

Read Galatians 5:16-26

What – Paul wrote the letter of Galatians to “all the churches in Galatia”, or the province of Asia minor. There were many churches there that Paul had helped start in the decade before he wrote this letter. After Paul had started these churches, men had come to many of them and began to plant false ideas about Christianity into the minds of the new converts. Paul called these men “Judaizers” because the heresy they were planting had to do with Christianity’s relationship to Judaism and the covenant of circumcision. Essentially, they were telling the new Christians that they were not truly saved until they were circumcised like Jews. You can see how this would be a stumbling block to many adult male converts. Paul was very irritated by this heresy and at the end of this letter, in the verses we are looking at today, he reminded the Galatians what a walk with God looks like. He told them their lives should be guided by God and that the proof of their love for the Lord would show up not in any particular one time action, but by the results, or “fruit” of God acting in their lives and the lives of those around them. He concluded this section with the statement that, “against such things there is no law,” contrasting the works of the law (things not to do) with the works of the Spirit (things to do).

Why – This section is important because it highlights several areas that we still struggle with today. First is the reminder that the world and the scriptures are not compatible. It is our duty before God to either accept what is written or not. There is no middle ground or halfway point, and we do not get to choose what is right and wrong. God has defined that in His Word, and we are simply called to accept it. The church often argues points of doctrine and this leads people to believe that much of what is in the Bible “depends on interpretation”. This is rarely true. Most everything is cut and dry. God tells us what is right and what is wrong very clearly, and the debates within the church commonly are hair splitting theological issues which bear little weight in the face of deciding how we act and live as Christians. Second, and equally important, was Paul’s discussion here of how we live out our faith. He defined for us that a life lived for God is one where we are always being guided by God. This seems impossible, but Paul is describing a life of discipline. The “disciplines” are those things that we do that connect us to God. Some interpret this scripture rather mystically and are waiting for God to verbally speak to them. While this might happen on occasion, most often this is simply an excuse for not doing what we know God is calling us to do. God’s plan is that we stay connected to Him through the means He has provided. Daily times of prayer and study, meditation on Him and His Word and surrounding ourselves with other Christians are all simple methods that God has prescribed and provided to keep us in touch with Him. How many people do you know that can study the Bible and then knowingly sin almost immediately after? Few would do this, because when you read the Word, you feel connected and sense His presence. This is the life Paul was prescribing in this scripture.

WOW – Paul’s words are so powerful here because of the immediacy and practicality, but also because of the astounding statements he made as he revealed some of God’s most profound proclamations on how we live our lives. Overlooked and rarely taught is the importance of verse 18. “But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law” is a reminder of why the law has lost its power since the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

We often look at the Law (Ten Commandments, etc) as rules, a list of “no-no’s” that God has handcuffed us with. Paul’s statement in verse 18 was a powerful reminder that God is a PROACTIVE God. If you are following, indeed chasing with a passion, after Jesus, do you really think you are danger of breaking one of God’s laws? God’s plan is that you are so enamored with Jesus, so in tune with who He is and what He desires, that the Law is meaningless to you. God’s Law for us shows us His character, identifies sin and points to Jesus, but should not be needed as a list of do’s and don’ts. Our relationship with Jesus gives us that. In addition to this deep understanding of our walk with Christ, Paul commented on our relationship to the world in verse 24. We, according to this verse, should have crucified the sinful nature. Paul was directly commenting here on the fact that our relationship with Jesus should make the things of the world distasteful to us. We should know, by the Spirit within us, what is wrong, and we should be opposed to it. The church (the people being the church) has a duty to stand up against what is not of God in our culture. Not just privately, but publically as is suggested by the word “crucified”, we should be proclaiming the goodness of God and the evil that is destroying men, woman and children around us. When we do this, we will be “in step” with God. He is moving and we should be doing what He is doing. That is an amazing thought, and one that is encouraging to me as we seek to share and live out our faith in this decaying world.