

## GALATIANS AND YOU

Studies in the Epistle of Paul  
to the Galatians

by

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### Chapter Nine

#### PRACTICAL APPLICATION

##### The Struggle of the Two Natures (verses 16-18)

In these verses we have clearly depicted the struggle between the old nature and the new nature which is the common experience of Christians everywhere. And this conflict is a war to the death. There can be no cessation of hostilities until we are called home to glory. A truce is out of the question. Appeasement policies are futile. We may as well recognize the situation at the outset.

**"This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh."** Herein lies the key to conquest - not through the terrors of the law, but through the SPIRIT of the LORD will victory over the flesh be won. The spirit of the law and the law of the SPIRIT are poles apart. The injunction to walk in the SPIRIT implies power of choice on the part of the believer, whether to submit to the bondage of sin or to enter into that freedom in the SPIRIT which is rightfully his as a child of GOD. True, the old nature has not been eradicated, but its power over the soul which is trusting in CHRIST for salvation has been broken. Putting it figuratively, the dogs have been chained; they are no longer at large; but if we fail to keep our distance, and carelessly or deliberately give occasion to sin, we have ourselves to blame for the consequence. We have the privilege of walking in the SPIRIT; but we are not compelled to do so; it is a voluntary matter. Approaching the subject from another angle, many a follower of JESUS fails of living a truly victorious life because he tries to study and prescribe for his own symptoms instead of giving the HOLY SPIRIT the right-of-way in his life and letting Him minister as only He can in the treatment of hidden roots of moral and spiritual ailment.

It is to be noted that in the main the way to triumph over the old nature is not so much a matter of negative repression as of positive possession of the boundless resources of grace available through the SPIRIT. Thomas Chalmers once preached a sermon entitled "*The Expulsive Power of a New Affection*," and the reverberations of its challenging message still ring out. We turn the hose on dirt. We let in the pure air to drive out the foul. Tuberculosis is held at bay by a changing of climate. Need we enlarge at great length upon the application? There is no more effective way to fortify ourselves against the hurts of the flesh than to walk in the SPIRIT day by day and hour by hour.

**"For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would."** Nothing is to be gained by denying or minimizing this mutual antagonism. The acceptance of CHRIST into the heart will inevitably provoke a bitter and determined resistance on the part of the old sinful nature which hitherto has had everything its own way. Nor will the flesh be put to sleep by the fond delusion that it is dead and buried. It is imperative for our spiritual growth that we grasp the fact that the old nature is not removed or reformed at regeneration. Failure to understand this elementary fact frequently plunges the new convert into needless bewilderment and even despair of his standing before GOD when, after a peaceful period of triumph and fellowship with JESUS, he stumbles into the old sins and faults he fancied had been vanquished forever. With older Christians this error often operates to effect quite different results. Persuaded that they cannot sin, adherents of the heresy of sinless perfection will deny that those practices are sinful which the Word of GOD plainly denounces as sinful. He who thinks he has reached perfection is the victim of an illusion indicating that he is desperately in need of a new pair of glasses to forestall threatening blindness.

At the same time, we must not allow false claims to perfection on the part of some to make us unmindful of the true goal of perfection for all followers of the LORD JESUS. We are to claim and win victories over the flesh in the power of the HOLY SPIRIT. To forget that the old nature has no right to rule us will but increase its might to worst us in the battles of life. Beware the peril of insensibility to the terribleness of sin. If my heart can feel comfortable under sin, my soul is critically ill. We are most hurt by sin when we are least hurt by it. Numbness may be recognized by the trained physician as the forerunner of paralysis or even death itself. Turning to the brighter side of the picture, it holds gloriously true that the more we say yes to JESUS the easier will it be, until finally it becomes a fixed habit. Precious and weighty, then, is our responsibility for cultivating response-ability to JESUS.

### **The works of the flesh (verses 19-21)**

Having reminded his readers that a relentless warfare between the old nature and the new nature is inescapable, the apostle in the remainder of this chapter draws a picture of the sharp and vivid contrast between the works of the flesh and the fruits of the SPIRIT. We turn to his comprehensive catalogue of the sins of the flesh in verses 19-21. It may be well to remind ourselves again at this point that the word "flesh" here indicates not the body - although that is included - but the natural man, the old nature.

**"Now the works of the flesh are manifest . . ."** Let us pause right here. **"The works of the flesh are manifest"** - that is to say, they are going to be shown for what they really are, in all their naked hideousness. The Word strips of glamour the sins that the world clothes with glamour. We do well from time to time to gaze upon the loathsome picture of sin which Scripture paints. But the average man pays more heed to the world's light estimate of sin than to what GOD says about it, blissfully unmindful of the fact that the sins which men call smart will smart throughout all eternity unless they are washed away in the penitently accepted blood of JESUS. Our souls are the more easily tarnished by the sins that are varnished. The fashion of sin is not changed by making it fashionable. Changing the label on the bottle does not convert poison into a harmless beverage. Would that men could see that the exciting currents of sin upon which they so gleefully launch their lives are but carrying them to the cataract of eternal ruin where the mirth

of each gives way to the gloom of doom!

