So let us simply be consistent, being the people God has made us to be.