Let us now turn for a brief survey of the sins enumerated in the three verses before us. Dr. Clarence Keen, in his helpful little book on Galatians, make the following threefold division: (1) sensual works of the flesh, (2) religious works of the flesh, and (3) social works of the flesh. We could classify them as sins of impurity, idolatry, hostility and revelry. In any event, the list of moral offenses here given by the apostle is suggestive merely, and by no means exhaustive. All of us, it is to be feared, are prone to let our freedom from certain types of sins blind us to our bondage to other kinds no less hateful, and perhaps even more hateful, in the sight of the LORD. Are sins of the mind less revolting to Him than those of the flesh?

**"Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness . . ."** Never, perhaps, has there been a day when it was more difficult to live a clean life than at this present time. Appeals to the flesh abound on every hand. Indecency is brazenly flaunted before our eyes. The vileness in our current magazines know no bounds. If it be true that "as goes the home, so goes the nation," then there is grave cause for concern as to the future of our beloved country in the steadily mounting divorce rate and the trail of broken homes from one end of the land to the other. Sensual sins of all kinds are frightfully prevalent in all strata of American society.

**"Idolatry, witchcraft . . ."** That man is incurably religious and will worship false gods rather than none at all, the non-Christian religions of the world abundantly prove. But in so-called Christian lands hosts of men and women, who would never sink to such depths of ignorance and superstition as to bow down to images of wood and stone, are nevertheless worshipers of idols - wealth, pleasure, power, fame. These they set upon the throne of their hearts which none but GOD has a right to occupy. How much better off the world would be if man-made gods were to give way to God-made men! As for witchcraft, it is an all too-familiar fact that many people who boast of being too intelligent to accept the Gospel are daily victimized by fortune-tellers, clairvoyants, spiritualistic mediums, and all sorts of religious imposters who prey upon the credulity of the followers.

**"Hatred, variance, emulations . . ."** Estrangement from GOD is a fruitful source of all manner of enmities and quarrels among men. What else is to be expected but that, in the absence of the restraints which a true faith in GOD imposes, unbridled greed and selfishness should break loose and work havoc in human society?

**"of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God."** The word "do" means, the habitual practice of such things. The Bible bases its estimate of a person's character, not upon his infrequent, out-of-the-ordinary actions, but upon his habitual ones. To live in sin as a settled choice and principle of life is a far more serious matter than to fall into sins through weakness and carelessness. Far from loving and clinging to sin, the born-again child of GOD loathes and shrinks from it as from deadly poison; and when he does yield to temptation, he is in misery until he has confessed his sin and found forgiveness through the merits of the shed blood of his REDEEMER: **"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned,**

**we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world"** (I John 1:7-2:2).

And as for the unregenerate man, even if he were admitted to heaven at death, he would be wretched beyond words in an atmosphere and environment so utterly alien to his unredeemed nature. As well expect a fish to live on dry land as to imagine for a moment that a sinner could ever be happy in Heaven. Since everlastingness is an indestructible property of the soul in the image of GOD, the only possible alternative to eternal fellowship with GOD is eternal separation from GOD - and that is hell.

### **The Fruit of the SPIRIT (verses 22-26)**

**"But the fruit of the Spirit is . . ."** The use of the singular "fruit" instead of the plural "fruits" is instructive. It suggests the common root and interdependence of these several spiritual graces mentioned. They can be produced only in a life that is rooted in the SPIRIT; they cannot be hung outwardly upon a life like the toys and ornaments on a Christmas tree. Fruitage in the Spirit requires rootage in the Spirit. As it has been well put, "Christian character is CHRIST's excellency reproduced by the SPIRIT in a renewed life."

To bring forth the fruit of the SPIRIT is not only the Christian's happy privilege; it is his bound duty as well. In a soul born of the SPIRIT there is to be fruit borne in the SPIRIT. The fact that we could do nothing to earn our salvation is by no means to be interpreted as implying that, having been saved by grace, we can do nothing to show our gratitude for the salvation we have received. Dare we be unmindful of the words of our SAVIOUR to the effect that our heavenly FATHER is glorified when we bring forth much fruit: **"Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples"** (John 15:8)?

Limitations of space prevent more than a few fragmentary comments on the several kinds of spiritual fruit referred to in verses 22 and 23. May our all-too-brief observations serve to quicken deeper and richer reflections in the minds of our readers.

**"Love."** The love of GOD cannot but evoke an answering love for Him from the heart of the believer. **"We love him because he first loved us"** (I John 4:19). This love has been shed abroad in our hearts by the HOLY SPIRIT (Romans 5:5). Needless to say, this love of GOD is bound to overflow in love for our fellow Christians: **"Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love"** (I John 4:7, 8).

**"Joy."** Joy is more intense than happiness and is not, like it, dependent upon outward circumstances or happenings. The difference may be illustrated by a river that flows steadily and continuously onward as compared with the transient hillside torrents produced by cloudbursts. There is no joy to compare with that which flows from a deep, rich and sweet communion with JESUS CHRIST.

**"Peace."** We cannot have the peace of GOD until we have made our peace with GOD through

Him who is our peace (Ephesians 2:14). But being reconciled, we have the peace which passeth all understanding (Philippians 4:7). If we abide in JESUS as we ought, there is in our souls a calmness that no outward hostility can upset: "**Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee**" (Isaiah 26:3). For the Christian surrounded by foes there is ever open a secret passage to the heart of GOD.

"**Longsuffering.**" There are men and women who masticate their dislikes thoroughly, make all-day suckers of their wrongs, and magnify every little pin-prick into a sword thrust. The temperament manifested in such conduct and attitudes is far removed from the longsuffering included in this cluster of spiritual graces so highly commended in Scripture. Irrigations of grace wash away the irritations of life as of negligible consequence. In passing, we might observe that there is not infrequently a vital connection between the enduring of injuries from the world and the bestowing of benefits on the world - like destructive floods disclosing to view rich veins of gold.

"**Gentleness.**" This is the spontaneous overflow of love in the heart. It is the spirit that would rather be hurt by others than hurt others. Would that more of us were as tenderhearted as we are thin-skinned, as impulsive in kindness as explosive in anger. We need to cultivate resourcefulness in kindness, to gain proficiency in the artistry of applying Christian love to the hearts and lives of those with whom we come in contact in the multitudinous activities and relationships of life.

"**Goodness.**" The real meaning of this word is generosity in things material and things spiritual. Niggardliness impoverishes while liberality enriches the soul; or, as Scripture puts it, "**The liberal soul shall be made fat.**" In the realm of the spirit we lose what we keep and keep what we lose for JESUS' sake (Matthew 16:25).

"**Faith,**" which can also be seen as faithfulness. Probably capable of a double meaning, of trustfulness and trustworthiness. The one who is led by the SPIRIT has an unswerving confidence in GOD and reliance upon His words of promise; at the same time he manifests dependability in the discharge of the responsibilities which the LORD sees fit to lay upon him. Having faith in GOD involves keeping faith with GOD. We trust Him. How far can He trust us?

"**Meekness.**" It cannot be too strongly insisted upon that meekness is not weakness. It is strength held under control, power kept in reserve. Steam does the most work when it makes the least noise. Not a few of us need less noise and more poise. Things need not shatter to matter. There is more might in the sunlight falling silently upon a small patch of earth than in the crashing of thunder and flashing of lightning in a terrific storm. We do well to store up the capital of quietude against the day of need.

"**Temperance.**" By temperance is meant self-control in the broadest and fullest sense of the term. We need to go into training for CHRIST and to keep ourselves spiritually fit at all times, for we never know when a critical test may come or a golden opportunity arise that will call upon our spiritual reserves. To this end we should be prepared to give up whatever mars our witness and hinders usefulness in the Master's service. Attaining to the best may necessitate abstaining from the rest. The lesser must sometimes be sacrificed to the higher good.

**"Against such there is no law."** And yet many Christians live and act as if there were, if one judges by the meagerness of spiritual fruitbearing in their lives. Law can neither produce nor prevent the fruit of the SPIRIT mentioned in these verses. Legality, however, militates against the vitality so essential to their production. Memorize Galatians 5:22, 23.

**"And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts."**

Positionally we died to sin with CHRIST on the Cross: **"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me"**

(Galatians 2:20). Is this great truth of identification with JESUS in His death a mighty pulsating dynamic in our lives? It should prove a stimulant and not a sedative for holy living.

**"If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit."** The word, "walk" in this verse means "to march in rank or keep in step with." This teaches that compliance with the will of the SPIRIT is no less important than reliance on the grace of the SPIRIT. If we expect to win major victories for CHRIST in the crucial battles of life, it is imperative that we obey the Spirit's bidding day in and day out.

**"Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another."** We need not labor the point that self-assertion makes for a divided church, whereas self-effacement makes for a united church. But the trouble is, in many churches there is an over-eager willingness to let a very small minority have a monopoly in the exercise of selflessness. Were the majority of members actuated by humility and unselfishness, how vastly different and how much more harmonious church life would be! Like frozen glue or mortar, self-centeredness needs to be softened into the selflessness commanded in Philippians 2:5, **"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus"** before much can be accomplished in the building of a truly unified church, knit together in love.

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